



La Vernia Downtown District Plan

A vision for revitalization and economic development

The University of Texas at San Antonio | Institute of Economic Development

Center for Urban and Regional Planning Research - College of Architecture

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Preface

This report presents a vision plan for the Downtown District of La Vernia, Texas and its primary market area in order to assist the community in its efforts to promote long-term sustainable economic growth while maintaining and enhancing its historical small-town ambiance. The proposals set forth in this Vision Plan also set the stage for the La Vernia community to take full advantage of its location between the growing San Antonio metropolitan area to the north and west and the thriving Eagle Ford Shale oil and gas developments to the south and east. The plan also includes a business/economic assessment and an economic gap analysis to target new investment opportunities in the La Vernia primary and secondary market areas.

This study was initiated by the Rural Business Program (RBP), a part of the South-West Texas Border Small Business Development Center (SWTSBDC) Network which is hosted by the Institute for Economic Development (IED) at the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA). To develop this vision plan for La Vernia, the RBP contracted with the Center for Urban and Regional Planning Research (CURPR) in the College of Architecture at UTSA.

CURPR Director Dr. Richard Tangum spearheaded the development of the overall vision plan for the Downtown District. The RBP, working in conjunction with the SWTSBDC-IED and its business advisors, also provided and continues to provide ongoing assistance to local

businesses and entrepreneurs in La Vernia to ensure that they will be able to meet the demands and challenges of the rapidly changing economy of the San Antonio metropolitan area and South Texas.

Several outcomes are expected through this Downtown District Vision Plan. The data generated through the economic analysis will: (1) provide La Vernia with a better understanding of the underlying dynamics of its economy, and enable the La Vernia Municipal Development District (MDD), with support from the team consisting of the CURPR, RBP and SWTSBDC-IED, to develop a comprehensive strategy; (2) promote economic growth via small business development and local entrepreneurship, while also (3) attracting new private-sector investment to La Vernia. This Vision Plan will also assist La Vernia with the redevelopment of its historic downtown and thus lay the foundation for future long-term growth as it positions itself as both a traditional small-town destination for tourists and as a thriving retail and financial services hub for the community and the surrounding area.

Dr. Richard Tangum, CURPR
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Background Assessment

Executive Summary

The City of La Vernia has an opportunity to promote economic development in its community by capitalizing on its strategic location along U.S. Highway 87 in South Texas between San Antonio and the Eagle Ford Shale Play. The economic trends in La Vernia indicate a retail opportunity gap of \$7.3 million in the city itself, and a gap of \$129.2 million within a five-mile radius (the primary market). This gap represents the amount of consumer spending by the residents of the community which is lost to businesses outside the community.

In order to support economic development in La Vernia, the Vision Plan recommends a revitalized Downtown District. This revitalization will attract both residents and visitors and improve the economic health of the community. The La Vernia Downtown District Plan includes:

- Improvements to Chihuahua Street, the main street of La Vernia's Downtown District, to make it more pedestrian-friendly and to attract residents and visitors to shop downtown;
- A proposed Civic Center and Plaza in the Downtown District to provide a public square and a visually identifiable central gathering place

for the community for special events, as well as a new home for city offices;

- A proposed Library and Learning Center (as part of the Civic Center) to provide the community with a central location for library and information services, internet access, educational facilities for learning activities, and a satellite campus; and,
- Development of additional commercial activity in the Downtown District, with a particular emphasis on destination retail shopping.

In addition to the revitalization of the Downtown District, the Vision Plan recommends:

- Gateway landmarks which clearly identify La Vernia to those entering the city, and improvements to U.S. Highway 87, the major corridor through the city;
- A new Regional Park bordering Cibolo Creek which would have facilities for outdoor recreation, including a natural amphitheater, and a hike-and-bike trail along the existing San Antonio & Gulf Shore Railroad right-of-way;
- Development of lodging options such as bed and breakfasts, and motel/hotel facilities so that visitors can stay overnight or plan weekend trips to generate additional revenue through tourist-related businesses; and,
- Development of a second industrial park to attract more light industry to the city and improve its employment base.



Figure 1: View of Proposed Downtown La Vernia



Figure 2: Downtown Study Area - La Vernia, TX

History

The settlement which became La Vernia was founded in the late 1840s and early 1850s. It was first named Live Oak Grove by William R. Wiseman of Mississippi in 1851 when he established a Presbyterian church there (*Hazlewood*). When a post office was built in 1853, the name of the settlement was changed to Post Oak, and William C. Rector, who had built a stagecoach stop and blacksmith shop, was named postmaster. In 1859 the name changed to La Vernia (*Hazelwood*).

The primary impetus for La Vernia's existence was its location along what became a major economic trade route, the southern branch of the Chihuahua Road. This particular branch ran from the port of Indianola on the Gulf of Mexico (at right in Figure 2), through Goliad and La Vernia to San Antonio, and then along the Balcones Escarpment to the Rio Grande (present-day Del Rio). From there it ran north along Devils River to what is now Crockett County, and then west to Fort Stockton and southwest through what at the time was still frontier country to Presidio/Ojinaga

and across the Rio Grande, with the final segment crossing the Chihuahua Desert along the Rio Conchos, and finally along the Rio Chuviscar to the city of Chihuahua.



Source: : <http://eriklerouge.blogspot.com/2011/06/indianola.html>

Figure 3: Map of Indianola and Vicinity from 1865-66



Figure 4: La Vernia Historical Marker

Source: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/texashistoricalmarkers/431209544/>

1850-1900: Age of Stagecoach Travel

La Vernia remained a small, isolated town through the next four decades, serving as a stop for people and freight in transit to and from the Gulf Coast. For the first few decades, there was also a security element to the route, as it connected San Antonio (and thus La Vernia and Indianola) to several forts in West Texas, such as Fort Stockton (Hemphill). These forts were frequently under attack from



Figure 5: Ox-drawn wooden cart/wagon in Floresville, Texas
Source: Texas Transportation Museum - Hemphill

Native American Indians whose lands they were situated in. In addition, due to the valuable goods they carried, the wagon trains themselves became a target for raids, either by Native Americans or by outlaws.

Typically, a wagon during the pre-independence (Texas) period was almost completely made of wood, drawn by oxen. It could carry about 5,000 lbs of freight, and traveled

an average of 10 miles per day (Figure 5). That meant a trip of several weeks from Indianola to Chihuahua and vice versa. Later, in the 1850s and 1860s, and especially in the decades after the Civil War, the wagons became larger and more durable. They usually were drawn by mules instead of oxen, included iron wheels and white canvas tops, weighed 4,000 lbs unloaded, and could carry about 7,000 lbs of freight (Figure 6).

The wagon routes from Indianola to San Antonio and beyond were also the primary means by which many of the German and other European immigrants to Texas arrived at their destinations, establishing settlements such as New Braunfels, Boerne, Comfort, Fredericksburg, Castroville, and of course, La Vernia. In the 1860s and 1870s, after the Civil War, immigrants from what would become Germany and Poland (which was at the time the Russian Empire and various German kingdoms, principalities, and states) settled in La Vernia. Even with this influx, the population of La Vernia remained in the 100-200 range for most of the 1800s (Hazlewood).

Concurrent with the use of wagons and carts for transport of heavy loads over long distances, the smaller and faster horse-drawn carriage became important as well. Because of their speed, horse-drawn carriages were also used for postal delivery, transport of bank valuables such as precious metals and legal tender, and other time-sensitive tasks. These were the stage coaches which became iconic in the American West in the late 1800s, and which

were eventually supplanted by rail transportation at the beginning of the 20th century (Figure 6).



Figure 6: Mule-drawn covered wagon on Houston Street in San Antonio
Source: Texas Transportation Museum - Hemphill

It was only the building of the San Antonio and Gulf Railroad in the 1890s that ensured the consolidation and growth of La Vernia. Towns without rail service tended to stagnate or decline. By contrast, La Vernia increased from a population of 110 in 1885 to 343 in 1900, an increase of more than 200% in 15 years (Hazlewood).

1900-1950: Age of Rail Travel

As the national economy shifted from animal-drawn vehicle travel to rail travel, La Vernia retained its role as a stop along the route between San Antonio and the Gulf of Mexico, although Indianola was no longer in existence due to several hurricanes forcing its abandonment in the later part of the 19th century.



Source: <http://www.laverniahistory.com/> - La Vernia Historical Commission

The town's population continued to grow between 1900 and 1915, from 343 to about 500 people (Hazlewood). This increase was less rapid than that of the 1885-1900 time period, but it was still significant. By 1915 La Vernia had four churches, two gin mills, a bank, a pottery maker, and a brick factory (Hazlewood).

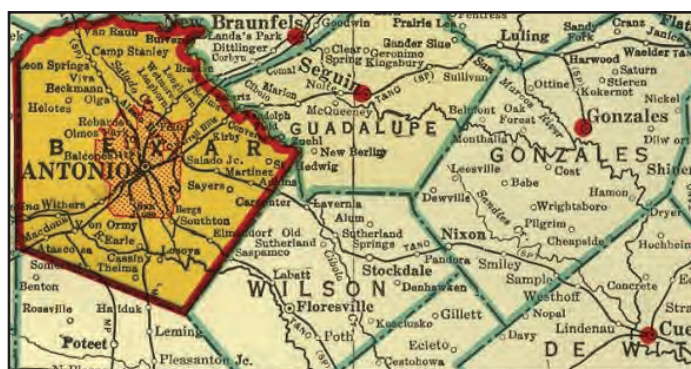


Figure 7: Railroads in South Texas, 1958

Source: Texas Transportation Museum - Hemphill

Figure 8: View looking eastward down Chihuahua Street, 1915

Local merchants and craftsmen in La Vernia were able to benefit from their location along the stagecoach route, and subsequently the rail line. They could sell their products to travelers, and also ship their products to other markets. One of the most notable businesses of this era was Suttles Pottery (the pottery maker mentioned above). George and Isaac Suttles arrived in La Vernia in the 1870s, and over the next four decades, Suttles Pottery produced thousands of pottery items and sold them to markets across the state (La Vernia Historical Association).

During this period, Chihuahua Street also retained its role as La Vernia's "Main Street," as the San Antonio and Gulf Railroad (later bought by Southern Pacific Railroad in 1905) passed through the town alongside it.



Figure 9: George Suttles and pottery

Source: Courtesy of his descendants.

The railroad line began as the San Antonio and Gulf Shore Railroad in 1893 (Hemphill). It sought to reach the Gulf of Mexico, similar to the nearby Galveston, Harrisburg, and San Antonio (G.H.&S.A.) Railroad, and the San Antonio and Aransas Pass (S.A.&A.P.) Railroad. However, it ran only to Sutherland Springs, a few miles southeast of La Vernia. Also, the train was wood-burning, and took five to six hours to reach La Vernia from San Antonio (Hemphill).



Figure 10: La Vernia train depot, circa 1930-31

Source: Texas Transportation Museum - Hemphill

The name of the railroad was changed to the San Antonio and Gulf Railroad in 1897, and the line was extended a further six miles to Stockdale. With its purchase by Southern Pacific in 1905, the line was consolidated with the G.H. & S.A. Railroad. In 1907, it was extended to Cuero, another 46 miles (the red dot at lower right in Figure 7), where it linked with existing Southern Pacific railroad lines from the Gulf coast (*Young*).

While most of the national construction of railroads took place before 1900, in Texas, it occurred primarily between 1900 and 1930. In fact, by 1911 Texas had more railroad mileage than any other state (*Werner*). In the U.S. during these three decades, the railroad became the most common means of passenger travel, not just for long distances between cities, but also for shorter distances between cities such as San Antonio and rural towns such as La Vernia. La Vernia's depot (Figure 10) provided the town's official time, since railroad clocks were required by the U.S. government to be accurate. The depot also served as La Vernia's post office and telegraph station (*Werner*).

The stock market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression which followed had a severe impact on the railroads in Texas. As automobiles became the preferred mode of transportation—beginning with the mass production of automobiles in the 1920s and culminating in the creation of the interstate highway system in the 1950s—the rail line in La Vernia (and in other small towns along its route) lost a substantial portion of its economic viability. This line was one of the first rail lines in the area to be abandoned,

as passenger traffic disappeared by the early 1950s, and freight traffic ceased by the end of the 1950s (*Hemphill*).

1950-1980: Triumph of the Automobile

Fortunately, La Vernia was not left behind when the United States highway system was implemented in 1926. The system standardized the numbering of highways from state to state. Previously, each state designated names and numbers for its major highways as it pleased. This was particularly important for Texas as it had resisted forming a Department of Transportation until 1917, and

had approved a gas tax despite vociferous opposition from the already politically powerful oil industry (*Hemphill*). The number of automobiles in Texas grew rapidly. There were about 200,000 in 1917, and nearly 1,500,000 in 1929.

What had been Texas Highway 9 became US Highway 87 (US 87). While the portion of US 87 north of San Antonio generally followed the route of "Old 9" through Boerne and Comfort, the portion south of San Antonio did not follow "Old 9" through Floresville, Karnes City, Beeville, and Sinton to Corpus Christi. That portion became

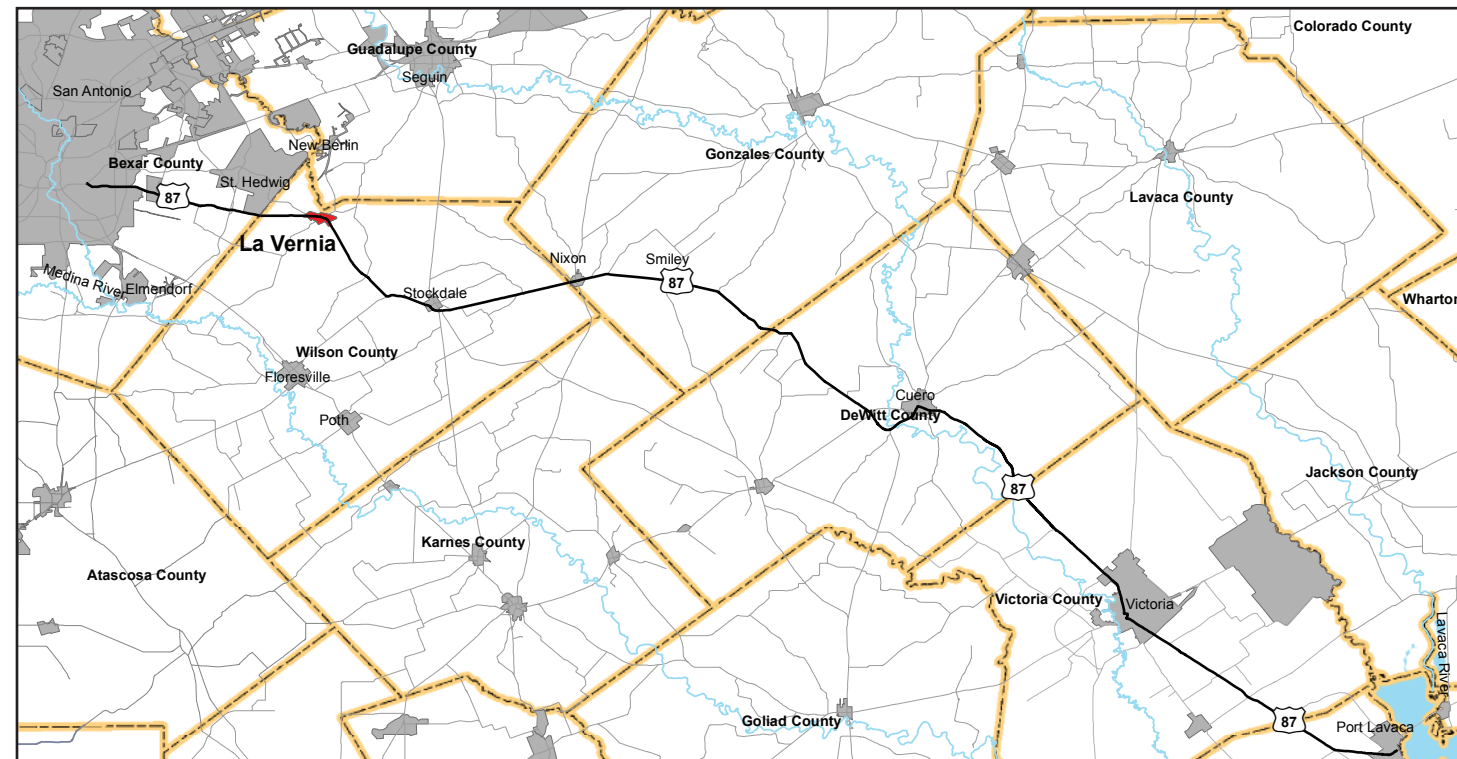


Figure 11: Route of U.S. Highway 87 from Port Lavaca to San Antonio (junction with IH10/US90)



Figure 12: Sidewalk Construction along Texas Highway 66 in Pleasanton, 1935
 Source: Texas Transportation Museum - Hemphill

US Highway 181. Instead, it followed the route of the Chihuahua stagecoach road—which was also the route of the San Antonio and Gulf Railroad—through La Vernia, Stockdale, Cuero, and Victoria to Port Lavaca, not far from the site of Indianola.

The Great Depression had hit Texas and the nation only a few years after the implementation of the new system. Unemployment was high, but the state was still required to implement its transportation network. Public works projects such as highway and bridge construction provided much-needed jobs, while also laying the foundation for the postwar boom in automobile use.

Figure 12 shows highway construction work (in this case, providing a public sidewalk along the highway) being done along Texas Highway 66 in Pleasanton, which became US Highway 281. The construction of the interstate highway system in the 1950s and 1960s helped seal the shift to automobile travel and transport.

Unlike the US highway system, however, the new interstates were focused more on uninterrupted long-distance travel. Consequently, many small towns—including La Vernia—in which the 1930s-era highway served as “Main Street” were left behind by the interstate network. In the San Antonio area, I-10 and I-410 (the inner urban “ring” or “loop”) come closest to La Vernia.

1980s-Present: Incorporation and Exurbanization

While La Vernia had grown somewhat between 1915 and 1965 (the unofficial population rose from 500 to 700), the first official US Census count in 1970 tallied a population of 425. However, La Vernia did not incorporate until 1980, at which time the population stood at 632.

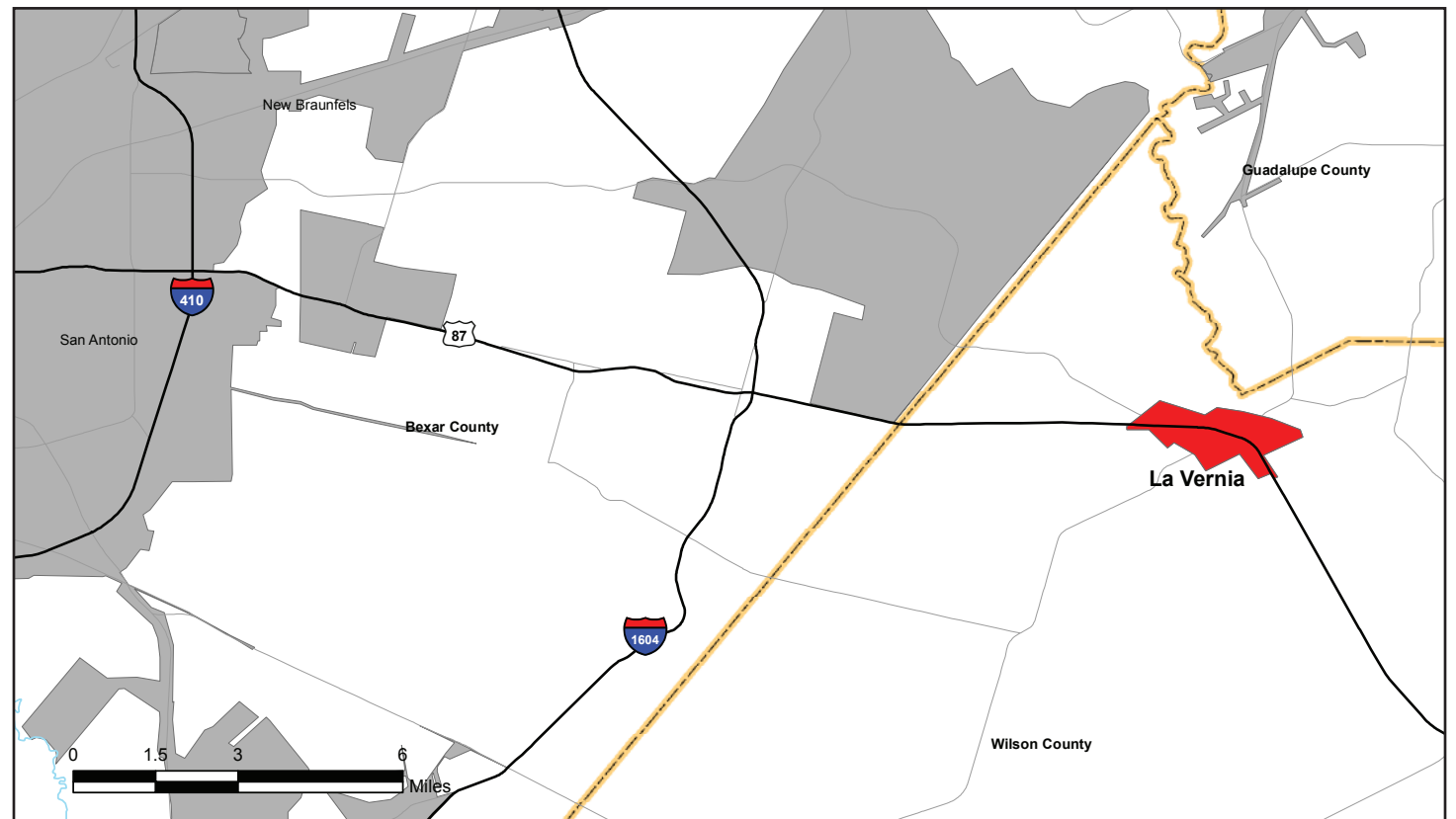


Figure 13: La Vernia in relation to the San Antonio urbanized area

The process of urban sprawl and suburbanization had been present in full force in the City of San Antonio for at least three decades by 1980. La Vernia may have begun experiencing the first wave of “exurban” migration from San Antonio by that time. But it is in the three decades since 1980 that La Vernia has experienced its most rapid population growth. Most of that growth is a consequence of the rapidly expanding San Antonio urbanized area.

This period also roughly coincides with the period of sustained national economic growth that occurred between 1983-2008 (with brief recessions in 1991 and 2000). While Texas suffered from the drop in the price of oil and gas in the 1980s, its economy also diversified during this period. Currently its economy is among the healthiest in the country, even in the aftermath of the economic downturn of 2008. Between 1990 and 2010, La Vernia grew from 639 residents to 1034 residents.

La Vernia effectively changed as a result of this exurbanization process. Instead of having most of its residents living relatively close to its historic center along Chihuahua Street, they were now dispersed over a wide area which incorporated formerly rural or agricultural land. As defined by a recent Brookings Institution study, exurban census tracts average about 14 acres of land per household, as compared with the national average of about 0.8 acres of land per household (*Berube*). Texas now leads the nation in total exurban population, with some 1.2 million of its 20.8 million people (as of 2000), or 6.0%, living in exurbs. This is

higher than the national average of 3.8% of the population being exurban.

The San Antonio metropolitan currently area ranks 22nd out of 88 large metropolitan areas in terms of the percentage of the population which is exurban. Of the 1.7 million people in the seven-county metropolitan area in 2000, approximately one-eighth (12.4%, or about 211,000) lived in exurban areas (*Berube*).

For La Vernia, this has meant the dispersal of the community over a larger and larger area. It has also led to a decline of its historic economic center along Chihuahua Street. Businesses have also shifted west, along US 87 and Farm to Market Road (FM) 1346.

The shift had already begun as early as the 1920s and 1930s with the construction of US 87. It accelerated in the postwar period. However, it has only been in the last three decades that the phenomenon has become most evident. Suburbanization and urban sprawl continue today. If San Antonio grows at the same pace numerically and spatially over the next three decades as it has over the last three, La Vernia could find itself becoming a suburb of San Antonio. Today, it is only about a dozen miles or so from Loop 410, which more or less delineates the existing urbanized area of San Antonio along its southern and southeast edge. (see Figure 13). Loop 1604, San Antonio’s “outer ring” is much closer. It is scarcely half a dozen miles from La Vernia.



Figure 14: Typical New Single Family Home

La Vernia Today

La Vernia Planning Charrette Process

A Planning Charrette was held in the Urban Planning Studio in the College of Architecture at the Downtown Campus of the University of Texas at San Antonio on Wednesday, June 12, 2013. The purpose of this charrette was to allow stakeholders of La Vernia (residents, local leaders and public officials) to identify the current Strengths and Weaknesses and the future Opportunities and Threats (categories known collectively as SWOT) for the community. Twenty-four stakeholders from the community participated in this Planning Charrette.

