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1 Community Goals and Objectives

1.1 Introduction

Community goals and objectives guide the actions recommended throughout the Comprehensive Plan. Rio Hondo residents' goals and objectives were developed through public hearings, presentations and interviews. In May of 2011 Rio Hondo held a planning workshop at City Hall. The purpose of the workshop was to identify, organize, and analyze goals and objectives for the community. Interviews and surveys with business owners, school staff, students and city officials further focused visions for the future. The conclusions from community input can be expressed as a plan vision statement that describes residents' hopes for what Rio Hondo might be like at the end of the planning period in 2032:

City of Rio Hondo Community Vision Statement

In 2032, Rio Hondo will be an economically viable community known for its entrepreneurial spirit that supplies residents and tourists with quality services, retail, entertainment, schools, and parks.

The City will be characterized by

- Its location on the Arroyo Colorado and its businesses and boaters that share use of the canal;
- Its destination for eco-tourists exploring famed Laguna Madre birding and fishing opportunities and Rio Grande Valley farming products.
 - Small businesses that allow residents to shop at home; increase the tax base to pay for ongoing City improvements; and provide jobs of varying skill levels so that more residents can work in town.

- Its small town character that offers a bustling central business district surrounded by safe neighborhoods with good schools, fun places for residents to gather; and housing types for all ages.

1.2 Community Planning Workshop

The planning workshop gathered information from Rio Hondo residents using an effective, established process known as the Goals Grid Method.¹ The following questions were presented to those in attendance:

1. What are you trying to achieve?
2. What are you trying to preserve?
3. What are you trying to avoid?
4. What are you trying to eliminate?

Residents responded as follows:

Preserve

- Annual events
- Water way and public access to it
- Public recreation areas and ability to provide residents low-cost recreation opportunities
- Small town feel of the City in which everyone knows everyone
- City's identify as a farming community (it once had cotton gins that would draw farmers to town)
- Rio Hondo bridge over the arroyo as a unique attraction in Texas

Achieve

- Increased housing choices, including affordable and multi-family

¹ Nichols, Fred (2000) *The Goals Grid: A Tool for Clarifying Goals and Objectives*

- Increased regulation for dilapidated housing, including an updated ordinance and increased code enforcement capabilities
- More recreation opportunities, including summer activities like a swimming pool, indoor recreation center (in cooperation with Cameron County Emergency Management coordinators), and skate park
- More year-round recreation opportunities for walking, (trail on abandoned railroad,) birding and fishing
- Create a Parks Advisory Board to lead park expansion efforts
- Annexation of surrounding ETJ to control and benefit from growth
- Increase multi-cultural activities, showcasing traditions from diverse backgrounds, particularly in agriculture
- More annual festivals to bring people to Rio Hondo, including “Arroyo Days” on city streets, dances at the Civic Center, and concerts at the park
- Beautify City Hall as a place to host more events
- Method for updating buildings downtown and attracting new business there
- Updated drainage system that increases culvert sizes to better handle stormwater flow
- Establish a streets maintenance plan
- Fix main water line to water treatment plant
- Determine role for new Municipal Development District

Eliminate

- Dilapidated/vacant buildings throughout town
- High rents in the downtown area
- Lack of resident access to the Port Authority land along the river that was once a city park
- Single-family housing in downtown

- Ineffective drainage on major city thoroughfares, SH 106 and Sam Houston, that causes standing water and impedes traffic flow in inclement weather

Avoid

- Lack of activities for youth in the summer
- Inability to rent property downtown
- Homebuilding in outlying sections of the ETJ
- Road damage by businesses in the ETJ
- Violence in town that occurs in larger cities

1.3 Goals and Objectives Framework

The results of the Goals Grid Method were used in conjunction with field work and background research to define specific goals, objectives, and policies found at the end of each chapter in the Comprehensive Plan.

Goals are overarching descriptions of the ideal future condition to which the community aspires.

Objectives are measurable outcomes that lead to the achievement of a goal.

Policies are actions that can be taken by residents, City staff, and elected officials to accomplish each objective.

The goals, objectives, and policies serve as a guide that all residents of Rio Hondo may use to help shape the physical, economic, and social character of their community.

2 Population Analysis

2.1 Methodology

Comprehensive plans include estimates of current and future population because planning for community facilities and services depends on the size and rate of a community's growth. The United States Census Bureau collects population information at ten-year intervals; this information is a primary source for analyzing current population characteristics and creating population estimates and forecasts.

This study uses U.S. Census data from 1990, 2000 and 2010 as well as fieldwork findings as its basis for analysis. Some components of this population analysis rely on 1990 and 2000 population characteristics because only basic 2010 Census counts had been released for Texas at the time of the planning process.

The long-term population forecast was created using symptomatic, cohort component, housing unit, and trend extrapolation methods and includes the effects of occupied housing and constraints on land use. The analysis also includes information regarding future development and local or regional economic shifts that may affect the community's growth.

2.2 Historic & Present Population

Table 2A: Rio Hondo, Population Change, 1960-2010

Year	Rio Hondo	Cameron County	State of Texas
1960	1,344	151,098	9,579,677
1970	1,167	140,368	11,196,730
1980	1,673	209,727	14,229,191
1990	1,793	260,120	16,986,540
2000	1,942	335,227	20,851,820
2010	2,356	406,220	25,145,561

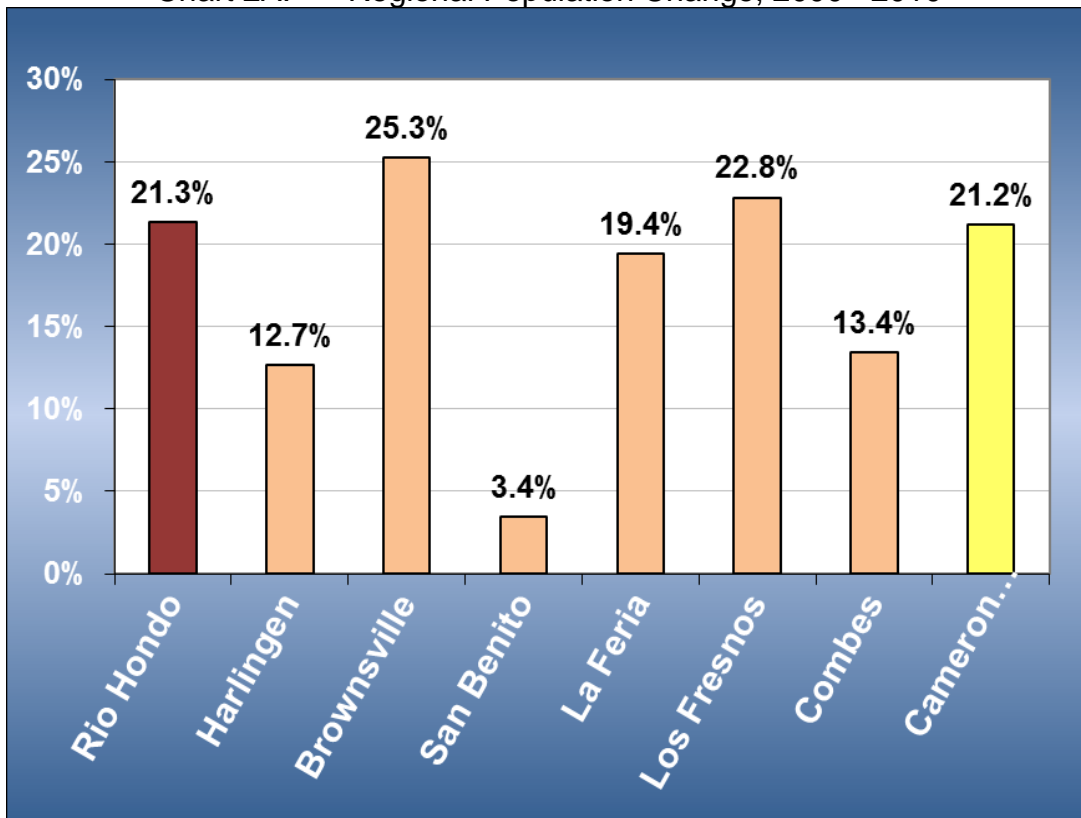
Source: US Census Bureau, Profile of Demographic Characteristics, 1960-2010.

Over the past 50 years, Rio Hondo’s population has grown from 1,344 to over 2,300. The City experienced continued population growth between decades with the exception of a slight decline in 1970. Over the same period, the population of Cameron County followed a similar pattern of continued population growth with a slight decline in 1970. The State of Texas as a whole grew each decade.

Regional Population Change:

As illustrated in *Chart 2A*, regional population change from 2000 to 2010 ranged from 3.4% to 25.3%. Rio Hondo, Brownsville, and Los Fresnos experienced growth rates of greater than 20%, while Harlingen, San Benito, La Feria, and Combes experienced lower growth rates. The population of Cameron County grew by 21.2% during this time period.

Chart 2A: Regional Population Change, 2000 –2010



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

2.3 Population Characteristics

The analysis of Rio Hondo's population characteristics uses data from US Census Reports for 2000 and 2010. The analysis identifies racial breakdown, and age cohort information in Rio Hondo's population.

Project Beneficiaries by Sex, Race and Ethnicity. *Table 2B: Population by Race & Ethnicity, 2000-2010* describes how the population's ethnicity changed during the last decade.

Between the years 2000 and 2010, Rio Hondo's population became slightly more Hispanic. It appears that individuals who identified themselves as Other in 2000, identified themselves as White in 2010 as no other race category increased.. Non-white racial categories comprised only 9.2% of the City's population in 2010. The City's racial composition is similar to that of Cameron County. Compared to the City of Rio Hondo and Cameron County, the State of Texas has a significantly lower percentages of White (70.4%) and Hispanic/Latino (37.6%) residents and a higher percentage of Black/African American (11.8%) residents.

Table 2B: Population by Race & Ethnicity, 2000 - 2010

Characteristic	Rio Hondo				Cameron County	
	2000		2010		2010	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Total Population	1,942	100%	2,356	100%	406,220	100%
White	1,499	77.2%	2,125	90.2%	353,423	87.0%
Black or African American	1	0.1%	12	0.5%	2,155	0.5%
American Indian, Alaskan Native	5	0.3%	7	0.3%	1,688	0.4%
Asian	7	0.4%	2	0.1%	2,689	0.7%
Native Hawaiian / Other Pacific Islander	1	0.1%	1	0.0%	113	0.0%
Other	398	20.5%	190	8.1%	39,905	9.8%
Two or More Races	33	1.7%	19	0.8%	6,247	1.5%
Hispanic or Latino	1,607	82.7%	1,990	84.5%	357,747	88.1%

Source: 2000, and 2010 U.S. Census

Project Beneficiaries by Sex, Race and Income. *Table 2C: Beneficiary Report* contains information required by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban

Development in the fulfillment of this planning grant. The numbers detailed for project beneficiaries below may not correspond to the numbers presented in *Table 2B* above. This is because HUD grant programs generally require at least a 51% low to moderate community income level to qualify for funding, but income levels are not collected from all Census respondents. Census income levels are derived from a 1-in-6 sample and weighted to represent the total population. Race beneficiary numbers are then mathematically derived to correspond to income beneficiary numbers. When Census income level estimates seem too high, extra door-to-door surveys are conducted in communities to verify a 51% low to moderate income level. Because the income tabulation is slightly different for the grant application, the resulting numbers generally do not correspond to the 100% population samples that are represented in *Table 2B*. Also, the numbers below are based on 2000 Census data because the application for grant funding for the Comprehensive Plan was completed prior to the 2010 Census.

Table 2C: Beneficiary Report

Total Project Beneficiaries 1,884 Male 912 Female 972

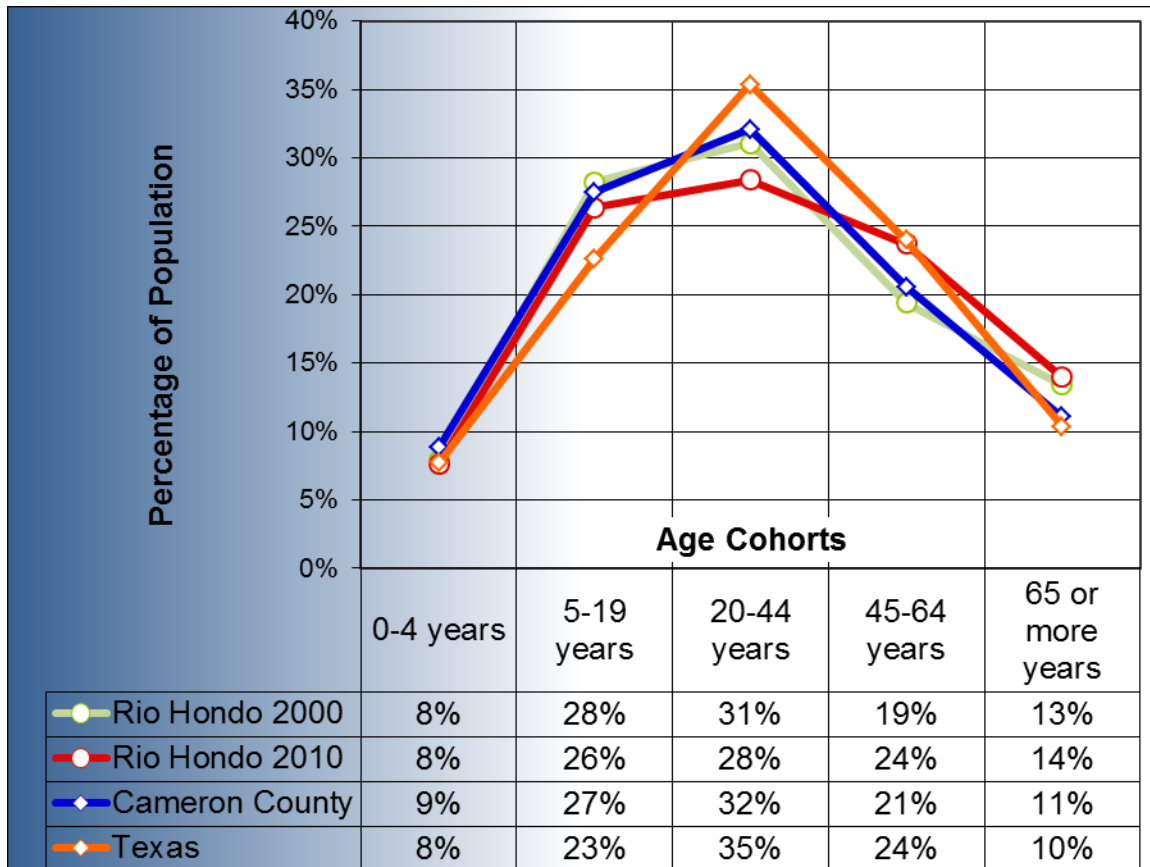
Race	Non-Hispanic	Hispanic Ethnicity also	Total
White	303	1152	1454
Black/African American	1	0	1
Asian	5	0	5
American Indian/Alaskan Native	2	3	5
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	1	0	1
American Indian/Alaskan Native & White	1	0	1
Asian & White	0	0	0
Black/African American & White	0	0	0
American Indian/Alaskan Native & Black/African American	0	0	0
Other Multi-Racial	13	405	417
		Grand Total	1,884

Income Level	No. of Persons
Very Low (at or below 30% of the AMFI)	352
Low (31-50% of the AMFI)	289

Moderate (51-80% of the AMFI)	378
Non-Low/Moderate (above 80% of AMFI)	865
Total	1,884
Subtotal – All Low/Mod	1,019
Percent Low/Mod	54.1%

Age Cohorts. In 2010, the median age for residents of Rio Hondo was 35.2 years, older than both Cameron County’s median (30.6 years) and the State’s median (33.6 years). *Chart 2C: Population by Age Group, 2000 - 2010* tabulates the populations of the City, County and State into five separate age cohorts: 0-4; 5-19; 20-44; 45-64; and 65 or greater. Between 2000 and 2010, the percentage of total population of Rio Hondo’s younger cohorts, 5-19 years and 20-44 years, shrunk 2-3%, while the oldest two cohorts grew 1-5%. The numbers may indicate that residents are aging in place and/or that older persons are choosing to locate in Rio Hondo. The City’s population is slightly older compared to the state and Cameron County. The city’s percentage of its youngest residents, aged 0 to 4, stayed the same, indicating that youth categories may increase in the future as the 0-4 year old cohort moves to the 5-19 year-old cohort.

Chart 2D: Population by Age Group, 2000 – 2010



Source: 2000 and 2010 Census of Population and Housing, Summary Population and Housing Characteristics

2.4 2012 Population Estimate

Population estimates help determine how much growth has occurred since the last decennial census. Estimates identify changes to the city’s population and also provide a benchmark to guide population projections and forecasts. The Texas State Data Center periodically issues population estimates for all incorporated places in the state, and the Center’s system provides a standard for the estimate produced as part of this study. The Center uses a combination of the symptomatic, cohort component and housing unit methods to calculate estimates and projections. Descriptions of these methods are as follows:

- The **Symptomatic Method** is based on factors such as county-level birth and death data, public and private school enrollment, Medicare enrollment, net movement of people from the military to civilian populations, and housing unit figures.

- The **Cohort-Component Method** bases its calculations on each age group, or cohort, used in the census process. Projections rely on data that describe county-level birth and death rates and county-to-county migration patterns for each cohort. Projections also include historical trends in local school enrollment and vehicle registration.

- The **Housing Unit Method** employs the formula $P = (H * PPH) + GQ$. Where P = total population, H = occupied housing units, PPH = average number of persons per household, and GQ = population in group quarters. The Texas State Data Center's housing unit method also considers building permit and demolition data to identify changes to the housing stock.

The state data center's latest population estimate was 2,278 in January of 2010. The April 2010 Census reports a population of 2,356 with an average household size of 3.13 persons. Field surveys for this plan were completed in May of 2011, including surveys of multi-family units. The plan found 704 occupied single family units within the City limits. It also found 108 occupied multi-family units, mostly consisting of one and two-bedrooms. About one-third of the units are reserved for seniors. The small sizes and high senior occupancy indicates that average household sizes for the smaller multi-family units may be as low as one person. Using conservative average household counts of 1.2 to 2 persons per unit for the smaller unit sizes, and the 3.13 persons per household for the majority of the houses, the total population estimate for 2012 is **2,393**.

Rio Hondo's extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ) contains approximately **416** additional residents as estimated from census data and the windshield survey. The ETJ in Texas is an area extending one-half mile from the city limits within which an incorporated city has certain rights and responsibilities. The City of Rio Hondo's ETJ abuts that of Harlingen on the east side of the city limits around Sam Houston Blvd/SH 345. Its ETJ must be established via agreements with the City of Harlingen. Combined, the total population within Rio Hondo's ETJ and city limits in 2012 is approximately **2,800**.

2.5 Future Population Forecast

Population forecasts are a key element in planning for the future. Federal, state, and local funding decisions for facilities such as highways, sewage treatment plants, and schools are based upon the projected number of people who will use them. A population forecast is a statement of what a place's population will be given a set of likely future conditions that consider the physical, social, economic, or political conditions that might encourage or inhibit growth.²

Several factors that can have an impact on population change were considered when forecasting the size of Rio Hondo's future population, including:

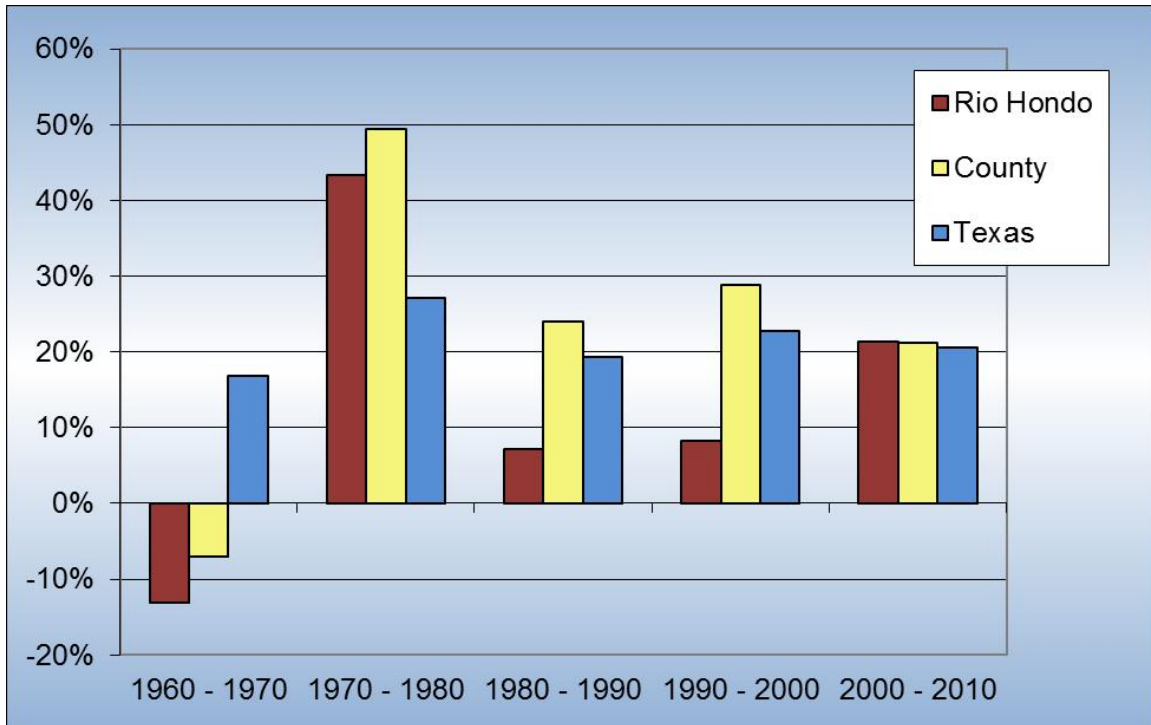
- Historic growth and migration patterns;
- Age of population;
- Public facilities;
- Location along routes to employment centers;
- Ability to annex surrounding areas located in the ETJ; and
- Expected new subdivisions.

Historic Growth and Migration Patterns. As illustrated in *Chart 2E*, Rio Hondo has primarily experienced positive growth over the past 40 years and its growth rate by decade has fluctuated greatly since 1970. Cameron County and Rio

² Richard E. Klosterman, *Community Analysis and Planning Techniques* (Savage, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1990).

Hondo population changes have followed a similar pattern of positive and negative growth. Historically, Cameron County has experienced higher positive growth rates than Rio Hondo. However, in 2010, the population growth rates for Rio Hondo, Cameron County, and the State of Texas were all 21%.

Chart 2E: Population Change: City, County, Texas (1960 – 2010)



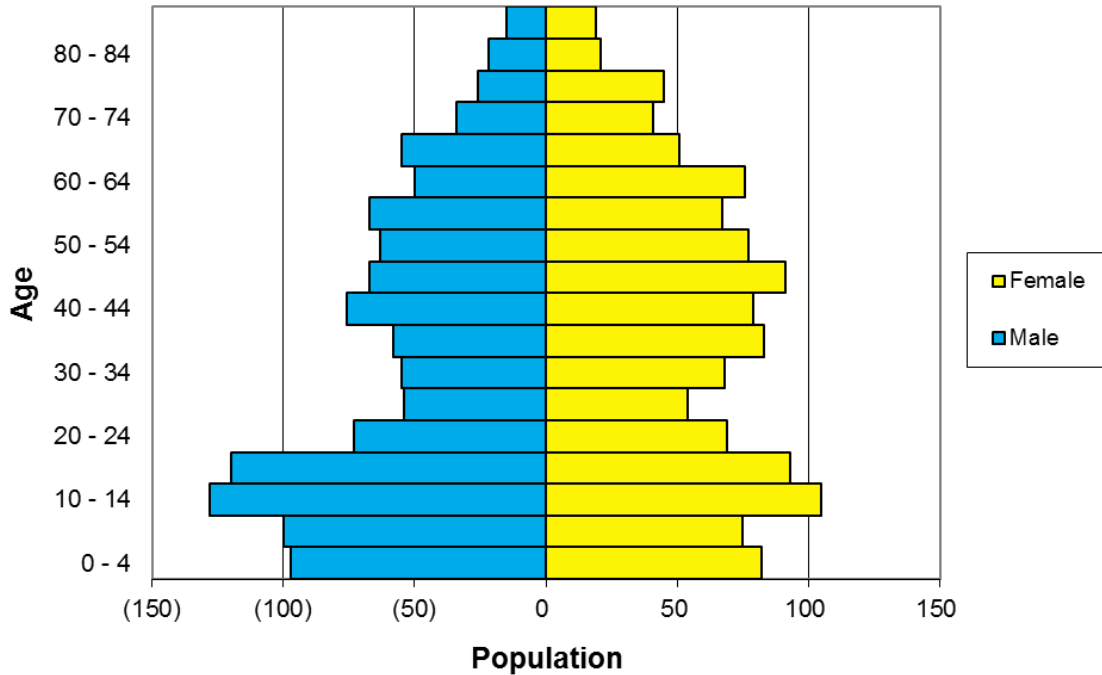
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census, 1940–2010; 2010 estimate excluded for simplicity.

Age of Population: In 2010, the City had a smaller percentage of young adults (20-44 years) than the State (28% compared to the State’s 35%). As that cohort is the principle childbearing facet of the population, the City should expect a lower birth rate than that of Texas at 13 births per thousand in 2009³). The breakdown of males and females in the City is about even for most age cohorts and will have little impact on population growth. These trends indicate that if

³ U.S. National Center for Health Statistics, *Births, Marriages, Divorces, and Deaths: Provisional Data for 2009*. NVSR Volume 58, Number 25. 6 pp. (PHS) 2010-1120.

population increases occur, in-migration may be a higher contributor to growth than natural increase.

Chart 2D: Population by Age and Gender, 2010



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census, 2010

Public Facilities. The City maintains public facilities that may attract new residents and/or allow residents to choose to remain in Rio Hondo. Facilities include 3 public parks, a community center, city hall, library, and water and wastewater services. Most of the roads in the City are paved.

Industrial/Commercial Base. According to the Texas Workforce Commission’s October 2011 estimate, unemployment in Cameron County is at 11.9%, higher than the State’s rate of 8.0%. The Texas Workforce Commission does not report employment data for communities of Rio Hondo’s size. Cameron County and neighboring counties in the Lower Rio Grande Valley have had historically high unemployment rates because job growth cannot keep pace with population growth in the Valley. Trade, manufacturing, and tourism are all major components of the local economy. Manufacturing plants are a significant factor

on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border, with a major presence of maquiladoras, or twin-plant manufacturers, in Matamoros, Mexico. The Port of Brownsville is an important link with Mexico and affords the only entry point on the border accessible by the four modes of transportation. Also, South Padre Island (SPI) and bird and wildlife sanctuaries are all prominent tourist attractions. Although these industries suffered between 2008 and 2011 because of security concerns in Mexico and a downturn in tourism spending due to the 2008 national recession, job growth has continued. The problem remains that job growth has not matched incredible population growth in the region.

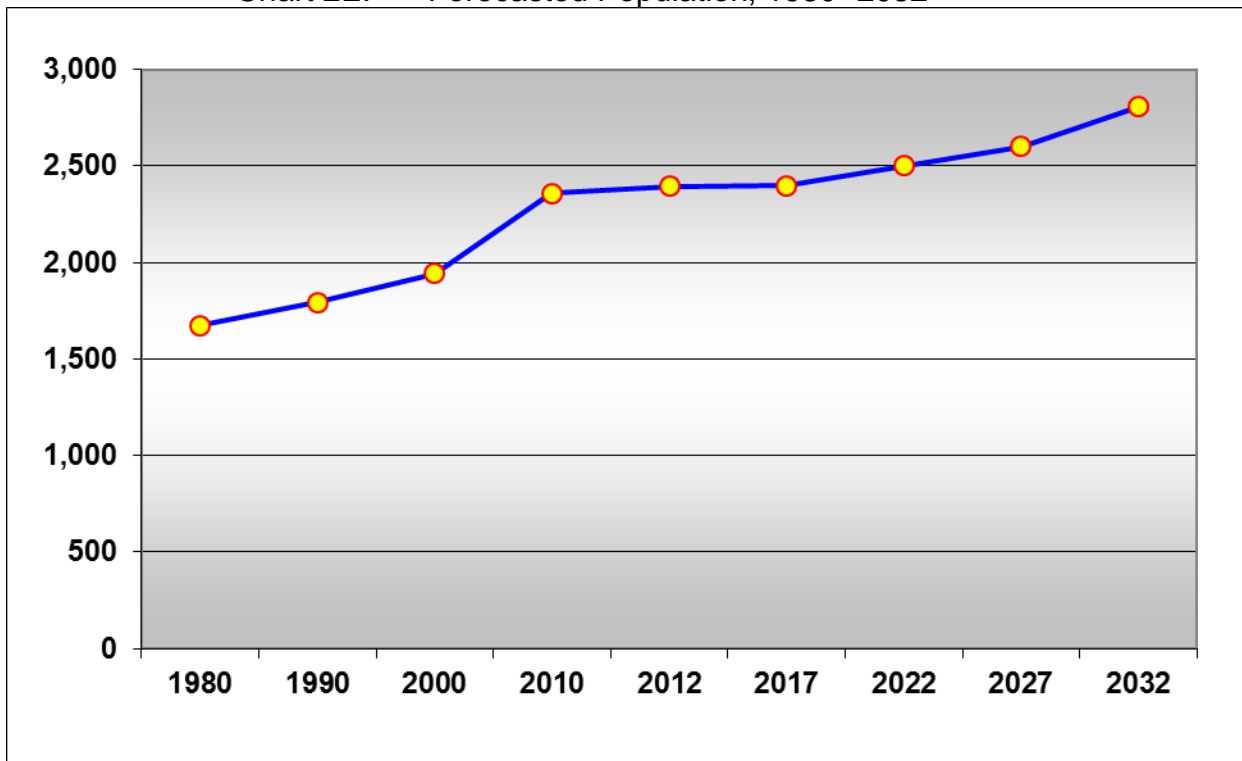
Geographic Location. Rio Hondo is located about 10 miles east of Harlingen; 30 miles from Brownsville and the Texas-Mexico border; and 30 miles from the Gulf of Mexico/Padre Island. Harlingen and Brownsville are employment and population centers in the Valley with Harlingen having about 75,000 residents and Brownsville 150,000 residents.

Additional Developable Lots. The City has 59 acres of semi-developed and 317 acres of agricultural lots within the City limits; more semi-developed and agricultural lots are available in the ETJ although a large portion of the southern ETJ lots are used for farming. About 200 vacant lots of varying sizes that could be developed as residentially are available within the city limits. The City would like to annex its ETJ, indicating that more residents on the outskirts of the city limits may become part of the city's population during the planning period. Current residential growth has occurred beyond the southern portion of the City's ETJ, indicating that housing in the southern portion of the City's ETJ may continue to increase during the planning period. Because the City was incorporated as a General Law Type A city, annexation of property would have to be voluntary on the part of the landowner unless the City can prove under Chapter 41.001 of the Texas Local Government Code that the area has been receiving long-standing treatment as part of the municipality. Under the provision, any area for which city records indicate the delivery of city services during the preceding 20 years can be involuntarily annexed. The City serves ETJ areas

north and south of the city limits with Fire Protection through the City's Volunteer Fire Department. However, Cameron County provides police protection services and garbage services to ETJ residents. Water and sewer services also are provided only within the City limits. Many ETJ residents are connected to water supply through the East Rio Hondo Water Supply Corporation which serves most of unincorporated Cameron County. City of Rio Hondo water and sewer rates were between 25% and 40% lower on average than the ERHWSC in 2011, which would be a selling tool to ETJ residents. Under an annexation, the East Rio Hondo Water Supply Corp may continue to serve households and businesses that the city annexes or the City can purchase the water and/or sewer facilities for those areas from the ERHWSC and provide services to those residents. In purchasing facilities, the City also may be required to pay to improve its own system to accommodate increased connections and pay to connect those properties to its system.

Rio Hondo's Twenty-Year Population Forecast. All of the population projection models predict growth for Rio Hondo and Cameron County during the next 20 years. Projected population increases range from 18% to 33%, depending on the model (about 2,700 persons for the lowest estimate and 3,200 persons for the highest). The City chose a medium range growth scenario because growth in the Valley is projected to continue. However, the high growth scenario may not be warranted because the expense of providing water and sewer services and street and drainage facilities to more residents may limit its ability to annex and bring more of its ETJ residents into the City limit. Also, its population appears to be aging slightly and may contribute to population losses during the planning period. Growth is predicted to be steady and continue at current levels of around 20 percent, which could bring the population to 2,807 residents by 2032. At 3.13 persons per household, the City may see as many as 130 new housing units to accommodate this population growth, either through annexing ETJ homes and/or through the construction of new units within the city limits.

Chart 2E: Forecasted Population, 1980 -2032



Source: Texas State Data Center's State Population Estimates and Projections Program combined with Cohort-component method calculations, linear regression calculations and Texas Water Development Board 2007 Regional Water Plans County and City Population Projections.

2.6 Population Distribution

Information regarding the distribution of population in Rio Hondo in 2000 is based on the 2011 windshield survey conducted by GrantWorks. Population distribution and density was mapped (*Map 2A*) using the 2032 projected population number of **2,807** people. It is anticipated that population growth will occur at the City's center in southern Rio Hondo both through single-family and multi-family developments where water and sewer services are easily extended. It is anticipated that the City will annex some property in its ETJ, extending the City limits, and that growth will also occur in the newly-annexed areas.

3 Housing Study

3.1 Background

The Housing Study analyzes the location and condition of Rio Hondo's housing stock. It identifies the various types of housing, including multifamily (condominiums, apartments, duplexes, etc.), single-family detached (the typical house), and mobile/manufactured homes. Finally, it identifies the housing developments funded using governmental assistance. The information gathered in this study sheds light on the housing needs of the community, helps to direct the formation of housing goals, and establishes a blueprint for future actions the City might take to provide adequate housing for its residents. Rio Hondo has not participated in any coordinated housing management efforts or conducted any previous housing studies.

3.2 Methodology

The 2000 and 2010 Census of Population and Housing provides some insight into the general housing conditions in Rio Hondo, including the age and number of units and the costs associated with owning or renting a housing unit.

In May of 2011, an exterior/windshield survey of all residential buildings in Rio Hondo was conducted to determine the physical condition of each housing unit. A housing unit can be a single-family detached house, a mobile/manufactured home, or a multifamily unit such as an apartment, condominium, or town home. Data gathered during a windshield survey provides a geographic perspective on the condition of housing in different parts of the City. The survey uses a classification system that rates the condition of each housing unit on a scale from "standard" to "dilapidated" as defined in *Table 3A: Housing Condition Survey Classifications and Criteria*. The windshield survey also identifies vacant and abandoned houses.

Table 3A: Housing Condition Survey Classifications and Criteria

Classification	Criteria
<p>Standard</p>	<p>Few or no minor visible exterior defects such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cracked, peeling, or missing paint • cracked, sagging, rotting, or missing siding, steps, porch planks, or other wooden surfaces • cracked or broken window panes • cracked masonry, brick, or mortar surfaces • missing or damaged roof shingles • small rust spots on mobile homes <p>Generally meets local building codes No detriment to health and safety present</p>
<p>Deteriorating</p>	<p>Few visible exterior defects requiring repair beyond routine maintenance such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • missing or damaged wooden surfaces that could cause injury if walked upon or leaned against • missing window panes • badly deteriorated window frames • major holes in exterior walls, up to one (1) foot across and/or penetrate through the interior walls • roof missing many shingles or has holes up to six (6) inches across • chimney bricks missing • extensive rusting, joint separation on mobile home exterior <p>Rehabilitation is economically feasible</p>
<p>Dilapidated</p>	<p>Fails to provide safe shelter Several of the major defects listed under Deteriorating Any major structural damage such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sagging foundation • sagging roof • slanted or tilted exterior walls • missing doors • collapsed chimney or porch • fire or severe water damage <p>Rehabilitation is not economically feasible</p>

3.3 Current Housing Conditions

Housing conditions were determined using available Census data and the windshield survey described above. The 2010 Census and the 2006-2010 American Community Survey Census products were used with the survey findings to render a complete picture of the City's current housing stock.

Current Housing Stock: The windshield survey provides a snapshot of the conditions in Rio Hondo in 2011, updating 2010 Census data taken a year prior. It tabulated 717 single-family housing units (including mobile/manufactured housing units), and 114 multifamily units, including apartments throughout the city and smaller multi-family buildings located mostly in the northern side of Rio Hondo. The results of the housing conditions and occupancy survey are mapped as *Map 3A: Existing Housing Units* and are tabulated below in Table 3B.

Table 3B: Housing Conditions

Type / Condition		Occupancy	City	ETJ	Total Region
Stick Frame	Standard	Occupied	420	77	497
		Vacant	0	0	0
	Deteriorated	Occupied	181	35	216
		Vacant	2	0	2
	Dilapidated	Occupied	20	3	23
		Vacant	7	4	11
	Total (Occupied)		621	115	736
	Total (Vacant)		9	4	13
Subtotal - Stick Frame Homes		630	119	749	
Type / Condition		Occupancy	City	ETJ	Total Region
Mobile & Manufactured	Standard	Occupied	65	6	71
		Vacant	0	0	0
	Deteriorated	Occupied	21	4	25
		Vacant	0	0	0
	Dilapidated	Occupied	1	2	3
		Vacant	0	1	1
	Total (Occupied)		87	12	99
	Total (Vacant)		0	1	1
Subtotal - Mobile/Manufactured Homes		87	13	100	
Subtotal - Single Family Units		717	132	849	

Type / Condition		Occupancy	City	ETJ	Total Region
Multi-Family	Standard	Occupied	86	0	86
		Vacant	0	0	0
	Deteriorated	Occupied	10	0	10
		Vacant	0	0	0
	Dilapidated	Occupied	12	0	12
		Vacant	6	0	6
	Total (Occupied)		108	0	108
	Total (Vacant)		6	0	6
<i>Subtotal - Multi-Family Homes</i>			<i>114</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>114</i>
Type / Condition		Occupancy	City	ETJ	Total Region
Total Housing Conditions	Standard	Occupied	571	83	654
		Vacant	0	0	0
		Total Standard	571	83	654
	Deteriorated	Occupied	212	39	251
		Vacant	2	0	2
		Total Deteriorated	214	39	253
	Dilapidated	Occupied	33	5	38
		Vacant	13	5	18
		Total Dilapidated	46	10	56
	Total (Occupied)		816	127	943
Total (Vacant)		15	5	20	
<i>Total Housing Units</i>			<i>831</i>	<i>132</i>	<i>963</i>

Source: Grantworks, Inc., 2011 Fieldwork Study

Housing Condition: Many of the housing units within the City limits were found to be in good condition. About 33% or 260 homes and apartments in the City were found in the field survey to be in dilapidated or deteriorated conditions. Most of the deteriorated and dilapidated housing is located in the original town area of the City in the blocks north and south of Colorado. Seven vacant dilapidated homes that may need to be demolished are located mostly in northern central Rio Hondo.

The effects of deteriorated and dilapidated housing include:

1. Health risks to residents of deteriorated and dilapidated structures.
2. Reluctance of future homeowners to move to an area with large numbers of deteriorated or dilapidated houses.
3. Downward pressure on property values.

Housing Stock Age: The *age* of a community’s housing stock is an indicator of its overall condition. As shown in *Table 3C*, the majority of the City’s houses are more than 30 years old and are slightly older than the County in general.

Table 3C: Housing by Age

Table 3C: Median House Age		
<i>City</i>	<i>County</i>	<i>State</i>
1973 - 1981	1981 - 1985	1980 - 1982

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, B25035; American FactFinder <<http://factfinder.census.gov>>

Housing Type: Of the single-family housing stock within Rio Hondo, 12% (87 units) are manufactured. The majority of manufactured units are located in the Twin Palms RV Park on Colorado. The City allows manufactured housing to be placed in the City only within a licensed mobile home park. The remaining 27 manufactured houses in the city limits are non-conforming, according to the City’s mobile home regulation ordinance adopted in 1985. One-quarter of the manufactured housing (22 units) is in deteriorated or dilapidated conditions. They are mostly located throughout the central northern part of the City.. Within the ETJ, 9% (12 units) are manufactured. While manufactured housing is typically more affordable, its overall quality and longevity is questionable, and if cities do not enforce ordinances regarding construction quality, abandoned mobile homes can become a community problem. The City’s existing ordinance appears to have limited the placement of manufactured structures.

Renter Occupied Housing: More than one-quarter of housing units in Rio Hondo are renter-occupied, according to the 2010 census. The Census reported that 216 of 825 (29%) units are renter-occupied. This figure is higher than in 2000 when the Census reported that 21 percent of units were renter-occupied. Field survey and interviews revealed that about half of these units are multi-family (114), indicating that about 100 single-family units are available for rental in Rio Hondo. The City’s multifamily rental supply is shown in Table 3D below. The Casa de Valle apartments are reserved for senior tenants. The remaining units are available for any ages. Only six of the 114 units are handicapped

accessible. As Table 3E shows, about 20 of the 114 units accommodate larger families.

Table 3D: Multifamily units in Rio Hondo

Name	Condition	Total Units	Occupied	Vacant
Rio Hondo Village Apartments (section 8)	Standard	50	50	0
Casa De Valle (usda)	Standard	30	30	0
Rio Hondo Apartments (private 1940s)	Dilapidated	13	10	3
Quadplex	Deteriorated	8	8	0
Triplex	Standard	6	6	0
Mixed Use (downtown)	Dilapidated	5	2	3
Duplex	Deteriorated	2	2	0
Total		114	108	6
Total Standard		86	86	0
Total Deteriorated		10	10	0
Total Dilapidated		18	12	6
Total Occupancy			108	6
Total Multi Family Units		114		

Source: Grantworks, Inc., 2011 Fieldwork Study

Table 3E: Multifamily units by number of bedrooms

Units by Capacity	Units	Percent
One- bedroom	66	58%
Two-bedroom	27	24%
Three-bedroom	19	17%
Four-bedroom	2	2%
Total	114	

Source: Grantworks, Inc., 2011 Fieldwork Study

In 2000, only 12 single-family units were rented. Assuming that 114 of 126 rental units were multi-family, Census figures indicate that between 2000 and 2010 there was an upward trend of homeowners renting their units. Still, the multi-family unit owners reported they have waiting lists for units. In the summer of 2011, the Rio Hondo Village Apartments in south Rio Hondo had as many as 30 applicants waiting for units while the senior apartments had 3 applicants on its waiting list.

Vacancy & Abandonment: The 2010 U.S. Census recorded a 9% vacancy rate in Rio Hondo, slightly lower than the Texas rates of 10.6%. The windshield survey indicated a vacancy rate on all units of just 1% with only about 6 homes being dilapidated and vacant in northern Rio Hondo and 6 dilapidated multi-family units being unoccupied. Vacant commercial buildings appear to be more abundant than vacant housing units.

Vacant dilapidated housing causes health and safety hazards and represents a tax liability to government entities in the form of uncollected property taxes. Vacant, dilapidated structures should be demolished for health and safety reasons as well as to maintain surrounding property values. The City has a Buildings Ordinance (Ordinance # 343) that sets minimum standards for buildings. It was adopted in 2005. It calls for the establishment of a 5-person Building Standards and Renewal Board appointed by the City Council. However, the City does not mention the existence of this Board on its City website, nor does it have a Building Official.

Under the Ordinance, the Building Official is tasked with inventorying and inspecting abandoned or unoccupied units and reporting to the Board. Under the Ordinance, the Board has the power to order a Notice of Complaint and to post an Intent to Seek Abatement form on a substandard property. The owner has 10 days to contact the Building Official and come to a voluntary abatement agreement or to request a hearing with the Board if he or she desires. A voluntary abatement procedure (repair or demolish) must be enacted by the Owner within 90 days, unless hearings establish the need for more time. The Board may order that a structure be secured but it may not order a structure to be demolished at the City's expense. It can recommend such action to the City Council. The City may impose a lien on the property for such expenses except in the case where the structure is claimed as a homestead.

3.4 Housing Analysis

This analysis draws from the windshield survey described above and data from the U.S. Census and the field work. The two data sets are used in conjunction to identify housing problems and needs.

Fair Housing / Housing Choices:

In conjunction with acceptance of grant funds from the TxCDBG program of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the City affirmed that it “affirmatively furthers fair housing” (AFFH) and upholds the 1968 Fair Housing Act. The Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination based on disability, familial status, race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.

In making improvement decisions, the City should consider whether its policy and budget decisions intentionally or unintentionally sanction segregation or limit free housing choice, if it has sufficiently educated the public about the Fair Housing Act and if it has taken proper steps to uphold the Act. The following analysis is guided by the State of Texas Interim Analysis of Impediments and the Fair Housing Activities Statement—Texas (FHAIST), both of which provide standards for analyzing fair housing in a community. The FHAIST is a tool developed by state agencies and housing advocates in 2011 for distribution of TxCDBG Disaster Relief funding following Hurricanes Ike and Dolly. Rio Hondo applied for the Disaster Relief funding, and, in doing so, formed a FHAIST committee to evaluate and monitor city policy and actions related to fair housing throughout the disaster relief grant projects.

Table 3E provides basic data on the availability of housing types as it relates to fair housing. Conclusions about housing options for each protected class follow the table.

Table 3F: Fair Housing Analysis

Housing by Type/Location (Field Survey 2011)					
	Units	% of all Units *	ADA Accessible	2+ Bedroom	Location
<u>Apartments (Occupied and Vacant)</u>					
Apartments	93	11%	6	48	Southern/Central RH
Duplex	2	0%	0	0	Eastern RH
Triplex	6	1%	0	0	Northern RH
Quadplex	8	1%	0	0	Northern/Central RH
Mixed Use	5	1%	0	0	Central RH
Total MF Units	114	14%	6	48	
<u>Houses</u>					
Single Family Rentals***	102	12%	N/A	24	Throughout City
Single Family Owned	605	73%	N/A	258	Throughout City
Single Family Vacant	8	1%	N/A	3	Northern RH
Total Units	830				

* Percentage derived from 826 total housing units in City from Plan field survey (occupied and vacant)

** 2+ bedroom is estimated from 2010 Census data using minimum percentage within 90% margin of error.

Housing by Race/Ethnicity (American Community Survey 2005-2009)					
<u>Ownership by Race*****</u>					
% White Owned	489	72%	% Asian Owned	2	100%
% White Rented	187	28%	% Asian Rented	0	0%
% Black Owned	3	75%	% Other Owned	34	59%
% Black Rented	1	25%	% Other Rented	24	41%
% Amer Indian or Alaskan Native Owned	3	75%	% Two or more owned	5	63%
% Amer Indian or Alaskan Native Rented	1	25%	% Two or more rented	3	38%
<u>Ownership by Ethnicity</u>					
% Hispanic Owned	404	68%			
% Hispanic Rented	193	32%			

***Number is estimated based on total number of rentals counted in the Census minus number of apartments counted in field survey.

**** Source: Census 2010, Sf-1 Data, Quick Table Hi (QTH1)

Race: Rio Hondo’s population is predominantly Hispanic. More than 85% of the population is Hispanic, according to the 2010 Census. Households of protected classes, including race and ethnicity, are located throughout the City. In addition, both rental and owner-occupied housing is available in all parts of the City. Rental housing is located near to commercial and recreation land uses and to schools.

Disabled Population: Census and field survey data indicate that the City may not have enough housing units that are accessible to disabled persons. In 2000, 223 persons reported having a physical disability, representing almost 12% of the sampled population. Of that number, about 6% (114) were 65 years of age or older. Updated data will not be available via the Census for small towns until about 2014 because the Census has revised how it asks disability questions. However, in 2011 only 6 fully accessible multi-family units are available in the City. It is not known how many single family units in the City are handicapped accessible. Fieldwork surveys did not note many handicapped access ramps or oversized doors to accommodate wheelchairs. Casa de Valle Apartments for seniors have 30 units with handicapped accessible bathrooms.

The City’s zoning regulations do not prohibit non-related occupants from sharing the same residence. Such a provision would impede the establishment of group homes for disabled individuals in neighborhoods.

Familial Status: A variety of rental properties and homes for ownership are available to accommodate families as well as single occupants According to ACS estimates, at least 68% of owner-occupied units and at least 49% of renter-occupied units have 3 or more bedrooms.

Table 3F: Accommodations for Families

	Estimate	Margin of Error (+/-)
Total	893	144
Owner occupied:	588	107
No bedroom	4	6
1 bedroom	22	19
2 bedrooms	159	63
3 bedrooms	285	79
4 bedrooms	118	50

5 or more bedrooms	0	127
Renter occupied:	305	121
No bedroom	0	127
1 bedroom	12	17
2 bedrooms	144	70
3 bedrooms	149	101
4 bedrooms	0	127
5 or more bedrooms	0	127

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2006-2010, Table B25042

Fair Housing Policies and Education: Communities may have policies that unintentionally fail to Affirmatively Further Fair Housing (AFFH). These can be reflected in comprehensive plans, capital improvement projects, zoning or subdivision ordinances, and requirements for assistance to homes in floodplains. Given that certification of AFFH is required when receiving HUD funds, jurisdictions should ensure that their practices do not promote concentrations of protected classes, that they AFFH, and that they do not unintentionally preclude housing affordability or restrict accessibility to housing for persons with disabilities.

The City has adopted or agreed to adopt a number of policies and undertake actions to increase local awareness of fair housing issues and increase availability of housing choices to protected classes. Rio Hondo adopted a FFAST form in 2011 as required for applicants of Disaster Relief funding. Anticipated and ongoing actions are listed in the goals and objectives section at the end of this chapter.

The City publishes the following ad in its newspaper of record in conjunction with TXCDBG grants. The City last ran this ad in December of 2011.

To promote fair housing practices, the City of Rio Hondo encourages potential homeowners and renters to be aware of their rights under the National Fair Housing Law. Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, as amended, prohibits discrimination against any person on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, handicap, familial status or national origin in the sale or rental of units in the housing market. For more information on fair housing or

to report possible fair housing discrimination, call the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's toll-free hotline at 1-800-669-9777.

In addition, the City posts provisions of the National Fair Housing Laws and the process for filing a complaint regarding housing discrimination at City Hall, has designated a fair housing officer, and has designated April as Fair Housing Month.

The FFAST recommends a number of actions that communities should undertake to AFFH. Officials, a locally appointed FFAST committee, residents and planners reviewed those actions during the course of the planning study. It was found that the City is already undertaking many of these actions, and that it can augment these actions with new policies and procedures. Existing city policy is discussed below. New actions the City may take are listed in the Goals and Objectives section of this study.

1. *Flood Plain Construction:* The FFAST requires that the City review policies that might unfairly limit access by residents of protected classes to disaster recovery funds. Those can include flood plain, zoning, and similar ordinances that prohibit reconstruction in the flood plain without some form of additional relief to those residents prohibited from rebuilding.

In Rio Hondo, the floodplain is restricted mostly within the banks of the 12-foot deep Arroyo Colorado canal. No homes are located within the FEMA designated flood plain. The City's subdivision ordinance specifies that plat proposals must show that the development is "reasonably safe from flooding."

The City's zoning ordinance does not mention regulations related to building in the floodplain. The City does have a floodplain prevention ordinance adopted in 1987. In 2012, it was considering replacing this ordinance with the Texas Water Development Board model Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance, which allows for construction in the

floodplain so long as structures are adequately protected against flood damage. Variances are also allowable.

Ordinance Review: The FFAST requires that the City review ordinances that might impede fair housing choice. A review of ordinances related to housing and construction was conducted as part of these planning studies. The City has few ordinances related to housing. It has a mobile home regulation ordinance, a building standard ordinance, a subdivision ordinance, and a zoning ordinance. No impediments were found. However, the city's zoning ordinance could be updated to require accommodations for handicapped residents and visitors; allow for manufactured housing on a temporary basis if needed in time of disaster, and to allow mixed uses that would create more housing choice for all residents.

The City's existing Zoning Ordinance does not define handicap parking requirements; nor do the Subdivision and Zoning Ordinances specify where sidewalks are required. Handicap parking requirements are enforced at the State level with other ADA standards through the Architectural Barriers Texas Accessibility Standards (TAS), Article 9102 in the Texas Civil Statutes. An ordinance update has been recommended to explicitly reference the TAS in the zoning code. An ordinance update was recommended in the Subdivision Ordinance to require sidewalks in more dense developments.

The zoning ordinance amendments also include a provision allowing for temporary use permits for travel trailers or manufactured homes used to house residents who have lost their homes due to a natural disaster.

Affordability: Housing is considered affordable when monthly costs are less than 30% of monthly income. *Table 3D: Housing Tenure Data* tabulates the median monthly income, total number of owner and renter occupied housing units and the housing costs as a percentage of income for both renters and home

owners. Data from the 2005-2009 ACS and the 2006-2010 ACS show that housing costs are rising for both renters and mortgage payers. Costs are stable for those without a mortgage. The table indicates that owner-occupied households with a mortgage spend the largest percentage of their monthly income on housing in both the city (33%) and the county (40%), and that percentage is rising. Based on the 30% of housing cost to monthly income standard for affordability, the housing costs for owner housing is barely affordable. Rental costs have risen but may still be affordable. Census numbers show an upward trend of home rental in the City, although a much higher percentage of householders own versus rent. As a consequence of this trend, renting as a percent of income jumped from 13% of monthly income in the Census 2005 to 2009 estimates to 22% in the 2006 to 2010 estimates. Median rents almost doubled during that time period to \$568 from \$331. Interviews of multi-family property owners indicated that multi-family rents (for a 2-bedroom) ranged from \$300 to \$600 per month in Rio Hondo and that waiting lists in the larger complexes could take one year to clear.

Table 3G: Occupied Housing Characteristics

		City	County
Owner Occupied	<i>Total Occupied Housing Units</i>	879	109,863
	# of Units	588	78,606
	% of Total	67%	72%
	Monthly \$ w/Mortgage (median)	\$858	\$1,045
	% of monthly income	33%	40%
	Monthly \$ w/o Mortgage (median)	\$356	\$349
	% of Income	14%	13%
Rental Units	Number of Units	291	31,257
	% of total units	33%	28%
	Median monthly rent	\$568	\$584
	% of monthly income	22%	22%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey 2006-2010, Tables B25077, B25081, B25088; American FactFinder <<http://factfinder.census.gov>> American Community Survey (ACS) numbers are subject to large margins of error for smaller geographies and estimates only.

Another affordability measure for housing and a key component of mortgage lending decisions is the price to income ratio. The price to income ratio is the disparity between median income and median housing value. It provides a

measure to answer the question, “Is a median priced home affordable for a median income earner?” *Table 3E: Median Household Incomes and Housing Values* shows the ratio for Rio Hondo, Cameron County and the State. Rio Hondo’s price to income ratio is lower than that of the County and the state, indicating that housing prices might be slightly more affordable than in other parts of Cameron County and other parts of the state.

Table 3H: Median Household Income and Housing Values

	City		County	State
Median Household Income	\$23,550	- \$35,420	\$31,264	\$49,646
Median Household Monthly Income	\$1,963	- \$2,952	\$2,605	\$4,137
Median Home Value	\$50,951	- \$65,849	\$74,000	\$123,500
Median Home Value / Median Household Income	2.0		2.4	2.5

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey 2006-2010, Tables B19013, B25077; American FactFinder <<http://factfinder.census.gov>>

Construction Costs: It is commonly held that housing construction costs in rural communities are cheaper than in urban areas. Land values in rural areas are typically lower and there are fewer impact and regulatory fees. However, a number of elements drive up the cost of rural construction. There are fewer rural builders and developers, which means less competition. Rural builders also produce at a lower volume while paying material costs equal to those in urban areas.⁴ The city issued 119 building permits between 2007 and 2011. Six of those were for new home construction, one for business new construction and the remaining for remodeling, additions, and other smaller home and building improvements. New construction, according to values declared on the permits, ranges from about \$37 to \$65 per square foot in Rio Hondo. Regional statistics on land sales and construction costs indicate that building homes is less expensive in the Rio Hondo area than in nearby San Antonio or Corpus Christi. Table 3I compares costs around the region. Costs for Rio Hondo were not available. Harlingen pricing was used to approximate Rio Hondo because of its proximity.

Table 3I: Average Residential Construction Costs

Harlingen	San Antonio	Corpus Christi	Houston
\$131,235	\$139,984	\$134,735	\$146,983

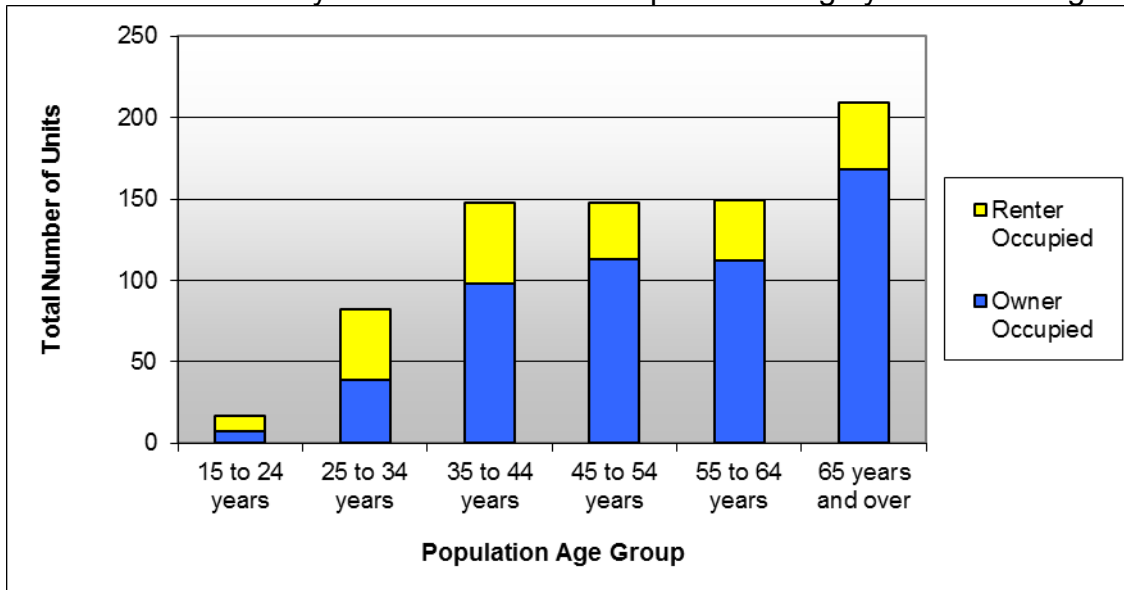
Source: *US Means Residential Square foot costs, 2008 Contractors Pricing Guide, Average One-Story Residential base costs (2,000 sf) and Location Factors, pg. 26 and 267.*

Center reports that rural land prices in the Lower Rio Grande Valley region, which includes Rio Hondo, indicates that land prices are unstable in the region. Median price per acre ranged from a low of \$3,127 in 2010 to \$5,607 in 2006. Median prices per acre in the area in 2000 were \$1,456, indicating that land value has risen in the region.

Elderly Residents’ Needs: Elderly residents appear to have choices both to rent and own housing units as needed, according to income and familial status. *Chart 3A: Owner and Renter Occupied Housing by Residents’ Age* shows that home ownership in the City increases in the older cohorts both in number of units. Almost three-quarters of the units are owned by householders older than 45. Half of the rental units are occupied by those over the age of 45. This means that elderly residents have choices in Rio Hondo to both own and rent housing units. These 30 units are equipped with ADA-compliant bathrooms. However, only two of 30 provide doors and entrances for wheelchairs, indicating that resident’s ability to age in place may be somewhat limited in Rio Hondo. No nursing homes are available in Rio Hondo. However, they are available nearby in Harlingen.

⁴ Scanlon, Kirk, (2002) *Making it Work: Developing Affordable Housing in Rural Texas*, Texas Association of Community Development Corporations, Austin TX.

Chart 3A: County Owner & Renter Occupied Housing by Residents' Age



Source: U.S. Census Bureau; 2010 Census Table: QT-H2: Tenure, Household Size, and Age of Householder: 2010

Future Housing Needs: To accommodate projected growth of about 400 residents in Rio Hondo over the planning period, Rio Hondo would need to add at least 100 housing units by 2032. If the units were added in Rio Hondo's current density patterns, it would need to add as many as 97 homes and 17 multi-family units. However, if it wanted to accommodate its aging population, assisting elderly residents to age in place and meeting demands for affordable multi-family unit housing, then it could meet demands by building more multi-family and mixed use housing. Within the City limits, areas for housing development exist on the eastern side of the City just north and south of FM 106/Colorado Avenue; and in the western part of the city along the Arroyo. The provision of sewer services would need to be addressed to accommodate much housing development west of the Arroyo. Multi-family and single-family housing development could occur between Madero and Hatch off FM 106, closer to the High School and the intersection of FM 106 and Sam Houston/FM 345. EJT areas could also accommodate single-family or multi-family housing growth and the City may want to consider annexation of areas between from south of Ebony to Parker Road to accommodate future housing tracts. Developers would need to provide public road access to these areas to continue the city grid in those areas.

Table 3J: Future Housing Demand

	SF	Multi-Fam	Manf / Mobile	Total
Occupied Housing, 2012	620	108	87	815
Share of Total	76%	13%	11%	100%
Future Needs 2022	644	112	90	847
Future Needs 2032	717	125	101	943
Add'l Housing 2022	24	4	3	32
Add'l Housing 2032	97	17	14	128
Occupied Housing, 2032	717	125	101	943
Owner Occupied	65	11	9	86
Renter Occupied	32	6	5	42
Totals	97	17	14	128

Source: 2011 Fieldwork, Population Projections (see Chapter 2)

3.5 Identification of Housing Needs

Rio Hondo will need to increase its housing stock by about 15% to accommodate growth. To maintain enough housing stock it will also have to address aging housing units representing 1 in 3 units. The statistics above and discussions with residents and housing advocates highlight the following needs as they relate to overall housing availability and affordability; identifiable population segments; and future population growth.

1. Aging, deteriorating, and dilapidated housing stock, both single-family and rental units;
2. Waiting lists for multi-family units for both families and seniors;
3. Need for more housing units, including those for handicapped residents;

3.6 Local Capacity

Existing City Codes: The City regulates housing through at least six ordinances:

- 1) Building Standards Ordinance that orders the abatement of abandoned homes declared to be substandard;
- 2) Mobile Home Ordinance establishes the location of manufactured and mobile homes only in designated Class M Mobile Homes Districts;

- 3) Standard Codes Ordinance adopts the 2003 International Residential Code and Energy Code, as well as the 2001 versions of the Standard Plumbing, Mechanical, Gas and Fire Prevention Codes;
- 4) Building Permit Ordinance requires building permits and certificate of occupancy for structures that are undergoing renovations or new construction;
- 5) Zoning Ordinance: Establishes districts prohibiting the construction of businesses or industry in residential neighborhoods and limiting residential building heights to 40 feet. It also establishes a Multi-Family District and allows for the construction of multi-family units in M, Business and Industrial Districts and limits the height of a multi-family structure to 40 feet and 2 ½ stories; and.
- 6) Subdivision Ordinance provides the orderly division of land and requires that new development be served with standard water, sewer, streets, and drainage structures. It limits block length to 600 feet, and requires streets in adjoining areas to continue but only “where necessary to the neighborhood pattern.” It also requires that streets be at least 31 feet in width. It specifies standards for sidewalks in neighborhoods but doesn’t specify where they are required

Code Enforcement: Code enforcement helps ensure the integrity of the housing stock into the future. Regardless of what ordinances the City adopts, a system of regular, standardized enforcement must be in place for the codes to have effect. Enforcement can be made to pay for itself at least in part if fines are appropriate and standardized methods are in place to expedite processing.

Rio Hondo City limits: The City currently contracts with a code enforcement officer on a part-time basis. The officer conducts inspections needed for building permits and for enforcing the Codes listed above. Permit fees cover inspection costs.

Cameron County ETJ: The legislature has granted Cameron County at least one tool other counties do not have in protecting the housing stock outside city boundaries. It can require building permits for new residential

and commercial construction. The County adopted the International Building Code 2006 version. Its Engineering Department has three full-time inspectors and 1 building official to enforce the Code both for approving building permits and investigating complaints of hazardous buildings throughout the County outside City boundaries. The County also operates under an interlocal agreement with all cities in the County that requires the more stringent subdivision regulation to apply in a City's ETJ. If a plat were to be requested in the City's ETJ, the City and the County (Cameron County Engineering in San Benito) would jointly review the plat. The developer must comply with the stricter regulation in each ordinance. For example, setbacks may be more stringent in the City's ordinance and drainage engineering standards are stricter in the County's subdivision ordinance.

Budgeting: The City has budgeted in the past for matching funds for the HOME Program, allowing it to rehabilitate or demolish and reconstruct dilapidated, occupied homes within its City Limits. The City does not have a line item in its budget to pay for demolishing vacant or abandoned homes or other structures if they were deemed to be substandard.

Agency Partnering: In addition to code adoption and enforcement, the City can partner with regional and county-wide agencies that assist on issues regarding housing, economic development, financing and legal support. These include:

- Local Community Action Agencies
- Local Area Agencies on Aging
- Local Councils of Governments
- Local Legal Aid Services
- Local Housing Finances Corporations

Harlingen Housing Authority
219 E Jackson St.
Harlingen, TX

(956) 423-2521

Residents using housing choice vouchers in Harlingen can select from a variety of properties including single family homes, duplex units, apartment complexes, and mobile homes. Currently, the waitlist for housing choice vouchers in Harlingen is approximately 170 applicants. Due to lack of funding, for the past two years the Housing Choice (formerly Section 8) office has not been able to provide housing choice vouchers to new applicants. During this time, the office has only accepted additions to the waitlist. The office will re-open in the near future and will then be able to provide additional vouchers to waitlisted applicants. In the past, the process of obtaining a housing choice voucher took approximately six months to a year to complete. However, recently, due to lack of funds, the process is taking up to two years to complete. Rio Hondo residents do not often seek assistance from this authority, officials said.

Cameron County Housing Authority
65 Castrellano Circle
Brownsville, TX
(956) 541-4983
dflores@cchatx.org)

The Cameron County Housing Authority is composed of a total of 320 public housing units, 1006 Housing Choice vouchers, and 177 conventional units. Cameron County Housing Authority's jurisdiction falls between South Padre Island and La Feria in Cameron County and includes the City of Rio Hondo. 49 Housing Choice vouchers are provided to Rio Hondo Village Apartment residents in Rio Hondo. Information was not available as to how many other Housing Choice vouchers of the 1,006 are being allocated to Rio Hondo residents. Cameron County does not operate or provide any public housing units in Rio Hondo.

Local Community Action Agencies: Community action agencies (CAAs) are the delivery system for federal and state antipoverty programs. The agency provides programs that assist Rio Hondo residents with maintaining their housing stock.

Main Office:
Cameron-Willacy Counties Community Projects, Inc
1144 Professional Drive
Brownsville, TX 78521
Phone: 956/544-6411

The area office in Rio Hondo:

Susan Salinas
Rio Hondo Multi-Service Center
121 Arroyo Blvd
Rio Hondo, TX 78583
(956) 748-2072

Cameron-Willacy Counties Community Projects provides:

- Weatherization Assistance Program provides qualifying low-income residents of owner occupied or renter occupied housing units with an energy audit and weatherization improvements that reduce utility costs and address the infiltration of air (up to \$6,500). Improvements include: insulation in the attic, walls and floors; caulking, weather-stripping, replacement of exterior doors and/or windows, repair or replacement of heating and/or air conditioning units and storm windows. Funding is not available for homes found to be not structurally sound. This program is administered through the Texas Department of Community Affairs for the US Department of Energy. Applicants must be 18 years or older and provide social security numbers of all household members and proof of income including wages, retirement checks, or child support. In addition, applicants must show their 12 month consumption history of electric and gas usage as well as a copy of their most current electric and gas bill statement. To apply, Rio Hondo residents can obtain an application form at the Rio Hondo Multi-Service Center and contact Susan Salinas at (956)748-2072 for an appointment. Applicants who qualify are taken on a first-come, first-serve basis. Rio Hondo residents currently receive assistance through this program.

Local Area Agencies on Aging: Local area agencies on aging (AAAs) are affiliated with the Texas Department on Aging and offer a variety of services for seniors including case management, transportation services, meal services, senior activity centers, and home modification assistance. The Area Agency on Aging office for Rio Hondo is located in McAllen.

Main Office
311 N. 15th Street
McAllen, Texas 78501

Phone: (956) 682-3481
lrgvdc.org

The local Area Agency on Aging is administered by the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council, which serves Cameron, Hidalgo, and Willacy Counties. (LRGVDC) Agency gets state and federal funds to help coordinate local elderly care in the counties including homemaker services, meals, and caregiver orientation and training of staff needed to carry these programs out. They also provide information and referral for health and social services and benefits counseling and act as a nursing home ombudsman. In addition, there are several senior centers throughout the service area. These centers provide a range of services including information, referral, and outreach, nutrition education, recreation, transportation, physical fitness activities, and noon meals. The Rio Hondo Senior Center can be reached at (956) 748-3082.

Local Legal Aid Services: Local legal aid organizations provide civil legal representation and advice at little or no cost to low income individuals who cannot afford a lawyer. Legal aid focuses on legal issues relating to basic needs, self-sufficiency, children and families, elderly and disability, and housing and homelessness prevention.

Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid (TRLA) provides legal services to communities located in Southwest Texas. TRLA is the largest legal aid provider in the state of Texas and specialized in the areas of housing, domestic violence and family law, economic and social justice, individual rights, labor, and public benefits. TRLA has several branch offices throughout the state including a location in Harlingen that serves Cameron County. The branch office can be reached at (956) 364-3800 and more information can be found on their website: <http://www.trla.org/>.

Community Housing Development Organizations: A community housing development organization (CHDO) is a private, nonprofit, community-based service organization with the capacity to develop affordable housing or carry out other HOME program funded activities for the community it serves.

Community Development Corporation of Brownsville

901 E Levee Street
Brownsville, TX 78520
(956) 541-4599

The Community Development Corporation of Brownsville (CDCB) has been recognized nationally as the recipient of several affordable housing awards. CDCB provides several first time homebuyer programs to residents of Cameron County including down payment assistance programs and mutual self-help programs. More information can be found at <http://www.cdcb.org/>.

- **Downpayment Assistance:** CDCB has partnered with the City of Brownsville and the State of Texas to utilize federal, state, and private downpayment assistance funds to help over 990 families at an average of \$9,000 per family.
- **Affordable Housing Loan Program:** The Affordable Housing Loan Program is CDCB's oldest program and provides financial assistance to low income households constructing a new home. The program is available to families who own a substandard home or are purchasing a lot in the City of Brownsville or Rural Cameron County. The program requires a 3.5% downpayment and can refinance up to \$7,500 on any balance owned on the purchased lot.
- **Affordable Family Communities:** Due to the growing demand for affordable housing in Cameron County, CDCB developed the Affordable Family Communities program that consists of twelve subdivisions where 70% of developed lots are designated for affordable homes sold to qualifying families. These subdivisions are found in both urban and rural areas including San Benito and Los Fresnos. CDCB maintains a three year inventory of land to be used for affordable housing production.
- **Mutual Self Help:** This program is available to families earning 60% or less of the States Median Family Income. The program is based on sweat equity where six to ten families share labor and skills to complete each home. In rural areas outside Brownsville, CDCB uses funds from USDA Rural Development's 523 Mutual Self Help Grants as well as HUD loans. Lots for

the Mutual Self Help program are provided in CDCB's Affordable Family Communities.

Habitat for Humanity of the Rio Grande Valley
<http://www.rgv-habitat.org/>
412 W. Ash
McAllen, TX
(956) 686-7455

Habitat for Humanity utilizes a network of donors, partner families, and volunteers to provide home ownership opportunities to low-income families. The Rio Grande Valley office serves residents of Hidalgo, Willacy, and Cameron Counties. To qualify for the program, an applicant must have a good credit score and cannot previously have owned a home or land or currently possess a mortgage. Upon approval, clients provide 600 hours of sweat equity and obtain a 40 year, no interest loan. The process takes approximately one year from approval to ownership. To apply, applicants may either fill out an online form or visit the main office located in McAllen. In their current fiscal year, Habitat for Humanity of the Rio Grande Valley aims to build 40 homes in Cameron County, 6 of which have already been completed.

Local Housing Finance Corporations: Local housing finance corporations (HFCs) may periodically receive bond funds to use at the local level for single-family homebuyer assistance or multifamily development purposes. The Cameron County HFC has no active programs. Its most recent assistance included offering Mortgage Credit Certificates, which reduce the federal income taxes by 40 percent of qualified home buyers.

Texas State Affordable Housing Corporation Texas State Affordable Housing Corporation (TSAHC) is a self-supporting, not-for-profit organization created by state statute in 1994 to provide safe, decent and affordable housing for low-income Texans and other underserved populations. The TSAHC provides a variety of affordable housing programs that range from First-time Homebuyer Programs for individuals and families. Programs provide low-interest financing to individuals, particularly first-time homebuyers, teachers, paid firefighters, EMS personnel, peace officers, correction of juvenile corrections officers, county jailers and public security officers. It also provides various financing options for developers of both single-family and multifamily housing, portions of which would serve low-to-moderate income tenants. Programs are listed on the agency

website at www.tsahc.org. The agency can be reached at 512-477-3555 or 888-638-3555.

Texas Department of Housing and Community Development (TDHCA) The state agency responsible for promoting and preserving homeownership, and financing the development of affordable rental housing. The agency has programs to both build and rehabilitate single-family and multifamily housing. The City can apply for funding to:

- assist with multifamily unit rehabilitation projects; (*Rental Housing Development Program*);
- assist renters, including veterans and persons with disabilities, with utility and security deposits (*Tenant Based Rental Assistance Program, Tenant Based Rental Assistance Program for Persons with Disabilities, and the Veterans Housing Support Program*);
- provide down payment assistance to individuals who have not owned a home in three years or who are first-time home buyers (*Texas HOMEbuyer Assistance Programs*);
- repair or replace substandard homes for low-to-moderate income residents (*HOME Rehabilitation Program and Homeownership Assistance Program*); and
- construct home accessibility projects for disabled residents (*Amy Young Barrier Removal Program*)

Contact:

www.tdhca.state.tx.us

Phone: (512) 475-3800

or (800) 525-0657

USDA Rural Development: The mission of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development is to improve the economy and quality of life in rural America. USDA programs include homeownership opportunities, owner-occupied housing assistance, rental assistance, rental housing development, community development activities, business development, and technical assistance in rural areas of the state (generally considered areas with a population of less than 20,000 people). The Rural Housing Service within USDA Rural Development administers three homebuyer assistance programs in rural areas. USDA also sells low-cost homes. Their website is located at www.rurdev.usda.gov/tx/hp.htm

USDA Rural Development Guaranteed Rural Housing Loans for Single-family Dwellings offers help for people who want to own a home but cannot pay a down payment. Low and moderate-income applicants can have closing costs associated with purchasing a house financed into the loan up to the appraised value of the property. Loans can be for new or existing homes. The Guaranteed Rural Housing Program charges a 1.5% guarantee fee that is due at closing. Generally, the program targets communities with populations of 10,000 or less in locations not closely associated with urban areas..

Homeownership loans from USDA Rural Development can also be used to modernize existing homes by adding bathrooms, central heating, modern kitchens, and other improvements such as driveways and foundation plantings. Individuals who meet the requirements should contact USDA directly for these loans. In Cameron County maximum loans are \$132,600 in 2011 and the Edinburg office serves applicants from Rio Hondo. Seniors age 62 and higher may be eligible for grants of up to \$7,500 for home repairs depending on fund availability. In addition, funds for updating or building new multi-family residential developments are available annually and are generally released around the month of February. Notice of funds availability as well as information on when to apply for these grants is found on the national USDA Rural Development website (http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rd_nofas.html). Programs are explained at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/tx/hp.htm> or the following offices can be contacted.

Scooter Brockette
USDA Rural Development Housing Programs Director
101 S. Main, Ste. 102
Temple, TX 76501
(254) 742-9770
Scooter.Brockette@tx.usda.gov

Elizabeth Garza
Area Specialist
S. 2514 Veterans Blvd.
Edinburg, TX 78539-7062
(956) 383-4928 x 4

For a complete listing of State and federal programs available see:
<http://www.tdhca.state.tx.us/overview.htm>

3.7 Goals and Objectives to Meet Housing Plan

Goal 1: Expand housing choices in Rio Hondo

Objective 1.1: Increase the availability of housing for disadvantaged populations, including for the disabled and the elderly.

Policy 1.1.1: Adopt a Future Land Use Plan in 2012 that encourages a mix of housing types and locations; neighborhood retail, and adequate pedestrian and automobile connections to schools, shopping and recreation.

Policy 1.1.2: By 2013, revise zoning ordinance to allow for housing choices throughout the city including mixed uses (first floor retail/second floor residential); and multifamily units and retail near residential, schools and medical services; and choices of lot sizes.

Policy 1.1.3: Develop an incentive program by 2015 that encourages the development of multifamily housing and/or single-family housing with handicapped designs and/or other amenities for the elderly and disabled. An example would be incentives for increased density or building heights in exchange for one-floor or ADA accessible ground floor units.

Objective 1.2: Increase the number of multi-family rental units from 114 to at least 135 during the planning period.

Policy 1.2.1: Adopt a Future Land Use Plan in 2012 that encourages a mix of housing types and locations; neighborhood retail, and adequate pedestrian and automobile connections to schools, shopping and recreation.

Policy 1.2.2: Convene a meeting with current multi-family unit owners and representatives from the TDHCA, USDA, TSAHC and/or the Lower Rio Grande Valley Certified Development Company as well as other regional housing advocates by 2014 to determine how at least one multi-family complex can be built or an existing one updated and expanded in Rio Hondo.

Objective 1.3: Encourage infill development on platted lots where water, sewer, street and drainage systems already exist or channel development in areas that in which these facilities can be easily built.

Policy 1.3.1: Adopt a Future Land Use Map in 2012 that portrays the City's desire for infill and development on lots that have city services.

Policy 1.3.2: Apply bi-annually for TxCDBG and USDA funding to upgrade water and sewer facilities to serve increasing numbers of residents in the City limits and or in areas adjacent to the city limits that could be annexed.

Policy 1.3.3: Throughout the planning period, continue to fund adequate personnel and equipment for operation and maintenance of water, sewer and drainage systems.

Policy 1.3.4: Throughout the planning period, continue to maintain streets in areas highlighted as being developed on the City's Future Land Use Map.

Objective 1.4: By 2020, reduce the number of occupied and vacant dilapidated housing units from 46 to 20.

Policy 1.4.1: By 2013, continue efforts to bring sub-standard buildings to Code by reinvigorating the Building Standards and Renewal Board and place its existence on the City website to raise the prominence of the City not tolerating substandard buildings.

Policy 1.4.2: In 2012, the City should apply to participate in the TDHCA HOME Rehabilitation Program and Homeownership Assistance Program, budgeting required funds and resources for in-kind and financial match requirements. Up to 9 homes can be rehabilitated per cycle. After completing a cycle in 2014, the City should apply to become a part of the Agency's Reservation System for ongoing rehabilitation/reconstruction of the City's housing stock.

Policy 1.4.3: Throughout the planning period maintain literature at the City Hall or at the Library about statewide and local programs that offer individual grants and loans, particularly to disabled and seniors on fixed incomes, for housing rehabilitation, energy efficiency and weatherization.

Policy 1.4.4: Begin negotiating with garbage company or landfills for availability of and/or discount pricing for roll-off containers to haul debris from demolished substandard structures.

Objective 1.5: By 2015, assist rental property owners with upgrading older units in the City that have consistently high vacancy rates.

Policy 1.5.1: Consult the TDHCA, TSAHC, and LRGVDC on programs that may draw down grants or loans to rehabilitate aged multifamily units in town

Policy 1.5.2: Create a budget line item and/or a revolving loan fund (with USDA assistance) that would accrue funding for any match/financial contributions needed from the City for housing improvement programs.

Goal 2: The City of Rio Hondo affirmatively furthers fair housing through its policies and publications.

Objective 2.1: Increase residents' awareness of and access to information about financial management, home purchase/maintenance assistance, and fair housing resources.

Policy 2.1.1: Advertise at City Hall and on a City website when available:

- Cameron County Housing Authority Housing Choice rental assistance
- City-endorsed grants: HOME, CDBG

- Links to USDA Rural Development Home Assistance programs;
- Weatherization assistance (through the West Texas Opportunities, Inc.)
- Other housing services/counseling programs as the City investigates throughout the planning period.
- Wheelchair ramp building assistance for low-income residents (Texas Ramp Project, www.texasramps.org)

Policy 2.1.2: Provide at City hall and on the City's website when available:

- Local, state, and federal contacts for reporting a fair housing complaint (posters, flyers, etc.)
- A copy of the City's Fair Housing policy and complaint procedures
- A copy of the Federal Fair Housing Act⁵
- A copy of the Texas Accessibility Standards⁶ and Construction Requirements for Single-Family Affordable Housing (Texas Government Code, Section 2306.514⁷)

Objective 2.2: Adopt city policies that proclaim the City's intentions to affirmatively further fair housing.