After a brief introduction to the planning process, the stakeholders formed two groups of about twelve each. Each group was led by a moderator from the research staff of the UTSA Center for Urban and Regional Planning and Research (CURPR) and was assigned a graduate assistant to record the SWOT factors identified by the group. As each category was addressed within the groups, the moderator asked the group for examples of that category, and reiterated the examples so that they were recorded.

When each group finished discussion about a category, the list of examples for that category was posted on the wall for the stakeholders to view. At the end of the SWOT portion of the Planning Charrette these lists (four from each group) were summarized by a stakeholder serving as group spokesperson. In addition, maps of La Vernia were provided along with stickers so that each stakeholder had

an opportunity to identify the major entrances to the city. After a short period of discussion, the formal portion of the Planning Charrette was concluded. However, stakeholders were welcome to stay and discuss the results informally with each other and with the CURPR staff.

Strengths

Some of the first strengths to be mentioned were the small-town atmosphere and identity of La Vernia. It was

also noted that the city is a close-knit community and is family-oriented. The high quality of the school district was identified as an important strength, as were the high education levels and high incomes of the residents of the La Vernia community. The safe nature of the community was also seen as a major strength. The relatively low crime rate, and the relative quiet of residential streets were highlighted as well. Associated with these strengths was a sense of community pride among the residents.



Source: Elaine Stephens

Figure 15: : La Vernia Planning Charrette, June 12, 2013

Other key strengths identified by the stakeholders included: community involvement in children’s activities such as sports, churches, and the CYO; participation in community organizations; and the active role of both businesses individually and through the Chamber of Commerce and churches in the community.

Another set of strengths was related to its proximity to San Antonio. Specifically, Highway 87 was considered to provide easy access between La Vernia and San Antonio and the nearby countryside. One result of this easy access was that La Vernia is a good place for commuters to live, particularly those commuting to San Antonio. The proximity of San Antonio also means that La Vernia has easy access to the San Antonio labor market.

La Vernia also has a number of strengths deriving from its historical heritage. First and foremost is the history of the Chihuahua Trail, which was a 19th-century stagecoach route that passed through La Vernia and was, in fact, an important factor in the town’s initial settlement and growth. One of the legacies of the Chihuahua Trail is the traditional “Main Street” of the city along Chihuahua Street. Also mentioned were the Gonzales Road Marker and the historic bridge (linked with the history of the Alamo and thus with the history of San Antonio). The role of the La Vernia Historical Association in highlighting the city’s historical legacy, and the uniquely diverse heritage of the community were also considered strengths.

Various community events held in La Vernia were identified as strengths as well. Among those mentioned were the Chihuahua Trail Art Show; the Bluebonnet Festival; the Barbecue Cook-Off and Music Festival; bike events; and trail rides. The natural landscape of the hills near La Vernia and Cibolo Creek, the city parks, and the railroad right-of-way were also mentioned as strengths of the community.

In addition, the high amount of professional services per capita, the presence of emergency services, the recent opening of an H-E-B supermarket, and the proximity of the Eagle Ford Shale Play, and its economic activity were all identified as strengths.

Weaknesses

Many of the identified weaknesses highlights the relative lack of various types of service and economic infrastructures in La Vernia and the need to address that deficiency. The following weaknesses related to a lack of civic infrastructure were the absence of a community center and a central gathering place such as a town square or plaza; poor pedestrian accessibility; few sidewalks; lack of emergency medical response services; inadequate storm water drainage; outdated water and sewer mains; an overburdened city water system; the excessive amount of time needed for addressing public infrastructure projects; the insufficient size of city hall for serving the city’s growing population (especially with regard to parking); and the difficulty in providing critical infrastructures to meet the needs of a rapidly growing population.

Another set of weaknesses derived from a lack of economic infrastructure, particularly as it relates to the community’s tax base and revenue for city government; absence of a commercial and economic hub; insufficient shopping or entertainment facilities that would make La Vernia a destination; the relative lack of nightlife, which would also draw people to La Vernia (or in the case of residents, keep them in La Vernia) to spend money; the resulting loss of potential sales tax revenue; the lack of local businesses to generate revenue and keep the consumer expenditures in La Vernia; the lack of good primary (well-paid, non-service) jobs in town; the absence of rental housing properties; the lack of dedicated easements on Chihuahua Street, which makes redevelopment of the historic “Main Street” of the city more problematic; little hotel space; and lack of businesses catering to young people (often overlooked as a source of revenue and also as a source of community cohesion).

A third set of weaknesses were specific to La Vernia’s road infrastructure and street network. Among these were: the low connectivity of the street network (i.e. “not enough corners”); the linear, elongated shape of the city, with Highway 87 being the driving force behind that shape; unnecessary traffic congestion and bottlenecks caused by the lack of an effective way to cope or manage with the increased traffic load at school drop-off and pick-up points; and the negative impacts of heavy-load truck traffic associated with the Eagle Ford Shale drilling activity.

Other weaknesses identified by the stakeholders were: the difficulty or inability to annex land needed to handle future growth; being seen as the “stepchild” of Wilson County in terms of funding and the attention paid to La Vernia by the county government in Floresville; the relative lack of community outreach programs; the rapid increase in land prices and the effect of that increase on housing affordability. Also considered to be a major weakness is the presence of the Cibolo Creek floodplain and floodway to the east and north of town, which: (a) leads to a risk of flooding of farmland and residences already present in the floodplain; and (b) prevents the future growth of La Vernia to the north and east, meaning that virtually all future growth will be increasingly distant from the historic downtown.

Threats

Understandably, many of the potential threats are linked with the current weaknesses. For example, the historical buildings in the old downtown area are at risk or in danger of being neglected or being replaced. The nature of traffic along Highway 87, including commuters and 18-wheeler traffic from the Eagle Ford Shale Play, is such that La Vernia is at risk of turning into a “bedroom” community with little or no economic activity of its own save for that related to Highway 87 (gasoline stations and convenience stores). The lack of clear signage identifying downtown and other points of interest, and the lack of sufficient parking downtown mean that businesses which are not located along Highway 87 may have difficulty staying open, and eventually disappear.

The proximity to San Antonio is a strength, but also a threat. The threat is the encroachment of San Antonio’s area of extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ) moving closer to La Vernia, with the possibility of it eventually reaching the current La Vernia city limits. In that case, any possibility for La Vernia growing and broadening its revenue sources and tax base, will be severely diminished. The lack of funding to implement plans and its inability to annex land are crucial weaknesses which contribute to this threat of being surrounded or “swallowed” (economically if not politically) by San Antonio.

Another concern raised was that the suburbanization of the area surrounding La Vernia, and especially the increase in housing prices without a corresponding increase in city revenue or in its median household income, would result in the “hollowing out” of La Vernia. In this scenario the housing stock would remain for the most part, but a significant portion of the local residents (especially those on fixed incomes) would be “priced out” of the market.

This potential lack of affordable housing was also noted as a serious threat. It could result not only as a consequence of the expansion of the San Antonio metropolitan area, but also as a result of the economic boom associated with the Eagle Ford Shale Play. In La Vernia’s case, it could come under pressure as the need for housing (both temporary and permanent) grew, and an increased demand resulting in a drastic increase in both rental and sale prices. If the demand for housing were combined with little or no tax revenue coming from Eagle Ford Shale related businesses,

La Vernia would be hit with the negative impacts of Eagle Ford while not sharing in the positive impacts that increased business activity could bring.

As the situation currently stands, La Vernia lacks the ability to provide “shovel-ready” sites where businesses can locate in a timely manner. Combined with the resistance by some in the community to economic growth and the fear of rapid change, this poses a significant threat to the economic future of the community. In addition, the lack of sales tax and other business-based revenue will make it more difficult for La Vernia to update its infrastructure thereby increasing its vulnerability to flooding and the economic costs, associated with that vulnerability.

Opportunities

The potential threats facing La Vernia are not inevitable or unavoidable. Quite the contrary. In fact, there is an equally potent list of future opportunities which, if realized, could result in more or less a mirror image of the one given in the previous section.

One of La Vernia’s strongest potential opportunities is its ability to leverage its proximity to both San Antonio and the Eagle Ford Shale Play to capture some of the economic benefits that would otherwise pass it by. For instance, its easy access to San Antonio and Seguin could serve as a marketing tool to oil and gas company executives who want to live within easy commuting distance of the Eagle Ford Shale Play, while enjoying easy access to important

government and corporate offices in the San Antonio metropolitan area.

If La Vernia were able to draw a sufficient number of corporate executives, it could transform itself into a financial services and shopping hub for the Eagle Ford Shale region. Some executives already live in the La Vernia area, so there is a foundation on which to build. Increased business activity would, in turn, lead to an increase in sales tax revenue.

La Vernia could also leverage its educational facilities for possible career retraining and vocational education programs. Furthermore, La Vernia is close enough to San Antonio that it could possibly form a partnership or joint effort with one or more of San Antonio's several institutions of higher education to provide programs—along with college and university courses—at a satellite or branch campus.

There is a need but also a great potential for medical facilities in this area. La Vernia is just far enough from San Antonio, Seguin, and Floresville to warrant its own comprehensive care facility. It need not be a full-fledged hospital, but it would need to be open 24 hours if the population grows as quickly as the projections indicate.

La Vernia also has potential to develop both its historical tourism and event tourism assets. Historical buildings in the Mill area, Chihuahua Street, and elsewhere could provide a glimpse of La Vernia's heritage, while the Cibolo

Creek area and the landscape of the hills near La Vernia could serve as recreational destinations. La Vernia already has a partnership with the San Antonio River Authority (SARA), which would be useful for both preserving the quality of Cibolo Creek and providing a place for the local population to enjoy the amenities associated with a healthy riparian environment.

La Vernia's "Norman Rockwell" image of small-town America could also provide it with a niche for a regional tourism economy. Existing events such as the bike ride and music festival have the potential to reinforce this image and attract repeat visitors on a regular basis. Related to this is the potential for a farmer's market located in a square or plaza in the historic part of town. This would reinforce La Vernia's small-town image while also providing additional tax revenue.

One of the most important opportunities is the potential for La Vernia to issue bonds and thus improve its infrastructure. This will be key to securing both new businesses and new residents. La Vernia currently has a low level of indebtedness and so it has ample room to maneuver financially to accommodate future growth. The city will be able to plan its future growth instead of having to react to unplanned growth which would be more costly and less flexible than planning ahead. There is already a good network of utility providers in place to provide the necessary business infrastructure that will be needed. There is also significant potential for cooperation between

the city government and the private sector to attract and retain new businesses.

The population in the surrounding area (within a 10-mile radius) already strongly identifies itself with La Vernia. This means that La Vernia has a very high chance of capturing not only its primary market area (0-5 miles), but its secondary market area (5-10 miles) as well. The major traffic arteries—Highway 90 and Farm to Market 775 (Bluebonnet and Seguin Roads) could serve as "growth corridors" in this regard, as they would see a potential infill of commercial, retail, medium-density residential, and public/institutional land uses as the city grows in population and size.

The potential of FM 775 should not be overlooked as an axis for future development. It represents an area of potential competition with Floresville (to the southwest) and Seguin (to the northeast) for secondary markets. This is due to the fact that the secondary market of La Vernia overlaps with the secondary markets of the other two. For example, the area along FM 775, which is between 5 and 10 miles from La Vernia, is also around 5 and 10 miles from Floresville. If La Vernia is able to capitalize on this development it could increase its economic base significantly.

Demographics

Population

Over the past four decades, La Vernia has undergone a significant change: from a small rural town of a few hundred people in 1970, to a fast-growing bedroom community of over 1,000 people in 2010. This reflects the changing demographics of Wilson County, which has grown at an even faster rate than La Vernia over the same time span, and which is now considered to be part of the San Antonio-New Braunfels Metropolitan Statistical Area.

Table 1: La Vernia and Wilson County: Population Growth, 1970-2050 (projected population for 2020-2050)

Year	La Vernia	Growth	Wilson	Growth
1970	425		13,041	
1980	632	48.71%	16,756	28.49%
1990	639	1.11%	22,650	35.18%
2000	931	45.70%	32,408	43.08%
2010	1,034	11.06%	42,918	32.43%
2020	1,219	17.89%	50,596	17.89%
2030	1,418	16.32%	58,852	16.32%
2040	1,589	12.10%	65,974	12.10%
2050	1,727	8.65%	71,683	8.65%

Source: US Census Bureau and Texas State Data Center

Future population totals are projected according to a migration model established by the Office of the State Demographer. The three major forecast trends are based on zero in-migration, migration at the same rate as 2000-

2010 (known as “1.0”), and migration at half the rate of 2000-2010 (known as “0.5”). This study uses the “0.5” model, as it represents the middle path, where migration is still significant but not to the same extent as it was in the first decade of the 21st century.

While La Vernia is projected to have a 2050 population approximately 2 ½ times larger than its 1970 population, Wilson County is projected to more than triple over the same time span (see Table 1). In both cases, recent growth and future growth are largely the result of the continued trend in suburbanization seen not only in San Antonio but in many other urban areas across Texas, and across the nation. The flight of people and jobs from within San Antonio’s city boundaries to suburbs in Bexar County, and to exurbs in surrounding counties has created difficulties both for the central city (which loses substantial tax revenue but is still bound to provide services) and for the growing suburbs and exurbs which experience sharp increases in property values and traffic congestion but struggle to upgrade the infrastructure from rural to suburban as fast as the growth occurs.

By comparing the two figures below (Figures 16 and 17), it is apparent that as a small town, La Vernia experiences much more fluctuation in its growth than does Wilson County. Larger geographic units, for the most part, are aggregates of smaller units, and thus exhibit less volatility (fluctuation) over time than those smaller units. Both La Vernia and Wilson County are projected to continue to grow at a steady pace over the next four decades.

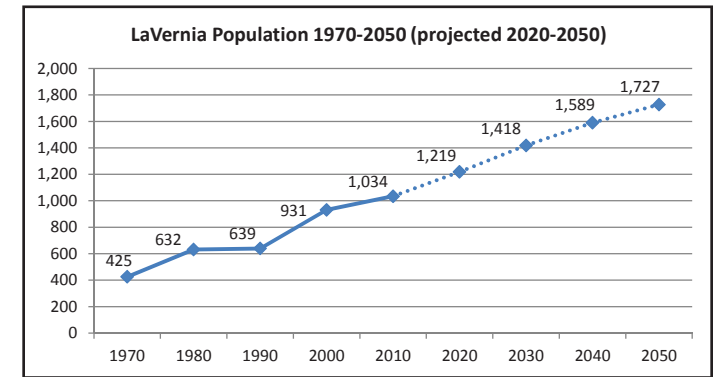


Figure 16: La Vernia Population Growth, 1970-2050
Source: US Census Bureau Texas State Data Center

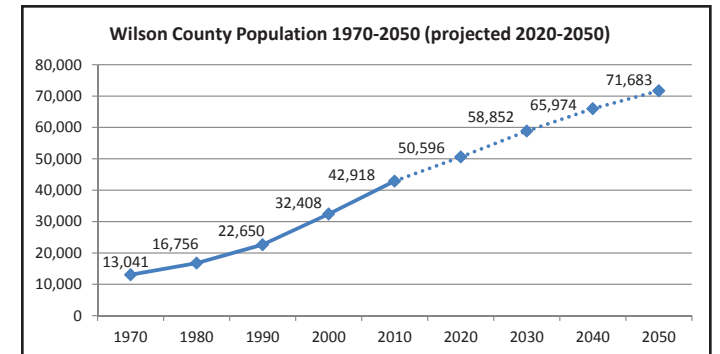


Figure 17: Wilson County Population Growth, 1970-2050
Source: US Census Bureau and Texas State Data Center

Further insights can be gathered by looking at the age cohorts of the population; in particular, comparing the under 18 and over 64 age cohorts (sometimes termed the “dependent” population) with the 18 to 64 age cohort (sometimes called the “working-age” population). The most noticeable difference between La Vernia and Wilson County is the difference in the 18 to 64 and the over 64 age cohorts. La Vernia has a higher share of population over

64 than Wilson County, and a lower share of population from 18 to 64 (Tables 2 and 3).

The median age for La Vernia is almost two years younger than that of Wilson County. This is partly due to the distribution of the population within those larger cohorts. For example, the five-year cohort with the largest share of the population in La Vernia is the 10-14 age group, which accounts for 10% of its total population; the age cohort with the largest share in Wilson County is 45-49, with 8.6% of its total population.

Table 2: La Vernia Population by Age, 2010

Under 18	275	26.6%
18 to 64	607	58.7%
Over 64	152	14.7%
Total	1,034	100.0%
Median Age 38.2		

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Table 3: Wilson County Population by Age, 2010

Under 18	11,334	26.4%
18 to 64	26,172	61.0%
Over 64	5,412	12.6%
Total	42,918	100.0%
Median Age 40.0		

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Race/Ethnicity

Unfortunately, data on race/ethnicity for La Vernia is only available from the 1990 Census and later. This is due to its small size. Before 1990 such data was only available for places with a population of 1,000 or higher. Data for Wilson County is available from before 1980, but specific population counts for the Hispanic/Latino population were

not taken before that year. Therefore, the relevant data on race and ethnicity for Wilson County is only available from the 1980 Census and later.

Table 4: La Vernia Race and Ethnicity - 1990-2010

Race/Ethnicity	1990	2000	2010
White, non-Hispanic	469 73.4%	719 77.2%	771 74.6%
Hispanic, all races	168 26.3%	186 20.0%	227 22.0%
Other, non-Hispanic	2 0.3%	26 2.8%	36 3.5%
Total	639	931	1034

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Table 5: Wilson County Race and Ethnicity - 1990-2010

Wilson County Race/Ethnicity				
Race/Ethnicity	1980	1990	2000	2010
White, non-Hispanic	10,388 62.0%	14,273 63.0%	19,728 60.9%	25,186 58.7%
Hispanic, all races	6,112 36.5%	8,054 35.6%	11,834 36.5%	16,412 38.2%
Other, non-Hispanic	256 1.5%	323 1.4%	846 2.6%	1,320 3.1%
Total	16,756	22,650	32,408	42,918

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

As can be seen in the above tables and figures, there is a distinct difference between La Vernia and Wilson County in terms of race/ethnicity. La Vernia has a higher percentage of White, non-Hispanic population and a lower percentage of Hispanic population (all races) than Wilson County (Tables 4 and 5).

In fact, the Hispanic share of La Vernia's population was lower in 2010 than it was in 1990. This can be seen by comparing the green columns and the red columns in Figures 18 and 19. In the red column (representing

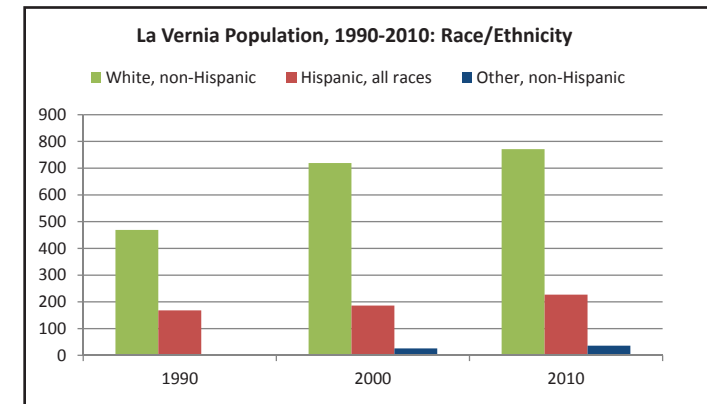


Figure 18: La Vernia, 1990-2010: Race/ Ethnicity

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

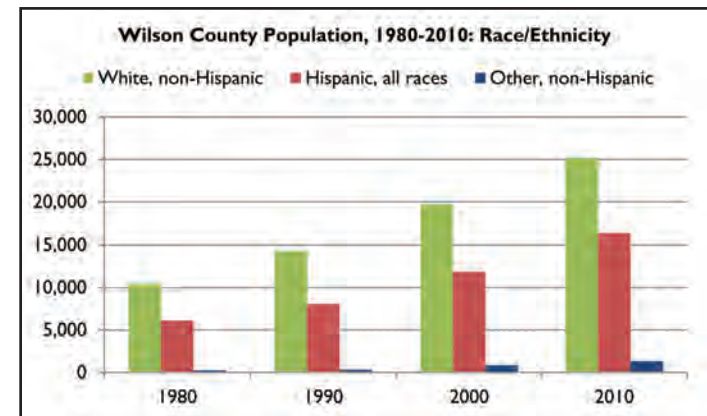


Figure 19: Wilson County, 1980-2010: Race/Ethnicity

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Hispanic, all races), there is very little change for La Vernia, meaning the absolute numbers of the Hispanic population changed very little. By contrast, there is significant change in the Hispanic population in Wilson County, as the absolute numbers and the share of the total population both increase.

In both cases, the green column (representing White, non-Hispanic) increases, but in Wilson County the rate of increase is outpaced by the rate of increase for the Hispanic population. However, in La Vernia the population growth over the past twenty years is primarily the result of growth in the White non-Hispanic population, particularly between 1990 and 2000.

Housing

La Vernia has a higher share of its occupied units being rented—and a lower share of its occupied units being owner-occupied—than Wilson County overall. Almost one-third of the occupied units in La Vernia are rented, compared with only about one-sixth of the occupied units in Wilson County (Tables 6 and 7).

However, Wilson County has a higher vacancy rate than La Vernia (10.5% compared with 7.1%). This may be due to the economic downturn following 2008, in which many homes lost value and in some cases ended up being worth less than their mortgages.

When an area’s available housing units are owner-occupied rather than rented, the housing market is less flexible. There is also a higher likelihood that newly-built houses will be unoccupied, and that some existing owner-occupied houses will be foreclosed and remain vacant after foreclosure. In an economic downturn in which housing prices have suffered, renting becomes a more attractive option, and this might explain the lower vacancy in La Vernia, as a greater portion of its housing units are rented rather than owner-occupied.

Wilson County has a higher average household size, with 2.82 persons per household, as compared with 2.54 persons per household in La Vernia. This difference is likely due to the higher percentage of renters in La Vernia. For the most part, renters tend to be single, one-parent households, or small families.

Table 6: La Vernia Housing, 2010: Occupancy Status

Total	Vacant	Occupied	Owner-Occupied	Renter-Occupied
438	31	407	274	133
Share of Total	7.1%	92.9%	62.6%	30.4%
Share of Occupied		100.0%	67.3%	32.7%
Average Household Size: 2.54				

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Table 7: Wilson County Housing, 2010: Occupancy Status

Total	Vacant	Occupied	Owner-Occupied	Renter-Occupied
16766	1757	15009	12566	2443
Share of Total	10.5%	89.5%	74.9%	14.6%
Share of Occupied		100.0%	83.7%	16.3%
Average Household Size: 2.82				

Source: U.S. Census Bureau



Figure 20: Housing in the Downtown District

Traffic Patterns

Roads

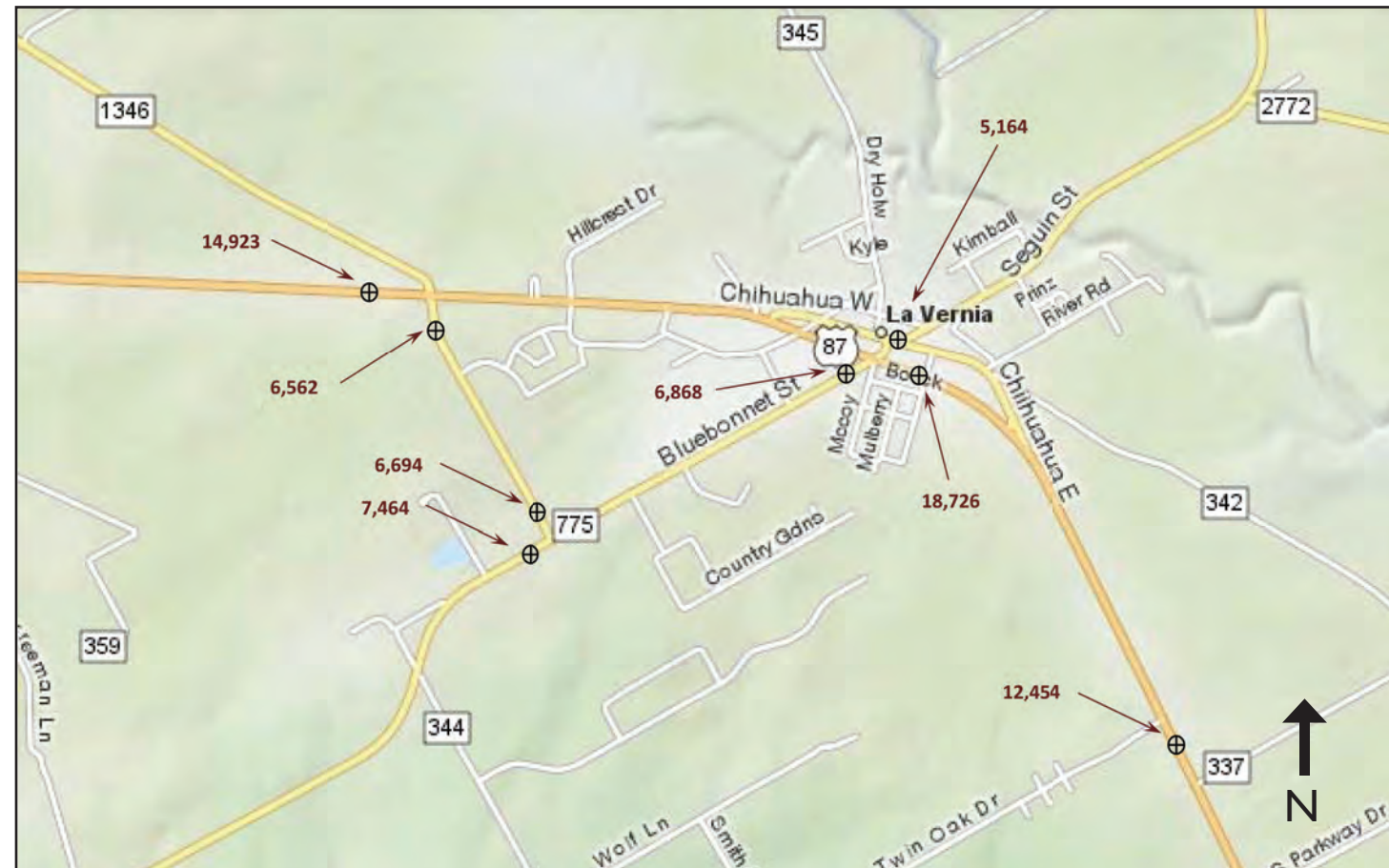
La Vernia's traffic is overwhelmingly concentrated on US Highway 87 (US 87), which runs west from La Vernia toward San Antonio and south from La Vernia toward Stockdale and further on to Cuero, Victoria, and Port Lavaca. The highest annual average daily traffic (AADT) count in 2012 was 18,726 on US 87 a few blocks east of Bluebonnet Road. By comparison, the portion of US 87 near the western edge of La Vernia had an AADT count of 14,923 vehicle trips per day; the portion near the southeastern edge had a count of 12,454 (Figure 21).