Policy 2.2.1: Adopt a Fair Housing Ordinance by 2012 based on HUD model ordinances and re-examine annually to ensure its compliance with federal and state law.

Policy 2.2.2: City Council appoint a Fair Housing Working Group to begin developing an anti-NIMBYism action plan by 2012 to disseminate timely and accurate information to residents and other concerned parties during the planning and execution of fair housing projects and developments. The Action Plan should include the requirement that developers seeking to use tax credits or other public financing mechanisms in Rio Hondo should have an Affirmative Marketing Plan.

Policy 2.2.3: Establish a procedure in 2012 at City Hall to keep logs and records of fair housing complaints and referrals.

Policy 2.2.4: Place Fair Housing contacts on all materials to the public, including water bills (if feasible), and letters to residents by 2012.

Policy 2.2.5: Appoint a resident realtor or other housing advocate from Rio Hondo as early as 2012 to work with housing coordinators at the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council on developing a regional testing program. The start of such a program

⁵ Available at the Department of Justice Civil Rights Division website:

www.justice.gov/crt/about/hce/title8.php

⁶ Available at www.tdlr.state.tx.us/ab/abtas.htm

⁷ Available at www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Docs/GV/htm/GV.2306.htm#2306.514

may be dependent on the state establishing an education package that will assist regions in creating testing programs.

Policy 2.2.6: Adopt a policy by 2014 explicitly requiring that all non-federally funded projects in the City follow State and Federal laws regarding special-needs construction standards.

Policy 2.2.7: Pass a resolution annually designating April as Fair Housing Month and sponsor activities that promote fair housing.

Policy 2.2.8: Provide fair housing training throughout the planning period to all staff, as trainings are available.⁸

Policy 2.2.9: Coordinate throughout the planning period housing grant applications with other grant applications so that housing quality in an area is improved at the same time as water, sewer, streets, and drainage.

Policy 2.2.10: Hold a public hearing annually to solicit input from the community about procedures for Fair Housing complaints.

Policy 2.2.11: City Council adopt a resolution that requires those developing ordinances to consider Fair Housing/AFFH implications. The timing of this objective is related to the state developing guidelines the cities can use to determine whether an ordinance has a disparate fair housing impact.

Objective 2.3: Increase the number of single-family housing units that accept US HUD Housing Choice Program Vouchers (Section 8) so that persons of low-to-moderate income levels can access single-family houses.

Policy 2.3.1: Assist regional Housing Choice Voucher (previously Section 8) program office by 2012 with identifying landlords to increase participation in the program throughout the City.

Policy 2.3.2: Provide landlords by 2013 with information on any incentives offered by the program office(s) to increase participation.

To reach these goals, the following plan will guide the City's official housing-related activities in the 2012-2032 period:

⁸ Annual training is expected to be offered through the Texas Department of Agriculture beginning in 2012 or 2013.

Table 3K: Housing Objectives & Activities, 2012-2032

Year	Project	Estimated Cost	Source of Funds*
2012	Work with city staff and volunteers to accomplish fair housing tasks listed in Goal 2	Staff/volunteer time	GEN
2013	Apply for state funding to rehabilitate up to 9 single-family units or an apartment complex, then become a part of the TDHCA's HOME reservation system to complete one house annually	\$25,000 match	GEN, TDHCA, TSHC
2013	Begin an annual housing fair where residents can receive information from housing providers and financial institutions about homeownership, rental assistance and a variety of rehabilitation programs. Include a panel discussion of housing issues and assistance from not-for-profit groups and churches, could be in conjunction with other events.	Staff time	GEN
2013	Revise Zoning Map and Ordinance to increase flexibility and include provisions for ground floor units that are accessible; and diversifies housing choices for residents	\$2,000/legal fees	GEN
2014	Meet with TDHCA, USDA, and/or TSAHC representatives and other regional housing advocates to determine how at least one multi-family complex can be built in Rio Hondo.	Funds for program matches could be required, variable	GEN, EDC, MDD
2015	Consider creating a revolving loan fund to assist multifamily unit owners with rehabilitation;	Staff time	GEN, USDA RD, MDD
2016	Adopt later versions of the International Building Code and International Fire Code	\$500 for purchase of code books	GEN
2018-2020	Create an annexation plan that lays out intentions to annex contiguous land where future housing could be built.	\$3,000 (development of plan/legal fees)	GEN

* Sources are described in the Local Capacity section.

4 Land Use Study

4.1 Background

The location and extent of land uses in a community affects property values, neighborhood stability, traffic flow, aesthetics, and economic development potential .The Land Use Study analyzes current land use patterns and formulates a future land use plan that implements the vision residents have for the city in 2032. The plan for a community's future land use is based on knowledge of the past and present and actions suggested to be taken to influence the course of development. Because of the dynamic nature of land development, this plan should be re-evaluated periodically and amended to stay current with the needs of the community.

The Land Use Study includes:

- Existing land use Inventory and Analysis
- Discussion of future development considerations, including geographic constraints, population forecasts, economic growth, physical design, generally recognized planning principles, and expectations and desires expressed by City officials and residents.
- A policy framework of goals and objectives to help reach the vision
- A description of the elements of the future land use map

4.2 Existing Land Use Inventory and Analysis

An inventory of existing land uses provides the community with a tool that reveals graphically how land is used and statistically how much is used for each purpose in the community. The inventory of Rio Hondo's land uses took place in the May of 2011 and was updated as land uses changed throughout the planning process. Though land uses vary throughout the City and its ETJ, a drive through Rio Hondo reveals a community comprised of single-family, institutional, commercial, warehouse/industrial and agricultural areas. The land use inventory and analysis resulted in the Land Use Map (Map 4A).

The land use survey of Rio Hondo references the standard land use classifications in *Table 4A: Land Use Classifications*.

Table 4A: Land Use Classifications

Classification	Examples
Single-Family Residential	Single-family houses, mobile homes
Multifamily Residential	Duplexes, triplexes, apartments, condominiums
Commercial	Stores, mini-storage businesses, offices, including medical offices, and commercial parking lots/facilities
Industrial	Factories, salvage yards, mines, large warehouses, industrial yards and refineries
Institutional	Educational and religious institutions, and hospitals, jails, prisons, and nursing homes, including associated parking lots and recreation/park areas for the institutional use only
Cemetery	Cemetery
Park and Recreation	Developed recreation or open space (public or private), not associated with other uses
Public	Government offices and facilities, water and wastewater facilities, public utilities
ROW	Highway and street right-of-way, railroad right of way
Utility	Private utility, including cell phone towers, electrical stations, transformer stations, etc.
Semi-Developed	Vacant subdivided lots of less than 10 acres in areas with or very near water, sewer, and street infrastructure
Agricultural / Undeveloped	Fields, farms, woodlands, open flood plain

Development is much denser within the City limits than in the ETJ with approximately 69% of the City's land area developed or semi-developed compared to 27% in the ETJ. *Chart 4A and Table 4B* provide a detailed summary of the geographical extent of the each land use within the City.

Chart 4A: Land Use Percentages in the City

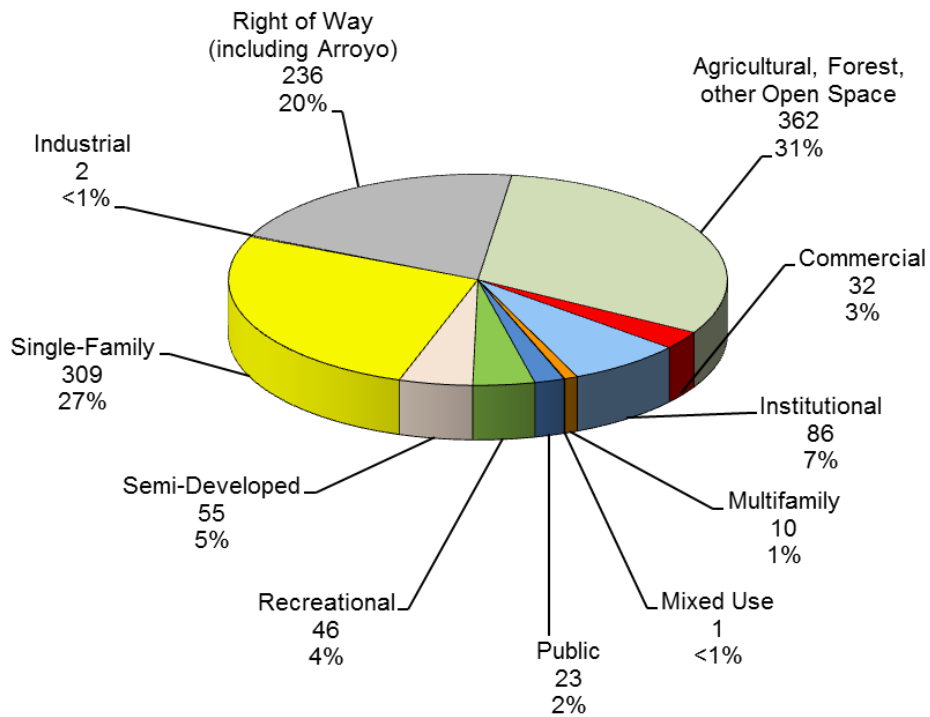


Table 4B: Extent of Land Uses within City Limits, 2012

City Land Use Classification	Acres	% of DEV	% of TOTAL	Acres/100
Commercial	32	4%	3%	1.3
Institutional	86	11%	7%	3.6
Multifamily	10	1%	1%	0.4
Mixed Use	1	0%	0%	0.0
Public	23	3%	2%	0.9
Recreational	46	6%	4%	1.9
Semi-Developed	55	7%	5%	2.3
Single-Family	309	39%	27%	12.9
Utility	0	0%	0%	0.0
Industrial	2	0%	0%	0.1
Right of Way (including Arroyo)	236	29%	20%	14
Total for Developed Areas	800	100%	69%	49
Agricultural, Forest, other Open Space	362		31%	22
Citywide Total	1,162		100%	71

Source: GrantWorks, Inc. Field Survey, 2011

Single-family Residential Land Use: This category comprises almost 40% (309 acres) of the City's developed land. There are an additional 271 acres of residential land use in the ETJ. Single-family residential uses include detached and semi-detached housing units designed to accommodate one household as well as mobile homes and manufactured housing. Most of the single family homes are concentrated in the center of the City around the original school buildings and downtown. Later development dispersed some residents west of the Arroyo and north and east of downtown along the state highways. The current residential density is 2.29 dwelling units/acre of residential land.

Multifamily and Mixed Use Residential Land Use: Three multi-family complexes, a few duplexes and a few residents living in second story or divided portions of downtown buildings comprise the available multi-unit uses in the City. No multi-family uses are located in the ETJ. The majority of multi-family uses are located one block off of FM 106 and south of downtown. A total of 112 multi-family units, including duplexes are available in the City. Multifamily housing units allow for higher density development, can be more affordable than single family housing and provide a way for seniors to age in place.

Commercial Land Use: Rio Hondo contains 32 acres of compact commercial development within its corporate boundaries. Most of the commercial land is located along FM 106. The ETJ contains an additional 35 acres. However, the acreage is comprised of large lots containing only 3 businesses. Most of the city's commercial land uses are within the central business district conveniently located next to residential, public and institutional uses. Although the business locations are advantageous because of their proximity to residences and because they can attract passersby on FM 106, many of the commercial properties in the central business district are vacant.

Industrial Use: Warehouse and industrial land uses are the most common source of noise, air, water and other point source pollution. Warehouse/industrial land

uses in and around Rio Hondo could be considered light industrial. Within the city limits they comprise 2 acres of developed land in northern Rio Hondo next to the wastewater treatment plant. The use is related to agribusiness and feed production. The ETJ contains 33 acres of industrial use belonging to two different entities. The major entity is Wilbur Ellis Inc, an international agribusiness company with a location in Rio Hondo that processes components for fertilizer and seed. Another entity in the southern portion of the ETJ relates to sand pit excavation and sales.

Institutional Land Uses: Institutional land includes areas occupied by schools, churches, hospitals, nursing homes, and similar institutions. This land use type occupies approximately 86 acres, accounting for 11% of the City's developed land. Most of the institutional uses in Rio Hondo are schools and churches.

Parks and Recreation Land Uses: The City supplies the general public with 20 acres of developed recreational land at the Rio Hondo County Park, City Park and Boat Ramp Park. Another 3 acres is undeveloped and the City planned to purchase another 4 acres to expand Boat Ramp Park during the first part of the planning period. The City provides about 6 acres of developed parkland per 1,000 residents. The acreage barely meets or falls short of standards for parks per 1,000 residents. The National Parks and Recreation Association (NRPA) recommends 5 to 15 acres per 1,000. However, standards developed for small cities in the State of Colorado suggest that small cities should provide 14 acres per 1,000 persons to provide residents with needed activity in small towns. Expanding Boat Ramp Park will allow the city to meet national standards. However, to meet standards for small cities it would need another 20 acres, particularly as the city adds population.

Public Land: Facilities belonging to local, county, and state governments include the Rio Hondo City Hall and the Cameron County Precinct 4 office and occupy 23 acres within the city limits.

Major Transportation and Rights-of-way: Streets, easements, transportation and river rights-of-way comprise 236 acres (29%) of developed land in Rio Hondo. In Rio Hondo, the Arroyo consumes 137 acres and streets and alleys and their right of ways are 99 acres.

Semi-Developed or Vacant: Approximately 55 acres (7%) of the land within the corporate boundaries of Rio Hondo is semi-developed. Semi-developed areas include vacant, subdivided land of less than 10 acres that are accessible via existing roadways and reasonably proximate to existing water/sewer infrastructure. Semi-developed areas also include land where surrounding development densities make agricultural uses less practical and where residential and other development remains likely. Another 30 acres are semi-developed in the ETJ.

Agricultural and Undeveloped Lands Within the City, 382 acres of land are classified as agricultural or undeveloped. About 127 of those acres are undeveloped. It is unpredictable as to whether the other 255 acres of current working agricultural lands would remain farm lands during the planning period. In the ETJ, another 1,750 acres is agricultural or undeveloped. The majority of that land is being farmed or used for ranching. The City would like to maintain its agricultural base in the planning period. Therefore, it should adopt policies that encourage or require clustering of housing development to preserve working lands. These policies can mainly be enacted through the subdivision ordinance and, within the city limits, through the zoning ordinance. The City can also make agriculture a part of its City brand and celebrate agriculture through its festivals, and through its business recruitment and retention campaigns so that those who own working lands are supported and appreciated and are encouraged to maintain such lands.

4.3 Development Considerations

The future layout of the city depends on a variety of known or assumable development considerations. These include:

- population growth;
- physical limitations: public utilities, thoroughfares, and other facilities, flooding and drainage constraints;
- governmental constraints: political character of the ETJ, regulations and zoning;
- recommended “best planning practices”; and
- land use goals and objectives established by the community

This discussion of development considerations brings together the background information necessary to compose the Future Land Use Map (Map 4B).

Occupied Dwellings and Future Population: Because of continued population growth expectations in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, available land and Rio Hondo’s desire to annex acreage in its ETJ, Rio Hondo’s population is expected to increase by at least 15% during the planning period. To accommodate this growth, the City can expect to see at least 100 new housing units by 2032. City zoning policy can affect decisions by developers on how many of the new units are multi-family and single-family, and where the units are built. In meeting the goal for a vibrant and continuing central historic business district, this plan encourages housing to be built at the City’s core to support CBD businesses and to maintain the City’s original grid pattern to ensure that travel by car, bike and foot to the CBD is efficient.

Major Thoroughfares: FM 106, SH 345, and FM 1846 and Reynolds Street serve as the City’s major thoroughfares. They bring traffic into the City from the region as well as provide circulation for local traffic. Southern and northern east-west connectors are desirable to promote development north and south of the CBD. This plan recommends upgrading Parkway and Bates as additional minor

collectors to allow those areas with undeveloped and semi-developed land to grow during the planning period.

Soils The City of Rio Hondo is located within an area that contains approximately 12 different soil types, 11 of which are located in its region. These soil types are shown in *Figure 4A* below. *Table 4C* contains a summary of various intrinsic characteristics of each soil type in the area with respect to a particular soil's suitability for use as a load-bearing base for construction. As described by the NRCS⁹, "Not limited" indicates that the soil can be used for the purpose with few modifications. "Somewhat limited" indicates that limitations can be minimized by special design or construction methods. "Very limited" indicates that limitations cannot be overcome without major soil removal and replacement, special structural design, or extensive use of specialized construction methods. Some areas of the City may not be suitable for development due to unstable soils typically found in flood prone areas.

In *Table 4C*, "Hydrologic Group" refers to the capacity of the soil absorb excess moisture, particularly from rainfall. Group A soils have high absorption and porosity and low runoff potential while Group D soils have low absorption and high runoff potential. Construction on Group A and B soils generally does not require soil modification. Construction on Group C and D soils should be examined and tested closely on a case-by-case basis.

Table 4C: Soil Characteristics

MUSYM		Hydrologic Group	Building Restrictions						Acreage in City
			<i>Dwellings w/out Basements</i>	<i>Dwellings with Basements</i>	<i>Small Commercial Buildings</i>	<i>Local roads and streets</i>	<i>Sewage Lagoons</i>	<i>Septic Tank Fields</i>	
HO	Hidalgo sandy clay loam	B	Somewhat limited: shrink-swell	Somewhat limited: shrink-swell	Somewhat limited: shrink-swell	Very limited: low strength;	Somewhat limited: seepage	Not Limited	267

⁹ <http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/WebSoilSurvey.aspx>

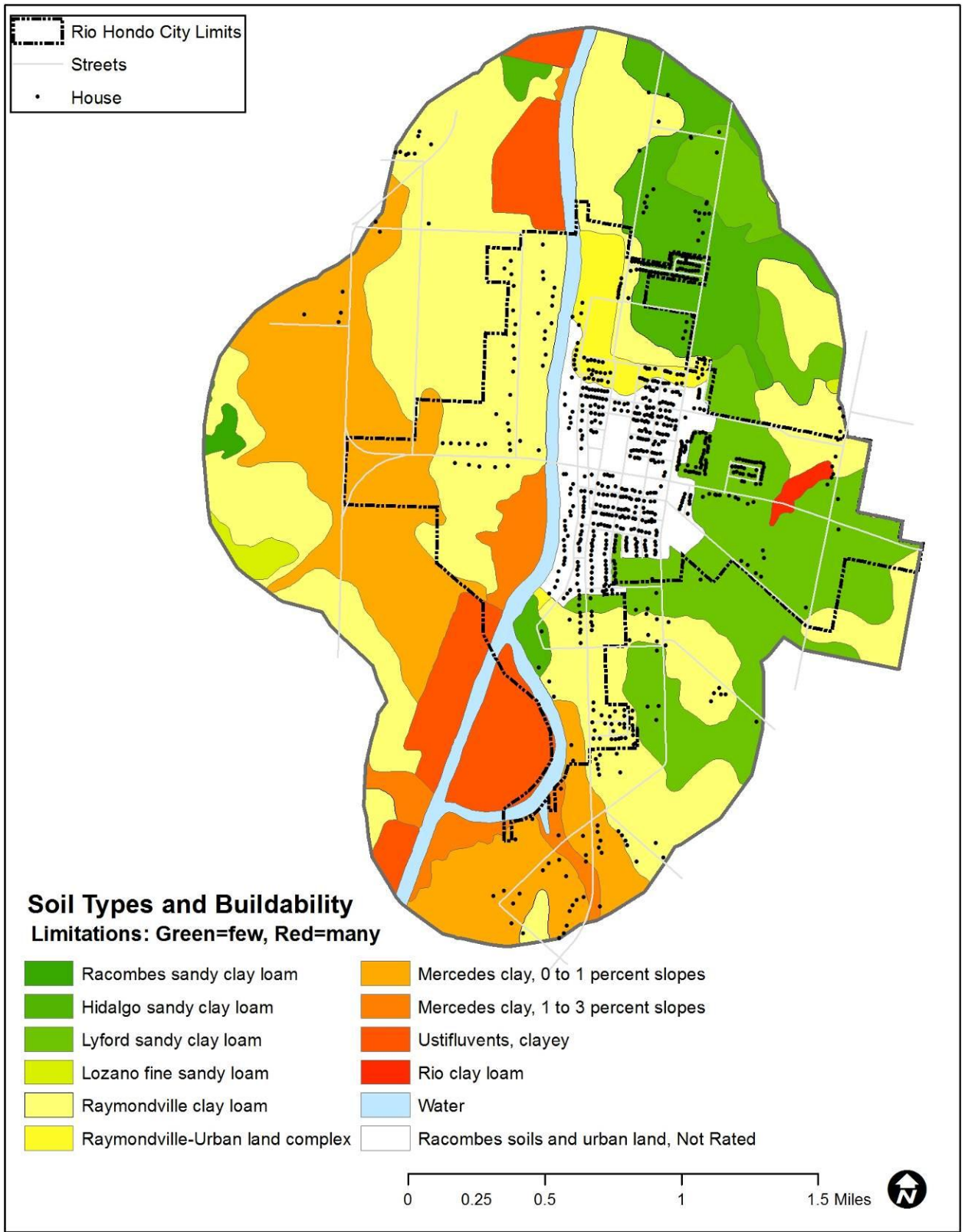
						shrink-swell			
LR	Lozano fine sandy loam	C	Somewhat limited: shrink-swell	Somewhat limited: depth to saturated zone, shrink-swell	Somewhat limited: shrink-swell	Very limited: low strength; shrink-swell	Very limited: seepage; depth to saturated zone	Somewhat limited: depth to saturated zone	21
LY	Lyford sandy clay loam	B	Somewhat limited: shrink-swell	Somewhat limited: depth to saturated zone, shrink-swell	Somewhat limited: shrink-swell	Very limited: low strength; shrink-swell	Somewhat limited: depth to saturated zone; seepage	Not Limited	563
MEA	Mercedes clay, 0 to 1% slopes	D	Very limited: shrink-swell	Very limited: shrink-swell	Very limited: shrink-swell	Very limited: low strength; shrink-swell	Not limited	Very limited: Clayey	616
MEB	Mercedes clay, 1 to 3% slopes	D	Very limited: shrink-swell	Very limited: shrink-swell	Very limited: shrink-swell	Very limited: low strength; shrink-swell	Not limited	Very limited: Clayey	108
RA	Racombes sandy clay loam	B	Somewhat limited: shrink-swell	Somewhat limited: depth to saturated zone, shrink-swell	Somewhat limited: shrink-swell	Somewhat limited: low strength; shrink-swell	Somewhat limited: depth to saturated zone; seepage	Not Limited	11
RDX	Racombes soils and urban land		Not rated	Not rated	Not rated	Not rated	Not rated	Not Limited	229
RE	Raymondville clay loam	C	Very limited: shrink-swell	Very limited: shrink-swell	Very limited: shrink-swell	Very limited: low strength; shrink-swell	Not limited	Very limited: Clayey	1240

RM	Raymondville-Urban land complex	C	Very limited: shrink-swell	Very limited: shrink-swell	Very limited: shrink-swell	Very limited: low strength; shrink-swell	Not limited	Very limited: Clayey	71
RO	Rio clay loam	C/D	Very limited: ponding; depth to saturated zone; sink-swell	Very limited: ponding; depth to saturated zone; sink-swell	Very limited: ponding; depth to saturated zone; sink-swell	Very limited: ponding; depth to saturated zone; low strength; shrink-swell	Very limited: ponding; depth to saturated zone	Very limited: ponding; clayey; depth to saturated zone	12
USX	Ustifluvents, clayey	D	Very limited: flooding; shrink-swell	Very limited	Very limited: flooding; depth to saturated zone; shrink-swell	Very limited: shrink-swell; low strength; flooding	Somewhat limited: slope; flooding	Very limited: flooding; clayey	254
W	Water		Not rated	Not rated	Not rated	Not rated	Not rated	Not rated	137

Source: *Soil survey of Cameron County, TX*. Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2007, accessed at http://soils.usda.gov/survey/online_surveys/texas/

Soils are best suited for development in the eastern part of the City and its ETJ. Development is possible in areas that are somewhat limited with more pointed soil testing, and with heightened design considerations and building techniques. The soils in the central portion of the City have not been rated and, while their buildability conditions are not known, several homes and businesses have been built in that area.

Figure 4A: Soil Associations for the City of Rio Hondo



Public Utilities: All residents within the City have access to water services provided through the City. The East Rio Hondo WSC supplies water to residents in the ETJ. Sewer services are available to residents east of the Arroyo. The City has not been able to serve residents west of the Arroyo. It has discussed building a trunk line to Harlingen's nearby system to serve them but no plans are underway to fund or complete the project. A lack of sewer will make development west of the Arroyo difficult for the duration of the planning period. Residents on the west side use on-site systems for their waste services.

Public Services and Facilities: The City maintains public facilities that may attract new residents and/or allow residents to choose to remain in Rio Hondo. Facilities include 3 public parks, a community center, city hall, library, and water and wastewater services. Most of the roads in the City are paved. Parks are located in central and south Rio Hondo. If more development occurs in the north or west portion of town, another small to medium size park will be needed to accommodate growth there.

Storm Drainage/Flood Hazard: Rio Hondo is located in the Nueces-Rio Grand Coastal Basin and specifically within the South Laguna Madre Watershed. The City is located immediately adjacent to the Arroyo Colorado, which is part of the Intracoastal Waterway. The Arroyo Colorado is the receiving body for all of the area's stormwater runoff. The City of Rio Hondo has relatively little topographical relief, with a maximum elevation of +/- 30 feet above mean sea level (MSL) in several areas of the City and as low as 5 MSL along the banks of the Arroyo Colorado.

The U.S. National Flood Insurance Program provides flood insurance rate maps that depict the 100-year and 500-year special flood hazard areas for many communities, including the City of Rio Hondo. The effective date of the most recent Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) is June 1, 1981 and the FIRM # is 480112 0001B. The mapped floodplain lies within the Arroyo Colorado channel in

the western portion of the City and ETJ. Although soil conditions around the Arroyo are prone to flooding, particularly on the western side of the bank, those lands were not mapped as flood plain. However, development around the western portion of the Arroyo should be carefully considered.

The City can limit flood damage and improve its drainage system by purchasing land, zoning for open space, or otherwise raising standards for buildings proposed to be constructed or re-constructed in the floodplain or in problem drainage areas. Public ownership and legal restrictions on future construction can reduce insurance premiums for homeowners in conjunction with participation in the CRS. City purchase of land can also be combined with park and open space goals, as with plans to expand Boat Ramp Park.

Natural and man-made constraints: Natural constraints to development include the Arroyo Colorado which splits the town into east and west quadrants and makes sewer provision and thoroughfare planning difficult. Man-made constraints include state highways that direct traffic flow into and out of Rio Hondo in both east-west and southerly directions. A lift-span bridge built in the 1950s to provide passage over the Arroyo limits the widening of FM 106 and can impede traffic when it is raised for boats Also impeding development is an extensive irrigation canal system built by the Cameron County Irrigation District #2 in 1916. It divides property in the eastern portion of the City and its ETJ, both north and south of FM 106 and may require heightened erosion control on lots developed next to it to prevent damage to water quality. Abutting jurisdictions of surrounding larger cities also is a man-made constraint to development. (See *ETJ* explanation below).

ETJ: Rio Hondo's ETJ is limited by the City of Harlingen 3.5-mile and 5 mile ETJ. Unlike many cities, its ETJ does not extend one-half mile from the City's corporate limits. Its ETJ is fixed because portions of its half-mile radius are claimed as ETJ by larger Harlingen and Brownsville ETJ territories. The City of

Brownsville's 5-mile ETJ also blocks movement of its ETJ beyond Nelson Road east of the City. When Rio Hondo annexes property, its ETJ boundaries do not change unless it makes agreements with neighboring cities. In 2012, the City and Harlingen reached an agreement that extended Rio Hondo's eastern ETJ slightly in the area of the high school and south of the high school. The approved ETJ includes approximately 2,370 acres. The City can annex within its ETJ as shown on *Maps 1A* through *9B* of this plan. The southern portion of the ETJ has seen the most residential development since its 2001 plan. It includes Glenview, Bishop, Hue and Lakeview. Almost 50 homes are located in the southern ETJ area. The City has plans during the planning period to continue to petition the City of Harlingen for increased ETJ authority on its eastern side within its state-allowed 1/2-mile distance from its city limit.

Subdivision Regulations and Zoning: The City adopted Subdivision and Zoning regulations in 2001 that allow it some control over how development proceeds within the city limits and in its ETJ. State statutes require a subdivision plat and basic provision of utilities when the owner of a tract of land under county jurisdiction divides the tract in two or more parts, but the State does not similarly regulate development within a City. Therefore, subdivision and zoning are necessary inside the City limits to ensure minimum provision of services as unplatted areas develop. Subdivision ordinances can regulate street and ROW widths, lot sizes, road connectivity and provision of parks in newly developing areas, for example. Amending the City's subdivision ordinance to require stricter development standards would provide the City with some control over how development proceeds in its ETJ and within the City limits.

The City has also adopted zoning regulations. While it provides for some orderly development, some of its zoning categories are duplicative and others are too cumulative (allowing residential uses in industrial districts, for example) to effectively regulate development and promote development in a way that carries out the City's vision of being an economically viable community for residents and

tourists. The Future Land Use Plan informs this goal. Suggestions for zoning map and ordinance changes relate to vision shown on *Map 4B: Future Land Use 2032*. Subdivision Ordinance changes also are aimed at promoting the City's vision of having quality services and parks/entertainment.

Physical Form and Design: The physical design of the City relates to how individual lots are developed. Physical design considerations include, among others, lot sizes, lot line setbacks, parking location, and building material. Rio Hondo's physical layout is a grid in the original central part of the City. Later development at the edges is not contiguous to the original city center. Residents rely on minor arterials for transportation rather than local streets. The eastern and western portions of town are divided by the Arroyo. Public access to the Arroyo is provided only on the western side at Boat Ramp Park. A new high school campus at the intersection of FM 106 and SH 345 in 1995 spurred some development in the eastern part of the city's region. The City annexed the eastern high school complex and some developed and semi-developed lands surrounding it in 2007.

Lots in the central part of the city average less than 1/4-acre. Lots outside the City center average slightly more than 1 acre, although some lots are less than ¼ acre in conventional developments. The City's physical form can be controlled at its edges by subdivision regulations. The City adopted a Subdivision Ordinance in 2001. To align the ordinance with the Comprehensive Plan's vision of protecting natural resources for eco-tourism and of ensuring that neighborhoods are safe with fun places for residents to gather; the City should adopt the following changes to its Subdivision ordinance:

- Require street connectivity to neighboring development;
- Reduce street width requirements to maintain the City's small-town feel,
- Add parkland, sidewalk and trail requirements, including for disabled individuals and residents of all ages; and

- Add standards for stormwater management and erosion and sedimentation control

The City's Zoning Ordinance, also adopted in 2001, can give the City the power to control design aspects of the community. As was mentioned above, altering the Ordinance's zoning category specifications could help implement the City's vision of having a stable business community downtown. In particular, re-assigning more of the lots downtown from a "B" Business category to an "L" Local Retail District and altering provisions of that district could be helpful in maintaining the historic design and ensuring its vibrancy. For example, allowing more residents to live downtown in mixed use configurations may help the businesses survive.. Other ordinance change suggestions crafted to meet the Plan's vision can be found in *Chapter 15*.

4.4 Future Land Use Goals and Objectives

This statement of future land use goals and objectives for Rio Hondo is not official City law; rather, it is a policy meant to guide the City toward a future vision for the community.

Good planning encourages development within the City limits on lots already provided with water and sewer infrastructure before development of more distant areas. This "infill development" saves a city infrastructure costs, encourages an orderly development pattern, and increases a city's sense of place. Guiding ETJ development through land use planning, communication with developers, and use of a subdivision ordinance helps a city to plan effectively for the future extension of public services and infrastructure improvements and to encourage high-quality construction..

The following goals for Land Use are derived from the needs and desires of residents and business owners expressed during the planning workshop and during interviews.

Goal 1: A mix of businesses that provides jobs; products and services desired by residents and tourists; and a healthy tax base to adequately fund city infrastructure

Objective 1.1: Provide programs that assist new businesses with start-up capital, channel their development downtown to draw area residents and tourists, and incorporate technology to speed City permitting processes.

Policy 1.1.1: By 2013, adopt changes to the zoning code that preserve and encourage the development of store-front businesses that combine first-floor retail with second-floor and/or granny flat apartments that allow business owners to live where they work and/or create more of a 24-hour a day presence in the business district.

Policy 1.1.2: By 2014, begin listing on an upgraded City website properties for sale in Rio Hondo and contacts to reach realtors or owners. Also, on an upgraded City website, create a special page called “Doing Business in Rio Hondo” and upload all the forms a business would need to fill out to get started, including City forms like building permits and state forms needed for filing as a business entity or links to those forms on state websites

Policy 1.1.3: Throughout the planning period, EDC or MDD continue to offer building improvement grants to downtown businesses and/or start a program that assists businesses with their signs or awnings that help market their establishments and make the business areas look more vibrant.

Policy 1.1.4: By 2014, work with area telecommunications providers to stress the importance of laying fiber optic lines through Rio Hondo.

Objective 1.2: Retain existing and new businesses by helping them market to residents, tourists and surrounding business entities in the region.

Policy 1.2.1: By 2012, EDC, MDD and other volunteer entities create a work group to develop a “brand” for the City.

Policy 1.2.2: By 2013, “branding” work group expend EDC funds to develop a professional logo for Rio Hondo to be placed on business signs, street signs in the business district, the City’s website, and other marketing materials.

Policy 1.2.3: By 2014, hold an event to launch the “brand”. This could be at an Arroyo Days or another branding event.

Policy 1.2.4: By 2014, EDC provide welcome packets to visitors to the Twin Palms RV Park and other lodging entities in the surrounding area with coupons for existing businesses and descriptions of Rio Hondo amenities and history.

Policy 1.2.5: By 2014, host city workshops to educate “first responders” (employees in businesses on main streets or key locations in Rio Hondo) and city employees on the brand, what to say to passersby to better advertise Rio Hondo and direct them to local businesses.

Objective 1.3: Channel industry to locate in areas where adequate roads and utilities can be provided and where they complement surrounding uses.

Policy 1.3.1: By 2012, adopt changes to the Zoning Ordinance that allow industry to locate on major roads.

Objective 1.4: Throughout the planning period make the Central Business District a gateway that draws tourists and provides businesses that attract residents and tourists to shop downtown.

Policy 1.4.1: By 2012, adopt zoning that establishes specific regulations for downtown development and re-development, including provisions for placing buildings near the street, parking in the rear of buildings, percentages of street facing facades that must be doors and windows, and allowance of mixed use buildings to encourage residents to live downtown

Policy 1.4.2: By 2012, determine if the City could purchase land for a park/parking lot along Colorado Avenue to alleviate a lack of parking in the eastern part of the CBD. If the purchase is made, develop the land by 2014 possibly as a pocket park/parking lot. TDA Downtown Revitalization funds could provide some of the construction or acquisition funding.

Policy 1.4.3: Between 2012 and 2020, MDD, EDC and City officials market west end downtown property by the lift-span bridge to create a focal point for downtown and entry into the City. This includes adopting zoning that will allow for a mix of uses to be developed on the lots

Policy 1.4.4: By 2013, MDD and EDC determine how to fund the addition of amenities in the CBD like benches, planters and trash receptacles. This effort could include donation of amenities created by students or artists.

Policy 1.4.5: By 2015, upgrade the east and west gateways into the CBD by developing at least one of the following: landscape and/or “Welcome to Rio Hondo” monuments that frame both the east and west entrances; a scenic overlook on the east side of the Arroyo in City Park; and/or placement of a mural on the west or south-facing City Hall walls seen from FM 106.

Goal 2: A variety of housing types that keeps up with growth

Objective 2.1: Over the planning period, secure multi-family housing to expand housing type options in the City.

Policy 2.1.1: By 2013, revise zoning ordinance to allow for housing choices throughout the city including mixed uses (first floor retail/second floor residential); and multifamily units and retail near residential, schools and medical services; and choices of lot sizes.

Policy 2.1.2: In 2014, contact the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council's Certified Development Company and the Harlingen Chamber of Commerce to determine a plan for attracting a developer to build a mini-riverwalk project that includes business and housing located near the City's lift span bridge. The plan should include rehabilitating dilapidated apartments in the City.

Objective 2.2: Encourage infill development on platted lots where water, sewer, street and drainage systems already exist or channel development in areas that in which these facilities can be easily built.

Policy 2.2.1: Adopt a Future Land Use Map in 2012 that portrays the City's desire for infill and development on lots that have city services.

Policy 2.2.2: Apply bi-annually for TxCDBG and USDA funding to upgrade water and sewer facilities to serve increasing numbers of residents in the City limits and or in areas adjacent to the city limits that could be annexed. This would include negotiations with the East Rio Hondo Water Supply Corp. throughout the planning period.

Policy 2.2.3: In 2012, the City should apply to participate in the TDHCA HOME Rehabilitation Program and Homeownership Assistance Program, budgeting required funds and resources for in-kind and financial match requirements. Up to 9 homes can be rehabilitated per cycle. After completing a cycle in 2014, the City should apply to become a part of the Agency's Reservation System for ongoing rehabilitation/reconstruction of the City's housing stock.

Policy 2.2.4: Throughout the planning period, continue to fund adequate personnel and equipment for operation and maintenance of water, sewer and drainage systems.

Policy 2.2.5: Throughout the planning period, continue to maintain streets in areas highlighted as being developed on the City's Future Land Use Map.

Goal 3: City infrastructure that improves quality of life and provides safe roads and transportation options for bicyclists and pedestrians.

Objective 3.1: Ensure that residents are connected to safe water and sewer systems and that land expansion occurs where water and sewer services can be easily provided.

Policy 3.1.1: Adopt a Future Land Use Map in 2012 that portrays the City's desire for infill and development on lots that have city services.

Policy 3.1.2: Beginning in 2012 and continuing throughout the planning period, regularly apply for available grants through the Texas Department of Agriculture's Office of Rural Affairs to fund replacement of aging, undersized and deteriorated water and sewer lines.

Policy 2.3.1: Between 2012 and 2016, work with the Arroyo Colorado Watershed Partnership (ACW) to fund the construction of a small-scale wetland at the treatment plant site.

Policy 3.1.3: By 2016, upgrade the water treatment plant components to ensure adequate production capacity.

Policy 2.3.1: Between 2016 and 2020, work with the City of Harlingen to extend wastewater service to homes in Rio Hondo west of the Arroyo. Extension of services will also benefit Boat Ramp Park and an increase in business and residences on the west side of the Arroyo.

Policy 3.1.4: Throughout the planning period, work with developers and the East Rio Hondo Water Supply Corporation to ensure the expansion of the water and sewer system as needed by new development.

Objective 3.2: Build out the existing city parks and add at least one downtown mini-park to encourage more community gathering and increase recreation activities available to residents and tourists during the planning period.

Policy 3.2.1: By mid-2012, apply for Texas Parks and Wildlife Funds to complete Boat Ramp Park expansion including a kayak launch, restrooms, and picnic areas. CIAP land purchase may be able to serve as match.

Policy 3.2.2: By 2013, complete CIAP project to purchase more property for park expansion and re-plant native species on acquired property to stabilize bank of Arroyo Colorado in that location.

Policy 3.2.3: By 2013, revise the City's subdivision ordinance to require developers to build quality parks in new subdivisions.

Policy 3.2.4: By 2014, complete third phase of boat ramp project around the kayak launch, including a fishing pier.

Policy 3.2.5: By 2015, purchase or work with downtown property owners to develop a mini-park or community garden downtown.

Policy 3.2.6: By 2016, find funding for materials and volunteers to construct a natural playscape area to complement birding/habitat areas in the park. This could include a life-size birdhouse, water element and climbing boulders, ropes or logs.

Policy 3.2.7: By 2025, make City Park behind City Hall a recreation destination to draw visitors (residents and tourists) to the CBD by replacing existing wood fence with a slatted fence or railing to allow for an Arroyo overlook.

Policy 3.2.8: By 2025, add a pavilion/picnic area to open space just north of the lift-span bridge and just south of the City Fire Station to provide an attractive entryway into the City.

Policy 3.2.9: By 2016, determine scale of project the City can build to add a basketball court and increase parking at the Rio Hondo County Park. The strategy will depend on the availability of FEMA funds to construct an emergency shelter that would double as an indoor recreation center. If that facility is not built, the city should build a second basketball court and/or volleyball courts; and parking that includes several handicapped-accessible spaces.

Policy 3.2.10: By 2025, discuss leasing and/or purchasing property from the Port of Harlingen in the area where a city park used to sit next to the Resaca off Parkway Avenue.

Policy 3.2.11: By 2027, work with the Port Authority and the Economic Development District of the LRGVDC to find funding to build a pedestrian or vehicular bridge across the dam to provide access to the City's former swimming hole.

Policy 3.2.12: By 2029, design bridge and build it.

Policy 3.2.13: By 2032, determine a plan for funding to re-build dilapidated, over-grown pavilion and rustic swimming infrastructure.

Objective 3.3: Throughout the planning period continue to maintain existing streets and widen or develop new streets to accommodate new development.

Policy 3.3.1: By 2015, widen Harris Road to accommodate increased recreational traffic, including boat trailers, to Boat Ramp Park.

Policy 3.3.2: By 2016, work with Cameron County to widen Parkway to serve as a more functional east-west connector in southern Rio Hondo Project would include sidewalks and bike lanes.

Policy 3.3.3: By 2018, reconstruct Bates Road to better accommodate truck traffic heading to industrial locations in northern Rio Hondo. The improved road could be the start of a new northern east-west connector to be completed by developers. Project would include curb and gutter and sidewalks.

Policy 3.3.4: Throughout the planning period, work with the County and developers to create a stronger grid in southern Rio Hondo to make travel in southern Rio Hondo more effective. Possible new streets include an extension of Short from Reynolds to Robertson and the connection of Retama from north to south between Ebony and Huerta.

Objective 3.4: Throughout the planning period, increase the availability of sidewalks and bicycle lanes to provide alternative transportation to residents and tourists.

Policy 3.4.1: Between 2012 and 2015, work with TXDOT to build sidewalks on South Reynolds from FM 106 to Parkway.

Policy 3.4.2: Between 2015 and 2017, upgrade sidewalks and ADA ramps in the Central Business District as discussed in *Chapter 12: Central Business District*

Policy 3.4.3: By 2017, work with the County to stripe bike lanes on S. Robertson Road. By 2019, work with TXDOT to stripe bike lanes on SH 345 between Bishop Road and FM 106.

4.5 Future Land Use Map

The graphic representation on the Future Land Use Plan map is intended to help the City's elected and appointed officials and residents visualize the desired future land development pattern in the community. It represents possible future needs based on the population, housing, and other analyses in the City of Rio Hondo Comprehensive Plan. The map is not a rigid, parcel-specific mandate for how land shall be developed. The Future Land Use Map should be made accessible to residents and developers and serve as the basis for discussion about land development.

Map 4B Future Land Use 2032, the future land use plan, and *Tables 4D and 4E* illustrate the City's preferred development pattern in 2032. It is expected that over the planning period, about 100 housing units will be added either semi-developed vacant lots in existing neighborhoods, and through the development of single-family and multi-family housing where roads and utilities can be easily provided. Because the maintenance of agriculture in the community is an important and desired goal both locally and regionally, the plan does not envision

development in large farm areas such as along Bishop Road and north of the city limits. It is hoped that businesses will increase downtown and at major intersections where roads can both draw customers and provide easy access. It is also hoped that gateway development can define each end of the CBD and offer more public access to the scenic views of the Arroyo. These changes are shown on the Future Land Use Map and would provide for an arrangement of land in the following proportions.

Table 4D: Future Land Use, 2032

City Land Use Classification	Existing	Future				Change
	Acres 2012	Acres 2032	% of DEV 2032	% of TOTAL 2032	Acres/100	Current vs. Future
Commercial	32	79	9%	7%	3	143%
Institutional	86	88	10%	8%	3	2%
Multifamily	10	14	2%	1%	0	39%
Mixed Use	1	2	0%	0%	0	242%
Public Use	23	22	3%	2%	1	-1%
Recreational	46	50	6%	4%	2	7%
Semi-Developed	55	34	4%	3%	1	-38%
Single-Family	309	320	37%	28%	11	3%
Warehouse/Industrial	2	26	3%	2%	1	1179%
Right of Way	236	236	27%	20%	8	0%
Total for Developed Areas	800	870	100%	75%	31	9%
Agricultural, Undeveloped	362	292		25%	10	-19%
Citywide Total	1,162	1,162		100%		
Regional Land Use Classification (City + ETJ)	Existing	Future				Change
	Acres 2012	Acres 2032	% of DEV 2032	% of TOTAL 2032	Acres/100	Current vs. Future
Commercial	67	138	9%	4%	4	106%
Institutional	92	109	7%	3%	3	18%
Multifamily	10	14	1%	0%	0	39%
Mixed Use	1	2	0%	0%	0	242%
Public Use	23	22	1%	1%	1	-1%
Recreational	140	143	9%	4%	4	2%
Semi-Developed	86	43	3%	1%	1	-50%
Single-Family	580	622	40%	18%	17	7%
Warehouse/Industrial	35	64	4%	2%	2	82%
Right of Way	388	382	25%	11%	10	-2%
Total for Developed Areas	1,420	1,539	100%	44%	42	8%
Agricultural, Undeveloped	2,111	1,992		56%	55	-6%
Regional Total	3,532	3,532		100%		

5 Water Supply and Distribution Study

5.1 Review of Prior Studies and Existing Data

The exact dates of the original construction of the City of Rio Hondo's water distribution system are unknown. The type of materials and the degree of deterioration in the older lines indicates that the original system was installed sometime in the 1940's and 1950's. The staff at the City has indicated that approximately 30-40 percent of the system is original. There have been a series of studies performed on the water supply, treatment, storage, and distribution over the past thirty years. The studies are listed in chronological order below:

- Potable Water Requirements; Neptune-Wilkerson Associates, Austin, 1981. This is the study that produced the design parameters for the water treatment plant (WTP).
- Comprehensive Planning Study; Carlos Colinas Vargas and Associates, 1986. This was a general study of the system.
- Comprehensive Planning and Capacity Study; Ricardo Gomez and Associates in collaboration with Guzman & Munoz Engineering and Surveying Inc. 2001. This was also a general study of the system.

All of these studies produced information that was used to guide the City in an ongoing improvement program. Each of the studies also resulted in a new set of system maps.

System improvement projects have generally been implemented over the past 25 years through various Texas Department of Agriculture Grant Programs. Until 2011, these programs were housed at the Texas Department of Rural Affairs (TDRA, formerly ORCA). These projects are described briefly as follows:

- 1986 – Installed approximately 8,100 LF of 6" water line, with fire hydrants and service re-connects;

- 1997 – Installed approximately 8,500 LF of 12” water line, 5,100 LF of 8” water line, and fire hydrants, and service re-connects;
- 1999 – Water treatment plant improvements including an additional ground storage tank (GST) with supply line, effluent line, transfer line, high service line, replaced two pumps, and installed a new pump;
- 2000 – Water treatment plant improvements including refurbishing the clarifier, installed a new pump, installed a new sludge pump, and installed new chemical feed equipment for sludge dewatering;
- 2006 – Refurbished the elevated water tank (EST), installed approximately 9,200 LF of 8” water line, gate valves, fire hydrants, and service re-connects;

The following discussion provides an inventory of the major components of the City’s water system as of the date of this Comprehensive Plan. The plan will also identify areas of operation in which system improvements should be implemented in order to improve the safety, efficiency, and economy of the treatment and distribution operations. The plan will conclude by providing a prioritized summary of the needed improvements and their estimated costs.

5.2 Water System Inventory

The City of Rio Hondo receives raw water from the Cameron County Water Control and Improvement District # 3 (CCWCID #3). The raw water is temporarily stored in a reservoir adjacent to the WTP. The water is processed through the plant by adding chlorine, lime, and alum for pre-chlorination, ph adjustment, and coagulation, respectively. The water then goes through mechanical rapid-mix, two-stage mechanical flocculation, clarification and solids settlement, and filtration. The water is then transferred to two (2) ground storage tanks. Two high-service pumps send it on to the distribution network with an elevated storage tank floating on the system to maintain operating pressure. Documentation by TCEQ indicates that the system experiences an average daily demand of 0.397 MGD (397,000 gallons per day) and has experienced a maximum daily demand

of 0.613 MGD (613,000 GPD) on July 7, 2008. The WTP is designed to produce up to 0.781 MGD, or 781,000 gallons per day (GPD). *Table 5A* and *5B* show the inventory and locations of the various components associated with water treatment, storage, and distribution system.

Table 5A: Major Water System Components

Component	Location	Capacity or Size
Surface water source	CCWCID/Rio Grande River	By Contract
Raw water reservoir	NE of WTP	0.781 MG
Raw Water Pumps (2)	Raw Water Reservoir	550 GPM, 600 GPM
WTP	City Plant Site – Robertson Road	0.781 MGD
GST # 1	City Plant Site – Robertson Road	214,000 Gallons
GST # 2	City Plant Site – Robertson Road	165,000 Gallons
Elevated Storage Tank (EST)	Adjacent to WTP Site	150,000 Gallons
Transfer Pump #1 Transfer Pump #2	City Plant Site – Robertson Road	580GPM 580GPM
High Service Pump # 1 High Service Pump # 2	City Plant Site – Robertson Road	550 GPM 550 GPM

Table 5B: Water Distribution System Components

Component	Linear Feet (LF)	Component	# Of Units
2" Line	918	12" Line	12,018
4" Line	16,043	Gate Valves	105
6" Line	16,264	Service connections	923(TCEQ Data)
8" Line	21,681		

5.3 Water System Analysis

Standards and Criteria: The Texas Commission of Environmental Quality (TCEQ), the American Water Works Association (AWWA), and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have established regulations and standards for the safe treatment, storage, and distribution of potable water to the public. All Public Water Supply (PWS) systems operating within the State of Texas must adhere to these regulations and standards.

According to copies of recent routine compliance reports from the TCEQ,

TCEQ has adopted the following engineering standards that apply to the minimum production and supply capacities for public water systems:

Table 5C: Minimum Water System Standards

FACILITY OR MEASURE (Based on 923 Connections)	TCEQ / Engineering Standard	City of Rio Hondo
Well Production, Surface Water Production, or Purchase Capacity (GPM/Connection)	0.6	0.59***
Total Storage – TCEQ (gal/connection)	200	573***
Elevated Storage (gal/connection)	100	162***
Raw Water Pump (GPM/Connection)*****	0.6	0.6*****
Transfer Pump (GPM/Connection)*****	0.6	0.63*****
Service Pump (GPM/Connection)****	2.0	0.59*****
Service Pump Peaking Factor (GPM)	Max Day Demand (GPM) x 1.25 = 532	550
Normal Operating Pressure (psi)	35	50-67
“C” Certified Operators*	2	4
Minimum Main Size**	2”	2 ”

Sources: TCEQ and Texas State Data Center Population Estimates for 2009 and plan fieldwork

*Depends on system type and size, according to TCEQ 30 TAC 290, Subchapter D: Rules and Regulations for Public Water Systems, Section 290.46

** According to TCEQ 30 TAC 290, Subchapter D: Rules and Regulations for Public Water Systems, no new waterline under two inches in diameter will be allowed to be installed in a public water system distribution system. These minimum line sizes do not apply to individual customer service lines.

*** Calculated using TCEQ Water Utility Database information indicating a total of 923 connections to the system and using the maximum WTP capacity of 0.781 MGD as reported in the CCI Report # 722671 – 02/03/2009

**** If Elevated Storage Capacity is > 200 Gallons/Connection, Service Pump Capacity is 0.6 GPM/Connection. If Elevated Storage Capacity is < 200 Gallons/Connection, Service Pump Capacity is 2.0 GPM/Connection. The minimum Elevated Storage Capacity requirement is always 100 Gallons/Connection. Service Pump Peaking Factor=Maximum Daily Demand (GPM) X 1.25

***** Determined with largest pump out of service.

Table 5C indicates that the City of Rio Hondo is operating in accordance with the established standards for minimum production and supply capacities in most categories. However, the information also indicates that there are some areas that may need improvement if the City is to fully comply with the current standards.

Water Supply: The City of Rio Hondo receives raw water from the Cameron County Water Control and Improvement District # 3 (CCWCID #3). The raw water is temporarily stored in a reservoir adjacent to the WTP. The water is processed through the plant by adding chlorine, lime, and alum for pre-

chlorination, ph adjustment, and coagulation, respectively. The water then goes through mechanical rapid-mix, two-stage mechanical flocculation, clarification and solids settlement, and filtration. The water is then transferred to two (2) ground storage tanks. Two high-service pumps send it on to the distribution network with an elevated storage tank floating on the system to maintain operating pressure.

The filtration rate capacity is five (5) GPM per square foot of filter area. The mixed media filter area currently consists of two (2) 7.6'x 7.5' filters for a total of 114.0 SF. This results in a capacity of 570 GPM, or 820,800 GPD. However, inefficiencies in other components such as the transfer pumps, raw water pumps, sludge pumps, and mixers combine to reduce the overall capacities to the rated 0.781 MGD (781,000 GPD).

Water Storage: For water systems with more than 250 connections, The Texas Administrative Code, Title 30, Chapter 290, Subchapter D, Sections 290.45(b)(1) (D)(ii) and 290.45(b)(1) (D)(iv) mandates that the systems have: a) 200 gallons of total storage per connection; and, b) 100 gallons of elevated storage per connection or a pressure tank capacity of 20 gallons per connection. According to the TCEQ Water Utility Database the City has 923 total connections. The City of Rio Hondo meets the established minimum standards for water storage capacity with 573 Gallons/connection of total storage and 162 Gallons/connection of elevated storage.

The city owns and operates 1 – 165,000-gallon GST, 1 – 214,000 gallon GST and 1 – 150,000-gallon EST. City staff describes one of the GST's and the EST as being in fair to good condition. The 165,000-gallon GST has been subjected to several incidences of vandalism in the form of gunshot holes, and has been repaired as needed.

Water Distribution System: Water system pipes in the City of Rio Hondo range in size from 2” to 12” in diameter. The system is comprised of approximately 67,500 linear feet (LF) of distribution lines. The materials contained in these pipes are primarily C-900 PVC. The remaining +/- 30% of the lines are either cast iron or a material that has yet to be determined by the current staff. The city does not have an established program for routine line replacement. The City does not dedicate specific revenues such as a water utility fund for annual repair and maintenance. The city replaces lines periodically when required by events such as line breakage, valve malfunctions, or other related system failures.

2” diameter lines represent roughly 2.9% (1,952 LF) of the water distribution system in City of Rio Hondo. The Texas Administrative Code (TAC), Subchapter D, Section 290.44(c) prohibits the installation of new water distribution mains smaller than 2”. The standards permit more than ten (10) connections on existing water mains only when a licensed professional engineer deems it necessary. There are segments of 2” diameter pipe in the distribution system. Some are located at the periphery of the system where the intensity of development is low but several are located within established residential neighborhoods and have numerous single-family connections.

The City of Rio Hondo does not currently have any specific water line replacement programs. City staff has indicated that the City is interested in developing a routine line replacement program if the appropriate funding mechanism can be established.

System Water Pressure. The City’s water system operates at a normal working pressure of approximately 51-52 psi. This is sufficient to operate the system effectively. The two (2) high-service pumps deliver water to the system at pressure and the elevated storage tank (EST) floats on the system to maintain this operating pressure. The EST can be bypassed and the service pumps can

provide pressure directly to the distribution network in the event that repairs must be made to the EST.

Future Development Considerations: The City of Rio Hondo is projected to experience some degree of growth during this planning period. The Texas Administrative Code (TAC) Title 30, Chapter 291 states the when a water utility reaches 85% of its minimum capacity requirements it must submit to the TCEQ Director a planning report indicating how the utility plans to expand its capacity in order to meet future demands. According to the information contained in the latest TCEQ Compliance Investigation, the City’s system is near or slightly above 100% of some of those minimum capacity requirements. Some requirements will support a limited number of new connections before reaching the 85% threshold. A summary of allowable connections per requirement is shown below.

Table 5D: Capacity for New Connections

Measure	Required	Provided	# New Connections
WTP Production Capacity	0.6	0.59	0
Total Storage	200	573	687
Elevated Storage	100	162	352
Service Pump Capacity	2.0	0.59*	0*
Raw Water Pump Capacity	0.6	0.6*	0*
Transfer Pump Capacity	0.6	0.63*	0*

* See below

The information shown above indicates that the most restrictive elements in the City’s water system with respect to future growth are the elements associated with the WTP’s production capacity and the distribution system’s high service pumps.

The population is estimated to grow by approximately 400 residents during the planning period. The basis for this estimate is explained in detail in the Chapter 2: Population Analysis. The average number of persons per household in Rio Hondo is approximately 3.0. If there are 3.0 persons per connection, then 400 additional persons will equate to approximately 134 new connections. With the

current number of connections at 923, the City may have as many as 1,057 connections by the end of the planning period. As mentioned previously, the minimum production capacity per state requirements is 0.6 GPM per connection. A total of 1,057 connections will require a WTP production capacity of 634 GPM, or 913,248 GPD (.9133 MGD). If the City is to remain under the 85% threshold for the entire 20-year planning period, the capacity will need to be $.9133 \text{ MGD} / 0.85 = +/-1.075 \text{ MGD}$.

This plan proposes improvements to the WTP that will increase the plant's capacity to approximately this value. A brief description and cost estimate of these improvements are presented in the final section of this chapter.

Fire Protection Considerations. The primary consideration for fire protection issues is whether or not the system is capable of delivering sufficient flow volume at sufficient pressure to effectively respond to emergencies. The standards for adequate fire protection are established in the International Fire Code (IFC). The code recommends minimum flow volume, flow pressure, hydrant spacing, and construction standards. Examples of the IFC recommendations are as follows:

1. Every building in a community should be located no more than 500' from a fire hydrant; and
2. All fire hydrants should be installed on water mains no smaller than 6" in diameter; and
3. Each hydrant should provide a minimum flow volume of 1,500 GPM; and
4. The minimum flow volume should be delivered at a minimum residual pressure of 20 psi.

Fire departments perform individual hydrant flow tests to determine if adequate pressure and flow rates are available at specified hydrant locations. Testing every hydrant is usually beyond the capabilities of most small communities, but field-testing at selected hydrants can give the City some preliminary information

on water system fire fighting capabilities. When any major new subdivision construction is proposed, a computer-aided water system model of the existing conditions and the effects of the proposed development should be prepared by the consulting engineer. This model will assist the City and its representatives to evaluate the existing system's capacity to provide adequate flow volume at sufficient pressure to effectively respond to emergencies.

There are homes within the City of Rio Hondo that are not within 500 feet of a hydrant connected to a 6" water main. There are also several homes that are near fire hydrants installed on 4" mains. A 4" line will provide adequate flow volume and pressure for fire fighting purposes under ideal conditions, but the configuration is usually not effective. A 2" line cannot provide adequate flow and pressure for fire fighting purposes under any conditions. City staff has indicated that there are a significant number of fire hydrants that are non-functional. This plan recommends several line replacement projects for aging, deteriorating, and/or undersized lines. All of these line replacement projects will include lines of sufficient size to provide adequate flow and pressure for fire fighting purposes. These projects will also include fire hydrants at the appropriate locations. There is also a proposed project for aging, deteriorated, and non-functioning fire hydrant and valve replacement throughout the City that will include a comprehensive survey of these items in order to identify those that require replacement.

System Operations. TCEQ conducted a Comprehensive Compliance Investigation (CCI) in February 2009. TCEQ records indicate that there were several outstanding violations from previous investigations in 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, and two (2) in 2007. The alleged violations (AV's) have been referred to the TCEQ Enforcement Division in the past, and the City's system is currently under an Agreed Order # 2005-1348-PWS-E. All of these AV's involve the WTP capacity as described above. The City is currently seeking a financial

package from the USDA – Rural Development Office to begin the process of upgrading the WTP in order to address all of the outstanding issues.

Water System Revenues: The City of Rio Hondo has adopted a comprehensive rate schedule that distinguishes residential water rates from commercial water rates. There are also rate categories for sprinkler systems, multi-housing, and recreational vehicles/mobile home parks, although in some cases the rates are the same. The rate schedule as adopted by Ordinance # 363 dated March 2011 is as follows:

- a) Residential Rate: Minimum bill for up to 3,000 gallons = \$26.00
And for all gallons over 3,000 gallons = \$3.10/1,000 gallons
- b) Sprinkler System: Minimum bill for up to 3,000 gallons = \$26.00
And for all gallons over 3,000 gallons = \$3.10/1,000 gallons
- c) Commercial Rate: Minimum bill for up to 3,000 gallons = \$26.00
And for all gallons over 3,000 gallons = \$3.10/1,000 gallons
- d) Multi-Housing Rate: Minimum Rate to be charged for each active service in a Multi-unit Facility such as Apartments and Housing Facilities:
 - 1. Minimum bill for up to 3,000 gallons Occupied Unit = \$26.00
 - 2. Minimum bill for up to 3,000 gallons Not Occupied = \$14.60
And for all gallons over 3,000 or a portion thereof over the total minimum amounts = \$3.10/1,000 gallons

Table 5F contains information about the revenues and expenditures of the water utility department. The information is intended to give the City an indication of whether or not the City water rates are set at a level sufficient to support the operation and maintenance of the water supply and distribution system without placing an undue burden on the ratepayers or customers. The revenue information is obtained directly from billing information provided by the City for the period of time from January 2010 through December 2010. The expenditure information is for the actual fiscal year period from October 2009 through September 2010. This plan is assuming that the slight difference of three (3)

months will not significantly affect the analysis as the pumping rates are fairly uniform for the past two (2) years.

According to the information provided by the City and shown in *Table 5F*, the revenues received from water customer billings is below the water production costs. This may be due to the fact that the water costs are based on actual costs incurred during the fiscal year 2009-2010, and the water revenues are based on the billing information for the calendar year 2010. The actual costs figures for 2010 are not yet available. When these costs become available, the City should perform a water rate study in order to determine an appropriate rate that will at least keep the revenues sufficient to cover the costs.

It may be desirable for the City of Rio Hondo to consider establishing a dedicated utility fund with excess monies generated through customer billings rather than transferring the excess to the general fund. This fund may be used to facilitate the training of City personnel, provide maintenance services to address TCEQ violation issues, and contribute to financing future system improvements. Any decision of this nature would have to be considered in the context of the resource requirements of the general fund at the time of consideration.

Table 5E: Water Costs to City, Customers

(1) 2010 Total Treated Water Pumped (MG)	115.34
(2) 2010 Total Annual Water Billed (MG)	73.19
(3) City Water Usage-Unbilled	Unknown
Apparent Water System Losses (MG) {(1) - (2) - (3)}	42.147
2009-2010 Water Expenditures by City (\$\$)	\$418,160
2009-2010 Cost per 1,000 Gallons (\$\$)	\$5.71
2009-2010 Cost per Customer (923 Connections)	\$453.04
2010 Water Revenues (\$\$)	\$407,252
2010 Water Revenues per 1,000 Gallons (\$\$)	\$5.56
2010 Revenue Per Customer (923 Connections)	\$441.23
2010 Monthly Revenue Per Customer (\$\$)	\$36.77
2010 Average Monthly Usage Per Customer (Gallons)	6,608
2010 Monthly Cost to Customer for 1,000 gallons (\$\$)	\$5.56
2009-2010 City Cost to Produce 1,000 gallons (\$\$)	\$5.71

Source: Derived from City of Rio Hondo Water Utility, based on 923 retail connections

Water losses: Unmetered water usage and/or unaccounted for usage affects the cost to provide water services. The information shown above indicates that approximately 41,147,500 (42.15 MG) gallons of water is either unbilled or unaccounted for. This value is reached by subtracting the amount of water billed from the amount of treated water pumped in 2010. Part of this value is simply authorized unmetered water use by City departments. The remainder of the unaccounted water is probably water loss. A small portion may be unauthorized use. If one uses the entire amount of 42.15 MG and compares it to the total treated water pumped, a value of +/- 36.5% is calculated as water loss. A typical value of acceptable water loss ranges from 6% - 11%. However, if one assumes that a significant portion is authorized unbilled water use by various City departments, the actual water loss may well be within the acceptable range. Major sources of water loss include:

- Line leakage,
- Line breaks,

- Aging or faulty meters,
- Inaccurate or incomplete record keeping,
- Water theft and unauthorized use.

The City may want to consider installing equipment and establish operations to meter for authorized uses of water that are not billed.

Regional and Drought Planning. In 1999, the 75th Texas Legislature passed Senate Bill 1. This legislation requires that all entities providing public water supplies must develop drought contingency plans. These plans must be implemented during periods of severe water shortages and drought. A drought contingency plan often combines several strategies designed to achieve long-term advancements in the efficient use of water. The plans require the development of specific response measures aimed at avoiding, minimizing, or mitigating the risks and impacts of drought-related water shortages and other emergencies. The plan adopted by a water provider should ensure the provider's capability of providing adequate water supplies under drought conditions.

The City of Rio Hondo adopted a plan in July 1998, Ordinance No. 274. The comprehensive Drought Contingency Plan contains three "Trigger Conditions" under which the City of Rio Hondo will initiate drought contingency measures. These trigger conditions are as follows:

1. Voluntary Water Conservation – When the level of U.S. water stored in Amistad and Falcon Reservoirs reaches 51%, or 1.66 million acre-feet (MA/F);
2. Mandatory Water Conservation – When the level of U.S. water stored in Amistad and Falcon Reservoirs reaches 25%, or 834,600 acre-feet;
3. Water Curtailment – When the level of U.S. water stored in Amistad and Falcon Reservoirs reaches 15%, or 504,600 acre-feet.

The Emergency Management Program describes the specific actions that the City of Rio Hondo will take under each “trigger condition”. As each successive trigger condition is reached there are accumulative actions that will be taken by the City ranging from informing the public of the situation, through prohibiting the use of sprinkler systems for lawns, gardens, landscaped areas on certain days, to limiting all outdoor irrigation of vegetation to the hours of 6:00 p.m. to 10:00 P.M. on weekends.

Regional and Drought Planning: The Region M 2006 Rio Grande Regional Water Plan (RGRWP) projects that Cameron County as a whole will experience a population increase of approximately 41% during the planning period covered in this Comprehensive Plan (CP). The RGRWP identifies municipal water use and irrigation water use as the two largest users of the water supply. The municipal water use is projected to increase by approximately 37% during the CP planning period, and the irrigation water use is projected to decrease by approximately 12% during the same period (2012-2032). This decrease is due to the conversion of land from agricultural use to urban use as a result of population growth. However, the RGRWP predicts that the City of Rio Hondo municipal water needs will actually operate under a slowly declining surplus during this same period. The City should consider some of the strategies that the RGRWP sets forth for addressing any potential deficits. These include but are not limited to:

- Municipal water conservation;
- Non-potable reuse of reclaimed water;
- Acquisition of additional Rio Grande water through water rights purchase and contract;
- Groundwater development.

Texas water law requires that revised and updated Regional and State Water Plans be prepared every five years. The 2011 Plans are currently in the public comment stage and may be found at the TWDB web site.

The Rio Hondo Comprehensive Plan places a high priority on a continuing program of replacing old and undersized system lines to help ensure that the City and the surrounding area continue to meet local water supply demand.

Prioritized Problems. City leaders, residents, staff, and consulting engineers have identified the following areas of concern with regard to the water system:

1. A need for upgrading the water treatment plant in order to increase capacity;
2. A need to replace aging, deteriorated lines throughout the system that are susceptible to leaks and breaks;
3. A need to replace the southern main line under the Arroyo; and
4. A need to replace and/or repair malfunctioning valves and fire hydrants;

Goals and Objectives for the Water System

Goal 1: A local water system that operates efficiently and cost-effectively.

Objective 1.1: As soon as possible, address all outstanding TCEQ issues and take the necessary steps to prevent future TCEQ notices.

Policy 1.1.1: Promote and exercise preventative maintenance by inspecting all facilities once per year.

Policy 1.1.2: Maintain a monitoring plan and report on a timely basis.

Objective 1.2: Reduce system water loss by 40% by 2030.

Policy 1.2.1: Implement methods to classify meters and replace meters that are damaged or leaking.

Policy 1.2.2: Replace deteriorated lines throughout system, with priority given to those made of obsolete materials.

Policy 1.2.3: By 2016, enact procedures to document water used but not billed.

Objective 1.3: The city is financially able to maintain and improve the system to improve quality of life for residents and enable growth.

Policy 1.3.1: By 2013, evaluate rate structure and usage characteristics to determine if a rate increase would be feasible and enable the city to complete more line replacement projects.

Policy 1.3.2: Beginning in 2011 and continuing throughout the planning period, regularly apply for available grants through the Texas Department of Agriculture's Office of Rural Affairs to fund replacement of aging, deteriorated water lines.

Goal 2: City and area residents have clean, safe, potable water.

Objective 2.1: Over the planning period, deteriorated lines and equipment are replaced and/or improved.

Policy 2.1.1: Continue maintaining and inspecting the existing system facilities according to a regular schedule and providing repairs as the need arises.

Policy 2.1.2: In phases throughout the planning period, replace deteriorated and undersized lines with PVC lines 4" or larger in diameter.

Policy 2.1.3: In phases throughout the planning period, replace all asbestos concrete lines with the appropriate-sized PVC pipes.

Goal 3: Customers have access to a sustainable water supply that provides sufficient pressure and capacity to allow future economic growth.

Objective 3.1: By 2016, upgrade the water treatment plant to ensure adequate production capacity.

Policy 3.1.1: Upgrade all treatment plant components to increase capacity to adequate levels.

Policy 3.1.2: Install fire hydrants and upgrade lines in areas with inadequate fire protection coverage, replace malfunctioning valves and fire hydrants.

5.4 Water Supply and Distribution System Plan

Proposed System Improvements – Planning Period 2012-2032:

The following section describes a series of proposed improvements to the existing water treatment, storage, and distribution system. The improvement projects are presented as phased improvements that are suggested for implementation over the 20-year planning period encompassed by this Comprehensive Plan.

The projects are listed in a sequence that represents just one of several possible approaches, all of which should lead to the achievement of the long-term goals adopted by the City for the operation and maintenance of the water treatment,

storage and distribution system. The sequence shown in this plan is a logical, step-by-step process intended to increase the safety, efficiency, and economy of the water system operations. The sequence is intended only as a suggested program of phased improvements, and alternative sequences are recommended if funding availability requires significant changes.

Table 5F contains the estimated projected costs for each phase of the improvements program. These costs are based on current costs of record for similar projects in the same geographical area of the state. Every effort has been made to include appropriate cost factors such as inflation, variations in the market, and advances in water treatment, storage, and distribution technology. These cost estimates are predicated on several assumptions related to the scope of each phase. These assumptions are as follows:

- The choice of specific lines to be replaced within each area – The cost estimates assume that lines less than six (6) inches in diameter within the area of interest will be replaced with 6”-8” C-900 DR 18 PVC pipe and fire hydrants at the appropriate spacing. Without specific information indicating either volume or pressure problems in the immediately surrounding service areas, the existing lines six (6) inches or larger are assumed to be in serviceable condition and will remain so for the length of the planning period. The priority is placed on replacing the smaller lines, but each individual project evaluation may identify segments of larger lines that need replacement. In this event, the funding should be applied to replacing the lines with the greatest need for repair, regardless of size;
- Fire hydrants – Fire hydrants are included in the estimates. However, when replacing lines of 6 (6) inches and larger, the estimates will assume that approximately 50% of the existing fire hydrants, if any, can be re-used;
- Service re-connects, valves, and appurtenances – Service re-connects, valves, and appurtenances are estimated at 12%-15% of the line costs,

depending on the housing density and complexity of the proposed improvements;

- Street and Pavement Repair – Streets, driveways, and pavement repair is estimated at 10%-12% of the line costs, depending on the housing density and the presence of curb & gutter in the area of interest;
- Engineering and Surveying – Engineering and surveying services are estimated at 15% of the estimated construction costs of the combined elements described above.

The suggested phases for the system improvements are as follows:

- ✓ Phase 1 – Obtain funding to upgrade the WTP in order to increase the production capacity to bring the City into compliance with TCEQ requirements and provide for future growth. Project will include replacing the smallest pump at the raw water pump station with a minimum 750 GPM pump & controls, add a minimum of 20 SF to the mixed media filter area, upgrade mixers, upgrade flocculation basins, upgrade the sedimentation basin(s), add a new 0.1 MG GST, upgrade plant piping as needed, and replace the process control panel and associated electrical work;
- ✓ Phase 2 – Obtain funding to replace approximately 6,350 LF of undersized, aging, and deteriorated water lines in selected areas of the City. Project will include replacing the broken southern main line under the arroyo. The project will include boring and casing under the arroyo, approximately 13 fire hydrants at appropriate locations, service re-connects, valves, and street, pavement, and driveway repair. Project will include approximately 300 LF of 12" bore & casing under the arroyo;
- ✓ Phase 3 – Obtain funding to replace approximately 7,950 LF of undersized, aging, and deteriorated water lines in the remaining areas of the City. The project will include approximately 16 fire hydrants at

appropriate locations, service re-connects, valves, and street, pavement, and driveway repair;

- ✓ Phase 4 – Obtain funding to perform a comprehensive survey of all valves and fire hydrants in order to determine which of these components are malfunctioning. Project should include replacement or repair of all such defective components. Cost estimate assumes approximately 30 fire hydrants and 71 valves will need replacement with this project.

The City strives to provide a safe, efficient, and uninterrupted water supply while meeting all applicable water system standards. These goals can be accomplished by implementing the improvements described above over the planning period of 2012 through 2032. The estimated costs for the proposed improvements to the water system are as follows:

Table 5F: Water System Improvement Plan Projects, 2012-2032

Project ID/ Phase	Year	Project	Estimated Cost	Source
1	2012-2015	Upgrade the WTP to bring the City into compliance with TCEQ requirements and provide for future growth. Project will include replacing the smallest pump at the raw water pump station; upgrading mixers, flocculation basins, and sedimentation basin(s), adding a new 0.1 MG GST, and replacing the process control panel and associated electrical work.	\$552,000	TxCDBG, GEN (General Obligation Bond), USDA-RD, TWDB loan, City Utility Fund (Rev Bond)
2	2016-2020	Replace 6,350 LF of undersized, aging, and deteriorated water lines on FM 106, South Arroyo St. and S Reynolds/FM 1846. Replace broken southern main line under the Arroyo	\$365,200	TxCDBG, GEN (General Obligation Bond), USDA, TWDB loan, City Utility Fund (Rev Bond)
3	2020-2026	Replace 7,950 LF of undersized, aging, and deteriorated water lines in northern and southern parts of the City.	\$340,800	TxCDBG, GEN (General Obligation Bond), USDA, TWDB loan, City Utility Fund (Rev Bond)

4 (City Wide)	2026-2032	Survey and replace all malfunctioning valves and fire hydrants. Cost estimate assumes replacement of approximately 30 fire hydrants and 71 valves.	\$342,125	TxCDBG, GEN (General Obligation Bond), USDA, TWDB loan, City Utility Fund (Rev Bond)
5 (City wide)	2012-2032	Continue the City's participation in the Region M Rio Grande River Regional Water Plan as the plans develop.	\$1,500 (Annually)	City Utility or General Fund

** TxCDBG = Texas Community Development Block Grant Program, administered through the Texas Department of Agriculture, TWDB = Texas Water Development Board grants and loans, UTILITY = City utility funds/revenue bonds, USDA = US Department of Agriculture Water and Wastewater Infrastructure loans and grants, GEN = Municipal Funds and general obligation bonds

Notes on Cost Estimates

1	GrantWorks Engineering Staff provided cost estimate.
2	GrantWorks Engineering Staff provided cost estimate.
3	GrantWorks Engineering Staff provided cost estimate.

6 Wastewater Collection and Treatment System Study

6.1 Review of Prior Studies and Existing Data

No accurate information is available on when the City of Rio Hondo's existing sewage collection system was installed. The pipe materials of the City's remaining sections of the original system indicate that the system was installed during the 1940's and 1950'. The original wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) consisted of an oxidation pond and sludge removal/drying beds. The original WWTP was upgraded in 1978 with the addition of three (3) ponds. In 1990, the WWTP was completely re-constructed using extended aeration-activated sludge technology. The current collection and treatment system has a design capacity of 400,000 GPD, or 0.4 MGD. The City of Rio Hondo currently has a permit to discharge at an average daily rate of 400,000 GPD, or 0.4 MGD, and a 2-hour peak flow of 833 GPM, or 1.20 MGD.

There have been three (3) comprehensive studies of the system prior to this plan. They are as follows:

1. 1977 – Quilio Engineering of Brownsville made a report and sketches that led to the renovation of the treatment plant;
2. 1986 – A Comprehensive Planning Study by Carlos Colinas Vargas and Associates that ultimately led to the conversion of the WWTP to a more efficient extended aeration/activated sludge treatment technology;
3. 2001 - A Comprehensive Planning Study by Ricardo Gomez and Associates in conjunction with Guzman & Munoz Engineering that led to the creation of the most recent system maps.

The system is currently operating in compliance with the applicable rules and regulations. In 2009 an issue arose with the ability of the WWTP to prevent the discharge of untreated or inadequately treated wastes during electrical power failures by means of alternate power sources. This issue has been resolved with the purchase and installation of a standby electrical generator at the WWTP.

The City of Rio Hondo has obtained funding for limited line, manhole, and cleanout replacement from various sources since the WWTP construction was completed in 1994.

The main source of funding has been the various programs offered through the Texas Department of Agriculture (formerly TDRA). The programs have accomplished the following:

- 1991 – UN-D Program installed 12” sewer line, manholes, force main, and replaced a lift station;
- 1994 – CDBG Program replaced the WWTP with the current system;
- 2010 – CD-S Program replaced lift station, manholes, and sewer pipe.

6.2 Wastewater System Inventory

Sewer Lines: The City’s sewer mains range in diameter from 6” to 18” and are located in both the street Right-of-Ways (ROW) and in the alleys. The oldest collection lines are composed of Vitrified Clay Pipe (VCP) and the newer lines are comprised of P.V.C. The newer PVC lines are reported to be in good condition, while the aging VCP lines are reported to be in poor condition. VCP becomes very brittle with age and is prone to breaks and joint separation. This condition can be a primary source of excessive inflow and infiltration. Collection lines that are broken and separated also constitute a hazard to people and the environment.

The City has been replacing collection mains in its system when sources of funding have been available for the last twenty years. As described above, the City has qualified for three (3) CDBG grants for collection line and manhole replacement since 1991. The quantity of the collection lines associated with the system operated by the City of Rio Hondo are shown by size, total length, and percentage of the system as a whole in *Table 6A*:

Table 6A: Major Sewer System Components

Sewer Lines			
	DIAMETER	LENGTH (ft.)	PERCENT
Force Main			
	4" FM	0	0%
	6" FM	6,177	0%
Sub total - Force Main		6,177	0%
	DIAMETER	LENGTH (ft.)	PERCENT
Gravity Feed			

	6"	23,359	56.2%
	8"	15,593	29.7%
	10"	4,275	8.1%
	12"	95	0.2%
	18"	3,040	5.8%
Sub total - Gravity Feed		46,322	100%
Total Sewer Lines		52,539	100%

Manholes and Cleanouts: There are approximately 118 manholes distributed throughout the collection system. For exact locations please see *Map 6A: Existing Sewer System Map*. Approximately 15 manholes have been replaced with CDBG funds over the last twenty years. The older, deteriorating brick and mortar manholes in the system are one of the leading causes of excessive inflow and infiltration into the collection system and the City should continue to replace these brick manholes as funding sources are found in the future. This plan recommends that the City commission a comprehensive *Inflow and Infiltration Study* of the conditions of all of the manholes in the system as part of the overall improvements plan for the system.

Lift Stations: There are seven (7) lift stations operating within the collection system. Many of these pump stations are small, each serving a limited number of residential and commercial properties. All but one of the lift stations are designed to pump into a gravity manhole in near proximity to the lift station, thus reducing the requirements for extended force mains to almost zero. There is no information available concerning the capacities of these lift stations at this time. The City does not use a formal naming system for the lift stations; instead they are generally referred to by their location. Little information is known about the lift stations, but describes them as being generally in fair to good condition. The lift stations are located as follows:

Table 6B: Lift Station Inventory

Lift Stations			
Name	Pump Capacity (gpm)	Year Built	Condition
South – Reynolds & Parkway	Unknown	1991	FAIR
Short Street	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
City Hall	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Roberto Garza & Harrolds	Unknown	2010	GOOD
East Colorado	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Twin Palms	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
WWTP	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown

Wastewater Treatment Facility: The City of Rio Hondo owns and operates the WWTP. In 1990, the WWTP was completely re-constructed using extended aeration-activated sludge technology. The current collection and treatment system has a design capacity of 400,000 GPD, or 0.4 MGD. The City of Rio Hondo currently has a permit to discharge at an average daily rate of 400,000 GPD, or 0.4 MGD, and a 2-hour peak flow of 833 GPM, or 1.20 MGD. According to City staff, the facility currently meets TCEQ permitted levels for effluent quality with regard to total suspended solids (TSS), 20mg/l, Five day Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD-5), 20mg/l, and Enterococci, CFU Bacteria colony count of 35/100ml. The treatment levels specified in the City’s current permit expire June, 1, 2015.

The segment of the Arroyo Colorado to which the City of Rio Hondo discharges is classified as an impaired water body in Texas. In 2002, TCEQ completed a watershed-level study on low dissolved oxygen (DO) levels in the Arroyo. The study showed that higher DO levels could be achieved by reducing the amount of nutrients and BOD entering the water body. In response to the study, a not-for-profit consortium called the Arroyo Colorado Watershed Partnership worked with TCEQ to complete the Arroyo Colorado Watershed Protection Plan in 2007. The Wastewater Infrastructure portion was developed as an agreement between local wastewater operators and the TCEQ to reduce the amount of pollutants entering the Arroyo Colorado to the maximum extent feasible.

The Plan’s first priority is to establish an area standard of wastewater treatment of 10 mg/l BOD-5 and 15 mg/l TSS. The City’s next permit in June of 2015 will incorporate this higher standard. However, City public works officials report that its daily average

measures of these bi-products are much below even the higher standard. Therefore, the City will not need to take any action to meet the 2015 permit levels.

In addition the plan encourages the voluntary utilization of enhanced treatment projects to reduce the loading of pollutants. These include the construction of small-scale wetland systems for enhanced wastewater treatment and to limit the flow of treated effluent discharged into the Arroyo. The City has sought funding to build a wetland creek at its wastewater treatment plant site on the bank of the Arroyo in the northern part of the City. The plan would create a man-made creek fed by treated effluent and require the construction of at least one pond and a pumping mechanism.

Standards and Criteria: The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) outline the standards or criteria applicable to the design and operation of municipal wastewater systems. The standards address influent quality, collection, treatment, and effluent quality. The TCEQ guidelines were originally set forth in Title 30 Part 1 Chapter 317 of the Texas Administrative Code "*Design Criteria for Sewerage Systems*". The State of Texas has revised the standards and replaced Chapter 317 with Chapter 217, "*Design Criteria for Domestic Wastewater Systems*" which outlines system design and operations in all respects. EPA requirements mainly relate to discharge limitations and industrial wastewater treatment.

For wastewater treatment facilities, the TCEQ standards provide detailed information concerning design flows and design loadings expected at the treatment facility for the average municipal wastewater effluent stream. The authorized effluent discharge quality limitations are established in the individual municipality or operator's Permit to Discharge Waste, and will vary based on local conditions. Typically, effluent strength entering the treatment facility should not exceed approximately 200-350 mg/L BOD-5, depending on the characteristics of the influent stream and the source of the wastewater stream. BOD5 and TSS values higher than 200 mg/L would likely be the result of wastewater demand from industrial sources that should be pretreated or eliminated.

The average quantity of wastewater flow set forth by the standards depends on the source. For example, a residential subdivision would have a design flow of 75-100 gallons per capita per day, while a hospital design flow is approximately 200 gallons per capita per day. For another example, the design flow criteria for a facility with expected flows of less than 1.0 MGD establishes the permitted flow as the maximum 30-day average flow. This permitted flow is estimated by multiplying the average annual flow by a factor of at least 1.5, and dividing that value by 12. When site-specific data is unavailable, the two-hour peak flow must be estimated by multiplying the permitted flow described above by a factor of 4.0.

The criteria for sewage treatment facilities are based on process type and address the individual system components. The design standards take into account design flow, peak flow, influent characteristics, and required discharge quality. The criteria are comprehensive and consider most treatment technologies currently in common use.

When a public sewer system experiences average daily flows in excess of 75% of its permitted capacity for three or more consecutive months TCEQ regulations require that the system owner begin planning for plant expansion or replacement. When average daily flows exceed 85% for three or more consecutive months, TCEQ requires that the owner of the facility begin construction on a new or expanded treatment facility. The City of Rio Hondo experienced exactly such a scenario in 2004 and subsequently obtained funding through a bond sale to upgrade and expand the City's treatment facility.

Design criteria for collection systems include standards for pipe size, horizontal and vertical spacing, gradient, manhole spacing, lift station connections, and allowable infiltration/inflow. The standards require a minimum diameter of six (6) inches for gravity collection mains. The standards also specify minimum gradients for various pipe sizes that will be required to achieve a flow velocity of at least two (2) feet per second (fps). The grade requirements and pipe size minimums that should be required within the City's system are listed in *Table 6C*.

Table 6B: Sewer Gradient Standards

Main Size (Inches)	Fall in feet per 100' of line
6	0.50
8	0.33

10	0.25
12	0.20

The typical manhole spacing for 6” to 15” main sizes with straight alignment and uniform grades is 500 feet (maximum). Reduced spacing may be necessary based on a system's ability to clean and maintain its sewer with available equipment.

Lift station design criteria establishes general requirements that include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. The raw wastewater pump, with the exception of a grinder pump, must be capable of passing a sphere of 2.5 inches or greater;
2. The raw wastewater pump must have suction and discharge openings of at least 3.0 inches in diameter;
3. The lift station pumping capacity must have a firm pumping capacity equal to or greater than the expected peak flow;
4. For a lift station with more than two (2) pumps, a force main in excess of one-half mile, or firm pumping capacity of 100 GPM or greater, system curves must be provided for both the normal and peak operating conditions at C values for proposed and existing pipe;
5. A collection system lift station must be equipped with a tested quick-connect mechanism or a transfer switch properly sized to connect to a portable generator, if not equipped with an onsite generator;
6. Lift stations must include an audiovisual alarm system and the system must transmit all alarm conditions to a continuously monitored location;
7. A lift station must be fully accessible during a 25-year 24-hour rainfall event;
8. A force main must be a minimum of 4.0 inches in diameter, unless it is used in conjunction with a grinder pump station;
9. For a duplex pump station, the minimum velocity is 3.0 feet per second with one pump in operation;
10. For a pump station with three or more pumps, the minimum velocity is 2.0 feet per second with only the smallest pump in operation;

11. The use of pipe or fittings rated at a working pressure of less than 150 pounds per square inch is prohibited.

6.3 Wastewater System Analysis

The wastewater system analysis evaluates the system components with respect to the applicable standards and criteria as described in the previous sections. This analysis will consider the following elements:

- The wastewater treatment facilities;
- Industrial waste and special treatment facilities;
- Collection system conditions;
- Unserved/underserved areas;
- Manhole conditions;
- The characteristics of the soil and terrain affecting the collection facilities;
- Lift station conditions;
- Infiltration/inflow problems;
- Operational procedures.

Wastewater Treatment Facilities:

The City of Rio Hondo's current wastewater treatment plant, completed in 1994, appears to be in good condition. The facility also has emergency back-up power. The City's current permit authorizes a 0.4 MGD limit on average annual daily plant discharge, and a 2-hour peak discharge of 1.20 MGD. City staff considers mitigation and reduction in the quantity of inflow and infiltration to be the most pressing issue with regard to the efficient operation of the WWTP. The City staff has also identified the following additional issue that should be addressed in the near future in order to improve the plant operations:

- A need for a bar screen/grit chamber prior to the plant lift station to keep large objects and debris from entering the treatment plant inflow stream;

Long-term, the City may decrease its discharge to the Arroyo by building a wetland creek facility at its plant site. .

Collection System:

City staff states that the general condition of most of the pipes within the collection system is fair with the older VCP sections in poor condition. The combination of old, deteriorating VCP pipe and aging brick & mortar manholes are the primary cause of the current excess of inflow and infiltration of stormwater into the system.

Inflow and Infiltration (I/I): Inflow and Infiltration (I/I) are terms used to describe the flow of surface water or ground water into a wastewater collection system. Primary causes include deteriorated manholes that are no longer watertight, cracked or collapsed pipes, disjointed pipe connections, and inadvertent stormwater flows into the sanitary system via storm drains. I/I is a serious, continuous, and cumulative problem that has a significant adverse effect on the operation costs and efficiency of a wastewater treatment facility. As described above, the problems that Rio Hondo is experiencing with inflow and infiltration primarily stem from the presence of deteriorating brick and mortar manholes in the system, and the presence of old, deteriorated Vitriified Clay Pipe. While the City does not have accurate measurements of excess flows in the collection system, the City Staff have expressed concern over what they consider to be excessive peak wet-weather flows.

Acceptable levels of I/I are determined by applying the standard of 200 gallons per inch of diameter per mile of pipe per day. Using information collected in the system inventory, the allowable I/I for the City of Rio Hondo would be about 15,140 GPD. The I/I experienced in the City's system appears to exceed this standard. City staff cites mitigating I/I as the main priority for the sewer system within the planning period.

Manholes: The recommended spacing between manholes in the collection system is 500 feet. Based on the total number of manholes (118), the average spacing in the developed part of the City computes to approximately 445 feet, within the recommended maximum.

Lift Stations: The City currently assumes the responsibility for the maintenance and operation of seven (7) lift stations located throughout the community. Two of these lift stations have been replaced within the past twenty (20) years, and the Nopales & Harrolds Street lift station is less than two years old.

Industrial Waste and Special Treatment Facilities: The City has no current producers of industrial wastes within the city limits.

Operational Procedures: The City currently has two certified Class “C” licensed operators. This satisfies the minimum requirement set forth by TCEQ for a collection and treatment system of the type and capacity currently owned and operated by the City. In the area of operational procedures, there are several issues that all sewer systems should address concerning its treatment and collection systems that require a minimum of capital outlay. These issues are continuous and should be addressed by routine, scheduled operational procedures such as the following:

- Establish a routine to locate sources of I/I and a plan to address these problems in a timely fashion;
- Establish a program for routine scheduled maintenance of plant mechanical equipment, possibly incorporating currently available technological systems such as SCADA (Supervisor Control And Data Acquisition) packages designed for this task;
- Monitor influent and effluent quality on a regularly scheduled basis, with appropriate recording and reporting procedures;
- Establish a routine line and manhole inspection schedule and a plan for the required line and manhole replacement and/or rehabilitation.

In many systems these operational/maintenance practices occur in the form of repair as opposed to preventive maintenance. This situation appears to have occurred frequently in the City of Rio Hondo. The City should strive to commission a comprehensive *Inflow and Infiltration Study* as soon as a reliable funding source is found.

Unserved Areas: Currently, the only unserved areas within the corporate City Limits are the area west of the Arroyo Colorado along West Colorado Avenue and Harris Road and a portion of eastern Rio Hondo. One recommendation of the TCEQ Pollutant Reduction Plan for the Arroyo Colorado is to connect individuals currently using OSSF to municipal

wastewater systems. The Arroyo Colorado Water (ACW) Partnership has discussed serving the neighborhood by extending City of Harlingen lines to it.

Soils Characteristics and Topography: The integrity of wastewater systems may be affected by soil and topography with respect to system infiltration and inflow, pipe breakage, and other construction issues. For example, soils with high porosity characteristics may contribute to higher system infiltration rates than soils with low infiltration rates, particularly when collection lines and manholes have deteriorated due to age and breakage. Soils that absorb water and swell, like fat clays, can crack sewer pipes and manholes, particularly when these components have been constructed with improper bedding material or techniques. In areas that include septic systems, certain soils may be unsuitable for septic systems if they do not have suitable porosity and percolation characteristics.

The City's soil types from USDA-National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) County Soil Survey reports are shown in *Table 6C*. The NRCS has prepared soil surveys for most of the counties in the State of Texas. These surveys are issued for each individual county. Soils in any given area have a great deal of local variability that may not be apparent in the individual County Soil Surveys. The reports cannot provide the precise level of sub-surface conditions that is necessary to understand and predict soil behavior on individual parcels of land. While a soil survey report is highly useful in gaining broad understanding of general soil characteristics in the area, the information provided in the surveys does not remove the necessity for local onsite geotechnical investigation in determining suitability of soils for septic systems or other specific land uses.

The City of Rio Hondo is located within an area that contains approximately 12 different soil types, 11 of which are located in its region. These soil types are shown in *Figure 4A* below. *Table 4C* contains a summary of various intrinsic characteristics of each soil type in the area with respect to a particular soil's suitability for use as a load-bearing base for construction. As described by the NRCS¹⁰, "Not limited" indicates that the soil can be used for the purpose with few modifications. "Somewhat limited" indicates that limitations

¹⁰ <http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/WebSoilSurvey.aspx>

can be minimized by special design or construction methods. "Very limited" indicates that limitations cannot be overcome without major soil removal and replacement, special structural design, or extensive use of specialized construction methods. Some areas of the City may not be suitable for development due to unstable soils typically found in flood prone areas.

In *Table 6C*, "Hydrologic Group" refers to the capacity of the soil absorb excess moisture, particularly from rainfall. Group A soils have high absorption and porosity and low runoff potential while Group D soils have low absorption and high runoff potential. Construction on Group A and B soils generally does not require soil modification. Construction on Group C and D soils should be examined and tested closely on a case-by-case basis.

Table 6C: Soil Characteristics

MUSYM		Hydrologic Group	Building Restrictions						Acreage in City
			<i>Dwellings w/out Basements</i>	<i>Dwellings with Basements</i>	<i>Small Commercial Buildings</i>	<i>Local roads and streets</i>	<i>Sewage Lagoons</i>	<i>Septic Tank Fields</i>	
HO	Hidalgo sandy clay loam	B	Somewhat limited: shrink-swell	Somewhat limited: shrink-swell	Somewhat limited: shrink-swell	Very limited: low strength; shrink-swell	Somewhat limited: seepage	Not Limited	267
LR	Lozano fine sandy loam	C	Somewhat limited: shrink-swell	Somewhat limited: depth to saturated zone, shrink-swell	Somewhat limited: shrink-swell	Very limited: low strength; shrink-swell	Very limited: seepage; depth to saturated zone	Somewhat limited: depth to saturated zone	21
LY	Lyford sandy clay loam	B	Somewhat limited: shrink-swell	Somewhat limited: depth to saturated zone, shrink-swell	Somewhat limited: shrink-swell	Very limited: low strength; shrink-swell	Somewhat limited: depth to saturated zone; seepage	Not Limited	563
MEA	Mercedes clay, 0 to 1% slopes	D	Very limited: shrink-swell	Very limited: shrink-swell	Very limited: shrink-swell	Very limited: low strength; shrink-swell	Not limited	Very limited: Clayey	616

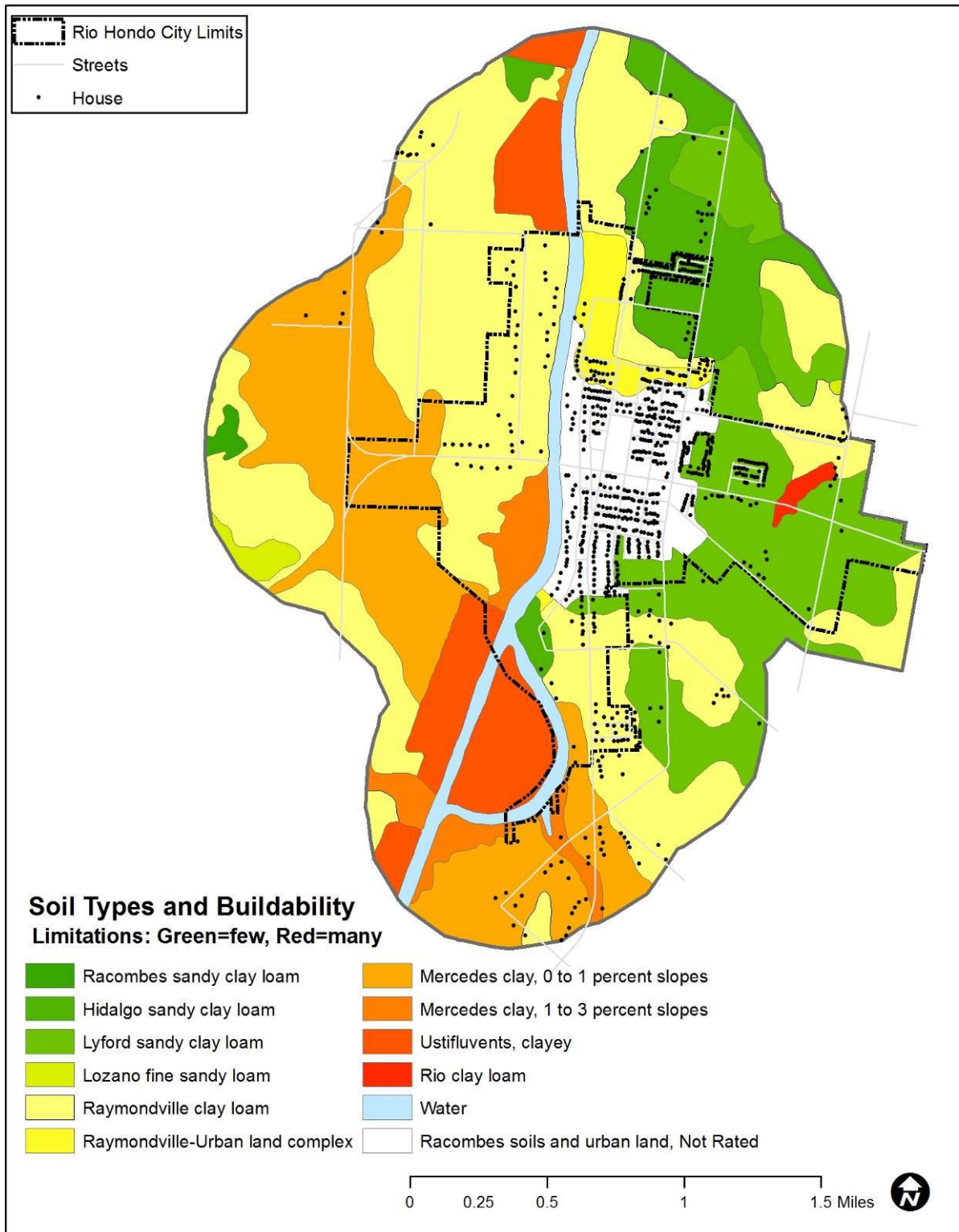
MEB	Mercedes clay, 1 to 3% slopes	D	Very limited: shrink-swell	Very limited: shrink-swell	Very limited: shrink-swell	Very limited: low strength; shrink-swell	Not limited	Very limited: Clayey	108
RA	Racombe sandy clay loam	B	Somewhat limited: shrink-swell	Somewhat limited: depth to saturated zone, shrink-swell	Somewhat limited: shrink-swell	Somewhat limited: low strength; shrink-swell	Somewhat limited: depth to saturated zone; seepage	Not Limited	11
RDX	Racombe soils and urban land		Not rated	Not rated	Not rated	Not rated	Not rated	Not Limited	229
RE	Raymondville clay loam	C	Very limited: shrink-swell	Very limited: shrink-swell	Very limited: shrink-swell	Very limited: low strength; shrink-swell	Not limited	Very limited: Clayey	1240
RM	Raymondville-Urban land complex	C	Very limited: shrink-swell	Very limited: shrink-swell	Very limited: shrink-swell	Very limited: low strength; shrink-swell	Not limited	Very limited: Clayey	71
RO	Rio clay loam	C/D	Very limited: ponding; depth to saturated zone; sink-swell	Very limited: ponding; depth to saturated zone; sink-swell	Very limited: ponding; depth to saturated zone; sink-swell	Very limited: ponding; depth to saturation; low strength; shrink-swell	Very limited: ponding; depth to saturated zone	Very limited: ponding; clayey; depth to saturated zone	12
USX	Ustifluvents, clayey	D	Very limited: flooding; shrink-swell	Very limited	Very limited: flooding; depth to saturated zone; shrink-swell	Very limited: shrink-swell; low strength; flooding	Somewhat limited: slope; flooding	Very limited: flooding; clayey	254

W	Water		Not rated	Not rated	Not rated	Not rated	Not rated	Not rated	137
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Source: *Soil survey of Cameron County, TX*. Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2007, accessed at http://soils.usda.gov/survey/online_surveys/texas/

Soils are best suited for development in the eastern part of the City and its ETJ. Development is possible in areas that are somewhat limited with more pointed soil testing, and with heightened design considerations and building techniques. The soils in the central portion of the City have not been rated and, while their buildability conditions are not known, several homes and businesses have been built in that area.

Figure 6A: Soil Associations for the City of Rio Hondo



Prioritized Problems: In summary, the wastewater system analysis and input from local sources has identified the following problems with the current municipal wastewater collection and treatment system:

- 1) Need for bar screen and grit chamber at the upstream entrance to the WWTP Lift Station;
- 2) Need for wet well upgrade at the WWTP Lift Station;
- 3) Need for back-up 300 GPM pump at the WWTP Lift Station;
- 4) Need for emergency back-up power at the lift stations that do not currently have that capability;
- 5) System infiltration in large rain events:
 - a. Need for a comprehensive I/I Study;
 - b. Presence of brick and mortar manholes in the system contributes to excessive inflow and infiltration;
 - c. Presence of aging and deteriorated collection lines in the system, also a major contributor to excessive inflow/infiltration;
- 6) Need to comply with the Pollutant Reduction Plan for the Arroyo Colorado by reducing the amount of discharge into the Arroyo from the plant and lowering the use of OSSF systems in the city's service area:
- 7) Lack of service west of the Arroyo.

6.4 Wastewater Collection and Treatment System Plan

Goals and Objectives: The City establishes the following goals for its wastewater system:

Goal 1: An efficient wastewater system with minimal operational and maintenance costs.

Objective 1.1: Upgrade Plant lift station by 2015.

Policy 1.1.1: Replace and upgrade plant lift station with bar screen to filter incoming effluent and thereby reduce operational costs.

Policy 1.1.2: Upgrade plant lift station with back-up pump and controls to improve efficiency and thereby reduce operational costs.

Policy 1.1.3: Apply for grants and/or loans from the TxCDBG Program, USDA Rural Development, and other sources in order to keep the costs of system improvements at a minimum.

Goal 2: Safe and sanitary wastewater disposal.

Objective 2.1: Over the planning period, replace lines and manholes identified in a comprehensive I/I study in order reduce potential overflows to the WWTP.

Objective 2.2: By 2032, replace lines and equipment that pose a safety hazard and implement an annual program to ensure the continued safety of the wastewater system.

Policy 2.2.1: After major improvements are made according to the phased projects in this report, begin an annual program to smoke test and pressure test all existing manholes and cleanouts for leakage. Install waterproofing and seals as needed.

Objective 2.3: Protect the integrity of the Arroyo Colorado watershed by reducing discharge into the Arroyo.

Policy 2.3.1: Between 2012 and 2016, work with the ACW Partnership to fund the construction of a small-scale wetland at the treatment plant site.

Policy 2.3.1: Between 2016 and 2020, work with the City of Harlingen to extend wastewater service to homes in Rio Hondo west of the Arroyo..

Proposed System Improvements – Planning Period 2012-2032:

The following section describes a series of proposed improvements to the existing wastewater collection and treatment system. The improvement projects are presented as phased improvements that are suggested for implementation over the 20-year planning period encompassed by this Comprehensive Plan.

The projects are listed in a sequence that represents just one of several possible avenues, all of which should lead to the achievement of the long-term goals adopted by the City of Rio Hondo for the operation and maintenance of the wastewater collection and treatment system. The sequence shown in this plan is a logical, step-by-step process intended to increase the safety, efficiency, and economy of the wastewater system operations. The sequence is intended only as a suggested program of phased improvements, and alternative sequences are recommended if funding availability requires significant changes to this proposed system improvements program.

Table 6C contains the estimated projected costs for each phase of the improvements program. These costs are based on current costs of record for similar projects in the same geographical area of the state. Every effort has been made to include appropriate cost factors such as inflation, variations in the market, and advances in wastewater technology.

The suggested phases for the system improvements are as follows:

- ✓ Phase 1 – Upgrade and refurbish the WWTP Lift Station. Project will include a new wet well, a mechanical bar screen with associated platform and piping, a new 300 GPM back-up pump with electrical, controls, and piping;
- ✓ Phase 2 – Continue the efforts to reduce and/or mitigate infiltration and inflow into the collection system by commissioning a comprehensive I/I study to identify and prioritize future line and manhole replacement projects. This project will also include replacing approximately 4,350 LF of aging and deteriorated collection lines and manholes along the central trunk line in the City. The project will replace existing lines with 10"-12" SDR 26 PVC pipe and will include replacement of approximately 13 manholes at the appropriate locations. Project will include service reconnections, street, pavement, and driveway repairs, and Engineering & Survey services;
- ✓ Phase 3 – Continue the efforts to reduce and/or mitigate infiltration and inflow into the collection system by replacing approximately 8,950 LF of aging and deteriorated collection lines and manholes in the north-central portion of the City. The project will replace existing lines with 8" SDR 26 PVC pipe and will include replacement of approximately 23 manholes at the appropriate locations. Project will include service reconnections, street, pavement, and driveway repairs, and Engineering & Survey services;
- ✓ Phase 4 – Continue the efforts to reduce and/or mitigate infiltration and inflow into the collection system by replacing approximately 8,300 LF of aging and deteriorated collection lines and manholes in the central portion of the City. The project will replace existing lines with 8" SDR 26 PVC pipe and will include replacement of approximately 22 manholes at the appropriate locations. Project

will include service reconnections, street, pavement, and driveway repairs, and Engineering & Survey services.

Table 6C: Wastewater System Improvement Plan, 2012-32

Project ID / Phase	Year	Project	Estimated Cost*	Source of Funds**
1 (a)	2012-2015	Upgrade and refurbish the WWTP Lift Station. Project will include a new wet well, a mechanical bar screen with associated platform and piping, a new 300 GPM back-up pump with electrical, controls, and piping.	\$346,200	(TWDB, TxCDBG, USDA, WASTEWATER UTILITY)
1 (b)	2013-2016	Construct a small-scale wetland at the treatment plant site to reduce discharge to the Arroyo	\$90,000	(TWDB, GLO, USDA, WASTEWATER UTILITY)
2	2017-2020	Commission a comprehensive I/I study to identify and prioritize future line and manhole replacement projects. Replace approximately 4,350 LF of aging and deteriorated collection line along Harrolds Street.	\$304,900	(TWDB, TxCDBG, USDA, WASTEWATER UTILITY)
3	2021-2026	Replace approximately 8,950 LF of aging and deteriorated collection lines and manholes in the north-central portion of the City.	\$438,200	(TWDB, TxCDBG, USDA, WASTEWATER UTILITY)
4	2027-2032	Replace approximately 8,300 LF of aging and deteriorated collection lines and manholes in the central portion of the City..	\$483,600	(TWDB, TxCDBG, USDA, WASTEWATER UTILITY)

*Includes any associated engineering, administration, and/or acquisition costs.

**Sources: Texas Community Development Block Grant Program (TxCDBG), Texas Water Development Board (TWDB), City of Rio Hondo Water & Sewer Fund (Wastewater Utility), or Certificates of Obligation/Revenue Bonds (Bond); General Land Office Coastal Management Program grant

7 Storm Drainage System Study

7.1 Review of Prior Studies and Existing Data

Storm drainage facilities prevent or minimize damage resulting from overland flows or pooling of water during and following periods of rainfall. They collect and channel the runoff from heavy rainfalls or other surface water into a natural stream course or other body of water. A community's storm drainage system might include creeks, rivers, canals, reservoirs, lakes, marshes or wetlands, channels, culverts, enclosed pipe storm sewers, and ditches.

The most recent studies of the system are as follows:

1. 1986 – A Comprehensive Planning Study by Carlos Colinas Vargas & Associates determined that many of the system components were undersized and inadequate to convey runoff from a routine storm event;
2. 2001 - A Comprehensive Planning Study by Ricardo Gomez & Associates in conjunction with Guzman & Munoz Engineering identified several problem areas and proposed a series of improvements to mitigate the more serious issues. City staff has indicated that some of the proposed measures have been implemented, but precise information about the specifics of the improvements is not available at this time. This study also produced the latest comprehensive maps of the system;
3. 2011 – A major drainage improvement project is currently under way to improve the system in three areas of the City. New main drainage lines will be built along Robert Garza Street from Robertson Street to the Arroyo Colorado, along the alley between Paloma Street and Catherine Street from Robertson Street to the Arroyo Colorado, and in the eastern section of the city along Sam Houston Blvd. to the existing irrigation canal.

7.2 Storm Drainage System Inventory

Field Survey: In May of 2011, GrantWorks, Inc. conducted a field survey of the stormwater drainage system in the City of Rio Hondo. The survey identified the location, type, size, condition and level of blockage or damage (when applicable) for all the drainage features including curb and gutter, channels & roadside ditches, bridges and culverts. That information is illustrated on *Map 7A: Existing Drainage System 2011*.

The drainage system elements that serve the City of Rio Hondo are controlled by three (3) separate entities: Cameron County, the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), and the City of Rio Hondo. The drainage system's capabilities are subject to the jurisdiction of these three entities, so the City does not control some of the decisions related to the scope, location, or timing of drainage system improvements. The City is responsible for minor roadside ditch and culvert maintenance and major structures that are located within the city limits on roads and properties maintained by the City. Cameron County is responsible for structures in the ETJ not located on US Highways or on TxDOT farm-to-market roads (FM). TxDOT maintains the roadside drainage systems along FM 106, FM 1826, and SH 345.

Drainage systems typically consist of curb and gutter, enclosed pipes, open ditches, channels, creeks, and bridges that use the natural topography or grade of the land to convey storm water from the community to a nearby creek, river, or reservoir. The City of Rio Hondo relies on a system of irrigation canals, roadside ditches, culvert pipes, drainage channels, and curb and gutters sections (with associated inlets and underground pipe networks) to control excess storm water. There are sections of underground pipe networks in the City that are difficult to identify due to the scarcity of information on them.

The type of culvert pipes found throughout the City and ETJ of Rio Hondo consist almost exclusively of Reinforced Concrete Pipe (RCP) and Reinforced Concrete

Box Culvert (RCBC). The field survey recorded 73 culvert pipes within the city limits and ETJ. Of those, 49 were located within the City's corporate boundaries. However, 9 of the culverts located within the city limits are the responsibility of TxDOT. Rio Hondo is not responsible for the maintenance of any culverts utilized for the drainage of TxDOT or County maintained right of ways. Altogether, TxDOT and Cameron County are responsible for maintaining 24 of the 73 culverts located throughout the municipal region of Rio Hondo. *Table 7A: Drainage Structures Located in the City Area* identifies the type, condition and responsible governmental entity of the existing drainage structures.

Table 7A: Drainage Structures Located in the City Area

City Limits						
City Responsibility			Blocked			Damaged
	Count	%	<30%	>30% & <60%	>60%	
HDPE	0	0%	0	0	0	0
CMP	0	0%	0	0	0	0
RCBC	0	0%	0	0	0	0
RCP	49	100%	31	15	3	15
STEEL	0	0%	0	0	0	0
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>15</i>
TxDOT Maintenance Responsibility						
TxDOT Maintenance Responsibility			Blocked			Damaged
	Count	%	<30%	>30% & <60%	>60%	
HDPE	0	0%	0	0	0	0
CMP	0	0%	0	0	0	0
RCBC	0	0%	0	0	0	0
RCP	9	100%	6	2	1	2
STEEL	0	0%	0	0	0	0
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>
Outside City Limits						
County Responsibility			Blocked			Damaged
	Count	%	<30%	>30% & <60%	>60%	
HDPE	0	0%	0	0	0	0
CMP	0	0%	0	0	0	0
RCBC	0	0%	0	0	0	0
RCP	10	100%	8	1	1	3
STEEL	0	0%	0	0	0	0
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>3</i>
TxDOT Responsibility						
TxDOT Responsibility			Blocked			Damaged
	Count	%	<30%	>30% & <60%	>60%	
HDPE	0	0%	0	0	0	0
CMP	0	0%	0	0	0	0
RCBC	0	0%	0	0	0	0
RCP	5	100%	2	3	0	0
STEEL	0	0%	0	0	0	0
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Total</i>	<i>73</i>		<i>47</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>% Total</i>	<i>100%</i>		<i>64%</i>	<i>29%</i>	<i>7%</i>	<i>27%</i>

Source: GrantWorks field survey.

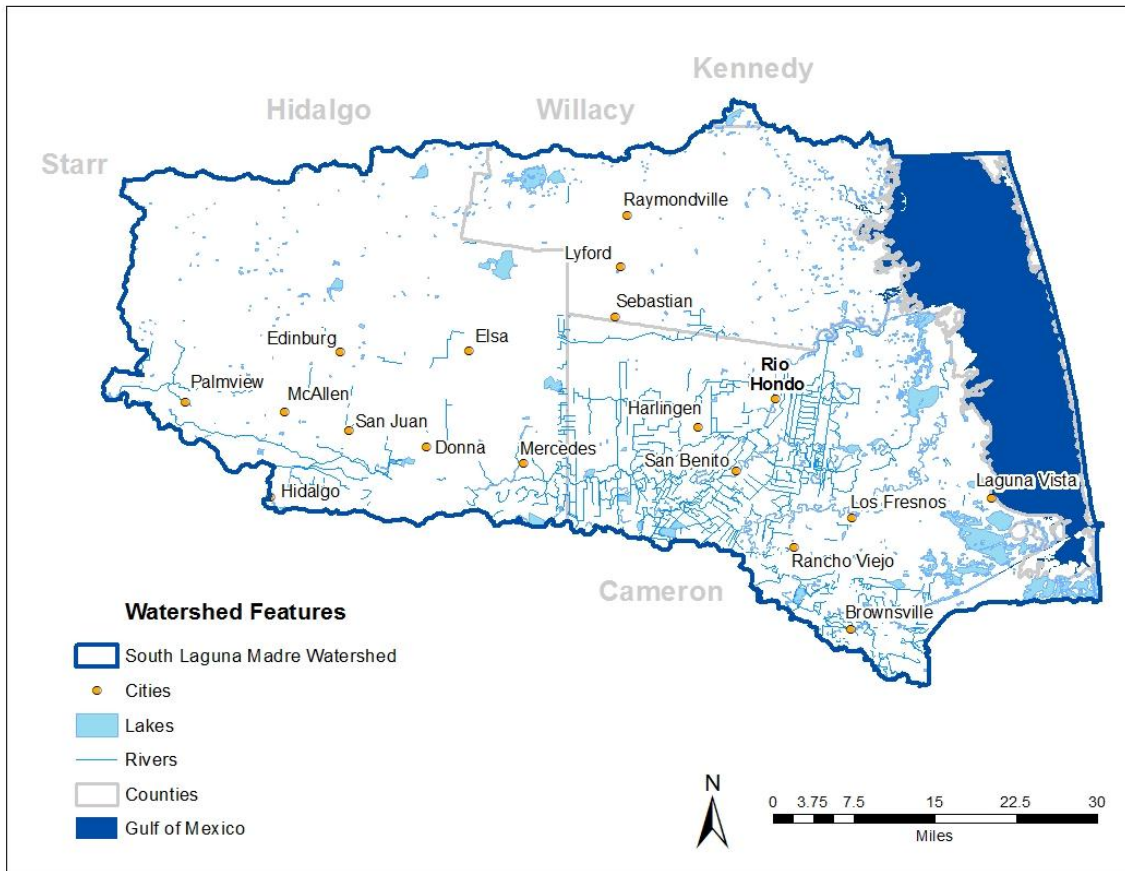
In addition to culverts, approximately 39,750 LF of curb and gutter, area inlets, curb inlets and 16,850 LF of underground enclosed pipe in various subdivisions throughout the City convey storm water from the community to the adjacent arroyo. The curb and gutter system in these areas appears to be in relatively good condition and seems to be functioning properly. Precise information as to the exact size and location of all of the underground pipes is not available at this time. However, storm sewer inlets were inventoried and are shown on *Map 7A: Existing Drainage System 2010*. The City also uses approximately 133,800 LF of roadside ditches, 35,700 LF of irrigation canals, 6,000 LF of natural channels, and 18,250 LF of irrigation pipes to convey storm water from the City and surrounding areas to the Arroyo.

7.3 Storm Drainage System Analysis

Geographic Context: Rio Hondo is generally located in the Nueces-Rio Grand Coastal Basin and specifically within the South Laguna Madre Watershed. The City is located immediately adjacent to the Arroyo Colorado, which is part of the Intracoastal Waterway. The Arroyo Colorado is the receiving body for all of the area's stormwater runoff. *Figure 7A* below depicts the watershed.

The City of Rio Hondo has relatively little topographical relief, with a maximum elevation of +/- 30 feet above mean sea level (MSL) in several areas of the City and as low as 5 MSL along the banks of the Arroyo Colorado.

Figure 7A: South Laguna Madre Watershed



Existing Drainage Facilities The City's drainage system has developed as the City has developed. The sections below examine the state of each type of drainage facility in more detail.

Roadside Ditches/Drainage Channels: Roadside ditches line local, county and state roads throughout the City to convey stormwater to intermittent creek and irrigation canals. Channel types are shown in Table 7B. The City maintains most of the roadside ditches within the City, while TxDOT and Cameron County maintain the rest. Cameron Water Irrigation District # 2 is responsible for the maintenance of the irrigation facilities.

Table 7B: Drainage Channel Type and Length, City Limits & ETJ

Drainage Channel Type	LF
Roadside Ditch	133,800
Irrigation Canals	35,700
Natural Lined Channels	5,950
Irrigation Pipes	18,250

Source: 2011 Fieldwork

Three potential sources of problems were noted with the City's open ditch and channel system.

- 1) Some roadside ditches are not interconnected, leaving water to find its own course to outfalls, usually over city streets;
- 2) Some ditches have heavy vegetation and silt build-up that reduces the cross-sectional flow area;
- 3) Many of the roadside ditches are relatively shallow, which does not provide sufficient cross-sectional flow area.

The photos below are examples of these conditions. Roadside ditches along the main streets are generally in good condition. Other roadside ditches in the neighborhoods illustrate how debris, vegetation, and silt can accumulate over time and significantly reduce the effectiveness of the system.



Figure 7A. Roadside ditch along thoroughfare in good condition



Figure 7B. Roadside ditch within residential area in poor condition

Underground storm drainage system: With over 39,000 LF of curb and gutter throughout the City, there are underground storm drains associated with some of these areas. The systems generally discharge to either the Arroyo Colorado directly, or indirectly via the irrigation canals. Curb inlets and curb and gutter are shown on *Map 7A: Existing Drainage System 2011*. Curb inlet markings indicate where underground storm drainage is handling storm water. City staff indicates that the underground systems are performing well at the time of this plan.

Most of the curb and gutter sections are in good condition with little or no damage. Small sections of curb and gutter show signs of wear and may need to be improved during the planning period to maintain their ability to channel water effectively.



Figure 7C. Curb Inlet in good condition



Figure 7D. Area Inlet in good condition

Culverts: The most significant potential source of problems with Rio Hondo’s culvert facilities is their relatively small sizing in some areas. The most common problem encountered with culvert pipes is either blockage from the accumulation of silt, vegetation, and other debris, or damaged ends from vehicle traffic. Of the City maintained system, about 37% of the culverts are more than 30% blocked.

Culvert damage can result from several factors including but not limited to: insufficient turning radii of pavement sections at intersections; insufficient pavement width at intersections; high velocities of the runoff in the ditches, channels, and streams; and the absence of protective headwalls or end treatments for the culvert pipes. Those factors cause vehicular traffic, particularly truck traffic, to pass over and crush the unprotected ends of the pipes in the

process of turning. High water velocities within the ditches, channels, and streams can cause erosion and undermining of the culvert pipes, which can damage or significantly reduce their bearing capacity.



Figure 7E. Culvert w/o Headwall in fair condition



Figure 7F. Culvert with Safety End Treatment (SET) in good condition

Flood Planning and Policies

National Flood Insurance Program: The National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) is a FEMA program that provides federally backed flood insurance to members of communities that carry out measures to reduce the risk of flood damage. While NFIP participation is voluntary, federally backed flood insurance is not available for structures in non-participating communities, and disaster assistance as well as federal grants and loans are not available for structures in FEMA designated special flood hazard areas (SFHAs) of non-participating communities. Various requirements and caveats apply to the obligations of lenders and property owners with respect to flood insurance, and specific questions should be addressed to FEMA or the Texas Water Development Board NFIP division.

The City currently participates in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). Among many other services, the U.S. National Flood Insurance Program provides flood insurance rate maps that depict the 100-year and 500-year special flood hazard areas for many communities, including the City of Rio Hondo. The effective date of the most recent Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) is June 1, 1981 and the FIRM # is 480112 0001B. Rio Hondo's special flood hazard areas are shown on *Map 7A: Existing Drainage System 2010*.

Appendix 7A contains more detailed information concerning the NFIP and the benefits that a community can receive through active participation. More detailed information regarding all aspects of the program can also be found through the TWDB (www.twdb.state.tx.us/wrpi/flood/nfip.htm) and FEMA (www.fema.gov/nfip/) websites.

Appendix 7B contains information on how to score points through the Community Rating System, which is a set of actions participating communities can take to

reduce flood insurance rates for property owners. Community Rating System recommended actions related to the Rio Hondo Comprehensive Plan include:

- Adopting the Comprehensive Plan.
- Adopting the recommended subdivision ordinance which contains erosion and sedimentation control requirements during and after construction and standards for drainage facilities for new construction.
- Educating residents whose properties are located within floodplains about floodplain building regulations.
- Purchasing, zoning for open space, or otherwise restricting parcels designated to be in the floodplain. The City could further increase the credits homeowners could receive on flood insurance premiums by zoning for open space along flood plains and/or purchasing drainage easements or parcels in the floodplain. The amount of premium reduction is based on the percentage of special flood hazard area preserved as open space.

Flood Prevention Ordinances: The City had adopted a Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance as of the date of this plan. A typical Flood Plain Ordinance states that no premise in the City shall be connected to the City's sewer system if it lies within a floodplain and that no building permit shall be issued for a premise that will connect to the sewer system if it lies within a designated SFHA.

Subdivision and Zoning Ordinances: The City has adopted both a subdivision and a zoning ordinance. However, neither of these ordinances contains any specific requirements relating to development within a SFHA. Recommended ordinance wording can be found in Chapters 14 and 15. The current subdivision ordinance should be amended specifically to set minimum standards for new construction. In addition to requirements for water, sewer, and street access, a subdivision ordinance should require that lots in a floodplain must be larger than a certain size (e.g. 5 acres) or prohibit development that may have the potential to increase downstream flooding.

A zoning ordinance generally deals with land use and the aesthetic considerations of development, but it can also set minimum lot sizes and specify

allowed impervious surface cover, which impacts the amount of stormwater runoff entering the drainage system instead of infiltrating the soil where it falls.

7.4 Storm Drainage System Plan

This report is an evaluation, analysis and planning report rather than a design study, and detailed design data for individual construction projects has not been developed as a part of the report. The construction of improvements to the storm drainage system should be preceded by a detailed engineering design analysis, plans, and specifications. This report is intended solely to provide the City of Rio Hondo with guidance in the planning of future storm drainage improvements.

Prioritized Problems. City leaders, staff, and consulting engineers have identified the following areas of concern with regard to the storm-water system.

1. Drainage infrastructure is currently undersized in some areas of town, which allows water to pool; contributes to street deterioration; and occasionally floods homes.
2. Need to use a consistent method for sizing culverts and drainage infrastructure to ensure new structures function efficiently.
3. Need for ordinances to control development in natural drainage areas and designated flood areas.
4. Need to maintain ditches and control erosion and sedimentation build-up that impedes the function of existing and future drainage infrastructure.

Like many rural cities, the City of Rio Hondo faces a difficult predicament with respect to drainage problems. There is no grant money available to make improvements to the drainage systems of rural towns. Routine maintenance is the only viable route available to many cities to address various drainage problems. The following plan framework outlines a specific set of actions to meet the City's drainage system needs with local resources.

Goal 1: A citywide drainage system that prevents flooding of public roadways.

Objective 1.1: Mitigate all problem drainage areas over the planning period.

Policy 1.1.1: Between 2012 and 2018 budget annually to revise drainage structures in identified as problem drainage areas and engage engineers to properly size culverts and design ditches.

Policy 1.1.2: Between 2012 and 2032, determine if problem drainage areas can be addressed as water and sewer improvements are made.

Policy 1.1.3: Continue to communicate regularly with TxDOT and Cameron County to provide for on-going, semi-annual routine maintenance of all culvert pipes, drainage channels, and roadside ditches by removing silt, debris, and vegetation that impede the flow of water.

Policy 1.1.4: Meet with TxDOT and Cameron County annually to coordinate on-going, semi-annual routine maintenance of all culvert pipes, drainage channels, and roadside ditches by removing silt, debris, and vegetation that impede the flow of water.

Objective 1.2: By 2020, commission and adopt a basic street and drainage construction manual/ordinance specifying required width and depth of drainage channels and diameter of culverts for use by current and future city staff and contractors hired to construct improvements.

Objective 1.3: Deter growth from occurring adjacent to drainage ways.

Policy 1.3.1: Revise flood prevention ordinances by 2012 that establish a floodplain administrator and regulate building in the flood plain and establish a floodplain development permitting system.

Policy 1.3.2: Adopt subdivision regulations by 2016 that require drainage site planning; stormwater retention to alleviate downstream flooding events caused by increased impervious cover; and setbacks from floodways.

Policy 1.3.3: Establish drainage easements by 2026 along the drainage ways to ensure maximum conveyance within the drainage way, either through city purchase of property or donation of easements.

Goal 2: Maintain a functional citywide drainage system that limits sedimentation loading to nearby creeks and prevents flooding of private property.

Objective 2.1: Expand drainage system between 2012 and 2032 to alleviate problem drainage areas.

Objective 2.2: Decrease opportunities for introducing sediment into the city's drainage system.

Policy 2.2.1: Educate city public works staff on and increase annual funding to the public works department to construct properly sized drainage channels and culverts. Work with Northeast Texas Water Municipal District water quality coordinator to develop staff training.

Policy 2.2.2: Adopt a subdivision ordinance by 2016 that includes a requirement for erosion control measures and designs during construction.

Proposed System Improvements – Planning Period 2012-2032:

The following section describes a series of proposed improvements to the existing drainage infrastructure. The improvement projects are presented as phased improvements that are suggested for implementation over the 20-year planning period encompassed by this Comprehensive Plan.

The projects are listed in a sequence that represents just one of several possible avenues, all of which should lead to the achievement of the long-term goals adopted by the City of Rio Hondo for the maintenance of the drainage infrastructure. The sequence shown in this plan is a logical, step-by-step process intended to increase the safety, and efficiency of the drainage infrastructure. The sequence is intended only as a suggested program of phased improvements, and alternative sequences are recommended if funding availability requires significant changes to this proposed infrastructure improvements program.

Table 7B contains the estimated projected costs for each phase of the improvements program. These costs are based on current costs of record for similar projects in the same geographical area of the state. Every effort has been made to include appropriate cost factors such as inflation, variations in the market, and advances in wastewater technology. These cost estimates are predicated on several assumptions related to the scope of each phase. These assumptions are as follows:

- ✓ Culvert pipe replacements costs are based on using Reinforced Concrete Pipe (RCP);

- ✓ Culvert replacements are estimated for a pipe size increase of one standard size over the existing size. Standard sizes are defined as those sizes that are readily available from a local supplier;
- ✓ The culverts that are identified as damaged are assumed to require 100% replacement;
- ✓ For City maintained culverts, the addition of a standard winged Head Wall at each end of the pipe is assumed for culverts scheduled for replacement;
- ✓ The cost estimates include grading to “daylight” at each end in order to ensure positive drainage;
- ✓ Culvert replacement includes driveway and pavement repair assuming a pavement cut of 4’ in width, ROW width minus 20’ in length, and a 2” depth of HMAC pavement placement;
- ✓ New and existing roadside ditches assumes a full depth excavation with a triangular cross-section of a 3.0’ top width and a 1.0’ depth at center;
- ✓ Existing drainage channel maintenance assumes a one-half depth excavation with a trapezoidal cross-section of a 7.0’ top width, 1.0 bottom width, 3.0’ depth at center, and 1:1 side slope;
- ✓ Engineering and Surveying – Engineering and surveying services are estimated at 35% of the estimated construction costs of an element as described above.

The proposed phases of future drainage system improvements are as follows:

1. Phase 1 – Complete the project under current Disaster Relief Grant funding that will improve drainage facilities along Robert Garza Street, Madero Avenue, and Sam Houston Blvd.;
2. Phase 2 – Work with TxDOT to upgrade the underground pipe on both sides of Colorado Avenue from Arroyo Blvd. west to the Arroyo Colorado. Replace approximately sixteen (16) culverts in the south central portion of the City along Paloma, Catherine, and Ebony Avenues, Reynolds,

- Retama, and Ramon Streets. Replacements will be 24"-30" RCP with Safety End Treatments (SET's). Clean and regrade approximately 15,600 LF of roadside ditches along the streets in the area. The project will include Engineering & Surveying Services;
3. Phase 3 - Replace approximately nine (9) culverts in the south portion of the City along Parkway Avenue and the area south. Replacements will be 24"-30" RCP with Safety End Treatments (SET's). Clean and regrade approximately 16,000 LF of roadside ditches along the streets in the area. The project will include Engineering & Surveying Services;
 4. Phase 4 - Replace approximately fifteen (15) culverts in the north central portion of the City along Harris Street, Arroyo, Miramar, Heywood, and Forrest Avenue. Replacements will be 24"-30" RCP with Safety End Treatments (SET's). Clean and regrade approximately 21,200 LF of roadside ditches along the streets in the area. The project will include Engineering & Surveying Services.

The estimated costs for the proposed improvements described above are as follows:

Table 7C: Drainage System Improvement Plan Projects, 2012-2032

Project ID / Phase	Year	Project	Estimated Cost*	Source of Funds
1	2012-2013	Complete the project under current Disaster Relief Grant funding that will improve drainage facilities along Robert Garza Street, Madero Avenue, and Sam Houston Blvd.;	\$1,000,000	TxCDBG DR
2	2014-2020	Work with TxDOT to upgrade the underground pipe on both sides of Colorado Avenue from Arroyo Blvd. west to the Arroyo Colorado. Replace approximately sixteen (16) culverts and regrade ditches in the south central portion of the City.	\$322,600	TxDOT, GEN, TWDB, FMA,** USDA
3	2020-2026	Replace approximately nine (9) culverts and regrade roadside ditches in the south portion of the City.	\$350,600	GEN, TWDB, FMA,** USDA
4	2027-2032	Replace approximately fifteen (15) culverts and regrade ditches in the	\$484,700	GEN, TWDB, FMA,** USDA

		north central portion of the City.		
5	2016-2032	Adopt a streets and drainage construction manual/ordinance.	\$5,000 (Legal, Engineers)	GEN

TWDB=Texas Water Development Board Flood Protection Planning; FMA=Flood Mitigation Assistance program through the TWDB for NFIP members only; USDA= USDA Rural Development; GEN = General Funds of the City of Rio Hondo; Private=Land donation, COUNTY= County Road and Bridge; TxCDBG=Texas Community Development Block Grant program if area is involved in project where street/curb and gutter repair is required; TxCDBG DR=TxCDBG Disaster Relief funds.

Notes on Estimates:

*	Negotiate a cost sharing agreement that provides equipment, labor, and materials for drainage maintenance.
**	Refer to NFIP information concerning available funding through the program.

7.5 Appendix 7A: National Flood Insurance Program

The following describes regulations set by FEMA with which NFIP members must comply. The text derives primarily from NFIP Legislation and Regulation Guidance Documents (sections 59-61, available at www.fema.gov/plan/prevent/fhm/frm_docs.shtml)

Federal “100-year” Standard: The NFIP has used a comprehensive study by a group of experts to advise the agency as to the best standard to be used as the basis for risk assessment, insurance rating, and floodplain management for the Program. After extensive study and coordination with Federal and State agencies, this group recommended the 1-percent-annual-chance flood (also referred to as the 100-year or “Base Flood”) be used as the standard for the NFIP.

The 1-percent-annual-chance flood was chosen on the basis that it provides a higher level of protection while not imposing overly stringent requirements or the burden of excessive costs on property owners. The 1-percent-annual-chance flood (or 100-year flood) represents a magnitude and frequency that has a statistical probability of being equaled or exceeded in any given year, or, stated alternatively, the 100-year flood has a 26 percent (or 1 in 4) chance of occurring over the life of a 30-year mortgage. The regulatory flood plains cover areas that would most likely be inundated by the largest storm events that typically occur in the area. While these storm events are referred to as 100-year or 500-year events, the designation actually refers to the probability of a storm of that particular magnitude occurring in any given year. As mentioned before, the “100-year” storm has a 1% chance of occurring in any given year, and the “500-year” storm has a 0.2% chance of occurring in any given year.

Identifying and Mapping Flood-Prone Areas: Under the NFIP, Flood Hazard Boundary Maps (FHBMs), which delineated the boundaries of the community’s

Special Flood Hazard Areas (SFHAs), have been prepared using approximate methods prior to completion of a community's Flood Insurance Study (FIS). These methods identify on an approximate basis a 1-percent-annual-chance floodplain, but do not include the determination of Base Flood Elevations (BFEs) (100-year flood elevations), flood depths, or floodways. The Flood Hazard Boundary Map is intended to assist communities that do not have current FIRMs in managing floodplain development, and to assist insurance agents and property owners in identifying those areas where the purchase of flood insurance was advisable.

FISs that use detailed hydrologic and hydraulic analyses to develop BFEs and designate floodways and risk zones for developed areas of the floodplain have been subsequently produced for most NFIP communities. Once more detailed risk data was provided to communities, the community could then enter the Regular Program whereby the community is required to adopt more comprehensive floodplain management requirements and owners of structures could purchase higher amounts of insurance.

An FIS usually generates the following flood hazard information:

- BFEs are presented as either water-surface elevations or average depths of flow above the ground surface. These elevations and depths are usually referenced to either the National Geodetic Vertical Datum of 1929 (NGVD29) or the North American Vertical Datum of 1988 (NAVD88).
- Water-surface elevations for the 10-year (10-percent-annual-chance), 50-year (2-percent-annual-chance), 100-year (1-percent-annual-chance), and 500-year (0.2-percent-annual-chance) floods.
- Boundaries of the regulatory 100-year floodway. The regulatory floodway is defined as the channel of a stream plus any adjacent floodplain areas that must be kept free of encroachment so that the entire Base Flood (100-year flood) discharge can be conveyed with no greater than a 1.0-foot increase in the BFE.

- The boundaries of the 100- and 500-year floodplains. The 100-year floodplain is referred to as the Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA).

Floodplain Management: The Congressional Acts that created the NFIP prohibit the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) from providing flood insurance to property owners unless the community adopts and enforces floodplain management criteria established under the authority of Section 1361(c) of the Act. These criteria are established in the NFIP regulations at 44 CFR §60.3. The community must adopt a floodplain management ordinance that meets or exceeds the minimum NFIP criteria. Under the NFIP, “community” is defined as:

“any State, or area or political subdivision thereof, or any Indian tribe or authorized tribal organization, or Alaska Native village or authorized native organization, which has authority to adopt and enforce floodplain management regulations for the areas within its jurisdiction.”

The power to regulate development in the floodplain, including requiring and approving permits, inspecting property, and citing violations, is granted to communities under a State’s police powers. FEMA has no direct involvement in the administration of local floodplain management ordinances.

Minimum NFIP Floodplain Management Requirements: Under the NFIP, the minimum floodplain management requirements that a community must adopt depend on the type of flood risk data (detailed FIS and FIRMs with BFEs or approximate A Zones and V Zones without BFEs) that the community has been provided by FEMA. Under the NFIP regulations, participating NFIP communities are required to regulate all development in SFHAs. “Development” is defined as:

“Any man-made change to improved or unimproved real estate, including but not limited to buildings or other structures, mining, dredging, filling, grading, paving, excavation or drilling operations or storage of equipment or materials.”

Before a property owner can undertake any development in the SFHA, a permit must be obtained from the community. The community is responsible for reviewing the proposed development to ensure that it complies with the community's floodplain management ordinance. Communities are also required to review proposed development in SFHAs to ensure that all necessary permits have been received from those governmental agencies from which approval is required by Federal or State law, such as 404 wetland permits from the Army Corps of Engineers or permits under the Endangered Species Act.

Under the NFIP, communities must review subdivision proposals and other proposed new development, including manufactured home parks or subdivisions to ensure that these development proposals are reasonably safe from flooding and that utilities and facilities servicing these subdivisions or other development are constructed to minimize or eliminate flood damage.

In general, the NFIP minimum floodplain management regulations require that new construction or substantially improved or substantially damaged existing buildings in A Zones must have their lowest floor (including basement) elevated to or above the Base Flood Elevation (BFE). Non-residential structures in A Zones can be either elevated or dry-floodproofed. In V Zones, the building must be elevated on piles and columns and the bottom of the lowest horizontal structural member of the lowest floor of all new construction or substantially improved existing buildings must be elevated to or above the BFE. The minimum floodplain management requirements are further described below:

For all new and substantially improved buildings in A Zones:

- All new construction and substantial improvements of residential buildings must have the lowest floor (including basement) elevated to or above the BFE.
- All new construction and substantial improvements of non-residential buildings must either have the lowest floor (including basement) elevated to or above the BFE or dry-floodproofed to the BFE. Dry floodproofing

means that the building must be designed and constructed to be watertight, substantially impermeable to floodwaters.

- Buildings can be elevated to or above the BFE using fill, or they can be elevated on extended foundation walls or other enclosure walls, on piles, or on columns.
- Because extended foundation or other enclosure walls will be exposed to flood forces, they must be designed and constructed to withstand hydrostatic pressure otherwise the walls can fail and the building can be damaged. The NFIP regulations require that foundation and enclosure walls that are subject to the 100-year flood be constructed with flood-resistant materials and contain openings that will permit the automatic entry and exit of floodwaters. These openings allow floodwaters to reach equal levels on both sides of the walls and thereby lessen the potential for damage. Any enclosed area below the BFE can only be used for the parking of vehicles, building access, or storage.

In addition, to the above requirements, communities are required to select and adopt a regulatory floodway in riverine A Zones. The area chosen for the regulatory floodway must be designed to carry the waters of the 1-percent-annual-chance flood without increasing the water surface elevation of that flood more than one foot at any point. Once the floodway is designated, the community must prohibit development within that floodway which would cause any increase in flood heights. The floodway generally includes the river channel and adjacent floodplain areas that often contain forests and wetlands. This requirement has the effect of limiting development in the most hazardous and environmentally sensitive part of the floodplain.

Ordinance Adoption: Once FEMA provides a community with the flood hazard information upon which floodplain management regulations are based, the community is required to adopt a floodplain management ordinance that meets or exceeds the minimum NFIP requirements. FEMA can suspend communities from

the Program for failure to adopt once the community is notified of being flood-prone or for failure to maintain a floodplain management ordinance that meets or exceeds the minimum requirements of the NFIP. The procedures for suspending a community from the Program for failure to adopt or maintain a floodplain management ordinance that meets or exceeds the minimum requirements of the NFIP are established in the NFIP regulations at 44 CFR §59.24(a) and (d).

Prior to filing an application for NFIP participation, the community would have to adopt a resolution stating it wishes to become an NFIP participant and designating a Floodplain Administrator. The 77th Legislature of the State of Texas amended Subchapter I, Chapter 16, Water Code, by adding Section 16.3145 to read as follows:

"The governing body of each city and county shall adopt ordinances or orders, as appropriate, necessary for the city or county to be eligible to participate in the National Flood Insurance Program....., not later than January 1, 2001"

Model ordinances and sample permit forms are available online at www.twdb.state.tx.us/wrpi/flood/nfip.htm. Flood prevention ordinances often require or encourage appropriate development in flood prone areas and/or set zoning standards for areas to restrict the use or density of floodplain development. They also vest a designated Flood Administrator with the responsibility of delineating areas of special flood hazard; providing information about inhabited floodplain areas; maintaining FEMA flood maps; and cooperating with federal, state and local officials and private firms in undertaking to study, survey, map and identify floodplain. The Administrator is also to assist with the development and implementation of floodplain management measures.

Community Rating System: The NFIP's Community Rating System (CRS) provides discounts on flood insurance premiums in those communities that establish floodplain management programs that go beyond NFIP minimum requirements. Under the CRS, communities receive credit for more restrictive

regulations, acquisition, relocation, or floodproofing of flood-prone buildings, preservation of open space, and other measures that reduce flood damages or protect the natural resources and functions of floodplains.

Under the CRS, flood insurance premium rates are adjusted to reflect the reduced flood risk resulting from community activities that meet the three goals of the CRS:

1. Reduce flood losses, i.e.,
 - a. Protect public health and safety,
 - b. Reduce damage to property,
 - c. Prevent increases in flood damage from new construction,
 - d. Reduce the risk of erosion damage, and
 - e. Protect natural and beneficial floodplain functions;
2. Facilitate accurate insurance rating; and
3. Promote the awareness of flood insurance.

There are 10 CRS classes: Class 1 requires the most credit points and gives the largest premium reduction; Class 10 receives no premium reduction. CRS premium discounts on flood insurance range from 5 percent for Class 9 communities up to 45 percent for Class 1 communities. The CRS recognizes 18 creditable activities, organized under four categories: Public Information, Mapping and Regulations, Flood Damage Reduction, and Flood Preparedness.

For example, credits are provided for use of future conditions hydrology and more restrictive floodway standards, prohibiting fill in the floodway, and adopting compensatory storage regulations, innovative land development criteria, stormwater management regulations, other higher regulatory standards, and local floodplain management plans. Credits are also provided in the CRS for preserving open space in their natural state and for low-density zoning and for acquiring and clearing buildings from the floodplain and returning the area to open space. The 2002 *CRS Coordinator's Manual* includes a new section, "Land

Development Criteria,” which specifically credits community land development regulations that limit development in the floodplain or provide incentives to limit floodplain development. Communities receive credits for adopting smart growth land development criteria and for creating open space through their land development process.

7.6 Appendix 7B: NFIP Community Rating System

The National Flood Insurance Program Community Rating System

Information from: <http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/CRS/>

The Community Rating System (CRS) is a part of the NFIP. The CRS reduces flood insurance premiums to reflect what a community does above and beyond the NFIP's minimum standards for floodplain regulation. The objective of the CRS is to reward communities for what they are doing, as well as to provide an incentive for new flood protection activities. The reduction in flood insurance premium rates is provided according to a community's CRS classification, as shown in the chart.

Community participation in the CRS is VOLUNTARY.

To apply for CRS participation, a community submits documentation that shows what it is doing and that its activities deserve at least 500 points. The documentation is attached to the appropriate worksheet pages in this CRS Application. The application is submitted to the ISO/CRS Specialist. The ISO/CRS Specialist is an employee of the Insurance Services Office, Inc. (ISO). ISO works on behalf of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the insurance companies to review CRS applications, verify the communities' credit points, and perform program improvement tasks.

A Quick Check of a Community's Potential CRS Credit

a. Purpose

A minimum of 500 points is needed to receive a CRS classification of Class 9, which will reduce premium rates. This quick check provides some basic information for local officials to determine if their communities will have enough points to attain Class 9.

If a community does not qualify for at least 500 points, it may want to initiate some new activities in order to attain Class 9. For example, some of the public information activities can be implemented for a very low start-up cost. The quick check can identify where points can be earned for new activities.

b. Quick Check Instructions

The section numbering system is used throughout all CRS publications. Sections 300 through 600 describe the 18 creditable activities. Activity 310 (Elevation Certificates) is required of all CRS communities and Activity 510 (Floodplain Management Planning) is required of designated repetitive loss communities. The rest of the activities are optional. Only the elements most frequently applied for are listed.

If the activity is applicable, the average community score (which is in parentheses) should be entered in the blank to the left to provide a rough estimate of the community's initial credit points.

c. Minimum Requirements

- **Section 211 (Prerequisites):** The community must be in the Regular Phase of the NFIP and be in full compliance with the minimum requirements of the NFIP. The application must include a letter from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Regional Office confirming that the community is meeting all of the latest NFIP requirements.
- **Activity 310 (Elevation Certificates):** All CRS communities must maintain FEMA's elevation certificates for all new and substantially improved construction in the floodplain after the date of application for CRS classification.
- **Sections 501–503 (Repetitive Loss Areas):** A community with properties that have received repeated flood insurance claim payments must map the areas affected. Communities with 10 or more such properties must prepare, adopt, and implement a plan to reduce damage in repetitive loss areas. The FEMA Regional Office can tell whether this applies to any given community.

d. Other Activities

If the activity is applicable, the average community score (which is in parentheses) should be entered in the blank at left to provide a rough estimate of the community's initial credit points.

Public Information Activities (Series 300)

- ___ (69) 310 (Elevation Certificates) Maintain FEMA elevation certificates for all new construction. Maintaining them after the date of CRS application is a minimum requirement for any CRS credit.
- ___ (138) 320 (Map Information) Respond to inquiries to identify a property's FIRM zone and publicize this service.
- ___ (90) 330 (Outreach Projects) Send information about the flood hazard, flood insurance, and flood protection measures to floodprone residents or all residents of the community.
- ___ (19) 340 (Hazard Disclosure) Real estate agents advise potential purchasers of floodprone property about the flood hazard; or regulations require a notice of the flood hazard.
- ___ (24) 350 (Flood Protection Information) The public library maintains references on flood insurance and flood protection.
- ___ (53) 360 (Flood Protection Assistance) Give inquiring property owners

technical advice on protecting their buildings from flooding, and publicize this service.

Mapping and Regulatory Activities (Series 400)

- ___ (86) 410 (Additional Flood Data) Develop new flood elevations, floodway delineations, wave heights, or other regulatory flood hazard data for an area that was not mapped in detail by the flood insurance study; or have the flood insurance study's hydrology or allowable floodway surcharge based on a higher state or local standard.
- ___ (191) 420 (Open Space Preservation) Guarantee that a portion of currently vacant floodplain will be kept free from development.
- ___ (166) 430 (Higher Regulatory Standards) Require freeboard; require soil tests or engineered foundations; require compensatory storage; zone the floodplain for minimum lot sizes of 1 acre or larger; regulate to protect sand dunes; or have regulations tailored to protect critical facilities or areas subject to special flood hazards (e.g., alluvial fans, ice jams, or subsidence).
- ___ (79) 440 (Flood Data Maintenance) Keep flood and property data on computer records; use better base maps; or maintain elevation reference marks.
- ___ (98) 450 (Stormwater Management) Regulate new development throughout the watershed to ensure that post-development runoff is no worse than pre-development runoff.

Flood Damage Reduction Activities (Series 500)

- ___ (115) 510 (Floodplain Management Planning) Prepare, adopt, implement, and update a comprehensive plan using a standard planning process.
- ___ (213) 520 (Acquisition and Relocation) Acquire and/or relocate floodprone buildings so that they are out of the floodplain.
- ___ (93) 530 (Flood Protection) Document floodproofed or elevated pre-FIRM buildings.
- ___ (232) 540 (Drainage System Maintenance) Conduct periodic inspections of all channels and retention basins and perform maintenance as needed.

Flood Preparedness Activities (Series 600)

- ___ (93) 610 (Flood Warning Program) Provide early flood warnings to the public and have a detailed flood response plan keyed to flood crest predictions.
- ___ (198) 620 (Levee Safety) Maintain levees that are not credited with providing base flood protection.
- ___ (66) 630 (Dam Safety) All communities in a State with an approved

dam safety program receive credit.

___ **TOTAL ESTIMATED POINTS FOR THE COMMUNITY**

8 Street System Study

Prior Studies. The City of Rio Hondo conducted the last study of its streets system as part of its 2001 Comprehensive Plan. It found the majority of the City's streets were in fair condition and that more preventive maintenance was needed to maintain the City's streets. It recommended new construction of dirt roads and roads in poor condition, and Rehabilitation and Asphalt Overlay of roads in Fair condition. Of the 53,800 LF of roadway prioritized for improvement, the City had funding to address about one-third or almost 19,000 LF between 2001 and 2011. The projects were funded with City funds and TxCDBG funds, including Disaster Relief funding after Hurricane Dolly which struck the region in 2008.

Existing Data. The City of Rio Hondo contains 15 miles of streets and highways within the city limits and an additional 12 miles of streets and highways within its ETJ, for a total of 27 miles. Of this total, the City is responsible for the operation and maintenance of 10 miles, while Cameron County and TxDOT are responsible for the operation and maintenance of the remaining 17 miles.

8.1 Street System Inventory

In the spring of 2011, surveys of the existing street system were conducted and the following information was collected:

- The dimension of each street, both the width and right-of-way;
- The surface material (e.g. asphalt, caliche, or gravel/dirt);
- A rating of the condition of each street's surface to determine its classification. The classifications are:

<u>Good Condition</u>	Few surface cracks or potholes, little edge deterioration
<u>Fair Condition</u>	Surface cracks less than 1/2 inch wide, potholes less than 2 inches in diameter or ≤ 2 " in depth, crumbling edges extend less than 1 inch from

	street edge
<u>Poor Condition</u>	Surface cracks more than 1/2 inch wide, potholes greater than 2 inches in diameter or ≥ 2 " in depth, crumbling edges extend more than 1 inch from street edge

- The location of existing curbs and gutters or similar drainage (all drainage structures are identified in Chapter 7 Drainage Study).

The results of the field survey are tabulated in *Table 8A: Street Inventory*. The street system is delineated within the table by location (City or ETJ), maintenance (City, County, TxDOT), and material (asphalt, etc.). That provides a clear outline of the streets' characteristics and condition and a basis for further analysis. *Map 8A: Existing Street System* illustrates the information for spatial analysis and includes street location, condition, right-of-way and width. *Map 8A* also shows unimproved or "paper streets".

Streets are in better condition than they were when they were evaluated for the 2001 study. Thirty-seven percent of the City's streets were rated to be in Good condition as compared to 17 percent of the streets in 2001. Rating methodologies were slightly different in 2001. However, the survey shows an overall improvement in street conditions, including more paved roads.

Table 8A: Street Inventory

All Streets (City & ETJ)				All Streets (City Only)			City Maintained Streets (City Only)		
CONDITION	LF	Miles	%	LF	Miles	%	LF	Miles	%
Asphalt				Asphalt			Asphalt		
Good	54,426	10	38%	29,002	5	37%	16,214	3	30%
Fair	53,995	10	38%	37,587	7	47%	32,888	6	60%
Poor	1,908	0	1%	1,908	0	2%	1,908	0	4%
Subtotal	110,330	21	77%	68,497	13	86%	51,010	10	94%
Dirt & Gravel				Dirt & Gravel			Dirt & Gravel		
Good	0	0	0%	0	0	0%	0	0	0%
Fair	7,960	2	6%	3,208	1	4%	3,208	1	6%
Poor	8,005	2	6%	209	0	0%	209	0	0%
Subtotal	15,966	3	11%	3,417	1	4%	3,417	1	6%
Caliche				Caliche			Caliche		
Good	0	0	0%	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Fair	16,861	3	12%	6,747	1	0.0849505	0	0	0%
Poor	763	0	1%	763	0	1%	0	0	0%
Subtotal	17,624	3.3	12%	7,510	1.4	9.5%	0	0.0	0%
TOTAL	143,919	27.26	100%	79,424	15.04	100%	54,427	10.31	100%
Conditions (General)									
All Streets (City & ETJ)				All Streets (City Only)			City Maintained Streets (City Only)		
Good	54,426	10	38%	29,002	5	37%	16,214	3	30%
Fair	78,817	15	55%	47,543	9	60%	36,096	7	66%
Poor	10,676	2	7%	2,880	1	4%	2,117	0	4%
TOTAL	143,919	27.26	100%	79,424	15.04	100%	54,427	10.31	100%

Conditions by Type									
All Streets (City & ETJ)				All Streets (City Only)			City Maintained Streets (City Only)		
Paved	110,330	20.90	77%	68,497	12.97	86%	51,010	9.66	94%
Good	54,426	10.31	38%	29,002	5.49	37%	16,214	3.07	30%
Fair	53,995	10.23	38%	37,587	7.12	47%	32,888	6.23	60%
Poor	1,908	0.36	1%	1,908	0.36	2%	1,908	0.36	4%
Unpaved	33,589	6.36	23%	10,927	2.07	14%	3,417	0.65	6%
Good	8,723	1.65	6%	3,971	0.75	5%	3,208	0.61	6%
Fair	16,861	3.19	12%	6,747	1.28	8%	-	0.00	0%
Poor	8,768	1.66	6%	972	0.18	1%	209	0.04	0%
TOTAL	143,919	27.26	100%	79,424	15.04	100%	54,427	10.31	100%

Source: GrantWorks 2011 Fieldwork.

8.2 Street System Analysis

The street system analysis determines the adequacy of the system to meet existing and forecasted needs and makes recommendations for any needed improvements concerning traffic flow and street conditions.

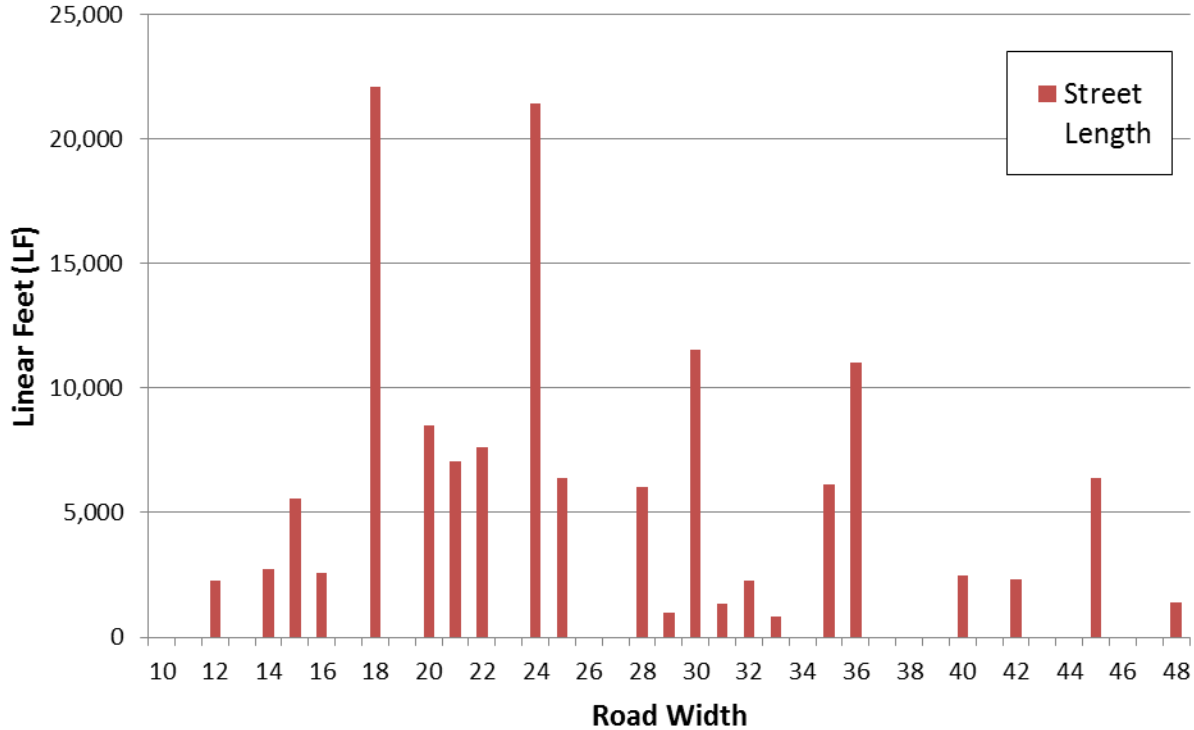
Rio Hondo's existing street system is laid out in the traditional grid pattern in the center of the City, with the blocks tripling in length in the newer developments located toward the edges of the city limits. As such, streets vary in length from 200' to 2000". The majority of the streets serving the City are local, residential streets; however, several major thoroughfares traverse the city providing corridors for thru-traffic as well as passage into and out of the City.

Street Condition: Within the city limits, 86% of roads are paved. Of the paved streets, 37% are in good condition, 60% are in fair condition, and the remaining 4% are in poor condition. The state maintained major thoroughfares are in good condition. Local streets are in need of repair in both north and south Rio Hondo.

Street Width: The width of City maintained streets are standard, ranging from 12 feet to 48 feet. Parkway Street located just north of the Rio Hondo County Park may be too narrow for its purpose of serving as a route to a multi-family complex and the City's main park, and as one of the city's few east-west.. *Chart 8A* shows the number of linear feet of roadway at each road width.

Curb and Gutter: Most of the streets in Rio Hondo are rural, using drainage ditches as opposed to curb and gutter. Some of the local streets in central Rio Hondo around the school complexes and in new subdivisions have curb and gutter which the city maintains. Most of the curb was in good condition with some weed growth that the city could better maintain in northern Rio Hondo.

Chart 8A: Street Width Distribution



Undeveloped Streets: In both the City and the ETJ, a sections of right-of-way were dedicated when the land was platted, but streets were never constructed. These streets are known as “paper streets”, as they only exist on paper. There are two common reasons for this: 1) the developments were never completely built out; or, 2) topographical barriers made construction of the streets impractical. The following areas are examples of “paper streets” Most should be preserved as right of way for future development:

Table 8B: Undeveloped City Streets

Street Name	From	To	Preserve?
N/A	Reynolds	Robertson, north of Zinnia Cir	Yes – new development
Retama	City limits	South to Huerta Street	Yes, new development

Source: GrantWorks 2011 Fieldwork.

Figure 8A: Undeveloped Street example, Retama



Note: Right of Way is currently only available from Bullis south to Huerta.

8.3 Street System Plan

This plan addresses the concerns noted in the preceding analysis section. It serves as a guide to the prioritization, costs, funding, and timing of future street improvements. Where appropriate, new street construction should comply with the specifications established in the City's Subdivision Ordinance.

Prioritized Problems. The problems with the City's street system are ranked and listed as follows:

1. Local streets in fair to poor condition and are in need of repaving or reconstruction.
2. Prioritizing construction projects with limited budget.
3. Parkway Road too narrow for its use.

4. Paper streets just outside the city limits could be built to encourage more development.

Goals and Objectives:

Goal 1: A safe, well-maintained and functional community street system.

Objective 1.1: Throughout the plan repair streets in fair to poor condition.

Policy 1.1.1: Develop a funding source by 2013 to increase the city's annual budget for street repairs.

Policy 1.1.2: By 2017, seal coat or overlay at least 10,000 LF of streets in fair to poor condition, includes Heywood, Mesquite, Bates, Catherine, Bullis, Harris and Parkway streets.

Policy 1.1.3: By 2032, seal coat or overlay another 10,000 LF of streets in fair to poor condition, including Paloma, Miramar, Retama, Huisache and Ramon streets.

Policy 1.1.4: By 2017, develop a plan to re-seal coat streets on a rotating basis once every 10 years.

Objective 1.2: Throughout the planning period maintain curb and gutter and roadside ditches as directed in Chapter 7: Storm Drainage Study.

Objective 1.3: By 2015, work with Cameron County to widen Parkway to serve as a more functional east west connector in southern Rio Hondo.

Objective 1.4: Throughout the planning period, work with the County and developers to create a stronger grid in southern Rio Hondo to make travel in southern Rio Hondo more effective. Possible new streets include an extension of Short from Reynolds to Robertson and the connection of Retama from north to south from Ebony to Huerta.

Objective 1.5: Prevent deterioration of surfaces by promoting drainage and weed control at street edges on an annual basis.

Implementation Plan:

The successful implementation of the proposed street system plan should meet all of the stated goals and objectives. A plan should effectively utilize funds by identifying street improvements that will benefit the community the most. For example, little benefit would come from constructing and then maintaining a street that met no particular planning or design standards.

Most small cities have very limited resources to expend on street improvements. Both new paving and re-paving are costly endeavors. The City also has limited capability to maintain the existing pavement. It budgets less than \$25,000 annually for street improvements.