After US 87, the next busiest road is Farm to Market (FM) 775, which runs approximately southwest to northeast, and which is called Bluebonnet Road to the southwest of Chihuahua Street and Seguin Road to the northeast of Chihuahua Street. The fourth highest AADT count in La Vernia was along Bluebonnet Road/FM 775 near La Vernia High School, with 7,464 vehicle trips per day. After that, Bluebonnet Road had a count of 6,868 right before the intersection with US 87 and Chihuahua Street had a count of 5,164 right at the intersection with Seguin Road.

In addition to US 87, the roads most likely to be affected by future population growth are FM 1346 and Bluebonnet Road/FM 775. Subdivisions such as Country Hills and Deer Ridge along FM 775 are almost as close to the Bexar County line as they are to La Vernia. Further along FM 775, The Reserve, Vintage Oaks, and Copper Creek residential

areas are more than halfway to US Highway 181 (which links San Antonio with Floresville). The Ranch Country and Oak Hollow subdivisions along US 87 southeast of town are about as close to Sutherland Springs as they are to La Vernia.

The land along US 87 west of town and FM 1346 north of town, which in some cases is still used as ranchland or farmland, has already been "settled" as it were, and has not yet experienced the proliferation of subdivisions seen elsewhere in the area. This area might remain as it is and serve as a sort of "greenbelt" barrier between the San Antonio urbanized area and the La Vernia area.



Source: Texas Department of Transportation

Figure 21: City of La Vernia, Average Daily Traffic Volume, 2012

However, if population projections for Bexar County and the San Antonio Metropolitan Statistical Area hold true, there will be considerable population growth in the next three decades, and along with that an increased chance of further suburbanization and urban sprawl. In that case, the area between the Bexar County line and La Vernia will also undergo development and by doing so bring La Vernia into the San Antonio urbanized area—thereby changing La Vernia from an exurb to a suburb.

Main Streets in La Vernia

Although US 87 runs through the center of La Vernia and has significant commercial activity, it does not quite meet the criteria to be considered as a “Main Street.” Among these criteria are:

- Significant commercial activity
- Historical continuity
- Public places to gather

As the original “Main Street” for La Vernia, Chihuahua Street could ideally be developed in such a way as to recapture the importance it once held as both the hub of business and of social activity in the community.

For the most part, US 87 has taken over the business functions. As for the social and civic functions, these seem to be centered in the area between US 87 and Bluebonnet Road/FM 775. Both the city’s high school and the city park are located in this area, to the west of the historical downtown.

Seguin Road/FM 775 lacks either significant commercial activity or public places to gather; however, it does have the historical identity as the road from La Vernia to Seguin. The portion of the road closest to Chihuahua Street has several acres of empty space and ideally could (and should) be included in any plan to revitalize the historical downtown area.

Bluebonnet Road does not have as much open space to work with near US 87 as Seguin Road has near Chihuahua Street. However, that does not mean Bluebonnet Road should be overlooked when considering ways to improve the historical downtown. For instance, the site of the Brahan Lodge—located between La Vernia High School and US 87—could be improved and better linked with US 87 and Chihuahua Street by expanding the sidewalk along the public right-of-way on the north side of the street.

While the population density of La Vernia and its surroundings is quite low, US 87 still serves as a major traffic corridor. The highway itself has too much traffic to serve as a gathering space, however.

The most logical place for a “Main Street” which has commercial activity, historical continuity, and a central gathering place such as a square or plaza would be in the area where US 87 and Chihuahua Street meet FM 775 (Bluebonnet and Seguin Roads).

Development of the central portion of Chihuahua Street (Figure 22 and 23), whether through restoration or infill,

could achieve the dual purpose of honoring the historical heritage of La Vernia and creating an economically and culturally vibrant downtown.



Figure 22: Chihuahua Street



Figure 23: Chihuahua Street Sidewalk

Economic Base Analysis

While much of the country experienced an increase in the civilian unemployment rate during the last recession, both Wilson County and Texas fared somewhat better. Unemployment increased by about 14% to 15% for each between 2000 and 2010, as compared to an increase of over 36% nationwide (Table 8). La Vernia, by contrast, saw its civilian unemployment rise from 3.5% in 2000 to 12.2% in 2010. Given the small size of the labor force, however, this is understandable: La Vernia had an estimated labor force of 372 in 2000 and 608 in 2010.

La Vernia and Wilson County both experienced a decrease in the percentage of their population below the poverty level, between 2000 and 2010, and thus fared better when compared with the state and the nation. In fact, La Vernia’s poverty level decreased from 12.3% to 6.2%. This can be explained by the relatively good state of the economy in South Texas due to the recent increase in drilling activity in the Eagle Ford Shale area to the south. La Vernia’s proximity to the diverse urban economy of San Antonio also contributed to its lower poverty level.

The three largest industries in La Vernia by share of the city’s work force—highlighted in yellow in Table 9—are (1) Educational, health, and social services; (2) Retail trade; and (3) Construction. Both retail trade and construction moved into the top three industries between 2000 and 2010, replacing Transportation, warehousing etc. (which fell

from second to eighth) and Public administration (which fell from third to tie for sixth).

Table 8: Changes in Economic Measures - 2000-2010

Economic Measure	La Vernia	Wilson County	Texas	United States
Civilian Unemployment, 2000 (%)	3.5	4.9	6.1	5.8
Civilian Unemployment, 2010 (%)	12.2	5.6	7.0	7.9
Change, 2000-2010	248.6%	14.3%	14.8%	36.2%
Population below Poverty Level, 2000 (%)	12.3	11.3	15.4	12.4
Population below Poverty Level, 2010 (%)	6.2	9.0	16.8	13.8
Change, 2000-2010	-49.6%	-20.4%	9.1%	11.3%
Median Household Income (MHI), 2000	\$38,500	\$40,006	\$39,927	\$41,994
Median Household Income (MHI), 2010	\$51,513	\$60,493	\$49,646	\$51,914
Change, 2000-2010	33.8%	51.2%	24.3%	23.6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

La Vernia Gap Analysis

In business and economics, a gap analysis is a tool that helps companies, organizations, and communities compare actual performance with potential performance. At its core are two questions: “Where are we?” and “Where do we want to be?” If a community does not make the best use of current resources, or forgoes investment in capital, technology, and infrastructure, it may produce or perform below its economic potential.

Many communities use gap analysis as an informational tool to determine precisely where they have the most potential

for improvement. For La Vernia, this analysis ensures that city funds and efforts dedicated to improving performance can be applied in the most efficient and effective way.

This gap analysis for La Vernia and the surrounding area is intended to identify particular sectors and/or industries in which La Vernia has a comparative advantage, but which

Table 9: La Vernia Employment by Industry - 2000-2010

Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	3.1	4.7	51.6%
Construction	7.2	13.1	81.9%
Manufacturing	5.8	9.0	55.2%
Wholesale trade	3.1	2.8	-9.7%
Retail trade	6.7	13.1	95.5%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	12.3	5.2	-57.7%
Information	2.5	2.2	-12.0%
Finance, insurance, real estate, and rental and leasing	6.7	2.1	-68.7%
Professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services	5.6	6.4	14.3%
Educational, health and social services	22.0	23.4	6.4%
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services	8.1	9.2	13.6%
Other services (except public administration)	8.1	2.4	-70.4%
Public administration	8.9	6.4	-28.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

have not yet been developed to their fullest potential. The gap analysis is not meant to be comprehensive, in the sense that all under-represented industries should be developed; rather, development should be targeted and precise.

This is in order to realize the maximum return on investment (whether that investment be public, private, or a mix of the

two) and to provide the highest possible benefit to the stakeholders of La Vernia—businesses, government, and residents. This analysis is based on data provided by a June 2013 report from the Rural Business Program, including data from the Nielsen Company (*Executive Summary 2013*).

The population of the City of La Vernia was 1,034 in 2010 and was estimated to be 1,111 in 2012, which represents a growth of 7.4%. There were 407 households within the city limits in 2010 (See *Table 10*).

As noted in *Table 10* the population of the primary market area (0 – 5 mile radius) was 10,293 in 2010, and is projected to be 10,836 in 2013, a growth rate of 5.3%. From 2013 to 2018 the growth rate is expected to be 8.8%. The number of households is also projected to grow from 3,543 to 3,720 between 2010 and 2013. This represents an increase of 5.0% of the projected growth in households between 2010 and 2013 (*Executive Summary 2013*).

The population of the secondary market area (0 – 10 mile radius) was 27,828 in 2010 and is projected to be 29,268 in 2013, which is a growth rate of 5.2%. The population is expected to grow by 8.7% between 2013 and 2018. There were 9,844 households in the secondary market area in 2010, and an estimated 10,374 households in 2013. This represents an increase of 5.4%. The number of households in the secondary market area is expected to grow by 9.1% between 2013 and 2018 (*Executive Summary 2013*).

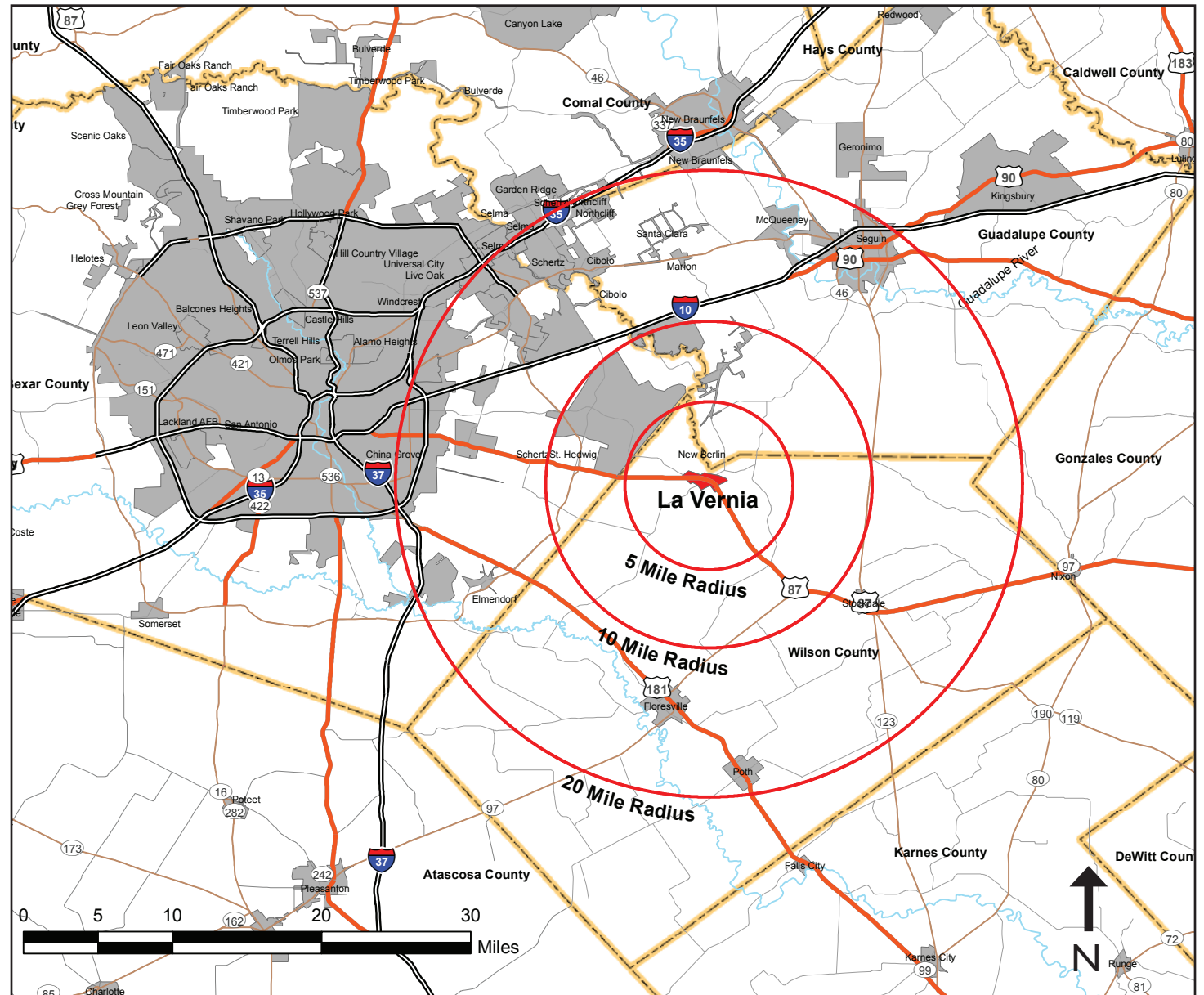


Figure 24: City of La Vernia with 5, 10, and 20-mile radii Market Areas

Table 10: Comparison of Basic Data for Gap Analysis Zones

Data	City of La Vernia	Primary Market (0 - 5 mile radius)	Secondary Market (0 - 10 mile radius)
Population 2010	1,034	10,293	27,828
Population 2013 (est.)	1,111	10,836	29,268
Change %	7.4	5.3	5.2
Households 2010	407	3,543	9,844
Households 2013 (est.)	not available	3,720	10,374
Change %	not available	5.0	5.4
Consumer Expenditures 2013 (est.)	\$15,763,471	\$174,988,893	\$471,841,034
Retail Sales 2013 (est.)	\$8,423,227	\$45,749,543	\$138,128,469
Opportunity Gap	\$7,340,244	\$129,239,350	\$333,712,565
Lost Consumer Expenditure (Percent)	46.56%	73.86%	70.73%

Source: "Executive Summary 2013: La Vernia, TX 78121" [Adobe PDF]; "La Vernia Gap Analysis" [Excel spreadsheet]; "RMP Opportunity Gap – Retail Stores (La Vernia)" [Adobe PDF]; Rural Business Center, 2013; U.S. Census Bureau. 2010 Census; 2012 population estimates

The population of the tertiary market area (0 – 20 mile radius) was 338,627 in 2010, and is projected to grow to 357,287 in 2013, a growth rate of 5.5%. The population is expected to grow an additional 9.0% between 2013 and 2018. In 2010, there were 117,172 households in the tertiary market area, and in 2013 there are an estimated 123,717 households, which represents an increase of 5.6%. The number of households in the tertiary market is expected to grow by 9.2% between 2013 and 2018 (*Executive Summary*).

Retail Trade Analysis and Gap Analysis

A Retail Market Power Opportunity Gap Analysis was also performed for La Vernia and its surrounding market area. The four zones examined were:

1. City of La Vernia (area within city limits)

2. 0 – 5 mile radius (Primary Market Area)
3. 0 – 10 mile radius (Secondary Market Area)
4. 0 – 20 mile radius (Tertiary Market Area)

Of these four zones, two will be examined in detail: the 0 – 5 mile radius (also known as the primary market) and the 0 – 10 mile radius (also known as the secondary market). The City of La Vernia zone is focused too narrowly to get a true picture of the La Vernia market area. Conversely, the 0 – 20 mile radius (also known as the tertiary market) has too broad a focus, as it encompasses almost the entirety of Wilson County (including Floresville), almost half of Guadalupe County (including Seguin), and a considerable portion of eastern Bexar County (including parts of San Antonio)(see Figure 24).

Gap Analysis I: City of La Vernia (Within City Limits)

The market area within the La Vernia city limits has an estimated total of about \$15,763,000 in consumer expenditures for 2013, and an estimated total of about \$8,423,000 in retail sales. This represents an opportunity gap, or retail supply deficit, of about \$7,340,000 (See Table 10). This means that about 47% of the total consumer spending by residents living within the city limits goes to businesses outside city limits.

Of the 46 sectors with state sales data (and thus a measurable market potential), only one sector has a retail market potential of 1.00 or greater: Gasoline Stations with Convenience Stores, which has a potential of 1.30. This means that there is a possibility of locating at least one new business of average size (for that sector) without resulting in an opportunity surplus (an oversupply of retail business in that sector).

A potential below 1.00 is considered Low; a potential between 1.00 and 2.99 is considered Medium; and a potential of 3.00 or greater is considered High. Since the rest of the sectors have very low or negative potentials—and also since quite a few people in the La Vernia market area do not live within the city limits—it is best to turn to the next largest zone.

Gap Analysis 2: Primary Market Area (0 – 5 Miles)

Overall, the area delimited within a five-mile radius of the city center of La Vernia has an estimated total of about \$174,989,000 in consumer expenditures for 2013, and an estimated total of about \$45,750,000 in retail sales. This represents an opportunity gap, or retail supply deficit, of about \$129,239,000 (see Table 10). This means that about 74% of total consumer spending by people living within a five-mile radius of La Vernia—over \$129 million of an estimated annual \$175 million—is going to businesses located outside that five mile radius.

The key number for addressing this (or any) gap analysis is the retail market potential, which represents the opportunity provided by the gap relative to what already exists in the market area (not the absolute opportunity). This is because of the disparity in average business size from sector to sector; therefore, a sector with a very large average business size—in employees, but more importantly, in sales—will “eat up” much more of an opportunity gap than a sector with a very small average business size.

The sectors with the highest potentials are therefore those in which businesses are most needed (given the average size of businesses in that sector) and economic development efforts can be most effective.

The 14 sectors with the most potential for the La Vernia Primary Market area (within a 5-mile radius of the town center) are shown in Table 11.

It is clear from the potential for these 14 sectors that La Vernia’s primary market area has considerable room for economic growth. In fact, it is imperative that La Vernia “capture” these consumer expenditures to avoid losing its primary market area to nearby competitors. These include not only San Antonio to the northwest, but Floresville to the southwest, and Seguin to the northeast.

The shortage of supply to meet consumer demand in these sectors should be remedied as soon as possible to stanch the loss of consumer expenditures (and hence the loss of sales tax revenue) to rival market areas. Ultimately, the goal should be to increase La Vernia’s economic tax base to a level commensurate with the population of its primary



Figure 25: City of La Vernia, Primary Market Area (within 5-mile radius)

Table 11: Sectors with High Potential for La Vernia’s Primary Market

Sector	Opportunity Gap	TX Avg. Sales per Business	Potential
Gasoline Stations with Convenience Stores	\$12,363,962	\$700,000	17.66
Building Material and Supply Dealers	\$15,526,166	\$900,000	17.25
Limited-Service Eating Places	\$5,894,873	\$500,000	11.79
Full-Service Restaurants	\$6,966,578	\$600,000	11.61
Women's Clothing Stores	\$1,432,264	\$200,000	7.16
Other Miscellaneous Store Retailers	\$2,636,298	\$400,000	6.59
Pharmacies and Drug Stores	\$5,421,982	\$900,000	6.02
Automotive Parts/Accessories and Tire Stores	\$2,236,964	\$400,000	5.59
Grocery Stores	\$19,445,847	\$4,300,000	4.52
Sporting Goods Stores	\$1,260,097	\$300,000	4.20
Beer, Wine, and Liquor Stores	\$1,454,324	\$400,000	3.64
Lawn, Garden Equipment and Supply Stores	\$1,400,730	\$400,000	3.50
Gift, Novelty, and Souvenir Stores	\$683,074	\$200,000	3.42
Shoe Stores	\$1,018,539	\$300,000	3.40

Source: “La Vernia Gap Analysis” [Excel spreadsheet]; “RMP Opportunity Gap – Retail Stores (La Vernia)” [Adobe PDF]; Rural Business Center, 2013

market (and the expenses associated with the provision of services and infrastructure to that population).

Gap Analysis 3: Secondary Market Area (0 – 10 Miles)

The fact that the secondary market areas of Floresville, Seguin, and San Antonio all overlap with the secondary market areas of La Vernia means that La Vernia is in direct competition with those three areas for its secondary market.

The map shown in Figure's 24 and 26 illustrates that significant portions of La Vernia's secondary market are also part of neighboring secondary markets. It will therefore be very difficult for La Vernia to capture the entirety of consumer expenditures within its secondary market area. In particular, it will be difficult for La Vernia to compete with San Antonio in its secondary market area to the northwest.

It should also be clear, however, that although its secondary market area will be difficult to capture in its entirety, La Vernia should still make every possible effort to fully capture or maximize the potential of its primary market area—which in the direction of San Antonio happens to end just about at the Wilson/Bexar County Line.

Overall, the area delimited within a ten-mile radius of the city center of La Vernia has an estimated total of about \$471,841,000 in consumer expenditures for 2013,

and an estimated total of about \$138,128,000 in retail sales. The result is a deficit, or opportunity gap, of about \$333,713,000 (see Table 10). This represents a loss of almost 71% of consumer expenditure to businesses outside the secondary market area.

Every sector listed in Table 11 (for the primary market area), save one, also has a high potential for the secondary market, and is shown in white in Table 12 on the next page. The lone exception is Gasoline Stations with Convenience Stores, which as mentioned previously, was the only sector to have a potential greater than 1.00 for the City of La Vernia (the smallest area studied), and was also the sector with the highest potential (17.66) for the primary market area.

The potential of the Gasoline Stations with Convenience Stores sector is actually negative, which means there is an oversupply of such establishments for La Vernia's secondary market area. However, since the same sector has the highest potential for the primary market, it is apparent that the oversupply is taking place within the area between five and ten miles from La Vernia, and not in the between zero and five miles from La Vernia (for which there is actually a shortage of gasoline stations with convenience stores).

In addition to the 13 sectors remaining from the primary market, 16 sectors have high potential specifically for the secondary market, and are shown in italics and with a tan background in Table 12. This brings the total number of

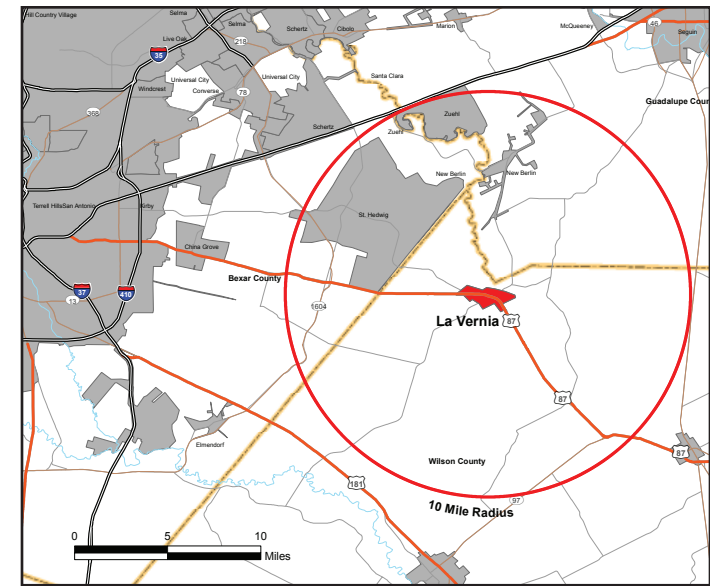


Figure 26: City of La Vernia, Secondary Market Area (within 10-mile radius)

sectors with high potential for the secondary market to 29.

Gap Analysis 4: Tertiary Market Area (0 – 20 Miles)

The tertiary market area, defined by a 20-mile radius from the center of La Vernia, is notable for the size of its population: over 12 times the population of the secondary market area and almost 33 times the population of the primary market area. This is due to the urbanized nature of a significant portion of the area, which encompasses a substantial portion of eastern Bexar County, including a portion of San Antonio, the western half of Guadalupe

Table 12: Sectors with High Potential for La Vernia's Secondary Market (0 - 10 mile radius)

Sector	Opportunity Gap	TX Avg. Sales per Business	Potential
Building Material and Supply Dealers	\$39,375,885	\$900,000	43.75
Limited-Service Eating Places	\$18,459,324	\$500,000	36.92
Full-Service Restaurants	\$18,332,554	\$600,000	30.55
Pharmacies and Drug Stores	\$18,317,615	\$900,000	20.35
Other Miscellaneous Store Retailers	\$6,903,579	\$400,000	17.26
Automotive Parts/Accessories and Tire Stores	\$6,210,553	\$400,000	15.53
Women's Clothing Stores	\$2,509,353	\$200,000	12.55
Grocery Stores	\$51,581,503	\$4,300,000	12.00
Beer, Wine and Liquor Stores	\$3,959,681	\$400,000	9.90
Gift, Novelty and Souvenir Stores	\$1,837,969	\$200,000	9.19
Sporting Goods Stores	\$2,751,470	\$300,000	9.17
Shoe Stores	\$2,699,277	\$300,000	9.00
<i>Other Clothing Stores</i>	<i>\$1,540,016</i>	<i>\$200,000</i>	<i>7.70</i>
<i>Book Stores</i>	<i>\$1,536,362</i>	<i>\$200,000</i>	<i>7.68</i>
<i>Clothing Accessories Stores</i>	<i>\$716,631</i>	<i>\$100,000</i>	<i>7.17</i>
Lawn, Garden Equipment, Supplies Stores	\$2,866,491	\$400,000	7.17
<i>Sew/Needlework/Piece Goods Stores</i>	<i>\$700,668</i>	<i>\$100,000</i>	<i>7.01</i>
<i>Special Foodservices</i>	<i>\$3,342,066</i>	<i>\$500,000</i>	<i>6.68</i>
<i>Drinking Places -Alcoholic Beverages</i>	<i>\$1,958,469</i>	<i>\$300,000</i>	<i>6.53</i>
<i>Office Supplies and Stationery Stores</i>	<i>\$2,234,178</i>	<i>\$400,000</i>	<i>5.59</i>
<i>Childrens, Infants Clothing Stores</i>	<i>\$1,103,884</i>	<i>\$200,000</i>	<i>5.52</i>
<i>Other Health and Personal Care Stores</i>	<i>\$2,189,989</i>	<i>\$400,000</i>	<i>5.47</i>
<i>Florists</i>	<i>\$523,497</i>	<i>\$100,000</i>	<i>5.23</i>
<i>Cosmetics, Beauty Supplies, Perfume Stores</i>	<i>\$1,430,198</i>	<i>\$300,000</i>	<i>4.77</i>
<i>Family Clothing Stores</i>	<i>\$8,422,929</i>	<i>\$1,800,000</i>	<i>4.68</i>
<i>Jewelry Stores</i>	<i>\$2,757,722</i>	<i>\$700,000</i>	<i>3.94</i>
<i>Furniture Stores</i>	<i>\$1,962,548</i>	<i>\$500,000</i>	<i>3.93</i>
<i>Automotive Dealers</i>	<i>\$43,669,032</i>	<i>\$12,700,000</i>	<i>3.44</i>
<i>Other General Merchandise Stores</i>	<i>\$28,028,241</i>	<i>\$9,300,000</i>	<i>3.01</i>

Source: "La Vernia Gap Analysis" [Excel spreadsheet]; "RMP Opportunity Gap – Retail Stores (La Vernia)" [Adobe PDF]; Rural Business Center, 2013

County, including Seguin, and virtually all of Wilson County, including Floresville.

Consequently, the opportunity gap numbers and the resulting market potential shown in Table 13 are similarly outsized, and care needs to be taken when analyzing this data. Much of this area is not only within La Vernia's tertiary market, but also within the tertiary market of one of the three nearby communities (Floresville, Seguin, and San Antonio). This is readily apparent when the 20-mile radii for the four cities are shown on the same map (Executive Summary).

Overall, the area delimited within a 20 mile radius of the city center of La Vernia has an estimated total of about \$5,000,172,000 (\$5.0 billion) in consumer expenditures for 2013, and an estimated total of about \$3,825,128,000 (\$3.8 billion) in retail sales. The result is a deficit, or opportunity gap, of about \$1,175,044,000 (\$1.2 billion) (Executive Summary).

Currently, 23.5% of consumer expenditures in the tertiary market area are lost to businesses outside the 20-mile radius. This signifies that this large market area satisfies over three-quarters of its consumer demand (largely because of the San Antonio economy).

Of the 29 sectors present in Table 12, 25 remain with high potential in Table 13, and are shown in white. The four sectors that fall off the list for the tertiary market are: Automotive Parts/Accessories and Tire Stores; Lawn,

Table 13: Sectors with High Potential for La Vernia's Tertiary Market (0 - 20 mile radius)

Sector	Opportunity Gap	TX Avg. Sales per Business	Potential
Limited-Service Eating Places	\$125,013,776	\$500,000	250.03
Full-Service Restaurants	\$128,090,696	\$600,000	213.48
Pharmacies and Drug Stores	\$177,046,138	\$900,000	196.72
Women's Clothing Stores	\$26,187,586	\$200,000	130.94
Other Miscellaneous Store Retailers	\$42,863,145	\$400,000	107.16
Building Material and Supply Dealers	\$86,428,961	\$900,000	96.03
Gift, Novelty and Souvenir Stores	\$15,852,404	\$200,000	79.26
Sew/Needlework/Piece Goods Stores	\$7,266,657	\$100,000	72.67
Furniture Stores	\$36,029,800	\$500,000	72.06
Beer, Wine and Liquor Stores	\$27,021,349	\$400,000	67.55
Shoe Stores	\$19,154,846	\$300,000	63.85
Special Foodservices	\$31,280,091	\$500,000	62.56
Other Health and Personal Care Stores	\$21,222,507	\$400,000	53.06
Office Supplies and Stationery Stores	\$18,954,323	\$400,000	47.39
Childrens, Infants Clothing Stores	\$8,966,445	\$200,000	44.83
Sporting Goods Stores	\$13,379,169	\$300,000	44.60
Florists	\$4,249,729	\$100,000	42.50
Book Stores	\$8,497,657	\$200,000	42.49
Drinking Places -Alcoholic Beverages	\$10,795,825	\$300,000	35.99
<i>Computer and Software Stores</i>	<i>\$9,089,151</i>	<i>\$300,000</i>	<i>30.30</i>
Family Clothing Stores	\$40,795,354	\$1,800,000	22.66
Grocery Stores	\$96,418,847	\$4,300,000	22.42
Jewelry Stores	\$15,128,164	\$700,000	21.61
Other General Merchandise Stores	\$197,149,345	\$9,300,000	21.20
Other Clothing Stores	\$3,734,494	\$200,000	18.67
<i>Musical Instrument and Supplies Stores</i>	<i>\$5,263,977</i>	<i>\$300,000</i>	<i>17.55</i>
<i>Used Merchandise Stores</i>	<i>\$9,995,728</i>	<i>\$600,000</i>	<i>16.66</i>
<i>Optical Goods Stores</i>	<i>\$10,444,053</i>	<i>\$800,000</i>	<i>13.06</i>
Clothing Accessories Stores	\$1,289,763	\$100,000	12.90
<i>Hobby, Toys and Games Stores</i>	<i>\$16,294,334</i>	<i>\$1,500,000</i>	<i>10.86</i>
<i>Home Furnishing Stores</i>	<i>\$20,874,487</i>	<i>\$2,000,000</i>	<i>10.44</i>
<i>Camera and Photographic Equipment Stores</i>	<i>\$2,506,553</i>	<i>\$500,000</i>	<i>5.01</i>
<i>Prerecorded Tapes, CDs, Record Stores</i>	<i>\$2,567,730</i>	<i>\$600,000</i>	<i>4.28</i>
<i>News Dealers and Newsstands</i>	<i>\$1,625,924</i>	<i>\$500,000</i>	<i>3.25</i>

Source: IBID

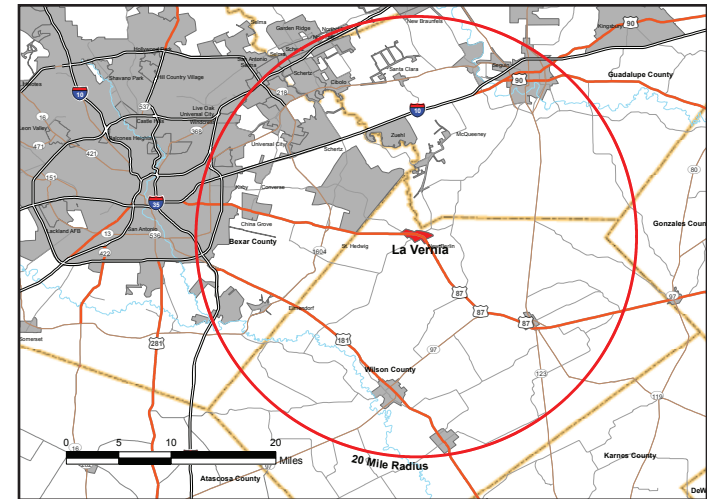


Figure 27: City of La Vernia, Tertiary Market Area (within 20-mile radius)

Garden Equipment, Supplies Stores; Cosmetics, Beauty Supplies, Perfume Stores; and Automotive Dealers.

The effect of the San Antonio urbanized area is most evident in this case, as three of those four sectors typically locate in the outer portions of an urbanized area. Specifically, a number of business establishments in eastern Bexar County likely serve not only the Bexar County population, but the Comal, Guadalupe, and Wilson County populations as well.

In addition to the 25 sectors remaining from the secondary market, there are nine other sectors which have high potential specifically for the tertiary market. These sectors are shown in Table 13 in italics and with a tan background. This brings the total number of sectors with high potential for the tertiary market to 34.

Fiber Optic Network

The La Vernia Municipal Development District (MDD) has begun the process of implementing a fiber optic cable network, in cooperation with the Guadalupe Valley Electric Cooperative (GVEC), in order to better serve the residents of the La Vernia community and also to attract new business to the city and its primary market. GVEC is installing 90 miles of fiber optic cable which will result in network speeds similar to the Google Fiber networks in Austin and Kansas City (La Vernia Municipal Development District).

This fiber optic network will replace the less reliable wireless networks offered by several service providers. It will put La Vernia in a good position to attract new residents and new businesses from San Antonio and elsewhere in the region.

Summary

There are several sectors which show up near the top of Tables 11, 12, and 13.

These are:

- Limited-Service Eating Places
- Full-Service Restaurants
- Building Material and Supply Dealers
- Pharmacy and Drug Stores
- Women's Clothing Stores
- Grocery Stores
- Other Miscellaneous Store Retailers

For the primary market (0 – 5 mile radius), the main goal of the Municipal Development District should be to capture a larger proportion of consumer expenditures by residents of the market area. This area corresponds somewhat to the extraterritorial jurisdiction of the City of La Vernia, and also is similar in size to the La Vernia Independent School District and the La Vernia ZIP code (78121).

La Vernia is already providing the residents of this 5-mile radius with utilities and other services. Ideally, this area would eventually be annexed and thus formally be included in the municipal tax base. In the meantime, it is important to make sure that new business establishments actually locate either within La Vernia city limits or relatively close to them in a development district of some sort.

For the secondary market (0 – 10 mile radius), the main goal should be to both capture a higher share of consumer

expenditures by residents of the market area and attract consumers from outside the market area to shop at certain specialized businesses. This is where the competition will be most heated, for two reasons. First, a large percentage of consumer expenditures is spent outside the 10-mile radius. Second, a considerable portion of the area falls within the secondary market areas (10-mile radii) of San Antonio, Seguin, and Floresville.

For the tertiary market area (0 – 20 mile radius), the main goal should be to attract consumers from this very large area to La Vernia for unique goods and services that cannot be obtained elsewhere in the San Antonio metropolitan area or South Texas. Such establishments would reflect the special attributes of La Vernia that distinguish it from Floresville, Seguin, or San Antonio.



Figure 28: Koepp Chevrolet - Intersection of US 87 and Bluebonnet Road



Figure 29: HEB - US 87 South



Options for the Future

Importance of the Downtown District and Chihuahua Street

As with many towns originally built before the age of the automobile, La Vernia has a distinctive Downtown District in which the size of city blocks is noticeably smaller than blocks built after the automobile became dominant. These blocks, and the Main Street of the town at the center of the District, were built with the pedestrian in mind. Streets were not as wide, and most buildings were located at the front of the property, abutting sidewalks and easily accessible to those walking along them. Although there were varying uses for the buildings along the Main Street, they were consistent in form and character, giving the street a cohesive and recognizable identity.

In La Vernia's case, its Downtown District and Main Street were oriented to the Old Chihuahua Road, which brought stagecoach traffic from the port of Indianola to San Antonio

and then on to the city of Chihuahua in Mexico. Given this history, it comes as no surprise that the Main Street of La Vernia was named Chihuahua Street.

When the railroad replaced the stagecoach as the prevailing form of transportation, the San Antonio and Gulf Shore Railroad line built in the 1890s (and eventually bought by Southern Pacific) closely followed the route of the Old Chihuahua Road, passing through many of the same towns. In La Vernia, the train depot was located a block to the north of Chihuahua Street. In the pre-automobile era, it was common for cities and towns—both large and small—to have the depot within easy walking distance of the commercial and civic center of the town. For La Vernia, the train depot represented an important part of its downtown, as it also served as a post office and telegraph station. The Old Mill was located adjacent to the rail line; the Lay Hotel, the S.P. Wiseman Racket Store, and the La Vernia Drug Store were located along Chihuahua Street.



Source: Texas Transportation Museum - Hemphill

Figure 31: La Vernia Railroad Depot, 1930s

In the early decades of the automobile, before World War II, the beginning of the U.S. Highway system followed much the same route, as Chihuahua Street was the original route of U.S. Highway 87 through La Vernia until 1957. At that time a new route for U.S. 87 was built a short distance to the south and Chihuahua Street was given the designation of "Loop 321" (*Texas Department of Transportation*).

During those decades (about 1920-1960), there was a coexistence of the railroad with the automobile, just as a half-century earlier (about 1870-1910) there was a similar coexistence of the stagecoach with the railroad.

Also, during the early decades of the automobile, the average traveling speed—even on highways—was significantly slower than it is now. Even though parking places for cars were added to the Main Street, the shops remained oriented to pedestrians and the Downtown District was still the commercial heart of the city.

Center for Government, Culture, and Retail

In addition to being located along the main corridor for transportation during much of its history, the Downtown District represented the center of government, culture, and retail business for La Vernia and the surrounding area until recent decades. Chihuahua Street was part of the route of U.S. 87 until the late 1950s. Hence government functions such as the La Vernia Post Office, the Wilson County Sheriff's Office (represented by a constable), and after incorporation, La Vernia's City Hall were all located along Chihuahua Street.

Chihuahua Street and its surrounding blocks (including the site of the train depot) also represented the main civic gathering place, where people would meet informally for small events with family or friends, or more formally for community celebrations and commemorations. Having a place that functions as a “civic space” for the community is vital for the creation and nurturing of the distinct identity of the community. Such a space also gives a community both a physical heart—in terms of where the various activities of the community intersect—and an emotional heart, where people form their attachment to the community and the place.

This emotional heart or spirit of a community is part of the concept known as “sense of place”. Sense of place is a vague concept, but nevertheless a real thing. Generally, the citizens of a community know when it is strong, and when it is weak or absent. For La Vernia, Chihuahua Street is the locus of the community’s sense of place and the nexus of the community itself.

Chihuahua Street was the original location of the city’s commercial establishments and served as the place where people went to buy or sell goods and services, whether they be crops, household items, clothing, a hotel room, legal representation, a meal, medicine, a train ticket to San Antonio, or a telegraph message sent to Chicago.

Of these three functions, only the government function is still visibly present in the Chihuahua Street area. Retail began to shift to U.S 87 in the 1960s, and today Chihuahua

Street is almost invisible in terms of retail activity. Along with retail, civic culture disappeared; but while there is clearly a new retail corridor that residents can identify, there is no true civic center any longer. The location of a new post office a few miles to the southwest along Bluebonnet Road (FM 775), and the location of the Wilson County Sheriff’s Office along U.S. 87, removed two key government functions from Chihuahua Street and further reduced its level of activity. Even though La Vernia’s residents still need to go to City Hall on Chihuahua Street for certain government-provided services, there is little if anything to keep them there once they are finished.

While there are various places where people can meet, there is no one place—a singular place or civic place such as a plaza or park—where citizens can gather to hold both formal and informal community celebrations. Renewing the function of Chihuahua Street as a center of civic culture for La Vernia will restore it as the cultural center and civic gathering place for the community. This is one of the most important steps in improving the Downtown District.

Chihuahua Street Improvements

In order to bring Chihuahua Street back to its role as Main Street for La Vernia, improvements can be made in all three of its functions: government, civic culture, and retail commerce. Several are discussed below.

In terms of its government spaces, the most pressing need is to increase the capacity of City Hall in order to meet the needs of the rapidly growing population. While La Vernia’s City Hall met the city’s needs in the first few decades after incorporation, the city has since outgrown it. When a larger City Hall is built, it is important that it be located relatively close to the current location, and ideally along Chihuahua Street.

One possible location for a new City Hall is the eastern portion of the block bounded by Chihuahua Street to the north, Bluebonnet Road to the east, U.S. 87 to the south, and Nicholson/San Antonio Road to the west.

To create a civic space where people can meet and gather, there should be some sort of space defined as public and which is appealing to the public. It should have trees to provide shade in summer, benches or other such street furniture to allow people to sit and talk or people-watch. It should also have some sort of water feature to provide a visible and audible signal that the space is for recreation and enjoyment; and it should be “readable” as a public space without the need for signs. There may in fact be signage, but the space should be easily recognizable as inviting and social to everyone, including children, and so the signs should just provide confirmation of what has already been grasped without the written word.

To create a pleasurable, pedestrian-oriented retail environment and a genuine Main Street experience, Chihuahua Street and other streets in the Downtown

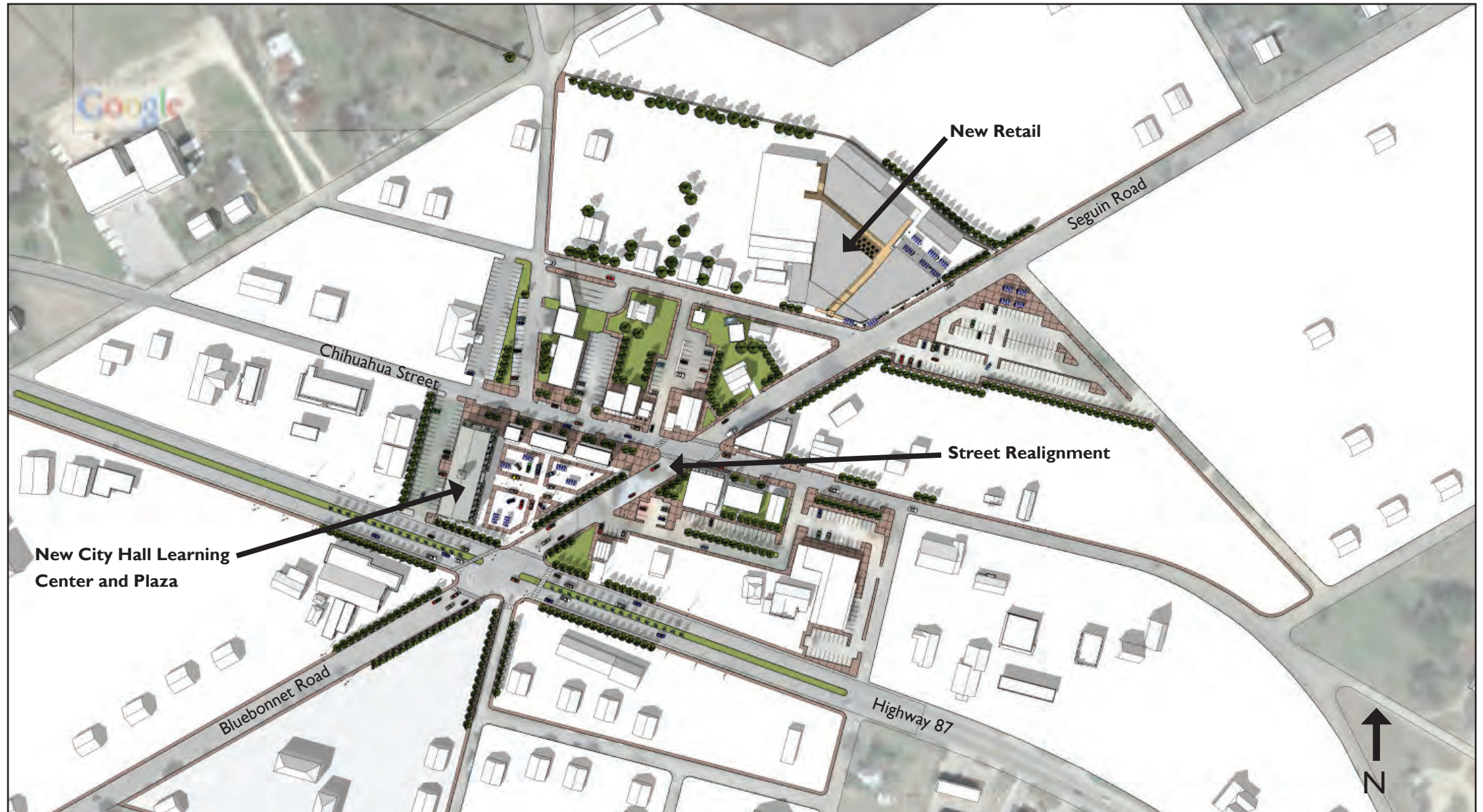


Figure 32: Proposed Downtown District

District should have sidewalks wide enough for trees to be planted near the curb, for benches to be placed outside retail shops if desired, and still have enough room for two people to walk side-by-side. The pedestrian and human scale of the existing buildings should be supplemented with new buildings of similar size and style. This is not intended to be rote imitation, but a revitalization of a lost tradition as a living continuation of the community's identity and sense of place.

The Downtown District can encourage more pedestrian activity by implementing shared parking along Chihuahua

Street as well as side lots on intersecting streets and in lots behind the businesses on Chihuahua Street. These parking areas should be easily accessible by car, but they should for the most part be to the side or to the rear of the businesses on Chihuahua Street in order to ensure a more pedestrian-friendly Main Street experience for residents and visitors.

Shared parking occurs when lots are reserved for businesses or offices for specified hours, but become available to the public at other times. This is important for encouraging residents and visitors to come downtown to

shop, as it would ensure enough supply of parking spaces to accommodate spikes in shopping activity for specific shops or for specific times of day.

Figures 32 and 33 show how these amenities and design features can be incorporated into the Downtown District. Figure 32 describes a proposed Downtown District for La Vernia, and Figure 33 below shows a proposed streetscape for the Downtown area.