Appropriate choices for repair will depend on the amount of wear/damage to be addressed with the repair, the amount of traffic the street is expected to receive, and the amount of funds available to make street improvements. Therefore, the investigation should offer several options with associated costs for accomplishing the desired results. Options include, but are not limited to:

- **Option 1: *Point Repairs:*** Excavation of failed pavement sections to the base course, back-filled with cold mix asphalt and compacted to existing grade. Surface sealant is optional. This method is used to treat potholes and other imperfections and roadway hazards, and constitutes a portion of annual, ongoing maintenance.
- **Option 2: *Seal Coat: (Also known as chip seal)*** Application of asphalt cement; cover with pre-coated aggregate at about one cubic yard of aggregate per 90 square yards. Ideally, this treatment is used once every three to five years to maintain streets and forestall more costly repairs. Using recent engineering cost estimates, chip seal coating would cost an estimated \$5 per square yard.
- **Option 3 *Overlay:*** Depending on the severity of wear, approximately one inch of surface is milled off the existing street in order to level depressions in the pavement. The remaining surface material is overlaid with a minimum of 1.5- to 2-inches of hot mix asphaltic concrete (HMAC) or hot mix/cold laid asphaltic concrete, followed by a surface treatment (two-course). This treatment is used to completely replace the surface material of a street to address pavement deterioration and extend street life. Two-course overlay increases the life of the pavement, and would require additional milling. Using

recent engineering cost estimates, overlay projects would cost an estimated \$25 per square yard, depending on processes chosen. (Labor and equipment cost estimates cited in RS Means, Heavy Construction Cost Data, 2008).

- **Option 4: Reclaim/Reconstruct:** Remove existing base to a minimum depth of six inches. Mix emulsified asphalt with recycled asphalt to create road way base. Apply two-course of asphalt cement to create bearing surface. Base is proof-rolled at each course. Surface sealant optional. Streets receiving the reclamation treatment will last 12 to 20 years, depending on the traffic load and environmental conditions. The cost of this method also approximates costs for paving a gravel road. Cost estimates would be higher than for overlay methods, at about \$50 per square yard. (Labor and equipment cost estimates cited in RS Means, Heavy Construction Cost Data, 2008).

Due to cost considerations, the city will also have to consider phasing. The phases would be implemented as funds become available and may be adjusted to reflect available funds. The order also may be re-arranged, depending on the urgency of required repairs and/or replacement. The phasing in this plan reflects an effort to address fair and poor streets that receive the most traffic by 2016.. The phases also were arranged to coincide with water, sewer, or drainage upgrades; and anticipated growth and activities reflected in the Comprehensive Plan. The phases are as follows:

Phase 1 – (2012) Involves streets in fair and poor conditions in northern Rio Hondo that route traffic directly to highly travelled destinations, including the schools, the parks, and the central business district. The repair operations should be accomplished through seal coating.

Phase 2 – (2013) Involves streets in fair and poor conditions in northern Rio Hondo that route traffic directly to highly-travelled destinations, including the schools, as well as areas of town that carry truck traffic and are vital to the city's

economy. Operations will include seal coating on Heywood and the reconstruction of Bates.

Phase 3 – (2014) This phase involves residential streets in fair and poor conditions in southern Rio Hondo that allow residents to access their homes. The projects are phased in conjunction with Storm Drainage improvements listed in Chapter 7: Storm Drainage Study. Street operations should be accomplished through seal coating.

Phase 4 – (2015) This phase involves upgrading Harris Road to accommodate increased recreational use of Boat Ramp Park as facilities are improved. The operation will involve seal coating existing pavement and adding pavement to widen the road 8 feet in existing Right of Way.

Phase 5 – (2016) This phase involves doubling Parkway Avenue road width in existing right of way, salvaging some pavement in fair condition at the west end of the road. As most of this road is located outside the City limit, the City would partner with the County to improve it. The operation will consist of constructing a new 24-foot wide road. The city will have to relocate its lift station located at the corner of the road to accomplish the project, adding another estimated \$60,000 to the project cost.

The phasing & cost estimates for each of these phases are shown in the following tables:

Table 8C: Rio Hondo Street Improvements by Phase

Phase	Street	From	To	Condition	Material	Linear Feet	Proposed Width	Square Yards	Cost
2012									
Phase 1	Heywood	Colorado	Robert Garza	Fair	Asphalt	1,034	24	2,757	\$ 13,786.67
Phase 1	Mesquite	Heywood	Arroyo	Fair	Asphalt	1,500	24	4,000	\$ 20,000.00
Subtotal						2,534		6,757	\$ 33,786.67
2013									
Phase 2	Heywood	Mesquite	Robert Garza	Poor	Asphalt	263	24	702	\$ 3,507.57
Phase 2	Bates	Robertson	Reynolds	Poor	Asphalt	1,452	24	3,872	\$ 193,600.00
Subtotal						1,715		4,574	\$ 197,107.57
2014									
Phase 3	Catherine	Miramar	Robertson	Fair	Asphalt	1,451	21	3,386	\$ 18,621.17
Subtotal						2,194		4,707	\$ 18,621.17
2015									
Phase 4	Harris	FM 106	Boat Ramp Park	Fair	Asphalt	1,314	20	2,920	\$ 14,600.00
Phase 4	Widen Harris	FM 106	Boat Ramp Park	Fair	Asphalt	1,314	8	1,168	\$ 58,400.00
Subtotal						2,628		4,088	\$ 73,000.00
2016									
Phase 5	Parkway	S Reynolds	Robertson	Fair	Asphalt	1,467	24	3,912	\$ 195,600.00
Subtotal						1,467		3,912	\$ 195,600.00
Total						10,538		24,037	\$ 524,719.84

The phased improvements described below are illustrated on *Map 8B: Proposed Street Improvements 2012-16*. Two of the streets where improvements are needed are located outside the city limits and would need to be constructed in cooperation with Cameron County. If the County were to assist, total costs for the City through 2016 would be about \$320,000.

Table 8D: Street Improvement Plan Projects, 2012-2016

Phase / Year	Description	Cost	Funding
Phase 1 (2012)	Street improvements around the school complex on Heywood and Mesquite	\$34,000	GEN
Phase 2 (2013)	Street improvements around the school complex on Heywood and reconstruct Bates to better accommodate truck traffic to industrial locations in northern Rio Hondo.	\$200,000	GEN, County, MDD, EDC
Phase 3 (2014)	Street improvements on Catherine in conjunction with drainage improvements for areas with traditional drainage problems.	\$18,621	GEN, TxCDBG
Phase 4 (2015)	Widen Harris Road to accommodate increased recreational traffic, including boat trailers, to Boat Ramp Park.	\$73,000	GEN, TP&W. Local
Phase 5 (2016)	Widen Parkway in southern Rio Hondo to act as an east-west connector on highly travelled road to multi-family units and Rio Hondo County Park.	\$195,000	GEN, County
2017-2032	Develop a funding source and a plan to seal coat streets on a rotating basis once every 10 years	\$35,000 (Annual)	GEN

GEN = City general funds or bonds; RD=USDA Rural Development (formerly FmHA); COUNTY – Cameron County; TxCDBG = Community Development Block Grant Program through Texas Department of Agriculture; MDD – Municipal Development District funds for economic development; EDC = City 4B funds. Local = regional not-for profit organization or other local funding source,

9.1 Thoroughfare Planning

The movement of people and goods through a community is a primary activity of daily life. In the United States, goods and people are transported primarily by automobile, making street and highway systems the most important transportation routes in communities for both local and through traffic. Every community has specific streets that provide structure and would appear on even the simplest map. These major streets connect different areas within a community and also connect different communities to one another. They are known as *thoroughfares*.

At one time, thoroughfare planning was concerned exclusively with how to move people from point to point as quickly as possible. Thoroughfare planning did not consider the extended cause and effect relationship between street construction and land development (e.g. suburban sprawl) or the tendency of highway construction to increase traffic rather than only address traffic needs. The result was development patterns that not only failed to save people time and money but also had negative effects on quality of life. Starting in the 1980s, planners, engineers, and activists began to question that style of thoroughfare planning. As a result, thoroughfare planning no longer focuses exclusively on capacity issues.

To serve the community most effectively, a thoroughfare plan should balance safety, mobility, and access. It should also be integrated with land use and growth patterns, commercial activity, economic development, quality of life imperatives and the needs of special populations. Integrating the thoroughfare plan with other components of a city's development can provide a balanced, pleasing, and efficient transportation system for both residents and visitors.

The design criteria and standards applied in this study come from *Context Sensitive Solutions in Designing Major Urban Thoroughfares for Walkable Communities*

(CSS manual). The CSS manual was developed by the Institute of Transportation Engineers in cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Congress for New Urbanism. The manual is particularly applicable to Rio Hondo because of the City's goals for a tourist-friendly, walkable downtown, and because of the topographic characteristics that limit thoroughfare construction and expansion. Approximately 17 states have adopted legislation or made a DOT policy change using CSS, and 24 additional states, including Texas, have hosted training initiatives and incorporate CSS into their design and development processes. Texas has become the first state to formally adopt the CSS manual in department of transportation project design and review processes. A free copy of the CSS manual can be found at <http://ite.org/bookstore/RP036.pdf>. The TxDOT Project Development Process Manual is at <http://onlinemanuals.txdot.gov/txdotmanuals/pdp/pdp.pdf>

9.2 Thoroughfare Design Standards

The CSS manual preserves long-standing U.S. Department of Transportation functional street classifications, which include street standards based on vehicle speed and sight distance. To those standards, it adds a new 'thoroughfare type' definition that incorporates multi-modal design choices such as bicycle lanes and sidewalks which were previously not included. *Chart 8A* shows the relationship between functional classification and thoroughfare type. *Table 8A* describes the functional and design aspects of each street type in general terms. *Table 8B* lists specific thoroughfare characteristics and design standards.

Chart 9A: Functional Classification and Thoroughfare Type

Functional Classification	Thoroughfare Types						
	Freeway/expressway/ Parkway	Rural Highway	Boulevard	Avenue	Street	Rural Road	Alley/rear Lane
Principal Arterial							
Minor Arterial							
Collector							
Local							

Source: Context Sensitive Solutions in Designing Major Urban Thoroughfares for Walkable Communities. *Institute of Transportation Engineers*. 2006. (pg. 50)

Table 9A: Street Functional Hierarchy

Street Type	Function and Design
Freeway (Principal/ Major Arterial)	Provides efficient movement at higher speeds (55 mph or more), often with controlled access to prevent slowing of movement. Provides access to major regional activity centers. <i>Examples: Interstates/other divided highways.</i>
Boulevard (Minor Arterial)	Moderate to high speed (30 to 55 mph) designed to serve large tracts of separated single land uses. Typically 4-8 lanes providing traffic distribution to smaller geographic areas with some degree of access management. Pedestrian and bike access are present, sometimes through a parallel facility. <i>Example: multilane streets with turn lanes.</i>
Avenue (Collector)	Walkable, low to medium speed, generally carries local traffic from neighborhoods to employment, shopping, or other points of interest at moderate speeds (20-45 mph). Should not exceed 4 lanes, may feature a raised, landscaped median. These are the primary pedestrian and bike routes. <i>Example: City streets with stoplights but few stop signs.</i>
Street (Local)	Primarily provides access to individual properties lining the street at generally low speeds (15-25 mph). Designed to connect residential neighborhoods to each other and to avenues. Streets may serve as the main road of commercial or mixed use areas and emphasize curb parking and pedestrian/bike access.

Table 9B: Street Characteristics and Design Standards

Urban Thoroughfare Type	Number of Through Lanes	Desired Operating Speed (mph)	Transit Service Emphasis	Median	Driveway Access	Curb Parking	Pedestrian Facilities [1]	Bicycle Facilities	Freight Mvmt. [2]
Freeway	4 to 6+	45–65	Express	Required	No	No	No	Optional separated pathway or shoulder	Regional truck route
Expressway/ Parkway	4 to 6	45–55	Express	Required	No	No	Optional separated pathway	Optional separated pathway or shoulder	Regional truck route
Boulevard	4 to 6	30–35	Express and Local	Required	Limited	Optional	Sidewalk	Bike lanes or parallel route	Regional truck route
Multiway Boulevard	4 to 6	25–35	Express and Local	Required on access lanes	Yes from access lane	Yes on access roadway	Sidewalk		Regional route/ local deliveries only on access roadway
Avenue	2 to 4	25–30	Local	Optional	Yes	Yes	Sidewalk	Bike lanes or shared	Local truck route
Street	2	25	Local or none	No	Yes	Yes	Sidewalk	Shared	Local deliveries only
Rural Road	2	25–35	Local or none	No	Yes	No	No	Shared or shoulder	Local deliveries only
Local Street	2	25	Local or none	No	Yes	Yes	Sidewalk	Shared	Local deliveries only
Alley/Rear Lane	1	5–10	None	No	Yes	No	Shared	Shared	Local deliveries only

Shaded cells represent thoroughfare types that are not addressed in this report.

Notes:

[1] Boulevard, Multiway Boulevard, Avenue, and Street thoroughfare types have sidewalks on both sides. Sidewalk width varies as a function of context zone, fronting land use and other factors.

[2] Freight movement is divided into three categories: 1) Regional truck route, 2) Local truck route and 3) Local deliveries only. Cells show highest order of truck movement allowed.

Source: Designing Walkable Urban Thoroughfares: A Context Sensitive Approach. *Institute of Transportation Engineers. 2010. (pg. 54)*

9.3 Inventory of Thoroughfares and Infrastructure

In the spring of 2011, a survey was conducted of the thoroughfare system of Rio Hondo. The survey included identification of:

- City's thoroughfares: right of way, traffic counts, and paving width;
- Traffic control data: stop signs, traffic lights, cross walks, and school zones;
- Parking restrictions
- Curb and gutter
- Route Continuity and Land use
- Problem intersections
- Traffic speeds and pedestrian safety
- Truck routes
- Regional transportation projects
- Origin and destination / traffic generator information

Prior Studies: The City of Rio Hondo Comprehensive Planning Study studied the City's street system in 2001. However, it looked mainly at preservation of street paving facilities and found no problems with street configuration and traffic flow. The study recommended that the City maintain its existing grid pattern for continued ease of traffic flow as the City grew.

Regionally, the Harlingen-San Benito Metropolitan Planning Organization sets policy for transportation expenditures. The MPO is the transportation planning body for northeastern Cameron County and its member cities, including Rio Hondo, Harlingen, San Benito, La Feria, Primera, Combes, Los Indos, Palm Valley and Santa Rosa. The 2010 – 2035 Metropolitan Transportation Plan calls for upgrades to roads throughout the area but does not mention Rio Hondo thoroughfares specifically. It advocates for the maintenance and construction of multi-modal networks that meet Level of Service Standards throughout the system, as well as increased transit services, including rural transit services.

City's Thoroughfares: Table 9C: Existing Thoroughfare System and Map 9A: Existing Thoroughfare System catalogue Rio Hondo's arterials and collectors.

The City's 2001 Comprehensive Plan, TxDOT and the MPO have categorized Rio Hondo thoroughfares slightly differently. The designation below considers 2010 TXDOT traffic counts, a May of 2011 traffic warrant analysis study completed by TXDOT for Rio Hondo intersections along FM 106; field survey information related to roadway width and right of way, the presence of traffic generators on or near the road, and road destination in the region. Since 2001, increased traffic on the City's thoroughfares has changed their designations slightly. Designations for Rio Hondo thoroughfares, based on their present use and traffic flow, are listed below.

Table 9C. Existing Thoroughfare System

Rio Hondo Arterial Streets			
Minor Arterials			
	Peak Traffic Counts ¹¹	ROW (LF)	Width (LF)
FM 106 (west of the Arroyo))	6,500 -	100	55
FM 106 at FM 1846	9,953**	100	55
FM 106 at Harrolds	12,000**	100	55
FM 106 (east at SH 345)	8,400	80	55
Major Collector			
SH 345 (at FM 106)	3,200	100	60
SH 345 (south)	3,200	80	40
FM 1846 (at FM 106))	2,700	60	40
FM 1846 (south)	2,400	100	36
Minor Collectors			
N. Sam Houston Blvd	N/A	60	24
N. Robertson Street	1,131**	60	30
S Robertson Street	N/A	60	30
N Reynolds St	1,715**	60-80	30-45

Source: GrantWorks Field Survey, 2011; TXDOT Statewide Planning Map at <http://www.dot.state.tx.us/apps>; Harlingen San Benito Metropolitan Planning Organization at hsbmpo.com/Documents (2010-2035 Plan, p. 26)

* Source is TXDOT Statewide Planning Map at <http://www.dot.state.tx.us/apps> last updated in 2010

**2011 TXDOT Pharr District Rio Hondo traffic signal warrant analysis, May of 2011

Traffic Lights The City has four-way traffic lights at the intersections of Colorado/FM 106 and Harrolds Street and at FM 106 and SH 345/Sam Houston

Street. The Harrolds light assists with queuing traffic in the busier downtown and school complex area. The SH 345 light controls traffic at the conflict point of two arterials. If the City decides that a traffic light could alleviate vehicle conflicts at other intersections on TxDOT roads, TxDOT's policy allows for a *traffic signal warrant analysis* requested by the community. Traffic signal warrant analysis consists of documenting and quantifying conditions such as vehicular volume, pedestrian volume, accidents, progression, and delay at a proposed site. The data gathered at the site is then compared to criteria established by the agency to determine if a traffic light will be installed. A traffic warrant analysis is free to the community. TXDOT completed warrant analyses in Rio Hondo at the Reynolds, Harrolds and Robertson intersections in 2011. None of the intersections, even Harrolds, met traffic levels to warrant lights. TXDOT monitors traffic annually and may move or add signals as needed. TXDOT officials said that during the first part of the planning period, they will be examining the signal infrastructure at Harrolds because of its age and may improve the lighting structure and re-evaluate the light's location. ADA accessible features and/or ramps would be upgraded to meet federal standards at the same time.

Stop Signs. An intersection where traffic flow is not properly regulated increases the potential hazards to pedestrians and motorists. Stop signs control local intersections throughout the community and the City police department reports no problem intersections or need for increased traffic controls. No additional signs are recommended in this Study.

Parking Restrictions. Parking is specifically restricted with No Parking signs in two areas of town: on Robertson Road to eliminate conflicts between parked vehicles, pedestrians and trucks. Parking is also prohibited on portions of Reynolds, Robert Garza and Harrolds in northern Rio Hondo to maintain traffic flow around the elementary, intermediate and junior high school. ADA accessible spaces (16 total) are located throughout the CBD. Parallel parking is allowed on

FM 106 in the central business district. *Chapter 12 Central Business District Study* makes recommendations for increasing parking in the alleys behind Colorado, establishing a city-owned parking lot downtown and making provisions for shared parking when use times differ such as for restaurants and churches. These improvements could distribute parking more evenly, and decrease conflicts between traffic flow and parking cars/pedestrians on FM 106 if central business district revitalization efforts are realized during the planning period and traffic increases on FM 106.

Curb and Gutter: Curb and gutter can be the most effective way to capture and direct run off during heavy rainfall. It can also prevent deterioration at the edges of street pavement. The City has approximately 40,900 linear feet of curb and gutter, primarily located in the City's original townsite in central Rio Hondo and along the extent of FM 106 from the lift span bridge to the Rio Hondo High School. Curb and gutter are combined with storm sewer inlets to keep water off the pavement. Drainage infrastructure is discussed in more detail in *Chapter 7: Storm Drainage System Study*.

Pedestrian Facilities: Sidewalks are available along FM 106 in the City Central Business District and along Harrolds Street around the elementary and junior high school complexes. Sidewalks continue on the south side of FM 106 to the high school about one block east of SH 345. Sidewalks are not available in the neighborhoods, including in south Rio Hondo along FM 1846 at Rio Hondo County Park and multi-family developments that front the TXDOT road. ADA ramp infrastructure along portions of FM 106 has been improved since 2008 as part of a TXDOT regional program to upgrade the most travelled ADA ramps in the region. However, less travelled ADA ramps in the CBD have not been improved and are not standard. The sidewalks lack amenities like benches and landscaping that might make their use more appealing, although awnings in the CBD and trees overhanging on the eastern portion of FM 106 do provide some shaded walking areas.

Figure 9A. Sidewalks



Sidewalks in the CBD along FM 106, left, are in fair to good conditions. Other sidewalks are in need of repair such as this one, right, at Robertson and FM 106.

Traffic Speeds and Pedestrian Safety. There were no areas identified by City staff as problematic for pedestrian safety related to traffic speed. In town, the posted speed limits on thoroughfares ranges from 20 to 30 mph and speeds resume to 45 and then to 55 mph as vehicles exist the City.

Problem Intersections. The most problematic intersection is at Reynolds and Colorado during peak use times around the school complex. Residents picking up or dropping off children at the schools rely on the traffic light at Harrolds for traffic flow. However, the school's entrance is on Reynolds Road. The lack of signalization at Reynolds may contribute to a lack of flow around the Central Business District in the early morning and late afternoon. TXDOT and the City have placed crosswalks and a school zone to calm traffic. The City prohibited trucks on Reynolds to alleviate congestion. Officials are reports do not report any other problem intersections in town.

Figure 9B. Problem Intersection



Traffic at Reynolds and FM 106 at Rio Hondo Junior High is high at peak hours temporarily on weekday afternoons.

Truck Routes and Traffic: Truck traffic is not allowed on Reynolds Street where it would interfere with school traffic, and on Arroyo Road where traffic is reserved for City Hall access.. Truck routes are designated with signage on Robertson Road and on North Reynolds north of the school complex. However, the street facilities narrow to 18 feet in northern Rio Hondo, making truck passage more difficult. Industrial businesses in the northern part of town rely on truck deliveries. The City needs to consider the availability of truck routes when citing industrial and commercial areas for future land use and zoning. The Texas Transportation Code §621.303 gives municipalities the authority to regulate truck traffic on city streets, and §623.072 covers the designation of specific routes.

Origin and Destination/Trip Generators: Predicting trip generation and traffic patterns on a roadway network requires the ability to determine trip rates and characteristics for various types of land use. The Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) compiles comprehensive listings of trip rates by land use in an informational report call *Trip Generation*. This document is updated periodically and is widely used in thoroughfare analysis. *Table 9D: Daily Trip Generation Rates* lists typical trip generation rates for land uses found in Rio Hondo.

Table 9D: Daily Trip Generation Rates

Land Use	Trip Rate Basis (Unit)	Daily Trips/ Unit
Single Family	Dwelling unit (DU)	9.57
Apartment	DU	6.72
Mobile Home Park	DU	4.99
General Office	1,000 SF	11.01
Shopping Center	1,000 SF, weekday	42.94
Heavy Industrial	Acre	6.75
Manufacturing	Acre	38.88
Light Industrial	Acre	51.8
Elementary School	Student	1.29
Middle/Junior High School	Student	1.62
High School	Student	1.71
City Park	Acre, Sunday	16
Motel	Rooms	5.63
Supermarket	1,000 SF, weekday	102.24

Source: Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE), *Trip Generation* (2003)

Rio Hondo has several major traffic generators, some of which cause traffic at predictable times and others for which generated trips are less regular. Major traffic generators are defined as sites that are the starting point or destination of more than 100 vehicle trips per day on average. A visit to the grocery store in one automobile generates two “trips:” the trip from the point of origin and the return trip. Trip generation rates are calculated in such a way as to account for what are known as “multi-event” trips, or those in which the driver leaves home and visits multiple destinations before returning home. Some traffic generators, such as schools or churches, only function on specific days; others, such as hospitals or grocery stores, function year round.

Rio Hondo's major trip generators and destinations are identified in *Table 9E: Major Traffic Generators* and are illustrated on *Map 9A: Existing Thoroughfare System*.

Table 9E: Major Traffic Generators

Site	Factor	Trip Rate Basis	Streets Affected	Avg. Daily Traffic Generated
Rio Hondo Elementary School*	644 (students)	1.29	N Reynolds, Nopales Streets	831
Rio Hondo Intermediate/Junior or High School	838 (students)	1.62	FM 106, N Reynolds, Mesquite, and Harrolds Streets	1,358
Rio Hondo High School	627 (students)	1.62	FM 106/SH 345	1,016
Central Business District (occupied)	125,089 SF/	43 trips /1,000 (ft ²)	FM 106 and CBD side streets	5,375
Rio Hondo County Park	8 acres, developed/units	16 trips/acre	S Reynolds Street/Parkway	160
Rio Hondo Municipal Complex	46,535 SF/	11 trips /1,000 (ft ²)	Arroyo Blvd	517
Rio Hondo Village Apartments	50	6.72	S Reynolds Street/Parkway	336
U.S. Post Office	2,500	11 trips /1,000 (ft ²)	FM 106	28
Casa de Valle Apartments	30	6.72	FM 106, Morning Glory Drive	202
Twin Palms RV Resort	70 pads	4.99	FM 106, Robertson Road	349
Stores Miscellaneous along FM 106	5,000 (ft ²)	43 trips /1,000 (ft ²)	FM 106	215

Source: GrantWorks Field Survey, 2009. Estimates based upon ITE standards, determined using facility size (approximate from building footprint).

* School size from 2009-2010 AEIS School Report Card

Regional Transportation Projects: There are no TxDOT projects in progress in Rio Hondo or its ETJ. In 2010, TxDOT completed improvements to ADA ramps on FM 106 between Reynolds and Robertson.

9.4 Thoroughfare System Analysis

9.4.1 System Connectivity

Connectivity measures the number of street connections in an area as a means of determining ease of travel (route continuity). Areas with high connectivity are characterized by short blocks and many connections between local, neighborhood streets and interlocal, arterial/collector streets. Areas with low connectivity are characterized by long blocks, many dead-ends, and few connections between neighborhoods. *Table 9F* lists advantages of high versus low connectivity.

Table 9F: Advantages of High vs. Low Connectivity

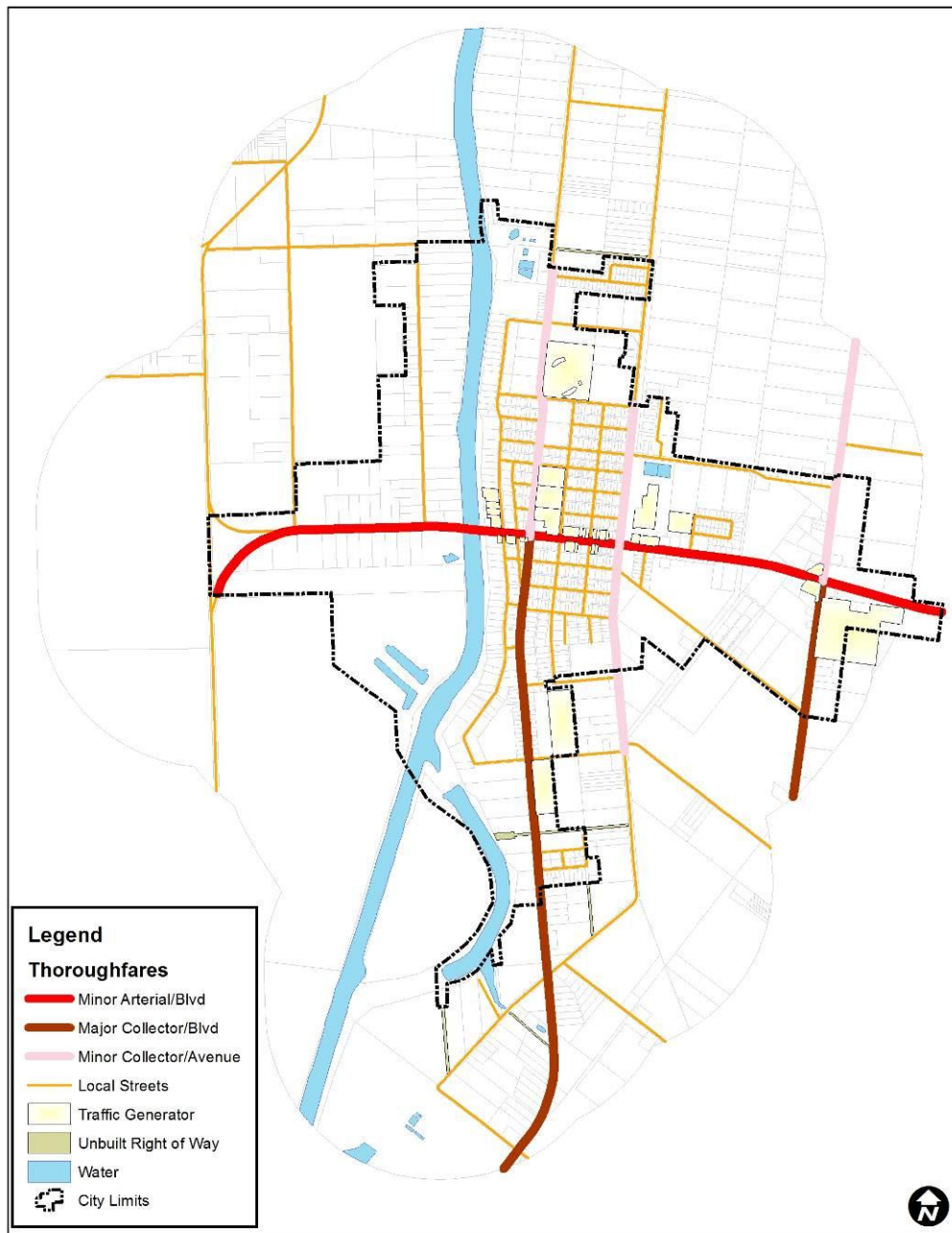
High Connectivity (Grid System)	Low Connectivity (Conventional System)
Dispersion of traffic lowers congestion on major roads	Lower traffic volumes on local streets
Reduced drive time (including for emergency and utility vehicles)	More very low volume local streets and cul-de-sacs, desirable to some residents
Enables walking and biking	Depending on street widths/lot sizes, can use less pavement/land
Block structure enables land use to evolve and adapt over time (development flexibility)	Possibly fewer accidents because of fewer intersections

Source: Adapted from Context Sensitive Solutions in Designing Major Urban Thoroughfares for Walkable Communities. Institute of Transportation Engineers. 2006. (pg. 28-29)

Rio Hondo's thoroughfare system has been formed mostly by the state roads that intersect it both north and south and east west. Thoroughfare configuration also is limited by the Arroyo Colorado. Only one bridge at FM 106 allows for passage over the Arroyo in Rio Hondo. This limits mobility from east to west. One housing development and the City's Boat Ramp Park have been developed west of the Arroyo Colorado. Connectivity for those western amenities and neighborhoods is

limited to FM 106 and will be for the duration of the planning period. The original townsite of Rio Hondo located near the CBD and the primary schools show high connectivity, in that local streets and thoroughfares disperse traffic and allow for multiple paths to destinations within that local area. However, connectivity decreases toward the edges of town in areas developed later. In these areas only one route is available to a destination or the routes are circuitous, making reaching the destination difficult.

Figure 9C. Thoroughfare Connectivity in Rio Hondo



At current densities and configurations, the thoroughfare system functions to move traffic around the City and to neighboring Harlingen and San Benito and points of interest toward the Laguna Madre/Padre Island recreation areas. In 2006, the MPO evaluated the Level of Service on the thoroughfares throughout the Harlingen-San Benito region. Analysis showed that traffic volumes on Rio Hondo's thoroughfares are far from exceeding roadway capacities. LOS ranged from .12 on parts of SH 345 to .62 on the western portion of FM 106 upon entrance to the City from Harlingen. Between 2006 and 2010, according to TXDOT survey, traffic volumes increased slightly between 3 and 17 percent, with the most increases occurring at the intersection of SH 345 and FM 106. The City should monitor the capacity of FM 106 at the lift span bridge and city entrance, where LOS was lowest, if the city grows during the planning period and work with TXDOT to ensure that FM 106 continues to meet LOS standards.

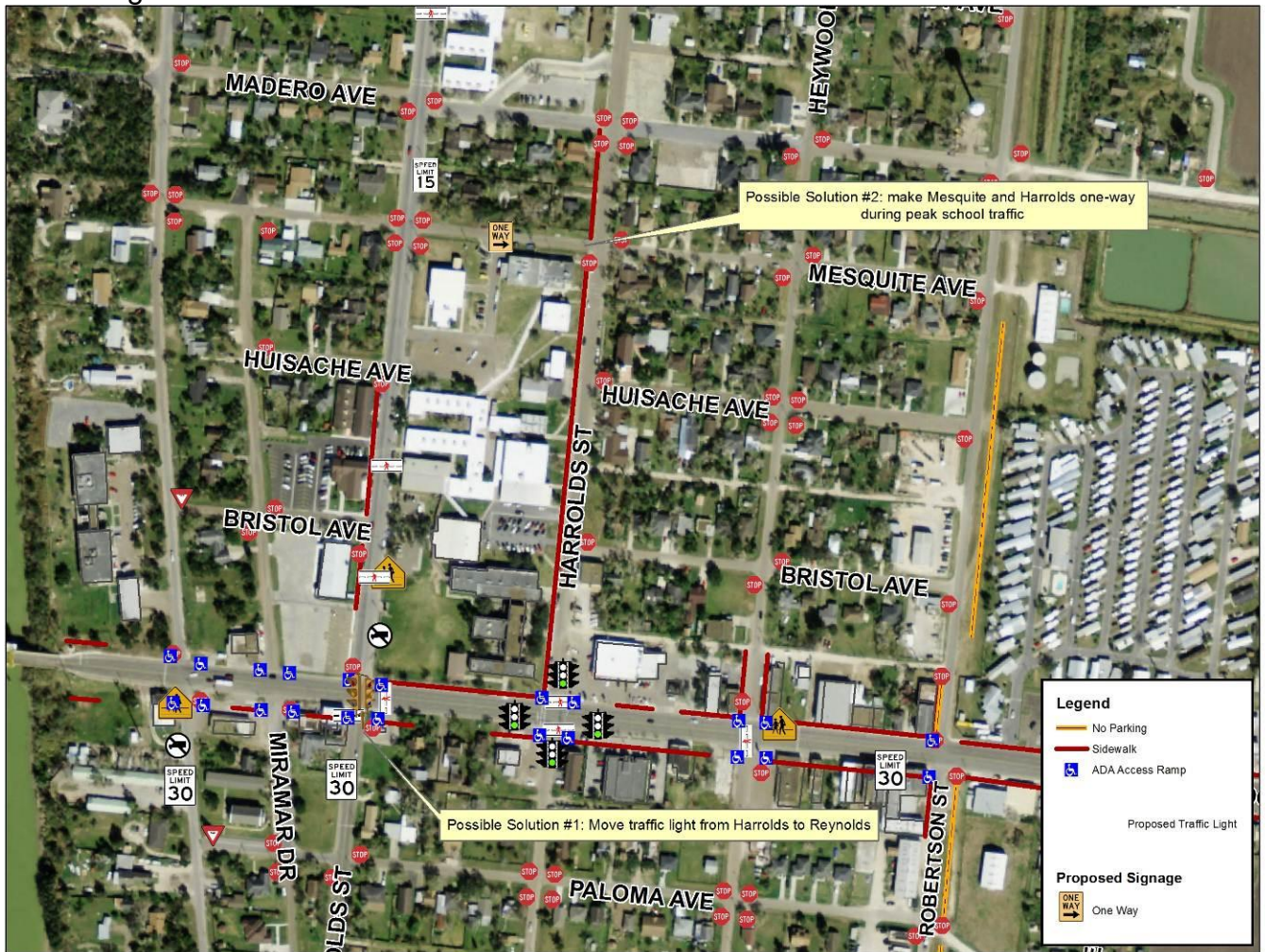
Proposed corridors that would assist the city with traffic movement as the City grows, particularly movement to and from businesses and to and from schools and public buildings and residences, are shown on *Map 9B: Proposed Thoroughfares*. As the City develops northward and southward, the City should consider east-west connectivity, making sure that development connects to existing thoroughfares. Also, it should work with TXDOT to monitor LOS at the lift-span bridge on FM 106 and work throughout the planning period with TXDOT to improve FM 106 and signalization near the bridge to maintain a satisfactory LOS. The City also should ensure that its core grid system continues at its edges where possible. This would require that existing streets be connected as vacant land is developed so that local street movement can occur without overburdening its collectors.

Changes to the City's Subdivision Ordinance, outlined in Chapter 14, also include provisions requiring developers to build these roadways to City standards and in concert with the City's Comprehensive Plan.

9.4.2 System Functionality

In addition to thoroughfare capacity, the ability of traffic to flow or the functionality of the system was considered. Police, business owners and residents reported that the thoroughfare system functions well except in central Rio Hondo at peak traffic hours around Rio Hondo Junior High and the intermediate. Vehicles coming to the school in the mornings block traffic temporarily on FM 106 at Colorado. In the afternoon, traffic heading south temporarily builds on Reynolds at FM 106. This impedes the utility of FM 106 as a Minor Arterial or Boulevard able to move traffic through large tracts of land and serve multiple purposes as the city's main thoroughfare. The existence of the lift-span bridge occasionally decreases LOS on the thoroughfare by stopping traffic briefly. The city's Major Collectors, South Reynolds and SH 345, perform the function of moving traffic easily through large tracts of land at moderate speeds. The City's Avenues (Minor Collectors) do carry traffic at low speeds from neighborhoods to employment centers. Two problems exist with them: 1) They don't provide travel options for pedestrians or bikers. 2) Connections are not easily made east-west between them. Most of the connectors are local residential streets.

Figure 9D. Sketch of Possible Solutions for Problem Intersection



9.4.3 Ranked Problems

Table 9G: Ranked Problems Relating to Thoroughfares

Thoroughfare System Problems	
1.	Lack of east-west connectivity to existing thoroughfares
2.	Decreased service on Reynolds at peak hours at Reynolds and FM 106. .
3.	Lack of direct truck routes to northern Rio Hondo industrial sites
4.	Lack of bike and pedestrian routes to employment and school centers
5.	Lack of a subdivision ordinance and land use plan that promotes multi-modal connectivity

9.5 Thoroughfare Improvements Plan

The Thoroughfare Improvements Plan outlines improvements that would increase the efficiency of Rio Hondo's thoroughfare network and forward the City's Land Use Plan and Economic Development goals.

Goal 1: Increase the functionality of the existing thoroughfares for pedestrians, bicycles and vehicles

Objective 1.1: In 2012, submit Thoroughfare Plan to the Harlingen-San Benito Metropolitan Planning Organization and the Cameron County Transportation Department so that those entities consider suggested improvements in future county and regional planning efforts and budgeting.

Objective 1.2: Between 2012 and 2015, work with TXDOT to build sidewalks on South Reynolds from FM 106 to Parkway.

Objective 1.3: By 2015-2016, City widen Parkway to 24 feet with sidewalks and bike lanes to create southern east-west connector.

Objective 1.4: By 2016, request a traffic warrant analysis at FM 106 and Reynolds and at Robertson Road to determine best place for traffic light and to alleviate peak-hour congestion on N. Reynolds.

Objective 1.5 : Between 2015 and 2017, upgrade sidewalks and ADA ramps in the Central Business District as discussed in Chapter 12: Central Business District.

Objective 1.6: By 2017, work with the County to stripe bike lanes on S. Robertson Road.

Objective 1.7: By 2018, reconstruct Bates Road with curb and gutter and sidewalks to its current 24 feet to better serve as a thoroughfare connecting Robertson to Reynolds.

Objective 1.8: By 2019, work with TXDOT to stripe bike lanes on SH 345 between Bishop Road and FM 106.

Objective 1.9: Between 2020 and 2028, work with the County or developers to expand North Robertson Road from 18 feet to 24 feet, and include bike lanes..

Goal 2: Increase thoroughfare system mobility as City grows.

Objective 2.1: By 2012, amend or adopt regulations that will assist the City in reaching thoroughfare goals by 2032.

Policy 2.1.1: Amend subdivision ordinance to standardize future thoroughfare ROW and paving widths by type; Enforce subdivision ordinance that requires sidewalks on thoroughfares.

Policy 2.1.2: Create a funding source by 2013 for city sidewalk maintenance, replacement and additions were needed on City streets.

Objective 2.2: Amend subdivision ordinance to require new development to have transportation facilities that connect areas of high residential land use to parks and schools via automobile, sidewalks and bike paths. Bike and walking paths should be designed to minimize or mitigate pedestrian-vehicular conflict points with appropriate safety infrastructure or use of separated paths.

Objective 2.3: By 2025, work with developers and the County to create a northern east-west connector, possibly at Bates Road, to connect to N. Sam Houston Road. The facility should have bike lanes and/or sidewalks as specified in the subdivision ordinance.

Recommended projects and their costs if available are listed below. The 20-year Thoroughfares Plan would cost more than \$1.3 million to implement. However, the City would cooperate with TXDOT, the County and developers on completing the plan. Costs that would be borne by the city would total about \$375,000.

Table 9H: Thoroughfare Improvement Plan Projects, 2012-2032

Phase/Year	Project	Estimated Cost ¹²	Source of Funds
1 2013-2014	Reconstruct Bates Road between N. Reynolds and Robertson and add curb and gutter and sidewalks	\$215,000	GEN, COUNTY
2 2016-2017	Widen Parkway between Reynolds and Retama to 24-foot plus sidewalks and bike lanes, using existing parkland for ROW expansion, plus movement of lift station, plus installation of underground	\$310,000	GEN, COUNTY, TxCDBG, TXDOT

¹² Cost for 5' concrete sidewalk, 4" thick, 6x6 wire mesh; calculated from R.S. Means Building Construction Cost Data, 66th Edition, 2008; \$20 to \$22.50 per linear foot includes material, labor and equipment; plus 15% for engineering. Assumes right of way will be donated.

	drainage/curb and gutter		
3 2015-2026-	Upgrade sidewalks in the CBD, east and west end	\$60,000	GEN, TxDOT, TCF, MDD
4 2017-2020	Stripe bike lane on South Robertson Rd from Parkway to FM 106	\$1,600	GEN, COUNTY
5 2018-2022	Construct 3,350 LF of sidewalks on east side of S Reynolds from FM 106 to Parkway	\$85,000	TxDOT (using existing ROW),
6 2020	Stripe bike lane on SH 345 between Bishop and FM 106	\$4,000	TxDOT
7 2023-2030	Construct an east-west connector in northern Rio Hondo at Bates Road between Robertson and N Sam Houston	\$640,000, does not include ROW acquisition or drainage	COUNTY, LOCAL

GEN = Municipal funds or bond funds; TxDOT = Texas Department of Transportation funding including Safe Routes to Schools and Transportation Enhancement Program; THC = Texas Historical Commission (Main Street, Downtown Revitalization Program); LOCAL = donations of time/money/goods from private citizens, developer as required by subdivision ordinance, charitable organizations, and local businesses

10 Recreation and Open Space Study

In small cities like Rio Hondo, recreational areas play a key role in maintaining not only the physical health of individuals, but also the emotional health of the community. Parks and recreational areas provide pleasant places for family reunions, friendly competition, exercise, and socializing.

Every city has the responsibility of providing adequate parks and open space for the health, entertainment, and beauty of the community. However, the limited availability of funds for these public uses generally requires foresight in planning for future expansion of parks and public open spaces.

Several factors contribute to the increasing demand for parks and recreational facilities in many Texas towns: the increase in life expectancy coupled with earlier retirement ages for many people; the spread of competitive sporting programs to the youngest and oldest age groups; and the understanding that a healthy diet and regular exercise are beneficial for mental and physical well-being.

The demand for park and recreational facilities in a community is a function of the community's population. Providing for park needs to all residents usually means offering improved and accessible parks characterized by a variety of facilities.

10.1 Plan Development Process

The City of Rio Hondo last adopted a Parks and Recreation Plan in 2001 as a part of its 2001 Comprehensive Planning effort. In 2001 the City's Park inventory consisted of a playground/picnic park behind city hall and a waterfront park consisting of a parking lot, a boat ramp, and a small pier area for fishing. The parks are located across the Arroyo Colorado from one another. The 2001 Plan

called for increasing the amount of parkland to 10 acres per 1,000 persons by constructing in 10 years:

- 1) a major community park with walking trails, restrooms, lighted baseball fields, basketball courts, tennis courts, and volleyball courts.
- 2) two new neighborhood parks with playground and picnic facilities
- 3) a community swimming pool

The plan had immediate priorities for accomplishing the above, including:

- The upkeep of existing facilities
- Negotiating with the ISD for increased public use of recreation areas for large festivals, and upgrading them if needed to use them for large festivals
- Acquiring property for an enlarged park system to achieve a 10-acres of park land per 1,000 persons standard.
- Adopting a park ordinance requiring developers to provide open space for future park development
- Protecting sensitive wildlife and ecological areas
- Increasing the number of full-time employees dedicated to park maintenance
- Creating a park advisory board

Since the 2001 plan, the community has accomplished the following:

Proposal in 2001	Status in 2011
✓ Maintenance of existing facilities	City maintains fields and grounds at all city parks
Negotiating with ISD for increased joint usage or special event usage	Youth baseball and football Rio Hondo leagues use practice fields at the Junior High and High School in coordination with ISD, no discussions related to special events
✓ Enlarging City Park System	In cooperation with the County, the City dedicated a 14-acre city-owned tract for a community park. Through bond funding, the County built a multi-use park with lighted baseball fields, basketball court, soccer field,

	playground, pavilions and Family Learning Center. Park opened in 2008. The City also began negotiations in 2009 to purchase up to 4 more acres of parkland at Boat Ramp Park
√ Increase park acreage from 4 acres per 1,000 residents to 10	Accomplished, however, population increased to 2,356 so currently at 8 acres per 1,000 residents. If they receive current applications for expanding boat ramp park they will meet the 10 acres per population goal
√ Adopt a park ordinance requiring developers to provide open space for future park development	Adopted a subdivision ordinance in 2001 requiring 5% of developed property to be dedicated to park development, or an in lieu fee paid into a park fund. No park fund was established or fee established by the City to implement the provision.
√ Increase the number of full-time employees dedicated to park maintenance	Implemented
Create a park advisory board	Not implemented
Create two new neighborhood parks	Not implemented
Construct a swimming pool	Not implemented

The Parks and Recreation planning process began in February of 2011 when the City Council authorized a professional consulting firm, GrantWorks Inc. of Austin, to update the City of Rio Hondo Comprehensive Plan. To begin judging the level of interest in park needs, planners consulted with City Staff, City officials and residents of all ages. A written survey was distributed to Rio Hondo Junior High School 7th grade students in May of 2011. 160 surveys were returned from students. Another 35 surveys were returned by adults who filled out surveys at City Hall and the seniors center. These surveys were provided in both English and Spanish.. Interviews were also conducted with other stakeholders during the planning process, including the City Commissioners, Little League Association volunteers, and other residents. Survey results are discussed in the Needs

Assessment & Identification section of this plan. In addition to surveys, the plan evaluates the city's current recreation resources in relation to its population size, a method called Standards-Based Assessments.

Following adoption of this plan by the City Council, the City's continuing responsibility will be to identify on-going funding resources and to provide guidance on facility operation and maintenance. The Council's responsibilities will include a review of this master plan on a regular basis to ensure its goals and objectives continue to meet the changing needs of Rio Hondo's citizens. Future revisions will be incorporated as necessary.

10.2 Recreation and Open Space Inventory

Local Recreational Areas The City of Rio Hondo maintains three park areas. Through the combination of recreation sites, residents have access to paved jogging/walking trails, lighted baseball fields, picnic areas with grills, playgrounds, a basketball court, and a soccer field. Two pavilions are available for larger gatherings. The Rio Hondo Independent School District has other recreation facilities on its campuses but they are not open for public use.

Rio Hondo Community Park: The City's 14-acre park was built in cooperation with Cameron County. The City purchased the property on South Reynolds Street between Kindengern St. and Parkway Avenue. The County built the park for about \$1.2 million with general obligation bond funding. The park was completed in 2008. While Cameron County lists the Park in its park system, the City maintains the Park. The park has two Little League baseball/softball fields, a soccer field, an uncovered basketball court, a playground and a pavilion. The facility has a paved parking lot with 77 lined spaces and 4 handicapped spaces. During the summer of 2011, the City received some surplus aggregate materials from the state and covered another unbuilt area of the park to increase the

parking capacity. Of the 14 acres, about 11 acres are developed. Prior to building the recreation amenities, the City had built a Family Learning Center on the property used for children’s after school programs. The facility is operated by the Boys and Girls Club of Harlingen.



Figure 10A. County Park Entrance



Figure 10B. County Park playground, benches, trail



Figure 10C. County Park, facilities

Lighted fields for baseball and basketball. Soccer field, not pictured, is not lighted.



Figure 10D. City Hall Park

Playground equipment for younger children, no lighting, deteriorating equipment



Figure 10E. City Hall Park

Park provides no view of the Arroyo, Lift-Span Bridge is shielded from view

City Hall Park: This .6-acre park is located behind City Hall. It has covered and uncovered picnic tables, grills and playground equipment for young children. It is not lighted for night use. The Park is more than 30 years old. At one time it had a tennis court that faced Colorado Avenue. However, a lack of maintenance allowed it to deteriorate and the City eliminated it.



Figure 10F. Boat Ramp Park



Figure 10G. Land south of Boat Ramp Park for expansion

Rio Hondo Civic Center This 15,000 sf facility is located next to City Hall and provides an indoor recreation area for residents. The facility is suitable for dances, indoor concerns and parties

Boat Ramp Park This 6.6-acre facility consists of a concrete Boat Ramp, parking for about 30 vehicles and a small pier where residents can fish. The wooden pier is deteriorating. The City plans to purchase another 4 acres south of the parking lot and expand the park to include a new pier and kayak launching area. Grant applications to Texas Park and Wildlife and the Texas General Land Office were pending for the purchase of the properties.

RHISD Maintained Recreational Facilities. The Rio Hondo ISD maintains a number of recreational facilities. ISD facilities are not open for public use on weekdays or weekends. However, Rio Hondo Youth baseball and football leagues use a field at junior high for baseball practices and have used the high school stadium and practice fields for football practices and games. The old High School stadium field and track across from the Elementary School at corner of Garza and Reynolds Street is open to the public. The City may wish to

coordinate with the ISD in an effort to provide residents with general access to the ISD's additional recreational facilities.

Rio Hondo Elementary School Campus: The Rio Hondo Elementary Campus in northern Rio Hondo has three small playgrounds. However, a perimeter fence prevents use of the grounds by residents on weekends or after-school hours.

Rio Hondo Middle & Junior High School Campus: This campus located between Mesquite and Colorado Avenue has a playground a baseball field and a covered basketball court. However, a perimeter fence prevents use of the grounds by residents on weekends or after-school hours. The Little League has an agreement with the school to use its baseball field for practices after-school hours and during the summer.

Rio Hondo High School Campus: The campus is located in eastern Rio Hondo along CR 106. It maintains 6 tennis courts in good condition, a lighted football field and track, a lighted baseball and softball field, and gymnasiums. Although the youth football leagues have used the high school fields, the facilities are not open to the public after school hours.

Table 10A: Recreation & Open Space Facility Inventory

Operation /Maintenance:		City	City	City	RHISD	RHISD	RHISD
Amenities	Total	Rio Hondo County Park	City Hall Park	Boat Ramp Park	High School	Junior High School	Elem School
Fields/Courts							
Baseball Fields	4	2 (shared)			1	1	
Softball Fields	3	2 (shared)			1		
Tee ball Fields							
Basketball Courts	2	1			1		
Football field	2				1		1
Tennis Courts	6				6		
Soccer Field	1	1					
Walking Trail/Track	3	½-mile			1 (1/4-mile lighted)		1 (1/4-mile lighted)
Use Areas							
Picnic Area	11	8	3				
Pavilion	1	1					
Gymnasium	3				1	1	1
Outdoor Amphitheater							
Grills	4	1	3				
Benches/Pier	6	5		1			
Playground Equipment							
Playscapes / Playgrounds	7	2	1				4
Swings	11	6	2				3
Other Facilities							
Restrooms	2	1			1		
Parking	5	1	1	1	1		1

Source: GrantWorks Field Survey, 2011

Open Space A City's park system often includes dedicated open spaces to provide opportunities for passive recreation, habitat for local flora and fauna, to preserve landmarks or vistas, or ensure no development occurs in areas where potential hazards exists, such as flooding (e.g. land within a FEMA 100 Year Floodplain). Within the City of Rio Hondo city limits, more than 150 acres of land are undeveloped. Another 48 acres is subdivided but not developed, for a total of about 200 acres of "open" land within the city limits. Designated flood plain is only located in the Arroyo Colorado River which is contained by bluffs.

Cemeteries: Rio Hondo has one cemetery, Rio Hondo Cemetery (2 acres). In the 1800s, cemeteries served as areas for relaxation and walking before the institution of public parks in cities. While communities no longer rely on cemeteries to serve this purpose, they are still considered valuable open spaces in the community that people use for walking and passive activities like reflection and meditation. The proximity of the cemetery to households and to an undeveloped riverfront area makes the Rio Hondo Cemetery a valuable extension of the town's open space.

Regional Recreation Opportunities. Rio Hondo residents have several national, state, county and municipal parks located within a short drive. These areas offer hiking, camping, golfing, birding and wildlife viewing, canoeing, swimming, boating, and fishing opportunities.

Padre Island National Seashore: Located about 35 miles north northeast of Rio Hondo, the 70-mile seashore park on the Gulf of Mexico provides nearby access to beaches, sand dunes, swimming, windsurfing, fishing, boating, birding, camping and other coastal recreation activities. An annual \$20 fee provides access to the park. Day and week passes cost \$5 to \$10 depending on activity.

Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge: Located about 15 miles east of Rio Hondo, on CR 106, this is the largest of three national wildlife refuges in the Rio Grande Valley. The refuge contains more than 45,000 acres and is an oasis for wildlife. The refuge offers picnics and trails and abundant wildlife for viewing. Fishing areas are also available. Trails range in distance from 1/8-mile to 3 ½ miles. Bicycling is permitted on touring roads where there is a 15-mile loop.

Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Site: Located about 22 miles southeast of Rio Hondo, this historic site provides a ½-mile walking trail to a scenic overlook of the battlefield area. Entrance is free.

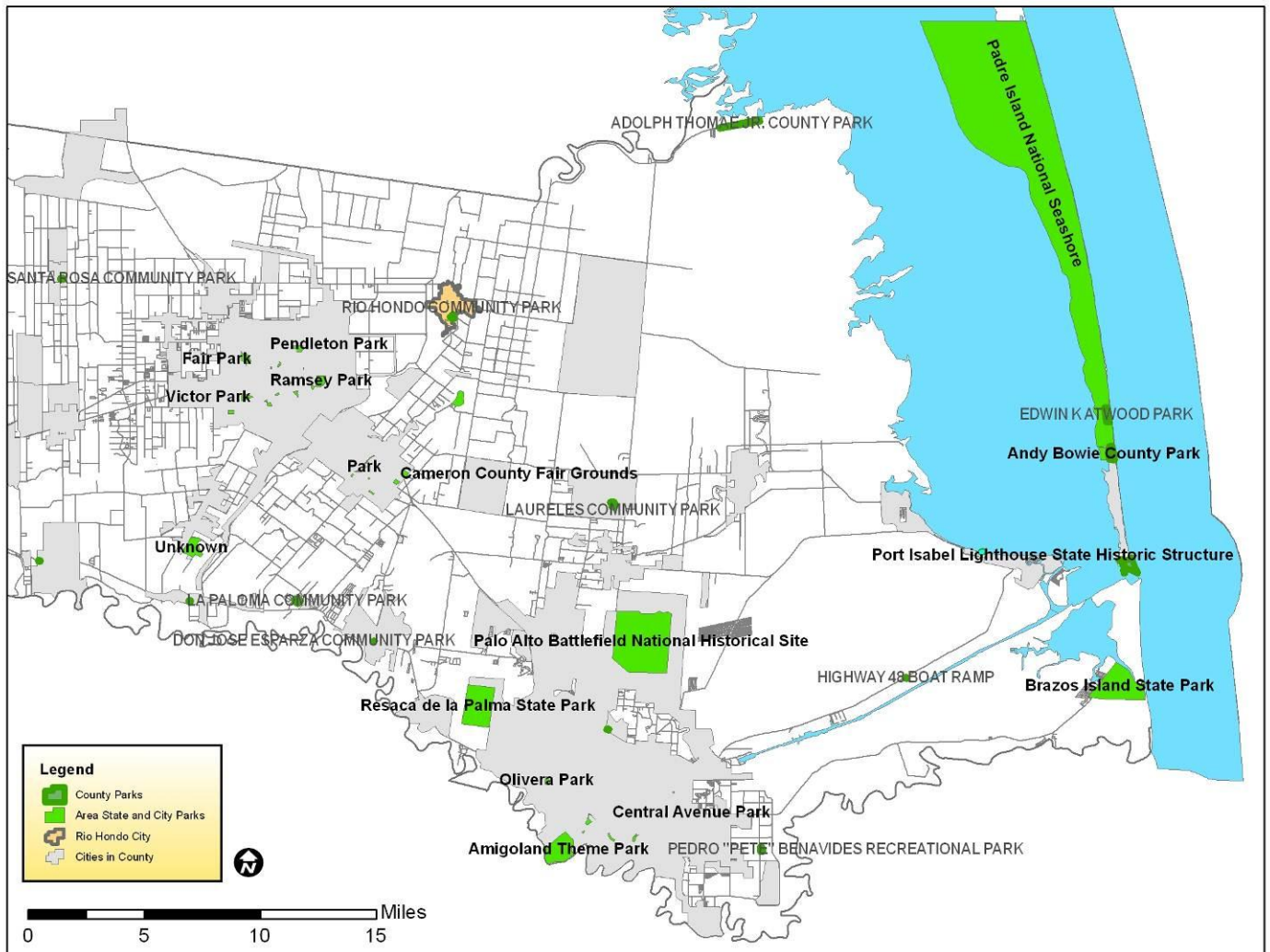
Santa Anna National Wildlife Refuge: Located about 40 miles west of Rio Hondo, this 2,088 acre refuge is home to almost 400 types of birds and other rare insects. The park offers 12 miles of foot trails, varying in length from ½-mile (paved and wheelchair accessible) to 7 miles. Bicycles are allowed on the 7-mile tour road. Fees are \$3 per visit per family.

Port Isabel Lighthouse State Historic Site: Located about 30 miles southeast of Rio Hondo, this one-acre state park operated by the City of Port Isabel offers scenic views of the Gulf of Mexico and picnicking facilities. Admission to the lighthouse structure ranges from \$1 to \$3 per person, depending on age.

Brazos Island State Recreation Area/Boca Chica State Park: Located about 48 miles southeast of Rio Hondo, this recreation area offers picnicking, wading, swimming, birding, natural history observation, camping, fishing (with a license), and surfing.

Resaca la Palma State Park: Located in Brownsville, Texas, this 1,200 acre preserve offers hiking, walking, birding and biking trails about 23 miles south of Rio Hondo. Admission is \$4 for adults and children are free.

Figure 10H: Public Parks Surrounding Rio Hondo



The Cameron County Park system provides recreation opportunities to Rio Hondo residents, mainly providing residents with beachfront access. The following County parks are available to Rio Hondo residents.

Andy Bowie County Park: This Cameron County facility is located about 36 miles southeast of Rio Hondo on Padre Island. It offers beach access for swimming and fishing and areas for horseback riding. Entry per vehicle is \$4.

Isla Blanca Park: This park located just south of Port Isabel offers one mile of beach access, 600 RV spaces for camping, fishing and surfing. The park also has 8 cabanas for overnight rental.

Edwin Atwood Park: Located just north of Andy Bowie Park, this County park increases beach access. Picnic pavilions are also available. Entry per vehicle is \$4

Adolph Thomae Jr County Park: This gated park is located about 15 miles northeast of Rio Hondo. Surrounded by the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, it offers lighted fishing piers, boat ramp, picnic tables with grills, playground, a 1/2-mile nature trail and 35 RV sites on the Arroyo Colorado.

Laureles Community Park: This park, completed in 2010, has facilities similar to Rio Hondo-County Community Park. It is located about 15 miles south of Rio Hondo.

Santa Rosa Community Park: Located about 15 miles west of Rio Hondo, this facility offers a swimming pool, softball field, playground, picnic and open space.

City of Harlingen park system provides recreation opportunities that can be accessed by Rio Hondo residents. The park system has 556 acres of park and recreational facilities. City parks, located between 6 and 12 miles from Rio Hondo, provide residents opportunities for swimming in three pools, playgrounds, picnic areas, baseball and soccer fields, the two-mile Arroyo Hike and Bike Trail that connects some of the parks, nature trails, tennis courts, and a disc golf course (Dixieland Park). Fair Park, Pendleton Park, Victor Park and Ramsey Park are the largest Harlingen Parks. Fees apply and users do not have to be residents of Harlingen. Entrance to swimming pools in the summer is \$1 per person.

Harlingen Soccer Complex: Ten regulation soccer fields, six of them lighted for tournament play. The complex is run by the City of Harlingen. It includes covered pavilion areas and a 1.2-mile walking/running trail. This facility is the closest park to Rio Hondo at about 7 miles west of the City between Harlingen and Rio Hondo.

City of Harlingen Municipal Golf Course: Located about 15 minutes from Rio Hondo, this 18-hole course is accessible to Rio Hondo residents. Green Fees are \$12 for 9 holes and \$15 for 18 holes.

Privately Owned Recreation Opportunities:

Harlingen area Country Clubs: Located in the city of Harlingen are two 18-hole private courses, one of which is open to the public, and 4 9-hole courses open to the public.

Schlitterbahn Beach Water Park: This private water park is open for admission seasonally and provides water recreation within 35 miles of Rio Hondo.

RV Resorts/Parks: Numerous RV parks are available in the Rio Hondo area, including in Rio Hondo. The Twin Palms RV and MH Resort offers a swimming pool and clubhouse/picnic area to its guests, most of whom are seniors. The pool is available only to guests. A small RV park is also available in the southwest end of downtown.

SMASH (Small Model Aircraft Society of Harlingen) Model Aircraft Flying Field: located just outside the city limits between the state-owned Montgomery Reservoir and the Arroyo Colorado. Access to the property is via low-water crossing at the end of Parkway Avenue. This 86-acre parcel is owned by the Port of Harlingen and leased to the SMASH club as one of three sites where the club flies model airplanes and holds events. The club, established in 1985, holds monthly events at the Rio Hondo facility. An annual event benefits the Boys and Girls Clubs of Harlingen, which has a location in Rio Hondo. Trespassing is prohibited on the 86-acre parcel which is mostly open space. A grown-over former City waterfront pavilion is located on the eastern side of the property on the Montgomery Reservoir banks. The Texas General Land Office owns the Montgomery Reservoir, created by a dam used to straighten the Arroyo Colorado when the canal was built.

10.3 Recreational and Open Space Standards

Basic planning principles guide the successful development of parks and recreational facilities in communities of all sizes and types. The standards in this section provide specific information to community leaders who understand their community's goals but could use an objective perspective to help prioritize those goals and consider additional needs. The following standards must be considered in relation to the specific needs and characteristics of the community in which they are to be applied. Accordingly, the City will want to consider the standards with respect to the unique character of the Rio Hondo community.

General Standards:

General open space development guidelines include:

- In most cases, active recreation areas should be separated according to the users' ages, primarily to protect younger children from injury. Some areas should be designated for use by all ages so entire families can enjoy being together.
- Recreational areas should be accessible to the age group they are designed to serve. For example, neighborhood playgrounds usually serve an area with a radius of one-half mile, which is a reasonable distance for a child to walk. Care should be taken to ensure that safe pedestrian routes provide access to these facilities. Larger facilities that are designed to serve all members of a family can be accessible by automobiles, and have a service area of approximately five (5) miles.
- Combined municipal and school recreational facilities are recommended to serve the needs of the community. Lack of coordination between these types of facilities often leads to the construction of redundant facilities. If possible, school recreational areas, including parking areas, drinking

fountains, and restrooms, should remain open on weekends and during the summer months.

- Greenbelts, hike and bike trails, parkways, or paths should be provided to connect large recreational areas, giving the community access to facilities, scenic views, and recreational opportunities. Vehicular routes should be encouraged only when recreational areas are separated by more than one mile; otherwise, walking trails, greenbelts, or other pedestrian routes are desirable.

Size and Service Area Standards:

Service standards provide the community with a way to judge whether there is a sufficient number of parks to serve all residents. The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) has created “Recreation, Park, and Open Space Standards and Guidelines” detailed in *Table 10B* (below). The guide lists types of parks found in most communities, defines a service area for each type, and provides a standard for acreage for each type of park. Using the NRPA standards, the community classified local parks based on how residents use them and determined a service area for each park, which will help plan the location and size of future parks. According to the NRPA standards, approximately 5 acres to 15 acres of developed park land should be available per 1,000 residents.

In addition to the NRP standards, the State of Colorado developed standards in 2003 for towns of fewer than 10,000 residents. Consultants used small town facility inventories, national and industry trend data, and government and resident surveys to determine an average acreage per capita needed for facility types in small towns. The study indicates that per capita needs in small towns that are remote and less dense than urban areas may be greater than NRPA standards because parks have a larger recreational role in small towns. The Small Parks Standards from the State of Colorado suggests that 14 acres of developed parkland are needed per 1,000 residents.

Table 10B: NRPA Service Area Standards and Guidelines

Local or Close-to-Home~6.25 to 10.5 acres per 1000

	Use	Service Area	Desirable Size	Acres/1000 Population	Desirable Site Characteristics	Local Example
Minipark	Specialized facilities that serve a concentrated or limited population or specific group such as tots or senior citizens	Less than 1/4 mile radius	1 acre or less	0.25 to 0.5	Within neighborhoods and close to apartment complexes, townhouse development, housing for the elderly or Central Business District.	City Hall Park
Neighborhood park/playground	Area for intense recreational activities such as field games, court games, crafts, skating, and picnicking; also for wading pool and playground apparatus area	1/4 to 1/2 mile radius to serve a population up to 5000.	15+ acres	1.0 to 2.0	Suited for intense development; easily accessible to neighborhood population; geographically centered with safe walking and bike access; may be developed as a school-park facility	Rio Hondo Community Park
Community Park	May include areas suited for intense recreational facilities, such as athletic complexes, large swimming pools; may be an area of natural quality for outdoor recreation, such as walking viewing, sitting, picnicking.	Several neighborhoods, 1 to 2 mile radius	25+ acres	5.0 to 8.0	May include natural features, such as water bodies, and areas suited for intense development; easily accessible to neighborhood served	Victor Park, Harlingen

Regional space ~ 15.20 acres per 1000

	Use	Service Area	Desirable Size	Acres/1000 Population	Desirable Site Characteristics	Local Example
Regional/metro politan park	Area of natural or ornamental quality for outdoor recreation, such as picnicking, boating, fishing, swimming, camping	Several Communities: 1 hour driving time	200+ acres	5.0 to 10.0	Contiguous to or encompassing natural resources.	Cameron County Andy Bowie Park

Regional park reserves	Areas of natural quality for nature-oriented outdoor recreation, such as viewing and studying nature, wildlife habitats, conservation, swimming, picnicking, and hiking. Generally 80% of the land is reserved for conservation and natural resource management, with less than 20% used for recreation.	Several communities, 1 hour driving time	1,000+ acres sufficient area to encompass the resource to be preserved and managed	Variable	Diverse or unique natural resources, such as lakes, streams, marshes, flora, fauna, and topography.	Resaca la Palma State Park
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Space that may be local or regional and is unique to each community

	Use	Service Area	Desirable Size	Acres/1000 Population	Desirable Site Characteristics	Local Example
Linear park	Area developed for one or more varying modes of recreational travel, such as hiking, biking, canoeing, horseback riding; may include active play areas.	No applicable standard	Sufficient width to protect the resources and provide maximum use	Variable	Built on natural corridors, such as utility right of ways, bluff lines, vegetation patterns, and roads, that link other components of the recreation system or community facilities, such as schools, libraries and other parks.	Arroyo Hike and Bike Trail, Harlingen
Special Use	Areas for specialized or single-purpose recreational activities, such as golf courses, natural centers, marinas, zoos conservatories, display gardens, arenas, outdoor theaters. Also, plazas or squares in or near commercial centers, boulevards, and parkways	No applicable standard	Variable depending on desired size	Variable	Within communities	Boat Ramp Park in Rio Hondo
Conservancy	Protection and management of the natural or cultural environment with recreational use as a secondary objective	No applicable standard	Sufficient to protect the resource	Variable	Variable, depending on the resource being protected.	Santa Anna National Wildlife Refuge

Source: NRPA-suggested classification system (Berke,Kaiser, Godschalk and Rodriguez, Urban Land Use Planning, University of Illinois Press, Fifth Edition.)

Facility Standards: In addition to size and location standards, standards are needed to determine what types of facilities should be provided in each of the City's parks. The NRPA provides one source of facility standards backed by years of research and implementation across the country. The State of Colorado study provides an alternate set of standards for towns of less than 10,000 residents. Colorado's consultants surveyed city governments and residents to determine citizen demand for park services as well as the capacity of typical park amenities in small towns (e.g. the number of people a playground can accommodate). The small-town standards are shown in *Table 10C*.

Table 10C: Small-Town Park Facility Standards

<u>Facility Type</u>	<u>Number of facilities per 1,000 residents</u>	<u>Acres required to accommodate 1 facility</u>	<u>Acreage required per 1,000 residents</u>
Soccer/multi-use fields	0.95	2.21	2.1
Baseball/softball fields	0.61	3.77	2.3
Tennis Courts	0.97	0.17	0.17
Basketball Courts	0.91	0.16	0.15
Volleyball Courts	0.13	0.1	0.01
Small skatepark (7000 sq ft.)	0.16	0.18	0.03
Full skate park (17,000 sq ft +)	0.06	0.5	0.03
BMX Track (Standard ABA Certified)	0.16	3.12	0.5
Paved Multi-Use Trail (per mile)	1.04	2.43	2.53
Dirt/Gravel Multi-Use Trail (per mile)	2.33	1.83	4.25
Playground (per 3200 sq. ft. of fully developed area)	0.16	0.14	0.02
Family Picnic Area	6.25	0.01	0.08
Group Picnic Area (with shelter)	0.36	2.06	0.74
Park Bench	7.69	0	0
Swimming Pool (outdoor)	0.12	0.34	0.04
Outdoor Events Venue (per acre)	0.42	3.19	1.34

Source: *Small Community Park & Recreation Planning Standards; 2003*, accessed at www.dola.state.co.us/osg/docs/Park%20Standards%20Report.pdf

For the purposes of the following recreation system analysis, the City uses a combination of NRPA and Colorado standards. Standards for courts, fields, playgrounds, walking trails and swimming pools were better articulated for the City in the Small Town standards. Football facilities, multi-recreation courts, and

golf courses are measured by the NRPA standards because they are not included in the Small-Town Standards. *Table 10D* incorporates both standards in a “Rio Hondo” standard and serves as one of the determining factors in decisions about future park needs.

Table 10D: City Facility Standards

Activity/ Facility	Facility Space /Land Space	Size and Dimensions	Orientation	Units per Capita	Service Radius	Notes
Basketball Court	7,000 SF/ 0.16 acres	46' – 50' x 84'	Long axis N-S	1 per 1,100*	¼-½ mile	Usually in school, recreation, or church facility. Safe walking or bike access. Outdoor courts in neighborhoods and community parks.
Racquetball or Handball Court	800 SF for 4-wall 1,000 SF for 3-wall	20' x 40'. Minimum 10' to rear of 3-wall court. Minimum 20' overhead clearance.	Long axis N-S Front wall at N	1 per 20,000†	15-30 minute travel time	4-wall usually indoor as part of multi-purpose facility. 3-wall usually outdoor in park or school setting
Tennis Court	Minimum 7,200 SF per court (0.17 acres)	36' x 78' with 12' clearance on both sides.	Long axis N-S	1 per 1,030*	¼-½ mile	Best in batteries of 2-4. Located in community or neighborhood park or near schools.
Volleyball Court	Minimum of 3,000 SF/0.1 acre	30' x 60' with 6' clearance on all sides.	Long axis N-S	1 per 7,540*	¼-½ mile	Usually in school, recreation, or church facility. Safe walking or bike access. Outdoor courts in neighborhoods and community parks.
Swimming Pool	Varies with size of pool and amenities. Usually 1/3 to 2 acres.	Teaching – min. of 25 yards x 45' even depth of 3-4 feet. Competitive – minimum of 25 x 16 m, minimum of 27 SF of water surface per swimmer. Deck to water ratio 2:1.	None, although care should be taken in siting lifeguard stations relative to afternoon sun.	1 per 8,250 residents*	15-30 minutes travel time.	Pools for general community use should be planned for teaching, competitive, and recreational purposes with enough depth (3.4m) to accommodate 1m and 3m diving boards. Located in community parks or school sites.

Table 10D: City Facility Standards (continued)

Activity/ Facility	Space Requirements	Size and Dimensions	Orientation	Units per Capita	Service Radius	Notes
Adult Baseball	3.0 to 3.85 acres	Baselines – 90' Pitching distance – 60 ½' Foul lines – 320' Center field – 400'	Locate home plate so pitcher throws across sun and batter not facing sun. Line from home plate to pitcher's mound runs east northeast.	1 per 1,670*	¼-½ mile	Part of neighborhood park. Lighted field part of community park.
Little League	1.2 acres	Baselines – 60' Pitching distance – 46' Foul lines – 200' Center field – 200-250'				
Softball	1.5 to 2.0 acres	Baselines – 60' Pitching distance – 46' or 40' for women Fast pitch field radius from plate – 225' between foul lines. Slow pitch – 275' or 250' for women.	Same as baseball.	1 per 5,000 if also used for youth baseball.†	¼-½ mile	Slight difference in dimensions for 16" slow pitch. May also be used for youth baseball.
Football	2 acres	160' x 360' with 6' clearance on all sides	Fall season, long axis NW-SE. For longer periods, N-S.	1 per 20,000†	15-30 minutes travel time	Usually part of a sports or school complex
Soccer / Multi-Use Field	1.7 - 2.2 acres	195-225' x 330-360'	Same as football	1 per 1,050*	1-2 miles	Number of units depends on popularity. Fields can be used for other informal rec areas.
Golf 9-hole 18-hole	50 acres min. 90 acres min.	Avg. length – 2,250 yds. Avg. length – 6,500 yds.	Majority of holes on N-S axis.	1 per 25,000† 1 per 50,000†	½-1 hour travel time	Accommodates 350 people per day. Accommodates 500-550 people per day.

Table 10D: City Facility Standards (continued)

Activity/ Facility	Space Requirements	Size and Dimensions	Orientation	Units per Capita	Service Radius	Notes
Multiuse Trails (Dirt/Gravel or paved)	N/A	Well-defined head, maximum 10' wide, maximum average grade of 5% not to exceed 15%.	N/A	Per mile: Unpaved - 430* Paved - 960*	N/A	Capacity: rural trail – 40 hikers per day per mile; urban trail – 90 hikers per day per mile.
¼ Mile Running Track	4.3 acres	Overall width – 276' Length – 600' Track width for 8 lanes is 32'	Long axis in sector from N-S to NW-SE with finish line at northerly end.	1 per 20,000 [†]	15 minute travel time	Usually part of a high school or in community park complex.
Small Skatepark	7,000 SF/ 0.16 acres		N/A	1 per 6,410*	15 min. travel time	Part of neighborhood park.
Playground	512 SF		N/A	1 per 1,000*	¼-½ mile	Part of neighborhood park.
Family Picnic Area	435 SF		N/A	1 per 160*	¼-½ mile	- 1 garbage can within 150 ft. of every 4 picnic tables
Group Picnic Area (Covered)	2 acres		N/A	1 per 2,780*	¼-½ mile	- 40 ft between picnic tables - picnic tables within 400 ft of parking
Bench			N/A	1 per 130*	N/A	Should be included with all park facilities.
Light Activity Area	Estimated 500 SF		N/A	1 per 1,000*	¼-½ mile	Could include facilities for horseshoe, shuffleboard, chess, meditation, or similar activity

Source: NRPA-suggested classification system (Berke, Kaiser, Godschalk and Rodriguez, Urban Land Use Planning, University of Illinois Press, Fifth Edition.); and *Small Community Park & Recreation Planning Standards*; 2003, accessed at www.dola.state.co.us/osg/docs/Park%20Standards%20Report.pdf

[†] - indicates that units per capita came from national/large city standards

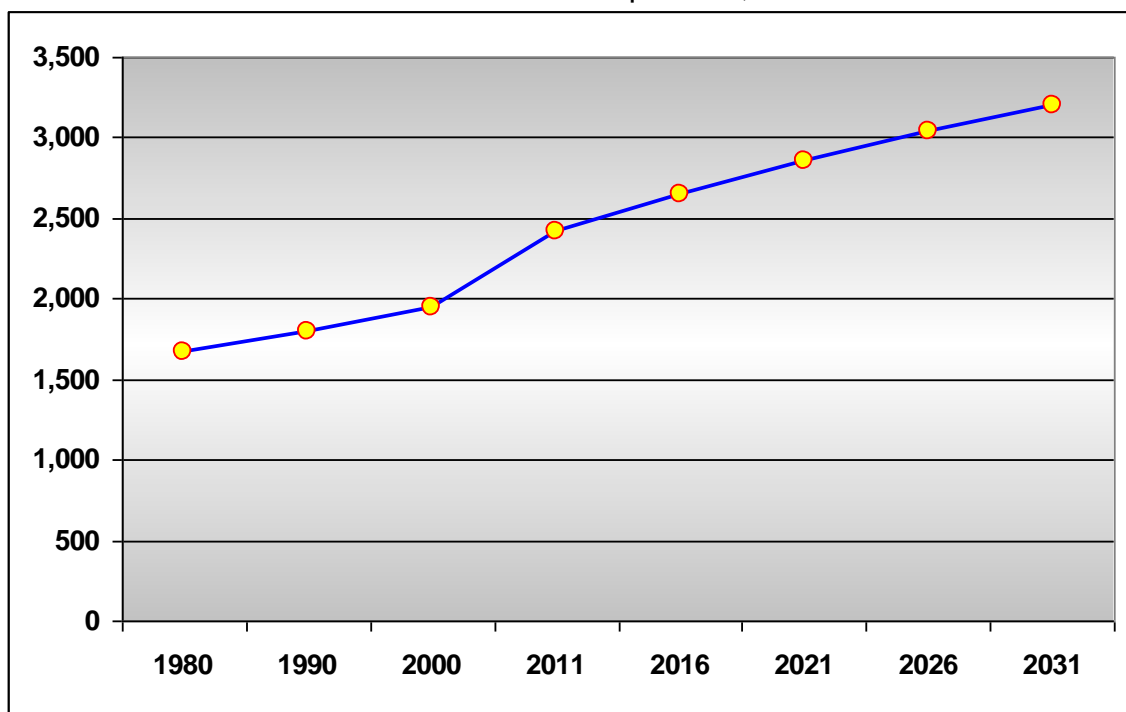
* - indicates that units per capita came small community standards

10.4 Recreational and Open Space Analysis

Demographic Analysis: Demographic analysis is useful in parks and recreation planning because future community facilities and services depend on the size and rate of the community's growth. Population projections and analysis are explored at length in *Chapter 2* of this Plan.

Population projections: The US Census reports that Rio Hondo had a population of 2,356 for the year 2010; this represents an increase of 21.3% from the 2000 census. During the same time period, the population of Cameron County experienced a similar increase, 21.2%. Historically, the population of Rio Hondo has continually increased since 1970. The highest growth rate, 43.1%, occurred between the years 1970 and 1980 following a slight decline in population between the years 1960 and 1970. The City's Comprehensive Plan projects that the population will grow as high as 3,200 by the end of the planning period.

Chart 10A: Forecasted Population, 1980 -2032



Source: Texas State Data Center's State Population Estimates combined with Cohort-component method calculations and Texas Water Development Board 2011 County and City Population Projections and city population estimate based on the 2011 windshield survey of houses.

Race/Ethnicity: More than three-quarters of Rio Hondo's population identified themselves as Hispanic in the 2010 Census. Race and ethnicity of the City's population according to the 2000 and 2010 Census is detailed in *Table 10E*. This table uses data from US Census Reports for 2000 and 2010 and shows the racial and ethnic composition of the City. While the population reports itself as being 85% Hispanic, races other than White make up less than 1 percent of the population. This indicates that Rio Hondo has a fairly homogenous population base. Racial and ethnic percentages for Cameron County are about the same as for Rio Hondo in each category. The City and County Hispanic/Latino residents comprise a much larger percentage of the population than the State's Hispanic/Latino population percentage (37.6%). In addition, the City and County African American population comprises a much smaller percentage than the State's African American population (11.8%). The City should ensure that input on park needs is drawn from all racial and ethnic groups. For this plan, students of all races who

attend the Rio Hondo Junior High School were included as those surveyed about park needs.

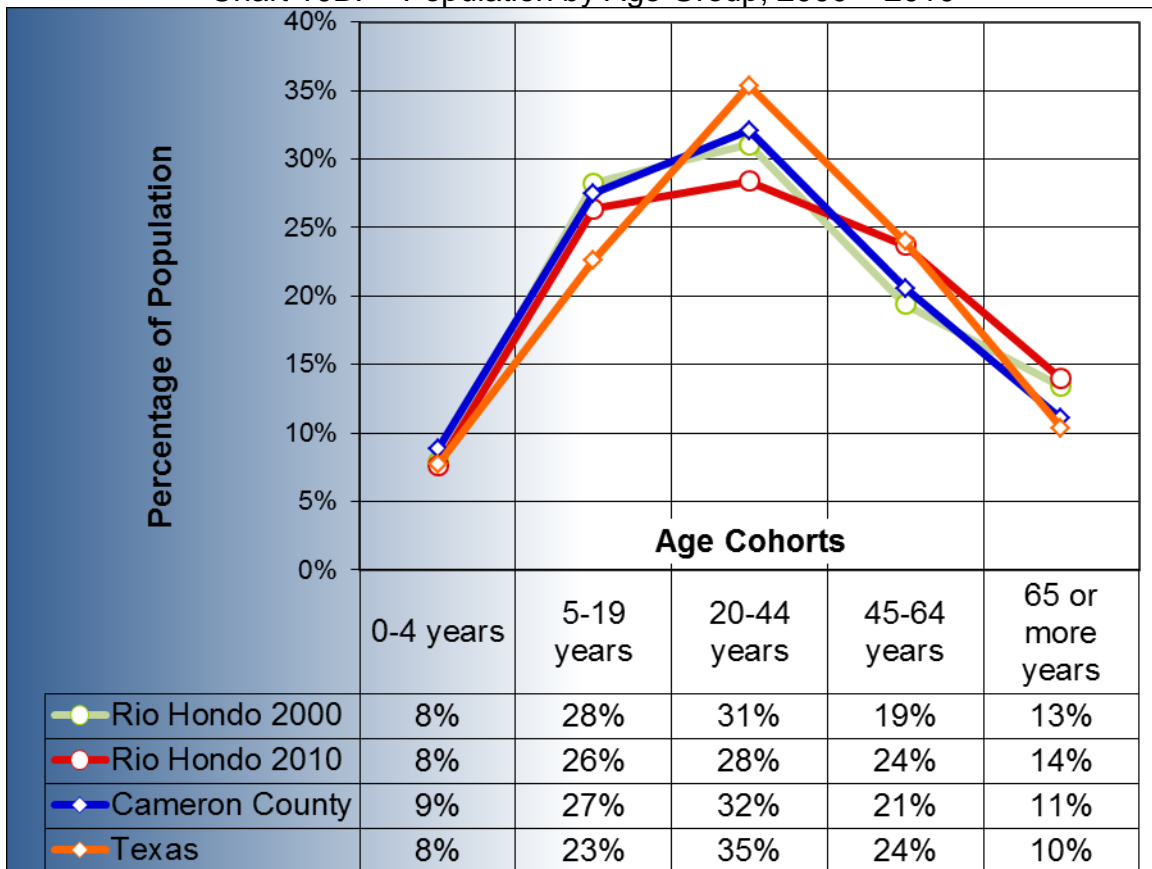
Table 10E: Population by Race & Ethnicity, 2000-2010

Characteristic	Rio Hondo				Cameron County	
	2000		2010		2010	
Characteristic	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Total Population	1,942	100%	2,356	100%	406,220	100%
White	1499	77.2%	2,125	90.2%	353,423	87.0%
Black or African American	1	0.1%	12	0.5%	2,155	0.5%
American Indian, Alaskan Native	5	0.3%	7	0.3%	1,688	0.4%
Asian	7	0.4%	2	0.1%	2,689	0.7%
Native Hawaiian / Other Pacific Islander	1	0.1%	1	0.0%	113	0.0%
Other	398	20.5%	190	8.1%	39,905	9.8%
Two or More Races	33	1.7%	19	0.8%	6,247	1.5%
Hispanic or Latino	1607	82.7%	1,990	84.5%	357,747	88.1%

Source: 2000 and 2010 Censuses of Population and Housing, Summary Population and Housing Characteristics and Summary Social, Economic, and Housing Characteristics

Age: The City's population reflects a mix of ages, not unlike that of the State of Texas as a whole. More than one-third of its population is over the age of 45, and about one-third is students or preschoolers. Its distribution of residents is similar to that of the state with the exception that a slightly higher percentage of seniors live in Rio Hondo than in Texas as a whole. This may be a reflection of Winter Texans who choose to live seasonally in Rio Hondo or of residents aging in place in the City. Since the population reflects a mix of ages, Rio Hondo's parks should offer amenities and activities that accommodate a wide range of ages.

Chart 10B: Population by Age Group, 2000 – 2010



Source: 2000 and 2010 Census of Population and Housing, Summary Population and Housing Characteristics

Elderly Population: The Lower Rio Grande Valley’s natural attributes offer a variety of activities for the senior population, including birding, fishing, boating, hunting and beach activity. The City’s Boat Ramp Park offers a place where residents can launch boats into the Arroyo Colorado and fish off a small pier. Its other two city parks also offer opportunities for walking and picnicking, activities often desired by seniors. To improve facilities in their existing parks for seniors, the City surveyed seniors who participate in activities at the City’s Senior Center. Older residents reported that they use the senior center and the County Park most for recreation. Surveys filled out by seniors indicate that they may spend recreational time with grandchildren. Many said that more playgrounds are needed in the City or that they spent time watching their grandchildren play baseball at Rio Hondo County Park or in Harlingen. They also said that they used

the 1/2-mile walking trail at the Rio Hondo County Park. The seniors listed more parking, playground equipment, and covered picnic areas as items needed to improve parks. The City has few handicap-accessible spaces located near the Senior Center. The County Park has four handicapped parking spots.

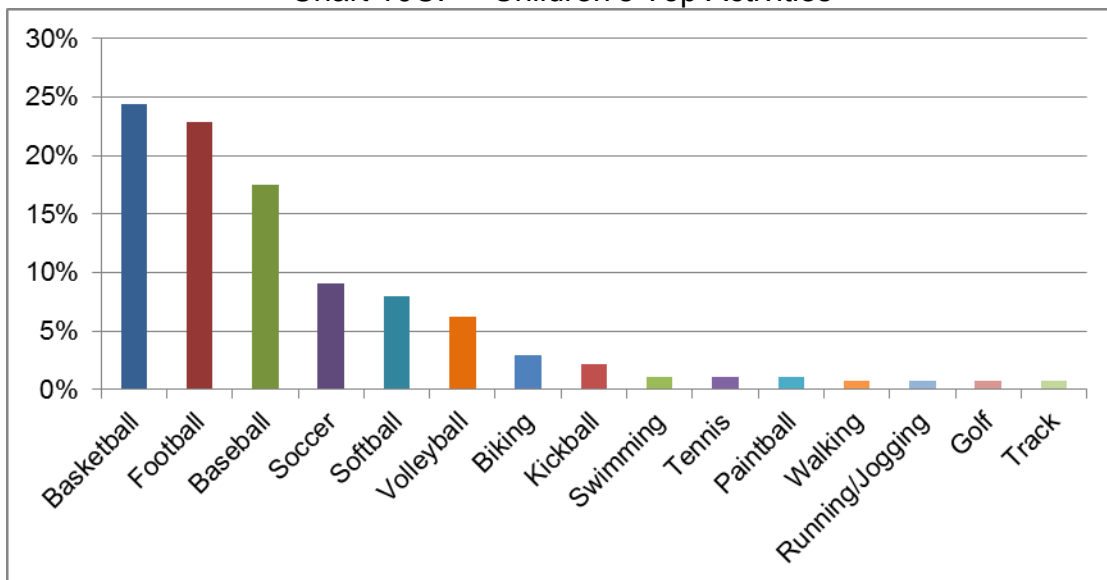
Income: Low wages, high unemployment and low income per capita in Cameron County make it questionable as to whether residents would have disposable income to support future park expansions with fees, bonds, or higher property taxes. Average weekly wages in Cameron County at the beginning of 2010 were \$532, more than a third less than the state average of \$892. In addition, unemployment in Cameron County rose to 11.35% in 2010 compared to the State's 8.45% rate. The 2009 American Community Survey reported the median annual household income as \$25,850 compared to the Statewide figure of \$48,199. Per capita income reported locally in the 2009 American Community Survey was roughly half that of the State, \$12,106 per year locally compared to approximately \$24,318 Statewide.

Needs Assessment & Identification: The City used the three needs assessment techniques (demand, standards, and resources) suggested by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department in developing this section. The demand-based approach relies on information gathered through surveys to indicate the desires of local residents for park and recreational facilities and services. The standards-based approach uses established NRPA and City standards to determine the number and types of facilities and the amount of park area required to meet the City's needs. The resource-based approach identifies assets and resources that could be used for open space, parks, and recreation facilities.

Demand Based Approach: The demand-based assessment is focused on a survey distributed at Rio Hondo Middle School during the spring of 2011 and a survey distributed at the Rio Hondo Senior Center during the summer of 2011. One hundred

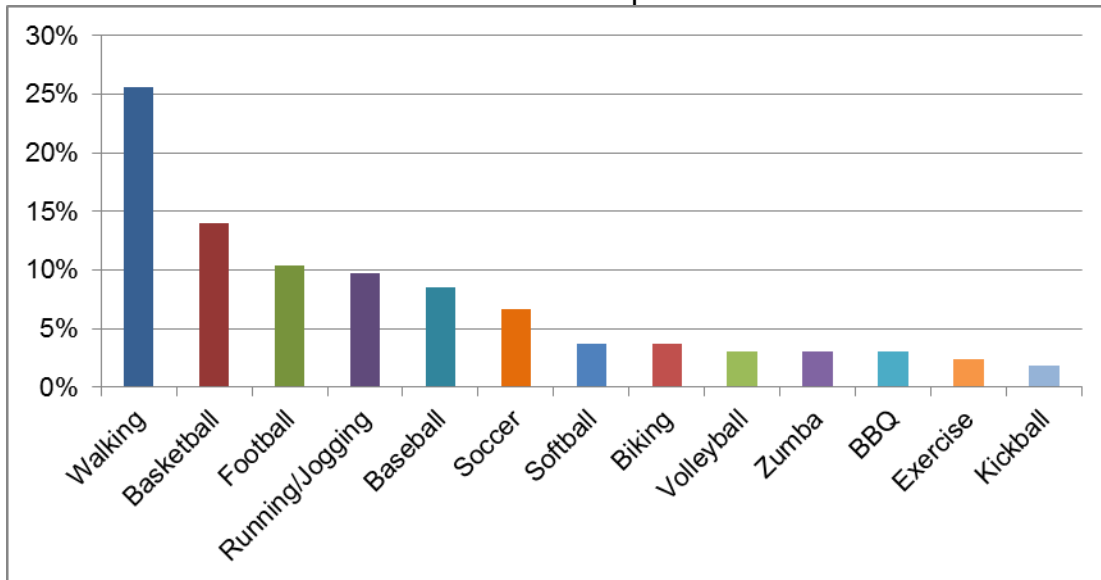
ninety-three surveys were returned. Data gathered from the surveys identified common recreational activities of adults and children, favorite parks and needed improvements, and desired additional recreational facilities. In general, survey respondents gave high scores to the construction of a public swimming pool and maintenance of basketball courts and covered picnic areas. In addition, survey respondents asked for updated playground equipment at city parks to improve safety and to increase activities to appeal to a wide variety of ages and abilities of residents. Middle school respondents showed interest in paintball and bowling facilities as “other” recreational facilities and seniors identified the need for more parking at city parks. Chart 10C: *Children’s Top Activities* and Chart 10D: *Adults’ Top Activities* show the activities children and adults currently participate in and the percentage of respondents participating in each activity. Top activities for children include basketball, football, and baseball whereas the top activity for adults is walking followed by basketball, football, and jogging. Throughout the community, organized sports such as basketball and baseball are popular with children and adults alike. Adults also enjoy a variety of activities that take advantage of open spaces around Rio Hondo, such as walking, biking, and BBQing.

Chart 10C: Children’s Top Activities



Source: GrantWorks community recreation survey, 2011

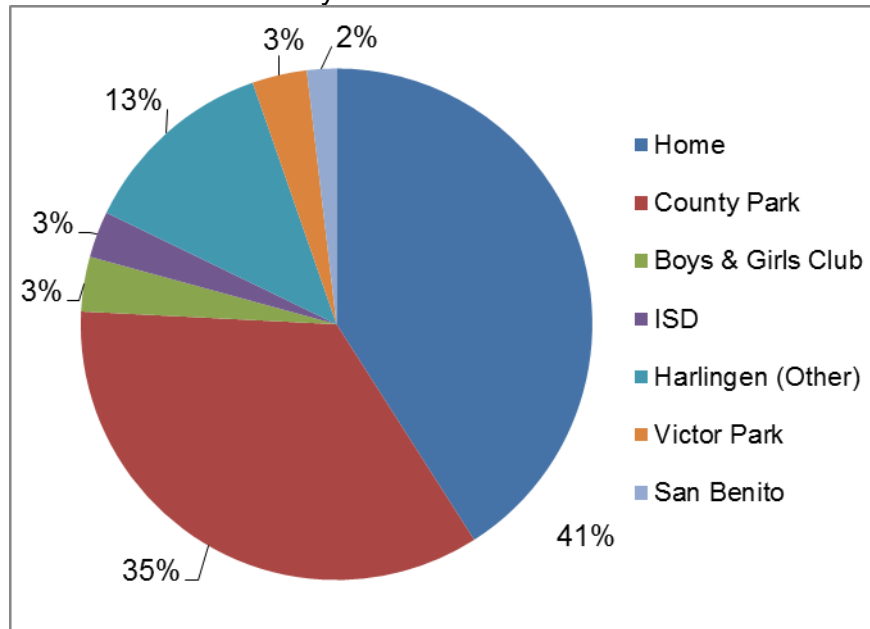
Chart 10D Adults' Top Activities



Source: GrantWorks community recreation survey, 2011

Most of the activities children and adults participate in are based from their homes and neighborhoods, indicating that children utilize back yards, the streets or local open spaces in their neighborhoods. 35% of respondents utilize the open space at County Park for a variety of activities including basketball, walking, baseball, and football. A significant percentage, 18%, travels to Harlingen or San Benito for recreational activities. In addition to Victor Park, respondents identified Arroyo Park, Harlingen Soccer Complex, and Fair Park as “Other” recreational destinations in Harlingen.

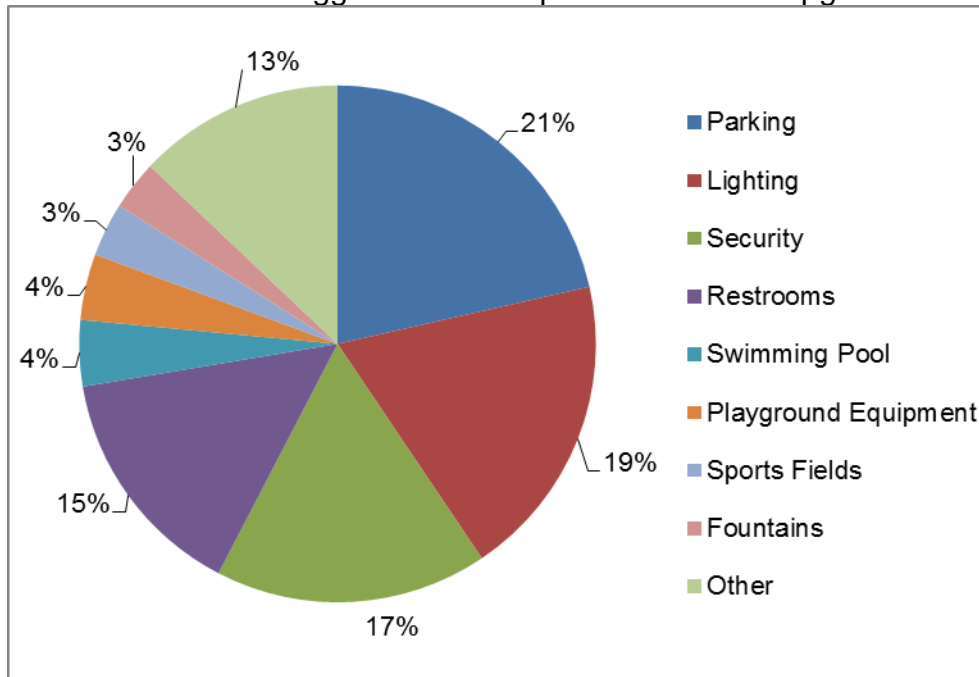
Chart 10E: Activity Locations for Children and Adults



Source: GrantWorks community recreation survey, 2011

The survey asked citizens if existing parks in Rio Hondo should be upgraded, and respondents were asked to mark “strongly agree”, “agree”, “disagree”, or “strongly disagree.” 79% of respondents stated that they strongly agree that the facilities should be upgraded or improved, 16% agreed, 1% disagreed, and 4% strongly disagreed. Twenty-eight people did not respond to this question. Survey respondents were also asked to write down specific improvements they would like to see to the park system. *Chart 12H* identifies the most common suggestions. The majority of comments pertained to improving and adding parking, lighting, security, and restroom facilities at the City’s parks. Suggestions that fall in the “Other” category include improvements to basketball courts, the addition of a bowling alley, miniature golf course and skate park, as well as improvements to park benches, shade, and trash maintenance. Other popular suggestions were additions to and maintenance of playground equipment focusing on more activities for children as well as a swimming pool.

Chart 10F: Suggestions for Improvements and Upgrades



Source: GrantWorks community recreation survey, 2011

The final two questions on the survey asked the respondents to identify and rank additional recreational facilities that they would like to have in Rio Hondo. Question 6 asked the respondent if a specific facility was “very important”, “somewhat important”, or “not important.” The responses were weighted; “very important” received three points, “somewhat important” received two points, and “not important” received minus one point. The resulting scores are shown in *Table 10F*. Respondents considered adding a swimming pool and improving playground equipment as most important. While there are currently a total of seven playscapes in the City of Rio Hondo, four are located at Rio Hondo Elementary School leaving only two at County Park and one at City Hall Park. Improving and adding basketball courts also scored high as it is the top activity for children. Adding covered picnic areas and improving Hike/Jogging/Bike trails ranked in the top five for additional recreation facilities.

Table 10F: Additional Recreation Facilities

Facility	Total Responses			Weighted Score
	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important	
Swimming Pool	143	13	27	428
Playground	118	23	29	371
Basketball Courts	121	15	30	363
Covered Picnic Area	109	33	30	363
Hike/Jogging/ Bike Trail	99	44	30	355
Recreation Center	111	30	38	355
Softball/ Baseball Field	108	27	31	347
Volleyball Courts	107	28	33	344
Outdoor Picnic Area	97	40	36	335
Soccer Field	86	36	43	287
Outdoor Tennis Courts	71	55	41	282
Golf Course	63	53	54	241

Source: GrantWorks community recreation survey, 2011

In addition to the activities in Table 10F, respondents were asked to record up to two other additional recreation facilities not provided in the above list. 17% of respondents who provided a response desire a paint ball facility and 11% would like the addition of a bowling alley and miniature golf course. 11% also expressed the need for additional parking facilities and both County Park and City Hall Park. Other popular responses were a football field (9%), concessions (8%), and a skate park (5%).

The final question asked the respondent to list the three most important facilities identified in question 6. The scores were weighted and are shown in *Table 10G*. Each first place vote received three points, second received two points and third received one point. Responses to this survey question differ slightly from the rating in the previous table. Consistent with the previous table, citizens of Rio Hondo strongly prioritize a new swimming pool. The second and third prioritized additional facilities were improvements to basketball courts and expanded parking. A Recreation center and a food court were also top priorities stated in survey responses. While playground equipment received the

second highest score in *Table 10F*, it ranked 6th in terms of prioritized additional facilities. The prioritized facilities answers indicate that Rio Hondo residents strongly value the addition of a public swimming pool, a facility that should be considered during the planning period.

Table10F: Prioritized Additional Facilities (all surveys)

Facility	Total Responses			Weighted Score
	First Priority	Second Priority	Third Priority	
Swimming Pool	64	30	13	265
Basketball Courts	13	11	9	70
Parking	23	0	0	69
Recreation Center	10	8	7	53
Food Court	8	9	4	46
Playground	5	8	7	38
Volleyball Courts	2	11	8	36
Soccer Field	2	11	7	35
Paint Ball	8	4	2	34
Football Field	4	6	3	27
Hike/ Jogging/ Bike Trail	3	0	11	20
Outdoor Picnic Area	2	5	4	20
Covered Picnic Area	2	2	9	19
Softball/Baseball Field	4	3	0	18
Golf Course	0	4	8	16

Source: GrantWorks community recreation survey, 2011

Like children, seniors have particular recreational needs. They are often less mobile than other adults and need activities they are physically capable of participating in either actively (e.g. walking, swimming) or passively (e.g. watching sports). The recreational facilities judged most important by households with seniors are: parking, playground, swimming pool, and covered picnic areas. *Table 10H* shows the ranking as top priority established by senior households according to the same methods used for the preceding prioritized additional facilities table.

Table 10G: Seniors Additional Facilities Priority Ranking

Facility	Ranked as Top Priority
Parking	1st
Playground	2nd
Swimming Pool	3rd
Covered Picnic Area	3rd
Softball/Baseball Field	4th
Golf Course	5th
Larger Park	5th
Outdoor Picnic Area	6th
Recreation Center	6th

Standards Based Approach: The standards-based assessment uses community attributes such as the current and future population of the community, acreage devoted to parks and open space, and the number of households within the service area of the recreational areas to determine the recreational needs of the community.

Needs based on Population. The following table identifies the City’s existing and future needs based upon the population growth and standards for facilities described earlier in the chapter. The City does not meet any standards currently, despite it having two parks in town. To meet demands based on population, Rio Hondo will need to plan to add many facilities throughout the planning period.

Table 10H: Facilities Standards & Existing Facilities Comparison

Facility	Existing*		Additional Facilities Needed		
	Existing	Suggested	Needed In 2012	Suggested for 2032	Needed in 2032
Basketball	1	2	1	3	2
Baseball/Softball	3	4	1	5	2
Soccer	1	2	1	3	2
Tennis	0	2	2	3	3
Group Picnic Areas (covered)	2	7	5	9	7

Family Picnic Areas	11	<u>15</u>	4	<u>20</u>	9
Playgrounds	3	<u>4</u>	1	<u>5</u>	2
Running track/walking trail (per mile)	1.5	<u>2</u>	1	<u>3</u>	2
Swimming Pool	0	<u>0</u>	0	<u>0</u>	0
Volleyball Court	0	<u>2</u>	2	<u>3</u>	3
Football	0	<u>0</u>	0	<u>0</u>	0

**Number based on facilities with public hours. Private and RHISD facilities are not included as they are not open to the public for use. The exception is the middle school track which is open for public use. Source: GrantWorks field survey, 2010 and NRPA-suggested classification system (Kaiser, Godschalk and Chapin, Urban Land Use Planning, University of Illinois Press.) and Small Community Park & Recreation Planning Standards; 2003, accessed at www.dola.state.co.us/osg/docs/Park%20Standards%20Report.pdf*

Acreage. Level of service is the term used to describe the importance or the role of a park system in a community and is expressed in acres of useable parkland per 1,000 persons. The level of service for parks and open space is based on useable space; therefore, undeveloped parkland is not included. Due to policies restricting the availability of use by the general public, the acreage of private recreational facilities, such as golf courses and public school campuses, are typically not used. Therefore, *Table 10L: Existing Parks Level of Service* does not include the RHISD campuses. Typically, levels of service ranging from 5 acres to 15 acres of developed park land per 1,000 people are targeted. ***The City of Rio Hondo has a LOS of 8 acres of developed parkland per 1000 residents.*** In 2012, it was attempting to purchase 4.4 acres of parkland south of Boat Ramp Park and develop it to double that park's size. If that park is developed, the City's developed acres per 1,000 residents would increase to 11. However, if the city grew to its projected 3,200 residents, it would fall back to 8 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. To maintain at least 10 acres of parkland per resident, the city would need to increase its park acreage by 5 acres (after the 4.4-acre Boat Ramp Park acquisition) during the planning period. Alternatively, it could establish joint-use/maintenance agreements with the Rio Hondo ISD to ensure access to residents after-school and/or on weekends of facilities like walking/running tracks and

tennis courts. Uses for residents at the schools could supply at least 2 acres, including the basketball court at the junior high school (which fronts Colorado Avenue); the junior high school track at Reynolds and Robert Garza Streets; and the tennis courts at the High School campus.

Table 10I: Existing Parks, Level of Service

Facility	Park Type	Desirable Size	Total Acres	Dev'd Acres	Service Area (Miles)	Households in Service Area*	%s
City Hall Park	Neighborhood	1	0.6	0.6	0.25	126	15%
Boat Ramp Park	Special Use	Varies	8.8	6.6	0.50	361	44%
Rio Hondo Community Park	Community	15+	14	12.6	0.50	359	43%
Total Acreage			23	20			
Population – 2,393 (2011 est)							
Level of Service (Acres of park per 1,000 residents)			10	8			
Level of Service Future			7	6			

Source: GrantWorks field survey, 2011, *Total number of households – 826 inside the city limits
 ** includes land acquired by City in 2011 for park expansion

Service Areas. The standards-based assessment also determines recreation needs in the community based upon the service area of the community's parks. The service area refers to the area formed by a predetermined radius extending out from the park that would typically serve the surrounding population. Using NRPA standards, the service area for a community park is 2 miles or the whole community, a neighborhood park is ½ mile and mini-park is a ¼ mile, the typical distance one would walk to get to the park.

The City's recreational facilities are located in the northwestern and southern part of the City, leaving the northeastern part of the City lacking parks. As the City grows it should be aware that residents in far north Rio Hondo and about 85 households just outside the city's limits in its ETJ residents are not located within a service area. Figure 10I illustrates the service areas of the Rio Hondo park system: County Park (1/2-mile), City Hall Park (1/4 mile), and Boat Ramp Park (1/2-mile) The graphic shows the outline of

the service area and the houses and neighborhoods that fall within the service areas. Of those located homes near a park, about 350 (43%) are located within a quarter-mile of a city or county-owned facility, an easy walking distance. See Figure 10J.

Figure 10I: Park Service Areas

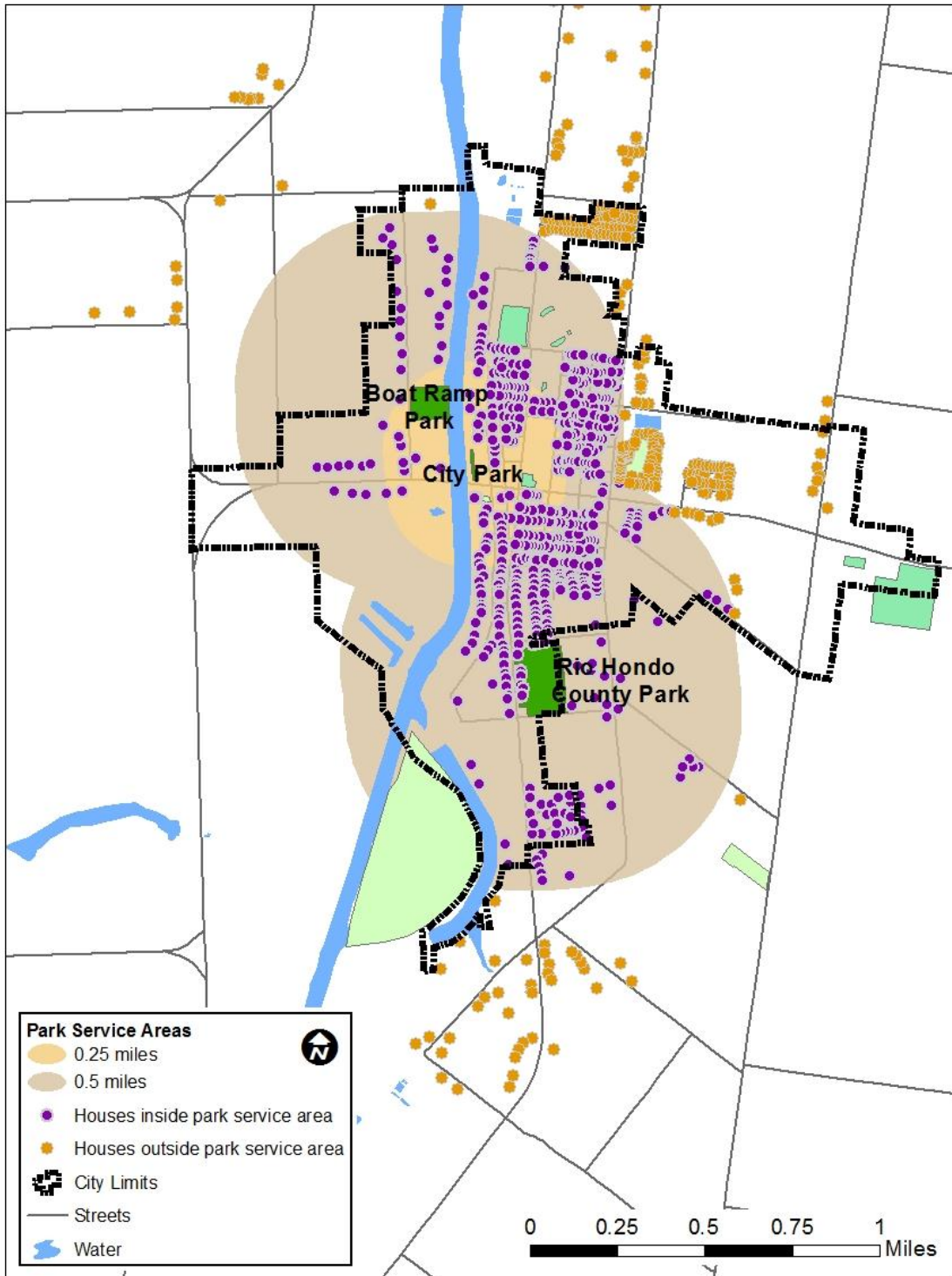
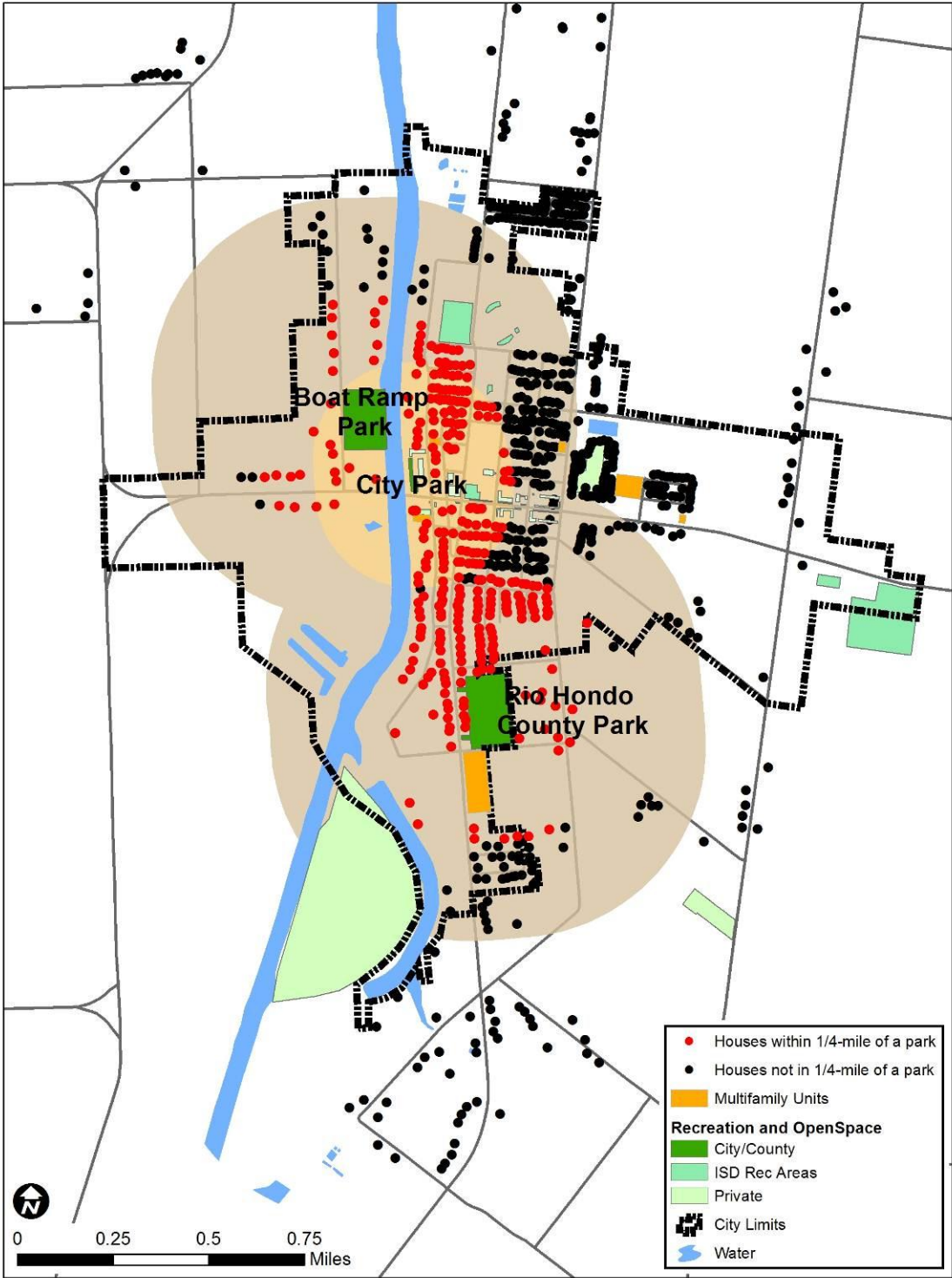


Figure 10J: Homes, 1/4-mile from a park



The Junior High track and football complex on Reynolds and Robert Garza Streets was not designated a park area because the school district has the right to control use of the facility by the public. Adults have access to the track after school and on weekends, but no one may play on the field. If this facility were added a few more homes in northern Rio Hondo would be located within a service area. The City does not have any agreements with the school district related to joint use by residents and students. Six tennis courts at the high school are not available for non-school use.

Joint Use Agreements: Many communities nationwide have expanded recreational opportunities available to their residents through informal or formal access given by school districts to public school playgrounds and facilities after school hours. In Texas, the “board of trustees of an independent school district may adopt rules to keep school campuses, including school libraries, open for recreational activities, latchkey programs, and tutoring after school hours”¹³. Both Federal and State governments are working to encourage joint use agreements. The Texas Department of State Health Services received 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds to support obesity prevention. As part of that project, the Department is working in eight (8) communities to establish joint use agreements between schools and local governments.

Joint use agreements between schools and cities can be a significant cost-saving alternative to construction or expansion of city parks. Although not as common, joint-use agreements can also be created between cities and churches or other private institutions with recreational spaces. Unfortunately, schools and private entities are not always willing to allow public access to school property because of concerns regarding cost, vandalism, maintenance, liability in the case of injury, and student safety.

The most common concern, liability in the case of injury, is not unjustified; however, Texas law limits the liability of a landowner for recreational activities¹⁴ and for tort

¹³ Education Code, Title 2, Chapter 11, Sec. 11.165

¹⁴ Civil Practice and Remedies Code, Title 4, Chapter 75

claims¹⁵. Public agencies such as schools and cities are specifically protected from the majority of potential lawsuits. As discussed in a recent summary of court cases available from Texas A&M University, the burden on a governmental unit is fairly low; it must prove that it has not been “grossly negligent” in its responsibility to warn of risks on its property¹⁶.

Liability, indemnification, and insurance considerations are an essential part of any joint use agreement, as are procedures such as cost-sharing, additional security, and similar tools to handle other concerns felt by schools. The National Policy & Legal Analysis Network to Prevent Child Obesity has assembled extensive research and information regarding joint use agreements on their website (www.nplanonline.org). Model joint use agreements and the steps to put a successful agreement in place are located on their website, and digital copies have been included on the CD accompanying these planning studies. A copy of the agreement between the City of Laredo and Laredo ISD is also located on the CD.

Resource-based assessment: The top recreational priorities established by the demand and standards-based assessments are a need for more playgrounds, picnic areas, ball fields, lighting, parking and another park to serve northern area residents. In addition, the City may need 3 additional acres of land to meet national park standards. It plans to expand Boat Ramp Park four acres, leaving planning for two acres during the planning period.

Recreational and Open Space Deficiencies: Discussions at public meetings, resident surveys, interviews of City and not-for-profit organization leaders, and the application of the previously mentioned standards, identified the following needs with existing recreation facilities.

¹⁵ Civil Practice and Remedies Code, Title 5, Chapter 101

¹⁶ Fambrough, J. (2011). Welcome (But Watch Out). *Legal Issues*. Retrieved from <http://recenter.tamu.edu/pdf/1967.pdf>

1. **Addition** of playground equipment, lighting and covered and uncovered picnic areas at existing parks.
2. **Development** of newly-acquired acreage at Boat Ramp Park and undeveloped acreage at County Park to increase the amount of developed acreage per 1,000 persons in the City to national standards;
3. **Addition** of three acres of parkland to include playgrounds, walking areas, picnic areas and, possibly, a swimming pool or water feature.

This could be accomplished by:

- a) Expanding City Park facilities to front Colorado Avenue and create a scenic view of the Arroyo (.2 acres)
 - b) Developing a Mini-park downtown (.1 acres)
 - c) Development of a Mini-park in northeast Rio Hondo provided by City or new developers (.5 acres), if increased development occurs there.
 - d) Addition of parkland to Rio Hondo County Park by purchasing land that fronts Reynolds; land east of the park; or land south of Parkway east of the apartment complex (.5 to 5 acres)
 - e) Development of shore land currently owned by the Port of Harlingen on the Montgomery Reservoir near the cemetery in southwestern Rio Hondo (2-5 acres)
 - f) Development of a constructed wetland/birding center on the east side of the Arroyo Colorado at the City's Wastewater Treatment Plant
4. **Addition** of a swimming facility to accommodate all ages. The residents' desire for a swimming pool may be addressed by the addition of a park water feature or the development of a swimming hole in the Montgomery Reservoir.

Priorities were determined based on high scoring from surveys for that type of project, available funding and ease of project completion, whether the project can serve multiple comprehensive plan goals besides recreation including economic development, and downtown development; and ability of Rio Hondo to implement and maintain projects versus the need to construct and maintain facilities with other entities. Those that Rio

Hondo could implement themselves received higher priority. The priorities for the Park Plan are as follows.

Table 10J: Recreation and Open Space Construction Priorities

Priority 1:	Rebuild Boat Ramp Park: Enlarge boat ramp and parking; repair boat ramp and pier; Purchase 2.2-acre lot south of park to expand park size in the future. (Funded through TPW, \$135,000 plus city match of \$45,000)
Priority 2:	Expansion of Boat Ramp Park: Purchase additional 2-acre tract south of 2011 park expansion. Build out 5-acre undeveloped portion of the park with a kayak-launch, improved pier, bird-watching areas, interpretive/natural playscape and restroom to complement bird-watching habitat, and covered picnic areas for boaters/residents.
Priority 3:	Buildout of Rio Hondo County Park: Development of a Shetland-size field; addition of 40 parking spaces, including handicapped accessible spaces; expand walking trail ¼-mile around soccer field; construct indoor recreation center with basketball court. (Possible FEMA funding for recreation center to double as an emergency storm shelter).
Priority 4:	Expansion and upgrade of City Park: Replace existing back fence with a scenic view area, including attractive railing, lighting and picnic areas that overlook the Arroyo and Boat Ramp Park; Build a pavilion and/or other picnic areas next to the fire station and add murals or art that catches the eye from Colorado Avenue, upgrade all playground equipment with playscapes and/or a sand volleyball court to serve a variety of ages.
Priority 5:	Develop Downtown Mini-Park: Purchase land for a parking lot/mini park to serve more residents, including seniors; and attract tourists to downtown. Alternatively, lease vacant land and create a community garden that would attract residents to downtown.
Priority 5:	Develop a Resaca swimming hole park: Work with the Port of Harlingen to purchase or lease land near the Resaca dam to improve a former city pavilion and swimming area. Project would need an improved pedestrian or vehicle bridge connecting a parking area at Arroyo and Parkway to the facility across the dam or allowing for parking inside the Port of Harlingen property; improvement of the dilapidated overgrown pavilion on the Resaca bank; and installation of rope swings.

10.5 Recreation and Open Space Plan

The following plan outlines projects the City should strive to achieve on a short-term basis within the first five years of the planning period and on a long-term basis. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department recommends that Park and Recreation plans be updated every five years to reflect changing realities in recreation trends, participation, area population and funding. This plan fulfills TP&W funding application requirements until 2017. In 2017, a plan update would be required to qualify for additional TP&W grants. An update would include revised goals and objectives that raise items of lower priority to higher priority as higher priority items are accomplished; a new facility inventory; and a new survey. In 2022, a new plan would be required.

Goals and Objectives: Rio Hondo's park plan provides a foundation for the development of future park and recreation facilities in the community. To realize this vision for the future, actions prescribed by this plan must relate to the specific goals that the citizens of Rio Hondo hope to achieve. In this plan, citizens and leaders contributed to the goals and the objectives listed below through public meetings related to community development, informal discussions with local residents, and officials' input at all stages of the planning process.

Goal 1: Rio Hondo will have a park system that provides recreation opportunity for residents of all ages

Short-term Objective 1.1 By 2016, build out Rio Hondo Boat Ramp Park to include activities for all ages.

Policy 1.1.1: By 2012, expand existing boat ramp and parking areas and purchase expansion tract with Texas Parks and Wildlife funds and local match.

Policy 1.1.2: By mid-2012, apply for Texas Parks and Wildlife Funds to complete Boat Ramp Park expansion including a kayak launch, restrooms, and picnic areas. CIAP land purchase may be able to serve as match.

Policy 1.1.3: By 2013, complete CIAP project to purchase more property for park expansion and re-plant native species on acquired property to stabilize bank of Arroyo Colorado in that location.

Policy 1.1.4: By 2014, complete third phase of boat ramp project around the kayak launch, including a fishing pier.

Policy 1.1.5: By 2016, find funding for materials and volunteers to construct a natural playscape area to complement birding/habitat areas in the park. This could include a life-size birdhouse, water element and climbing boulders, ropes or logs. (Phase 4, \$40,000).

Policy 1.1.6: Attract more birds to the area by constructing a small-scale wetland at the City's wastewater treatment plant.

Short-term Objective 1.2 By 2020, increase offerings at Rio Hondo County Park for seniors and youth.

Policy 1.2.1: By 2014, work with RH ISD to develop Joint Use agreements for use by residents of walking tracks, tennis courts, open fields to be used for soccer and junior high basketball court after school or on weekends.

Policy 1.2.2: By 2014, adopt subdivision regulation amendments that require developers to build parks or donate land or fees for parks.

Policy 1.2.3: By 2015, extend the concrete walking trail ¼-mile around the soccer field at Rio Hondo County Park to extend walking exercise for older residents. The extension should include fitness stations and benches so that seniors and others can rest as needed.

Policy 1.2.4: By 2016, determine scale of project the City can build to add a basketball court and increase parking at the Rio Hondo County Park. The strategy will depend on the availability of FEMA funds to construct an emergency shelter that would double as an indoor recreation center. If that facility is not built, the city should build a second basketball court and/or volleyball courts; and parking that includes several handicapped-accessible spaces.

Policy 2.1.1: By 2018, build a new Shetland size field to allow 4 – 6 year-olds to participate in baseball and t-ball play.

Long-term Objective 1.3: By 2032, determine if an old city park on Port of Harlingen property by the Resaca can be re-built and build it, if advisable.

Policy 1.3.1: By 2025, discuss leasing and/or purchasing property from the Port of Harlingen in the area where old park was located.

Policy 1.3.2: By 2027, work with area partners like the Port Authority and the Economic Development District of the LRGVDC to find funding to build a pedestrian or vehicular bridge across the dam to provide access to the City's former swimming hole.

Policy 1.3.3: By 2029, design bridge and build it.

Policy 1.3.4: By 2032, determine a plan for funding to re-build dilapidated, over-grown pavilion and rustic swimming infrastructure.

Goal 2: Rio Hondo has park facilities that entertain and attract tourists and Winter Texans

Short-term Objective 2.1: By 2016, complete improvements in Objective 1.1 to make boat ramp park more user friendly to attract boaters and bird watchers to Rio Hondo.

Short-term Objective 2.2: By 2015, purchase or work with downtown property owners to develop a mini-park or community garden downtown.

Long-term Objective 2.3: By 2025, make City Park behind City Hall a recreation destination to draw visitors (residents and tourists) to the CBD.

Policy 2.3.1: By 2020, replace the slatted fence with a railing and/or platform that provides an overlook of the Arroyo Colorado from the Park. Include an educational, historical exhibit about how Arroyo Colorado canal was created and its place in the intercoastal waterway. Signage should be placed on Colorado Avenue to direct visitors to the overlook and parking behind the library.

Policy 2.3.2: By 2025, add a pavilion/picnic area to open space just north of the lift-span bridge and just south of the City Fire Station to provide an attractive entryway into the City.

Policy 2.3.3: By 2025, replace the playscape and add picnic tables, a volleyball court and other recreation items in the existing City Hall Park area.

Table 10K: Recreation and Open Space Improvements, 2012-2032

Phase/Year	Capital Projects	Estimated Cost	Source of Funds
1 2012	Improve Boat Ramp Park: Purchase 2.2 acres of land south of the existing park to increase size of the park. Renovate Boat Ramp and parking lot to facilitate and increase the number of boat launches.	\$180,000 (Funded)	EDC, TP&W, TxCDBG, GEN

<p style="text-align: center;">2 2013</p>	<p>Improve Boat Ramp Park: Purchase a second 2.2 acre tract of property to preserve Arroyo Colorado shore/native habitat and replant native shrubs/trees for bank and habitat stabilization Expand project to east side of the Arroyo at the Wastewater Treatment Plant to construct a wetland that to attract more wildlife for viewing in Rio Hondo..</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">\$90,000 (Funded)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">CIAP, CMP</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">3 2014</p>	<p>Improve Boat Ramp Park: Continue to improve Boat Ramp area by adding a kayak launch, restrooms, picnic areas and a re-built fishing pier.(Annual costs to maintain restrooms may apply depending on type of restroom installed. Park area is not connected to City sewer system.)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">\$75,000</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">TP&W, Local, MDD, EDC, County , CIAP (as match)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">4 2014-2020</p>	<p>Upgrade Rio Hondo County Park, including adding a basketball court, parking , extending the walking trail ¼ mile around the soccer field, and adding a Shetland-size baseball field. If FEMA money is available to build emergency shelter, courts would be indoor. May be built in phases.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">\$200,000 to \$1,000,000</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">FEMA, Local</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">5 2015-2016</p>	<p>Develop a downtown mini-park or community garden</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">\$25,000</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">MDD, Local, TDA, TXDOT</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">6 2020-2026</p>	<p>Upgrade City Park behind City Hall, add scenic overlook, murals, new playscape equipment, pavilion along Colorado Avenue</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">\$60,000</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">EDC, MDD, Local</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">7 2027-2032</p>	<p>Begin discussing ways to building a swimming hole park on Port of Harlingen property at the Montgomery Reservoir</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Variable</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">GEN</p>
<p>Non Capital projects</p>			

2014	Adopt Subdivision and Zoning Ordinances that require developers to increase park acreage in town	\$2,000	GEN
2014	Develop joint use agreement with RHISD for resident use after-school hours or on weekends of tennis courts, basketball courts, and tracks.	Staff	GEN
2012-2032	Attend regional meetings such as the Small Cities Coalition and other economic development and tourism organizations to discuss funding for tourism-related park enhancements	Staff, officials	GEN, TP&W, County, neighboring cities

TxP&W = Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Grants, grants for parks were suspended in 2011, grants are available for boat ramps and trails; CIAP= Coastal Impact Assistance Program of the Texas General Land Office; CMP=Coastal Management Program; GEN = City of Rio Hondo municipal funds, including fees for park services; MDD = Sales tax revenue collected through the City of Rio Hondo Municipal Development District; EDC = Sales tax revenue collected through the City of Rio Hondo Economic Development Corp.; COUNTY = Cameron County; LOCAL = volunteer time and donations from private citizens, charitable organizations, and local businesses; Port = Port of Harlingen; TCF = Texas Department of Agriculture Texas Capital Fund Downtown Revitalization Programs; TxCBDG = Texas Community Development Block Grant program through the Texas Department of Agriculture; TXDOT (STP) = Texas Department of Transportation Surface Transportation Program; FEMA = Federal Emergency Management Agency Hurricane relief funding. CMP=Coastal Management Program grant through the Texas General Land Office.

Recommendations:

Because the City of Rio Hondo is not financially capable of making large-scale investments in its parks program, it is important that the City seeks out partnerships with local entities to ensure its continued provision of recreational facilities. The City should cultivate relationships with utility providers, local businesses, the County, the school district, and regional organizations promoting youth sports and Laguna Madre tourism. In addition, the City should continue to apply to available state grants for recreation. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Boat Ramp Access and Recreation Trail grants reimburse project costs up to 80 percent. Other grant programs for small and large parks were severely curtailed in 2011. The grants reimburse for up to 50 percent of the project costs. The 50% match costs can be in cash, through donation, or through in-kind labor from the City. Examples include donated supplies such as paint and lumber, man-hours worked by City crews, and donations from local civic groups

Suggested improvements would cost the City at least \$800,000 during a 20-year period. Almost 300,000 of these funds had been acquired in 2011. In addition, increasing the amount of park acreage and facilities may require that the City raise its annual budget allocation for parks maintenance. Paying for maintenance of park systems has long been an issue for many cities. It is recommended that agreements with various entities that will use the facility (the County, the ISD, or organized sports and civic groups) be established in order to ensure the extended usefulness and safety of new park facilities.

Residents requested a swimming pool. If the City were to build one, a feasibility analysis should be conducted to determine how ongoing maintenance costs are going to be paid. Grant funds are not available for ongoing maintenance. If user fees are charged, construction plans should take into consideration what type of users the facility will attract and how that will affect costs and income. For example, will children's areas or aqua therapy for seniors be included? While it is tempting to build the cheapest facilities possible, a pool must have the amenities necessary to attract paying customers and should be run as a business in order both to retain customers and minimize taxpayer burden. A preliminary analysis should balance residents' median income against the number and type of amenities necessary to gain sufficient pool members to cover ongoing maintenance. If the City expects to cover a loss, a pool may still be desirable if it provides other benefits to residents (e.g. less juvenile crime, better health, more community pride, etc.).

Grants and Funding:

The Texas Parks & Wildlife Department and Texas Historic Commission have administered competitive park grant programs to assist local units of government with the acquisition and/or development of public recreation areas and facilities throughout the state of Texas. Funding for these programs was severely limited for the 2011-2013 biennium due to lack of funding. However, the City should monitor their availability

throughout the planning period. The programs and amounts are listed below. The Small Community Grants program awards up to \$75,000 to localities with populations of 20,000 and under. Grant applications are accepted in March. Small communities may also apply for the Outdoor and Indoor Recreation Grant programs. The Small Community, Outdoor, and Indoor Recreation Grants provide a 50% reimbursement of eligible expenses.

<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/business/grants/trpa/>

Grant Type	Reimbursement of project cost up to:	Annual Application Deadlines	Award Limit
Outdoor Recreation	50%	Mar 1 and Aug 1	\$500,000
Indoor Recreation	50%	Aug 1	\$750,000
Small Community	50%	Mar 1	\$75,000
Community Outdoor Outreach Program (CO-OP) (programming only)	100%	Feb. 1 and Oct. 1	\$50,000
Recreation Trail*	80%	Feb 1	\$200,000
Boating Access*	75%	Oct. 31	\$500,000
Texas Preservation Trust Fund**	50%	June 1	\$50,000

* These TP&W programs remained funded in 2011. Funds for the other programs were severely limited. ** Available through the Texas Historic Commission, 1 to 1 match required.

Matching funds may come from a number of sources including, but not limited to the following:

- Capital improvement and revenue bonds
- Local appropriations (i.e. cash)
- 4B funds (economic development sales tax)

- In-kind labor, equipment, and materials to be provided by the sponsor or another governmental/educational entity
- The value of sponsor or publicly-owned non-parkland (must be proposed as acquisition in the application budget and the title must be transferred to the sponsor at the appropriate time **after** Department authorization is received). **Land leased from another governmental entity cannot be used as the sponsor's local match.**
- The value of the land (or fees) to be received as the result of local mandatory park dedication requirements
- The value of privately donated land, cash, labor, equipment, and materials
- Other eligible state/federal grants or resources, including but not limited to: Coastal Management Program, Community Development Block Grants, Fish and Wildlife Service.

Park land donated prior to an application being funded can only be counted as match if a “waiver of retroactivity” was approved by TPW prior to the land transfer. The waiver stands for the state fiscal year in which it is approved and the following two state fiscal years. The Park Grant Program Guidelines state: Waivers are valid only for a limited period of time. A waiver will expire at the end of the second state fiscal year following the state fiscal year in which the waiver was granted. A state fiscal year is September 1st to August 31st. Extensions up to three additional fiscal years will only be granted on a case-by-case basis.

Waivers of Retroactivity are only one means of securing park land prior to project approval while maintaining the match potential for a future grant application. Other means of securing property include the transferring of title to a private non-profit trust/foundation for holding, or through the use of certain right-of-first-refusal contracts which receive prior Department approval.

Questions regarding matching share eligibility should be directed to the Recreation Grants Branch at 512-389-8224 or by email at Rec.Grants@tpwd.state.tx.us.

Other potential parks and recreation funding programs with deadlines throughout the year include:

- Major League Baseball's Baseball Tomorrow Fund. Four deadlines each year. Letter of interest submitted first. If invited to apply, app submitted later. Letters of interest due 45 days before app deadlines of Jan. 1, April 1, July 1, and Oct. 1. Funds can be used for field improvements, equipment purchases, umpire training, but not on-going operational costs. No maximum request limit, but typical award is \$50,000 to \$100,000. No match required, but match improves chances of funding.
- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Community Outdoor Outreach Program. Three deadlines each year: Feb. 1, May 1, Oct. 1. Funds can be used to purchase supplies and equipment for outdoor programs. No construction allowed. Maximum request is \$30,000. No match required, but match improves chances of funding.
- U.S. Soccer Foundation. Annual deadline in October. Priority focus changes annually, but typically, funds can be used for construction of new fields or enhancement of existing fields with lighting or irrigation, in areas primarily designed to serve low-income communities. Maximum request is \$100,000. No match required, but match improves chances of funding.
- Tony Hawk Foundation. Annual deadline in early March. Funds can be used for the design, construction or operation of new skateboard parks, primarily to serve low-income communities. Maximum request is \$25,000. If funds requested for construction, match must be provided.

Tapping into Rio Hondo's already-strong volunteer community will be one method of raising funds and in-kind labor and donations. Organizing church, civic, and social groups into a non-profit recreation group would enable the City to take advantage of matching state grant programs and other funding local foundation opportunities.

11 Economic Development Study

The City of Rio Hondo, in Spanish “Deep River,” is named for its location on the Arroyo Colorado, a stream in the Rio Grande delta. Rio Hondo’s economy is based around small amounts of agriculture; its position on the Gulf Intercoastal Waterway (GIWW), a dredged coastal canal that carries barges from the Port of Harlingen 3 miles south of Rio Hondo to Fort Myers, Florida; and coastal tourism. A small number of businesses in the area use the canal and the Port of Harlingen for cheap transportation of bulk materials. Tourists, including Winter Texans, enjoy bird watching and boating on the GIWW and area waterways. Nearby Padre Island Seashore and county, state and federal parkland provided expanded tourist draws.

The Economic Development Study discusses Rio Hondo’s economic development opportunity through 2032 and includes:

Historic Development and General Character: describes the City’s recent economic history and situates the City’s economic sectors with relationship to Morris County.

Economic Base Analysis: describes the City’s economic sectors in detail and the availability of utilities, infrastructure, land, resources, and skills of the labor force.

Economic Comparison: Compares specific business cost and operating condition factors between Rio Hondo, Cameron County, and the State and highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the economy and ranks Rio Hondo against other rural Texas communities.

Economic Development Strategies: Describes tools and partners available to the City for advancing economic goals.

Economic Development Plan: Includes a policy framework that connects the City’s overarching economic goals to specific objectives and policies the City should follow. Also lists activities/policies in a table with costs and funding sources.

11.1 Historic Development and General Character

11.1.1 Development of the Economy

The City of Rio Hondo, Texas is located approximately 15 miles east of Harlingen in north central Cameron County. It is also located about 30 miles west of the Padre Island National Seashore, a national tourist attraction. The town was established in 1910 and incorporated in 1939 when it had grown to more than 700 residents and 33 businesses. The town prospered with the location of the Missouri Pacific rail line which cut through the town's eastern limits and the Gulf Intercoastal Waterway which by the 1940s cut through the western side of town. The Waterway is a coastal canal that originates in Brownville and ends in Fort Myers Florida. The Texas portion of the intercoastal canal spans 426 miles from Sabine Pass to the mouth of the Brownsville Ship Channel at Port Isabel. The principal commodities transported are crude petroleum and petroleum products, iron and steel, building materials, fertilizers, liquid sulfur, and other bulk products. Commercial fishing boats also transfer their catches via the canal. In addition, the boats supporting off-shore oil rigs gain access to the Gulf through the canal. The canal also is used extensively for recreation. In 1953, the City gained fame when a lift-span bridge was built over the Arroyo Colorado, allowing barge and boat traffic passage through the canal at County Road 106/Colorado Avenue. It is the only lift-span bridge in Texas that is operated on-site, and only one of two still operating in Texas. Business developed on the eastern banks of the canal primarily in areas north of the City limits in the City's ETJ and beyond the City's ETJ.

The City also is located in fertile farmland with cotton and grain as its principal crops. About 7 percent of the farms in the County are located in the Rio Hondo zip code. Crop production has been supported by the Cameron County Irrigation District #2 since 1916. The District provides water from the Rio Grande River to farmers and ranchers in the eastern part of the County. Local crops include cotton, corn, sorghum and grain. In prior years vegetable crops, including

watermelons, tomatoes and cabbage, dotted the Rio Hondo landscape but labor and maintenance costs have made it difficult for farmers to continue those investments.

11.1.2 Previous Studies

The City of Rio Hondo has not commissioned a city economic development study in the past. However, the University of Texas Pan American and the Lower Rio Grande Development Council have completed at least two studies related to regional economic development. The recommendations relevant to the Rio Hondo area are listed below to help guide the City's Comprehensive Plan.

1) The LRGVDC Five-Year Strategic Plan, 2011-2016, terms the Cameron, Willacy and Hidalgo Counties region as the "International Front Door to the Global Marketplace," citing its location between Mexico, Canada and the rest of Texas. The Development Council's Annual Work Plan prioritizes expansion of small business, and industrial and general business related to global trade. The five-year strategic plan as well as the agency's tri-county Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) noted the following Economic Goals and Objectives. Partners in implementing these strategies include the Valley's higher education institutions and Cameron Works Workforce Solutions offices in Harlingen and Brownsville. The goals are:

- Expanding public infrastructure to meet business demands, including regional flood control/drainage systems and updating FEMA maps to better identify existing flood prone areas;
- Supporting the expansion of small businesses with incubators for small-company startups; programs that link small businesses with international companies; increased financing for small businesses in the form of micro-loan and revolving loan programs; assistance for women-owned businesses; and creation of a regional small business alliance that can advise businesses and assist with the provision of health insurance benefits for small businesses;

- Increasing the number of alternate agricultural products produced in the region; and encouraging the purchase of locally grown products (Weekend Farmers Market have become popular in Harlingen and Brownsville, Rio Hondo's annual event called Arroyo Days also features fresh produce for sale)
- Increasing tourism through expanding and marketing historic preservation sites; promoting the World Birding Centers and environmental awareness; and promoting international activities and historic preservation sites.
- Enhancing regional marketing/education systems to extend training resources in the region and create a regional marketing strategy

The LRGVDC also is working in 2011 to develop a regional capital improvements plan to ensure economic growth and recovery following natural disasters. The plan will focus on the region's storm drainage vulnerabilities and propose solutions to minimize long-term economic impacts after catastrophic events. The plan was to be completed in 2012.

2) The South Texas Regional Economic Development Strategy (STRREDS) 2011-2015 completed in late 2010 was an economic development initiative of the University of Texas-Pan American's Rural Enterprise Development Center. STRREDS' primary focus is to create economic growth and jobs in rural South Texas. The study defined a South Texas Rural Region (STRR) that included towns of less than 20,000 population in Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr and Willacy Counties, including Rio Hondo.

Data was collected to gain a deeper understanding about the economic development challenges the rural communities face. This included a business survey, focus groups held in each county and interviews of community leaders.

The study had the following conclusions:

- Strengths: South Texas warm climate, long-standing businesses (some date back to 1903), cultural diversity, low business costs, increasing population

(small communities were projected to grow 6 percent by 2015), increasing recreational activities, ample rural land and skilled labor for rural business.

- Weaknesses: Lack of skilled labor for agribusiness; lack of access to capital for both rural business and agribusiness, rural areas are not aware of nor have access to available business assistance centers.

It recommended the following for business growth:

- Renewable energy delivery, innovative utilization of natural resources to promote eco-tourism, and efforts to grow more local and regional food in the Valley.
- Development of a South Texas Rural Advancement Center and a Regional Small Cities Coalition to establish a united voice from rural businesses in the region. The Small Cities Coalition was established, meets monthly to discuss economic development in rural areas, and Rio Hondo sends representatives to the meetings. The Cameron Workforce Solutions office provides staffing and organizational capacity for the meetings that rotate around the region.

11.1.3 Physical Growth of the Community

The City of Rio Hondo is located along County Road 106 (Colorado Avenue) which extends from downtown Harlingen east to the Port Isabel Cameron County Airport at the Laguna Madre waterway between Padre Island and the Gulf of Mexico. SH 345 connects Rio Hondo to the City of San Benito's east side bisects the eastern portion of Rio Hondo. The City's historic downtown is located along Colorado Avenue within the Original Townsite. Most of the businesses in town are located on Colorado Avenue, with new businesses extending down CR 1846 (S. Reynolds St.) which connects Rio Hondo to San Benito's west side and SH 83. SH 83 is a major transportation corridor in the Valley connecting Brownsville to Laredo. In recent years, single-family development has expanded to the west side of the Arroyo Colorado. Working farm land dominates the City's ETJ. In

recent years, some of this land has been subdivided for housing and a few neighboring retail businesses.

11.1.4 Relationship of Community to Region

The City of Rio Hondo is located in northeastern Cameron County, about 5 miles east of Harlingen and its International Airport. It is also located three miles north of the Port of Harlingen. The Port facilitates transportation of bulk imports through the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway on the Arroyo Colorado, which bisects Rio Hondo. The City and its surroundings are part of the Cameron County Irrigation District #2, which supplies municipal and irrigation water from the Rio Grande River to eastern Cameron County. Rio Hondo's location makes it ideal for industry.

It is near a port, an international airport, abundant land is available, and it has ample nearby recreation opportunities like the National Padre Island Seashore. However, the City plays a small part in the region's economy. It is dependent on surrounding larger towns for purchase of most materials and for jobs. About 1% of the County's population resides in Rio Hondo and 1% of County businesses are located in the Rio Hondo zip code. According to Census and Texas workforce data, most people over the age of 16 (93%) who reside in Cameron County work within the County. Of the Cameron County workers who reside in Rio Hondo, 80% work outside the City, 17 meaning that Rio Hondo residents are dependent on the surrounding cities for jobs and shopping.

Table 11A lists the number of establishments by industry in the City of Rio Hondo and in Cameron County. The Rio Hondo school district and retail trade are the categories with the highest percentages of county share. However, Rio Hondo's County share of establishments in any one industry does not exceed 4% of the County's total.

Table 11A: Rio Hondo share of County Establishments (2010)

Industry	Establishments in City	Establishments in County	Percent of Establishments located in City
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting	1	151	1%
Mining	0	9	0%
Utilities	0	31	0%
Construction	1	381	0%
Manufacturing	3	243	1%
Wholesale Trade	0	373	0%
Retail Trade	21	1008	2%
Transportation	0	303	0%
Information	0	73	0%
Finance and Insurance	0	371	0%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	0	307	0%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	1	460	0%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	0	16	0%
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	3	243	1%
Educational Services	2	57	4%
Health Care and Social Assistance	0	982	0%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	1	66	2%
Accommodation and Food Services	6	611	1%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	6	553	1%
Public Administration	1	135	1%
Unclassified	0	17	0%
Total	46	6,390	1%

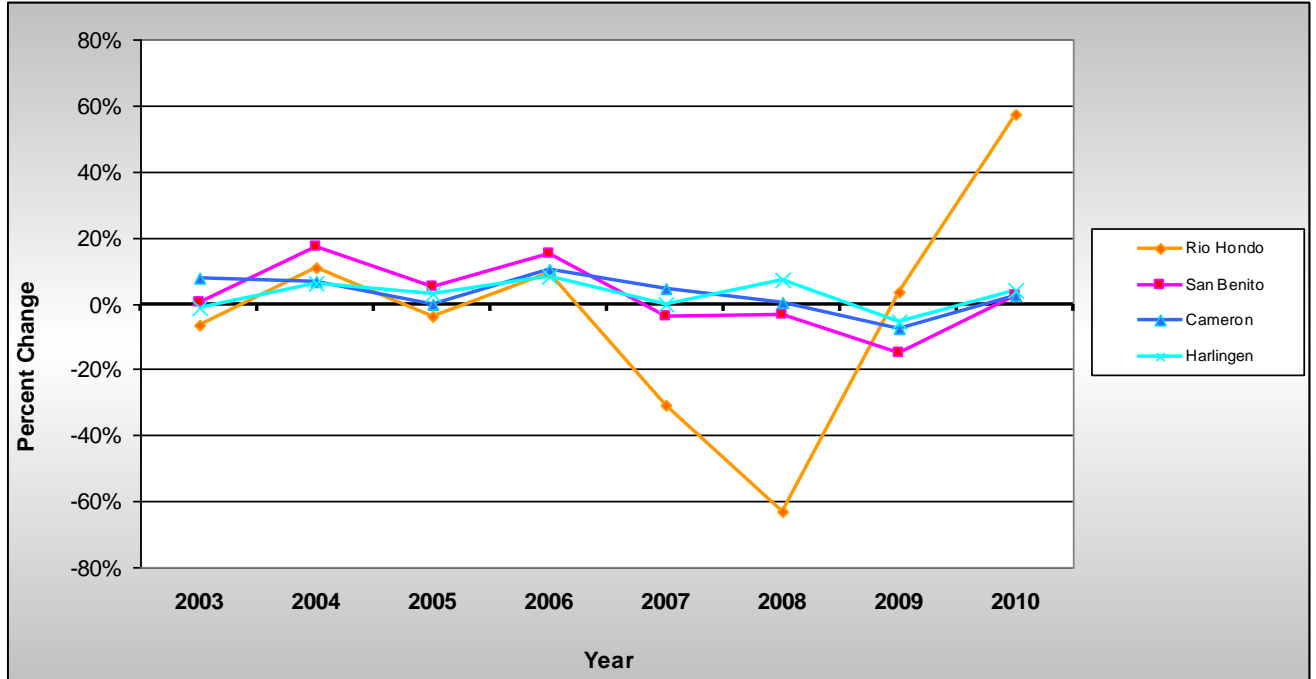
Source: Texas State Comptroller, 2011, and Texas Workforce Commission (Tracer; www.tracer2.com/) Quarterly Employment and Wages, 4th Quarter 2010 Data

City sales tax data provides an indication of change in the City's economy over time and of how strong the City's economy is with respect to Cameron County and neighboring cities. Rio Hondo's sales tax tumbled between 2006 and 2008 due to the closure of businesses, including restaurants, in a small field of establishments. Its small number of outlets makes each one valuable in

¹⁷ American Community Survey, 2005-2009, Table [B08008. SEX OF WORKERS BY PLACE OF WORK--PLACE LEVEL - WORKERS 16 YEARS AND OVER](#) (Of 606 workers, 117 worked in their place residence and 489 outside their place of residence.)

maintaining city sales tax revenue. Retail establishments constitute 45% of establishments in the City and generate the majority of sales tax

Chart 11A: Gross Sales Annual Growth, Rio Hondo, 2002-2010



Source: Quarterly Sales Tax Historical Data, Texas State Comptroller's office; <https://ourcpa.cpa.state.tx.us/allocation/HistSales.jsp>

Because Rio Hondo's local workforce and economy are closely connected to the larger region, the following analysis covers both local and regional economic trends.

11.2 Economic Base Analysis

The economic base analysis reveals information about an area's economic health and economic development potential. It reveals which industries currently drive growth and which could drive growth in the future. The information will help the community in determining plans for future economic programs.

11.2.1 Business Inventory

Business Types The City has about 45 establishments within its limits, according to taxpayer data from the State Comptroller's Office. Retail and Food and Accommodation outlets account for 59% of the establishments in Rio Hondo. Overall, the local businesses provide residents and other businesses with some purchase options, particularly for restaurants and food, commercial printing, a variety of retail trade and other basic services like dry cleaners, automotive repair and at least one salon/barbershop. No Wholesale Trade businesses are located in Rio Hondo.

Table 11B: Rio Hondo Business Types

Industry	Total Establishments	% of Total in Rio Hondo
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting	1	2%
All Other Miscellaneous Crop Farming	1	
Construction	1	2%
Roofing Contractors	1	
Manufacturing	3	7%
Commercial Lithographic Printing	2	
Other Commercial Printing	1	
Retail Trade	21	46%
Used Car Dealers	1	
Boat Dealers	1	
All Other Home Furnishings Stores	1	
Radio, Television, and Other Electronics Stores	1	
Other Building Material Dealers	1	
Supermarkets and Other Grocery (except Convenience) Stores	1	
Pharmacies and Drug Stores	1	
All Other Health and Personal Care Stores	1	
Gasoline Stations with Convenience Stores	1	
Other Gasoline Stations	1	
Jewelry Stores	1	
Discount Department Stores	1	
All Other Merchandise Stores	3	
Gift, Novelty, and Souvenir Stores	3	
Other Miscellaneous Store Retailers	1	
All Other Miscellaneous Store Retailers (except Tobacco Stores)	2	
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	1	2%
Interior Design Services	1	
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	3	7%
Landscaping Services	1	
Carpet and Upholstery Cleaning Services	1	

All Other Support Services	1	
Educational Services	2	4%
Elementary and Secondary Schools	2	
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	1	2%
Independent Artists, Writers, and Performers	1	
Accommodation and Food Services	6	13%
Food Services and Drinking Places	1	
Full-Service Restaurants	2	
Limited-Service Restaurants	1	
Cafeterias, Grill Buffets, and Buffets	1	
Snack and Nonalcoholic Beverage Bars	1	
Other Services (except Public Administration)	6	13%
Car Washes	1	
General Automotive Repair	1	
Commercial and Industrial Machinery and Equipment (except Automotive and Electronic) Repair and Maintenance	1	
Beauty Salons	1	
Coin Operated Laundries and Drycleaners	1	
Other Social Advocacy Organizations	1	
Public Administration	1	2%
Courts	1	
Total	46	100%

Source: Sales Taxpayer Information, Texas State Comptroller's office, 2010

Agriculture The Rio Hondo zip code has the third highest number of farms in the County that sell products valuing more than \$50,000 annually. Almost one-third of the County's large-size farms are located in Harlingen and another one-fifth in San Benito. Most of the farmers produce row crops, including corn, cotton, grain and sorghum, according to the USDA's Farm Service Agency Office in San Benito. 92 of the farms in the Rio Hondo area are small, producing less than \$50,000 of crops annually. Crop production is supported by an extensive irrigation system operated by Cameron County Irrigation District #2 which supplies municipal and irrigation water to San Benito, Rio Hondo, East Rio Hondo WSC and over 57,000 acres of irrigated farmland in the Rio Hondo/San Benito area.

Table 11C: Farm Production, Cameron County (2007)

Location		Value of all agricultural products sold			
Zip Code	Place Name	Total farms	Less than \$50,000	\$50,000 to \$249,999	\$250,000 or more
78520	BROWNSVILLE	79	71	5	3
78521	BROWNSVILLE	72	66	2	4
78522	BROWNSVILLE	5	4	1	-
78523	BROWNSVILLE	17	10	5	2
78526	BROWNSVILLE	39	35	4	-
78535	COMBES	13	12	-	1
78550	HARLINGEN	151	119	11	21
78551	HARLINGEN	21	21	0	-
78552	HARLINGEN	162	135	17	10
78553	HARLINGEN	16	14	-	2
78559	LA FERIA	98	79	9	10
78566	LOS FRESNOS	112	92	12	8
78567	LOS INDIOS	5	5	-	-
78568	LOZANO	12	11	-	1
78575	OLMITO	28	24	3	1
78578	PORT ISABEL	17	15	1	1
78583	RIO HONDO	120	92	13	15
78586	SAN BENITO	275	235	24	16
78592	SANTA MARIA	2	2	-	-
78593	SANTA ROSA	37	27	7	3
78597	SOUTH PADRE ISLAND	13	12	1	-
Total		1,294	1,081	115	98

Source: USDA – National Agricultural Statistics Service; 2007 Census of Agriculture, Zip Code Tabulations of Selected Items (<http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/>)

Although a limited amount of fruit and vegetables were grown in the Rio Hondo area in the past (watermelon, tomatoes and cabbage), the high cost of labor and maintenance of such crops has discouraged vegetable production on small farms, according to Farm Service Agency personnel. However, some farms producing vegetables are located in the Rio Hondo ETJ and produce enough crops to sell to the smaller area farmers’ markets in Harlingen and South Padre Island and at Rio Hondo’s Arroyo Days.

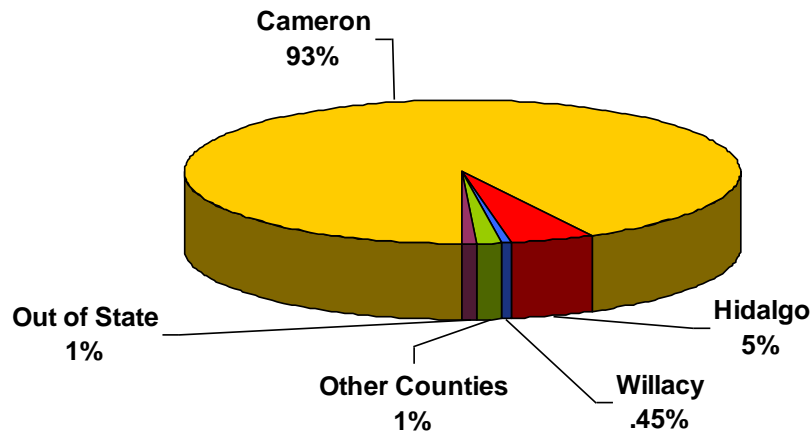
The Port of Harlingen, located just south of Rio Hondo, is the largest exporter of sugar refined by the Rio Grande Valley Sugar Growers, Inc, a cooperative of 126 sugar growers in the Lower Rio Grande Valley Area and based in Santa Rosa. Of the 126 sugar farms, none are located in Rio Hondo, according to the company. The harvest each fall is taken via truck to the Santa Rosa plant, about 15 miles west of Rio Hondo on CR 107.

Government The City of Rio Hondo employs 24 full time people, Rio Hondo ISD employs approximately 375 staff members and the County employs 19 people in a Precinct 4 satellite office in Rio Hondo, for a total of 418 government employees in Rio Hondo.

11.2.2 Labor Supply

Regional Workforce Rio Hondo's small size and its proximity to Harlingen makes its businesses and residents highly dependent on the labor force and employment available in the county and surrounding counties. The labor pool is too small for businesses to find all their employees in Rio Hondo; and for residents to only find jobs in Rio Hondo. Detailed data available for counties, but not cities the size of Rio Hondo, is used below to define some characteristics of the labor force in Rio Hondo. As shown in *Chart 11B*, approximately 93% of Cameron residents in 2000 worked within the County and another 5% work in neighboring Hidalgo County. There is a high probability, then, that Rio Hondo residents work in Cameron County and that businesses are finding employees in Cameron County.

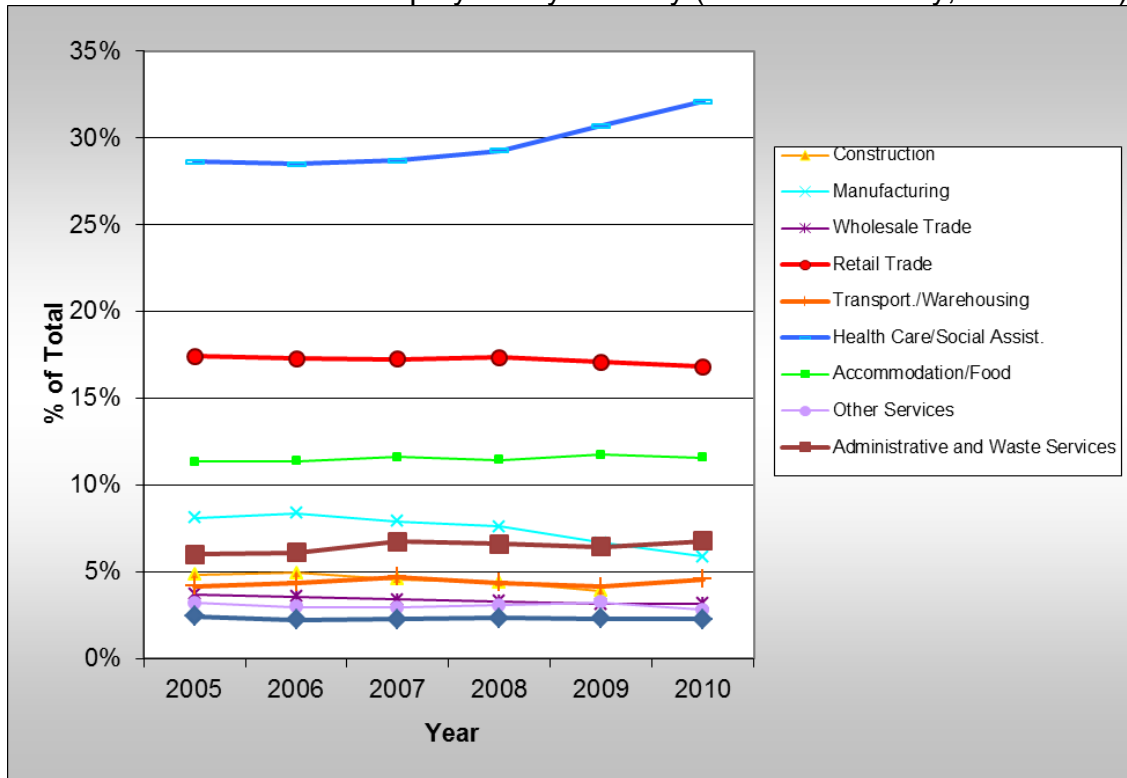
Chart 11B: Workplace Locations of Cameron County Residents (2000)



Source: Texas Labor Market Information based on the 2000 Census, similar data not available in the 2010 Census.

Chart 11C shows a more up-to-date picture of the types of jobs in Cameron County. Almost two-thirds of all jobs in Cameron County are in Health Care/Social Assistance, Retail Trade and Food and Accommodation industries. Many of these jobs are highly dependent on tourism. Diversifying the job base to include more international trade and high-tech industry is a stated goal of tri-county regional economic development programs. The City also needs to focus on diversifying its jobs base to ensure growth in higher salary employment. Government employment and industries that employ less than 3% of the workforce are not shown in the chart.

Chart 11C: Percent of Employees by Industry (Cameron County, 2005-2010)



Source: Texas Workforce Commission Employment and Wage data (Tracer; www.tracer2.com)

Unemployment: In 2010, employment numbers showed that the County has more workers than jobs. The County has one of the highest unemployment rates in the state at 11.4%. By May of 2011 that number had not improved growing to 11.8%. Unemployment in neighboring counties is even greater, however.

Table 11D: Changes Civilian Labor Force, County (2009-2010)

Year	Area	Labor Force	Employment	Unemployment	Unemployment Rate
2009	State	12,042,881	11,053,778	989,103	8.2%
2009	Lower RGV WDA	153,332	293,164	36,106	11.0%
2009	Cameron	153,332	137,610	15,722	10.2%
2010	State	12,190,650	11,160,703	1,029,947	8.5%
2010	Lower RGV WDA	159,659	298,479	41,799	12.3%
2010	Cameron	159,659	141,542	18,117	11.4%

Source: Texas Workforce Commission, Civil Labor Force Employment (LAUS)

* Lower Rio Grande Valley WDA is Hidalgo, Starr and Willacy Counties, Cameron County is its own WDA. The neighboring WDA is used here for comparison.

Wages: Table 11E, shows the most recent wage information available from the Texas Workforce Commission. As shown, employees who work in Cameron County and the Lower Rio Grande Valley WDA earn at least \$400 less each week than the Texas average.