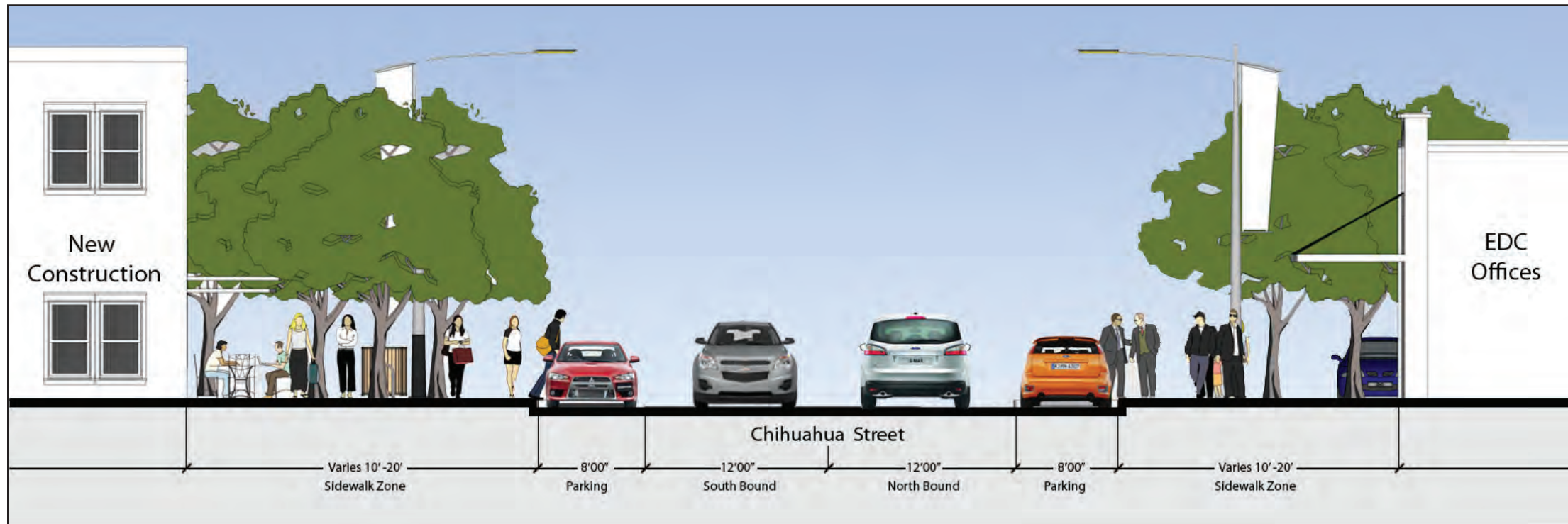


Figure 33: Proposed Street Improvements on Chihuahua Street Downtown

Guidelines for the La Vernia Downtown District

What gives a historic district much of its charm and appeal is the presence of various design elements that mesh well with the overall character of the district. These elements include sidewalks, landscaping, signage, awnings, canopies, and lighting.

Sidewalks

Sidewalks are often overlooked as an important component of urban design. Beyond being merely functional as a means of conveying pedestrian traffic, they can be places of public interaction, areas to sit and rest and people-watch, and in the right circumstances, informal extensions of the buildings adjacent to them (i.e. outdoor tables for a café).

First of all, sidewalks should be wide enough to accommodate both pedestrian movement and amenities such as street furniture, lighting, landscaping (trees, shrubs, planters, etc.), and portable signage.

In a downtown district, sidewalks should be at least eight to twelve feet wide if possible, and with no less than six feet of unobstructed clearance between street and business. For a sidewalk eight feet wide, that leaves two feet for additional use; in most cases this would mean landscaping such as trees, shrubs, and planters and/or distinctive lighting. For a sidewalk twelve feet wide, street furniture such as benches facing each other or facing the businesses (never facing the



Figure 34: Existing sidewalk conditions (street) or additional decorative elements such as public art can be added.

Where city ordinances permit, restaurants or cafés could place tables and chairs outdoors on the sidewalk during business hours, provided they do not impede pedestrian traffic. Such arrangements would likely be more profitable for the businesses if the landscaping and lighting, already exists along the sidewalk. If it does not exist, then businesses should be encouraged to work together in bringing about improvements in their immediate market area.

In the La Vernia Downtown District along Chihuahua Street, the sidewalks are relatively narrow and also intermittent, with significant gaps in some areas. Beyond the two-block area of Chihuahua Street between Dry Hollow and Crews Street and the one-block area of Bluebonnet Road between Chihuahua Street and U.S. Highway 87, sidewalks are virtually absent from the historic downtown area.

Landscaping

Landscaping both beautifies the appearance of a historic district and serves a practical purpose by visually and physically separating automobile traffic from pedestrians. It communicates to both drivers and pedestrians that the historic downtown and its Main Street are as much destinations at which to stop as they are through routes.

Key among landscaping features is the use of trees and shrubs. Trees provide shade for pedestrians. They also are able to shade parked cars (depending on the time of day). Shrubs are ideally used at corners to allow pedestrian visibility of automobile traffic. Shrubs and trees also provide anchors or protective barriers for sidewalk benches.



Figure 35: Existing landscape conditions along Chihuahua Street

An additional benefit of landscaping is a decrease in water runoff during storms. The vegetation serves as a natural means of flood mitigation by absorbing water that would

otherwise potentially flood streets, parking lots, and sidewalks. Landscaping should always be appropriate to the climate and require little to no watering. Landscaping is best addressed at a district-wide or community-wide level to be fully effective. Often, downtown businesses will pool their efforts to ensure that the quality and type of landscaping is consistent throughout the district.

In the Downtown District of La Vernia, there is some landscaping near the bank building at the intersection of Chihuahua Street and Dry Hollow. There is also some landscaping near the current City Hall at the intersection of Chihuahua Street and Bluebonnet Road. For the most part, however trees and shrubs are absent from the downtown streetscape.

Signage

Signage is what allows a business to identify and distinguish itself; whether it is a logo (for easily recognizable logos, this may be all that is necessary) or text, it is the business' calling card. As with other elements of urban design, the characteristics of business signage can either enhance or detract from the charm and appeal of a downtown district.

Important considerations to keep in mind when choosing or creating signage are: (1) that the signage should be in balance with the overall character of the property; (2) that the signage is appropriate for its location on the building; and (3) that the signage be compatible with the streetscape surrounding it.

Generally, a commercial business in a downtown district will have at least one and as many as five types of signs:

- Primary signs are of course the most visible; they are intended to be seen from the street, especially by drivers. They will either be flat against the building, usually above the awnings, or projecting from (perpendicular to) the building and printed on both sides.
- Secondary signs are intended to supplement the primary sign. They will usually be small rectangular signs that hang under the awning or canopy and perpendicular to the building, or free-standing

signs mounted to a pole or post (if there is no awning or canopy or if the building is set back from the street). They are intended to be seen by pedestrians, i.e. from the sidewalk and not the street.

- Window signs are painted or otherwise applied to the glass windows used at street level, and sometimes on upper floors (if the lower floor or floors are occupied by a different use or business). They are usually intended to catch the attention of pedestrians walking past the business, and in some cases will have merchandise displays (in the case of shops) or seating areas visible from the

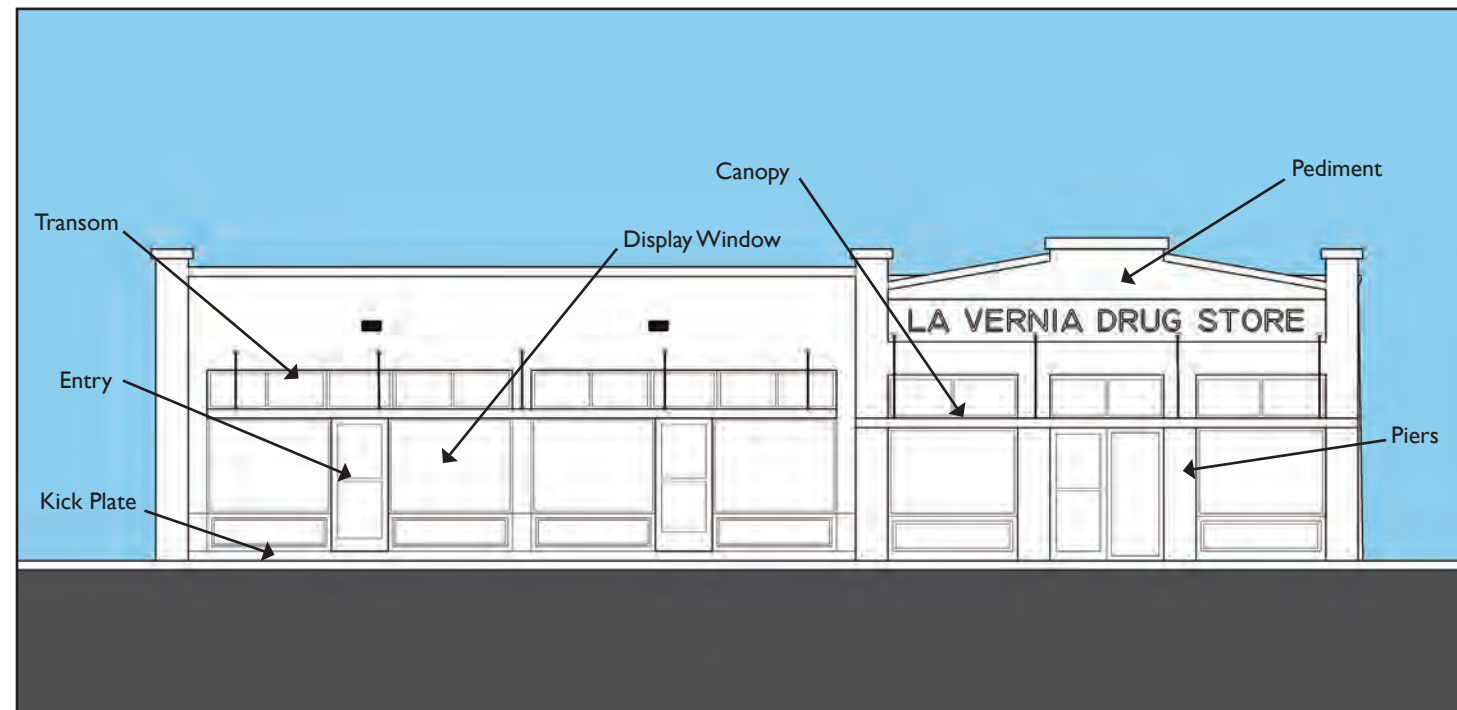


Figure 36: Typical commercial storefront in La Vernia

street (in the case of restaurants) to attract the pedestrian inside.

Traditionally, signs were mounted to fit within and to enhance the architectural features of a building.

For a sign to be in balance with the character of its building and property, it should be of appropriate size (not too small to be unreadable, but not too large to fit within the architectural context of the building), appropriate shape (to complement the existing form of the building), and appropriate design (in terms of text, color, and how it is lighted).

Primary and secondary signs should be as simple as possible to reduce visual clutter, and include little more than the name and/or logo of the business. Other signs should also be as simple as possible, and only include the most relevant information.

A building with multiple tenants should have a directory sign identifying all the businesses located within, and the signs should be coordinated to reduce visual clutter. Temporary signs should not obscure any building windows and should adhere to the existing design of the building's permanent signs.

No sign on a historical downtown district building should be animated, visually distract from the building, or obscure important architectural details of the building. Typefaces that are easy to read and compatible with the historical

nature of the area should be used, and the sign material itself should be painted wood or metal.

The sign should be lit indirectly, i.e. externally from a shielded lamp, and not lit internally, unless only the text and/or symbol are backlit, with the possible exception of a movie theater marquee. Light should not shine directly in the eyes of pedestrians or be otherwise unshielded or exposed. Neon should not be used on buildings built before 1930 or on residential structures, and when used should be shielded to create an indirect lighting effect. Awnings and canopies should not be internally illuminated.

The historic buildings in the La Vernia Downtown District for the most part have primary signage mounted or painted flat against the building above the canopy and/or transom windows. The one notable exception is the La Vernia Drug Store, which has both a primary sign painted on the front of the building and a secondary sign positioned on a pole close to the building but high enough to be visible to both motorists and pedestrians. Some buildings have old signs that have faded with age, while others are vacant and currently do not have any signage.

Awnings and Canopies

Awnings and canopies are functional elements which provide shielding from direct sunlight, but they also have important aesthetic design implications. Awnings are generally sloped structures with a fabric or similar material surface, while canopies are rigid structures (often made

of metal) generally mounted perpendicular to the building (not sloped).

As with other building elements, awnings and canopies should be appropriate for the style of the building. The color scheme of the awning or canopy should be compatible with the color scheme of the building façade.

Awnings on historic buildings should ideally be operable when conditions permit (i.e., can be opened or closed depending on weather and time of day). Also, the awning should fit the window opening of the building. "Bullnose", "bubble", and other odd awning shapes are inappropriate for historic buildings. Fixed metal canopies are appropriate if the building has had such a canopy historically. Appropriate fixtures such as wall-mounted brackets, chains, and posts should be used. A non-contributing building in a historic district or block with several historic buildings may use a contemporary version of a metal canopy in order to preserve the overall character of the streetscape.

Where it is demonstrated that most buildings within a block or district historically made use of a certain type of awning or canopy, efforts should be made to preserve that design element when restoring existing buildings in the block or district.

Awnings and canopies should also be mounted in a way that highlights moldings, transom windows, and other distinctive building features. They should never be mounted in such

a way that hides or covers such features, or that damages those features.

As integral parts of buildings, awnings and canopies should be regularly maintained and kept in good repair: typically washed regularly if made of fabric; painted regularly if made of metal; re-secured to the building if loose; and replaced when worn out or damaged.

For the most part, the canopies along Chihuahua Street in downtown La Vernia are intact and in good condition. Most of the canopies are attached with wall-mounted brackets, though a few are attached to posts. In some cases, they can be painted to better match the building or create a unified color scheme.

Lighting

Lighting is one of the most important elements in terms of making a public area appealing, especially for pedestrian foot traffic. Therefore, it should meet certain important conditions. These are described below.

The scale or height of the lighting should be oriented to pedestrian needs; it should not be positioned higher than adjacent or nearby buildings. Many historic districts make use of traditional light post styles dating from the era of gas lamps. These traditional styles are often ideally situated to provide attractive lighting of building fronts and sidewalks.

The type of lighting should also be pleasing to the eye; harsh florescent-type lighting should be avoided and

more natural-looking lighting should be used. Glare and light pollution should be minimized by shielding the light source where possible and directing it downward. Lighting should be placed carefully to provide a safe environment for pedestrians at night. Where possible, this can include the use of storefront lights after business hours. There should also be a consistent type of lighting along the Main Street or in the heart of the Downtown District in order to preserve (or recover) the historic quality of the area.

Well-designed lighting encourages pedestrian activity at night, while also improving the visibility of pedestrians to drivers. It also increases public safety for pedestrians and businesses.

At present there is little or no lighting in the La Vernia Downtown District, either for motorists or pedestrians. Most of the automobile traffic in La Vernia bypasses Chihuahua Street and uses U.S. Highway 87 and only standard street lights are used at intersections with stoplights. There are also only a few lights on utility poles, positioned much higher than nearby buildings in the district. As a result, the Downtown District presents a stark, dark and non-inviting image at night for both pedestrians and traffic, alike.

Public Art

One design element which is sometimes neglected in the streetscape of a pedestrian-friendly downtown district is the presence of public art which is scaled for the pedestrian. Often a city will commission works from local artists, and

then exhibit them either permanently or for a specified period of time in a dedicated display area.

One increasingly popular example of public art is the use of painted fiberglass animals; each individual animal is painted or decorated by a different local artist or resident. These art projects are typically done to publicize beautification efforts and raise awareness among both residents and non-residents of the city's cultural life and its art community (Artsology). This might be something that local businesses and residents may want to consider as a way to bring public art to the Downtown District; the Civic Center and Plaza area. This could also be done in other pedestrian friendly areas, such as Chihuahua Street. These areas would also be ideal for displaying the work of local artists.

Residents of La Vernia, local businesses, and city government would all be involved in bringing public art to the Downtown District; the Civic Center and Plaza area, along with other present or future pedestrian-friendly areas (such as Chihuahua Street) would be an ideal place to display the work of local artists.

The high school represents one of the most important institutions uniting residents of the city and the surrounding area. As such, one possibility for an ongoing public art project would be the painting of fiberglass bears; the bear is the mascot of La Vernia High School.

A Proposed Civic Center and Plaza

Plaza is a Spanish word which describes an open urban public space. Similar to a town square, a plaza is usually the location where the community will gather for holiday celebrations, fiestas, town fairs, sports, celebrations, weekend markets, and other civic and cultural events. A Main Street (Chihuahua Street or Bluebonnet Road) Plaza would also provide a central location for entertainment and festival events.

To develop this Civic Center and Plaza it is proposed that La Vernia realign Bluebonnet Road with Seguin Road and relocate City Hall to the empty lot just west of Bluebonnet Road (between US 87 and Chihuahua Street). This proposal will then provide a civic space for La Vernia. It would also be located at the intersection of two major traffic routes (US 87 and FM 775) making it easily accessible from within the La Vernia city limits and the surrounding area.

This location is also historically important, as it fronts on Chihuahua Street (the Old Chihuahua Road), and on Bluebonnet Road/FM 775 (the Old Seguin Road). As a

plaza, this location would regain its status as the center of public life in La Vernia.

As shown in Figure 38 on the next page the plaza would be on both sides of the realigned Bluebonnet Road. The larger portion of the plaza would be to the west of the road, in front of a new City Hall building directly to its west (currently a vacant parcel). The City Hall building could have two or more stories and incorporate a passageway from the plaza to the parking behind (west of) City Hall. It would house the City Council chambers, various city offices, and public waiting areas in one half of the building, and a public library/learning center in the other half of the building.

The northern portion of the plaza could include a small number of retail shops (such as a coffee shop with outdoor seating) to create a more active commercial and retail area along Chihuahua Street.

The eastern portion of the plaza, across Bluebonnet Street, would include the Old Firehouse (Heritage Museum) and a smaller parking area (roughly where the current city hall and police department parking is located). It would have similar signage and features to indicate that it is linked to the rest of the plaza. The Old Firehouse/Heritage Museum and the open space behind it could be used for children's activities or reserved for special events.

During special events and celebrations (which usually occur on the weekend or on certain holidays), the realigned



Figure 37: Proposed Chihuahua Street Streetscape



Figure 38: Proposed Civic Center and Plaza

portion of Bluebonnet Road could be closed to vehicular traffic by using removable bollards, and therefore open to pedestrians to walk along that portion of the road. The rest of the time (with the bollards removed) it would function as a normal road with vehicular traffic. This section of the road could also have a distinctive paving pattern or other feature that identifies it as a link between the two parts of the plaza and as a pedestrian zone for special occasions.

This would unify the western and eastern portions of the plaza and create a larger, more flexible space in which to hold civic events. There can be additional streetscape treatments such as distinctive sidewalks, lighting, furniture (such as benches), crosswalks, and signage, so that the space is both easily identifiable and visually unified.

La Vernia’s Main Street (Chihuahua Street/Bluebonnet Road) Plaza is envisioned as a destination space for both local residents and visitors to La Vernia. People can come to the plaza for a variety of different reasons, and the aim of creating this public space is to give them reasons to stay at the plaza and enjoy the space however they wish. Whether that be reading a book, meeting a friend for coffee, attending a special lecture, taking a break from a long-distance car trip, or resting after a long bicycle ride from the other side of town.

The plaza space should be open, well-lighted, and easily visible to those passing by (for the most part driving) on US 87 or FM 775. The goal is to communicate as clearly and simply as possible that “this is the main public space of La Vernia, and a destination worth visiting.”

Realign Bluebonnet Road with Seguin Road

One of the current weaknesses of the Downtown District is the misalignment between Bluebonnet Road and Seguin Road. This slows down traffic, which is desirable from a pedestrian point of view, but otherwise there is currently little or no positive outcome or benefit resulting from the misalignment.

Realigning the path of Bluebonnet Road to connect directly with Seguin Road could be done relatively easily. The only building of any size that would have to be demolished is the

current City Hall. The realignment would promote through traffic in the Downtown District, but it would not be moving at the same speed as traffic on U.S. 87. Instead, with the adoption of certain design approaches, the realigned road could become an important axis which would (along with Chihuahua Street) help to define the central space and civic gathering place of the city.

As shown in Figure 39 the realignment would also create new space on either side of Bluebonnet/Seguin Road between Chihuahua Street and U.S. 87. This space could become a central plaza for La Vernia, with the new City Hall just to the west of the plaza. The Old Firehouse (which houses the La Vernia Heritage Museum) would remain at its current location and anchor a smaller plaza or public gathering space along the east side of the realigned road.

To create a larger and more pedestrian-friendly space for the plaza during major community events such as festivals and holiday celebrations, bollards could be used to temporarily close the realigned road to automotive traffic.

A Proposed Library and Learning Center

Currently, the closest public library is in Floresville about 20 miles away. La Vernia residents do have some access to free reading materials through a unique library vending machine in the Lifechek Drug Store (Figure 41). While this



Figure 39: Realignment Bluebonnet and Seguin Roads

can be a great tool for libraries to sign up new members and allow them to quickly check out popular titles, it is a poor substitute for a brick and mortar library.

In many Texas towns the local library is the center of community activity. It usually provides internet access, meeting places for community organizations, summer programs for children, and provides test preparation services for students taking the SAT or ACT. A great example is in the city of Honey Grove, Texas, 90 miles northeast of Dallas. The population is about 1600 people, but registered borrowers come to the Bertha Voyer

Memorial Library from miles around to take advantage of the only free Wi-Fi in the area, weekly game nights, and regular social events. According to residents, the library is keeping the city together. A facility like this with added workspace for online college courses would be a major community asset in La Vernia. Figure 40 describes one possible design for a Library/ Learning Center that would be housed in the City Hall complex.

La Vernia's close proximity to San Antonio gives high school seniors a multitude of options when choosing where to further their education. Some may choose to



Figure 40: Proposed Library/Learning Center

live on campus in one of San Antonio's universities while others will move to Austin, College Station or beyond. The chances of them returning to La Vernia after their education is complete are slim. Since 1980 rural communities and towns throughout the country have experienced a flight of young people to urban centers where they believe there is more opportunity (Gillham).

There are some, however, who may choose to stay in La Vernia and commute to San Antonio every day to attend classes. While there are community colleges within 20



Figure 41: The library vending machine fondly known as “Laverne” is the only public library in the city

Source: La Vernia News

miles of the city, the larger schools can be up to 43 miles away. This can lead to a lot of time in heavy traffic and a lot of money spent on fuel. If La Vernia is to thrive, a way must be found to encourage students to stay in the area while giving them the same opportunity and resources to attend some college classes locally. One solution is a public library and learning center.

Distance learning is not new. Correspondence courses were hugely popular at the turn of the 20th century, and radio was used in the 1930's and 1940's by many public schools, colleges, and universities as a way to teach a larger number of students over great distances. Today, most major universities offer a number of classes and some even offer complete degree programs online (Lederman).

Younger students can make the most of this by staying in the area and still receiving a degree from an accredited institution. Working adults choose online degrees out of convenience since they generally don't have to leave their home. There are still times where they may need a quiet place to study with a source of reference materials to complete a project away from the noise of the family. A learning center would facilitate this by providing high-speed internet, Wi-Fi access, and an educational environment to counter two major drawbacks of online education, domestic distractions and unreliable technology.

The proposed City Hall complex provides an ideal location for a public library and learning center to both anchor the community and help students get their degree. The

learning center could consist of a computer lab outfitted with essential software and one or two classrooms for in-person instruction. No additional employees would be necessary other than the normal library staff. Professors from area colleges and universities could teach courses from the core curriculum to a group of local students.

The center could also include an area for group study sessions for students enrolled in the same classes, as well as a quiet area for those more inclined to study alone. The goal is to give college bound students and working adults a wide array of options and to help them achieve their goals. They may continue to commute to San Antonio for some classes, but will save money and time by taking certain classes online in a structured environment with the resources available at the learning center.

Develop a Regional Park Bordering Cibolo Creek

Along with the Downtown District, La Vernia can enhance its quality of life and increase its appeal to both visitors and residents by developing a portion of Cibolo Creek as a Regional Park. In order for the Regional Park to be readily accessible from the Downtown District by foot as well as from the rest of the area by bicycle or automobile, it should be located close-by along the stretch of Cibolo Creek that lies northeast of Chihuahua Street.

The proposed regional park would include open-air pavilions and other recreational structures to host dances

pedestrians walking along U.S. 87 must either cross over uneven surfaces such as lawns, driveways, parking lots, drainage ditches, or walk along the shoulder of the highway feet away from traffic (Figure 43).

Another significant step would be to visually link the opposite sides of the highway corridor with a curbed median where appropriate.

Developing Gateways for La Vernia

Gateways provide an important visual cue that one is entering or exiting a city. They can also serve to provide a memorable or distinctive symbol of the city to both residents and visitors.

The best gateways not only represent their cities, but they become destinations in and of themselves. There are several key elements a gateway should have to be successful:

- It should be easy to understand and comprehend; text should be kept simple, if it is used at all. Visual symbols which reflect the culture and history of

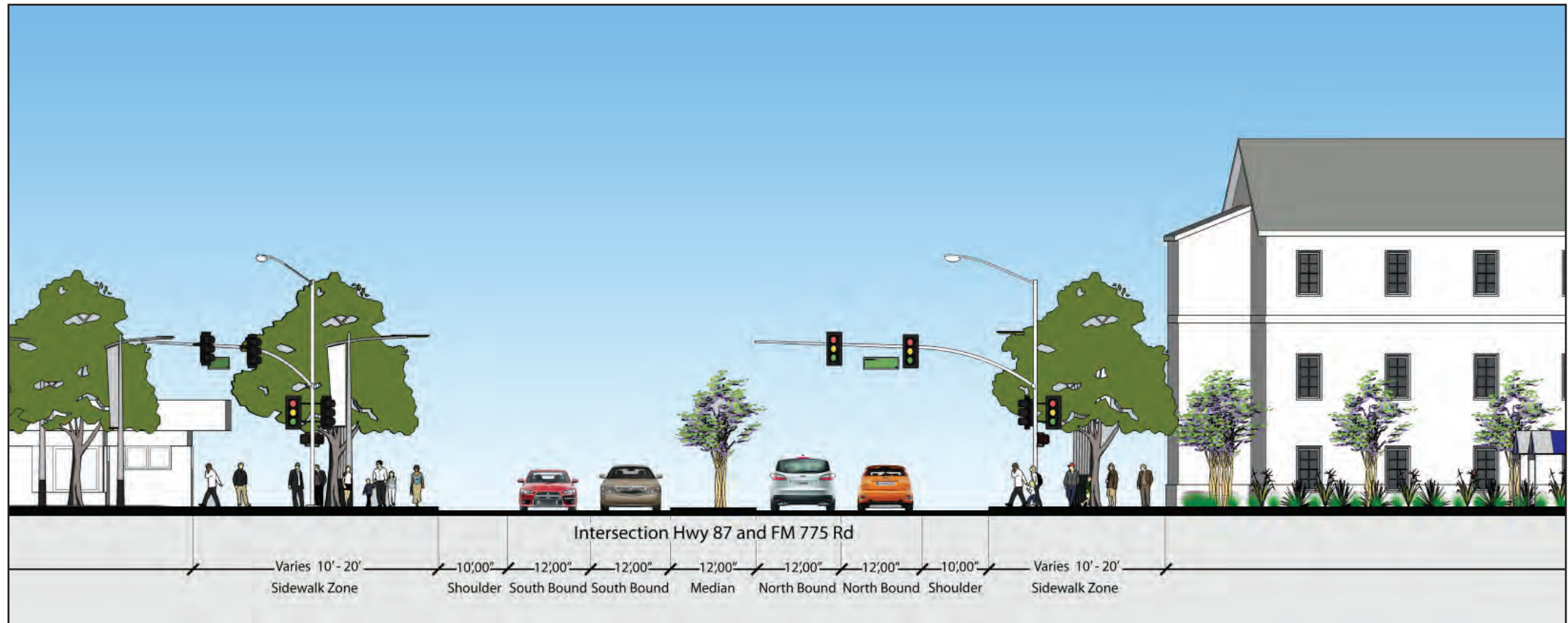


Figure 43: Proposed Street Improvements on Highway 87

the place will be most effective. For La Vernia, this could include an architectural style consistent with the South Texas region and with its history as a waypoint along the Old Chihuahua Road.

- The gateway should be large enough to be seen from a distance by the visitor or resident—that is, in advance of the person actually entering the city limits or approaching the highway exit. This gives the person time to have the gateway “register” in his or her mind.
- It should be lit at night. This is especially important for cities that rely on food and accommodation services for a significant portion of their revenue. The lighting does not have to be elaborate; as long as it does the necessary job of illuminating the gateway so that it can be seen from a distance as easily as it can be seen during the day, nothing more is required.
- It should be placed at or near a location with sufficient traffic so that it can be most effective in achieving its task of attracting the attention of those who pass by it.
- The gateway should either be distinctive enough to not need text or it should clearly identify the city in bold, bright letters. If there is a city name on the gateway, it can be either front lit or backlit. It should be clearly readable at any time of day or night so that anyone who passes by or through the gateway can easily read the city name from a distance (especially if driving).
- If intended to be a public place where people gather, the gateway should incorporate seating, shade trees or other appropriate protection from the elements, and indigenous or native vegetation.
- If intended to be a visitors’ center, the gateway should

should have wayfinding resources such as maps and visitors’ guides. The proposed La Vernia Main Plaza could serve as a destination gateway for the city.

- As the “front door” to the community, the gateway should be well-maintained (or need relatively little maintenance).

When done correctly, the creation of a gateway can be of tremendous benefit to a city, and greatly enhance both its regional visibility and its community identity. There are several examples of gateway or landmark architecture from locations along the Old Chihuahua Road in South Texas and the Mexican State of Chihuahua. The examples shown have a lot of variation, but they generally have



Figure 44: Proposed Gateway Locations



Figure 45: Proposed Gateway Installation on Highway 87 south of La Vernia

most (if not all) of the key elements of a gateway. All of them have some symbolic meaning for the community and present that community to others. A statue symbolizes a person important to the town's history; a stone arch or obelisk conveys stability, and often honors historical events or persons.



Figure 46: Indianola, Calhoun County: Statue of La Salle

Source: TexasEscapes.com; accessed July 8, 2013; <http://www.texasescapes.com/Tex>

La Vernia has always served as a trade center for the surrounding area, and as a transit stop or transfer point for both goods and people. Much of the cultural identity that La Vernia has originates in its role as an economic node in a trade network. While the mode of transit has changed from ox-cart, to stagecoach, to rail, to automobile, the identity of La Vernia as a way-station where business travelers and tourists can stop and rest, visit shops and buy various necessities, and perhaps take in some entertainment, remains.

As such, it is quite important that La Vernia increase its visibility to the traveler, whether the travel is for business or pleasure. A gateway is the packaging label for a city, and it should convey as simply as possible not just that the traveler is entering La Vernia, but that La Vernia is a distinctive place and worth stopping for a visit.

Developing Lodging Options

La Vernia has several potential opportunities to develop its lodging options, both in terms of accommodating long-distance travelers on U.S. 87, and visitors coming to La Vernia specifically for certain events or for recreation (such as a regional park and hike-and-bike trail). One of the goals of this plan is to make La Vernia, a destination for weekend getaways, and provide new sources of income and employment for the city. While the proposed regional park and retail establishments will draw visitors from the surrounding area, it is also important to keep visitors longer than a single day, if possible.



Figure 47: Goliad County: Entrance to Goliad State Park

Source: "Goliad State Park: Goliad, Texas," Texas State Parks Photo Gallery; accessed July 8, 2013; http://www.texasbob.com/texasparks/tp_goliad_sp_ph.html

Currently, there are no motels in La Vernia and the closest lodging is nearly 20 miles away in Floresville and San Antonio. There are several ways to address this problem. First, one of the large franchises could be drawn to the area to build a hotel like Holiday Inn or Hampton Inn. However, there are certain disadvantages that come with this. The typical hotel of this type is about 115 rooms and can cost over \$22 million dollars to construct.¹⁰ The proximity to San Antonio and the traffic counts on U.S. Highway 87 of 18,726 vehicles daily (*La Vernia Municipal Development District*) through the center of the city and 14,923 vehicles just west of the city (*La Vernia Municipal Development District*) could possibly justify a hotel of this size. In an area with no comparative market however, it could be a tough sell for a franchise that is unwilling to take the plunge.

A second option is a much smaller hotel or motel with anywhere from 10-40 rooms. There are many successful lodgings like this throughout Texas and are generally independently owned. A third option, for La Vernia, is the bed and breakfast or guest house.

A bed and breakfast (B&B) is typically a private home opened to guests, where the owner provides breakfast. This has a distinct advantage in that most are already built and the rooms simply need to be separated into individual units. One of the historic homes in La Vernia could be transformed into a bed and breakfast accommodation. They would be a draw to tourists interested in historic homes, while being close enough to town to take advantage of shopping and restaurants.

A guest house, a variation of the B&B, could be very successful in the center of the city. With a proposed retail center on the corner, Canfield Road provides an excellent location. Small houses could be constructed on the empty lots, or existing houses could be converted to guest houses where the visitors never see the owners except to pick up the keys before their stay. This provides tourists a charming place to stay with more privacy than a typical B&B.

Several examples of this business model can be seen in Fredericksburg, Texas. Throughout Fredericksburg there are cabins, bungalows, and cottages available that provide visitors a convenient place to stay within the city.

The addition of new lodging facilities and bed and breakfast or guest houses can also provide an additional source of income for La Vernia in the form of the hotel occupancy tax. This tax of 6% is imposed on a visitor paying for a room or space costing more than \$15.00 a day and can be subject to an additional tax by local authorities (*Office of the Texas Comptroller*). This revenue can only be used to directly enhance and promote tourism according to guidelines established by the state of Texas (Texas Hotel and Lodging Association).

There are a number of ways the city could use this new resource. A visitor information center could be established to provide tourists maps of the city, information on local historical landmarks, parks, and guides to local restaurants or shops (*Texas Hotel and Lodging Association*). It can pay for advertising or promotions directly designed to enhance tourism, or go towards programs that promote local arts and entertainment that also draw tourists. The tax can be used to increase signage in the city directing visitors to popular sights and attractions. It can also fund historical preservation and restoration programs (*Texas Hotel and Lodging Association*).

The potential to capitalize on tourism is there. Every year in April bicyclists from across Texas gather in La Vernia for the Wild West Hammer Fest, a bicycle tour that raises money for the Arthritis Foundation. Later in the year, the Barbecue Cook-Off takes place and brings competitive barbecue teams and many hungry visitors to the City Park. Providing some of these guests a place to stay for a night or

two will bring in revenue that can then be used to promote the city and increase attendance for future events.

Develop Commercial Activity in the Downtown District

Commercial development needs to be planned. It already happens at the level of individual business. Most (if not all) businesses carefully research potential locations before they build or open a new store. They will use data from the U.S. Decennial Census, the U.S. Economic Census, industry or trade groups, gap analyses that show them where there is unmet demand, economic forecasts for specific areas or locations, etc.

Establishments from each sector will have different characteristics, and they should be located where they can attract the most business. They also need to locate where they have the least negative impact on the surrounding area. For example, a gasoline station with a convenience store would best be located along a road with relatively high traffic, such as US 87 or perhaps FM 775 not in a historic downtown business district.

For this reason, it is wise for communities to also plan their commercial development. They can choose to highlight the business climate of a location in general, or they can target specific sectors or businesses that they feel would be a good match for their local economy.

As public agencies, they are also responsible for the well-being of the community as a whole. Therefore, they should also take into account possible impacts that new businesses would have on traffic, parking, storm water management, and other concerns. The cost of reacting to the consequences of unplanned or poorly managed development is often higher, both economically and socially, than the cost of a proactive and responsible approach to the economic development process.

While big-box retailers usually locate along major roads and highways on formerly rural land at the edge of an urban area, smaller retailers—whether franchised or independent—will best be served by locating where the density of population is higher and where there is more likelihood of pedestrian activity.

Traditional Main Street commercial areas usually had a hotel, a dry goods store, a clothing store, a drug store and/or soda fountain, or other large businesses located at key intersections along Main Street. Between and around these larger establishments were smaller shops and businesses, usually much more specialized. People would typically see these smaller shops while walking from one anchor store or destination to another.

Transportation and shipping facilities were often nearby though not always on Main Street itself. This usually guaranteed a certain level of foot traffic on a daily basis (at least on weekdays). Also, traditional Main Streets were usually located adjacent to or a short distance from a



Figure 48: Proposed Commercial Buildings on Chihuahua Street Material and Supply Dealers sector is linked with the Lawn, Garden Equipment, and Supply Stores sector. However, establishments in these sectors are more likely to be located along US 87 rather than along Chihuahua Street or elsewhere in the Downtown District.

town square or civic plaza. This provided another source of pedestrian traffic.

Sectors with High Potential for the Downtown District

The gap analysis for La Vernia’s primary market area (within a 5-mile radius of the city) shows that 14 sectors have high potential for filling opportunity gaps in that market area. Of these, 12 business sectors are suitable for the Downtown District (Table 11).

From the list, it is apparent that there are some potential synergies between sectors. For example, the Building

Sectors which would be more suited to the Downtown District in La Vernia will tend to have smaller average sales, and if located along Chihuahua Street, be suited as much for foot traffic or bicycle traffic as for automobile traffic.

These would include:

- Limited-Service Eating Places
- Full-Service Restaurants

- Women's Clothing Stores
- Other Miscellaneous Store Retailers
- Sporting Goods Stores
- Beer, Wine, and Liquor Stores
- Gift, Novelty, and Souvenir Stores
- Shoe Stores

Commercial Retail Potential of the Downtown District

In the case of La Vernia's Downtown District and Main Street (Chihuahua Street), the civic public space provided by the Main Plaza and the new City Hall would serve as one of the anchors. Another possible commercial or civic anchor is the location of the former Baumann's Supermarket. The area between these two locations would represent the heart of the Downtown District and would benefit from the increased activity at the two anchor locations.

There are also vacant lots and empty buildings along Chihuahua Street which could be potential sites for infill development, with small to mid-sized businesses. In particular, "boutique" retail shops which offer highly specialized services or products would suit the scale of the proposed Main Street commercial area.

There are also several buildings in the Downtown area that can be repurposed or restored. This would help maintain the visual identity of the Downtown District while also revitalizing it by bringing in new business establishments.

The large shed structure located just north of Chihuahua Street on Seguin Road (FM 775) could be creatively reused in a variety of ways, depending on the specific businesses that would locate there. It is conveniently located along a major traffic corridor and could provide an additional anchor for the Downtown District. It could house a cluster of small "boutique" retail establishments from the business sectors listed above. Examples could include: a tea room that serves sandwiches (Limited-Service Eating Places); a seasonal clothing and accessory boutique (Women's Clothing Stores); a custom-made boot shop (Shoe Stores); a shop selling accessories for cell phones and tablets (Other Miscellaneous Store Retailers). The shed could thus become a significant retail destination in the Downtown District.

These shops would help enhance the commercial retail potential of the Downtown District in two ways: they can help capture a greater percentage of consumer expenditures within the five-mile market area radius, and they can help attract additional consumer expenditure from outside the five-mile radius.

Capturing Local Consumer Expenditures

It is crucial for La Vernia's long-term economic health that it capture a larger share of consumer expenditures of the population of both the city and the surrounding area. As mentioned in the gap analysis, the population of the area within the five-mile market area radius is almost 11,000. Three-quarters of all consumer expenditure of this

population (about \$129 million of \$175 million) is being lost to businesses outside that five-mile radius.

If new shops were to open that offered goods and services that consumers are currently traveling to San Antonio, Floresville, or Seguin to buy, a substantial portion of those lost consumer expenditures could be recovered. In order to do so effectively, the prices of goods and services in the La Vernia market have to be competitive enough that it would be no more expensive (and preferably less expensive) for someone to buy a good or service locally in La Vernia than it would be to buy it in San Antonio, Floresville, or elsewhere. This cost can be calculated both in money spent on fuel and in time spent on driving.

This calculation is especially important for more commonly available goods or services. A large enough price difference between one location and another would prompt the consumer to choose the less expensive option, even when that option is located further away. When there is little or no price difference between locations (and when the good or service is otherwise identical), then the consumer will usually choose the closer option.

Of course, prices for goods and services may not change as often as fuel prices, but care needs to be taken to keep prices competitive with nearby markets, and to take into account the long-term average of fuel costs, as those costs impact consumer choice (especially when they exceed a certain threshold).

Table 14: High Potential Businesses for La Vernia’s Downtown District

Sector	TX avg. sales per business	Potential
Building Material and Supply Dealers	\$900,000	17.25
Limited-Service Eating Places	\$500,000	11.79
Full-Service Restaurants	\$600,000	11.61
Women’s Clothing Stores	\$200,000	7.16
Other Miscellaneous Store Retailers	\$400,000	6.59
Pharmacies and Drug Stores	\$900,000	6.02
Automotive Parts/Accessories and Tire Stores	\$400,000	5.59
Sporting Goods Stores	\$300,000	4.20
Beer, Wine, and Liquor Stores	\$400,000	3.64
Lawn, Garden Equipment, and Supply Stores	\$400,000	3.50
Gift, Novelty, and Souvenir Stores	\$200,000	3.42
Shoe Stores	\$300,000	3.40

Source: Rural Business Program; gap analysis data from Nielsen Corp.,

Specific sectors and businesses within those sectors will be determined by business owners, entrepreneurs and stakeholders of La Vernia according to their economic needs and preferences. Agencies such as the La Vernia Municipal Development District and the Greater La Vernia Chamber of Commerce can be key in facilitating communication between the residents, businesses, and officeholders of the community.

Attracting Non-Local Consumer Expenditures

In addition to keeping a greater share of its consumer spending, La Vernia and its surrounding area can also attract consumer spending from outside the primary market (the five-mile radius). For this kind of spending, La Vernia needs

to offer goods and services that are not common in the area and that can only be found in La Vernia.

If retail sales exceed consumer expenditures, that means the market area is effectively exporting goods and services to other areas (and benefiting from the revenue thus generated). This can be especially helpful to a local economy because the spending is not offset by the cost of providing infrastructure. People from outside the area are spending money locally but they do not require city services that residents need.

One of the classical examples of a sector that fulfills this function is tourism and its related activities. Cities that have distinct historical, cultural, and natural assets can differentiate themselves by creating a recognizable and attractive “brand”. The La Vernia Municipal Development District and Central Business District advisory committee held a contest to create a branding tag line and received more than 60 entries; the winning entry, “Live Vibrantly,” uses the cursive script “L” and “V” familiar to residents and adapts it to the tag line, which will “promote economic development and the revitalization of La Vernia’s Central Business District.”¹⁸

By highlighting and publicizing its natural assets (such as the Cibolo Creek area, the sandy hills nearby, wildlife and/or game animals), its historical assets (an important way station along the Old Chihuahua Road, later the San Antonio and Gulf Shore Railroad, and now US 87), and its cultural assets (music festival, bike ride, barbecue festival),

La Vernia can create both goods and services that will both employ the local population and attract visitors from the San Antonio metropolitan area for day trips and long-distance travelers from further afield for a day or two with an overnight stay.

Industrial Park Development

La Vernia has three existing areas within the city limits zoned for industrial use. The first light industrial park area is located along Industrial Lane immediately to the northwest of the historical Downtown District. This light industrial park is also the location of the La Vernia Church of Christ at the end of Industrial Lane. A second zoned industrial area is located on both sides of Seguin Road immediately above the Downtown District. This area is currently the site of water tank manufacturing business in a large open shed structure. This site has significant potential for commercial retail development and should eventually be considered for rezoning. A third area that is zoned for industrial use is south of River Road and borders Farm Road 342. Two light industries are located in this area.

In recent years, La Vernia has also encouraged the location of light industrial uses in an area about half a mile south of the city limits. This South Parkway Industrial Area appears to have 14 tenants arranged on both sides of a long cul-de-sac.

La Vernia could also plan additional industrial parks to complement the existing industrial park areas. The developing impact of the Eagle Ford Shale Play is still in its early stages and La Vernia has good proximity to the emerging oil and gas fields in the region. A more detailed market study is necessary to determine the potential for light industrial site expansion. This should be done in the context of a broader economic/business development strategy for the community.

Work Towards Home Rule

One of the key factors affecting the ability of a city to effectively implement its plans is whether or not it is a home rule city. To establish home rule, a city needs to have a population of at least 5,000 and a home rule charter has to be approved by its citizens via an election.

According to the Texas Attorney General offices home rule cities “have the inherent authority to do just about anything that qualifies as a ‘public purpose’ and is not contrary to the constitution or laws of the state.” By contrast, cities with populations under 5,000 have a much narrower range of powers and are in fact “restricted to doing what the state directs or permits them to do.”

One of the key powers of home rule is unilateral annexation. With this power, cities “can bring an adjacent unincorporated area into the city without the permission of the persons residing in that area.” This is important because it helps a city to guide the development of the

land around it, and because it allows the city to expand its revenue base through property taxes (some of which goes toward providing municipal utilities such as water and power).

Without the power of unilateral annexation, cities are often subject to outside forces—such as urban sprawl and suburbanization—and have little control over how they can approach them. In some cases they are responsible for providing services to residents outside city limits but within the utility service district, which adds to cost without adding to revenue.

As of the 2010 U.S. Census, La Vernia had a population of 1,034 within its city limits: this is approximately 20% of the population needed for home rule. Given existing city limits and existing zoning, it may be problematic for La Vernia to achieve home rule in time to successfully guide the development of the unincorporated land around it. For example, most of La Vernia’s residential areas are currently zoned for single-family detached housing (shown in green in Figure 49). A few areas along Bluebonnet Road, D.L. Vest, and San Antonio Road have existing multi-family attached housing, but much of the area zoned for such housing (shown in magenta) is still undeveloped. In particular, there are two locations on U.S. 87 near the intersection with San Antonio Road which are currently empty and which are zoned for multi-family residential use. There is also one small mobile home development along U.S. 87 (shown as light blue). Also, a significant portion of land zoned for general commercial (brown) or for retail

(orange) use remains undeveloped. While some of this land will undoubtedly see commercial or retail development, some of it can be used for single-family and/or multi-family residential use.

Similarly, some areas currently zoned for agricultural use (purple) would more logically see commercial retail and/or residential development. If residential development was encouraged in areas along or near U.S. 87 and La Vernia Road, in the vicinity of the new H-E-B, this would fulfill a double purpose. It would increase the population of the incorporated city; and it would result in a significant residential population within a quarter-mile (walking distance) of the H-E-B, and not much further than that from La Vernia Primary and Intermediate Schools.

La Vernia’s extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ) currently extends a half-mile from the city limits (Figure 49) and includes some areas which have already been developed for residential, commercial, retail, and industrial uses. One of the most effective ways to reach the crucial threshold of 5,000 residents necessary for home rule would be to convince those residents currently outside city limits, but within the current ETJ that they stand to benefit from becoming part of La Vernia.

One important reason for doing so is that many county services (upon which those residents rely) originate in Floresville, 15 miles away. By joining La Vernia, those residents would be within 1 ½ miles of city services—a tenth of the distance.

In the gap analysis it was shown that the population within a five-mile radius of La Vernia was (as of the 2010 Census) 10,293, which is about ten times the incorporated city's current population of 1,034. If La Vernia added no population within its city limits, it would need to add about 40% of its primary market's population to reach the threshold of 5,000. If, however, the population within the city limits were to double to around 2,000 residents (for example), then the city would only need to add about 30% of the population of its primary market area to reach the threshold.

A good portion of that 30% is likely to be found within the current extra-territorial jurisdiction. If residents of certain areas adjacent to the city and within the ETJ choose to join the city, then the ETJ would extend from the new city limits. This becomes important, especially if other cities—San Antonio and Floresville—continue to expand, their ETJs will draw nearer to the ETJ of La Vernia.

There is already substantial development occurring along U.S. 87 and La Vernia Road to the west (toward San Antonio), along Farm to Market Road 775 to the southwest (toward Floresville), and along U.S. 87 to the southeast (toward Stockdale). The area along FM 775 between La Vernia and U.S. Highway 181, and along U.S. Highway 181 between FM 775 and Floresville, is more or less continually subdivided and likely to be developed.

Added to the development occurring along U.S. 87 between the current San Antonio city limits and Loop 1604, this is

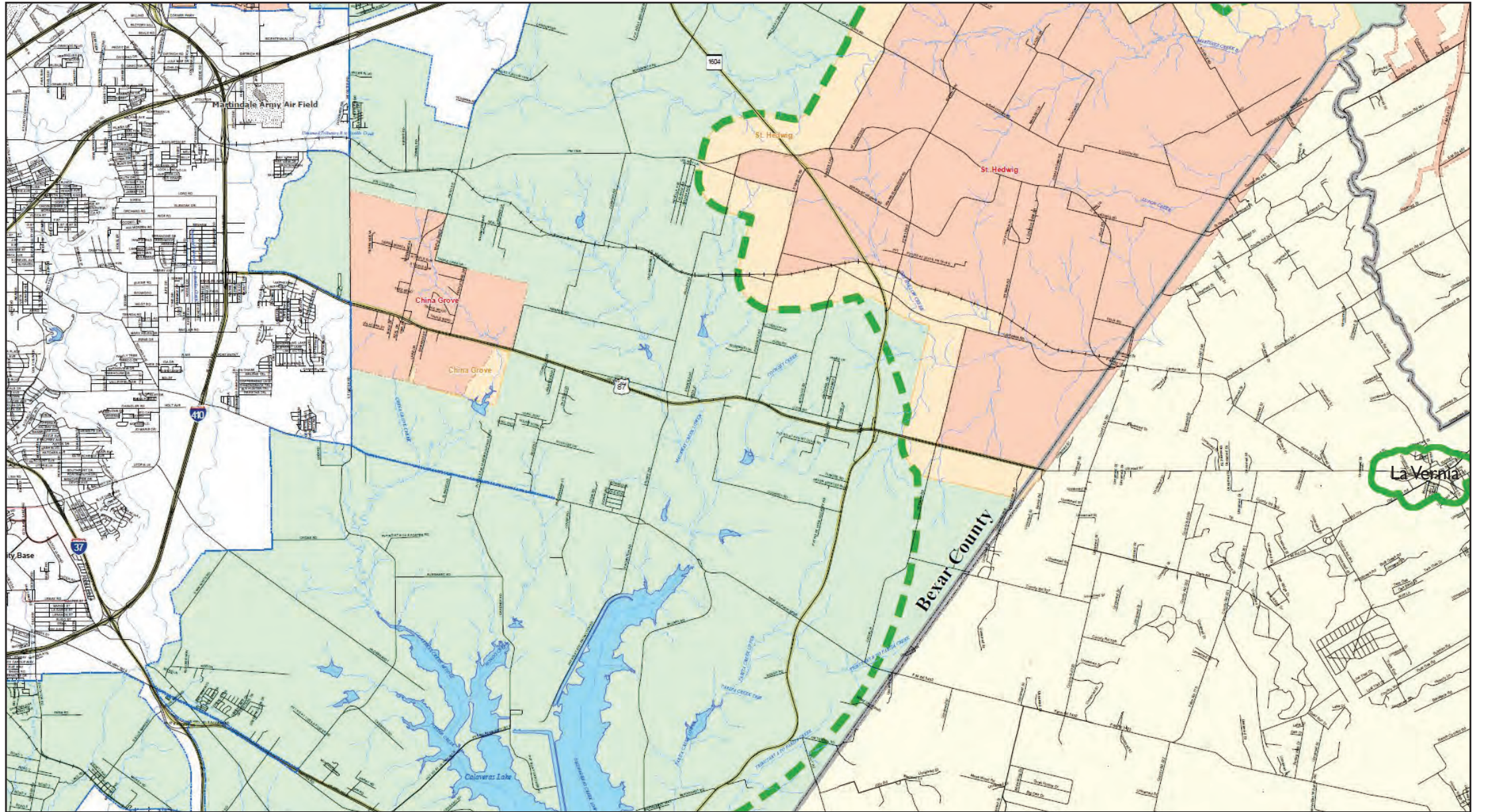
an indication that urban growth is continuing in the area. The primary challenge facing La Vernia is how to address urban growth in the coming decades. Home rule would give La Vernia more flexibility in doing so. It would also

allow it to plan more effectively to meet its long-term needs.