Table 11E: 4th Quarter 2010 Average Wages

Area	Avg. Weekly Wages
Texas	\$999
Lower Rio Grande Valley WDA	\$549
Cameron County	\$547

Source: Texas Workforce Commission, 4th Quarter 2010 QCEW, employers paying unemployment insurance, data by place of work.
** Lower Rio Grande Valley WDA is Hidalgo, Starr and Willacy Counties, Cameron County is its own WDA. The neighboring WDA is used here for comparison.*

Labor Skills: The skill levels associated with particular occupations are described using a two-part system. The first set of criteria describes the typical skill level required for a particular occupation. Occupations with high barriers to entry often require more than a year of work experience and demonstrated knowledge or required licenses. Occupations with moderate barriers might require several months of on-the job training. Occupations with lower barriers to entry require little prior experience and minimal on-the-job training.

The second set of criteria describes the educational prerequisites particular to the occupations. Occupations with high educational entry barriers usually require at least a college degree, while those with moderate educational barriers generally require a high school diploma and/or an associate degree from a two-year/technical college, specialized coursework, or certification. Occupations with low educational barriers do not require completion of high school. *Table 11F* shows the occupation by education requirement from the 2005-2009 American Community Survey for employed residents over the age of 16 in Rio Hondo, Cameron County, and Texas. A large percentage (30%) of City residents work in jobs requiring high education. This Census data only describes the skills of those Rio Hondo residents aged 16 and over who work. It does not provide data on

whether they work in Rio Hondo or not. The education of Rio Hondo residents in the workforce is similar to that found in the state and the county.

Table 11F: Occupation by Education and Gender (2005-2009)

	Rio Hondo	% of City	Cameron County	% of County	Texas	% of State
High Education	187	30%	35,007	27%	3,602,568	35%
Moderate Education	255	41%	57,174	43%	3,594,863	35%
Moderate-Low Education	88	14%	15,889	12%	1,294,450	13%
Low Education	95	15%	23,796	18%	1,711,203	17%
Total	625	100%	131,866	100%	10,203,084	100%

Source: Summarized from 2005-2009 American Community Survey, Table C24010

	Occupation	Male	Female	Total	% Total
High Education	Management occupations	16	11	27	4%
	Business and financial operations occupations	5	6	11	2%
	Computer and mathematical occupations	-	3	3	0%
	Architecture and engineering occupations	-	-	-	0%
	Life, physical, and social science occupations	-	-	-	0%
	Community and social services occupations	12	-	12	2%
	Legal occupations	-	-	-	0%
	Education, training, and library occupations	39	29	68	11%
	Arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media occupations	-	4	4	1%
	Health diagnosing and treating practitioners and other technical occupations	9	16	25	4%
	Health technologists and technicians	12	25	37	6%
Moderate Education	Healthcare support occupations	-	23	23	4%
	Fire fighting and prevention, and other protective service workers including supervisors	-	-	-	0%
	Law enforcement workers including supervisors	-	-	-	0%
	Personal care and service occupations	12	10	22	4%
	Sales and related occupations	46	37	83	13%
	Office and administrative support occupations	4	105	109	17%
	Production occupations	14	4	18	3%
Moderate - Low Education	Farming, fishing, and forestry occupations	-	3	3	0%
	Construction and extraction occupations	55	-	55	9%
	Supervisors, transportation and material moving workers, and other transportation workers except motor vehicle operators	-	7	7	1%
	Motor vehicle operators	23	-	23	4%
Low Education	Food preparation and serving related occupations	-	28	28	4%

Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance occupations	-	35	35	6%
Installation, maintenance, and repair occupations	4	-	4	1%
Material moving workers	28	-	28	4%
Total:	279	346	625	100%

Source: Summarized from 2005-2009 American Community Survey, Table C24010

11.2.3 Business Infrastructure

Electricity: Electricity is available to residents in Rio Hondo’s zip code through over a dozen service providers. Available offers listed through the State’s Texas Electric Choice service in July of 2011 ranged from 5.8¢ to 14.3¢ per kilowatt-hour (see www.powertochoose.com for up-to-date rates). The lower the price per kilowatt-hour, the more likely the offer is “variable-rate,” meaning that the cost per kilowatt-hour will change according to the market rate for energy.

Water and Wastewater: The City owns and maintains its water and wastewater distribution systems. The City supplies water and sewer services beyond its city limits. Commercial water rates are slightly higher in Rio Hondo than in San Benito or Harlingen. However, sewer rates are commensurate to neighboring cities. The City currently cannot expand its water and sewer connections due to limitations of the treatment plants. However, the City has placed expansion of both facilities as high priorities for capital improvements. This plan discusses plant expansions in Chapters 5 and 6. Charges for commercial water and wastewater are as follows:

Table 11G: Commercial Water/Wastewater Rates

(gallons)	Water (inside city)	Water (outside city)	Wastewater (inside city)	Wastewater (outside city)
Up to 3,000	\$26	\$26	26.27	\$52.53
Per 1,000 after 3,000	\$3.10	\$4.15	2.48	3.71
Typical monthly bill of 50,000 gallons	\$171.70	\$221.05	\$145.31	\$230.61

Natural Gas: Texas Gas Service owns and operates the natural gas services in the community. The rates vary by season and commodity prices.

Garbage Disposal: The City provides weekly curbside garbage service to residents and businesses. Rates are the same: \$17.69/month for one container, \$22.78 if more than one container.

Raw Materials Between 41 and 50 percent of the county is considered prime farmland. Natural resources in the County include oil and gas, barite, celestite, chromium, bentonite clay, fluorspar, manganese, and phosphate.

Industrial Site Location & Availability: Approximately 1,600 acres of undeveloped land exists within the City limits and the City's ETJ. Within the city limits, most of the available land is located in the eastern portion of the City. Much of the southeastern portion of undeveloped land is irrigated agricultural lands. Available industrial site locations would likely be in northeastern Rio Hondo, where some industrial uses already exist. Some vacant land is also located southwest of the City along FM 106 and is nearer to the Harlingen Port facility, west of the Arroyo canal. Soils in the western part of the ETJ are not as favorable for building as those in the northeastern ETJ.

Transportation Although Rio Hondo is not a major Cameron County population center, its business transportation infrastructure is more complete than for many rural areas. Rio Hondo businesses have access to major thoroughfares that link it to state highways in the region, a major international airport, a national port, and nearby rail services. The options described below provide a business choosing to locate in a rural area with many transportation options.

Roads: The City of Rio Hondo is located along County Road 106 (Colorado Avenue) which extends from downtown Harlingen east to Port Isabel Cameron County Airport at the Laguna Madre waterway between Padre Island and the

Gulf of Mexico. SH 345 connects Rio Hondo to the City of San Benito's east side and CR 1846 extends from Rio Hondo south to the City of San Benito's west side at SH 83: a major Valley highway that connects Brownsville to Laredo..

Ports: The Valley area has four ports near Rio Hondo, including at Harlingen, Port Mansfield, Port Isabel/San Benito and Brownsville. The Gulf Intracoastal Waterway provides over 1,300 miles of protected waterway that connects these ports and provides shallow water access to inland United States from Texas to Florida, including access of the Mississippi River. The Port of Harlingen is a shallow draft barge port. The port facility is located about 3 miles southwest of Rio Hondo on CR 106.

The Harlingen portion of the intracoastal waterway is maintained to a width of 125 feet and a depth of 12 feet and is supplied by The Arroyo Colorado, a fresh water river. The main items shipped into the Harlingen port for delivery to Valley businesses include dry and liquid sand, fertilizer, and fuel in the forms of gasoline and diesel. The main export out of the Valley through the port is sugar. In past years, cement was an import and an export and grain and cotton also were exported. The Port of Brownsville is also a major source of transportation for products coming into and exiting the Valley. However, it is a deep water port carrying heavy imports of steel beams, slabs and plates while exporting steel, petroleum, lubricants and grain products.

Public Transportation: Rio Hondo is not on the Valley Metro bus routes provided by the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council. The nearest bus stop to Rio Hondo is the Harlingen International Airport about 5 miles west of the City. The LRGVDC provides limited van service transportation for handicapped and seniors in Rio Hondo.

Railroad: Direct access to Union Pacific rail lines in the Valley is located at the Port of Harlingen about 3 miles southwest of Rio Hondo. Several Motor Freight Carriers have local terminals in Harlingen.

Airports: The closest airport is the Harlingen International Airport, less than 10 miles west of Rio Hondo. A Cameron County Airport is located in the Laguna Madre area to Rio Hondo’s east.

11.3 Economic Climate Comparison

Rio Hondo’s economic development potential can be measured in terms of strengths and weaknesses or “cost factors,” which relate to the cost of doing business in Rio Hondo, and “operating condition factors,” which describe the level and relative availability of the various elements necessary for economic development.

11.3.1 Cost Factors

An inventory of these factors reveals *comparative advantages and disadvantages* (those factors where the City’s competitive edge is greater or lesser). *Table 11H* lists some rules-of-thumb and definitions used to describe these factors.

Table 11H: Cost and Operating Condition Factors

DESCRIPTION AND EXPLANATION	
COST FACTORS:	
Wage Levels	Average income of adults working at least 20 hrs/wk, generally higher in suburban areas, Coastal U.S.
Electricity Costs	Industrial electric rates per kwh, generally higher in Northeast and California
Fuel Costs (w/tax)	Average cost varies little in-state
Water Costs	Cost per 50,000 gallons (commercial rates), locally determined
Sewer Costs	Cost per 50,000 gallons, locally determined
Building Costs	Cost of typical new single-family house, varies greatly
Land/site costs	Cost per acre, varies greatly from place to place
Local & State Taxes	Property taxes issued by city, county, and service districts
Financing Costs	Costs for local loans are compared to banks of their size and those available in larger markets.

OPERATING CONDITION FACTORS:	
Unskilled Labor	Low-income rural and central cities often have higher percentages
Skilled Labor	Suburban, wealthy and industrial areas have higher percentages
Productivity	Increases with presence of manufacturing and skilled labor
Unionization	Present in heavy industries, governmental agencies, some service industries (especially in the non-Right-to-Work states)
Local Regulation	Inflexible zoning, building or other regulations tend to hamper economic development
Site Availability	Near interstates, ports, airports, with utilities
Site Suitability	Terrain is level, flooding is rare, soils stable
Electric Power	Most sites in urbanized areas have ready access
Water/sewer Service	Excess capacity needed for additional manufacturing
Gas availability	Needed for many heavy industries
Motor carrier service	Interstate access or ports require and attract these
Rail/Freight service	Multiple carriers promote competitive rates
Air service	Major airport with national service within 40 minutes
Vocational Education	In most cities; the best link to area companies
School Facilities	SAT scores, expenditures per pupil
Medical Services	Surgical hospital, specialty diagnostic facilities
Natural Resources	Economically significant mining, agriculture, forestry, or recreation

Table 11I: Comparative Cost Factors and Table 11J: Comparative Operating Condition Factors summarizes these factors in comparison with Cameron County, and the State. The primary advantages to Rio Hondo and Cameron County businesses compared to State averages are slightly lower fuel and water costs, lower wages, and a workforce equal in skill as in the rest of the state.

Table 11I: Comparative Cost Factors

Factor	Rio Hondo	Cameron County	Texas
Wage Levels	\$532	\$532	\$892
Electricity Costs	\$0.067/kWh	\$0.067/kWh	\$0.0593/kWh
Fuel Costs	\$3.77	\$3.77	\$3.85
Water Rate (Commercial, \$/50,000 gallons)	\$171.70	\$158.12*	206.5**
Sewer Rate (Commercial, \$/50,000 gallons)	\$145.31	\$117.34*	\$105.1**
Building Costs***	\$131,235	\$131,235	\$129,485
Land costs (median price per acre)****	\$5,684	\$5,684	\$2,938 <
Local Property	0.818	0.588	0.40 - 0.85

Taxes (2009)***** Per \$100 of valuation			
Financing Costs*****	6.61	6.61	6.54
Wage Levels	\$532	\$532	\$892

Notes:

*City of San Benito rate

**Average for Texas cities under 2,000 population (from Texas Municipal League survey)

*** Derived from national price per square foot data from RSMeans cost plus air conditioning cost multiplied by the location factor. Priced based on a 2,000 sf home. County and City price use McAllen location factor. Texas price is from San Antonio.

**** 2009 Texas rural land prices from the Real Estate Center at Texas A&M University. < Average land prices in Cameron, Hidalgo and Willacy Counties. Higher prices can be attributed to working agricultural lands held by large producers and purchase of Rio Grande water rights.

***** From www.window.state.tx.us. County rate is average of cities in county. State rates are range for 10 largest cities.

*****Percentages are not interest rates charged; they are the amount of profit banks report on loans as an indicator of interest rate charges.

Operating conditions in the City are limited in some areas. However, the City's proximity to Harlingen where most positive operating condition factors can be found may offset a lack of offerings like medical services that most rural cities experience.

Table 11J: Operating Condition Factors

Factor	Rio Hondo	Rating	Cameron County	Texas
Unskilled Labor	29%	Similar	30%	29%
Skilled Labor	71%	Similar	70%	71%
Productivity (increase in establishments, 2005/2011)	-0.2%	Lower	2.15%	10.84%
Unionization	5.94%	Higher	4.65%	5%
Local Regulation	Zoning	Similar	No Zoning	Varies
Electric Power	100% served	Not a competitive factor		
Water/Sewer Capacity	100% served	Not a competitive factor		
Gas availability	Texas Gas Service	Not a competitive factor		
Motor carrier Svc.	8	Lower	100+	N/A
Rail/Freight service	No local rail	Lower	Union Pacific	N/A
Air service (find nearest international airport)	Valley International Airport (5 mi)	Similar	Valley International Airport	N/A

Vocational Education	HS	Lower	Post-HS	Post-HS
Site Availability	50% of land area undeveloped	Similar	Widely available	N/A
School Facilities (per pupil expenditures; 2008-09)	\$10,311	Higher	\$6,979-\$9,297*	\$11,567
HS Graduation Rate	79%	Similar	77.2%**	80.6%
Medical Services	Valley Baptist Health Systems (10 mi)	Similar	Brownsville Doctors Hospital, Harlingen Medical Center, Solara Hospital Harlingen, South Texas Rehabilitation Hospital, Valley Baptist Health Systems	75% of counties have ≥1 hospital
Natural Resources	Oil, Natural Gas, Agribusiness, Eco-tourism	Similar	Oil, Natural Gas, Agribusiness, Eco-tourism	Variable throughout the state
* Range of school districts across Cameron County; **TEA Region 1 score				

Sources: Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts Quarterly Sales Tax Historical Data (number of establishments); Texas Workforce Commission Quarterly Employment and Wages; Texas Almanac, 2009-2010, Texas Education Agency Academic Excellence Indicator System; Texas Town and Country Surveys; Texas Municipal League; Texas Department of State Health Services, Utilization Data for Texas Acute Care Hospitals by County, 2008; City Staff.

11.3.2 Specialization

An industry cluster analysis illustrates the degree to which individual industries have concentrated in Cameron County compared to the WDA, the State of Texas and the U.S. While the above analysis of employment changes in the County shows historical trends in each industry, the cluster analysis indicates each industry's prospects for future growth in the County.

Clustering occurs because of advantages accrued by businesses that locate near to other businesses in the same industry. When an industry clusters in an area, it differentiates the area from neighboring communities, and the cluster can attract

new residents and businesses. One famous example of clustering is Silicon Valley. *Table 11K* describes the advantages that come from clustering, how clustering is influenced, and how the public sector can support the clustering of industries.¹⁸

Table 11K: Advantages of Clustering

Clustering Incentive/ Influence	Description	Public Sector Support
Labor Market Pooling	Market/supply of specialized skilled labor	Labor market info, specialized training
Supplier Specialization	Suppliers with specialized equipment develop to serve industry establishments	Brokering, recruiting, entrepreneurship, credit
Knowledge Spillovers	Concentration of people knowledgeable in industry share information to everyone's benefit	Networking, public sector research and development support
Entrepreneurship	Opportunities arise for expansion and new establishments within the industry	Assistance for startups, spin-offs
Path Dependence and Lock-In	Opportunities available will be shaped by activities already established	Help extend, refine, recombine existing distinctive specializations
Culture	Important to helping economies/clusters change over time	Acknowledge and support cluster organization
Local Demand	Can encourage innovation, product improvement	Aggregate and strengthen local demand

The location quotient (LQ)¹⁹ indicates the presence of an industry cluster. When the LQ is less than 1.0, County residents can be expected to import the good or service produced by the industry. When the location quotient is greater than 1.0, An LQ greater than 1.2 suggests a high concentration of industrial employment in an area. An LQ of less than 0.8 indicates that employment demand for that industry is not very concentrated locally. The direction of change in an industry's LQ over time indicates whether that industry is growing in that location or declining. *Table 11E* shows Cameron County's location quotients in relation to Texas and the U.S. Location quotients greater than 1.0 in 2010 are highlighted. Focus is usually placed on those industries with the highest LQs and/or the those with the greatest changes over a time period.

¹⁸ Adapted from Joseph Cortright, "Making Sense of Clusters: Regional Competitiveness and Economic Development" (The Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program, March 2006): available through www.brookings.edu

¹⁹ The LQ is calculated by dividing the percentage of employees in an industry in the County by the percentage of employees in that industry in the larger regions. Data for small cities is not available for direct comparison.

Table 11L: Location Quotients (2003, 2010)

	2003		2010	
	County to TX	County to U.S.	County to TX	County to U.S.
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	1.39	1.08	0.90	0.58
Mining, quarrying, oil and gas extraction	0.01	0.03	0.02	0.07
Utilities	0.50	0.59	0.56	0.62
Construction	0.62	0.72	0.50	0.65
Manufacturing	0.88	0.77	0.61	0.54
Wholesale trade	0.67	0.77	0.53	0.62
Retail trade	1.18	1.21	1.24	1.23
Transportation and warehousing	0.98	1.12	1.08	1.24
Information	0.51	0.54	0.90	0.83
Educational services	0.48	0.29	0.63	0.40
Health care and social assistance	2.18	2.09	2.28	2.11
Arts, entertainment, and recreation	1.17	0.87	0.83	0.61
Finance and insurance	0.56	0.55	0.66	0.68
Real estate and rental and leasing	0.85	0.99	0.90	1.02
Professional and technical services	0.39	0.37	0.33	0.32
Management of companies and enterprises	0.26	0.09		
Administrative and waste services	0.79	0.81	0.90	0.97
Accommodation and food services	1.14	1.18	1.08	1.11
Other services, except public administration	0.99	0.90	0.79	0.68
Unclassified	0.91	0.74	0.33	0.13
Source: US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics and Texas Workforce Commission Employment and Wage data (www.tracer2.com)				

The cluster analysis indicates that Cameron has the strongest concentrations in Health Care and social assistance, retail trade, accommodations and food services and transportation and warehousing. Between 2003 and 2010, Retail Trade, Transportation, Health Care and Real Estate rental and leasing gained share while Accommodation and food services decreased slightly, perhaps a sign of less travel due to the worldwide economic recession.

11.3.3 Strengths and Weaknesses

The analysis detailed above can be used to identify city strengths and weaknesses. Officials and residents can build upon strengths to begin annual events, define local character, and highlight the town’s uniqueness. Recognizing weaknesses allows for realistic assessment of capabilities, identifying areas for improvement, and prioritizing needs.

Rio Hondo Strengths

1. Healthy regional economic development initiatives that the City can access to assist with larger-scale business recruitment and employer/employee training than a small city could undertake;
2. Proximity to the Laguna Madre Intercoastal Waterway, proximity to wildlife refuges surrounding the City, and international birding events and bird-watching lists that attracts tourism to the area.
3. Preferred area for Winter Texans;
4. Historic downtown with sidewalks;
5. Recreation offerings including a county park with youth programs, fishing, birding and boat recreation in the City limits;
6. Good school facilities;
7. Proximity to a port, railroad, airport and major roads leading directly to Valley transportation links;
8. Some diverse retail offerings and residents interested in maintaining small businesses in town.

Rio Hondo Weaknesses

1. Lack of industry diversity and employment;
2. Lack of traffic through town to support businesses;
3. General downtrend between 2005 and 2011 of number of businesses in town;
4. Vacant and dilapidated businesses downtown;
5. Lack of business signage and sign regulations that would create uniform or themed business signage throughout town;
6. Local financing for small business start-ups and expansions is difficult to obtain.

11.4 Economic Development Strategies

Economic development in rural America is any activity that makes the choice to remain in the community easier and more satisfying. Job opportunities are an obvious example, but this list also includes availability of decent affordable housing, quality education, an attractive, safe, and clean environment (natural and manmade), a comfortable social atmosphere, recreational and entertainment options, convenient shopping, adequate health care, a competitive and fair tax structure, responsive local government, transparent government regulations, and high-quality infrastructure (water, sewer, streets, drainage, telecommunications, etc.).

11.4.1 Define identity

Economic and town strengths, once identified, can serve as the centerpiece of an economic development plan. The first step is identifying Rio Hondo's "flavor." The easiest place to start is with current businesses, icons, and landmarks that are a part of Rio Hondo's history and its economy. The goal here is to answer the question: What is Rio Hondo's expertise? Some examples are given here to initiate thought in answering the question and developing a Rio Hondo "flavor" or "brand." Some examples follow:

- Historic landmarks include the Junior High building; built in 1924, the City's lift-span bridge (only one of two in Texas); the 1950s pharmacy downtown restored by the building's owner.
- The downtown business district buildings, built between 1905 and 1940, reflect an era when the Valley grew and flourished. Longtime residents know the history of the street that can be shared in murals, building rehabilitation and sidewalk enhancements.
- Agricultural products: Corn, wheat, sorghum and cotton are the area's main agricultural products. A few local farmers produce vegetables and dairy.
- Water recreation: Rio Hondo's name means "Deep River." Its lift bridge is unique in the state and the river provides access to boating, fishing and other water recreation in town. It's proximity to the Laguna Madre

waterway and the Padre Island National seashore provides more allure to water recreation opportunity.

- A new annual festival called *Arroyo Days* where residents can promote and sell local wares;
- Rio Hondo County Park provides opportunities for youth baseball and softball. Pavilions, basketball courts, soccer fields and playgrounds offer residents a place to gather and play weekdays, evenings and weekends.
- The Rio Hondo High mascot, the Fighting Bobcats, conjures images of the rural area's ties to South Texas wildlife and serves as a rallying symbol for all ages in the community.

A city's brand can take the form of a logo or a motto and can be used to define and sell the city and its activities to potential investors/residents as well as to build city pride. A city's logo and/or motto should appear on its website, on signs, at annual events, in partner organizations' materials when demonstrating city support, and in marketing materials. The website should be revised to showcase the brand . City events can also be tweaked to support the image the city wants to project; Even city regulation can be tied to the brand. For example, zoning could channel future development near the lift-bridge if that and the "Deep River" theme become defining pieces of the "brand."

11.4.2 Enhance City Quality of Life

Residents and businesses attracted to small towns assume they will find affordable housing, open space, recreational opportunity, lower cost of living, good smaller schools, and low crime. Quality of Life aspects of the community, away from the business world, can play tremendous roles in companies wishing to move employees to the area. Improving Quality of Life in the community is invaluable to all parties involved in economic development processes. Quality of Life amenities affect the City's ability to brand itself and recruit and retain businesses. These include parks, housing, schools, and the central business district. These amenities should be trumpeted on the website, including the city's

low crime rate as compared to Harlingen, San Benito, and La Feria;²⁰ the Arroyo and its boat ramp and fishing pier; and the facilities of the Rio Hondo County Park and Rio Hondo ISD. Projects suggested in *Chapter 3: Housing Study*; *Chapter 10: Recreation and Open Space Study*, and *Chapter 12: Central Business District Study* should be implemented.

11.4.3 Attract New Business

Several factors contribute to successful recruitment efforts. Many may not appear to be directly related to recruiting firms to town. Rather, they have to do with actions the city government, residents and local businesses can take to set up a successful environment to attract businesses. The following are efforts the City can focus on to establish a recruiting program.

- 1) Development of cluster industries: A key economic development tool is building clusters of industries in town that serve each other. Suppliers of raw materials and input products of existing businesses, and users of their waste and by-products, make good business neighbors. Likewise, businesses need service industries that assist companies in completing their work, transporting it, and providing employees with local amenities that convince them to stay in the market. Surveying existing businesses, tallying responses and placing the responses on the City website could give entrepreneurs an aggregated insight into Rio Hondo economics. A survey would ask Rio Hondo businesses and ETJ businesses surrounding the City what supplies they purchase to run their business; what goods customers ask for that they don't sell; what goods they would like to buy for their businesses but can't access; how and where they are transporting products; and what type of skills their workers need. An overview of cluster industries in the region is compiled annually by the Tech Prep of the Rio Grande Valley, Inc. provides a list of target industries in the region

²⁰ According to Uniform Crime Reports maintained by the Texas Department of Public Safety, 2009 and 2010. Rio Hondo began filing crime statistics in 2010.

that employ a large number of people and have growth potential. The local survey methodology described above would assist the City of Rio Hondo in localizing that data. The most recent list of targeted industries in for the region include those listed in Table 11M.

Table 11M: List of Targeted Industries

Administrative Support Services
Agriculture – Crop Production
Computer & Technical Services
Construction
Education
Health Services
Homeland Security & Law Enforcement
Hospitality & Tourism
Manufacturing
Retail Trade
Social Services
Transportation, Distribution and Logistics

Source: Labor Market Information Report, 2011, Tech Prep of the Rio Grande Valley, Inc.

- 2) Small Business expansion: Encouraging the growth of small businesses, particularly by residents for services that support larger industry, can help the town maintain local ownership of business decisions that can affect the long-term welfare of the community. Key ingredients include:
- Marketing available real estate to cluster business identified above
 - Ensuring City has modern communications infrastructure
 - Preserving environmental assets, like agriculture, ample water, open spaces
 - Maintaining, improving and expanding publically-owned resources that contribute to City quality of life to attract residents, businesses and tourists to the City.
 - Entrepreneurial innovation in the public and private sector. Start-up businesses could use temporary office space (incubator facilities). If such a facility does not exist they may need programs that defray rents, taxes or other expenses for its beginning years. Finally, they

need capital/access to micro loan sources, particularly those targeted at rural businesses.

- Maintaining connections between generations. Discussed further below, high school entrepreneurship clubs, mentoring programs, and organized systems for connecting business owners to younger generations can: provide employers with more focused employees, give students specific education goals, provide businesses with the employees they need to expand, give young residents reasons to remain in or return to the community, prevent the community from losing establishments because of owner retirement.

- 3) Telecommunications Services Maintaining and expanding internet capabilities in the City may be the most vital economic development strategy for attracting new business (and retaining existing business) during the next 20 years. The provision of such service trumps other strategies for at least two reasons. First, prospective residents and businesses will demand internet access and a lack of facilities equivalent to more urban areas may be a deal-breaker in location decisions. For example, businesses that prosper by branching into nearby communities need ways to communicate between offices. If they can't do that, they may bypass the City. Second, competitive internet presence for existing and new businesses is vital to attracting enough sales to weather economic trends. By developing internet sales, businesses are not dependent only on the small population or tourists who pass through town. In order to compete with more urban areas in the next 20 years, small towns must have fiber-optic lines that can handle the increasing data demands from customers, such as video transfer. Having wireless capabilities, although helpful currently, will not address City needs through 2032 as the technology is limited and will not be able to expand in its current form to meet increasing data demands.

Several companies offer wireless communications services to business and residents in Rio Hondo. The zip code area has 6 wireless choices, one of which is a not-for-profit organization and the remaining for-profit providers including Verizon, Cricket Communications, AT&T Mobility, Sprint and Rioplex. The community also has access to cable broadband services, meaning that the City does have access to wireline broadband internet access services that intertwine transmission with information processing capabilities. Satellite broadband services are available. However, the technology is dependent on line of sight to satellite locations, weather, and latency which can slow signal relays between the satellite and the ground, having particular effects on communications which require extensive data exchange between web server and client.

Fiber-to-the-home (fiber optic) provides the fastest links for emerging data transmissions including video exchanges. No fiber optic lines exist in Rio Hondo. However, the Rio Grande Valley Med/Ed Fiber Optic Network, a public private partnership, received a National Telecommunications and Information Administration federal grant to build 166-mile fiber network to connect the Valley's public colleges and universities. The \$15 million project will connect a total of 23 anchor educational and health institutions, with the goal of significantly improving instruction, research and health services in the region. When the project is completed around 2014, it may spur more affordable and advanced internet access for local consumers and businesses. With 166 miles of fiber optic laid in the region, private companies will be able to extend more services, including perhaps in Rio Hondo. The City should make the case during the planning period to private telecommunication companies for this expansion, perhaps joining with the nearby Port of Harlingen who will want the service.

- 4) Tourism: The City began its first annual event "Arroyo Days" in 2011. It is also applying for funding to improve boat ramp access into the Arroyo

Colorado, a major recreation area in the Harlingen area. Increasing marketing of these efforts and pairing local events with regional events like the Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival (in which tourists canoe the Arroyo but do not stop in Rio Hondo) could increase tourist visits to the City. The city and/or local businesses should obtain membership in or sponsor regional state tourism campaigns, organizations and associations that market rural areas, historic downtowns, and/or the Padre Island Seashore, birding trails and other regional recreational offerings.

- 5) Attracting retirees/Winter Texans: The City does not have links on common Winter Texan sites, nor is it a member of the Texas Department of Agriculture Rural Communities Program. RV Park owners in Rio Hondo say that Winter Texans rent their pads for their RVs during the winter months. Cooperation between lodgers, area tourist sites and the County will assist with advertising Rio Hondo as a place to stay near local attractions.

- 6) Annexation: The City may pursue expansion of water and sewer services, roads and road connectivity and negotiate with businesses and/or residents in the ETJ to agree to voluntary annexation. Through annexation, the City can protect a business or residential property investment by extending zoning classification to their property and, more importantly, to property surrounding it. It also may benefit from an increased residential population who could serve on local boards and commissions with in-city status. In Rio Hondo, businesses will be brought into the City's tax base through the city's new Municipal Development District. However, their status as being outside the City limits may continue to be a disincentive to being a part of the City community.

- 7) Zoning: The City's existing zoning ordinance should be updated to encourage more types of development such as mixed-use building, a

variety of housing development on the water, public access to the canal and ability to maintain and grow home businesses. Zoning increases quality of life in that it promotes lower traffic congestion, safety from fire and other dangers, and facilitates the adequate provision of transportation, water, sewerage, schools, parks and other requirements. Zoning in combination with development management tools such as expedited permitting can also be used to encourage types of development unfamiliar to an area's developers. For example, performance zoning can enable any style of construction that adheres to certain noise, traffic or pollution limits while mixed use zoning and form-based zoning can encourage the development of walkable areas that combine commercial, residential, and light-industrial uses. Enforcement of zoning ordinances coupled with periodic reviews of the ordinance's effects on the community can be a powerful tool for guiding development towards a desired future. The stability that a zoning ordinance brings can also increase land values throughout the community.

- 8) Housing Development: Most developers do not have the resources to build speculative homes in markets as small as Rio Hondo, so homes are generally built to order. This delay forces potential residents to look elsewhere. Local realtors, mortgagors, and developers must participate if Rio Hondo is to expand its housing market, and economy. The banks and the realtors are the eyes and ears of the housing market; they can provide valuable information concerning the types and numbers of potential new homeowners. Housing in Rio Hondo is relatively affordable, but more multifamily housing is needed for Rio Hondo to expand its housing market and its economy. Other suggestions for housing development can be found in Chapter 3 of this plan.

- 9) Development Management: Development Management Tools provide methods for lowering development costs to the City and the developer

without sacrificing development quality. Development costs that can be influenced by City processes include: fees, taxes, standards, time, and certainty. The City could charge impact fees requiring developers to pay the costs of development expansion, mainly street and utility infrastructure. The City could also enter into mutually-beneficial development agreements that allow the City and the developer to share development costs. One source of city funds would be the MDD. The City also could offer lower permit costs or quicker permit approval time if certain conditions are met. It could streamline development application, permit and public hearing processes to decrease time spent on approval stages. The City can also facilitate dialogue between residents, developers, and other stakeholders to ensure that all perspectives of site development are considered early in the development process. That might include an on-site pre-application walkthrough by all of the stakeholders.

The City should investigate methods of leveraging technology to make the development process clear and efficient. This could include posting information about the process, forms, and contact information on a City website, using a website to disseminate information about best management practices and residents' hopes about future development, and setting up online payment systems to handle development fees.

Tax incentive programs are another tool available to the City to assist new or expanding businesses. Tax incentive programs can be provided easily through statutory authority given to cities under Chapter 312 of the Texas Tax Code or Chapter 380 of the Texas Local Government Code. Chapter 312 allows municipalities to abate taxes of the increase in value for land, improvements and personal property for up to 10 years. Chapter 380 allows municipalities to provide grants or other cash incentives to an entity for a public purpose in an amount equivalent to the percentage of taxes that would be abated for similar increases in value. The number of years is

unlimited. A business entity would enter into a legal contract with the City for the benefit. Prior to entering into agreements, the City should adopt program guidelines and eligibility criteria in consultation with legal or financial professionals,

Described below are examples of incentives offered by many Texas cities and were compiled with the assistance of the Texas Economic Development Council (TEDC), a not-for-profit organization of Economic Development professionals in Texas.

- Sales Tax Rebate Program The City EDC or MDD could rebate to the new business its share of EDC or MDD sales taxes in sliding amounts of 100% of sales taxes collected the 1st year, 50 percent the 2nd year and 25 percent the third year. The rebate ends after three years and also ends if the business changes ownership during the three year rebate period.
- Property Tax Abatement Program The City abates property taxes after the first full appraisal year (Rendition period allows for the protest period to end and appraised value of the property to be fixed) in the amount of 100 percent following payment of the first full year tax, 66 percent the 2nd year and 33 percent the third year and the abatement period ends after four tax years. The abatement ends immediately if the business is sold. If the City were to choose to not have the business pay taxes the first year, the City will lose the “free year” of income for new appraised value under current Texas Law.

- Local Business Improvement Grants Cities can use available funds to assist businesses with small grants, usually for outdoor improvements that will enhance the appeal of a business and business districts. Eligible projects often include signage, landscaping, exterior paint, exterior façade work, awnings, window treatments or fencing. The City already has a \$1,500 grant that some businesses have used to paint buildings or pay for other minor cosmetic upgrades. This program should be advertised or extended.

11.4.4 Retain Existing Businesses

The most important factor in local economic development is the retention and expansion of existing business. Nearly 80 percent of all new jobs are created by the expansion of existing businesses. David Birch, a researcher on small businesses, estimates that 55% of business growth can be attributed to expansion of existing business, 44% to start-ups, and only 1% to relocations. Those statistics indicate that it is as or more important for a community to focus on fostering opportunities for existing and home-grown businesses than it is for a community to devote resources to attracting new businesses. A comprehensive approach to rural community development called HomeTown Competitiveness recommends increasing community involvement by creating committees and task forces charged with strengthening towns' Entrepreneurship, Charity, Youth Engagement, and Leadership. Some of the ideas promoted by the approach are:

- Developing mentoring relationships between business owners and younger residents that encourage younger generations to stay in or return to the community and enable them to continue a business when the owner retires.
- Develop a youth task force that includes members of multiple generations. Among other projects, it should coordinate with local schools and give young people the initiative and skills to transform hobbies into businesses.

- Providing scholarships for students that turn into loans if the student chooses not to return to the community after graduation.
- Establish a foundation (Community Affiliated Fund) to capture the transfer of wealth through endowments. The transfer of wealth is estimated by demographic forecasts to peak in 2014.
- Partner with local schools and workforce development groups to provide training for local businessmen to expand the workforce and grow their businesses.

Many of the actions a city can take to promote business (as listed above) also will retain and expand existing businesses. Since most of Rio Hondo's businesses are located on its central historic corridor, Colorado Avenue, heavy investment along the road will be essential to retaining and expanding businesses there. The businesses also need increased marketing in the form of social media, internet sales, street signage and other methods to gain the foot-traffic they need to survive. The City can assist businesses by continuing efforts to improve its website to be a portal for businesses in town and/or partnering with other organizations in the Valley that promote area business on their websites. This includes the Harlingen Area Chamber of Commerce. The City's recent efforts to create "Arroyo Days" gave local businesses, including home businesses, the opportunity to show and sell their products. "Buy Local" campaigns can help residents understand the importance of shopping at home. For every \$100 spent in locally owned independent stores, \$68 returns to the community through taxes, payroll, and other expenditures. Spending the same \$100 in a national chain, allows only \$43 to stay local, and spending the \$100 online brings no benefit to the community.

See Appendix A for more information on the HomeTown Competitiveness approach for rural communities. Also see www.the350project.net/home.html for ideas on starting Buy Local campaigns.

11.5 Capacity for Implementation

The Lower Rio Grande Valley has established several economic development efforts aimed at promoting the entire tri-county Lower Rio Grande Valley area. Local organizations within the City provide a financial and volunteer base for City action. The presence of regional and statewide organizations extends the City's capabilities to focus on specific Rio Hondo needs with additional skills, funding and expertise.

11.5.1 Local Organizations

The main role for a City to play in economic development is often through a taxing mechanism that gives the City a funding source for economic development projects. Texas law allows cities to form at least three types of corporations to raise funds for and promote economic development. All of the corporations and their taxes must be approved in an election by voters. The sales tax rate can be 1/8, 1/4, 3/8, or 1/2 percent. The only restriction is that the new combined rate of all local sales and use taxes does not exceed two percent and that total sales taxes combined cannot exceed a state cap of 8.25%. The mechanisms are described below.

1) **The §4A Corporation.** Sales taxes generated for a §4A Corporation are primarily intended for manufacturing and industrial development,. Cities may use the money to acquire or pay for land, buildings, equipment, facilities, expenditures, targeted infrastructure and improvements for purposes related to:

- manufacturing and industrial facilities, recycling facilities, distribution centers, small warehouse facilities;
- research and development facilities, regional or national corporate headquarters facilities, primary job training facilities for use by institutions of higher education, job training classes; telephone call centers; and career centers that are not located within a junior college taxing district;
- a general aviation business service airport that is an integral part of an industrial park;

- certain infrastructure improvements, which promote or develop new or expanded business enterprises;
- port-related facilities to support waterborne commerce; and
- maintenance and operating costs associated with projects.

§4A corporations also may, following a separate election to gain voter approval, spend §4A sales tax to clean up contaminated property. A corporation created under §4A cannot assume, or pay principal or interest on, debts that existed before the city created the corporation.

2) **The §4B corporation.** Sales taxes generated under a §4B corporation may use sales tax funds for a wider range of activities and purposes. §4B funds may be used for land, buildings, equipment, facilities, expenditures, targeted infrastructure and improvements for all purposes for which 4A funds may be used. They also can be used to build or improve professional and amateur sports and athletic facilities, tourism and entertainment facilities, and convention and public parks. They can also be used to enhance public events including related store, restaurant, concession, parking and transportation facilities; related street, water, drainage and sewer facilities; and affordable housing and demolition of dilapidated structures. Cities must hold at least one public hearing on each project proposed under §4B.

Also, under §4B funds may be used to promote and develop new and expanded business enterprises. A city may provide public safety facilities, recycling facilities, streets and roads, drainage and related improvements, demolition of existing structures, general municipally owned improvements, maintenance and operating costs associated with projects, or any other project that the board of directors determines will promote and develop such business enterprises. These expenditures may occur in the City's ETJ with approval by the County Commissioner's Court.

3) **Municipal Development District**, governed by chapter 377 of the Texas Local Government Code. Like a §4A/B tax, the Municipal Development District and tax rate are created through a local election. The election defines the

location of the district and amount of the tax. The district can include all or part of a city and its ETJ, so if a city has reached its sales tax limit in one location, the district can exclude that location from the new tax. It is the only city tax that can be imposed in the ETJ and can mitigate some of the financial burden on cities from ETJ development. Created by the state law in 2005, an MDD may accept grants or loans; buy, sell, and lease property; employ necessary personnel; enter into contracts with public and private parties; and adopt rules to govern its operation. It may issue bonds or other obligations to pay the costs of a development project after approval by the Texas Attorney General.

4) **Hotel/Motel Occupancy Tax.** The other sales tax available to municipalities for economic development is a hotel/motel tax. State law limits allows municipalities to charge up to a 7 percent on hotel and motel stays. The city may collect the tax on hotels and motels located within its ETJ, but the combination of municipal, county and state hotel/motel on an ETJ-located hotel or motel cannot exceed 15 percent. The money collected annually from such a tax could be directed by the City Council to an entity tasked with economic development related to increasing tourism.

5) **Revolving Loan Funds (RLF).** This mechanism, does not need to be approved by voters and can be funded initially through grants, EDC monies, donations or a combination of several funding sources. AN RLF assists businesses with capital needs. Many revolving loan funds provide bridge or gap financing between the amount of money needed to start a business and the amount available to a borrower from standard sources. RLF funding lowers the overall risk to institutional lenders, making application for conventional financing more successful. RLF loans usually range in duration from 3 to 5 years, with loan amounts ranging from \$1,000 to \$250,000, depending on the amount a business will receive from private lenders or other sources. Initially, a City RLF fund is capitalized through grant sources (e.g. Texas Capital Fund, MDD, other local/state/federal programs, and/or philanthropic organizations). Each round of interest and repaid loans provides funds for future loans, so borrowers should be

required to meet financial security and management ability standards to qualify for a loan. In addition, borrowers submit a business plan and collateral guarantees and should meet performance measures established by the Fund, such as increase in tax revenue or jobs in the community.

For a city of Rio Hondo's size, it is recommended that an independent financial consultant (ideally located outside Rio Hondo) administer an RLF. Independent administration enables prior review of loan applications before their submittal to the council or an appointed RLF board for approval. Independent application review avoids perceived favoritism and enables a thorough review of potential borrowers by financial specialists. More detailed information on establishing an RLF is available through the Council of Development Finance Agencies (www.cdfa.net).

6) Local Budgeting. A city has the power to budget its revenues. Cities can prioritize, if advisable, economic development spending in their general budget. In addition to voter-approved sales taxes like the §4A/B, cities can charge a 1-cent sales tax without voter approval to be used in their general budgets. One way of assigning budgeted amounts to economic development activities would be to allocate a set portion of the sales tax revenue toward projects that would enhance economic development.

Rio Hondo Economic Development Corporation: The Rio Hondo EDC, which is funded by a local 1/2-cent §4B sales tax, has pursued a variety of projects to improve businesses and quality of life in Rio Hondo. The Corporation receives about \$45,000 annually from the sales tax approved by voters in 2000. The Corporation has provided funding for park improvements, both at County Park and the Boat Ramp Park; it has offered \$1,000 grants to businesses to improve building exteriors which businesses have used for fresh coats of paint and other cosmetic low-cost items; and most recently funded a new summer event called Arroyo Days. The EDC envisions hosting an Arroyo Day once a month in the summer. The EDC can earn a profit from the event to increase their budget by

charging vendors fees for a table at the event. The EDC 4B Corporation Board consists of 7 residents, one of which is a council member, and meets monthly.

Rio Hondo Municipal Development District: Beginning in 2011, the City, by voter approval, dissolved its 4A Industrial Development Corp. and formed an MDD to increase its economic development revenue. In 2011, the City was working to establish by-laws for the organization. The City Council will serve as the MDD Board of Directors. It is not known how much revenue the MDD will generate. However, the former IDC was generating about \$45,000 annually. The collection should be larger since both in-city and ETJ businesses will be charging the tax.

11.5.2 Regional Organizations

Chambers of Commerce: Rio Hondo does not have a Chamber of Commerce. However, the Harlingen Area Chamber of Commerce serves Harlingen and surrounding communities such as Rio Hondo. The Chamber holds an annual Business Expo in June that allows businesses to showcase their products and services. Its website has links to area RV parks, recreation opportunities and programs for various segments of the community such as retirees. The Chamber holds monthly seminars on business topics for its members and it facilitates communication between school districts and the business community on employment needs. No businesses from Rio Hondo are among its members. Membership costs about \$150 per year. In Harlingen, the Chamber focuses on the needs of existing businesses and allows the Harlingen Economic Development Corporation to focus on business recruitment. Rio Hondo could have a similar arrangement if it encouraged its businesses to become Harlingen Area Chamber members and benefit from the workshops and other services the Chamber provides to existing businesses. Then, the Rio Hondo MDD board members could focus on recruitment programs.

Rio South Texas Economic Council This public and private association of economic development interest in Cameron County, Hidalgo, Starr and Willacy

Counties is dedicated to the promotion of new business opportunities and job creation through private investment in the region. Its staff and Board of Directors promote the region and advance regional and national ties in manufacturing, retail and education. It has defined growth industries for the region as Manufacturing, Healthcare, Retail and Hospitality, Business Services, Homeland Security and Law Enforcement, and Construction. Member communities can post available properties on the Council's website. (riosouthtexas.com). The Council's staff and board attend trade shows nationally to market the region. Member communities can send representatives with staff to the trade shows or other conferences. The organization pays registration fees while the individual covers travel expenses. In addition, networking opportunities exist for members who attend monthly meetings and committee meetings in the region. Monthly meetings are held throughout the region. Member communities can volunteer to host a meeting. Council offices are located in Edinburg. Contact Raudel Garza, Executive Director at 888-778-3201 or <http://www.riosouthtexas.com/rio>. Membership for a town the size of Rio Hondo is \$2,000 annually.

Economic Development District of the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council: This entity's 2011 Annual Work Program tasks itself with building local capacity for economic development and supporting small businesses through workshops, conferences and technical assistance. Local jurisdictions can apply through the EDD for financial assistance from the US Economic Development Administration. (EDA) Grants are available for infrastructure development, local capacity building, and business development to help communities alleviate conditions of severe and persistent unemployment and underemployment. The District can provide Small Business Administration Loans to small businesses. It also offers special assistance to women-owned small businesses in the form of technical support to low-income women to develop business skills.

EDA grants, ranging from \$100,000 to \$1.2 million, may not exceed 50% of the total cost of the project. Other grants, including from the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council, may be combined to assist the applicant in meeting

the matching costs. The projects are scored on their ability to strengthen diverse communities that have suffered disproportionate economic and job losses or long-term severe economic distress, and/or are rebuilding to become more competitive in the global economy. They are also scored on the project's aim to meet the following national priorities:

- Technology-led economic development,
- Support to small- and medium-sized businesses,
- Global competitiveness and innovation,
- Responses to economic dislocation because of auto industry restructuring or natural disasters,
- Commercialization of research, and/or
- Environmentally sustainable development.

Workforce Solutions, Cameron County: This organization serves residents of Cameron County and is part of the Texas Workforce System providing one-stop solutions for job seekers and employers. Services provided include labor market information, job training/retraining/skills upgrading, youth services, childcare and information and referral. The Workforce Center has offices in Cameron County and Brownsville. However, it provides services specifically in rural areas through its Mobile Lab, which have internet connectivity to link job seekers with Work-In-Texas (WIT) and other local, state, and national job listings. Resources, such as computers, telephone, fax machine, and the latest labor market information, are available to Rio Hondo residents weekly to make job search easier and faster. Services are provided in English and Spanish. Rio Hondo provides a site for the Mobile Lab outside its City Hall. The Mobile Lab staff can assist businesses with finding employees, on-site interviewing, and small business counseling. For job-seekers, it provides access to the state's Job Links website; referral to child care programs; computer and resume skill training and career services. However, it can meet with a client only once or twice a month in Rio Hondo. Training includes

keyboard/typing; English as a Second Language, Pre-GED, and Money Smart classes. Workforce staff said the main needs in Rio Hondo are computer literacy and English as a Second Language skills.

South Texas Rural Region Small Cities Coalition The Coalition formed out of initiatives suggested in the South Texas Regional Economic Development Strategy (STRREDS). It defined a South Texas Rural Region (STRR). Representatives from towns of less than 20,000 population in Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr and Willacy Counties, including Rio Hondo, meet monthly to discuss impediments to economic development in the rural areas. The City is usually represented at the meetings by the city administrator and/or the mayor. In addition, the Small Cities Coalition has worked together to receive EDA and USDA grants to solve discussed problems. In Rio Hondo, monies received through the Small Cities Coalition assisted in the expansion of the Rio Hondo Senior Center. The funding also allowed Coalition members to sponsor Literacy Day to spread the importance of early literacy as a key component to an educated workforce. The Coalition is provided administrative support through the Workforce Solutions, Cameron County office. Coalition training in 2011 and 2012 is funded through a nationwide USDA Rural Development program called Stronger Economies Together (SET). Through SET, the Coalition has received day-long trainings with the intention of building entrepreneurial capacity in the rural areas and forming a blueprint for action.

Port of Harlingen: The Port Authority is a quasi-governmental agency that operates with revenues the port generates. The facility is a “non-operating port” because it is not involved in the day to day operations of barge traffic. Rather, it builds wharf and dock facilities to increase waterborne traffic to and from it, promoting economic growth and jobs in the region. Companies needing waterborne transportation for goods can gain port access without the expense of building their own dock. Companies lease property from the Port and build their own storage facilities. The Port embarks on business attraction efforts annually, including trade shows of companies needing to locate in places where they can

access the type of materials transported via shallow barge ships. In one case, an international company north of Rio Hondo built its own Dock Terminal on its waterfront property and offloads materials directly from the canal to its storage facilities on its property. However, port officials say there are few companies who could afford to build their own docks because of the time, land and federal permits required to complete such a project. Most of the companies Rio Hondo would recruit would have materials they need shipped to the Port and then truck them to their nearby Rio Hondo sites. The City should work closely with the Port Authority, sending representatives to trade shows, linking websites and increasing other connections to the port.

Rio Grande Valley Partnership: This organization promotes regional economic development among Cameron, Starr, Willacy and Hidalgo Counties. The main office is in Weslaco. Its mission is to advocate for Valley economic development initiatives including better highways, increased educational opportunities, improved international relations with Mexico, more and better jobs, and state and federal legislation to benefit the Valley. Over the years, the Partnership has spun off the Lower Rio Grande Water Committee which monitors the conditions of the Rio Grande River and facilitates cooperation with Mexican counterparts and Tech Prep RGV, a partnership between businesses and schools that includes mentoring by local businesses to area students. It also spearheaded the formation of the Valley Agricultural Research and Development Corporation which gives grants for agricultural research projects in the Valley.

Small Business Development Centers: The University of Texas Pam American State University's Small Business Development Center in Edinburg offers advice, training, and data resources free of charge to those wanting to start or enlarge a small business. Some of the agency's material is offered via free online courses. The agency serves a 13 county area but are experienced in working specifically with rural area businesses. Prior to 2011, the SBDC has not been providing services actively in Rio Hondo.

Rural Enterprise Development Center This center at the University of Texas Pan American Division of Community Engagement in Edinburg serves as a resource in the Valley for rural economic development projects.

Tech Prep of the Rio Grande Valley is a federal program providing educational partnerships between business, education and government to train workers needed in the region. Its goal is to raise the skill levels of a home-grown workforce. It provides high school students with a 6-year track program to gain a workplace skill for jobs that are currently in demand or that will be in demand. Almost half of Rio Hondo High School students are enrolled in the Tech Prep program. The school graduates at least 50 such trainees annually. The Tech Prep organization produces a report annually called the Labor Market Information Report. The report identifies target industries for the region and for which students should be trained. The report identifies top growth occupations for the Valley region annually that entities like the City can use to target recruitment efforts. Teachers of Tech Prep classes bring in speakers from local businesses to their classes on occasion. However, currently the High School does not have a job-site training experience for the students. Funding required to transport students to job sites could be an issue in implementing such a program, school officials said.

Texas Tropical Trail Region Heritage Tourism Program The Texas Tropical Trail Region (TTTR) heritage tourism program is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit corporation developed in conjunction with the Texas Historical Commission and organized in February 2005 with an eleven-member volunteer Board of Directors, a salaried Executive Director and over 500 partners in tourism throughout the 20-county South Texas area known as the Texas Tropical Trail Region. This Region covers over 23,000 square miles and is home to over 1.7 million people. Four sub-regions or Byways (the Gulf Coast Byway, the Rio Grande Byway, the Wild Horse Desert Byway and the Brush Country Byway) are located within the Region. Rio Hondo is located in the Rio Grande Byway Region. While many

Cameron County cities are listed on the organization's website, Rio Hondo is not on the list. A map depicting Laguna Madre birding sites does not include Rio Hondo. The organization's mission is to showcase the heritage, natural beauty and diverse culture of South Texas for the benefit and enjoyment of Texans and travelers. To achieve this goal, the Board partners with tourism agencies, community leaders, and state and local entities to identify, preserve and interpret our natural, historical and cultural resources. The Tropical Trail Region headquarters are in Kingsville. The organization's website, thetropicaltraveler.com, lists local events in the area. It highlights events in May, Texas Tourism Month and has monthly meetings for Partner organizations, including cities. The meetings are free and open to the public.

11.5.3 State Organizations

Texas Department of Agriculture The agency has several programs that assist a community with economic development efforts these include (Also see <http://www.tda.state.tx.us>):

- *Main Street or Downtown Revitalization Programs:* Rio Hondo does not currently participate in the Texas Historical Commission's Main Street Program. The Main Street program requires that a city designate an individual to serve as the program coordinator who will spend at least 51% of their time on program activities. The Downtown Revitalization Program allows communities to qualify for the same grants as the Main Street Program without being designated as a Main Street City, but this reduction of restrictions results in a far more competitive process. The minimum award is \$50,000 and the maximum is \$150,000. Funds can be used for public infrastructure improvements such as parking, sidewalks, lighting, utility upgrades in designated "historic commercial district." Awards for both programs may be provided for construction of the following public infrastructure in the designated downtown area:

1. Acquisition of land needed for public infrastructure improvements
 2. Water & sewer facilities/lines
 3. Road/street construction/improvements
 4. Natural gas line construction/improvements
 5. Electric, telephone, & fiber optic line construction/improvements
 6. Traffic signals and signs
 7. Drainage
 8. Sidewalk construction/improvements
 9. Public parking lot construction/improvements
 10. Other construction activities required to eliminate architectural barriers for the handicapped
- *Infrastructure Development:* The Texas Capital Fund also provides funds for public infrastructure improvements including water & sewer facilities/lines, pre-treatment facilities, road/street construction/improvements, natural gas line construction/improvements, electric, telephone, & fiber optic line construction/improvements, harbor/channel dredging, purchase of real estate related to public infrastructure improvements, traffic signals and signs drainage improvements, and railroad spurs.
 - *Real Estate Development:* TCF funds also are available to assist businesses with real estate development if the business commits to create and/or retain permanent jobs, primarily for low and moderate-income persons. The real estate and/or improvements must be owned by the community and leased to the business. Award may not exceed 50% of the total project cost. A minimum equity injection of 10 to 33% also is required of the business. No match is required by the sponsoring public locality.
 - *GO TEXAN Rural Community Program (RCP)* provides financial and technical assistance related to tourism and economic development to member cities and associate members (e.g. chambers of commerce and EDCs). Memberships are for two years and cost \$150. Members receive emails and an infoletter discussing workshops and available resources for rural development. Members

are also linked to the GO TEXAN website and its social media contacts, including a GO TEXAN App for the iPhone which promotes restaurants, agricultural products and other retailers and services in member communities.

- *GO TEXAN Certified Retirement Community Program (CRC)*, codified under Texas Agriculture Code Title 2, Chapter 12, Section 12.040, is designed to help Texas communities encourage retirees and potential retirees to make their homes in Texas communities. The CRC program is established to:
 - 1) Promote Texas as a retirement destination to retirees both in and outside Texas;
 - 2) Help Texas communities market themselves as retirement locations and develop assets that retirees find attractive;
 - 3) Assist in developing retirement and long-term living communities that attract retirees, who: contribute to economic development, contribute to the State's workforce/knowledge base, and enrich Texas communities;
 - 4) Encourage tourism to Texas to encourage potential residents to evaluate the State as a retirement location and to increase the number of visitors of the retiree population.

The program application requires a \$5,000 fee, a local sponsor/contact, and names of members of a Retirement Board. The community must also submit a long-term plan outlining the steps a community will take to maintain its desirability as a destination for retirees and complete a Retiree Desirability Assessment provided by the TDA Rural Economic Development Division. Completing the application process would assist the City in creating a future retiree development plan. See www.retireintexas.org

Texas Center for Rural Entrepreneurship This not-for-profit organization formed in 2003 with funds from the USDA Rural Utilities Services. Its ongoing mission is to stimulate and support private and public entrepreneurship development in communities throughout rural Texas. This is accomplished by matching

resources to the needs of rural entrepreneurs and organizations in communities that promote and support entrepreneurship. The organization offers for a fee workshops to organizations trying to enhance their entrepreneurial skills. It also sponsors a certification for “Entrepreneur Ready Communities.” These are communities that undertake a 10-step process to establish an entrepreneurial community. The process purports to create a community that actively engages in new market opportunities; has formal community supports for entrepreneurial efforts both inside the community and through contacts established with individuals and organizations outside the community; and has a structure for ongoing entrepreneurial development. (See tcre.org)

Accion Texas This non-profit micro-lender provides small businesses in Texas and Louisiana with loans up to \$100,000 when they haven’t been able to access loans from traditional sources. The group’s headquarters is located in San Antonio.

USDA Rural Development, Rural Business Programs (Edinburg Office, Region 8) The USDA provides grants and loans through various programs for rural businesses. They include grants to finance and facilitate development of small and emerging rural businesses (less than 50 employees and less than \$1 million in projected gross revenue); provide seed money for revolving loan funds; conduct adult education programs for job training and advancement; and facilitate conversion to renewable energy systems. In addition, the USDA RD began operating a program in 2009 called Stronger Economies Together (SET), an intense training initiative to strengthen the capacity of rural communities. This pilot program is being run through the Small Cities Coalition.

11.6 Economic Development Plan

The following goals, objectives, and policies synthesize the above analysis and wishes for the City expressed by residents into a set of actions that the City

should follow. The underlying purpose of the economic development plan is to fulfill the vision of the comprehensive plan that in 2032 Rio Hondo will be an

“economically-viable community known for its entrepreneurial spirit that supplies residents and tourists with quality services, retail, entertainment, schools, and parks.”

11.6.1 Economic Development Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: Human resources are available in the form of staff, committees/task forces, and individual volunteers charged with implementing economic development initiatives.

The City of Rio Hondo has skilled staff, dedicated public officials and is blessed with skilled administrators, active and innovative elected officials, a dedicated Economic Development Corporation with funding. It also has access to an organized coalition of economic development associations in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Given the large number of economic development initiatives recommended in this plan, the City should consider the following options for maintaining and mobilizing more and ongoing human resources. Specific organizations/groups are recommended to take on projects throughout this plan; these may change depending on the choices the City makes about hiring staff, establishing committees, and finding volunteers.

	Possible Role(s)
Existing EDC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate and fund Arroyo Days and other community events that could bring tourists to town and enhance quality of life • Initiate an effort to “brand” the City • Oversee City website redesign • Keep website up to date in regards to economic development initiatives and successes • Hold training sessions for “first responders,” employees at store fronts who give directions and information to passersby
MDD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directors should include city officials, ISD staff or board members, small business owners, downtown business owners,

	<p>county staff or officials, faith-based organizations, and other stakeholders in the business community from healthcare, agriculture, workforce services and/or youth services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaise with chambers of commerce, Port, and regional development groups • Survey business needs • Develop city entrepreneurial skills/resources including economic development workshops for local businesses • Develop program guidelines and eligibility criteria for a Chapter 380 incentive program • Fund matches needed for state grants • Develop a youth leadership committee • Keep website up to date in regards to economic development initiatives and successes
City staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enforce ordinances related to development, dilapidated buildings and new construction. • Staff EDC and MDD meetings • Provide information and resources to existing and possible new businesses • Assist with keeping website up to date
Individual Volunteers (could be students)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist with branding/re-designing website, spreading brand message around town • Increase efforts to Buy Local • Take on small-scale projects (e.g. creation of city logo, mural painting, grant writing) • Support Arroyo Days and other city events

Objective 1.1: By 2012, the MDD should establish a clear economic development role for the MDD

Policy 1.1.1: By 2012, adopt by laws for the MDD. In adopting by-laws determine MDD role versus that of the EDC.

Policy 1.1.2: Also, during 2012 work with City Attorney to establish guidelines and eligibility criteria for Chapter 380 grants and loans to businesses.

Objective 1.2: By 2016, make the MDD a training ground for community entrepreneurs and community leaders

Policy 1.2.1: By 2013, City appoint representatives from ISD staff or board members, small business owners, downtown business owners, county staff or officials, faith-based organizations, and other stakeholders in the business community from healthcare, agriculture, workforce services and/or youth services to serve on the MDD once it is operational.

Policy 1.2.2: By 2014, fund the participation of MDD board members in regional economic development group meetings, conferences and workshops.

Objective 1.3: By 2014, increase the volunteers working with the EDC to extend local economic development efforts.

Policy 1.3.1: By 2012, appoint a blue-ribbon committee to develop a “brand” for the City and work with City staff and other volunteers to advertise the brand on the city website and through other marketing materials.

Policy 1.3.2: By 2013, EDC establish an Arroyo Days committee whose membership organizes and expands Arroyo Days.

Policy 1.3.3: By 2016, MDD establish a youth commission that assists the City with development priorities, implements campaigns or ideas to get young people thinking about creating their own businesses in Rio Hondo after education; and works with both elementary age children and adult business owner mentors to establish economic development initiatives, marketing programs and events for the City. Include ISD staff on committee as mentors.

Objective 1.4: By 2017, MDD and EDC jointly complete certification steps to become an Entrepreneur Ready Community working with the *Texas Center for Rural Entrepreneurship*

Policy 1.4.1: Between 2012 and 2017, establish committees and liaison relationships with regional economic groups that give Rio Hondo the organizational structure to become an Entrepreneur Ready Community. Work with the Texas Center for Rural Entrepreneurship for ideas and ways to move forward with such a certification.

Policy 1.4.2: By 2014, MDD complete business surveys and at least 35 interviews on business community needs.

Policy 1.4.3: By 2016, MDD and EDC form business networks within Rio Hondo and regionally, holding educational breakfast or after-work seminars, cataloging business resources for display at City Hall, and recruiting support businesses that Rio Hondo businesses need.

Policy 1.4.4: Join area economic development organizations including the Harlingen Area Chamber of Commerce, the Rio South Texas Economic Council, and the GO TEXAN Rural Communities program to gain exposure by 2016.

Policy 1.4.5: By 2017, become a certified Entrepreneurial-Ready Community.

Goal 2: Rio Hondo has a larger and more diverse business base, including 50% more establishments and jobs (or adding at least one business annually)

Objective 2.1: Continue to improve the City's water and sewer components and capacities throughout the planning period to ensure the systems meet growing demands within TCEQ guidelines. (See Chapter 5 Water Study and Chapter 6 Sewer Study for Policy recommendations throughout planning period)

Objective 2.2: Provide programs that assist new businesses with start-up capital, channel their development downtown in a business district that can draw area residents and tourists, and incorporate technology to speed City permitting processes.

Policy 2.2.1: By 2013, post on city website information links to microlending programs such as ACCION Texas, USDA RD and the LRGVDC. Also, hold a workshop to provide information about these products or provide free booth space at a local event to distribute such information to those interested.

Policy 2.2.2: By 2012, MDD adopt a sales tax rebate program for businesses that renovate or rebuild buildings downtown. Either the taxes owing to the increase in value after the renovation or all sales taxes could be forgiven for a period of 1 to 5 years.

Policy 2.2.1: By 2014, begin listing on an upgraded City website properties for sale in Rio Hondo and contacts to reach realtors or owners.

Policy 2.2.4: Throughout the planning period, EDC or MDD continue to offer building improvement grants to downtown businesses and/or start a program that assists businesses with their signs or awnings that help market their establishments and make the business areas look more vibrant.

Policy 2.2.5: By 2014, post on the City's website all pertinent ordinances related to building and development in Rio Hondo. This would include posting the City's Future Land Use Map, the Comprehensive Plan, its Zoning map, Zoning and Subdivision ordinances, and other related materials.

Policy 2.2.6: By 2014, on an upgraded City website, create a special page called “Doing Business in Rio Hondo” or “Businesses,” and upload all the forms a business would need to fill out to get started, including City forms like building permits and state forms needed for filing as a business entity or links to those forms on state websites.

Policy 2.2.7: By 2014, create an online payments page on the City website to allow businesses to pay for building permits and other fees online.

Objective 2.3: Build businesses around industry that have been identified in the region as “clusters.”

Policy 2.3.1: Advertise on City website by 2014 and keep up to date during the planning period lists of industry clusters prominent in the Lower Rio Grande Valley area.

Policy 2.3.2: By 2013, EDC work with the Texas Agrilife Extension office in San Benito to further develop the farming cluster of industry prevalent in the region. They can provide a workshop to raise awareness about farming opportunities. The Master Gardener Association of Cameron County also can be invited to spread information through workshops and to annual events to distribute information.

Policy 2.3.2: Assist the school district and local businesses by 2015 with transportation, training or other costs related to training Rio Hondo high school students in these cluster fields and/or creating internships/mentorships for students in Rio Hondo businesses.

Policy 2.3.3: By 2015, begin sending MDD representatives with Port of Harlingen staff or Rio South Texas Economic Council staff to conferences of industries identified as growing or clustering in the Rio Grande Valley.

Objective 2.4: Throughout the planning period expand City offerings that make businesses choose Rio Hondo as a great place for their employees to live.

Policy 2.4.1: By 2012, begin implementing objectives in *Chapter 10 Recreation and Open Space Study* that improve the City’s three parks and expand the park system.

Policy 2.4.2: By 2013, begin implementing the objectives in *Chapter 12 Central Business District* that will make the CBD a more viable place to do business.

Policy 2.4.3: By 2013, adopt changes to the zoning code that preserve and encourage the development of store-front businesses that combine first-floor retail with second-floor and/or granny flat apartments that allow business owners to live

where they work and/or create more of a 24-hour a day presence in the business district.

Policy 2.4.4: By 2014, begin implementing the objectives in *Chapter 3 Housing Study* to bring more housing choices to Rio Hondo for a variety of workers, retirees and others who can boost the economy by providing a stable workforce and adding consumers to the local markets.

Policy 2.4.5: By 2014, City administration should consider hiring adequate personnel or re-assigning duties to existing personnel like police and fire officials or other building officials, to enforce new and existing codes that regulate conditions and location of housing and related structures.

Policy 2.4.6: By 2015, work with area housing advocates and financing agencies, including the local USDA RD office, to place sources for housing finance on City's website and/or keep information at City Hall. This would include programs for that assist first-time homebuyers, particularly teachers, with financing options available from state funds.

Policy 2.4.7: By 2016, apply for downtown improvement grants through local foundations, the National Historic Trust, or the Texas Capital Fund-Downtown Revitalization to fund improvements such as lighting, garbage bins, trees, and benches.

Objective 2.5: By 2013, enhance certainty of future uses of Rio Hondo business and residential property to entice more investment in the City.

Policy 2.5.1: By 2013, adopt changes to the City's zoning ordinance and zoning map that allow for a variety of development types and viable places for businesses.

Policy 2.5.2: By 2014, work with area telecommunications providers to stress the importance of laying fiber optic lines through Rio Hondo.

Objective 2.6: Retain existing and new businesses by helping them market to residents, tourists and surrounding business entities in the region.

Policy 2.6.1: By 2012, EDC, MDD and other volunteer entities create a work group to develop a "brand" for the City.

Policy 2.6.2: By 2013, "branding" work group expend EDC funds to develop a professional logo for Rio Hondo to be placed on business signs, street signs in the business district, the City's website, and other marketing materials.

Policy 2.6.3: By 2014, hold an event to launch the "brand". This could be at an Arroyo Days or another branding event.

Policy 2.6.4: By 2014, EDC provide welcome packets to visitors to the Twin Palms RV Park and other lodging entities in the

surrounding area with coupons for existing businesses and descriptions of Rio Hondo amenities and history.

Policy 2.6.5: By 2014, host city workshops to educate “first responders” (employees in businesses on main streets or key locations in Rio Hondo) and city employees on the brand, what to say to passersby to better advertise Rio Hondo and direct them to local businesses.

Policy 2.6.6: By 2014, EDC hold quarterly breakfasts with speakers on economic development topics to which a variety of business entities are invited inside and outside the City. The objective would be to educate Rio Hondo business community and draw area business owners and economic development advocates to Rio Hondo for a visit.

Policy 2.6.7: By 2014 become a partner in the Texas Tropical Trail Region organization and list the City and its importance in the Laguna Madre system.

Policy 2.6.8: By 2015, join the Rio South Texas Economic Council to receive member benefits related to industry recruitment to the Lower Rio Grande Valley area. Annual dues are \$2,000.

Policy 2.6.9: By 2015, EDC launch a Buy Local Campaign with the help of the MDD, Youth Task Force and local businesses to build community pride and support for the business community. For one idea see www.the350project.net.

Policy 2.6.10: By 2016, become a GO TEXAN Rural Community town through the Texas Department of Agriculture for \$75 annually, extending marketing efforts beyond the region. Also work with area groups who market to Winter Texans and publicize events, lodging and Rio Hondo amenities on websites.

Policy 2.6.11: By 2016, City administrators and officials begin discussing whether to hire a staff member to work part-time on economic development and downtown development. This may include staffing for EDC, MDD, and a park board and/or possibly meet requirements for staffing if the City were to consider becoming a Main Street community.

Policy 2.6.12: Between 2017 and 2020, MDD develop methodologies to increase eco-tourism in Rio Hondo. One example would be displaying information about area birds, fish and outdoor recreation areas nearby at a downtown kiosk or a scenic overlook by the boat ramp or at another site overlooking the Arroyo like City Park. Another would be to assist local produce or dairy growers or farmers by providing them with an outlet to sell their products.

Goal 3: An educated and trained workforce lives in Rio Hondo.

Objective 3.1: Over the planning period, increase the pool of skilled workers to attract target industries with higher-paying wages.

Policy 3.1.1: In 2012, MDD convene a meeting with representatives of the Rio Hondo Library, Cameron Workforce Solutions, Cameron County Precinct 4 and the Rio Hondo ISD to determine ways to offer English as a Second Language and/or computer classes to Rio Hondo adults. Issues to be resolved include funding for ESL teaching software; child care to allow adults to come to class; salaries for teachers and paying for computer upgrades at least every five years. The Rio Hondo Library received 12 computers through grants from the County and not-for-profit organizations in 2011.

Policy 3.1.2: City provide space through the planning period for the Cameron Workforce Solutions Mobile Lab.

Objective 3.2: Encourage Rio Hondo graduates to come back to the City and start businesses after completing higher education.

Policy 3.2.1: Beginning in 2013, City or ISD keep an email list of graduates from Rio Hondo high school and send out quarterly emails or via social media outlets such as a blog about happenings in Rio Hondo to keep the students involved in the community.

Policy 3.2.2: The MDD, the ISD and Tech Prep of the Rio Grande Valley create a program at Rio Hondo High school that allows students to complete internships at local businesses.

Policy 3.2.3: By 2015, MDD or EDC offer a higher education scholarship to a teen who pledges to come back to Rio Hondo after graduation. If they do not return, the grant reverts to a loan.

Objective 3.3: MDD or EDC work with the Small Business Development Center at Pan American University beginning in 2012 to hold sessions in Rio Hondo about how to run a business.

11.6.2 Proposed Economic Development Actions

Table 11N: Proposed Economic Development Actions, 2012-2032

Year	Project	Estimated Cost	Source of Funds
2012	Determine roles for EDC versus MDD	None, Staff	GEN
2012-2013	City Council appoint a blue-ribbon committee to develop a “brand” for the City; an Arroyo Days committee to grow the festival; an education committee to bring adult ESL and	None	LOCAL

	computer classes to Rio Hondo Library or ISD, and assign liaisons to attend various area economic development organization meetings		
2012-2022	Continue offering grants for businesses to upgrade exterior of buildings and/or add signage	\$6,000 Annually	MDD or EDC
2012	Establish a sales tax rebate and/or revolving loan program to encourage downtown building upgrades	\$100,000	MDD, USDA RD, TDA
2013-2014	Revise City website to include new brand and logos, a Businesses Page and Buildings Page with links as suggested in objectives	\$1,000	EDC, LOCAL
2013	Adopt proposed changes to zoning ordinance and new Zoning Map and place on website	\$1,500	GEN
2013-2018	Work with the Texas Center for Rural Entrepreneurship to gain their expertise and become certified Entrepreneur- Ready Community	\$1,500	EDC
2014	Consider adding part-time staff or re-assigning duties to enforce building codes	\$12,000 Annually	Local, GEN
2014	Host workshops/breakfasts at the Civic Center to educate residents/businesses on small business operations; responses to tourists, micro-lending, LRGV economics; international trade; eco-tourism, local farming,	\$1,000	MDD, GEN, EDC, LOCAL
2014	MDD complete business surveys as recommended by the Texas Center for Rural Entrepreneurship	None	MDD
2014-2015	Develop a Welcome Packet for Winter Texans and others staying at area lodges, including RV parks and Develop a Buy Local Campaign and materials	\$5,000 (materials to make packets)	EDC, LOCAL (donations)
2015	City join the Harlingen Area Chamber of Commerce and encourage businesses to do the same	\$200 Annually	EDC
2015	Work with the RHISD to establish and/or fund internships for high school students at local businesses	\$5,000 Annually	MDD, EDC, Local
2015 - 2018	Budget matching funds for programs that will improve downtown appearance	\$30,000 match for \$150,000 grant	EDC

2016-2020	Develop eco-tourism exhibits, storefronts	\$5,000	MDD
2016-2032	Establish a Youth Commission to assist with economic development activities and fund their initiatives	Varies depending on project	MDD, GEN, LOCAL
2016-2032	Become a GO TEXAN Rural Community through the TDA to gain statewide advertising	\$75 Annually	EDC
2016-2032	Consider expanding staff to work on economic development and downtown improvement (part-time)	\$12,000 Annually	GEN, MDD

Also see recommended projects for Housing, Parks and Central Business District in their respective chapters in this Plan.

LOCAL = donations of time/money/goods from private citizens, area universities, charitable organizations, and local businesses; Chamber = Chamber of Commerce; Staff = Staff time; Council = Council time; USDA = US Department of Agriculture Rural Development; TxCDBG = Texas Community Development Block Grant Program; UTILITY = Utility funds; GEN = Municipal funds; EDC = Economic Development Corporation; TDA = Texas Department of Agriculture Rural Economic Development Programs

11.7 Appendix 11A: HomeTown Competitiveness Approach

The HomeTown Competitiveness approach to rural community development emphasizes strong community involvement by creating committees and task forces charged with strengthening towns' Entrepreneurship, Charity (Transfer of Wealth), Youth Engagement, and Leadership.

The "Pillars" of the approach (which are all supposed to work together to support the future of a town) are Entrepreneurship, Transfer of Wealth, Youth, and Leadership. The approach is one of intense community involvement. An oversight or steering committee is initially set up to oversee the whole process, and the different pillars need to have community task forces or to be headed up by individuals of the steering committee although innovative approaches to any part of this whole process are encouraged. The type of people that lead these committees need to be passionate and willing to work.

The Entrepreneurial Task Force is tasked with producing increased entrepreneurial activity, fostering an entrepreneurial culture, helping the town realize their economic development goals, and increasing community wealth, among other things. The main idea here is that it is better to remain focused on growing businesses within the community and expanding existing businesses than trying to get businesses to relocate to the community. The Heartland Center argues that five businesses with two employees each is better than one business with ten employees. If 80% of a town's employment is with one employer, and it decides to leave, the town's economy is instantly destroyed. This was experienced first-hand by Hearne in the retail sector of its economy, when Wal-Mart left Hearne in 1990. Diversity and many one to two-person businesses should be the goal for small towns. The attraction of large businesses and employers is part of a prevailing attitude and culture that needs to be changed by this task force. There have been decades of decline in rural America. What is not realized is that it is possible to do business from rural America today. Rural Americans are not as

place-bound as they used to be thanks to developments in telecommunications and e-commerce.

The Entrepreneurial Task Force's first step is business visitation. Basically, the task force wants to find out what existing businesses' future plans are. One objective of these visitations is the problem of transitioning businesses to other owners when their original owners decide to retire. Many times in small towns, nobody thinks about this and the shops simply close when their owners retire. This works hand in hand with the other strategies such as youth recruitment, but what the task force is charged with is finding prospective owners and fostering relationships between the old guard and a new one, and with making sure there is a new guard to replace the old one.

The Charitable Assets Task Force is charged with establishing a community foundation and with capturing the transfer of wealth that is siphoning rural America's money to the larger cities over the generations. The first step, after setting up the foundation, is advancing the idea in the community of giving money to the community foundation. Although people often donate to charity from their current income, they rarely do from their assets, such as naming a charity in their wills. For example, encouraging everyone to give 5% of their assets to a foundation in their wills is proposed as a way to capture the transfer of wealth and make a community foundation grow. People may be more willing to do this type of thing than some think. An example the Heartland Center used was a woman who gave \$1 million to a hospital foundation 200 miles from her hometown when she died. There was no community foundation in her hometown, and so she did not have the choice of donating to it.

The type of foundation that needs to be set up is called a Community Affiliated Fund, which is governed by a Fund Advisory Committee. These require a fair amount of legal work to set up. They will need to incorporate and fill out a series of IRS and other forms. The hardest part is getting the money. The Heartland Center warns that the first

donation is the hardest to secure. After that, they advise using peer pressure. Events that involve going to people's houses are best. These are basically just house meetings in which fundraisers summarize the foundation's cause and ask for money. It may be possible to tap into alumni and class reunions as well. There have been some amazing success stories in rural Nebraska according to the Heartland Center. Shickley, Nebraska, a town of about 400, has a fund worth \$1.7 million. The Center estimates that the transfer of wealth between generations is about to peak in rural America (in 2014) due to aging populations.

The Youth Task Force's purpose is to mobilize youth engagement, support youth and adults working together on community priorities, help young people create their own business and career opportunities, and to assist youth to move their ideas into action. The basic idea is to get youth thinking about these issues and starting businesses of their own. Mentoring is key here, and there are different levels of mentoring the Center suggests, such as high school kids mentoring kindergarteners, or holding multi-generational picnics. The Center believes that adding young people to groups generally make the adults act less petty and make them behave better in general. People need to encourage these young people in small towns to "make a job instead of take a job." Not that long ago, the Center claims, Americans knew how to create and sustain entrepreneurial communities. Ninety percent of Americans were self-employed; it was common sense, and it was simply the way people lived. But it is not the case anymore. People used to have two or three businesses in rural America. They focused on capturing growing regional markets, investing wealth back into creating more wealth, building for the benefit of future generations, and encouraging their children to carry on these businesses. Now, most parents encourage their kids to move to a big city and get a good job. This attitude needs to change in rural America for it to be successful. For instance, when a pharmacy in a small town closes, generally it does not change hands as there is nobody there who can operate it or who cares to operate it. So it closes and people have to travel twenty or more miles to get pharmaceuticals, or they order them

online. The business visitations mentioned in the Entrepreneurial pillar tie in here. Young people can fill these existing business roles. If a mentoring structure is in place, these transitions can happen smoothly in small towns.

The Center asserts that the world's economy is changing. The industrial age is coming to a close and the future, like the past, will be about entrepreneurship. 70% of economic growth and new jobs worldwide now are attributed to entrepreneurship, more youth are seeking the business ownership path, and the internet is overcoming geographic barriers. A major component of the approach is that the community needs to focus on attracting young people to come back to town after graduating from colleges. There are numerous ideas the Center presents on how to do this, but an intriguing one is the idea of granting scholarships out of foundation funds that turn into loans if the students decide not to return home after college. Another part of the approach is preparing a Community Teen Survey that the Center recommends handing out to 7th through 11th graders. It is geared towards finding out what kids like and dislike about their hometown. If the children do not like their own hometown, it simply needs to change. Community leaders should listen to the young people's ideas and try to implement change accordingly with charity dollars. The kids that the community needs to listen to are not the "usual suspects," such as cheerleaders and student council presidents, but perhaps are more introverted and tend to think outside the box. Many of these children may be loners. With the right kind of coaching, however, many of their interesting ideas can be turned into businesses. Business creation classes should be taught at the high school or after school. Business creation fairs can be conducted, with older business owners exchanging ideas and advice with the young ones. Some examples the Center uses to illustrate this are a group of kids that sold "natural" fertilizer (manure), and others that made hats out of rabbit pelts. A good resource for these ideas is the Innovation Center (www.theinnovationcenter.org). Eventually, the communities can set up youth city councils and youth chambers of commerce to perpetuate these movements. The key is

to bring the young people of child-bearing age back to town to create new businesses or take over an existing business.