Figure 49: City Limits, Existing Zoning, and Extraterritorial Jurisdiction (ETJ) of La Vernia

Source: La Vernia Municipal Development District



Source: City of San Antonio

Figure 50: ETJ San Antonio and La Vernia



Proposed Implementation Plan

Implementation Plan

This study presents a number of strategic initiatives and plans to revitalize La Vernia's Downtown District and make it once again the center of community life and commerce. Equally important it seeks to enhance the community's local economy while maintaining its small-town ambience. It also identifies and analyzes a number of factors that must be taken into account if La Vernia is to grow its economy, create new job opportunities and attract additional investment. A key point in devising any long-term strategy is the need to put in place a plan of action that takes full advantage of the community's civic and economic assets. Also important is the need to create an implementation effort that is centered around realistic and cost-effective initiatives. While this study outlines a vision for La Vernia to pursue the next step along this path is to define a workable course of action. This section proposes such a plan and describes an implementation strategy to assist La Vernia in redeveloping its historic downtown district and lay the foundation for its long-term growth.

Listed below are several recommendations discussed at length in the previous sections. They include ways to expand La Vernia's economy and improve its competitive status relative to the larger region. Also included are a number of recommendations focused on redeveloping La Vernia's historic downtown. These recommendations are also designed to lay a foundation for ensuring its long-term growth. How they are implemented will, of course, be dependent on many factors. The key, however, is to move

aggressively forward with an effective plan of action that works for the community as a whole.

Putting in Place a Development Strategy

It is important to keep in mind that the recommendations included in this study are only a start. The next step is to discuss carefully the proposed recommendations and make adjustments as needed. Once this is done it will then be important to establish priorities for development. These priorities will always be governed by the availability of resources, and their relationship to other pressing needs the community has to address. Once priorities are decided upon the next step is to put together an implementation strategy and plan. As this is done elements of the proposed plan can be implemented. It is also useful to acknowledge that adjustments and changes in the plan are likely to be made as the community moves forward with its implementation. This means that whatever plan is decided upon, steps will have to be taken to carefully monitor and evaluate it over time to ensure that it remains relevant to the community. However, the ultimate success of this plan will depend, in large part, on the kinds of leadership that is provided over the course of its implementation. In the end, leadership more than any other factor will drive this effort.

Recommendations

Several categories of recommendations are described below. These categories are centered on economic development initiatives and the redevelopment of La Vernia's downtown

district. In addition, a number of recommendations are directed toward several other related areas such as the development of a new regional park and the development of a second industrial park in the area to spur additional growth and new investment. The next section will then outline a proposed implementation strategy and a plan of action.

Recommendations – Downtown District Revitalization

It is strongly recommended that a high priority be given to the redevelopment of La Vernia's Downtown District. Specifically:

- Improvements to Chihuahua Street, La Vernia's main street in the Downtown District, should be improved to make it more pedestrian friendly and attractive to encourage more residents and visitors to shop downtown.
- As part of this revitalization/redevelopment effort in the Downtown District, it is also recommended that a Civic Center and Plaza be developed to create a public square that will be visually identifiable as a central gathering place for public events and festivals. It will also provide a central location for city offices.
- It is further recommended that a Library and Learning Center be incorporated into the proposed Civic Center/Plaza to provide the community with a central location for a library,

informational services and additional educational facilities. It will also provide greater access to internet services to local citizens and businesses in the district.

In addition it is recommended that:

- Emphasis should also be given to the development of additional retail and commercial type activity in the Downtown District with a particular focus on destination type retail shopping and high-end office and financial related activities.
- In order to accommodate the development of the proposed Civic Center/Plaza Complex, it is recommended that there be a realignment of several streets and related infrastructure in the Downtown District. This realignment will center mainly on the Chihuahua Street/Bluebonnet Road intersection and adjoining streets in the Downtown District. This realignment will also allow for the development of additional retail/commercial space in the downtown area.
- In addition to the redevelopment of the Downtown District it is recommended that improvements be made to the U.S. 87 Corridor adjacent to the district to make it more pedestrian friendly and attractive. Emphasis should also center on improving accessibility to the Downtown District from U.S. 87, and providing additional space for retail/commercial development.

Recommendations – Community Development

In addition to the revitalization and redevelopment of La Vernia’s Downtown District several other recommendations are put forward to facilitate the overall development of La Vernia. These are described below:

- It is recommended that several gateway landmarks which clearly identify La Vernia to those entering the city should be strategically located along the major highways serving the community. It is further recommended that improvements be made to the U.S. 87 Corridor within the City of La Vernia. These improvements will also open up additional land for retail/commercial development within the City of La Vernia.
- It is strongly recommended that the City of La Vernia and Wilson County move forward with the development of a new Regional Park bordering Cibolo Creek. This park would include facilities for outdoor recreation, entertainment venues and a hike-and-bike trail along the existing San Antonio and Gulf Shore Railroad right-of-way. This park should be planned and developed as part of a broader community development effort.
- In order to facilitate the long-term development and growth of La Vernia it is recommended that steps be taken to expand its local infrastructure and streets, especially in areas currently experiencing poor accessibility, inadequate

drainage conditions, and environmental concerns. This kind of development is especially needed in those parts of the community that are having problems with connectivity, traffic congestion due to activity in the Eagle Ford Shale Play, and poor street alignment within the community.

- To deal with the future development of La Vernia additional emphasis should be placed on those areas adjacent to it. These areas are currently subject to encroachment by San Antonio and other communities in the region. In order to annex these areas and ensure development that is compatible with the needs of La Vernia and its residents, it will have to achieve Home-Rule status. To accomplish this, the City of La Vernia and the community, as a whole, will have to focus on expanding its population base and move toward a comprehensive, long-term view of its growth potential. This move toward Home-Rule status should be a high priority for the community.

Recommendations – Economic/Business Development

As part of the overall redevelopment strategy for La Vernia several recommendations are also put forth to expand efforts to improve its economic and business assets. These recommendations are discussed below.

- High priority should be given to the development of an overall strategy to improve La Vernia’s economy by expanding its small business sector,

enhancing local entrepreneurship, and attracting new investment to grow its tax base and generate additional revenue for the city. To accomplish these goals it is further recommended that:

- Steps be taken to capture more local consumer expenditures to keep income in La Vernia by expanding its local business sector, broadening its tourism base to bring new income into the community, and expanding its overall market base to encourage new businesses to relocate or expand into the community.
- Emphasis should be placed on the development and revitalization of the historic Downtown District and the U.S. 87 Corridor to accommodate in-fill development to foster new business growth and to diversify the local economy.
- Based on the Economic Base/Gap Analysis included in this study for La Vernia it is recommended that a high priority be given to the development of a targeted business recruitment strategy to recruit several types of businesses that have been designated as having a high potential for growth in the local market. These include businesses related to: (1) Limited–Service Eating Places; (2) Full–Service Restaurants; (3) Building Material and Supply Stores; (4) Pharmacy and Drug Stores; (5)

Women’s Clothing Stores; (6) Grocery Stores; and, (7) Other-Miscellaneous Store Retailers.

- In conjunction with the above, it is also strongly recommended that steps should be taken to develop an overall marketing strategy for La Vernia describing its assets, resources and talent in order to recruit new businesses looking to relocate or expand operations in the area in order to grow its local economy and generate new investment.
- The City of La Vernia and the La Vernia Municipal Development District (MDD) should evaluate the potential for establishing a second industrial park in the community to attract more light industry to the community, improve its employment base, enhance the local economy and generate new investment. The proposed study should also examine the prospects for additional industrial development requirements related to the Eagle Ford Shale Play in South Texas.
- It is further recommended that the City of La Vernia, in conjunction with its school district, should take steps to leverage its existing educational facilities to establish a career training/retraining and vocational educational program for local and area residents. Given the large population base close to La Vernia and its strategic location, the development of such a facility has merit.
- Because of its potential market base that includes portions of Wilson, Guadalupe and Bexar counties

it is further recommended that the City of La Vernia and its MDD should broaden its secondary market. (5 to 10 miles) reach for local businesses to include residents living in the area. This market outreach should be an integral part of a broader economic growth strategy for La Vernia.

- In order to better leverage its local history, and to take full advantage of its strategic location, community events, environmental assets and recreational facilities, it is recommended that the City of La Vernia, the MDD and Wilson County develop a broad based tourism marketing/development strategy to attract visitors and tourists from the surrounding region and elsewhere. As part of this effort, the MDD and the City of La Vernia should also take steps to expand its lodging options to include bed and breakfast and hotel/motel facilities to attract more tourists and visitors to the community to generate additional revenue for the community, create new employment opportunities for local residents, and expand the local economy.

Implementation Strategy

To carry out the recommendations and the action steps discussed below it will be necessary to bring the community together to address matters of common concern and to develop an overall implementation strategy. The implementing entity for this task will be the La Vernia Municipal Development District (MDD). The MDD, in

turn, will draw heavily from local citizens, business and civic leaders, and public officials as it moves forward with the implementation of this plan. However, as noted earlier, the primary driver of this implementation effort will be the community's leadership.

Three main areas are addressed in this plan: (1) the revitalization of La Vernia's historic Downtown District, (2) the overall development of La Vernia, and (3) the development and implementation of an economic/business growth strategy for the community. While these areas are discussed separately they really overlap and reinforce one another. Another theme underlying this plan is the need to create a sustainable environment for La Vernia that will meet the needs of its citizens. This idea also reinforces the concept of investing in the community to generate long-term growth and equity. Underscoring all of this is the need to create a vision for La Vernia. This study and the discussion that follows provides a framework for that vision.

Implementing the Plan – Areas of Responsibility

In carrying out this plan a blend of public and private participation will be necessary. This public/private partnership is critical because no one entity has the resources needed to fully implement this kind of plan. Each sector also has a set of responsibilities. These are briefly described below:

Public Sector – City of La Vernia/MDD

The public sector in La Vernia is mainly responsible for the planning and construction of infrastructure improvements, the development of a future land use plan supported by a unified development ordinance, and the development of incentive packages to provide the basis for long-term economic and business growth. Other public entities such as the Texas Department of Transportation and Wilson County are responsible for developing, maintaining and upgrading the area's roads and highways. La Vernia's MDD, the city's primary economic/business development arm, is responsible for carrying out its community and economic development efforts. The MDD is also responsible for promoting economic development in La Vernia, inducing new businesses to relocate and/or expand into the community, creating partnerships to carry out development initiatives, and developing the assets and resources needed to carry out the development process.

Private Sector – Business Sector

The private sector in La Vernia creates the basis for its local economy. It also generates the necessary revenue and investment assets that drives that economy. It is comprised mainly of local and area businesses that provide goods and services to the local population. It also provides employment opportunities for local citizens. In many respects, this private sector is the "engine" of the local economy.

Any community's ability to address its needs is dependent, in large part, on the capabilities of the local government. It is also dependent on the kinds of assets, talents and resources the community is able to mobilize. One of the major problems confronting communities is the severe lack of assets and resources they are able to mobilize to actively engage in economic, business and community development activities. Another area of concern is their inability to use the talent and skills of their own citizens to deal with their problems and needs. Without this capacity to engage the community, as a whole, in the building/development process, a local government will be hard pressed to remain as a viable entity. Fortunately, the City of La Vernia has the capacity to engage its citizens in the development process. It also has the capacity to bring in the necessary resources and assets to facilitate this process.

It is important to point out that communities can be successful if they can pull themselves together when they need to do so. Successful communities are also proactive. They can anticipate change and problems rather than merely react to them. They are also successful because they have learned to plan ahead and take charge of their future. This plan reflects La Vernia's hope for the future. It also reflects its desire to create new opportunities for its citizens, and to set the stage for future growth.

Implementation Plan – City of La Vernia

The Implementation Plan described below outlines each of the recommendations presented earlier and the steps needed to carry them out. It also provides information

and guidance in obtaining the necessary resources needed for implementation. Additional information on possible funding sources to support these initiatives is included in Appendix B of this study. As noted previously, the primary coordinating and implementing entity for this plan is the La Vernia Municipal Development District (MDD). As it moves forward the MDD will also draw in other partners and assets to facilitate the implementation process.

Implementation Plan – Downtown District Revitalization

The goal is to redevelop and revitalize La Vernia’s historic Downtown District to make it once again the center of community life and commerce. Another goal is to create a vibrant Downtown District that will spur additional development in the community.

The MDD, in conjunction with the City of La Vernia should form a Downtown District Revitalization Task Force to spearhead the redevelopment/revitalization effort in the historic Downtown District. A key initiative of this Task Force will be to create a public/private partnership to develop a long-term plan to implement the recommendations put forth in this study and to mobilize the community’s assets, talents and resources to develop a plan of action with time lines and areas of responsibility to rebuild the Downtown District.

Once the Task Force is in place it will focus on the development of a detailed action plan to:

- Develop and initiate specific plans and action steps to improve Chihuahua Street to make it more pedestrian friendly and attractive to encourage more local residents and visitors to shop there and to use its facilities.
- Create a Civic Center/Plaza Complex committee to develop specific plans to build a new City Hall/Plaza/Library and Learning Center facility as part of a broader effort to redevelop and revitalize the Downtown District.
- The Task Force will also develop a list of potential retail/commercial businesses that could be targeted and recruited for the Downtown District. The Task Force will also work with existing businesses in the District to improve their operations, upgrade store fronts and enhance the appearance of the area based on concepts discussed in this plan.
- To encourage the development of additional retail/commercial type activity in the Downtown District, the MDD and the City of La Vernia along with the Task Force will put together an incentive package designed to attract targeted businesses to relocate and/or expand into the District. A similar package will be developed for existing businesses in the District to encourage them to remain there.
- In conjunction with the above, the MDD, the Task Force, and the City of La Vernia will establish a special working group to develop a plan to realign several streets and related infrastructure elements

in the Downtown District to accommodate the development of the proposed Civic Center/Plaza Complex and the Library-Learning Center facility. Emphasis will be centered on the Chihuahua Street/Bluebonnet Road intersection and adjoining streets in the Downtown District. This realignment will increase accessibility to the Downtown District, allow for the development of additional retail/commercial space in the District, reduce congestion and encourage new investment in the area.

A second major goal designed to encourage the revitalization and redevelopment of the historic Downtown District in La Vernia is the proposed redevelopment of the U.S. 87 Corridor adjacent to the District to make it more pedestrian friendly and attractive. The proposed redevelopment of this Corridor will also improve accessibility to the Downtown District and provide additional space for retail/commercial development along U.S. 87.

Specific Initiatives of the Task Force

In addition to spearheading the redevelopment of the Downtown District in La Vernia, the proposed Task Force will initiate efforts to redevelop the U.S. 87 Corridor adjacent to the District. This effort will involve several key players including the MDD, the City of La Vernia, Wilson County and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT). The intent is to improve the appearance of the U.S. Highway 87 Corridor, improve its connectivity to the Downtown District, and open up additional underdeveloped land along the highway for retail and

commercial use. To accomplish this, the Task Force will focus on several interrelated initiatives. These initiatives include:

1. Work closely with the TxDOT District Office in San Antonio to develop a long-term plan to upgrade U.S. 87 within the designated corridor. To accomplish this, the City of La Vernia and Wilson County will have to initiate discussions with TxDOT to develop a plan to improve the highway corridor and incorporate key design features to improve its appearance.
2. In addition to working with TxDOT, the MDD and the City of La Vernia should initiate the development of the land use plan and related ordinances to improve the designated corridor. The goal here is to improve the roadway and adjacent land areas, enhance accessibility, impose design standards to improve the corridor's appearance and ensure that any new development that takes place in the area is compatible with the needs and zoning requirements of La Vernia.
3. As development proceeds in the corridor the MDD and the Task Force should also examine the need to create an overall marketing strategy and incentive package designed to attract high-end retail and commercial business to the area. This development will also strengthen the Downtown District and provide additional venues for new investment in the community. Given the rather large market base in the area around La Vernia the

development of an expanded downtown shopping area/district makes sense. This initiative will also enable the community to capture consumer generated income streams that are now being directed toward other communities in the region.

The intent of these recommendations and action steps is to revitalize the historic Downtown District of La Vernia. This effort is also important for the overall economic success of La Vernia and the surrounding area. Without a strong central core La Vernia's efforts to build up its economy and improve the community will be much harder to achieve over time. Consequently, a high priority should be given to this task.

Implementation Plan – Community Development

The goal here is to improve the quality of life for all residents in La Vernia by expanding the local economy, creating new recreational areas and parks, undertaking comprehensive planning to enhance the overall environment, and expanding its infrastructure. Equally important is the need to look at the community's long-term requirements.

Specific Initiatives

In developing an overall development strategy for La Vernia the MDD and the City of La Vernia should move quickly to develop a comprehensive plan for the community to improve its housing, services, infrastructure network, accessibility, aesthetics and local economy. This should be

done in conjunction with the development of a long-range economic growth strategy and land use plan. In preparing this plan emphasis should be placed on sustainable development practices, smart growth principles, the development of new recreational facilities, and the creation of a targeted investment strategy designed to support the community's long-range development. In carrying out this initiative, several areas also need to be addressed. These include the following:

1. As recommended in the previous section, the development of gateway landmarks to clearly define La Vernia to those entering the city should be carefully considered. These landmarks should be located at strategic points on major highways and roads serving the community such as U.S. 87 and FM 775. These landmarks will not only serve to establish a clear boundary for La Vernia, they will also provide a distinctive signature for the community as a whole.
2. A second important initiative proposed is the development of a new Regional Park bordering Cibolo Creek. This is a long-term investment in the future of La Vernia. It could also serve as a catalyst for additional growth in the area. To move forward with its development the MDD and the City of La Vernia should create a special committee to better define its location and boundaries relative to Cibolo Creek, and determine the kinds of facilities it would need. This park would include areas that are currently subject to flooding and a portion of the right-of-way that was once part of the now



Figure 51: View from Civic Center/Library Balcony - Proposed Plaza

defunct San Antonio and Gulf Shore Railroad. This right-of-way could be used for hike-and-bike trails and camping facilities. Once the park area is defined steps should be taken to develop a land-use plan and an overall design concept for the park. In addition, a long-range funding plan to develop the proposed park should be prepared. Funding for this kind of facility is available through the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Information on possible funding sources for developing this and other facilities are provided in Appendix B.

3. In addition to the proposed regional park it is further recommended that the MDD and the City of La Vernia develop a comprehensive flood plain/drainage plan for the community. As noted previously this plan should center in on the Cibolo Creek floodplain and other areas east and north of La Vernia that are subject to flooding. Such a plan will provide several important benefits to the community. First, it will eliminate several barriers for future growth in the community. Second, it will allow for new investment in areas that are now considered to be off-limits for any kind of development. It will also help the community in developing better regulations for governing land uses and growth in areas already prone to flooding. Finally, it will prevent future disasters. Because of its importance to the well-being of the community as a whole, this recommendation should receive a high priority.



Figure 52: Proposed Regional Park



Figure 53: Proposed Regional Park - Picnic Areas

4. Another key recommendation is the development of a critical infrastructure plan for La Vernia. In order to facilitate the long-term development of La Vernia it is critically important to address concerns dealing with poor accessibility, inadequate drainage conditions, environmental pollution, flooding, connectivity, traffic congestion and the poor alignment of streets. By addressing these concerns in a proactive way a community is able to prevent or at least mitigate a serious problem or condition before it becomes dangerous or very expensive to fix. It is important to point out that communities that fail to anticipate needs or engage in long-term planning usually have to deal with the consequences of their inaction. They also have difficulty in providing a high quality of life for their citizens. The development of a plan designed to target critical infrastructure is important and should be given a high priority by the MDD and the City of La Vernia. To deal with this the City of La Vernia should take immediate steps to carefully evaluate all of its critical infrastructure and conduct a risk assessment on them to ensure that they are able to function and perform as they should. If problems arise, or if the risk assessment indicates that there is a high possibility of failure, the City of La Vernia and the MDD should take appropriate steps to mitigate the concern.
5. Managing the long-term growth prospects for La Vernia is a major challenge. In a previous plan prepared for the MDD by TIP Strategies, Inc., it was noted that “the small size of the city and the

amount of land dedicated to non-taxable uses significantly limits the city’s ability to support a growing population and employment base. In addition, development patterns that focuses on residential growth outside of the city limits puts further strain on the city’s ability to provide public services and finance infrastructure projects.” At the same time the encroachment of larger metropolitan areas like San Antonio threaten to engulf La Vernia. At this point in time La Vernia is limited as to what areas it can annex to protect itself from the encroachment by San Antonio and other larger cities in the region. To address this concern La Vernia will have to secure a Home-Rule status. However, for this to occur it will have to expand its present population to 5000. While, La Vernia does have some significant limitations in its ability to annex, it can pursue annexation opportunities through voluntary annexation of surrounding areas, and growing the community to increase its population. To move forward with this process, the MDD and the City of La Vernia should identify and prioritize areas that are most suitable for annexation. They can also work with populated areas close to La Vernia to seek their voluntary incorporation. This will be a long-term process. However, it is achievable. To facilitate this process the MDD and the City of La Vernia, in conjunction with Wilson County should develop a carefully thought out strategy to expedite this process.

Implementation Plan – Economic/Business Development

The goal here is to expand La Vernia’s economy, generate new investments in the community, provide job opportunities for residents, and obtain additional revenue for the city. To achieve these aims the MDD and the City of La Vernia will need to put in place an economic/business development strategy that focuses on expanding its small business sector, enhance entrepreneurship, and brings in new investment to build the local economy. The MDD can also work with businesses to expand their operations, improve their efficiency and enhance their workforce. To accomplish these ends several specific initiatives are proposed. These are described below:

Specific Initiatives

- I. To expand the local economy the MDD and the City of La Vernia should take steps to build up the community’s existing small business sector and improve entrepreneurship in the community. This can be accomplished by developing a business support network in the community. This network can focus on several things such as training, providing technical assistance and market research support to network businesses, and providing counseling. The MDD could also work with the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) Network and the Rural Business Program housed in the Institute for Economic Development at The University of Texas at San Antonio. The proposed network can also work with the La Vernia Chamber

of Commerce and other business support groups in the community. The intent and goal of this network would be to strengthen businesses in the community and provide additional support to enable them to grow their operations if they desire to do so. This network would also increase the ability of its member businesses to survive in bad economic times and grow in good ones.

2. In addition to working with existing businesses in the community, the MDD can take an active role in recruiting new businesses for La Vernia. Based on the Economic Base/Gap Analysis included in this study for La Vernia several types of businesses were identified as having a high potential to succeed in the local economy. Using this information the MDD can develop a targeted business recruitment strategy to recruit businesses in these sectors for relocation and/or expansion to La Vernia. This approach will also require an aggressive marketing strategy designed to attract these types of businesses to set up operations in La Vernia.
3. Another proposed initiative designed to enhance business development in La Vernia is to develop appropriate incentives and tax abatement packages for business owners and entrepreneurs looking to establish a new business in La Vernia. Special attention should be given to these businesses and entrepreneurs on the targeted business list.
4. In conjunction with the above, the MDD in partnership with the La Vernia Chamber of

Commerce and the Small Business Development Center at the Institute for Economic Development could develop an ongoing support function to work with local entrepreneurs, business owners and industry representatives. The MDD would also provide technical and research support to local businesses, location assistance and marketing support. This would require the MDD to expand its current operations.