The final task force is the Leadership Task Force. The Center claims that leadership development can be taught, and that there are many different ways to do this. In general, a hometown needs to transition power to new generations smoothly, without the stifling presence of an “old guard” that resists this change and hangs on to all the power they have until they die. This power needs to be shared so that there is not a leadership vacuum when the “old guard” dies. A leadership development program implemented in Hamilton, Texas has been very successful and numbers of its graduates have gone on to be on the school board, city council, or to become business owners. There are two main types of leadership programs, one more “skill-based” that teaches ways to practice conflict management and others that basically teach “civic literacy” to the participants, giving people detailed knowledge about the town they live in so that they can more effectively live and work in it. However, there are numerous ways to achieve this leadership training.

Small towns must “change or die.” Often, the baggage at these types of programs in small towns is rather heavy. People have long memories in small towns, everyone knows each other, and people fall too quickly into the roles they are expected to play. People need to reacquaint themselves and think of each other as potential leaders or business owners, and they need to start encouraging each other and helping each other to do these things. Indications that a leadership program is working would be things like having people from the program becoming mayors or city managers, sustaining quality leadership, or witnessing an increase in community involvement.

Again, all these pillars need to work together and be coordinated by an oversight committee. The HTC approach is specifically designed to deal with the four critical issues that are destroying rural America—the generational wealth transfer problem, the

historical youth out-migration trend, the loss of farms and small businesses, and the erosion of leadership capacity. The HTC approach has been implemented in many places in rural Nebraska to great success. The State of Indiana has adopted the HTC approach as its statewide rural community development strategy. It is gaining momentum.

12 Central Business District Study

12.1 Central Business District Extent and Context

In many of Texas' smaller, rural communities the City's Historic Business District provides a nexus for commercial activity. In Rio Hondo, the historic business district developed between 1920 and 1940 as establishments were built along Colorado Avenue. As illustrated in *Figure 12A*, the City's Historic or Central Business District (CBD) is a 28-acre grid bound by the Arroyo Colorado canal to the west, Robertson Street to the east, the alley between Colorado and Paloma Avenues on the south, and roughly the alley between Colorado and Bristol Avenues on the north. It includes most of the original downtown buildings, the Cameron County Precinct office, City Hall, Library and Park and a few residences still located on the City's main thoroughfare and entryway.

Figure 12A: Location of the Central Business District



Competing Business Areas: One area about ½-mile east of the CBD may compete with the central business district now and more so throughout the planning period. It sits at the corner of Colorado Avenue and State Highway 345. The Rio Hondo High School is also located at this corner. Figure 12B shows the location of the competing district. Gas station/convenience stores sit at the northwest and southwest corners. The northeast tract is irrigated cropland. The southeast corner is the Rio Hondo High School complex. According to TxDOT 2009 traffic counts and counts completed for traffic warrant analysis in 2010, volume on the east end of Colorado Avenue, near the competing business intersection, is higher than it is on the west end. About 12,000 cars per day pass through the SH 345/FM 106 intersection, while 6,500 cars per day pass through at the location where FM 106 meets the western part of the city limits. In the middle of the CBD, at FM 1846 and FM 106, almost 10,000 cars pass by per day. FM 1846 and SH 345 carry local traffic and traffic between Rio Hondo and San Benito. The competing intersection is largely undeveloped with much of the unoccupied land being farmed. However, if business growth occurs to capture the higher traffic volumes coming to and from San Benito or accessing the high school, those businesses could lure customers away from the more historic central business district. This area may be more attractive to commercial developers since land/rents may be less expensive, because they would not have to rehabilitate older buildings, and parking is more abundant.

Figure 12B: Competing Business Areas



The photos below illustrate some of the architecture, building materials and varying conditions of the structures in the CBD. Some buildings are revitalized, while others have sat vacant for many years. The buildings pictured below line Colorado Avenue which splits Rio Hondo into northern and southern sections. All residents who reside within the city limits are within one mile of the CBD.

Illustration 10A: Rio Hondo CBD character



Buildings range in age from the 1920s to the 1980s and comprise a variety of materials ranging from brick to wood to stucco. (above and below)



Awnings, which can provide shade and street definition, are of varying materials and widths or are not present on buildings.

12.2 CBD Inventory

This section consists of an inventory and descriptions of the economic components that provide employment and future growth opportunities for the City's CBD.

Land Uses. Map 12A: Central Business District Features illustrates the land uses that comprise the CBD. The CBD anchors are City Hall on the west end; and the Junior High School, Rio Hondo ISD Administration and Mike's Supermarket in the central part of the CBD. Businesses dot the CBD from west to east, including retail, service and restaurants. However, 8 out of 37 buildings are vacant. Future land use envisions more commercial as old buildings are renovated or re-built and single-family home lots are converted to commercial, missed use or multi-family uses. However, because of the extensive institutional and public uses present in the CBD, commercial land may never be more than 30% of the total. *Table 10A: Extent of CBD Land Uses* tabulates existing and expected 2032 land uses. The ratio between existing and projected commercial acreage is approximately 1:1.2. Future changes could add more parking, recreation and mixed uses downtown.

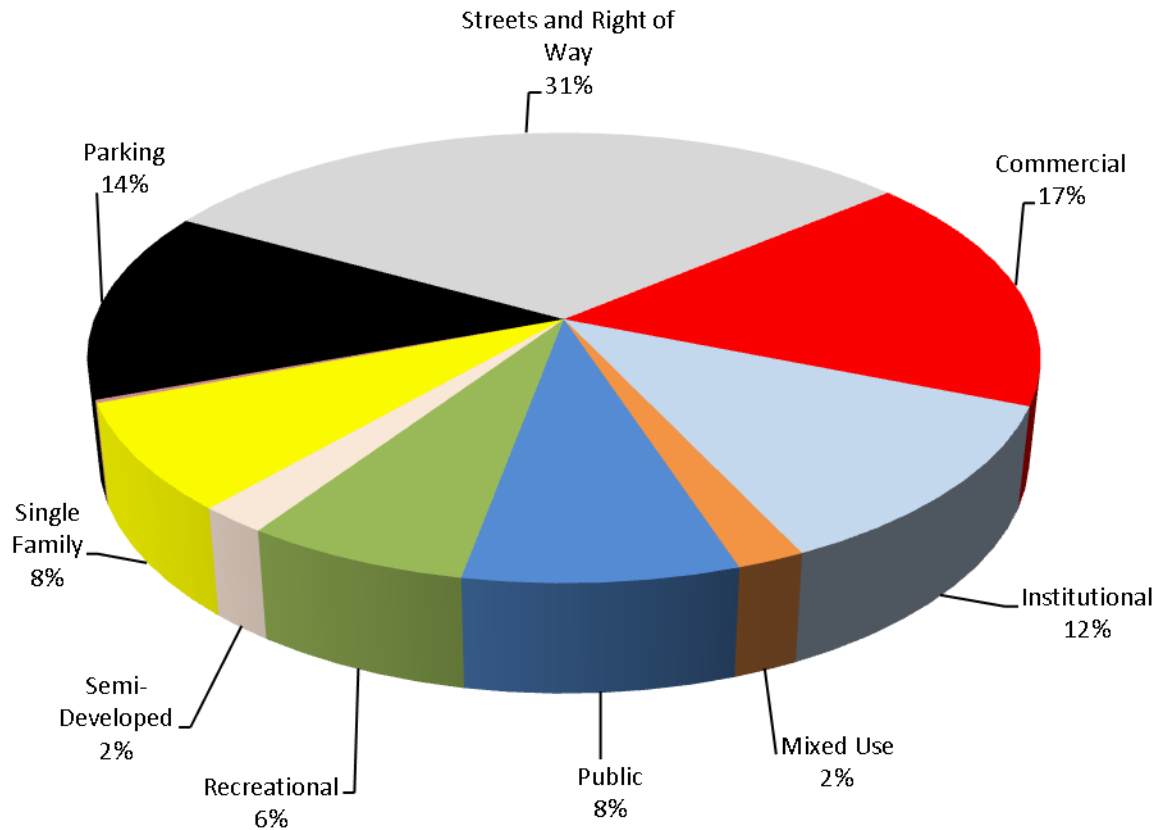


Table 12A: Extent of CBD Land Uses, 2012 and 2032

Land Use Classification	2012		2032	
	Acres	% CBD	Acres	% CBD
Commercial	4.8	17%	4.2	15%
Institutional	3.3	12%	3.3	12%
Mixed Use	0.5	2%	1.9	7%
Public	2.2	8%	2.0	7%
Recreational	1.8	7%	1.7	6%
Semi-Developed	0.6	2%	0.0	0%
Single-Family	2.1	8%	2.1	8%
Utility	0.1	0%	0.0	0%
Parking	3.8	14%	3.9	14%
Streets and Right of Way	8.5	31%	8.5	31%
CBD Total	27.6	100%	27.6	100%

Building Conditions: The inventory of structures in the CBD is illustrated and tabulated on *Map 12B: Central Business District Buildings and Occupants, 2012*. Many of the CBD buildings on Colorado Avenue were built between 1920 and 1980. Some owners have restored their buildings inside and out. But the majority sit in deteriorating states. The condition of structures in the CBD was determined during the windshield survey conducted in mid-2011. The criteria used to determine condition are outlined below.

Classification	Criteria
Very Good / Good	Both exterior and interior in good condition with few visible cosmetic defects or minor structural defects such as small cracks in masonry; fully handicapped accessible.
Fair	Exterior or interior in fair condition with cosmetic and structural defects including missing window glass, missing bricks or large cracks in exterior walls, minor sagging, deteriorated roof. Handicapped accessibility may be limited.
Poor	Exterior and interior in poor condition, with large sections of walls or roof missing, windows missing, major sagging or slumping of the structure.

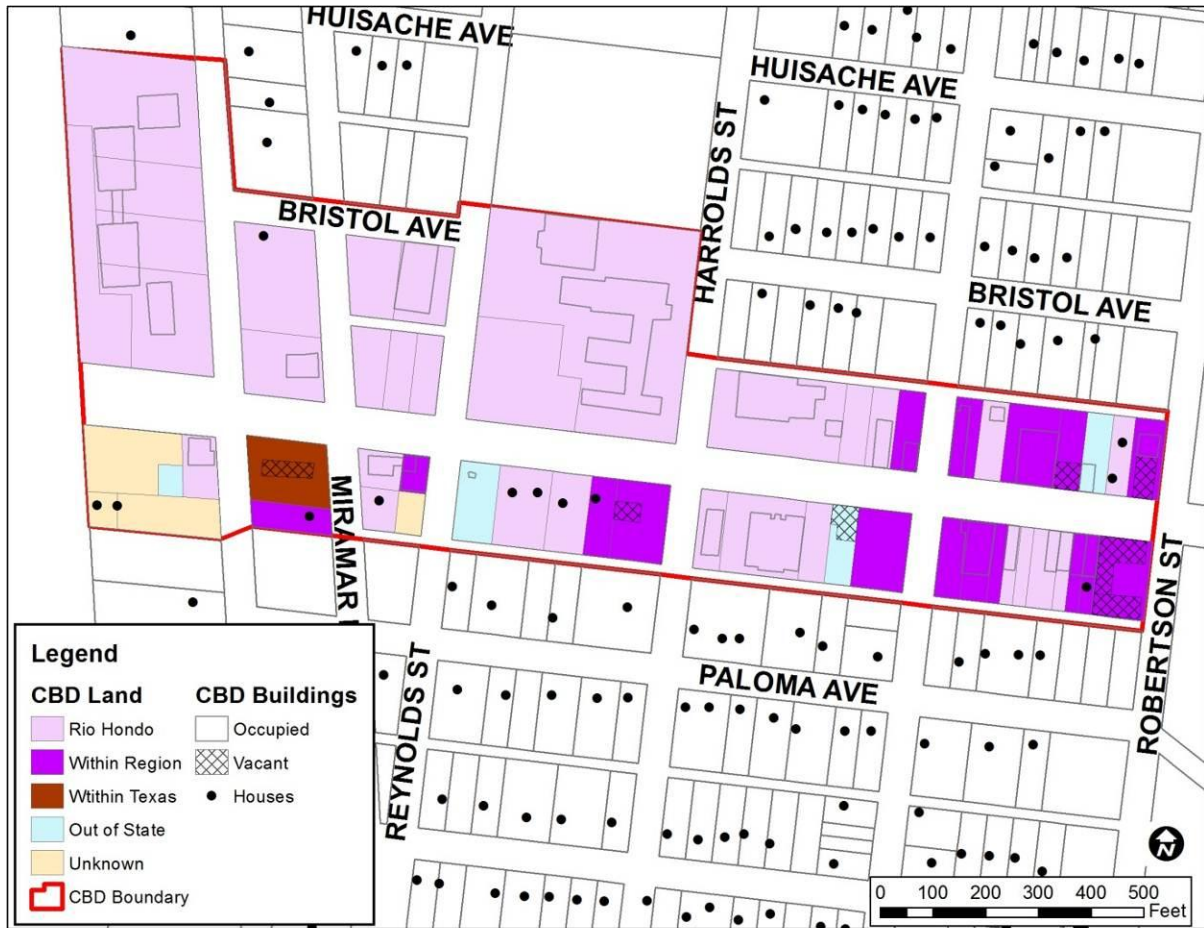
Most buildings are in fair to dilapidated condition; of the 37 buildings, 18 are in good condition. These include 3 restaurants, a pharmacy, a grocery store, city and ISD offices and a church. The remaining 19 are in fair or dilapidated conditions. The buildings in the poorest condition include a vacant convenience store and a tire shop.

Vacant Property: The CBD is almost fully built out, with two lots totaling about 1/2 acre being vacant. During the planning period, 7 buildings mostly located on the eastern end of the CBD also were vacant. One tin building on the western end of the CBD was identified as dilapidated and may not be repairable. One building is in standard condition, having been renovated and expanded in 2007. Half of the building is retail and half is a 3-bedroom residence. The remaining 5

vacant structures are in various stages of deterioration on the far eastern side of the CBD in the block between Heywood and Robertson. One structure is a vacant home, two buildings are mixed-use with small apartments on the top floor and vacant retail on the bottom floor, one is being used for storage and the fifth is a 6,000-square foot empty retail store.

Figure 12C shows that none of the owners of vacant buildings reside in Rio Hondo. During the planning period, two other previously vacant buildings were purchased and renovated by non-resident owners, bringing much wanted increased traffic to Colorado Avenue. Business owners and realtors said several reasons exist for other buildings remaining vacant. These include lack of capital in a down economy; lack of consistent retail traffic due to seasonal residents; lack of parking next to some of the buildings; and the high cost of renovating buildings that are between 70 and 90 years old.

Figure 12C: Parcel Ownership in the CBD



Property Values and City Revenue: According to Cameron County Appraisal District values for 2011, average land values for commercial property in the CBD are \$69,825/acre, with an average land value of about \$19,000 per property and an average size of ¼-acre. Estimated commercial improvement values are about \$12.50/square foot. These estimates are based on Appraisal District 2011 records and GIS mapping analysis completed for the plan of central business district buildings. Properties in the CBD account for approximately 5% of the estimated \$425,000 collected annually in ad valorem taxes for the City. In 2010, CBD businesses accounted for just over 20% of the city’s sales tax revenue, according to the 2010 City Audit.

Table 12B: Property Values in the CBD

Valuation Type	2011 Land Value	Acreage	Property Tax to City*
Vacant Land	\$37,500	0.43	\$323
Residential	\$139,276	2.10	\$2,955
Exempt (Public, Schools, Churches)	\$559,573	8.60	Exempt
Commercial	\$439,896	6.30	\$15,560
Total	\$1,176,245	17.43	\$18,838
Assessed Total	\$616,672	8.83	
<i>Value Per assessed acre</i>	\$69,870		
<i>Value Per Commercial acre</i>	\$69,825		
<i>Estimated Property Tax Per acre</i>	\$2,470		

City Revenue from CBD	2010/2011	% of Revenue Source
City Property Tax 2011**	\$18,838	5%
City Sales Tax 2010***	\$19,640	21%
Total (estimated)	\$38,478	

Source: *Includes tax on land and improvements. **City Audit 2010 ***State Comptroller Office, Local Tax Information Area report on CBD businesses, Sept. 2009-Oct 2010

Amenities and Aesthetics Amenities and aesthetics in a CBD help to define the district's identity, represent the attitude of residents and business owners towards the public, and provide a sense of comfort and convenience to customers.

Amenities: Amenities can include lighting, crosswalks, sidewalks, benches, trash cans, handicapped access ramps and parking. Amenities in Rio Hondo's CBD are shown on *Map 12A: Central Business District Features*. Amenities in the Rio Hondo CBD are sparse. They mainly consist of ADA ramps at corners and a few benches outside businesses on the western side of town. Overhead highway lights provide evening lighting and are located 200 to 300 feet apart. No lighting is available in the central part of the district between Reynolds and Harrolds Streets in front of the junior high and single-family homes. Sidewalks exist throughout the CBD, but some sections are in need of repair. The most notable damage is located on the west end of the CBD.

Another amenity that makes the CBD more attractive is trees. The CBD has about 120 trees that help provide some shade and greenery for visitors. Trees that are visible from Colorado Avenue (street trees) are located next to City Hall in the block between the Arroyo and N Arroyo Blvd and also in the blocks between Reynolds and Heywood.

Illustration 12B: Rio Hondo CBD amenities



ADA ramps on Harrolds Street. Ramps are present but not always in standard condition.



Tables provide seating in front of shops in the western part of the CBD.





No stairs exist in the CBD, making building entry easier than in many downtowns. However, some sidewalks are uneven, making them unpredictable for some pedestrians.

Sidewalks exist throughout the CBD. However, some, such as these at Heywood, are in need of repair.

Aesthetics:

Aesthetics include the elements that form the visual character of the downtown. They include building lines, materials, vistas and heights; trees, landscaping and planters; decorative items on sidewalks, awnings, and street signs. A sample of Rio Hondo's aesthetic qualities is pictured below. While many of the buildings were constructed in the 1920s, buildings in their current state do not define a downtown style or character. Building exteriors are a mixture of stone, brick, tin, wood and stucco of varying colors. Awnings are lacking on most buildings and are of varying materials if they exist. Signs are also of varying materials and various conditions.

Illustration 12C: Rio Hondo CBD aesthetics



Planters by the Cameron County Precinct building; Trees in parking lots and surrounding buildings



Floral plants in the eastern part of the CBD



*Trees
preserved
in parking
lots provide
shade*



*Awnings
vary in
material,
shape and
type*



Building materials, include brick, stucco, wood, and tin



Architectural Style Historical buildings in the CBD date from 1920 to 1940. The architecture could be considered a part of what is termed the Early Twentieth Century era in Texas. Designs from that era were not ornate. Rather, they followed popular tenets of eclecticism in which styles were borrowed and combined such that a variety of influences characterized a building. These styles may have included the following: regional Mexican influences; the early 20th century notion that the form of the building should follow its purpose; and composition featuring bilateral balance. The Junior High School, completed in

1924 as the City's first school building has an archway reminiscent of the High Victorian Italianate style built in many Texas towns in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The administration building mimics that style, though it was built in 1997

Illustration 10E: Downtown building architectural element, 1920-1940



Original school building features 1900-style Victorian archway.



1935 pharmacy/soda shop renovated to Texas vernacular style.



Built in 1930, this vacant building features two apartments and ground floor retail. It is an example of bilaterally balanced architecture of the early 20th century in which the “form follows function.”

Buildings in the CBD built after 1940 are of a variety of styles and materials, including wood, stucco and brick. They represent various styles as shown below.

Illustration 10F: Downtown buildings, post 1940



Various materials used in this building which was expanded over time.



Cinder block building represents use of pre-manufactured materials, Stucco building shown below.



This school and county building constructed in 1994 was sold and remodeled in 2011 as shown (right), changing window shapes, paint colors and glass type.



Building remodeled in 2011, reflective windows, new colors

Traffic Patterns and Infrastructure

Street Condition and Circulation: The inventory of CBD traffic circulation and capacity is illustrated on *Map 12A: CBD Features*. Included on the map are the location, width and right-of-way of streets, parking spaces, sidewalks, curb and gutter, traffic volumes, and traffic controls. The CBD is a 6-block grid, with blocks varying in length between 150 and 400 feet..

The CBD consists of about 8 acres of road and right of way, containing more than 1 mile of paved streets. Colorado Avenue, the city's main street, is maintained by TXDOT, with the remaining side streets maintained by the City. Colorado Avenue is 55 feet in width in a 100-foot right of way. The right of way does not include the sidewalks, which are maintained by the City. Traffic circulation is maintained on Colorado Avenue with a four-way traffic light at Harrolds Street to ease peak traffic increases around the schools. Stop signs control traffic from local streets to the state highway.

Traffic Controls: A four-way traffic light at Harrolds Street and stop signs provide the primary traffic controls. Signs on Colorado Avenue limit speeds to 30 mph.

Traffic Volumes and Movements: According to TxDOT 2009 traffic counts, volume on the east end of Colorado Avenue, near the competing business intersection, is higher than it is on the west end. About 8,400 cars per day pass through the SH 345/FM 106 intersection, while 6,500 cars per day pass through at the location where FM 106 meets the western part of the city limits.

There are no restrictions on traffic movement within the CBD (ie. one way, right turn only). City officials and police said traffic circulation is problematic at the intersection of FM 106 and Reynolds where there is a stop sign but no traffic light. Traffic backs up during the 8 a.m. drop-off hour and the 4 p.m. pick-up hour. Vehicles travel around the junior high to Harrolds Street to cross FM 106 at a controlled intersection.

Parking: Parking in the CBD consists of on-street parking and private lots. The street width on FM 106 allows for parallel parking next to the businesses. The parking lots and spaces cover about 11 percent (3 acres) of the CBD's 28 acre boundary. A total of 319 parking spaces and 16 handicapped spaces are available throughout the CBD. All parking is free but most of the spaces are located on private lots and associated with the specific businesses. There are about 57 parallel spaces along Colorado Avenue, most of which are available on the east end of the district

In total, the Rio Hondo CBD has 37 buildings and approximately 9 parking spaces per building, or 4 parking spaces per 1,000 square feet of current building space (occupied and non-occupied square footage of 81,625 square feet). That amount meets parking recommended for small-town or town center zoning regulations which call for at least 2 spaces per 1,000 square feet of business space.²¹ However, available parking is more limited on the eastern end of the district than the western end.

Some cities address parking shortages by encouraging shared parking. In Rio Hondo, the 93 spaces at the Church are unused during the week. However, this parking would be 3 blocks away from businesses on the eastern end of the

²¹ Reforming Parking Policies to Support Smart Growth, Metropolitan Transportation Commission, Bay Area, California, "Representative Parking Requirements" for Rural/Small Town, Flyer for Handbook, accessed at http://www.mtc.ca.gov/planning/smart_growth/parking_policies_flyer-web.pdf in July 2010.

district. A vacant lot at the corner of Heywood and Colorado has been discussed as a possible parking lot on the eastern end. Officials said that parking was sufficient during its annual festival, Arroyo Days, which took place in the western end of the CBD around City Hall.

Sidewalks: Sidewalks are located in the eastern portion of the CBD. The sidewalks are generally 8-foot in width and are in varying conditions throughout the CBD. The sidewalks are located within the TXDOT Right of Way. However, TXDOT does not maintain them, according to TXDOT area officials. TXDOT constructed ADA ramps at several intersections in the CBD in 2009 as part of a Valleywide program to upgrade ADA ramps on highways. It also recently installed a 200-foot section of sidewalk north and south of Colorado west of the draw bridge.

Sidewalks are intermittent in the western portion of the CBD between Reynolds and Arroyo Blvd. No sidewalks are located on the south side of the street west of Harrolds. A portion of this area is residential. North Heywood is the only side street leading to the CBD that has sidewalks. Those are present only in the block directly north of the CBD.

Illustration 10G: Sidewalks in the CBD



Sidewalks are in fair condition in the eastern end of the CBD.



A lack of sidewalks on the western end of the CBD may make navigation by pedestrians difficult.



Wide driveways fronting Colorado prevent sidewalk from being continuous throughout the CBD.

Thirteen handicapped access ramps are located within the CBD. While the ramps provide some accessibility to the disabled, most are uneven and not constructed to ADA standards which would include textured pavement for the blind and cross walks and crossing signals at more intersections to make passage safer across Colorado Avenue and across side streets.

12.3 Central Business District Analysis

This section reviews elements in the CBD, details impediments to CBD success and suggests solutions that could be implemented by the City, new organizations, volunteers or a combination of stakeholders to increase the vitality of the CBD.

Land Use: The CBD has several land uses including mixed uses, allowing for residential on second floors above retail. Civic uses consume 30% of the district and parking and streets another 40%, leaving only one-third of the district, about 8 acres, for commercial uses. Some of the commercial uses in the west end may not be suitable for a CBD including tire sales, automotive repair and vacant gasoline stations. Future land use planning should ensure that these uses which detract from the scenic corridor are prohibited from replicating in the district. Also, a small amount of residential housing is located on the street. Businesses may be a better fit for the corridor and housing should be slowly replaced with commercial uses, as ownership and the market allows. Creating a Town District to control uses in the CBD is one way the City can guide development in the district:

Building Design and Use: The Rio Hondo CBD includes non-residential structures ranging in size from 124 square feet (water station) to 26,400 square feet (the junior high) Table 12C lists the number of tenants by type of use. The predominant commercial uses in the CBD are office and general retail. Services include businesses such as salons and automotive repair shops. Office space is mainly for public entities including the school district, the County and the City. Three restaurants bring residents and visitors to downtown.

Table12C: CBD Tenants by Type

Office	9	24%
Retail	8	22%

Service	4	11%
Restaurant	3	8%
School	2	5%
Library	1	3%
Event Center	1	3%
Church	1	3%
Vacant	8	22%
Grand Total	37	

Vacancy: Vacant space in the CBD totals approximately 26,000 square feet, or 13% of the total building space. All buildings, except one restaurant/residence (about 3,000 sf), are dilapidated or are in varying states of deterioration that require extensive repair to be occupied. The locations of the vacant leases are illustrated on *Map 12B: Central Business District Buildings and Occupants, 2012*. Based upon a total estimated square footage of 194,870, the CBD has an occupied to vacant ratio of approximately 6 to 1.

Condition: About half of the buildings in the CBD are in standard condition and half are in deteriorating and dilapidated conditions. Five of the buildings built prior to 1960 have been updated in recent years, including two retail stores and two restaurant spaces and the Junior High building have been updated in the last decade, keeping the downtown viable. Property owners indicated that a lack of traffic, expenses to modernize buildings and a lack of parking on the eastern end of the CBD may be preventing these buildings from being upgraded and occupied.

The city could take the following action to create incentives to upkeep buildings downtown.

- 1) Track building vacancies and for-sale properties on a website linked to other economic development, community development and tourism websites in Rio Hondo, so that investors outside the region may consider the properties;

- 2) Work with Fire department officials to train staff and local CBD property owners on sections of the Codes related to Historic Buildings. This section of the IBC is intended to make it easier to renovate older buildings so long as the building official judges the building to “not constitute a distinct safety hazard.” (International Building Code, Historic Buildings)
- 3) Create a tax abatement program for property owners who renovate buildings within the Central Business District so that taxes will be fixed on properties prior to their improvement for a limited number of years to allow property owners to recoup their rehabilitation expenses (Examples can be found in Llano and Waxahachie, Texas)
- 4) Establish a revolving loan fund with USDA seed money or sales tax allotments and work with local banks to establish a low-interest financing pool available for restoration projects within the downtown
- 5) Determine if the City can purchase a lot to provide parking in the eastern portion of the CBD. The lot could be landscaped or house artistic elements and double as a park and/or visitor information center.

Design: The plan inventory identified CBD elements that could be used in drafting criteria to maintain the CBD’s historic character. The following summation of the CBD inventory and of historic downtown buildings of the period between 1920 and 1940 are intended to suggest standards for new construction that Rio Hondo could consider for formal adoption, mainly in the form of zoning regulations.

- 1) Buildings met the street or sidewalk, creating a sense of street enclosure and walkability. Buildings were parallel to the street and parking lots were not located in front of buildings.
- 2) Building heights were one or two-story.
- 3) Building materials were brick or stucco.
- 4) Entrances faced the main street.

- 5) Windows provided a high percentage (40 to 60%) of transparency on bottom floors so that customers outside could see into business spaces.
- 6) Building widths extend almost the entire width of the lot providing an unbroken façade.
- 7) Windows were distributed to repeat both vertically and horizontally in regular rows and columns.

Illustration 10J: Historic buildings in the CBD



Buildings in most downtowns are *historic*, but are not *historically significant*, so full restoration to their exact original appearance may not be necessary, and often is not desirable due to cost and current use limitations. However, encouraging and ensuring the proper treatment of a building's character-defining features such as storefronts, window openings, historic awnings and building materials is essential to maintaining the authenticity and integrity of the structure and the district overall.

Establishing pre-application meetings for those seeking building permits in the CBD may assist the City in goals to maintain a cohesive downtown. The City may want to establish a Downtown Advisory Commission to assist the City in adopting and enforcing downtown design regulations. Alternatively, it could require a review by the already-established Cameron County Historical Commission. This appointed commission also could apply for Certified Local Government status and apply on behalf of Rio Hondo for state Certified Local Government Grants. Regulations for CLG acceptance are less stringent for Counties than cities. Grants are available for architectural planning and preparation of façade studies that could assist a property owner in historic restoration as well as grants that would assist the community in developing historic context information to use in educational and reference materials; and/or writing or amending preservation ordinances. Matagorda County provides a good example in the state of how a Certified Local Government county has worked with cities to bring in more funds and organize activities to assist cities in maintaining historic properties within its borders.

Amenities: Amenities in a downtown can create a message to the visitor and passersby that defines Rio Hondo's Central Business District as a distinct place. The CBD's greatest amenity asset is its trees, which have been preserved in parking lots and planted in front of buildings, as well as its sidewalks, which are one level and offered in most parts of the CBD. However, it lacks other amenities that could define space and make the district more inviting to users. Types of amenities are described below.

Sidewalks, Crosswalks and Lighting: Downtown sidewalks are contiguous on the eastern end of the CBD and are intermittent in the western part of the CBD. The addition of cross walks and sidewalks in the western part of the CBD would assist residents and visitors with accessing those businesses and events at the City Municipal Complex. The City should strive to complete its sidewalk system during the planning period. Locations to add sidewalks and crosswalks are

located on *Map 12C: Proposed Central Business District Improvements*. The City could use three strategies to complete its downtown sidewalk system.

- 1) Apply for Safe Route to School funding since FM 106 leads directly to the middle school and on to the rest of the school complex. Projects mostly likely funded are for new sidewalks.
- 2) Adopt changes to its subdivision ordinance that would require developers of lots to build sidewalks.
- 3) Apply for TxDOT statewide transportation enhancement funding or use EDC/MDD funding to build or revise downtown sidewalks.

Street lighting is shown on *Map 12A: Business District Features*. The lighting style is for highways, with a lamp attached to a metal pole. Street lights downtown are erected by the city's electric provider. Currently, overhead wiring has been placed high enough that it doesn't interfere greatly with views of buildings. Texas Department of Agriculture Downtown Revitalization projects throughout the state have included the burying of overhead wiring with more modern lamp structures. Some examples of decorative and modern lamps are shown below.

Illustration 12M: Overhead wiring/lamp post style in the CBD



Illustration 12N: Examples of less invasive wiring and lighting



Wiring in Hughes Springs, Texas CBD doesn't interfere with building lines; decorative street lighting placed as part of a Downtown Revitalization Project provides illumination at night at the awning level



Improved street lighting and traffic signal poles might assist with downtown revitalization, as shown in these photos.

Signs: The city does not regulate signs within the City limits. The City may want to consider specific regulations for signs in the Central Business District to present a specific brand for the CBD. The City also may want to consider broad regulations for awnings to better identify the downtown style. Downtown business owners interviewed for this study had mixed opinions on whether awnings should be regulated. Business owners and county historic board commissioners expressed the following points:

- 1) Awnings should not be regulated to the extent that they stifle creativity; all awnings should not look the same.
- 2) Awnings should be present to provide a shaded downtown experience.
- 3) A policy should be established on awning infrastructure (whether they should be attached to the roof or raised via ground poles in a gallery configuration) as this greatly affects the expense of maintaining sidewalks and the downtown appearance.

The City may also want to consider the following design standards encouraged in other rural downtowns across the country. These could be part of a central business district design ordinance.



1. Encourage low-key, pedestrian-oriented (eye-level from sidewalks) signage.
2. Attached signs should be flush with the building facade, should not extend beyond the roofline, and should not hide interesting architectural detail.
3. Canopy signs can be painted directly onto canopies.
4. Small signs hung perpendicular to the street may be hung under canopies and arcades or from poles extending from the facade of the building.

Street Furniture: Street furniture is a collective term for objects and pieces of equipment installed on streets and roads for various purposes, including traffic barriers, benches, bollards, post boxes, phone boxes, streetlamps, traffic lights, traffic signs, bus stops, grit bins, tram stops, taxi stands, public lavatories, fountains, watering troughs and memorials, and waste receptacles. Street furniture provides opportunities to lengthen the visitor's trip to downtown; convey the city's "brand," and provide architectural beauty and color. The CBD is currently devoid of street furniture such as benches, newspaper stands, and waste receptacles. The City should purchase or assist businesses with purchasing street furniture throughout the planning period. The amenities should be decorative around a theme and have the intention of catching the eyes of passersby and enticing visitors to linger in the CBD.

Trees: The City should ensure that re-development of the CBD doesn't disturb street trees that provide shade for pedestrians on the sidewalk and natural beauty in the district. Also, the City should ensure that re-development during the planning period includes discussion about maintaining at least 120 trees and/or planting more trees to line the streets and provide shade at various locations in the CBD.

Gateways and District Signage: No signs at either edge of the CBD allow you to know that you have entered a special place. The lift-span bridge and controls provides a distinguishing landmark unique to Rio Hondo when approaching the CBD/City entrance from the west. However, once a traveler crosses the bridge, no buildings or amenities draw one into the district or encourage stopping. Below are the north and south views of the district's edges or gateways.

Illustration 120: West and east end edges of Rio Hondo CBD

	<p><i>View of City Hall, telephone poles, wiring and shrubbery north of lift-span bridge</i></p> <p><i>(Photos courtesy of Google Maps, Street view)</i></p>
	<p><i>View of empty lot, telephone poles, wiring and shrubbery south of lift-span bridge</i></p> <p><i>(Photos courtesy of Google Maps, Street view)</i></p>



Fence around RV Park that neighbors the east end of CBD provides uninviting edge

(Photos courtesy of Google Maps, Street view)

Gateway way signs can set the tone for downtown, reflect the City’s history, and contribute to a sense of place, allowing visitors to know they have arrived somewhere special. A committee working on “branding” the City should design a sign or work with a local property owner and artists to paint one on an existing building, even at City Hall. Alternatively, the City could enlist a Rio Hondo high school or Valley university art class with the task of designing a sign or a mural.

Illustration 12P: Example welcome signs from around small town Texas



Welcome signs can reflect local materials or historic dates or figures. They can be painted on buildings, or ornate and set apart with beautiful native plants. Welcoming features should be placed at both the west and east end of the CBD to delineate its boundary.



In addition to gateway signs, the City may want to upgrade City Park to include a scenic overlook that will catch the attention of drivers entering from the west over the lift-span bridge and that will give visitors and residents a way to enjoy the scenery of the Arroyo. Ideally, scenic overlooks would span north and south of the bridge on the east side of the Arroyo to frame the CBD.

Transportation:

Transportation in the CBD can be addressed in at least two forms, that for automobiles and that for pedestrians. In addition, accessibility status should be considered to ensure that handicapped individuals can use the CBD.

Automobiles: Future development in the CBD will require additional parking spaces. Map 12C: *Proposed Central Business District Improvements* shows locations where on-street parking and lot parking could be added. Automobile movement in the CBD has not been problematic, officials and property owners said. The City may have to subsidize parking, by being creative and assigning a parking lot more than one use as cities have done in the photos below.

Illustration 12Q: Examples of dual use downtown parking lot/park



Downtown mini-park/parking lot, Mount Vernon, Texas (top); Parking lot park with Gazebo and City information kiosk, Hughes Springs, Texas (below)



Pedestrian/accessibility: To increase the accessibility downtown, the City should consider 1) adding ADA ramps, 2) re-constructing old ADA ramps that do not meet current standards; and 3) adding crosswalks, signage and crossing signals; and handicapped parking spaces; 4) Adding sidewalks to create a continuous pedestrian path throughout the CBD and repairing sidewalks that are uneven. Suggested locations and phasing for these improvements can be found on *Map 12C: Central Business District Proposed Improvements* The City would work with TXDOT to fund most of these pedestrian improvements

Maintaining high-quality sidewalks in the CBD has implications for transportation, housing, and economic development. Advantages include:

- Greater willingness of customers to walk from parking, which reduces perceptions of parking congestion and reduces the number of cars that circle in search of parking
- Greater interest among travelers to stop and window shop
- Improved aesthetics, which make the downtown more attractive to new investors
- Greater accessibility for those who feel uncomfortable walking on uneven surfaces

Illustration R: Examples of recent sidewalk projects in rural Texas towns



Avinger, Texas: Amenities, including sidewalks, crosswalks and ramps in places where sidewalk is raised



*El Campo, Texas:
Sidewalks, lamps,
uniform awnings,
planters, mail boxes,
and ADA ramps*

Branding/Marketing:

CBD branding can be conveyed in various forms, including color-coded or matching street furniture; historic plaques on buildings, City downtown banners or street signs, and digital displays on websites that attract visitors to the region and the downtown

Historic buildings also could play a role in a “brand.” In some cities, plaques have been placed outside historic structures explaining the significance of people who built the buildings or detailing the materials or architectural styles of a certain period. The plaques can be numbered and placed on a tour map for interested visitors.

While physical amenities can go a long way in creating increased energy downtown, digital branding is vital to increase the number of visitors to Rio Hondo. A page of the City's website should be dedicated to Downtown Rio Hondo.

Funding Sources:

The following programs are available for assistance with improvements to downtown buildings and infrastructure. Other private sources, including community foundations, also may be available. Also see Chapter 11 Economic Development, Section 11.5 for more regional funding sources.

City Economic Development Corp. The City has two development corporations funded through sales taxes, an Economic Development Corporation (4B) and a Municipal Development District. The City's 4B Corporation established a fund that grants businesses \$1,500 for building façade improvements. A few businesses have used the funds to paint exteriors and fix minor blemishes.

City Tourism Funding: Cities may charge a lodging tax on occupied rooms of hotels, motels, RV parks, and bed and breakfast establishments located within the City. Any funds generated must be spent on tourism activities. Such taxes do not apply to persons who may be permanently residing in such facilities. Taxes do apply to facilities in the City's ETJ. The City does not have such a tax. By state law, taxes may not exceed 9% of the cost of the room.

Texas Main Street Program/ Texas Historical Commission

The Main Street Program assists cities with revitalizing their historic downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts by utilizing preservation and economic development strategies. Membership in the program would designate Rio Hondo as an official historical main street community thereby qualifying the City for several financial assistance programs aimed at upgrading the Central Business District. However, the Main Street Program requires a Coordinator that

designates at least 51% of his or work week toward program activities position and is paid at least \$30,000 per year with incremental annual raises. The City would be required to dedicate budgets for three (3) years of participation. Also, young cities in the Main Street program earn less application points than established cities, creating a lead time of at least two to four years before the City would begin to be competitive for Main Street grant funding.

The Community Development Division of the THC takes applications each July for Main Street Program status. 86 cities in Texas have Main Street designations in cities ranging in population from 1,000 to 200,000. Benefits of program members include:

- Ongoing comprehensive training for Main Street managers and board members;
- Training for communities in successful economic development approaches;
- A three-day, on-site evaluation and full report with recommendations
- Design assistance;
- Consultation with downtown merchants about visual merchandising and window display;
- Advice on heritage tourism programs and marketing; and
- Participation in the Texas First Lady's Tour of Main Street cities

The THC also offers to organized communities a Certified Local Government designation. However, the city must be committed to historic preservation processes, establish a qualified historic district commission, adopt a local historic preservation ordinance that requires mandatory review of exterior alteration and demolition of designated historic properties, adopted local preservation plan, and annual reports of preservation progress. CLG Application requirements for cities include:

Enacting and enforcing a local historic preservation ordinance to accomplish the following:

- Establish a local review board, committee or commission
- Appoint a local historic preservation officer

- Adopt criteria and process for designating historic properties and districts
- Establish standards and process for the review of alterations, demolitions and new construction in designated districts, or to individual properties
- Follow the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation
- Provide a minimum 60-day demolition delay for historic properties

Some cities rely on a County Certified Local Government to apply for funding. Cameron County already has an established Historic Commission Cameron County has already completed a number of actions needed for County Application to become a Certified Local Government. County applications have less stringent requirements and include the following:

- Adopting and/or amend county historical commission by-laws to accomplish the following:
 - Establish a county commission
 - Appoint a county historic preservation officer
 - Define and provide a process for survey, inventory and protecting historic properties
 - Follow the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards and Guidelines for Archaeology and Historic Preservation for all commission activities

Downtown Revitalization Program. The Downtown Revitalization program is provided to non-Main Street communities through the Texas Capital Fund administered by the Texas Department of Agriculture. The minimum award is \$50,000 and the maximum is \$150,000, with at least a 20 percent cash or in-kind match from the applicant. Main Street cities can also apply for similar funding.

The DR program requires that a city designate boundaries of its original commercial center or its historic district; and pass a resolution declaring that the public infrastructure needing to be improved in that district has characteristics of “slum/blight” that should be eliminated. Awards for both the Main Street and the

DR program may be used for the following public infrastructure in the designated downtown area:

- Acquisition of land needed for public infrastructure improvements
- Water & sewer facilities/lines
- Road/street construction/improvements
- Natural gas line construction/improvements
- Electric, telephone, & fiber optic line construction/improvements
- Traffic signals and signs
- Drainage
- Sidewalk construction/improvements
- Public parking lot construction/improvements
- Other construction activities required to eliminate architectural barriers for the handicapped

Applications are due in June annually. The City may score competitively for Downtown Revitalization funding under current Texas Department of Agriculture scoring criteria. Cities receiving funding in prior rounds of applications scored from between 75 to 95. In the sample below, Rio Hondo scored an 80. Scores are based on a mix of factors including poverty, unemployment, community size, and past awards. Occasionally, funding criteria/scoring categories change.

Scoring Categories (Max 100 Points)	
Community Need (Max 60 Points)	Score
Unemployment Rate (Max 5 pts): Applicant's local unemployment rate* is <u>12.7%</u> . Score 5 points if this figure meets or exceeds the state average of <u>8.7%</u> %. (5 points awarded if the applicant's most recently available quarterly unemployment rate is 1.5% over the state rate.) (July 2011 unemployment rates used here)	5
Poverty Rate (Max 15 pts): Applicant's 2010 county poverty rate for individuals is <u>34 %</u> . Score 5 points if this equals or exceeds the state average of 17.1%. Score 10 points if this equals or exceeds 19.7% (15% over the state rate). Score 15 points if this equals or exceeds 21.3% (25% over the state rate).	15
Enterprise Zone (Max 5 pts): Score 5 points if the project is located in an enterprise zone, empowerment zone, or defense zone. No enterprise zones in downtown Rio Hondo city.	0

Previous Contracts (Max 10 pts): Score 5 points if the city has been awarded one contract in the current calendar year or preceding 2 calendar years. Score 10 points if the city has been awarded zero contracts in the current calendar year or the preceding 2 calendar years.	10
Community Size (Max 10 pts): For cities: score 5 points if the city population is located in a county of 35,000 or less population; score additional 5 points if the city population is less than 5,000. For counties: score 5 points if the county population is less than 35,000; score 10 points if the county population is less than 15,000. Rio Hondo city: 2,431; Cameron County: 406,220	5
Per Capita Income (Max 5 pts): Score 5 points if the community's per capita income is below the statewide average of \$24,318. Rio Hondo city: \$18,246 (ACS 2005-2009)	5
Leverage, Economic Emphasis (Max 40 points)	Score
Leverage (Max 10 pts): A 10% cash match is required. Additional points will be given for additional matching funds. Score 5 points for contributing a 10% additional match; score 10 points for contributing an additional 20%.	10
Minority Hiring (Max 10 pts): This measures an applicant's hiring practices. Score 5 points if the city government's minority employment rate is equal to or greater than the city's minority population rate. Score 10 points if the city's minority employment rate is equal to or greater than 125% of the city minority percentage rate, or in cities where the minority population is 80% or greater, the applicant must employ a minimum of 95% minorities. Non-Caucasian pop. = 91%; Non-Caucasian City employees = 18%	10
Commercial Support (Max 10 pts): Score 5 points for letters from 50% or more of the businesses in the Downtown Revitalization area. Score 10 points for letters from 75% of the businesses in the Downtown Revitalization area.	10
Sidewalks and ADA Compliance (Max 10 pts): Score 10 points if 70% of the requested funds will be used for sidewalk and/or ADA compliance activities.	10
<i>Base score is 80 points. Lowest score funded in 2010 was 70 points. Changes to the state scoring criteria may increase or decrease the competitiveness of the City's application.</i>	80

The Department of Agriculture suggests ways that cities can create an organizational structure to reach downtown revitalization goals. It suggests that the City appoint a central committee composed of 15 members of the community, including representatives from city government, the media, banks, the Chamber of Commerce, historians, real estate agents, and downtown owners. Additionally subcommittees can be established to help implement programs. Proposed subcommittees include Design, Promotion, and Economic Restructuring and Organization.

The Economic Restructuring and Organization subcommittee can focus on creating methods to finance downtown revitalization. The MDD could serve such a role. Financing mechanisms would include

including a low-interest loan program with local banks to fund the repair and upgrading of buildings in the CBD; a community foundation established to provide small grants to repair building facades and signage; and assisting the City with development of incentives for downtown building rehabilitation, including tax abatements; and discussions with financial advisors about creation of a CBD or tourism corridor investment zone that would generate City funds to be used only in the CBD or a business attraction/tourism corridor. The committee could also supply information to building owners about state or federal tax benefits available for building rehabilitation. These include 1) a federal 10 percent and 20 percent Federal Investment Tax Credit for Rehabilitation of buildings constructed before 1936. Buildings in a registered historic district receive a 20 percent reduction and those in a non-historic district receive a 10 percent tax reduction. 2) A 50% tax credit (within specific limits) for all modifications to buildings that bring it into compliance with the ADA also is available. This would include the addition of or modification to a restroom for handicap compliance. 3) Voluntarily donation of a preservation easement or preservation restriction to the city or a not-for-profit organization protecting the property against changes that would be inconsistent with the preservation of the property, such as demolition of historic buildings, inappropriate alterations, or subdivision of land. The easement may also protect against deterioration by imposing affirmative maintenance obligations. The restrictions of the easement are generally incorporated into a recordable preservation easement deed that is part of the property's title (in legal terms, it "runs with the land") – and this title interest is binding both on the present owner and future owners. Property owners who make such donations may be eligible for federal tax deductions. The National Trust for Historic Preservation explains the details of this mechanism:

There are many kinds of historic properties – and easements are as varied as the properties they protect. Most preservation easements protect, at the very least, the exterior character-defining features of a historic property, but many go beyond this to include interior features, the historic setting of a property, and/or specific landscape features. Most easements restrict the owner’s use of development rights such as subdivision or air rights. Some allow the owner to exercise those rights, but only as approved by the easement-holding organization. Some prohibit additions or construction of secondary structures; others permit them if approved as compatible with the historic character of a building. The obligations of an easement run in two directions: the owner of the property has the obligation to comply with the terms of the easement, and the easement-holding organization has the obligation to monitor and enforce the easement.²²

The Texas Conservation Easement Act of 1983 gives a property owner the ability to preserve historic structures (as designated by the taxing entity or the Texas Historical or Historic Landmark Commission) and property, and provide tax relief to owners of historic properties. A preservation easement protects a property from alterations even after the original owner no longer holds the property. Three types of preservation easements can be attached to property deeds on land with historic buildings. They include the exterior or façade easement that protects the outside appearance of significant structures and buildings by restricting alterations and requiring routine maintenance; the scenic and open space easement that protects open spaces, historic and scenic views, the landscape surrounding significant buildings, archeological sites, and ecologically significant land; and the rarely-used interior easement that protects all or part of a building’s interior. An interior easement is difficult to monitor. A preservation easement can be terminated through condemnation (eminent domain), foreclosure, or abandonment of the property. Beginning an education program requires a well-planned and coordinated marketing program

²² *What is a preservation easement?*, National Trust for Historic Preservation, <http://www.preservationnation.org/resources/legal-resources/easements> as accessed on the worldwide web in August of 2011.

that educates the public on the advantages of donating such an easement.²³

The Promotion Committee can develop strategies to increase foot traffic downtown. These may include increased advertising of the Arroyo Days; surveys of residents and tourists about what businesses they would like to see downtown, increased signage to places of significance in the CBD or signs that delineate the CBD boundary; the development of monthly downtown promotion events, or more targeted worldwide Web presence.

The Design committee could work on establishing building design guidelines for the CBD, assisting the City in adopting a Downtown Building Review Committee or in establishing a similar relationship with the Cameron County Historical Commission; working with engineers to create a phased sidewalk plan that would enhance downtown; and develop suggestions for City sign and awning guidelines for CBD buildings.

More information about the Main Street Program can be accessed at <http://www.thc.state.tx.us>, and more information about the Downtown Revitalization Program can be accessed at <http://www.agr.state.tx.us/agr/>.

Texas Downtown Association (TDA) This not-for-profit organization currently has over 400 members that have undertaken over \$1 billion in downtown revitalization projects. A \$95 annual fee provides access to annual conferences and regional meetings; reduced fees for downtown assistance, strategic planning and guidance; access to cooperative advertising for Texas downtowns;

²³ Texas Community Heritage Development Division, Certified Local Government Program, "*Local Government Assistance Series, Number 2, Historic Preservation Easements in Texas,*" See

legislative monitoring, and an invitation to apply for an annual foundation small grant (under \$5,000) to assist downtown revitalization efforts.

Texas Heritage Trails Program This program operated through the Texas Historic Commission provides a combination of historic preservation and tourism program in 10 heritage regions designated throughout the state. Rio Hondo is located in the Texas Tropical Trail Region, Rio Grande Byway group. The Texas Heritage Trails Program can provide tourism evaluations of historic and cultural sites, and serve as a resource for new committees forming to set policy for the CBD. The Texas Tropical Trail Region office is located in Kingsville. Rio Hondo is not a partner member of this organization.

TxDOT Safe Routes to School (SRS) and Statewide Transportation Enhancement Projects (STP) This source has provided high-dollar reimbursement grants for drainage and sidewalk projects. Cities have used this source to redevelop sidewalks downtown. They are also used to better connect pedestrians from neighborhoods to schools so that students can more safely and easily walk to school. Since the Junior High is within the CBD, increased pedestrian connections to the school may benefit the CBD also. STP funds can be used for 12 categories of non-traditional transportation projects to enhance the aesthetics of roadways and provide facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists, including preservation of abandoned railways and acquisition of scenic easements; and landscaping and sidewalks along roadways. Eligible projects include purchasing of historic buildings; placement of amenities like lighting, public art, street furniture, and other beautification activities; preservation of buildings and facades in the historic district; and provision of facilities for pedestrians and bicycles. In recent rounds of funding, several Texas cities received over \$750,000 in funding each. Projects require a 20 percent match and are granted as reimbursement of 80 percent of the project costs. It is uncertain

when funding for this program will be available. More information can be obtained on this program at

<http://www.preservationnation.org/issues/transportation/additional-resources/building-on-the-past.pdf>

Small Business Development Center, UT Pan American. This office, funded through the US Small Business Administration, counsels area residents in starting small businesses. They assist clients with developing business plans and applying for bank loans. Specific programs assist minority and women with establishing new businesses and may be able to assist them with plans for building acquisition and/or rehabilitation.

12.4 Central Business District Plan

Goals and Objectives for Downtown Rio Hondo: The challenge during the planning period for Rio Hondo will be to maintain the CBD as a distinct area of town. Because no regulations are in place, an old building could be torn down to make way for new buildings that will not replicate the downtown feel created by buildings that line the street; large transparent windows that face the street; and parking channeled behind buildings instead of in front of buildings. In order to maintain and improve the CBD, the plan establishes the following Goals with objectives for meeting them. Capital improvements and increased organizational capacity can be funded for about \$650,000.

Goal 1: Colorado Avenue between the Arroyo and Robertson Street is the City's main business thoroughfare. Businesses succeed there and provide basic services and entertainment for residents and visitors.

Objective 1.1: Develop a Rio Hondo "brand" by 2013.

Policy 1.1.1: MDD appoint a Promotions committee to begin developing a theme for the City to be highlighted in the CBD, the City's main thoroughfare. Enlist the assistance of the area university business schools, if needed. In addition, ask for input through newspaper articles, websites, or holding a contest.

Policy 1.1.2: Throughout the planning period, ensure that the brand is "deliverable," don't make promises in signs or advertising that can't

be kept. The intention is to deliver what is expected so as not to lose trust in residents, tourists, and other consumers. Also select a narrow focus. (In *BoomTown USA*, author Jack Schultz, encourages towns to grow their vision/brand “deeper, not wider.”)

Policy 1.1.3: Promote the brand. See Objective 2.6 in Chapter 11 for steps.

Policy 1.1.4: Hire or solicit the help of high school students and/or other youth organizations by 2014 for downtown decoration projects such as mini-murals, a stand with a map for tourists, and benches and garbage bins painted with local themes.

Policy 1.1.5: By 2016, use the brand in every point of contact with visitors, including a dedicated website on directional, street, and welcome signs placed throughout the planning period and other tourism and city materials.

Objective 1.2: By 2020 increase the amount of sales and visitors to the CBD as measured by at least a 30% increase in sales tax revenue generated by the CBD.

Policy 1.2.1: Beginning in 2012, MDD complete surveys of business owners, tourists and residents about what they would like to buy in Rio Hondo. Post the results on the city websites on a business page. In addition, list property for sale or lease on the website.

Policy 1.2.2: Throughout the planning period, EDC continue providing to businesses small grants to assist with exterior building appearance, lighting, awnings.

Policy 1.2.3: By 2012, move and expand the City’s historical exhibit to a downtown building or a window front in a downtown building to attract passersby and visitors.

Policy 1.2.3: By 2013, MDD and EDC determine how to fund the addition of amenities in the CBD like benches, planters and trash receptacles. This effort could include donation of amenities created by students or artists.

Policy 1.2.4: By 2015, upgrade the east and west gateways into the CBD by developing at least one of the following: landscape and/or “Welcome to Rio Hondo” monuments that frame both the east and west entrances; a scenic overlook on the east side of the Arroyo in City Park that draws attention from the draw bridge and gives visitors and residents a scenic overlook of the Arroyo; and/or placement of a mural on the west or south facing City Hall walls that can be seen from FM 106.

Policy 1.2.5: Once the downtown has new amenities by 2016, gain regional and national exposure for Rio Hondo businesses by the City joining the Harlingen Area Chamber of Commerce, the Rio

South Texas Economic Council, and the GO TEXAN Rural Communities program.

Objective 1.3: Rehabilitate the east end of the CBD by 2018.

Policy 1.3.1: By 2012, create a plan to increase parking in the eastern portion of the CBD. Suggestions include creating a parking lot/ mini-park at the southwest corner of Heywood and Colorado Ave. Alternatively, assist proprietors with creating parking behind buildings adjacent to alleys between Robertson and Heywood.

Policy 1.3.2: By 2013, MDD or other city or regional entity establish a revolving loan fund, tax abatement or other funding mechanism to provide incentives for property owners to rehabilitate original downtown buildings and make them more marketable for sale or lease.

Policy 1.3.3: By 2013, adopt zoning that establishes specific regulations for downtown development and re-development, including provisions for placing buildings near the street, parking in the rear of buildings, percentages of street facing facades that must be doors and windows, and allowance of mixed use buildings to encourage residents to live downtown.

Policy 1.3.4: By 2014, post all of the city's ordinances related to building on the City's website on a special page called "Doing Business in Rio Hondo." This will enable prospective business owners to research business and development questions in Rio Hondo easier.

Policy 1.3.5: By 2015, adopt a central business district design ordinance that specifies regulations for awnings and signs.

Policy 1.3.6: By 2016, with a dedicated funding source to provide matching funds and in cooperation with the TXDOT San Benito office, apply for a TCF Downtown Redevelopment grant or a TXDOT STP grant to upgrade existing sidewalks.

Policy 1.3.7: By 2018, re-pave and widen the pavement in the alleys and adopt ordinances that make the alleys one-way. Also, add decorative lighting.

Objective 1.4: Rehabilitate the west end of the CBD by 2030 and create a gateway into Rio Hondo.

Policy 1.4.1: By 2015, create a scenic overlook in City Park that gives visitors and residents a view of the river and enhances the view visitors receive as they enter downtown from the lift-span bridge.

Policy 1.4.2: By 2016, extend park facilities to City Park open space that fronts FM 106 just south of the Fire Department. Facilities should be seen from the street, including a gazebo or other

structures. Alternatively, paint a mural on the back of City Hall that adds color and provides a welcome sign to visitors as they enter the City.

Policy 1.4.3: By 2017, add gateway signs to the east and west borders of the CBD, including landscaping or changing the fence around the Twin Palms RV Park to allow for freer pedestrian movement into the CBD.

Policy 1.4.4: By 2023, extend sidewalks through the western end of the CBD, upgrade existing sidewalks, add decorative lighting and standardize ADA ramps.

Policy 1.4.5: Throughout the planning period, market the land south of the lift span bridge on the east side of the Arroyo as an opportunity for a mixed-use development to upgrade affordable housing in the downtown and restaurant or retail offerings at the foot of the lift-span bridge.

Goal 2: The CBD is a place that joins Rio Hondo north and south neighborhoods and provides an area for residents and visitors of all ages to gather.

Objective 2.1: Develop a complete sidewalk system with intermittent shade in the CBD to encourage strolling and pedestrian use of the CBD. Pedestrians attract passersby and can be used by residents and visitors of all ages.

Policy 2.1.1: Between 2012 and 2014, MDD develop a financing plan in conjunction with TXDOT, energy providers and the Texas Agriculture Extension Office to upgrade sidewalks in east Rio Hondo. A project should include adding thematic street lighting to the western end of downtown.

Policy 2.1.2: By 2015, begin rehabilitating east end sidewalks and adding amenities through a combination of grants, city funds or bonds. Amenities should include lighting that sets a style for downtown lighting and lengthens a CBD's visitor stay into the evening hours.

Policy 2.1.3: Between 2014 and 2020, City officials ensure that standard ADA ramps are placed at intersections as buildings are developed on corners. Work with TXDOT throughout the planning period to encourage them to update and place new standard ADA ramps at intersections along FM 106 in the CBD.

Policy 2.1.4: By 2013, adopt subdivision regulations requiring sidewalks on developments that front FM 106 or share a lot line with properties that front the CBD.

Policy 2.1.5: By 2013, adopt zoning regulation amendments that bring buildings to the front of lots facing FM 106 in the CBD; require

parking or shared parking; and define where parking should be located on a lot that fronts FM 106.

Policy 2.1.6: Between 2016 and 2020, MDD work with any developers of new buildings and/or current property owners west of Reynolds to place sidewalks along FM 106 in property area next to sidewalk where advisable. Also, budget or work with TXDOT to place a sidewalk on City Hall property 165 feet from Arroyo Street west to join TXDOT sidewalk that leads to the lift-span bridge.

Policy 2.1.7: During the planning period, provide grants to property owners to place trees within 20 feet of the right of way with FM 106 in the blocks between Arroyo and Reynolds and between Harrolds and Robertson. In addition work with the Cameron County Master Gardeners Association to plant trees in the CBD.

Objective 2.2: Encourage businesses to develop parking lots behind their buildings and channel destination traffic down the alleys to make it easier for automobile traffic to negotiate the CBD and choose it for shopping, services and eating.

Policy 2.2.1: By 2014, City Council adopt ordinances making alleys one-half block north of FM 106 and one-half south of FM 106 one-way to encourage the back of lots to be used for parking.

Policy 2.2.2: By 2014, adopt zoning regulations that require screening between commercial and residential uses.

Policy 2.2.3: By 2014, adopt zoning regulations that bring buildings to the front of lots facing FM 106 in the CBD; require parking or shared parking; and define where parking should be located on a lot that fronts FM 106.

Policy 2.2.4: Between 2012 and 2020, Downtown Committee work with property owners to widen and/or improve the alleys between Paloma and Bristol in the CBD. Improvements would include the addition of lighting that is sensitive to neighboring residences, paving, screening between the alley and residences, rear parking for cars and bikes, and signage needed to direct traffic to the alleys for parking.

Objective 2.3: Encourage the development in the CBD of amenities that will draw residents and tourists to the CBD.

Policy 2.3.1: Between 2012 and 2020, MDD, EDC and City officials market west end downtown property by the lift-span bridge to create a focal point for downtown and entry into the City. This includes adopting zoning that will allow for a mix of uses to be developed on the lots.

Policy 2.3.2: Between 2013 and 2015, expand City Park next to City Hall so that amenities front FM 106. Examples of amenities

include gazebos, fencing that allows for a view into the park and views of the Arroyo, or other structures that attract attention to the open space south of the Fire Department.

Policy 2.3.3: By 2012, determine if the City could purchase land for a park/parking lot along Colorado Avenue to alleviate a lack of parking in the eastern part of the CBD. If the purchase is made, develop the land by 2014 possibly as a pocket park/parking lot. TDA Downtown Revitalization funds could provide some of the construction or acquisition funding.

Policy 2.3.4: Between 2012 and 2016, City consider leasing land on vacant lots between Reynolds and Robertson to launch a community garden that gets residents accustomed to coming downtown for recreation and gathering. Alternatively, City assist restaurants or other business owners to place a garden on empty lots for their use until the real estate can be developed.

Policy 2.3.5: By 2014, adopt subdivision and zoning regulations that require landscaping for new subdivisions and the depiction of existing trees in site plans so that developers and officials are aware of the impact development will have on trees and shade in the CBD.

Policy 2.3.6: By 2015, begin rehabilitating east end sidewalks and adding amenities through a combination of grants, city funds or bonds. Amenities should include lighting that sets a style for downtown lighting and lengthens a CBD's visitor stay into the evening hours.

Policy 2.3.7: Throughout the planning period, EDC or MDD set aside grant funds for outdoor amenities for CBD businesses, including awnings, signs, planters, murals, trash receptacles and benches. In addition, the City could sponsor a contest or develop a brigade of volunteers to create these amenities at cost.

Policy 2.3.8: By 2015, City encourage businesses to develop shared parking agreements and place signage inviting CBD visitors to use lots at agreed upon times.

Policy 2.3.9: By 2016, City officials work with Twin Palms owners to create a better entranceway between the units and downtown that will encourage visitors to walk across Robertson and stroll downtown.

Table 12D: Central Business District Improvements Plan, 2012-2032

Phase/ Year	Capital Projects	Estimated Cost	Source of Funds
Phase I / East End			
2012- 2016	Convert the vacant lot at the southwest corner of Heywood and FM 106 to parking and mini-park, alternatively convert land	\$120,000 to \$150,000	MDD, Local, TCF, TxDOT

	elsewhere in the CBD or on the eastern outskirts, or behind buildings for parking. City funded-or joint funded with a landowner/proprietor for a total of 40 additional parking spaces and either a mini-park or screening in alleys from residences		
2015-2017	Rehabilitate east end sidewalks (1,600 LF), add decorative lighting and upgrade 9 ADA ramps to standard, paint mural on RV Park fence, adopt district design ordinance for signs and awnings	\$170,000*	GEN (\$35,000 match), TXDOT, TCF, Local
2021-2023	Improve alleys between Paloma and Bristol and Harrolds and Robertson by paving and/or re-paving 1,200 LF of alley street, and adding low level lighting and screening between alley and residences	\$110,000	MDD, LOCAL, TCF, TxDOT
Phase II /West End			
2016	Add Gateway signs and/or border landscaping at the east and west end of the CBD	\$10,000	EDC, LOCAL
2017-2020	Create a scenic overlook in City Park, and undertake park improvements that would wrap activities around City Hall to front FM 106.	\$25,000	TP&W, MDD, THC, Port
2021-2026	Create continuous sidewalks, upgrade existing sidewalks and add standard ADA ramps and lighting in CBD west end*	\$100,000	GEN (\$35,000 match), TXDOT, TCF, LOCAL (business assessment)
Year	Non-Capital Projects	Estimated Cost*	Source of Funds
2012	Establish a Downtown committee. First action includes surveying businesses, tourists and residents about retail and other needs	N/A	GEN
2012	Move the City 's historical exhibit from City Hall to a vacant window front downtown, or advrtise the exhibit in a vacant store front and give directions to City Hall	\$250	GEN/EDC
2013	Downtown committee develop a brand for the City	\$5,000	LOCAL/Volunt eer
2012-2025	Continue to provide financial assistance to property owners for building facade	\$5,000 (Annual)	EDC, Texas AgriLife

	improvements, street furniture, and trees or gardens downtown		Extension
2013	Establish a funding source to assist developers/business owners with downtown building improvements	\$100,000 in seed money	MDD, LRGVC EDD, USDA
2013-2014	Adopt zoning amendments that specify downtown regulations for building setbacks, parking location, awnings, allowable uses and screening between businesses and residences	\$2,000 legal review	GEN
2014	Revise city website to add pages for business development and links to ordinances and assistance programs for businesses	\$3,000	GEN
2014	Adopt City ordinances making alleys between Bristol and Paloma one way and place signs delineating one-way status, and requiring plats and site plans to depict existing trees	\$500	GEN/EDC
2015-2032	Market southwestern block of CBD for redevelopment, including housing, restaurant and retail	Varies	MDD

GEN = City of Rio Hondo municipal funds; MDD = Sales tax revenue collected through the City of Rio Hondo Municipal Development District; EDC = Sales tax revenue collected through the City of Rio Hondo Economic Development Corp.; LOCAL = volunteer time and donations from private citizens, charitable organizations, and local businesses; Port = Port of Harlingen; TCF = Texas Department of Agriculture Texas Capital Fund Downtown Revitalization Programs; TxCBDG = Texas Community Development Block Grant program through the Texas Department of Agriculture, THC = Texas Historical Commission, including the Heritage Tourism Partnership Grant; USDA = US Department of Agriculture Rural Development; TXOT = Texas Department of Transportation Surface Transportation Program.

* Cost for sidewalk is for 9' concrete sidewalk, 4" thick, 6x6 wire mesh; calculated from R.S. Means Heavy Construction Cost Data, 66th Edition, 2008; \$20 per linear foot includes material, labor and equipment; excludes engineering costs and contractor's profit.

13 Capital Improvement Program

A capital improvements program (CIP) identifies long-term capital needs and prepares the community to anticipate spending needs with multi-year planning. CIPs are the foundation of financing for capital expenditures because they blend program and needs analysis with financial capabilities. When properly developed and used, CIPs are critical tools for anticipating large expenditure items and determining when and how much money will be needed to keep up with infrastructure needs.

13.1 Financial Analysis

Rio Hondo is typical of most small Texas cities in its types of revenues and expenditures. Revenues include taxes, fees, fines, interest, and occasional grant funds, while expenditures include operating expenses, maintenance, salaries, debt service, and capital outlays. Summaries of the City's actual revenues and expenditures for fiscal years ending September 30, 2009 and 2010 are included in *Table 13E* later in this chapter.

Sources and Amounts of Income and Expenditures. According to the City's most recent audit of the Fiscal Year ending Sept. 30, 2010, the City generates about one-third of its income via property taxes. The percentage of other revenue sources fluctuates from year to year, depending on the amount of intergovernmental revenue the City receives and its charges for services. In FY 2010 the City generated its income mostly through property tax and grants. However, it projected that its income for FY 2011 would be split more evenly between sources. During the past two years, revenues exceeded expenditures.

Table 13A: Government Fund Operating Revenues & Expenditures

	2009	2010
Revenues	\$1,108,183	\$1,295,235
Expenditures	\$1,203,449	\$1,489,555
Net change	(\$194,320)	(\$95,266)

Chart 13A: Sources of Income, FY 2009-10

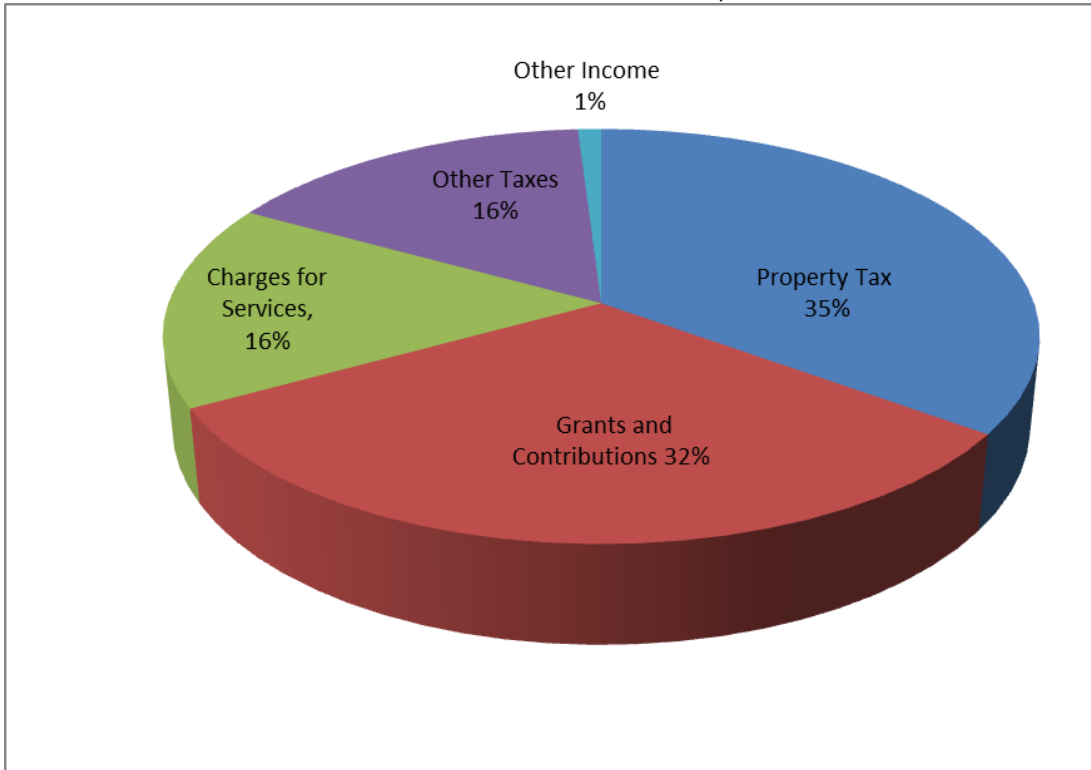
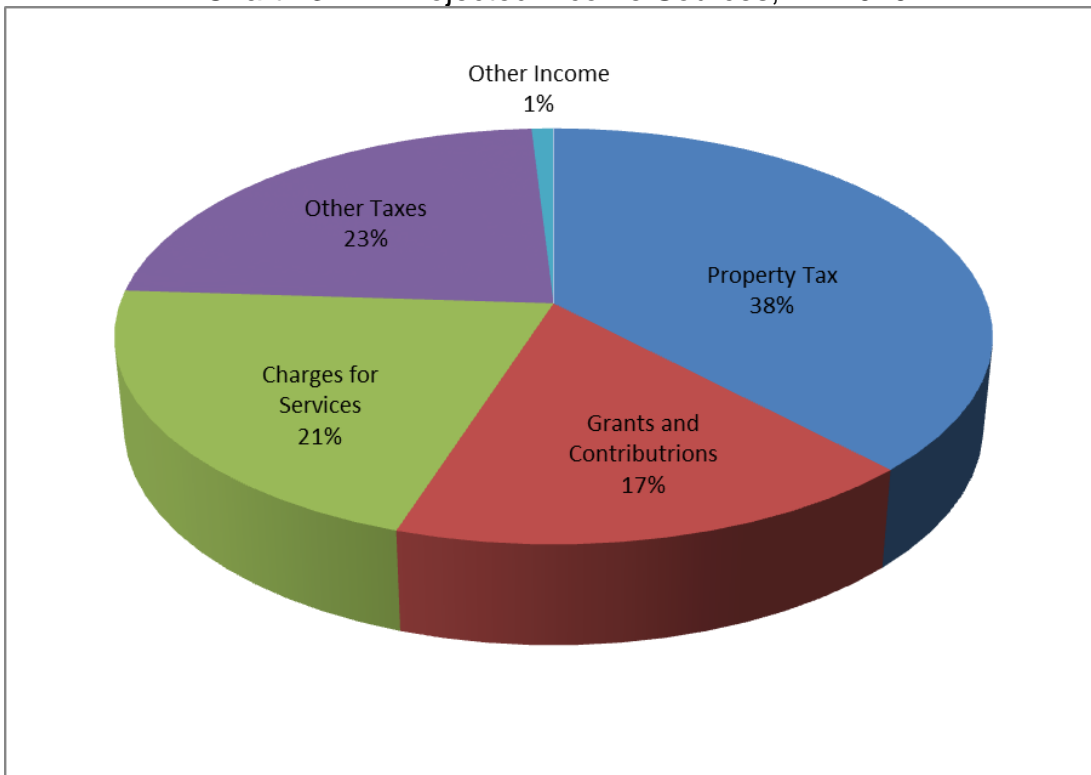


Chart 13B: Projected Income Sources, FY 2010-11



The City's organization of revenues and expenses follows standard governmental accounting practice. It has a General Fund and a Proprietary Fund for utility services. The expenditures and revenue are shown below in Table 13B. Over the two examined years, revenues increased by 17% while expenditures increased by 24%, resulting in the negative end of year balance. The large increase in expenditures relative to revenues was due in part to a steep increase in capital outlays in 2010.

Table 13B: Government Fund Revenues and Expenditures

	2009	2010
Revenues		
Property Taxes	\$423,348	\$447,017
Sales fees	98,854	92,074
Franchise fees	119,809	109,585
Licenses & Permits	10,917	14,962
Intergovernmental Revenues	91,765	419,114
Charges for Services	152,215	147,668
Fines and Forfeitures	51,738	50,303
Interest	657	1,542
Miscellaneous	158,880	12,970
Total Revenues	\$1,108,183	\$1,295,235
Expenditures		
General Government	\$394,387	\$338,086
Public Safety	332,418	360,626
Health and Welfare	76,370	71,627
Public Works – Streets	219,052	187,186
Culture & Recreation – Parks	-	46,996
Municipal and Library Complex	99,103	42,583
Capital Outlay	38,992	420,103
Debt Service	43,127	22,348
Total Expenditures	\$1,203,449	\$1,489,555
Beginning balance	(\$132,170)	(\$216,548)
Fund balance End of Year	(\$216,548)	(\$382,143)

Source: City of Rio Hondo, Annual Financial Report, Sept. 30, 2010, pg. 14

The City's proprietary fund is generated mostly through operational revenue. Proprietary revenue has exceeded total operating expenses resulting in positive operating income in 2009 and 2010. In 2009 and 2010, the City received other

sources of revenue through interest income and grants further increasing end of year net assets. Net assets grew nearly 5% between the years 2009 and 2010.

Table 13C: Proprietary Fund Revenues and Expenditures

	2009	2010
Operating Revenues:		
Water revenues	\$484,951	\$403,106
Sewer revenues	311,638	277,910
Garbage revenues	136,069	145,881
Penalties	28,141	23,999
Other	-	5,016
Total Revenues	\$960,799	\$855,912
Operating Expenses:		
Water department	\$354,435	\$251,520
Sewer department	156,965	211,852
Garbage department	129,003	128,927
Depreciation	128,270	128,270
Total Expenses	\$768,673	\$720,569
Operating Income	\$192,126	\$135,343
Other Revenue:		
Interest Income	1,552	129
Interest Expense	(23,937)	(22,365)
Contributions & Transfers	87,220	23,864
Changes in Net Assets	\$256,961	\$136,971
Net assets at Beginning of Year	\$2,614,744	\$2,871,705
Net assets at End of Year	\$2,871,705	\$3,008,676

Source: City of Rio Hondo, Annual Financial Report, Sept. 30, 2010, pg. 18

Long Term Debt. In addition to regular expenditures, the City pays debt on governmental activities, namely notes payable and compensated absences; and on its proprietary activities, namely certificates of obligations, accrued interest on bonds, and compensated absences. The City has an outstanding general obligation bond, which is paid through revenue from the proprietary fund and matures in August 2032. Table 13D describes its long-term debt obligations and the payment schedule for the City's business type activities debt.

Table 13D: Long Term Debt

Year	Type of Debt	Outstanding as of September 30, 2010		
2009	Governmental Activities	\$32,182		
	Business-type Activities	\$468,232		
	Total	\$500,414		
2010	Governmental Activities	\$42,197		
	Business-type Activities	\$458,002		
	Total	\$500,199		
Business Type Activities Payment Schedule				
Year	Business Type Activities Payment Schedule			
	Principal	Interest	Total	
2011	\$12,000	\$22,400	\$34,400	
2012	\$12,500	\$22,200	\$34,700	
2013-2016	\$55,500	\$80,450	\$135,950	
2017-2021	\$86,000	\$83,900	\$169,900	
2022-2026	\$110,000	\$59,700	\$169,700	
2027-2031	\$140,000	\$29,600	\$169,600	
2032-2036	\$32,000	\$1,600	\$33,600	
	\$448,000	\$299,850	\$747,850	

Source: City of Rio Hondo, Annual Financial Report, Sept. 30, 2010, pg. 36 -38

The income levels of residents may have some bearing on which state and local funding programs are available for capital improvements. The following statistics may be useful in making these determinations.

- In 1999, Rio Hondo annual per capita income was 46% percent of the national per capita income. Some programs require per capita income to be 80 percent of the national income or lower.
- The annual average unemployment rate for Cameron County in 2010 was 11.2 percent, higher than the national 2010 unemployment rate of 9.2 percent and the state rate of 8.2 percent. Rio Hondo unemployment rates are not readily available. Some programs are more available to localities where unemployment rates exceed the national rate by at least one percentage point.
- The Median Family Income in 2010 for Cameron County was reported by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development as being \$33,500. Households eligible for low-income programs had an annual income in 2010 at or below the rates in Table 13F. New income limits are released annually by HUD.

- The median family income for Rio Hondo in the 2000 census was \$27,941, compared to \$45,861 statewide (61 percent of statewide). Many programs require the city median to be 75 percent of the state median income or lower.
- More than 51 percent of Rio Hondo residents were classified as being low-to-moderate income in the 2000 census (54 percent). TxCDBG programs require that at least 51 percent of residents for communitywide projects be classified as “very low” or “extremely low” according to the HUD definitions in the table below.

Table 13E: HUD Income Limits

Cameron County, Texas								
FY 2010 Income Limit Category	1 Person	2 Person	3 Person	4 Person	5 Person	6 Person	7 Person	8 Person
Extremely Low (30%) Income Limits	\$9,800	\$11,200	\$12,600	\$13,950	\$15,100	\$16,200	\$17,300	\$18,450
Very Low (50%) Income Limits	\$16,300	\$18,600	\$20,950	\$23,250	\$25,150	\$27,000	\$28,850	\$30,700
Low (80%) Income Limits	\$26,050	\$29,800	\$33,500	\$37,200	\$40,200	\$43,200	\$46,150	\$49,150

13.2 Practices and Standards

Public Improvements Financing Practices. The type of financing used to pay for infrastructure expenditures depends on several factors, the most critical of which include the annual tax revenues generated, the unmet demand for different infrastructure projects, and the jurisdiction’s indebtedness. Because costs often run into the millions of dollars, multiple sources are often used to finance infrastructure expansion or replacement: general obligation bonds and certificates of general obligation, revenue bonds, operating revenues/general fund, impact fees, and state or federal funds.

- General obligation bonds are paid out of annual general revenues. These types of bonds usually raise large sums of money with the debt retired over

several decades. G.O. bonds are backed by the “full faith, credit and taxing powers” of the issuing jurisdiction. When G.O. bonds are sold, the jurisdiction guarantees that it will raise sufficient revenues to retire the debt on schedule, usually using property taxes. Because G.O. bonds are repaid by all taxpayers in a community, they are usually used to finance projects that benefit the community as a whole, such as public buildings, parks, recreation centers, and major street improvements. To minimize the need for property tax increases, cities make every effort to coordinate new bond issues with the retirement of previous bonds. Voter approval is required if the City wants to increase the taxes that it levies and the amount is included in the City’s state-imposed debt limits.