5. It is also recommended that a comprehensive business development strategy be developed as part of an overall plan to expand the local economy in La Vernia. As part of that strategy, the MDD and its partners would provide a series of workshops to inform small business owners and entrepreneurs on how to start up and operate a business; create a small business loan program to assist entrepreneurs and small business owners with additional capital to start up or expand their businesses; and, provide a range of incentive programs designed to encourage small business development in La Vernia.
6. As part of a broader economic growth strategy for La Vernia the MDD should initiate the development of a feasibility study to evaluate the potential for establishing a second industrial park in the community to attract light industry, improve its employment base and generate new investment. This study would also examine the ability of La Vernia to take advantage of new developments taking place in the Eagle Ford Shale Play. If this

study indicates that such a facility is feasible the MDD should take steps to seek appropriate financing for the project and evaluate the kinds of businesses that would be housed in this park. The development of this industrial park could also generate additional investment in the community and the surrounding areas and create new job opportunities for local residents.

7. Critical for any long-term development strategy to grow the local economy is the capability and capacity of the workforce in the community. To take advantage of existing educational facilities in La Vernia the MDD and the City of La Vernia in conjunction with the local school district should determine the feasibility of establishing a training/retraining and vocational educational facility and program for local and area residents. It is assumed that given the large population base in the region, its strategic location relative to San Antonio and the Eagle Ford Shale Play, that such a facility would be feasible. In carrying out this study it will be necessary to examine the long-term employment prospects in the region and to carefully evaluate the capabilities of the current workforce in the area. If the study indicates that this initiative is feasible, the MDD and the school district should establish a working group to develop a concept for the proposed facility and program in partnership with area workforce development boards and institutions of higher education. This initiative should be given a high priority.

8. As part of an overall economic growth strategy for La Vernia the MDD, the City of La Vernia and Wilson County should move toward the development and implementation of a tourism development/marketing strategy and plan for the area. This strategy and plan of action would be designed to take advantage of the area's historical, environmental and cultural assets to draw in visitors and tourists from the surrounding region and other parts of the country. A critical part of this effort is the need to expand the area's lodging options. At this time these options are limited. Therefore the first step in putting together an overall strategy to enhance tourism development is to inventory critical assets needed to sustain that industry. In addition, a marketing strategy will also have to be developed to expand tourism in the area. As these critical steps are taken, the MDD may also want to establish a visitor's center in La Vernia to serve as a coordinating entity for developing this industry for La Vernia and the surrounding region. In addition a strategic planning process to create a specific plan of action would need to be initiated to provide the tourism program a strong foundation and to generate community support.

Next Steps

The strategic initiatives, plans and recommendations presented and discussed in this section are designed to revitalize La Vernia's Downtown District, expand its local economy and provide a means to enhance the community's quality of life and well-being. Earlier it was noted that a key

point in devising any long-term strategy is the need to put in place a plan of action that takes full advantage of the community's civic and economic assets. Also important is the requirement to create an implementation effort that is centered around realistic and cost-effective initiatives. We believe that this plan reflects those points. The next step is to carefully review the recommendations and proposed action items to determine their merit. This effort will then set the stage for creating appropriate mechanisms and organizations to move forward with the implementation of this plan.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Summary of Community SWOT Session

Strengths

1. Professional Services per capita
2. Good Place for Commuters to Live
3. Emergency Services
4. High Income
5. High Education Level
6. Low Crime Rates
7. Good School District
8. Churches
9. Easy Access for Community and Surrounding Area
10. Close-Knit Community
11. Proximity to San Antonio (for jobs)
12. Proximity to Eagle Ford (for jobs)
13. Community Organizations
14. H-E-B
15. Chihuahua Trail Art Show
16. Chamber of Commerce
17. Cibolo Creek
18. Trail Rides
19. Railroad Right-of-Way
20. Bluebonnet Festival
21. Small-Town Atmosphere/Identity
22. Local History (Historical Association)
23. Family-Oriented
24. Quiet
25. Main Street
26. Unique and Diverse Heritage
27. Hills and Landscape Surrounding the City
28. BBQ Cook-Off and Music Festival
29. Bike Events

30. "Keep La Vernia Beautiful"
31. Community Pride
32. Involvement in Children's Activities (sports, church, CYO)
33. Gonzales Road Marker
34. Historic Bridge (linked with history of Alamo)
35. City Parks

Weaknesses

1. Lack of Community Center
2. Flood Plain (East and North of town)
3. Land Prices
4. Lack of Medical Facilities
5. Lack of Hotel Space
6. (Lack of?) Outreach Programs
7. Lack of Businesses Catering to Young People
8. Infrastructure!!
9. Lack of Pedestrian Accessibility/Sidewalks
10. Can't Annex Land
11. Lack of Rental Properties
12. Lack of Local Businesses to Create Revenue
13. Lack of Good/Primary Jobs in Town
14. Lack of Emergency Medical Response
15. Lack of Nightlife
16. Sales Tax Revenue Loss
17. City Water System (Infrastructure)
18. Water/Sewer Mains Need Updating
19. Inadequate Stormwater Drainage (esp. roads)
20. Prolonged Time Frame For Addressing Infrastructure (not enough funding)
21. Not Enough Shopping or Entertainment to Draw People In/Get Them to Stop and Spend
22. Low Connectivity of Street Network
23. Linear Nature of City (Spread along Hwy 87)
24. Heavy-Load Traffic from Eagle Ford

25. No Dedicated Easements on Chihuahua
26. Traffic Congestion/Bottlenecks During School Drop-off and Pick-up
27. No Town Square
28. City Hall is Too Small (not enough parking)
29. Trouble Keeping Up with Population Growth (esp. w/ Infrastructure)
30. "Stepchild" of Wilson County
31. No Commercial/Economic Hub

Threats

1. Historical Buildings at Risk/In Danger
2. Lack of Funding to Implement Plans
3. Encroachment of San Antonio ETJ
4. Highway 87 is a Commuter Corridor, No Visibility of Downtown to Draw Visitors or Commuters
5. I8-Wheeler Traffic from Eagle Ford
6. Lack of Signage
7. Lack of Parking Downtown
8. Negative Impacts of Eagle Ford Shale
9. Difficult to Annex Needed Land
10. Lack of Affordable Housing
11. Proximity of Temporary Housing for Eagle Ford Workers but no Revenue Benefit
12. Difficulty of Providing "Shovel-Ready" Sites
13. Some Resistance to Growth in the Community
14. Fear of Change
15. Risk of Flooding/Lack of Proper Drainage

Opportunities

1. Potential for a Main Street and Downtown
2. Cibolo Creek
3. Economic and Business Opportunities

4. Educational Opportunities (Possible Satellite Campus)
5. Some Aspects of Eagle Ford Shale
6. Potential for More Sales Tax Revenue
7. City can Now Plan Instead of React
8. Potential for Medical Facilities!
9. Potential for Farmers' Market
10. Easy Access to San Antonio and Seguin
11. Partnership with San Antonio River Authority (SARA)
12. Tourism Opportunities (Historical Legacy): Potential of Mill Area, Potential of Cibolo Creek, Public Interest from Surrounding Area for Recreational Opportunities
13. Population Within 5-10 Mile Zone Which Identifies as La Vernia (MARKET AREA!)
14. Commuters Using FM Road 775 Represent Potential Consumers
15. Attractive Landscape of Surrounding Area
16. Gophers?
17. Traditional "Norman Rockwell" Image is Potential Niche
18. Potential of Bike Ride & Music Festival to Attract More Visitors
19. Good Utility Providers (to Improve Business Infrastructure)
20. Very Low Bond Indebtedness; Can Issue Bonds
21. Potential Cooperation with Private Sector
22. Eagle Ford Shale can Increase Sales Tax Revenue
23. Some Oil and Gas Executives Live Near/In La Vernia
24. Potential for Financial Services and Shopping to Grow and Capture Some of Eagle Ford Spending Currently Lost to San Antonio
25. Potential as Financial "Hub" for Eagle Ford
26. Potential for Retraining and Vocational Education Using Educational Facilities
27. Potential for Youth Sports Facilities Which also Increases Opportunity for Local Businesses

Appendix B - Summary of Community Resources

U.S. Department of Agriculture-Rural Development Programs (USDA-RD)

Business and Industry Guaranteed Loans (B & I)

B&I loans are offered to improve the economic and environmental climate in rural communities. Cooperative organizations, partnerships, non-profits, public bodies, or individuals can apply for a loan provided that the funds are used for specific purposes. They can be used to acquire a business or industry if doing so will prevent employment loss or create employment opportunity. Funds can be used to modernize a business or purchase equipment, land, buildings, or easements. Further information can be found on the USDA-RD website: http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/BCP_gar.html

Rural Energy for America Program

This program is available to rural small businesses and agricultural producers through local lenders approved by the USDA. The loans and grants must be used to purchase renewable energy systems or make energy efficiency improvements. More information is available at: http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/BCP_ReapResEei_Eligibility.html

Rural Business Enterprise Grants Program (RBEG)

The RBEG Program gives grants to rural projects for the development of rural businesses, funding employment rated adult education programs, and distance learning networks in order to give employees access to adult education programs. Examples of eligible projects include

construction or renovations, training and technical assistance, and distance adult learning for training and advancement. More information can be obtained by visiting the RBEG Program website: http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/BCP_rbeg.html

Intermediary Relending Program (IRP)

The purpose of the IRP is to alleviate poverty and increase economic activity and employment in rural communities. Low-interest loans are given to community organizations for the establishment of revolving loan funds. The local organizations can then provide loans for activities like construction or repair of businesses, purchasing and development of land, or pollution control and abatement. More information can be found at: http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/BCP_irp.html

Rural Business Opportunity Grants (RBOG)

RBO grants are designed to promote sustainable economic development in rural communities with exceptional needs. Funds can be used for strategic planning, feasibility studies, leadership and entrepreneur training, and more. This program is designated for any area not within the boundaries of a city that has a population of more than 10,000: http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/BCP_RBOG.html

Community Facilities Grants

This program grants funds to develop essential community facilities in rural areas up to 20,000 in population. Funds may be used to build healthcare facilities, child care facilities and other public amenities: http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/HAD-CF_Grants.html

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

HUD's mission is to create strong, sustainable communities and ensure everyone has access to an affordable home. They accomplish this through a variety of grants and programs that offer assistance for a variety of needs including disaster recovery, home-improvement, and housing for the elderly.

HOME Investment Partnerships Program

This program offers grants to states and local governments to implement local housing strategies for increasing homeownership and affordable housing opportunities for low-income Americans. Funding can be used for the rehabilitation of housing, provide assistance to homebuyers and facilitate the construction of new housing. Participating jurisdictions must match 25% of HOME funds. More information can be found at: <http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=HUDPrograms2013-12.pdf>

Good Neighbor Next Door

Law enforcement officers, teachers, firefighters, and emergency medical technicians are given the opportunity to buy homes in revitalization areas at a significant discount. The goal is to make the neighborhoods safer and stronger. More information can be found at: <http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=HUDPrograms2013-21.pdf>

Community Development Block Grant Program(CDBG)

The CDBG Program is a national program whose goal is to develop viable communities by providing decent housing, suitable living environments and expanding economic opportunities principally for those of low to

moderate income. Funds can be allocated for several uses including disaster relief, water and sewer infrastructure improvements, and renewable energy pilot programs. More information is can be found through the Department of Housing and Urban Development website at: <http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/hudprograms/toc>

Rural Housing Stability Assistance Program

This program offers competitive grants to private non-profits, counties, and local governments for re-housing of individuals placed in emergency or transitional housing, and for improving the housing situation of low-income families in a geographical area. Funds can also be used to help low-income residents keep their homes and/or improve their access to affordable housing. Additional information is available at: <http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=HUDPrograms2013-15.pdf>

Self-Help Housing Property Disposition

This program makes surplus federal properties available to state and local governments at less than fair market value for the purpose of building self-help housing for low-income residents. Residents of the property must make a substantial contribution of labor towards the construction, rehabilitation, or renovation of the property. More information can be found by visiting the HUD website at: <http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=HUDPrograms2013-47.pdf>

Community Challenge Planning Grant Program

These grants are given in partnership with the U.S. Department of Transportation and the Environmental Protection Agency for the development of affordable, economically vital, and sustainable communities. Funds

go to the modifications of master plans, zoning, and building codes to promote mixed finance development and re-use of older buildings with the goal of promoting sustainability at the local or neighborhood and at the community level. More information can be obtained at: <http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=HUDPrograms2013-85.pdf>

Other Federal Resources

Economic Development Administration (EDA)

The EDA has several programs designed to improve communities throughout the country. The Public Works Program provides funding to revitalize, expand and upgrade infrastructure in distressed communities to draw new business and job opportunities to an area. They also provide planning and economic development strategies for local organizations like Economic Development Districts. More programs and information are available at: <http://www.eda.gov/>

Small Business Administration (SBA)

The SBA offers many financial assistance programs for small businesses. They set guidelines for loans through lenders and community development organizations, help small business contractors obtain surety bonds, and provide mentors and counseling through its Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE) Program. While they do not directly provide grants, they have several sources of funding listed on their website at: <http://www.sba.gov/content/what-sba-offers-help-small-businesses-grow>

Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA)

FEMA offers a variety of grants not only for victims of natural disasters, but for mitigation activities that avert future damage. They also offer grants to local fire departments

for staffing, volunteer firefighter retention, and reducing injuries and deaths among high-risk populations. More information can be found at: <http://www.fema.gov/grants>

Texas State Resources

Texas Main Street Program

The Texas Main Street Program was founded over 30 years ago and is operated by the Texas State Historical Commission. The programs goal is to provide technical expertise, resources and support for Texas communities for the preservation and revitalization of historic downtowns and commercial neighborhood districts. Communities can apply annually with no fee and each year up to five cities are selected for Texas Main Street designation. Once accepted, cities pay a nominal annual fee based on population and have access to strategic planning reports, design services, resources for funding projects, and much more. More information can be obtained by visiting: <http://www.thc.state.tx.us/preserve/projects-and-programs/texas-main-street> or by contacting the Texas Main Street State Coordinator by calling (512)463-6092.

Museum Services

The Texas State Historical Commission helps small history museums through its Museum Services Program. The staff can offer free consultations and assistance in any number of areas including reorganization, strategic planning, exhibit design, fundraising and volunteer recruiting and training. Additionally they offer training on various museum topics both in workshops and online. If more information is needed, visit: <http://www.thc.state.tx.us/preserve/projects-and-programs/museum-services> or contact the Museum Services Coordinator at (512)463-6427.

Cemetery Preservation

The Historic Texas Cemetery designation protects these cemeteries by recording boundaries in county records to alert present and future owners of land surrounding the area of its existence. This designation does not impose any restrictions on private use of land. The site must be designated as an HTC before it is eligible for a historical marker. More information is available at: <http://www.thc.state.tx.us/preserve/projects-and-programs/cemetery-preservation>.

Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation

The THCP Program was established in 1999 to help counties restore their historic courthouses. The program provides partial matching grants and is regularly funded by the Texas Legislature. Training and education is also provided to county staff for future preservation needs. Further information can be found at: <http://www.thc.state.tx.us/preserve/projects-and-programs/texas-historic-courthouse-preservation>

Certified Local Government Program

The CLG Program is a partnership for historic preservation involving of state, federal, and local government. Local governments work independently to develop and maintain a successful preservation program. To qualify, a city or county must enforce legislation that protects historic properties, establish a qualified review commission, maintain a survey and inventory of historic properties, and provide for public participation in the preservation process. More information is available at: <http://www.thc.state.tx.us/preserve/projects-and-programs/certified-local-government>

Other State Resources**Texas Commission on the Arts (TCA)**

The TCA offers a variety of grants to municipal and county arts agencies to provide services and support in the advancement of the cultural arts. Information and deadlines can be found at: <https://www2.arts.state.tx.us/tcagrants/TXArtsPlan/TAPTOC.asp>

Texas Department of Agriculture Programs**Texas Capital Fund**

This program allocates funds to incorporated cities and county governments that do not meet the standards the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban development's Community Development Block Grant program. Funds can be used for real estate development, infrastructure improvements, and downtown revitalization efforts. The TCF can help attract new business and grow the local economy. More information can be found at: <http://www.texasagriculture.gov/GrantsServices/RuralEconomicDevelopment/TexasCapitalFund.aspx>.

GO TEXAN Rural Community Program

This program is designed to encourage the growth of rural communities throughout Texas. It is a membership-based program that promotes economic activity in rural areas through restaurants, tourism, and special recognition of products made in Texas. Restaurants as well as items manufactured or grown in Texas receive the special GO TEXAS label: <http://www.gotexan.org/ForMembers/GOTEXANPartnerProgram.aspx>

State Office of Rural Health (SORH)

The SORH works with local healthcare providers, county leaders and state partners to support access to quality healthcare for rural Texans. They assist healthcare

providers through programs that assist with information and referrals, medical licensing, grants, and educational awards. A complete list of programs can be found at: <http://www.texasagriculture.gov/GrantsServices/RuralEconomicDevelopment/StateOfficeofRuralHealth.aspx>

Texas Education Agency (TEA)

The TEA provides grants to schools and school districts throughout Texas for the academic enrichment of students. Examples of grants offered are the Algebra Readiness for Small and Rural Schools Grant, the Online College and Career Preparation Technical Assistance Grant, and the Public Charter School Start-up Grant. More Information can be found at: <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2147487872>

Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA)

The mission of the TDHCA is to improve the quality of life of all Texans through the development of better communities. They act as an intermediary for federal grant funds for housing and community services. They also act as a financial and administrative resource that provides essential services and affordable housing to those who qualify and provides resources for first-time home buyers. <http://www.tdhca.state.tx.us/index.htm>

Texas Department of Transportation (TXDoT)

TXDoT offers a number of grants for infrastructure and accessibility improvements. The Safe Routes to Schools Grant is designed to improve the safety of children in grades K-8 that walk or bike to school. The routine Airport Maintenance Program matches local government grants up to \$50,000 for basic improvements like parking lots,

fences, or other similar needs at local airports. TXDOT also administers funds from several federal grant programs designed to help cities with planning and research, rural public transportation, and transportation for individuals with disabilities. Further information can be found at: <http://www.txdot.gov/government/funding.html>

Texas Water Development Board (TWDB)

The TWDB offers grants and loans for planning, design, and construction of water related infrastructure and improvement programs. They offer grants to local governments for programs and technical assistance for agricultural water conservation, flood mitigation, and clean drinking water programs. More information can be found at: <http://www.twdb.state.tx.us/financial/programs/AWCG/index.asp>

Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ)

The TCEQ offers both competitive and non-competitive grants to local governments for a variety of uses. Funds can be given for cleanup or prevention of pollution, research into pollution reduction, or for replacing old municipal vehicles with newer, more efficient models. The Texas Clean School Bus Program gives money to school districts to replace old school buses with new ones or retrofit them with new technology to reduce the pollution from diesel exhaust. More information can be found at: http://www.tceq.texas.gov/agency/governments_main.html

Texas State Soil and Water Board (TSSWCB)

The TSSWCB offers a matching funds program for soil and water conservation assistance. Through local conservation boards they also offer technical and planning assistance to agricultural producers to incorporate best management practices on their farms and ranches. Additional

information can be found at: <http://www.tsswcb.texas.gov/programs/swcdassistance>

Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPWD)

The TPWD offers 50% matching grant funds to municipalities, counties, and other units of government for development of parks, nature centers, urban outdoor recreation, and recreational trails. They also offer 75% matching funds for the construction of public boat ramps throughout Texas. Further information on programs and deadlines can be found at: <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/business/grants/trpa/#outdoor>.

Texas Veterans Commission (TVC)

The TVC awards reimbursement grants to local government agencies and Veterans Service Organizations that provide direct assistance to Texas veterans and their families. Grants are offered for limited financial assistance, transportation services, housing assistance and family and child services. More information, grant applications and deadlines can be found at: <http://www.tvc.texas.gov/Apply-For-A-Grant.aspx>.

Other Resources/Programs

Economic Development Initiatives - Type A/B

Economic Development Sales Tax

These voter-approved taxes are used by cities to promote economic development. To date, more than 583 cities in Texas have collected over \$500 million annually in sales tax revenue. There are key differences between the Type A and Type B sales tax mainly in the ways cities can adopt a sales tax, use tax revenue, and the oversight of project expenditures. Not every city can collect Type A sales taxes, but every city in Texas can collect Type B.

Type A is considered more restrictive and allows more traditional types of economic development initiatives that assist manufacturing or industrial activity. It can fund things like buildings, equipment, facilities, distribution centers, and infrastructure improvements. It can also fund business related airports, port facilities, and some airport activities within 25 miles of an international border.

Type B Sales Taxes fund the same projects that Type A can, as well as projects considered to be community initiatives. Facilities and expenditures for a professional of amateur sports park, entertainment facilities, tourist facilities, and affordable housing are allowed under Type B funds, but with additional procedural requirements. More information is available through the Office of the Attorney General of Texas at: https://www.oag.state.tx.us/AG_Publications/pdfs/econdevhb2013.pdf

Hotel Occupancy Tax (HOT)

The HOT is imposed on anyone paying for a room or space in a hotel, motel, or bed and breakfast costing \$15 or more per night. It also applies to condominiums, apartments, and houses that are rented for less than 30 consecutive days. The State of Texas charges 6% of the cost of the room and local city and county taxing authorities are allowed to impose an additional percentage provided it does not go above 15% of the room rate. Funds collected must be used to directly enhance and promote tourism and must also fit into one of the nine statutory categories outlined in the tax code. These categories include the funding of a visitors center, tourism related advertising, funding programs that enhance the arts, historical preservation, and others. Additional information can be found at: <http://www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/hotel/index.html>

Property Tax Incentives

Attracting new businesses and encouraging economic growth can be accomplished using the right property tax incentives. Property tax abatement, tax increment financing, and the Texas Economic Development Act are three ways a municipality can grow economically, attract new industries, and retain existing employers.

Property tax abatement is where incorporated cities, counties, and special districts are permitted to enter into an agreement with a taxpayer that exempts all or part of the increase in property value from taxation over a period of up to ten years.

Tax increment financing can be used by a city or county to publically finance needed improvements to infrastructure and buildings within a designated reinvestment zone. The cost of improvements is financed by future tax revenues levied against property in the improved area.

The Texas Economic Development Act gives school districts the ability to create jobs and attract investment. A school district can provide tax credits and an 8-year limitation on appraised value of a property on the school district property tax to eligible corporations or limited liability companies (LLC). In return the companies are required to use the property for manufacturing, research and development, clean energy generation and other similar uses. More information on property tax incentives can be found at https://www.oag.state.tx.us/AG_Publications/pdfs/econdevhb2013.pdf

County Development District (CDD)

Counties with a population of 400,000 or less can be petitioned by landowners to establish a CDD in an effort

to promote and develop tourism in the county. They are allowed to levy taxes for such purposes provided that they do not exceed the 2% cap on local tax rates. More information can be found at: <http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Docs/LG/htm/LG.383.htm>

Public Improvement Districts (PID)

PID's provide a way for cities make necessary public improvements by allowing them to collect special assessments on property within the city and its extraterritorial jurisdiction. A PID can be formed to improve drainage and wastewater facilities, construct or improve libraries or off-street parking, acquire and install pieces of art, or other similar projects that improve public safety and economic development. More information of PID's can be found at: http://www.texasahead.org/tax_programs/pubimprovement/

Municipal Management Districts (MMD)

Also called a downtown management district, a MMD is created within an existing commercial area as a supplement to municipal services in the area. Improvements to infrastructure and facilities are paid for by a combination of self-imposed property taxes, impact fees, and special assessments. Many cities in Texas have used this tool with great success. Additional information can be found at: https://www.oag.state.tx.us/AG_Publications/pdfs/econdevhb2013.pdf

Neighborhood Empowerment Zones (NEZ)

A NEZ can be established by a city to promote economic development activities within a designated area. The zone must promote the creation of affordable housing, an increase in economic development, an increase in quality of social services, education, and public safety,

and the rehabilitation of affordable housing. The city has certain development powers within the zone to draw in economic activity. They may grant waivers for building fees, issue municipal sales tax refunds, offer property tax abatements, and establish baseline performance standards and environmental goals on construction projects. More information can be found at: <http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Docs/LG/htm/LG.378.htm>

NAFTA Impact Zones

Cities with areas affected by the North American Free Trade Agreement are authorized to establish this zone. The rules are nearly identical to Neighborhood Empowerment Zones. Additional information can be found at: <http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Docs/LG/htm/LG.379.htm>