- Certificates of obligation are similar to G.O. bonds, however, they are usually used to pay a contractual obligation incurred in: (1) a construction contract; (2) the purchase of materials, supplies, equipment, machinery, buildings, land, and rights-of-way for authorized needs and purposes; or (3) the payment of professional services, including services provided by tax appraisers, engineers, architects, attorneys, map makers, auditors, financial advisors, and fiscal agents. Voter approval is not needed. . Combination tax and revenue certificates of obligation are issued for both governmental and business type activities. General obligation bonds, governmental revenue bonds and tax notes pledge the full faith and credit of the City. Combination tax and revenue certificates of obligation are payable from the net revenues of the water and sewer system and general debt service tax.
- Revenue bonds are sold to develop projects that produce revenues, such as municipal sewer and water systems. The guarantee of repayment comes from the revenues generated by the financed project, which usually includes taxes or fees collected from the project’s beneficiaries. Most projects financed using revenue bonds benefit a wide class of users, such as water customers, airport users, or toll road users. Unlike G.O. bonds, revenue bonds do not require the

backing of the jurisdiction's "full faith, credit and taxing powers." Consequently, the local government is not obligated to raise taxes to avoid default on the revenue bonds. Because of this, revenue bonds usually carry higher interest rates than general obligation bonds. These bonds parallel those used for private enterprises; voter approval is usually not necessary to float revenue bonds.

- Private Activity Bonds are a special type of bond administered by the Texas Bond Review Board. From the Bond Review Board website:

Private activity bonds are those bonds that meet any of the following tests: 1) Private Business Use Test - more than 10% of the proceeds are to be used for any private business use; 2) Private Security or Payment Test - payment on principal or interest of more than 10% of the proceeds is to be directly or indirectly secured by, or payments are to be derived from a private business use; and 3) Private Loan Financing Test - proceeds are to be used to make or finance loans to persons other than governmental units.

The Tax Act of 1986 limited municipality Private Activity Bond use. The Texas Bond Review Board allocates these bonds according to a "first-come, first-served" basis every year. They should be contacted at 1-512-463-1741 (or at <http://www.brb.state.tx.us>) if a municipality or jurisdiction wishes to be considered for an allocation.

- General Fund Operating Revenues are funds that are derived from the income-generating functions of a local government such as sales and property tax collections and fees and fines levied by its courts. Financing infrastructure using operating revenues or the general fund saves the interest and fees associated with issuing bonds, but because the operating revenue cannot usually provide the large cash flows of a bond issuance, it is usually used to finance smaller, lower-cost capital improvement projects that can be paid for in one year. Some cities with limited budgets have allocated a portion

of their budgets annually into a fund for specific projects, such as street or drainage improvement, and allowing the fund to accumulate and gain interest until it was large enough to fund a project.

- Exactions include both dedication of land for specific purposes and construction of public facilities as authorized by constitutional, statutory or charter authority, including a subdivision ordinance. A city may require that a developer fund or construct public facilities in proportion to the impact the development will have on city services. Such projects include drainage easements and facilities, street and alley right of way, water and wastewater easements and facilities, street lighting, fire hydrants, sidewalks, street signs, and traffic control devices. Less common are park dedication (or fees in lieu); school site dedications; major public works facility dedication (water treatment plant); and public service facility dedication like fire or police stations, and library branches. The dedication, construction, or payment in lieu must be “reasonably related” to the public needs created by the new development as shown by the City.
- Fees include user fees, impact fees, and special assessments and are usually collected from the beneficiaries of a project. User fees include public swimming pool or golf course user fees, trash collection fees, or water meter tap fees. Impact fees, a type of exaction, include charges to property developers to defray the costs of providing off-site water, sewer, and transportation infrastructure impacted by a new development. Developers typically pass the cost of infrastructure construction to the primary beneficiaries, the residents of the new development.

Special assessments are used to fund improvements such as water, wastewater, drainage, sidewalk, parking, library, recreation, and landscaping. While impact fees reflect the cost of the development, special assessments reflect the projected increase in a development’s value created by the

improvements. They are assessed against properties affected by the improvement and must be approved by property owners representing more than 50 percent of the area of property to be taxed.

- State and federal funds. Grants and low-interest loans provided by state and federal agencies have long been a key ingredient in the development of local infrastructure. Most assistance requires some form of local matching contribution, and some requires that other socioeconomic conditions be present in the local jurisdiction, such as low-income neighborhoods or high unemployment. Common programs include:
 - **Texas Community Development Block Grant Program (TxCDBG)** These funds, allotted to rural municipalities through the Texas Department of Agriculture Community Development program, originate with the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. Application cycles run bi-annually, beginning in odd years, with applications due in early fall of the even year prior to the beginning of the funding cycle. The next cycle will begin in 2013 with applications due in the summer of 2012. In the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council region, the LRGVDC sets a grant maximum amount for local governments each funding cycle. Then, allocation of funding is based on a set of scores devised by the LRGVDC. A minimum match of 10 percent is required. CDBG funds are often used in conjunction with other funding sources if projects are more costly than a typical CDBG allocation. Water and sewer projects had the highest priority in 2011-2012, followed by housing rehabilitation, drainage, street and fire protection projects.
 - **Texas Capital Fund (TCF)** The Texas Department of Agriculture provides funding to assist in the creation of new permanent jobs or retention of existing permanent jobs for low-to-moderate income persons and the Downtown Revitalization Program which awards

matching funds for rural downtown improvement projects. The Valley Regional Office is located in San Juan.

- **Texas Parks & Wildlife grant program (TP&W)** TP&W administers a number of grant programs to help counties and communities build new parks, conserve natural resources, preserve historical sites, provide access to water bodies, develop educational programs for youth, and more. The Small Community Grant provides a maximum \$75,000 grant in 50% matching funds to qualifying communities to acquire and develop parkland. TP&W Outdoor Recreation Grant funds provide up to \$500,000 and Indoor Recreation Grant funds provide up to \$750,000 to eligible applicants. Both of those grant programs also require a 50% match. Other TP&W grants and programs include the Community Outdoor Outreach Program, Recreational Trail Grants, and a variety of wildlife and other recreational grants. Due to state legislative decisions in 2011, funding for TP&W grants will be extremely limited until at least 2013. Recreation trail and boating access funding is still available because those grants are federally funded. For more information, visit www.tpwd.state.tx.us, write to TP&W at 4200 Smith School Road, Austin, Texas, 78744, or call 1-800-792-1112.
- **Safe Routes to School Program (TxDOT)** Funds are available for the planning and construction of infrastructure related to sidewalks, trails and school crossings in the vicinity of primary and middle schools. The Texas Department of Transportation makes irregular program calls to applicants interested in applying for funding. The program is funded through SAFETEA-LU legislation and is dependent on continued funding from Congress.
- **State Transportation Enhancement Program (TXDOT)** Infrastructure funds can be used for 12 categories for non-traditional transportation

projects to enhance the aesthetics of roadways and provide facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists, including preservation of abandoned railways and acquisition of scenic easements; and landscaping along roadways. The program is funded through SAFETEA-LU legislation and is dependent on continued funding from Congress.

- **State Water Revolving Loan Funds and State Loan Programs (Texas Water Development Board)** The TWDB's State Revolving Loan Fund makes loans available to expand water and sewer systems in rural areas. Utility districts and cities are the typical applicants for assistance. The Board also provides funding for water system improvements through the Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Fund, funded through EPA. This low interest loan program was created to finance projects that help bring existing public water systems into compliance with drinking water rules and regulations. The Texas Water Development Fund II, funded through state loans, is available to fund both water and wastewater improvement projects and some major flood control projects. All programs provide utilities and political subdivisions loans at below market rates. However, the funded entity must often float bonds as collateral for loans and pledge system revenues and/or taxes. The loans are typically for 20 to 25 years, although they may be financed for a maximum of 50 years. More information is available through the Texas Water Development Board's Office of Project Finance and Construction Assistance, Program and Policy Development Division at (512) 463-7853.
- **Economically Distressed Areas Program (EDAP) (Texas Water Development Board)** The City of Rio Hondo received this funding in 2000 to connect 4 subdivisions not receiving sewer services. This program provides financial assistance in the form of a grant, a loan, or a combination grant/loan to bring water and wastewater services to

economically distressed areas where the present water and wastewater facilities are inadequate to meet the minimal needs of residents. The program also includes measures to prevent future substandard development. Under new 2008 rules for funding, target areas in any county statewide that meet distress criteria of incomes averaging less than 75% of the statewide median income are eligible for this funding. The county or city in which the funds will be used must also have adopted the Texas Water Development Board's Model Subdivision Rules, which require that residential subdivisions be provided with water and sewer infrastructure up front, either paid for or bonded by developers. More information on this topic can be accessed at www.twdb.state.tx.us/assistance/msr/edap.asp. The Board projects it will have \$25 million to allocate each year through 2015 for sewer and water projects in economically distressed areas that lack sewer or water services.

- **USDA's Rural Development Service (RD) Funds** are available for a variety of projects through the USDA Service Center in Edinburg. The office works with communities to secure low-interest funding for projects that may also be funded partially with USDA grant monies. Municipalities are often required to issue certificates of obligation to secure the loan. Professional service fees can be built into the loan amounts. Funding is dependent annually on Congressional allocations. Communities are encouraged to apply for USDA funding in the fall so that applications are pending when federal funding is disbursed in February. Programs include:

Rural Utilities Services. Water and Waste Water Disposable grants or loans are available to communities of less than 10,000 in population, also for integrating smart grid technologies, increasing access to 21st century telecommunications services;

funding sustainable renewable energy development and conservation projects.

Housing and Community Assistance, limited resources to assist municipalities with housing rehabilitation for low-income or elderly populations or for the construction or rehabilitation of rural rental housing, housing for farm laborers, childcare centers, fire and police stations, hospitals, libraries, nursing homes, and schools in rural communities.

Rural Business Opportunity grants that provide training and technical assistance to rural entrepreneurs and economic development officials.

- **Federal Emergency Management Agency Flood Mitigation Assistance** This federal pre-disaster program provides grants to assist States and communities in implementing measures to reduce or eliminate the long-term risk of flood damage to buildings, manufactured homes, and other structures insurable under the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). Applicants must participate in the National Flood Insurance Program. Rio Hondo is a member.
- **Flood Protection Planning (TWDB)** Grants are used to evaluate structural and nonstructural solutions to flooding problems and to consider flood protection needs of the region/watershed. Areas of evaluation include drainage studies and cost-effective, technically-feasible flood control alternatives. The program requires a 50/50 match. Funds are not available through this program for construction costs.
- In the border region, the **Border Environmental Infrastructure Fund (BEIF)** administered through the US EPA and the North American Development Bank (NADB). Projects must directly address adverse

health conditions shown to be related to non-potable water sources and/or documented failing centralized or on-site wastewater treatment systems. Planning funds are available up to \$500,000 and can pay no more than 50 percent of the final design costs. BEIF Construction funding is available for up to \$8 million and total project construction costs cannot exceed \$30 million. BEIF funding can be supplemented through loans from the NADB's Water Conservation Investment Fund. Historically, funded entities provide matches of 50 percent or more of construction costs. These funds could come from a combination of the other above listed sources..

Table 13F: Schedule of Selected State Grant Programs

Project Type	Deadlines	Program and Uses	Grant/Loan Assistance	Match
Parks	January 31 (suspended until 2014)	Texas Parks & Wildlife Small Community Grant Program (for communities of less than 20,000 population). City would be required to self-administer the project. Funds can be used for development or rehab of any public <u>outdoor</u> recreation facilities.	Up to \$75,000	1 to 1 match requirement. Match can be cash, in-kind, or donated.
Parks	July 31 (suspended until 2014)	Texas Parks & Wildlife Department Local Parks Program Outdoor Parks (Must have master park plan completed by May 31 st to apply.) Funds can be used for development or rehab of any public <u>outdoor</u> recreation facilities.	Up to \$500,000	1 to 1 match required. Match can be cash, land, or in-kind.
Parks	May 1	TPW Recreational Trails Program. Funds can be used for new trail development or rehab of existing trails, and trail amenities such as parking areas, restrooms, drinking fountains.	Up to \$100,000	20% of total project cost required as local match contribution (can be cash, land value, and/or in-kind).
Parks	July 31 (suspended until 2014)	Texas Parks & Wildlife Department Local Parks Program Indoor Parks (Must have master park plan on file with TPW.) Funds can be used for development or rehab of any public <u>indoor</u> recreation facilities.	Up to \$750,000	1 to 1 match required. Match can be cash, land, or in-kind.
Parks	October 31	TPW State Boating Access Program. Funds can be used to develop new or renovate public boating access facilities including boat ramps, parking areas, access roads, boater amenities such as restrooms, picnic areas, courtesy docks, etc.	Up to \$500,000.	25% of total project cost required as local match contribution (can be cash, land value, and/or in-kind).

Eco Devt	Applications awarded monthly	<p>*Texas Capital Fund/Infrastructure Development-Real Estate Programs for economic development projects that create new jobs for low-to-moderate income persons (new or expanding businesses). Texas Department of Agricultural Affairs</p> <p>Infrastructure Development: Public infrastructure improvements can include: water & sewer facilities/lines, pre-treatment facilities, road/street construction/improvements, natural gas line construction/improvements, electric, telephone, & fiber optic line construction/improvements, harbor/channel dredging, purchase of real estate related to public infrastructure improvements, traffic signals and signs drainage improvements, and railroad spurs.</p> <p>Real Estate Development: Funds must be used for real estate development to assist a business that commits to create and/or retain permanent jobs, primarily for low and moderate-income persons. The real estate and/or improvements must be owned by the community and leased to the business. Award may not exceed 50% of the total project cost. A minimum equity injection is also required of the business.</p>	<p>From \$50,000 to \$1,000,000, based on the number of jobs the business will create or retain.</p> <p>Locality can request up to \$25,000 per job business will create/retain during a 3-year period.</p>	<p><i>No match required by public locality.</i> Business is required to inject 10 to 33% equity.</p> <p>Other costs to business: Pv-INF and Pv-RE are 100% repayable loans at 0% interest over 20 years.</p>
Eco Devt	Applications due annually in July	<p>Texas Capital Fund – Downtown Revitalization Program. Funds can be used for public infrastructure improvements such as parking, sidewalks, lighting, utility upgrades in designated “historic commercial district.”</p> <p>Engineering costs are not eligible to be paid with TCF-DRP funds so these costs must be paid for with local funds.</p>	Up to \$150,000.	<p><i>10% is minimum required match, but only get points if match is either 20% or 30%. On a \$150,000 grant, that means \$15,000 is required, but points awarded for \$30,000 or \$45,000 (can be cash and in-kind)</i></p>

Eco Devt	Applications due annually in October	<p>Texas Capital Fund – Main Street Program. Funds can be used for public infrastructure improvements such as parking, sidewalks, lighting, utility upgrades in the designated “historic commercial district” of participating Main Street communities.</p> <p>Engineering costs are not eligible to be paid with TCF-DRP funds so these costs must be paid for with local funds.</p>	Up to \$150,000.	10% is minimum required match, but only get points if match is either 20% or 30%. On a \$150,000 grant, that means \$15,000 is required, but points awarded for \$30,000 or \$45,000 (can be cash and in-kind)
Water/ Sewer	Varies	Small Towns Environment Program, (STEP) funds for water and sewer projects utilizing at least 51% local volunteer labor and in-kind donations to complete project.	Up to \$350,000	<i>No match required.</i>
Drainage	October of each year	Flood Mitigation Assistance Program Funds for planning and project grants to develop or update the flood hazard component of a Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan (prepared by the CoG) and for constructing flood mitigation projects.	<p>Planning grant max: \$50,000</p> <p>Construction: No more than \$3.3 million over a 5-year period.</p>	25% match of which not more than half (12.5%) can be of in-kind services.
Housing	Ongoing	HOME Funds can be used for rehabilitation or demolition and reconstruction of up to six substandard homes. Rehabilitation is not permitted for manufactured homes.	Up to \$550,000 for 6 homes	<i>Match required, 1% to 12.5% on total project amount, depending on population size. Plus \$12,000 in cash leverage. Match can be in-kind or cash.²⁴</i>
Sidewalks	<p>Fall (when federal funds available)</p> <p>SRTS plan must be approved by</p>	<p>Texas Department of Transportation Safe Routes to School. Non-infrastructure funds can be used to create student safety programs and incentives.</p> <p>Infrastructure funds can be used to construct sidewalks, bike lanes, drop-off lanes, etc., or install signage, signalization, etc.</p>	Infrastructure construction projects: Up to \$750,000	<i>No match required, but local injection can earn additional points. Match contribution can be cash, land value, and/or in-kind.</i>

²⁴ HOME program requirements change regularly.

	TxDOT	Must have an SRTS Plan in place to apply for infrastructure construction funds.		
Streets/ sidewalks	Fall	Texas Department of Transportation (TXDOT) Transportation Enhancement Program. Infrastructure funds can be used for 12 categories for non-traditional transportation projects to enhance the aesthetics of roadways and provide facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists, including preservation of abandoned railways and acquisition of scenic easements; and landscaping along roadways.	Reimburses 80% of costs of project	<i>20% match required, plus costs reimbursed only.</i>
Water/ Sewer	Applications taken every other year. Next cycle applications due in summer of 2012 for 2013-2014 biennium	Texas Community Development Program. <u>Community Development Fund.</u> Last round of applications were due in September of 2008, with awards made for 2009-2011. Funds can be used for water and/or sewer improvements. Drainage improvements can be constructed if they are incidental to the water or sewer improvements.	Up to \$350,000 (varies by region)	<i>Match based on population: 0 – 1,500 persons = 5% 1,501 – 3,000 = 10% 3,001 – 5,000 = 15% ≥ 5,000 = 20%</i>
Infrastructure	Early Feb each year	Renewable Energy Demonstration Pilot Program (TDA) Assists rural communities with installing renewable energy projects, including wind turbines or solar panels to power wastewater treatment or water treatment facilities.	Up to \$500,000	Match of 2% to 25% required, depending on town size. Sliding scale earns points on application. Match can be cash, land, or in-kind.
Planning	Applications taken every other year. Next cycle applications due in summer of 2012 for	Texas Community Development Program. <u>Planning and Capacity Building Fund.</u> Last round of applications were due in September of 2008, with awards made for 2009-2011. Funds can be used to map housing, land use, streets, drainage, public utilities; determine needs to ensure adequate utilities; determine future growth patterns (10-year growth period); & establishes a capital improvement plan.	Varies by size, but maximum grant is \$50,000.	Match based on population: 0 – 1,500 persons = 5% 1,501 – 3,000 = 10% 3,001 – 5,000 = 15% ≥ 5,000 = 20%

	2013-2014 biennium			
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Other potential parks and recreation funding programs with deadlines throughout the year include:

- Major League Baseball's Baseball Tomorrow Fund. Four deadlines each year. Letter of interest submitted first. If invited to apply, app submitted later. Letters of interest due 45 days before app deadlines of Jan. 1, April 1, July 1, and Oct. 1. Funds can be used for field improvements, equipment purchases, umpire training, but not on-going operational costs. No maximum request limit, but typical award is \$50,000 to \$100,000. No match required, but match improves chances of funding.
- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Community Outdoor Outreach Program. Three deadlines each year: Feb. 1, May 1, Oct. 1. Funds can be used to purchase supplies and equipment for outdoor programs. No construction allowed. Maximum request is \$30,000. No match required, but match improves chances of funding. **(suspended until 2014)**
- U.S. Soccer Foundation. Annual deadline in October. Priority focus changes annually, but typically, funds can be used for construction of new fields or enhancement of existing fields with lighting or irrigation, in areas primarily designed to serve low-income communities. Maximum request is \$100,000. No match required, but match improves chances of funding.
- Tony Hawk Foundation. Annual deadline in early March. Funds can be used for the design, construction or operation of new skateboard parks, primarily to serve low-income communities. Maximum request is \$25,000. If funds requested for construction, match must be provided.

Other options for financing capital improvements may include:

- use of county prisoners as day laborers for drainage, park, and street projects as a way to save money and accomplish additional work;
- encouragement of volunteer groups to make simple park improvements and to clear brush and debris out of vacant lots and drainage ways;

Cost of Financing. Each option available to pay for infrastructure carries a certain financial obligation. One objective of local governments is to incur minimal interest and finance charges, which may depend on the bond rating of the jurisdiction. If enterprise funds, revenues from general taxes, or outside assistance from state or federal sources are sufficient to pay for infrastructure development, no financing costs will be incurred. A 2011 Texas Municipal League survey of cities indicated that, for cities with populations between 2,200 and 3,000 residents, general obligation bond debt ranged from \$90,000 to \$68 million and certificate of obligation debt ranged from \$90,000 to \$6 million. Revenue bond debt ranged from \$20,000 to \$6 million. Most of the debt paid for water and sewer infrastructure, municipal buildings, parks, swimming pools and community centers.

Equity. Local governments must determine the relationship between those who receive the benefits and those who pay the costs. In some cases, it is possible to identify groups of individuals who benefit more directly from a particular project; in others, the benefit may be more widely distributed. Some forms of financing may be more burdensome to one group of citizens than another, leaving local governments to decide how the costs and benefits of infrastructure projects will be distributed. Some financing mechanisms, such as impact fees and special assessments, require the government to prove a relationship between the residents served and the fee paid.

Political Acceptability. While most communities have a range of infrastructure financing options, local political realities often play a major role in determining which option is chosen. In some communities, it may not be politically feasible to increase property taxes, while it may be acceptable to issue bonded indebtedness for a specifically earmarked purpose. In other cases, it may be more acceptable to charge fees directly to those who benefit from a project or incur debt that will be repaid by fees charged for use of the project.

Debt Affordability. Debt capacity analysis can facilitate well-informed decisions about the issuance of additional long-term debt and is a key planning tool to ensure that governments meet their capital needs without sacrificing their financial strength. The analysis below provides some benchmarks to use in making decisions about financing of capital projects during the planning period. More detailed debt affordability studies may be required prior to major debt issuance decisions.

Two types of indicators can be used to evaluate the current debt burden of a municipality: debt outstanding, which measures the total dollar amount of principal that must be repaid, and debt service, which includes the principal and interest payments that must be repaid on an annual basis.

When considering the use of debt to finance capital improvements, four common measures of a City's ability to issue new debt should be considered:

Direct Debt

- (1) *Total general obligation debt outstanding as a percentage of the assessed value of property in the City should not exceed 10%. This indicator measures the government's fiscal capacity. Communities with higher percentages should carefully consider whether the local tax base can support new debt. More fiscally conservative communities may establish six percent as the upper limit for this item. Communities could*

also calculate general obligation debt as a percentage of *total market value*, as a measure of the community's wealth, or capacity of the tax base to support present and future revenue needs. Some cities have set limits for general obligation debt at 3% of total valuation.

The total assessed value of the property in Rio Hondo in 2010 was \$54,393,121. Even including governmental and business-type, the city's general obligation debt is less than 1 percent of assessed property value. Based on a benchmark of 6 to 10 percent of assessed property value, Rio Hondo's local tax base could support between \$3.2 and \$5.4 million in general obligation debt.

(2) Per capita bonded indebtedness: The amount of direct debt outstanding for each citizen of a jurisdiction should generally be kept below \$1,200. If fiscal policy is especially conservative, \$600 in bonded debt per resident would be a more reasonable number. Direct debt includes all long-term obligations directly supported by general revenues and taxes. It does not include interest expenses. Considering only the City's debt per capita (including the sum of all general obligation bonds and notes outstanding), the City could support between \$1.4 million and \$2.8 million in general obligation debt according to this indicator.

It is important for the City to consider residents' overlapping debt burden in making decisions related to the political viability of debt issuance. Overlapping debt, a resident's direct debt outstanding from all jurisdictions in a tax base, provides a measure of a resident's total debt burden. As shown in Table 13G, Rio Hondo residents are paying \$3,029 per capita to all its taxing entities for general obligation bonds (principal only), exceeding recommended standards. However the share of per capita debt for City of Rio Hondo is well within standards.

Table 13G: Total/Overlapping Debt FY 2010

Taxing Entity	Outstanding Debt	City's Share of Tax Base	City Residents' Per Capita Share of Debt
Rio Hondo	\$28,127	100%	\$11.94
Rio Hondo ISD	\$24,447,985	28%	\$2,860.42
Cameron CO	\$ 63,645,000	1%	\$156.68
Totals	\$88,121,112		\$3,029.03

Source: Texas Bond Review Board Website: at <http://www.brb.state.tx.us/lgs/lgsdbsearch.aspx>

(3) *The City's annual debt service (principal and interest) should not exceed 20% of the City's annual receipts.*

The City's annual debt service for 2010 was \$22,348 (principal and interest for 2010 in Table 13B). In 2010, \$1,295,235 was generated in taxes and other revenues from governmental activities. The debt service is about 1.6% of the City's annual receipts. According to this indicator, Rio Hondo could support an annual debt service of up to about \$250,000.

(4) *Revenue Debt:*

Revenue bonds are loans used to improve revenue-generating equipment such as utility infrastructure. They are paid back through revenue funds and thus do not increase per-capita debt for city residents. In 2010, the City held a combination tax and revenue certificate of obligation totaling \$448,000 for wastewater treatment plant expansion and other capital improvements. One measure of calculating the limits of revenue debt is by determining the City's debt service coverage ratio (DSCR), which refers to the amount of cash available to meet annual payments on debt and is calculated by the following:

$$\frac{\text{(Net Operating Income + depreciation and amortization + non-operating revenues)}}{\text{Annual Debt Service (principal and interest)}}$$

A debt service coverage ratio greater than 1.0 is required in order to make annual debt payments. At 1.0, all income is used to pay debt. Financiers often consider the DSCR when determining whether a client should take on new debt.

Based on the 2010 audit report, the City's Water and Sewer Fund DSCR is 6.5. During the planning period, its payment requirements will increase bringing its DSCR to as low as 1.3. Using 2010 income, depreciation and non-operating revenues, the Water and Sewer Fund should not exceed \$225,000 in annual debt service for outstanding revenue bonds. Exceeding this amount could result in a debt service coverage ratio less than 1.0, indicating that the Fund would be unable to make all annual debt payment with available cash.

The City should consider the above benchmarks when determining ways to finance its capital improvements program. Based on the analysis above, the city could afford to issue \$5.4 million in general obligation debt, depending on its fiscal policy. When considering per capita indebtedness, a measure of the willingness of taxpayers to take on more debt, however, the City may only be able to support \$2.8 million in general obligation debt. In the Proprietary Fund, the City should not exceed about \$800,000 in debt issuance.

The numbers discussed above are benchmarks only and are dependent on market interest rates, available funding packages, loans and bonds issued by other area political entities, and other factors that would have to be examined more carefully at the time of financing.

13.3 Impact of Projects on Protected Classes

In prioritizing projects, the City reviewed both the locations where protected classes reside and the locations of past infrastructure projects and projects

recommended in the various studies in the Plan to determine if those projects had or would inadvertently result in disparate treatment of members of protected classes. Specifically, it noted whether infrastructure projects had the impact of:

- Positively promoting affordable housing in areas outside of geographic concentration and giving members of protected classes the opportunity to move out of areas of concentration;
- Positively promoting equal treatment and access for disabled persons, particularly in public facilities;
- Negatively promoting racial concentration or disparate treatment of members of protected classes; or
- Negatively placing undesirable infrastructure in areas where protected classes reside.

Because Rio Hondo is 85 percent Hispanic virtually the entire town is greater than 65 percent minority, and, so no areas of geographic concentration exist, and therefore, no opportunity for disparate treatment exists. Nevertheless, grant-funded projects have been built in both north and south Rio Hondo indicating no disparate treatment of protected classes. Also, multi-family units of varying conditions are available in both north and south Rio Hondo, indicating that housing choice is available throughout town. In addition, no residential or commercial lots in the City are located in the floodplain, so there has been no history of protected classes' ability to re-build in the floodplain after flood events.

As many as 250 residents may have physical disabilities, according to the 2000 Census which collected the latest data available on disabilities. New data for cities the size of Rio Hondo on disabilities will not be available until about 2014 when data is collected for the 2008-2013 American Community Survey. The Plan notes that accessibility may be limited for disabled individuals in parts of town. In the CBD, in particular, sidewalks are in fair to poor condition, they are not continuous, and many ADA ramps are aged and non-standard. The projects listed in Table 13H call for the addition and repair of sidewalks and non-standard

ADA ramps that would improve accessibility throughout town, particularly in the CBD, for disabled persons.

13.4 Capital Needs Inventory and Prioritization

The capital needs listed here should be built while keeping in mind their relative importance. However, due to competition for limited funds, improvements that may be considered “mandatory” because they promote health and safety may be built after other improvements considered “desirable” or “acceptable” such as certain street construction or new utility department vehicles. A community must consider both the urgency and the feasibility of a particular capital project. If funds are likely to become available for a lower priority project before a higher priority project, the City should indicate this on its capital improvements schedule. Capital needs have been classified using the following system:

1. Mandatory (M): those which address an imminent threat to life or health;
2. Necessary (N): those which provide important public services by improving existing systems and/or replacing obsolete facilities;
3. Desirable (D): those which improve the aesthetic aspects of a community or address quality of life issues;
4. Acceptable (A): those which may fall under the “necessary” or “desirable” categories above, but are undertaken primarily to reduce operating costs to the City.

In the case of Rio Hondo, all of the projects proposed were classified as “necessary,” to improving the city’s drainage, water and wastewater systems during the planning period.

Table 13H: Capital Needs Prioritization

Water Project	Year	Need
Upgrade the Water Treatment Plant by replacing 1 pump and make needed changes to the mixers, flocculation basins and sedimentation basins. Also replace process control panel.	2012-2016	Mandatory
Replace approximately 6,350 LF of aging, deteriorated water lines along FM 106, South Reynolds and South Arroyo Street. Also repair broken main under the Arroyo.	2016-2020	Necessary
Replace approximately 7,950 LF of aging, deteriorated water lines in the northern and southern portions of the City.	2021-2026	Necessary
Replace all malfunctioning valves and fire hydrants throughout the City.	2027-2032	Necessary
Wastewater Project	Year	
Upgrade the Wastewater Treatment Plant Lift Station, including wet well, bar screen, and back-up pump.	2012-2016	Necessary
Construct a wetland at the Wastewater Treatment Plant to reduce discharge into the Arroyo.	2012-2016	Necessary
Replace approximately 4,350 LF of aging and deteriorated VCP collection lines and manholes along Harrolds Street	2017-2020	Necessary
Replace approximately 8,950 LF of aging and deteriorated VCP collection lines and manholes in central northern Rio Hondo.	2021-2026	Necessary
Replace approximately 8,300 LF of aging and deteriorated VCP collection lines and manholes in central and southern Rio Hondo.	2027-2032	Necessary
Drainage Project	Year	
Complete the project under current Disaster Relief Grant funding that will improve drainage facilities along Robert Garza Street, Madero Avenue, and Sam Houston Blvd	2012-2013	Necessary
Upgrade the underground pipe on both sides of Colorado Avenue from Arroyo Blvd. west to the Arroyo Colorado. Replace approximately sixteen (16) culverts and regrade ditches in the south central portion of the City.	2014-2020	Necessary
Replace nine (9) culverts and regrade roadside ditches in the south portion of the City.	2020-2026	Necessary

Replace approximately fifteen (15) culverts and regrade ditches in the north central portion of the City	2027-2032	Necessary
Recreation		
Renovate the boat ramp and parking lot to accommodate more visitors.	2012	Desirable
Replant native shrubs and trees on expanded Boat Ramp park area and add a kayak launch, restrooms, picnic areas and re-build the fishing pier.	2013	Desirable
Improve Boat Ramp Park: Continue to improve Boat Ramp area by adding a kayak launch, restrooms, picnic areas and a re-built fishing pier.(Annual costs to maintain restrooms may apply depending on type of restroom installed. Park area is not connected to City sewer system.)	2014	Desirable
At Rio Hondo County Park, add basketball court, parking, walking trail extension, and a Shetland size baseball field. If FEMA funding is available, also build a building for emergency shelter and recreation. (Basketball court would be inside the building if constructed.)	2014-2020	Desirable
Develop a downtown mini-park and/or community garden.	2015-2016	Desirable
Upgrade City Park, adding a scenic overlook, new playscape and pavilion along Colorado Avenue.	2020-2026	Desirable
Central Business District		
Develop a downtown mini-park and/or community garden/parking lot at corner of Colorado and Heywood.	2012-2016	Desirable
Rehabilitate east end sidewalks (1,600 LF), add decorative lighting and upgrade 9 ADA ramps to standard, place entrance sign or mural	2015-2017	Desirable
Add Gateway signs and/or border landscaping at the east and west end of the CBD	2016	Desirable
Create a scenic overlook in City Park, and undertake park improvements that would wrap activities around City Hall to front FM 106	2017-2020	Desirable
Improve alleys between Paloma and Bristol and Harrolds and Robertson by paving and/or re-paving 1,200 LF of alley street, and adding lighting and screening between alley and residences	2021-2023	Desirable
Create continuous sidewalks, upgrade existing sidewalks and add standard ADA ramps and lighting in CBD west end*	2021-2026	Desirable
Streets and Thoroughfares		
Complete street improvements around the school complex on Heywood and Mesquite	2012-2013	Desirable

Reconstruct Bates Road between N. Reynolds and Robertson and add curb and gutter and sidewalks	2013-2014	Desirable
Street improvements on Catherine in conjunction with drainage improvements for areas with traditional drainage problems	2014-2015	Desirable
Widen Harris Road to accommodate increased recreational traffic, including boat trailers, to Boat Ramp Park	2015-2016	Desirable
Widen Parkway between Reynolds and Retama to 24-feet plus sidewalks and bike lanes, using existing parkland for ROW expansion, plus movement of lift station, plus installation of underground drainage/curb and gutter	2016-2017	Desirable
Construct 3,350 LF of sidewalks on east side of S Reynolds from FM 106 to Parkway	2018-2022	Desirable
Construct an east-west connector in northern Rio Hondo at Bates Road between Robertson and N Sam Houston	2023-2030	Desirable

13.5 Capital Improvements Program Schedule

The following table delineates the proposed capital improvements for the 2012-2017 planning period, the estimated costs, sources of funds, and timing of the projects. The projects are listed in order of priority. Projects that fall after 2017 are listed in detail in the appropriate chapters.

Costs for projects are estimates based on recent representative bids for similar items. Unit costs may vary within a given time period for a variety of reasons including but not limited to:

1. Economies of scale – A project with large quantities of a particular item will have a lower unit cost than a project with small quantities;
2. Relative location of the project with respect to the bidding contractors location – Contractors having to mobilize labor, equipment, & materials from a long distance will bid a higher unit cost than contractors in the local area;
3. The general state of the economy – Contractors & Suppliers bid lower when work is scarce than when work is plentiful;
4. Energy prices – PVC, steel, iron and fuel costs rise and fall with the global price of oil.

Table 13I: Capital Improvements Program Schedule, 2012-17

Map ID	Type	Scheduled Capital Improvement Projects	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Priority	Cost	Source of Funds
1	W	Upgrade the Water Treatment Plant by replacing 1 pump and make needed changes to the mixers, flocculation basins and sedimentation basins. Also replace process control panel.							M	\$552,000	USDA, NADB loan, TWDB, UTILITY
2	R, ED	Renovate the boat ramp and parking lot to accommodate more visitors. Replant native shrubs and trees on expanded Boat Ramp park area and add a kayak launch, restrooms, picnic areas and rebuild the fishing pier. Project includes city purchase of 4.4 acres of land.							D	\$270,000 (funded) \$75,000 (not funded)	EDC, TP&W, TxCDBG, CIAP, CMP, GEN
3	WW	Upgrade the Wastewater Treatment Plant Lift Station, including wet well, bar screen, and back-up pump.							N	\$346,200	TxCDBG, GEN), USDA, TWDB, UTILITY
4	S	Complete street improvements around the school complex on Heywood and Mesquite							D	\$34,000	GEN
5	R, CBD, ED	Convert the vacant lot at the southwest corner of Heywood and FM 106 to parking and mini-park, alternatively convert land elsewhere in the CBD or on the eastern outskirts, or behind buildings for parking. City funded-or joint funded with a landowner/proprietor for a total of 40 additional parking spaces and either a mini-park or screening in alleys from residences							D	\$120,000 to \$150,000	MDD, LOCAL, TCF, TxDOT

Map ID	Type	Scheduled Capital Improvement Projects	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Priority	Cost	Source of Funds
6	WW, R, ED	Construct a wetland at the Wastewater Treatment Plant to reduce discharge into the Arroyo.							N	\$90,000	TWDB, CIAP, USDA, UTILITY
7	S	Reconstruct Bates Road between N. Reynolds and Robertson and add curb and gutter and sidewalks							D	\$215,000	GEN, COUNTY
8	D	Work with TXDOT to revise the underground pipe on both sides of Colorado Avenue from Arroyo Blvd. west to the Arroyo Colorado to accommodate more runoff. Replace approximately sixteen (16) culverts and regrade ditches in the south central portion of the City.							N	\$322,600	TxDOT, GEN, TWDB, FMA,** USDA
9	S	Street improvements on Catherine in conjunction with drainage improvements for areas with traditional drainage problems							N	\$19,000	GEN
10	R	At Rio Hondo County Park, add basketball court, parking, walking trail extension, and a Shetland size baseball field. If FEMA funding is available, also build a building for emergency shelter and recreation. (Basketball court would be inside the building if constructed.)							D	\$200,000 to \$1,000,000	FEMA, LOCAL, EDC, TP&W, COUNTY
11	S	Widen Harris Road to accommodate increased recreational traffic, including boat trailers, to Boat Ramp Park							D	\$73,000	GEN, TP&W, LOCAL

Map ID	Type	Scheduled Capital Improvement Projects	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Priority	Cost	Source of Funds
12	CBD	Rehabilitate east end sidewalks (1,600 LF), add decorative lighting and upgrade 9 ADA ramps to standard, place entrance sign or mural							D	\$165,000	GEN (\$35,000 match), TXDOT, TCF, LOCAL
13	CBD	Add Gateway signs and/or border landscaping at the east and west end of the CBD							D	\$10,000	EDC, LOCAL
14	S	Widen Parkway between Reynolds and Retama to 24-feet plus sidewalks and bike lanes, using existing parkland for ROW expansion, plus movement of lift station, plus installation of underground drainage/curb and gutter							D	\$195,000	GEN, COUNTY

CIAP = Coastal Impact Assistance Program through the Texas General Land Office; CMP = Coastal Management Program through the Texas General Land Office; COUNTY = Cameron County; EDC=City of Rio Hondo 4B Economic Development Corporation; FEMA=Federal Emergency Management Agency post-disaster funds; FMA=TWDB Flood Mitigation Assistance programs GEN = City municipal funds or bonds LOCAL = donations from private citizens, charitable organizations, local businesses or regional organizations MDD = City of Rio Hondo Municipal Development District; TCF= Texas Capital Fund through the Texas Department of Agriculture funds; TxCDBG = Federal CDBG grants through the Texas Department of Agriculture, TP&W=Texas Parks and Wildlife grants, TXDOT = Texas Department of Transportation funds; TWDB = Texas Water Development Board loans, USDA = U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development loans; UTILITY = City Utility Funds and/or Revenue Bond

14 Subdivision Ordinance

14.1 Purpose and Intent

The City of Rio Hondo adopted subdivision regulations in 2001 as Ordinance No. 295. The City has not amended it since that time. Amendments were suggested in 2012 to better follow the vision, goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan, 2012-2032. During consideration and prior to adoption, the City Council should seek counsel and advice from the City's attorney regarding the legal aspects and implications of subdivision control amendments.

The subdivision of land is a major factor in the process of achieving sound community development which ultimately becomes a public responsibility, since streets and utilities must be maintained and public services customary to urban areas must be provided. Without a subdivision ordinance, a city has little recourse to prevent installation of substandard infrastructure beyond denial of water/sewer connections or rejection of roads for city maintenance. When a city refuses to allow infrastructure connections or to accept dedication of street right of way, it can wind up in expensive legal battles with developers.

More importantly, the built environment can enhance or diminish the overall quality of life in the community. Land subdivision is a critical first step in defining the built environment. Therefore, it is to the interest of the public, the developer, and the future owners that subdivisions be conceived, designed and developed in accordance with appropriate design standards and development specifications. It is the intent of these regulations to aid in guiding the growth of the City of Rio Hondo, Texas and its environs in an orderly manner; and to provide attractive, well planned subdivisions with adequate streets, utilities, and building sites in a manner that will be uniformly applied.

The goals and objectives guiding the City in the preparation and adoption of this ordinance are:

- To provide for the harmonious development of the urban area.
- To coordinate the supply of services as a tool for directing the optimal distribution of population in the urban area.
- To provide for the separation of pedestrian and vehicular traffic.
- To designate and preserve through advance dedication/reservation of rights-of-way for transportation corridors.
- To insure the acquisition of land and facilities for public needs - parks, schools, open space, fire and police facilities.
- To preserve and maintain scenic vistas.
- To encourage the preservation of natural vegetation to minimize erosion.
- To restrict development in areas where hazards may result.
- To minimize the financial burden of urban development upon the City.
- To assure the accuracy of land records.
- To address the needs of sensitive lands that would be adversely affected by common land development practices or by the strict applications of this ordinance.
- To encourage the recognition and preservation of natural ecosystems.
- To implement the Comprehensive Plan for Rio Hondo.

14.2 Proposed Changes to Existing Ordinance

The following changes are shown in green and yellow highlight in the existing Ordinance:

- Added definitions for Applicant, Easement, Exaction, Final Plat, Footcandle, Full Cutoff Luminaire, Lumen, Luminaire, and Preliminary Plat.
- Suggested alterations to definitions for General Plan, Engineer, Extraterritorial Jurisdiction, Lot, Plat, and Street.
- Changed City Secretary to City Administrator throughout the Ordinance.

- Suggested deletion or admission of some sentences in the 2001 adopted version that were in [].
- Added a section detailing requirements for Construction Plans.
- Added requirements for final plats in regards to tax documents and proper inspection of improvements or posting maintenance bonds.
- Added sections to address procedures for Replat , Amended and Vacated Plat requests.
- Added some specifications for street standards to requiring subdivisions to have two or more auto and/or pedestrian connections to neighboring development.
- Suggested changes to Local street standards and put measurements in a table.
- Extended requirements for water and sewer connections in subdivisions to make requirements clearer.
- Suggested changes for sidewalk and trail standards.
- Added a section for Stormwater Management Facility standards, including run-off standards.
- Added a section on erosion and sedimentation control standards and Protection of Natural Resources.
- Suggested changes to Parkland Standards to require higher standards.
- Added a section on street light standards.

15 Zoning Ordinance

15.1 Zoning Ordinance Context

The City of Rio Hondo adopted Zoning Ordinance 294 in 2001 and amended it in 2007 after an annexation of property in eastern Rio Hondo that included the high school and surrounding businesses and undeveloped property. As a part of the Comprehensive Planning effort, planning consultants reviewed the Ordinance to determine whether it furthers goals and objectives outlined in the updated 2012 Comprehensive Plan; whether it meets the City's certification that it affirmatively furthers fair housing; and whether its tenets incorporate any changes to state law regarding zoning since 2001.

15.1.1 Review of Existing Ordinance

The review suggests the following changes to the City's Ordinance. It did not find that the existing ordinance created impediments to Fair Housing in the City. However, it could specify federal/state regulations for provisions for handicapped parking and other building and sidewalk requirements related to federal ADA laws.

1. Add a definition and regulations for "Towers" allowed in all districts so that their location is limited for aesthetic and safety purposes.
2. Add parking regulations for businesses and parks. In the current ordinance, parking stipulations are outlined for residential and religious gathering places but not for businesses, parks, and other uses. Also, mention requirements for the use of federal/state handicap parking regulations.
3. Add handicapped parking requirements in public and business areas to accommodate disabled residents and visitors in compliance with federal laws.

4. Add a definition for Group Homes. While they are not prohibited or require increased scrutiny that would jeopardize the community's adherence to federal Fair Housing practices, they are not mentioned or defined.
5. Use the "L" Local Retail District more frequently throughout the City to provide opportunity for compatible business uses next to residential that would encourage a more walkable community and assist disabled residents with better access to purchasing goods. This category would help maintain the small-town charm of the Central Business District.
6. Lower the 75-foot building height allowance in the "L" District to better blend in with residential uses as the District is intended. .
7. Expand or re-define the specific-use categories in the districts. As written they are too limited, out-of-date and too specific. For example, the regulations do not provide a location for automobile service/tire sales store; or bar/entertainment establishments while they limit film developing and printing (perhaps a once more noxious process) to the Business District, disallowing them in the "L" District. Suggest creating a Permitted Use Table instead.
8. Add stipulations for fencing and screening.
9. Remove the "P" Public District as it is the same as the "SFR" District. The change would lessen the need for re-zonings as public uses change and make it easier to both allow a new use if the public use is abandoned and stipulate where a new municipal office use can be located.
10. Add provisions for the allowance of Variances. The Board of Adjustments section does not discuss allowances for variances, which could alleviate judicial challenges by use of an administrative procedure. The Zoning Ordinance was amended in 2004 to allow for specific use permits.
11. Add regulations for submittal of a Site Plan. The ordinance requires a Site Plan, but it does not specify its content.
12. Add definitions needed for better clarification of terms and state laws.

13. Amend the Zoning Map to eliminate many “N” District or Open categories created over the past 10 years through annexation; change the Public Uses to “SFR” uses to avoid duplication; and .change some of the commercial areas zoned “B” to “L” or “SFR”: to accommodate goals expressed in the Housing, Land Use, Economic Development and Central Business District chapters of the Comprehensive Plan; and leave “N” categories on lots not previously zoned or zoned as “N” in which no street access is currently available.

15.2 Proposed Changes to Existing Ordinance

The revised ordinance suggests the following specific changes for the zoning commission’s review:

- 1) A reduction in zoning categories from eight to six, deleting MF (Multi-Family) and P, (Public).
- 2) Changing those zones on the zoning map from MF to L and from P to SFR.
- 3) Replacing the word Building Inspector with Zoning Administrator throughout the Ordinance and adding a definition as that person being assigned by the City Commision to enforce the Zoning Ordinance.
- 4) Allowing duplexes and triplexes in SFR districts and assigning residences of more than three attached dwellings to District L and greater.
- 5) Changing the Building Height in the L District to 40 feet from 75 feet to be in more accordance with Local Retail and surrounding adjacent uses.
- 6) Deleting Use Categories in each Article describing a District and adding a new Permitted Uses Table to graphically show allowable uses. Also, re-assigning uses in some cases so that they are not cumulative from SFR to B to I. (See new Article 9)
- 7) Changing the Building Height in the B District and I Districts to 60 feet from 75 feet to be in more accordance with the character of the City. (A

- provision for Variances was added in case this creates a property hardship)
- 8) Revising the wording of Non-Conforming Use regulations to keep the same intent but state the concept more clearly.
 - 9) In new Article 11 deleting the word Exception from the title of the article to avoid confusion with the term special exception.
 - 10) In new Article 11: Area Regulations, adding regulations related to Lots, Location of Dwellings and clarifying other matters.
 - 11) In new Article 11, adding Area Regulations related to Swimming pools and adding a provision for permitting them.
 - 12) In new Article 11, adding Area Regulations related to Antenna structures.
 - 13) In new Article 11, adding Area Regulations related to building materials for commercial structures
 - 14). In new Article 11, adding Area Regulations related to methods for measurement of lot width, setbacks, and height
 - 15) In new Article 12, adding Site Development Standards related to commercial buildings, Parking, and Fencing and Screening.
 - 16) In new Article 14, making significant changes to the Powers section of the Board of Adjustment, assigning them hearings for alleged errors in decision made by staff, special exceptions and variances. The existing ordinances did not allow for variances of area regulations like building heights. The section lays out standards they must use in deciding applications for special exceptions and variances.
 - 17) Adds to Article 16, Creation of Building Site, standards for site plans, hearing and approval of applications for zoning changes by the P&Z.
 - 18) Deletes Article 17, "Boundaries of Districts Where Uncertainty May Existed" and moves the concepts unchanged to new Article 24, Zoning District Map.
 - 19) Replaces old Article 20, Enforcement with new Article 19 to provide procedures for City Commission and staff to discover, provide written notice, and stop work orders on Violations of the Zoning Ordinance.

- 20) Adds and changes Definitions (new Article 23) to clarify some and add definitions related to new concepts.
- 21) Type in Ordinance 332, adopted in 2004, to add provisions for Specific Use Permits, Now Article 26.

Any changes to the Zoning Ordinance should be reviewed by an attorney familiar with land use law during the amendment process to ensure that changes are made in accordance with State law. Texas Local Government Code Section 211 lays out provisions for zoning ordinance amendments for general law cities with a zoning commission. Proper procedure requires a report to the City Council from the Zoning Commission; proper notice of affected property owners within 200 feet of a zoning change; public hearings; and specifies number of votes needed to adopt the changes. These steps are described in Article 22: Changes and Amendments in the existing ordinance. However, in general, the steps would be the following:

- 1) The zoning commission makes a preliminary report to the City Commission on the proposed amendments.
- 2) If zoning classifications are recommended to be changed, all property owners within 200 feet of a change must be a mailed a notice 10 days prior to the zoning commission hearing on the proposed amendment.
- 3) Zoning commission holds a public hearing on the proposed amendment.
- 4) Zoning Commission makes final report to the City Commission
- 5) City publishes notice of a public hearing on the proposed amendment 15 days in advance of the hearing.
- 6) The City Commission holds a public hearing on the proposed amendments.
- 7) If 20 percent of property owners scheduled to be re-zoned submit a written petition, then City Commission vote for the amendment must be $\frac{3}{4}$ of the body in the affirmative. If not, then an affirmative vote stands.

15.3 Legal Considerations

Zoning is the most common means of regulating local land use in the United States. It gained popularity in the 1920s when many states, including Texas in 1927, passed planning and zoning enabling legislation allowing cities and some counties to enact land use plans and zoning regulations.

Included in this study is a proposed Zoning Ordinance that takes into consideration the desires of city residents expressed during Comprehensive Plan preparation. A digitized zoning district map that is ready for adoption as the “official” zoning map accompanies this text. Any zoning ordinance that the City considers adopting or any amendments that it considers making to its existing ordinance should be reviewed by the City Attorney. Zoning ordinances should have periodic reviews and amendments to allow the City to deal with issues prior to their becoming contentious.

Zoning seeks a balance between the right of the property owner to use land and the right of the general public to a healthy, safe, and orderly living environment. Conventional purposes of zoning have focused on:

1. Separating conflicting land uses;
2. Ensuring that new development is located according to a general community plan; and
3. Promoting quality development that will not harm the health, safety or welfare of the public.

In Texas, a city’s zoning power extends only over land within its corporate limits. A city has no zoning power within its extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ) or within other territory outside of the city limits. State law and legal history have further defined the purposes of zoning regulations:

Lessen street congestion by limiting the level and density of development in the various zoning districts to allow for appropriate match between types of development and the level of infrastructure that can be reasonable provided by the city.

Promote safety from fire and other dangers by imposing minimum yard setback and access-related requirements to hinder the spread of fire and to ensure access by emergency personnel and equipment.

Promote health and general welfare by separating land uses that involve potentially dangerous activities, excessive noise, pollution, odors, or heavy traffic to non-residential or non-commercial areas of the city.

Promote adequate light and air by requiring setbacks, open space, and building location, arrangement, size, or height requirements.

Prevent undue concentration of population or overcrowding through minimum or maximum square footage, lot sizes, or parking space requirements.

Facilitate adequate transportation, water, sewer, schools, parks, and other public service requirements through matching the infrastructure requirements of a particular land use with the city's ability to provide for these needs.

Zoning must have a consistent, close connection to real community goals and objectives, not vaguely perceived needs. The right of the public to restrict the use of private property must be based on a well-reasoned, desired future community, as expressed in a locally-adopted community plan (specified in Section 211.004 of the Local Government Code). These often take the form of a Future Land Use Plan, Comprehensive Plan, or Master Plan.

Local Government Code Section 211.003 provides that a city may enact zoning regulations to address any of the five following aspects of development:

1. height and size of buildings
2. percentage of a lot that is occupied
3. size of yards, courts or other open spaces
4. population density of the site
5. location and use of the buildings and land for residential, business, industrial, or other purposes

For historical, architecturally significant, or cultural sites or areas, cities may regulate the construction, alteration, or razing of structures. In addition, zoning ordinances usually contain standards that the city has established with regard to minimum lot sizes, setbacks, yards, impervious cover, parking, screening, and other criteria that must be met when developing property. A typical ordinance also sets out the permitted uses of land within designated zoning districts and indicates how to obtain special use permits, variances, and amendments of the zoning ordinance.

Zoning regulations must be uniform for each kind of building in a district, but may vary from district to district based upon the character of each district and its suitability for particular uses, with due consideration given to conserving the value of buildings and encouraging the most appropriate use of land in the city.

Zoning has not been successful in reshaping land uses and growth that occurred in the past. Often, cities adopt zoning ordinances in reaction to some undesired development or series of events, such as mobile homes moving to vacant lots in a neighborhood of single-family homes or a new business generating noxious pollution or lots of traffic. These types of situations are usually regulated through *nuisance ordinances* such as those regulating noise, pollution, dangerous structures, mobile homes, junk cars, etc.

Though zoning is not generally aimed at controlling land uses that legally existed prior to the adoption of land regulations, the ordinance can be used to prevent nonconforming uses or structures from being rebuilt if they are destroyed or from being converted to another nonconforming use. To illustrate this point: an auto body repair shop in a residential zone that was considered a nonconforming use burns down. If the owner proposed to rebuild it on the same site, the city government, under the zoning ordinance, could legally prevent the owner from rebuilding the shop at that location.

A zoning ordinance consists of two parts—the text and a map. The text explains the different land use zones and districts, including permitted and conditional uses, minimum lot requirements, general development standards, and how the zoning process is to be administered. The zoning map reflects the future land use according to the city’s plan and shows the location of the zones and districts for different types of land uses. Ordinances or resolutions adopting zoning refer to both the text and the map.

15.4 Zoning Ordinance Types

A city enacting zoning regulations or revisions has a few choices on types of zoning codes. The technical expertise needed to implement a code varies according to the type of zoning.

Use-based (conventional) codes are the regulations for land use developed throughout most of the 20th century. Also known as Euclidean zoning, they define what use can be used on each property, often emphasizing a separation of uses. The original intent of conventional codes was to separate non-compatible uses so that, for example, factories that generated pollution and large-truck traffic were not located next to housing or small commercial shops. The focus is on preventing development that could damage a neighbor’s property or safety. The

codes often separate retail, single-family, multifamily, office, and industrial uses from one another and apply strict standards to what types of uses and density can be placed on each property. The codes are based on a City Future Land Use plan often found in a Comprehensive Plan that articulates a vision of how property should be used during a planning period. That vision usually includes decisions about where city government would provide its services in the future.

Conventional Zoning involves separating a city into land use zones and districts. Typical zones are R-Residential, M-Industrial/Manufacturing, and C-Commercial. Districts refer to a specific kind of zone such as R-1 Single Family Residential or R-2 Multifamily Residential. In each district, certain land uses are permitted outright or may be permitted as conditional uses; other uses are prohibited or not listed. For example, in a residential zone, a single-family house is permitted outright, a daycare in a single-family home may be permitted conditionally if it does not change the character of the area, but the construction of a fast-food restaurant (an intensive commercial use) is likely to be prohibited.

Finally, conventional zoning sets building intensity limits, or building envelopes, on lots through uniform application in a zone of setback, height, density and other requirements.

Unified Development codes are single documents containing zoning and subdivision regulations and any other development-related regulations in the City's Code of Ordinances. They seek to avoid conflicting or inconsistent language that can develop if separate ordinances are used. They are also intended to make decision makers more aware of the entire land development process from "platting to certificate of occupancy."

Form-based codes²⁵ focus on building form, de-emphasizing density and use regulation. In place of long lists of allowed uses in a district, the codes focus on what buildings should look like, their role in shaping the public space, their role in creating “a place” or town character, and their relationship to the street or other transportation infrastructure, like sidewalks, open space between buildings, and parking access. They focus on the idea that uses of a building may change over time but its façade, relationship to other buildings, and its role in creating public spaces will remain.

In form-based codes, “zones” can be defined by devising a system of districts, neighborhoods and corridors; or defined by street types in the City (local streets, state highways, county roads), or by the types of land uses in the City (agricultural, central business district, open spaces, residential neighborhoods, etc). A building’s relationship to its environment is defined in each designation, including allowable building types, dimensions, parking locations, façade features, and the appearance of the streetscape (width of sidewalks, landscaping, bike lane, street widths, lighting, and street furniture). In addition to building form, these codes usually emphasize mixed uses, defining allowable housing and commercial types so that they are compatible and can be placed near each other within one zone. Instead of a use-based zoning map, the code is based on a Regulating Plan that assigns broad zones accompanied by graphic-based tables that show required elements for building shapes, placement, street types and neighborhood character in each zone. The zones are often broader and more flexible than in a conventional ordinance.

The form-based code is designed to be short, full of graphics, and easy to administer. They incorporate a 1) regulating plan (a schematic representation of the master plan illustrating the location of streets, blocks and public spaces, 2)

²⁵ Source: Form-based Codes Institute, Sample Request for Qualifications (RFQ) For Consultants to Prepare a Form-Based Code, 2007; at formbasedcodes.org; and Form-Based Codes Fact Sheet, 2005; Local Government Commission access on the Web in January of 2009 at http://www.lgc.org/freepub/PDF/Land_Use/fact_sheets/form_based_codes.pdf

building form standards based on definitions of allowed building types appropriate to the region or neighborhood and that allow buildings to complement neighboring buildings and the street; 3) street standards (plan and section) that balance the needs of motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders, and 4) use regulations, as needed.

The creation of a form-based code requires public participation that allows residents, officials and city staff to develop a vision for the city. The beginning aspects of the creation of a form-based code begin with the City's Comprehensive Plan. The Plan goals and objectives delineated in Chapter 2: Community Goals and Objectives were generated during public workshops, hearings and interviews of officials, residents and others with regional interests. They define a Vision for the City to work toward during the 20-year Plan duration.

Urban design consultants are usually employed to draft form-based codes to include drawings rendered based on the city's character and vision that accurately and clearly represent the required building formats. Although that process requires up front expenses, the idea is that the form-based code will eventually save the City expenses of drawn-out development processes and lengthy code language interpretations. With the vision already created and outlined in the forms drawn into the Code, decisions on development applications largely can be handled by city staff, much as is the process for issuing a building permit when the buildings actually begin to be built. Up-front training of staff is also required to reassure the public and developers that application approvals are meeting the code's requirements.

In cities where zoning codes already exist, the form-based code should be integrated into the existing regulatory framework to insure procedural consistency, adherence to state and local legal requirements, and maximize code effectiveness.

Hybrid codes combine elements of form-based zoning and conventional zoning. They are most often used when conventional zoning is already in place. They can introduce desired building forms without undertaking a complete re-write of a code. For example, form-based zones can be applied to certain areas of town, like already-developed areas where compatible infill is desired, while traditional zoning categories can remain in other areas, like heavy industry, where safety and property protection are chief concerns. Often, hybrid codes incorporate the form sections of the form-based code, and keep the provisions, processes and standards of the conventional code to allow for seamless administration of the code. A hybrid attempts to resolve differences between current development standards and future urban form goals.

Transfer of Development Rights These programs, often implemented in localities wanting to preserve land for a specific use like agriculture or open space (or for other community goods like affordable housing or recreation) allow property owners to sever their development rights (or maintain a base minimum of development rights) on land (*sending areas*) and sell them to developers to allow them to increase density or other features on other property (*receiving areas*) zoned for higher development-type uses. Local governments may also buy development rights in order to control price, design details, restrict growth, or create a TDR bank that developers can use to achieve their development goals on already-zoned property.

TDR programs can be more difficult to administer than zoning, since agreements require the seller to place deed restrictions or conservation easements on his or her property. Cities often require assistance from legal staff or not-for-profit land trust advisors to ensure proper preparation of easement documents. However, the TDR programs can be more permanent than zoning as they cannot bend to political will at a later time. They also can lower the need for administration of

variance requests. Developers can purchase TDRs to meet density or other needs on their properties, rather than trying to downzone undeveloped parcels.

The downside to TDR programs is that they lock in property uses, limiting future options as societal values and community characteristics change over the years. In addition, some legal “takings” issues have arisen if a sending area is zoned for zero growth. Thorough comprehensive planning that gauges the need for development in a community is essential so that the community designates appropriate amounts of sending and receiving areas.

TDR programs are most effective in communities facing strong development pressure where officials believe it would be difficult to successfully implement traditional zoning restrictions to achieve preservation goals or where financial resources are not available for municipalities to buy land or development rights on their own. It allows officials to use the market to pay for the preservation of public goods like open space while preserving flexibility for developers.

Planned Unit Development (PUD) A PUD is a designed grouping of varied and compatible land uses, such as housing, recreation, commercial centers, and industrial parks, within one development or subdivision. It is used as part of conventional zoning or form-based code to allow for flexibility in land use planning. It can be an overlay district or a zoning category designation. It is usually implemented to carry out master planning of a tract of a land and is intended: to carry out specific goals of the comprehensive plan; foster City or public/private partnered special projects; allow for the development of mixed use, transit-oriented, or traditional neighborhoods with a variety of uses and housing types; and/or to preserve natural features, open space, and other topographical features of the land. Standards within a PUD usually are negotiated on a case-by-case basis, and require approval procedures similar to those found in subdivision ordinances, including plan review and public hearings.

15.5 Elements that Create Challenges to Zoning

There are four major areas of legal concern for communities with zoning. The first centers on the constitutional right to free speech found in the First Amendment. Provisions adopted to control aesthetics, especially sign regulations, are especially vulnerable.

The second area of concern is called the *taking issue*. The Fifth Amendment prevents governments from taking private property unless it is for a public purpose and just compensation is paid. Normally, when private land is taken for use as a road or park, the landowner will be fairly compensated. However, a taking may arise from land use regulations that deprive a property owner of virtually all economic value of the property.

Two other areas of concern arise from the Fourteenth Amendment. One is called *due process*, which governs the substance and conduct of all government regulations. Due process requires that governments treat all people fairly and reasonably. The restrictions imposed by zoning regulations must be reasonable. They must be based on actual needs and not on arbitrary or unrealistic standards. In administering the zoning regulations, local government must treat all people fairly, give proper notice of hearings, and follow all procedures set forth in the Texas enabling statutes to avoid violations of due process.

The final legal concern regards the *equal protection clause* of the Fourteenth Amendment. This clause requires governments to treat all people in the same manner unless there is a valid purpose for dissimilar treatment. The equal protection clause is especially stringent when it involves prohibition of discrimination based upon race, creed, color, disability, national origin or gender.

Deed Restrictions

State law does not allow cities that have adopted zoning to also enforce private deed restrictions. Enforcement of deed restrictions remains a private matter between the involved property owners to be settled through private civil litigation. Generally courts have held that when both zoning regulations and deed restrictions exist, the strictest provision must be met. For example, if the owner of a property located in a Commercial zoning district wishes to build a paint store, the city would not protest if the land has a deed restriction limiting use to residential. The private citizens affected by the proposed land use change could file, and would likely win, a civil suit aimed at enforcing the deed restriction.

Historic Overlay

Local government Code section 211.003(b) allows cities to regulate the construction, alteration, or razing of structures that are historically, culturally, or architecturally significant. This is often done by creating an overlay mechanism in the zoning ordinance that may be applied to certain individual buildings or to a larger district. This overlay is an additional zoning designation and must be shown on the official zoning map.

The historic overlay can regulate certain aesthetic or design issues for historic structures but not the use of the property. For example, the city would have approval authority over changes to the façade of a historic movie theater, but could not address whether the building be used for a theater or a bookstore.

Historic preservation should be addressed in a separate ordinance that establishes the procedures for the operation of a local historic preservation commission, the means by which a property owner may seek to make changes to a historic structure, criteria and design standards, the legal effect of commission review, and an appeals procedure.

Pre-existing Uses

Property uses in place before a zoning ordinance takes effect that do not adhere to the zoning ordinance are called *nonconforming uses*. A person who claims the right to continue a nonconforming use bears the burden of establishing that the use pre-existed the zoning regulation. Courts usually only protect “innocent” nonconforming uses. Nonconforming uses are not considered innocent if they are begun with the knowledge that the regulations will soon apply or that the regulations are in the process of being proposed.

Most zoning ordinances prohibit a nonconforming use from being re-started if it is temporarily discontinued for a specified period of time. Both the time period and the definition of “discontinued use” must be clearly stated in the zoning ordinance. Six or twelve months are typical time periods used, but courts have generally held that in order for there to be a finding of discontinuance of use, there must be an intent to abandon and some overt act of abandonment, such as failure to pay property taxes or utility charges or severe deterioration of the structure. The mere passage of time during which a nonconforming use is discontinued does not indicate abandonment by itself, even if the time period is lengthy.

Cities may prohibit the expansion of a nonconforming use beyond the level that was present at the time the city zoning regulations took effect. Many cities allow modest expansion, a practice upheld by the Texas courts. In these cases, the zoning ordinance requires board of adjustment approval of the increase.

Since 1972, Texas courts have allowed cities to include provisions in their zoning regulations that require the discontinuance of nonconforming uses if the owners are provided a reasonable amount of time to recover their investment from the particular use, a practice commonly known as *amortization*.

Amortization involves the determination of the owner's capital investment in the property and of his expected income stream from the property. The city can use this information to allow the nonconforming use sufficient time to remain in existence to reasonably reimburse the property owner for his investment in the property.

A city may be legally required to provide compensation to a property owner if the time period for phasing out the nonconforming use was not sufficient for the property owner to recoup reasonable monetary expectations from the property. There does not appear to be clear court precedent that establishes a uniform time period during which all investments in a property are realized. Accordingly, cities must consider resolution of such issues on a case-by-case basis after consultation with legal counsel.

Zoning in Annexed Areas

A city may require an annexed area comply with the city's existing zoning ordinance. If it wants the regulations to apply immediately upon annexation, a city must pass an ordinance specifying the zoning classifications and district boundaries that will apply to the new area when it is annexed. This ordinance must have a public hearing that is advertised in the local newspaper at least 15 days beforehand.

In no case will zoning become effective for a property until the area is actually annexed. However, a city may pursue an injunction to halt proposed development or construction in an area outside the city limits if the construction would violate the proposed zoning regulations. To secure an injunction, the city would have to show that an ordinance annexing and zoning the area had already passed its first reading.

There are special provisions relating to annexed areas that have been used for agricultural operations for the last fifteen years. Zoning laws and other municipal

regulations generally may not be applied to agricultural operations that were located outside the city boundaries on August 31, 1981. There are exceptions to this protection; if the city confronts this issue, it should consult with its legal counsel regarding Agricultural Code Chapter 251

Sexually Oriented Businesses

According to the U.S. Supreme Court, cities may not completely prohibit the operation of sexually oriented businesses within a city. However, the regulation of the location of these businesses is allowed. Sexually oriented businesses, as defined by state law, include “a sex parlor, nude studio, modeling studio, love parlor, adult bookstore, adult movie theater, adult video arcade, adult video store, adult motel, or other commercial enterprise, the primary business of which is the offering of a service or selling, renting, or exhibiting of devices or any other items intended to provide sexual stimulation or sexual gratification to the customer.”

Many cities prohibit such businesses within 1,000 feet of a school, regular place of religious worship, or residential neighborhood. Attorneys recommend following the “five percent rule” in regulating the location of sexually oriented businesses. Under this standard, a city should ensure its ordinance allows at least five percent of the acres of the city territory available for the location of sexually oriented businesses. However, these areas must be located where such businesses could practically and legally locate.

Wireless Telecommunications Facilities

The 1996 Telecommunications Act sets forth certain limitations on a city’s authority to regulate the location of wireless telecommunications facilities (47 U.S.C.A. 332 (c)(7)). In essence the law requires that zoning or other regulations cannot have the effect of banning the construction, modification, or placement of wireless telecommunications facilities in the city and that zoning decisions cannot systematically give one telecommunications service provider an advantage over its competitors. Zoning regulations can be written to limit these facilities to non-

residential areas, but can only recommend more restrictive placement such as on public lands or on sites where telecommunications facilities already exist.

Mobile Homes and HUD-code Manufactured Housing

The Texas Manufactured Housing Standards Act (Article 5221f) sets the limits on city regulation of mobile homes and HUD-code Manufactured Housing. “Mobile homes” are defined as certain structures constructed before June 15, 1976, and “HUD-code manufactured homes” are defined as certain structures constructed on or after June 15, 1976 and meet minimum standards set by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). A city’s ability to regulate a structure through zoning and other regulations under this Act depends on whether the structure is a mobile home or a HUD-code manufactured home.

Section 4A of Article 5221f allows incorporated cities to completely prohibit installation of mobile homes as a residential dwelling inside the city limits unless the mobile home in question was occupied within the city limits before the prohibition.

A city has less power in regard to regulating HUD-code manufactured homes as residential dwellings. State law only allows cities to require that these structures locate in areas deemed appropriate by the city. The city may not completely “zone-out” HUD-code manufactured homes within the city limits.

The zoning ordinance should indicate those areas within the city that are available for HUD-code manufactured homes. The requirement that HUD-code manufactured homes be allowed in some part of the city does not affect the validity of deed restrictions that are otherwise applicable to various properties. Often, deed restrictions prohibit placement of manufactured homes on involved properties.

Group and Community Homes for the Disabled

The Community Homes for Disabled Persons Location Act (Texas Human Resources Code, Section 123.001) regarding community homes for groups of disabled people preempts municipal zoning regulations whenever there is any conflict with the Act. A “community home” must meet all of the following criteria:

The home must provide food, shelter, personal guidance, care, habilitation services, and supervision to persons with disabilities who reside there. The phrase “person with a disability” is defined by statute to include any person whose ability to care for himself, perform manual tasks, learn, work, walk, see, hear, speak, or breathe is substantially limited because the person has one or thirteen conditions specifically listed in the statute (see Section 123.002 of the Texas Human Resources Code for the complete list).

- The home must not be located within one-half mile of another community home.
- The home must not have more than six persons with disabilities and no more than two supervisors residing in the home at the same time.
- The home must meet all applicable state or federal licensing requirements.
- The home must be operated by an authorized state agency or entity such as a nonprofit corporation or be a personal care facility listed under Chapter 247 of the Texas Health and Safety Code.

By statute, the exterior of the home must retain compatibility with surrounding residential structures. If the group home meets the above conditions, the city must allow the home to locate in any district that is zoned residential. Further, any deed restriction that would prohibit the use of the property as a group home is invalid if the restriction was imposed or amended after September 1, 1985. Municipal ordinances may require that residents of the community home not park more motor vehicles at the facility than there are bedrooms in the facility.

Even when a group home does not qualify under the state Act, it may qualify under federal law. The Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988 forbids local laws that would constitute discrimination against the handicapped in housing. In essence, this federal law prevents cities from imposing blanket prohibitions on the location of group homes for the disabled in residential neighborhoods. Cities must provide some reasonable procedure for allowing group homes for the disabled to locate in an area zoned for residential use.

The protections provided to group homes for the disabled are not necessarily extended to group homes for other classes such as troubled youth who may or may not be disabled. If a city is faced with a request to allow a group home of this nature, it should determine whether the members of the group meet any of the state or federal requirements for disability. If not, and if the facility is run by a nongovernmental entity, the home is likely to be subject to the traditional zoning regulations.

Federal, State, County or School District Properties

City ordinances do not generally apply to federal or state entities or their property. In many cases, federal and state agencies make an effort to find appropriate locations for their facilities, but they are not obligated to comply with local zoning regulations.

Courts have determined that state statute allows independent school districts to choose any reasonable location of school buildings within the district and allows counties to locate a solid waste dump anywhere appropriate as long as the dump complies with state law. In these two instances, the state has given counties and school districts the power to choose locations without regard for city zoning regulations.

City building codes may be imposed on school district facilities and auxiliary county courthouses, but not on main county courthouses, state or federal facilities.

Religious Structures and Facilities

Recent rulings, particularly the U.S. Supreme Court case of *City of Boerne v. Flores*, have held that the Religious Freedom Restoration Act was unconstitutional in the way it limited the ability of local governments to regulate properties owned by religious groups in the same way as those owned by other groups. Generally, religious entities are subject to the same laws as any other entity as long as those laws are neutral in their construction. Despite these recent rulings, cities should consult with legal counsel before applying zoning regulations to churches or to other structures used for religious practice.

Sign Regulations

Cities may regulate the size, location, height, and lighting of signs, but the regulation of the content of the sign's message are almost always beyond a city's power. Most cities prefer to address the regulation of signs by a separate city ordinance independent of the zoning ordinance due to concerns that a First Amendment challenge regarding the sign regulations would invalidate the entire zoning ordinance.

Pawnshops

Consumer Credit Commissioner licensed pawnshops, as defined in Section 2 of the Texas Pawnshop Act (Article 5069-51.02, Vernon's Texas Civil Statutes), must be permitted in at least one general zoning classification (such as commercial). No additional special use permits other than those imposed by the state may be required by the city.

15.6 Administering the Zoning Ordinance

The city must designate both the staff and the entities needed to assist in the zoning process. Such entities usually include a zoning commission, a board of adjustment, and designated city staff to handle day-to-day zoning issues.

Zoning Commission

General law cities (Type A, B or C) can choose to appoint a zoning commission or have their city councils perform that function. The zoning commission is responsible for recommending zoning regulations and district boundaries.

The members are appointed by a majority vote of the city council. For general law cities, the requirements are included in the zoning ordinance. The term of office is limited to two (2) years by the Texas Constitution.

Though not specifically required, many cities require that zoning commission members be residents of the city and that terms of office be staggered. Removal, filling of vacancies, and successive terms are not addressed by state statute and are determined by each locality in its ordinance.

Planning Commission

Municipalities may create separate entities called “planning commissions” for approval of plats and producing and recommending a master or comprehensive plan for the city. Appointing a planning commission is at the discretion of the city council. Ordinances or charters of many cities combine the functions of the planning commission with those of the zoning commission in an entity called the “planning and zoning commission.”

Although rarely done, general law city councils may themselves serve as a combined planning and zoning commission, though it is much more common for a separate council-appointed entity to serve in this capacity.

Combined Planning and Zoning Commission

A planning and zoning commission recommends zoning district boundaries and zoning regulations for each district. Public hearings are held to produce a draft zoning ordinance and zoning map for consideration and approval by the city council. Once the ordinance has been approved, the commission considers and makes recommendations to the city council on amendments to the zoning ordinance and in certain cases, special use permits. The commission is also responsible for reviewing and approving plats.

If allowed for by city ordinance, a planning and zoning commission can provide review and make recommendations to the city council on matters such as right-of-way abandonment, amendments to the platting ordinance, and the acceptance of donated rights-of-way and easements.

Board of Adjustments

The Board of Adjustments is created by ordinance for the purposes of: hearing appeals to decisions made by an administrative official or the planning and zoning commission; deciding special exceptions and variances from the zoning ordinance; and hearing and deciding other matters authorized by the zoning ordinance. Although the Standard Zoning Enabling Act does not require a Board of Adjustment (in which case the legislative body issues variances and hears appeals), having the Board of Adjustments review administrative decisions and hear appeals avoids the problem of a city council both issuing regulations and reviewing appeals as well as the potential legal difficulties caused by the council acting in both a legislative and an administrative capacity. Legislation in Texas (Local Government Code, Title 7, Subtitle 8, Sec. 211.008) specifically allows Type A general law municipalities to designate the governing body (or legislative body) to act as the board, but states that court review should apply the same standard of review that it would apply to a board not containing members of the governing body. Therefore, if a governing body acts as a board of adjustment, it must closely follow rules for granting variances as if it was an administrative, and

not a legislative, body. The board consists of at least five members, each appointed for two years.

Amendments to the Zoning Ordinance:

All zoning regulations and amendments to those regulations must be adopted by ordinance rather than by resolution. For amendments to the zoning ordinance, state law generally requires review and recommendations by the planning and zoning commission and final passage by the city council with public notice and hearings at both steps.

There are two types of amendments to the zoning ordinance: a zoning change affecting a specific property (commonly referred to as “rezoning”) and a comprehensive system-wide change to the text of the zoning ordinance that affects all similarly situated properties throughout the jurisdiction.

To change the zoning classification for specific tracts, the act requires notice by mail of the zoning commission’s hearing to all property owners within the city limits and within 200 feet of the affected tract (or partial tract if only a portion is being rezoned). If the owners of 20 percent of the land within the area to be reclassified *or* the owners of 20 percent of the land within 200 feet of that area protest the proposed change by written petition, the change must be approved by three-fourths of the entire city council to pass. The mayor’s vote is only counted if he is able to vote on such matters under local provisions.

The right of protest of a zoning change exists anytime there is a proposed change to the zoning ordinance and requires a three-quarters majority of the city council to approve the change. The duty to provide special notice to the landowners within 200 feet of the proposed change is only required if the change involves a zoning reclassification to a particular property. For example, if an amendment would uniformly change the uses allowed under a particular zoning classification but not actually change the classification of any specific areas in

town, no special notice would be required to any particular landowners. If administrative changes to the ordinance are proposed, such as increasing the number of days during which any zoning decision can be appealed, no special notice would be required to specific landowners.

There are four requirements that must be met under Chapter 211 of the Local Government Code before zoning regulations are adopted or a change in zoning regulations or district boundaries is approved:

Planning and zoning commission issues a preliminary report that describes all proposals for zoning regulations or district boundaries. This report may be in written or verbal format. The information included in the report is not specified in state law. Many communities include land use maps that show how the proposed change would impact residential, commercial, and industrial areas of the city and a recommendation of the planning or zoning commission. The local zoning ordinance should indicate the format and type of information to be addressed in the preliminary report.

Planning and zoning commission gives notice and holds public hearings for proposed changes affecting a particular tract or group of properties. The notice must be sent to all property owners within 200 feet of the affected property(s) by U.S. mail at least eleven (11) days before the hearing date. The hearing notice must state the time and location of the public meeting and the address and proposed change to the zoning classification for the property(s) in question. The identity and addresses of affected property owners is determined by reference to the most recently approved city tax roll. If the city has recently annexed property that is not reflected in the most recent tax roll and that property is within 200 feet of the proposed change, an additional newspaper notice is required (Section 211.007(c) of the Local Government Code).

Planning and zoning commission issues final report with recommendations, as required by state law. The local zoning ordinance should indicate whether the report be presented in verbal or written format and what information should be included in the report, other than the required recommendation of the planning and zoning commission.

After providing proper notice, the city council holds a public hearing and considers the final report to give interested parties and citizens the chance to comment on recommendations. Notice of the time and place of the hearing must be published in an official newspaper of general circulation at least 16 days before the date of the hearing. The city council may receive the recommendations of the planning and zoning commission, hold the public hearing, and take action on the proposed ordinance at the same meeting.

If a proposed zoning change is considered by the city council of a general law city that also serves as the zoning commission, the council must provide the 16-day newspaper notice and must send written notice of the proposed change by U.S. mail to each property owner whose property is within 200 feet of the proposed change. There is an additional 30 day waiting period for adopting the proposed change beginning on the date that the required newspaper and individual notices are provided to the property owners.

Changing the area affected by a rezoning amendment:

Areas subject to rezoning cannot be increased once the issue comes before the city unless additional notice is provided to affected property owners. In order for the change to be valid, all land subject to the proposed changes must have been described in the notice as required by state statute and city ordinance.

The area subject to a proposed zoning change can be reduced after the issue has been brought before the city without the provision of additional notice to affected property owners because not making the zoning change will not present

an additional injury to the neighboring property owners. The city only needs to ensure that it has provided notice of the maximum area of land potentially subject to the change.

The planning and zoning commission has the power to recommend and the city the power to approve a reduction of the proposed area affected by a rezoning with or without the permission of the applicant. Most zoning experts agree that the planning and zoning commission should recommend the change before council consideration.

Changing the zoning use of an area affected by a rezoning amendment: An area subject to a proposed rezoning cannot be subjected to a change that is less restrictive (more intense) than what was originally requested unless additional notice is provided to the affected property owners. However, the same area may be subjected to a more restrictive (less intense) zoning designation than was in the original notices because neighboring land owners are usually not harmed by a change that incorporates a use that is less intense than was originally proposed. The planning and zoning commission has the power to recommend and the city council the power to approve a reduction of the intensity of use proposed by a rezoning with or without the permission of the applicant. Most zoning experts agree that the planning and zoning commission should recommend the change before council consideration.

Conditional Zoning:

Zoning changes that include additional requirements such as a fence, hedge, or other physical feature are called “conditional zoning.” Any conditions placed upon the rezoning must be reasonable and directly related to the zoning change in question. They should also protect the general public welfare and not just the interests of a few neighboring property owners. If such conditions are necessary and the circumstances are appropriate, the city may want to propose the use of a planned development district.

