Garden Ridge, Texas

A Vision for the Future

Center for Urban and Regional Planning Research - College of Architecture, Construction and Planning
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Preface

This study is intended to serve as a planning guide for the City of Garden Ridge which lies within a rapidly developing urban growth corridor between San Antonio and Austin. This corridor is projected to have major increases in population during the decade ahead. Anticipating this population growth, the City of San Antonio in its recently released draft of the City's comprehensive plan defines the adjacent Rolling Oaks Mall area as one of thirteen designated growth centers which will be concentrations of employment and services with over 15,000 jobs. The significance of this is that the proposed growth center is located just southwest of Garden Ridge. Indeed, it reinforces the idea that Garden Ridge is situated in a high growth corridor that will, in all likelihood, influence its own development over the next decade.

Other key issues that will impact Garden Ridge over the long term include the future development of the Hanson Quarry, the future of Bracken, and the ongoing discussion dealing with the Lonestar Rail District.

A significant land area within Garden Ridge is the Hanson Quarry site. Its future use is a major concern once its operations end. We believe that this site should be master planned and redeveloped as a mixed-use development. This site should be master planned when the quarry operations end and the site becomes available for development. The redevelopment of the Quarry in the Lincoln Heights neighborhood of north central San Antonio is an example of a mixed use development pattern that could also be applied to the Hanson property.

Consideration should also be given to the annexation of the unincorporated Bracken area southwest of Garden Ridge. This area has a historical and physical connection to Garden Ridge. Discussions should be initiated with the residents of the area and the City of San Antonio to determine the feasibility of moving forward with this annexation process at an appropriate time. Not only would the annexation expand Garden Ridge it will add new assets that will contribute to its long-term development.

The need for a passenger rail connection remains strong within this corridor to address the growing problems of traffic congestion along Interstate 35. Although the Union Pacific Railroad recently decided not to allow passenger trains on its existing freight tracks, one option being considered involves building new tracks for passenger trains next to Union Pacific's existing tracks. If this option is pursued in the future, Garden Ridge/Schertz will become one of the terminal locations. The major advantage of this rail corridor option is that it connects existing concentrations of population. It does expand economic prospects and provides another growth generator for Garden Ridge.

The challenge ahead for Garden Ridge is to anticipate and plan for these changes to insure the best quality of life for its residents. This plan offers several recommendations on steps that need to be taken to create an effective growth pattern for the future. It also provides a possible blueprint for mastering the challenges that Garden Ridge will undoubtedly experience in the years ahead.

Dr. Richard Tangum, Director, CURPR
Bert Moyer, CURPR, Research Scientist III, CURPR
Ernest Gerlach, Senior Fellow, CURPR

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Todd Arvidson, Alderman/Place 4
Larry Thompson, Alderman/Place 5

Planning and Zoning Commission

Sam Stock, Chairman
Frank Dansby, Vice Chairman
Gregory Czerniak, Commissioner
Kay Bower, Commissioner
Shawn Willis, Commissioner
Kathryn Owens, Commissioner

Nancy Cain, City Administrator
Shelley Goodwin, City Secretary

UTSA Team

College of Architecture, Construction, and Planning

Center for Urban and Regional Planning Research
Dr. Richard Tangum, Director, CURPR
Bert Moyer, Research Associate III, CURPR
Ernest Gerlach, Senior Fellow CURPR
Scott Pusich, Graduate Research Assistant
Luis Zamora, Graduate Research Assistant
Sara Serra, Graduate Research Assistant
Jewell Barnett, Graduate Research Assistant
Riley Metcalf, Graduate Research Assistant

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Introduction

Future Directions

This vision study describes and discusses, at length, several key strategic initiatives and plans the community of Garden Ridge could pursue over the next ten years. It also includes a number of recommendations and specific projects designed to spur new growth and investment in the community. They include actions like the development of a long-range land use and zoning plan for Garden Ridge; the creation of a development zone along FM 2252 to foster growth on its eastern boundary; the development of a main street corridor centered on FM 2252 to enhance business growth; the creation of a comprehensive park and recreational plan to improve the community's quality of life; and, the inclusion of circulation enhancements to facilitate the movement of traffic within the community. Also discussed is the possible implementation of the Lone Star Rail District initiative that could have significant ramifications for Garden Ridge's local economy and future growth prospects. Finally, the study outlines a possible approach that the local leadership and the residents of Garden Ridge could use as they move forward with the development of their community.

Underscoring any discussion on community planning is the fact that communities are complex. Even the smallest are made up of many different parts and relationships. They include things like business enterprises, cultural and civic assets, social networks, governmental institutions, families, schools and more. These parts also tend to change over time as new forces impact the community. Some of these change elements are external to the community. Others are internal. The bottom line, however, is that communities are always changing. How they plan for and react to these changes is a measure of their resilience.

The community of Garden Ridge, has, over the years, created a rather distinct living environment for its residents. However, changes being generated by external conditions and events such as the continuing growth of the I-35 corridor and the rapid growth of other communities around it, have had a direct impact on Garden Ridge. These changes have also caused the community of Garden Ridge to begin thinking about its place in the region, and how it wants to address these changes. Equally important are the changes now taking place within the community itself. These include a growing population base; the need for additional services and amenities; the need for more investment to grow the community; and, the development of a local economy to provide more job opportunities and to increase tax revenues. It goes without saying that these changes will have a significant impact on Garden Ridge in the years to come.

The community vision described in this study, and the current thrust of development in the area around it dictates the need for a long-range strategy for Garden Ridge. The key is to devise a strategy that can meet its current challenges, while setting the stage for future growth.

Figure 1: Active Railway in Garden Ridge Source: CURPR

Figure 2: Available Land For Sale between FM 2252 and Rail
Source: CURPR

Historical Background

The Old Nacogdoches Road (FM 2252) runs through the southern edge of the City of Garden Ridge. This historic roadway, also called "El Camino Real" or "King's Highway", was developed in 1691 to link the Spanish colonial missions in East Texas with the administrative center of New Spain in Mexico City. The roadway also passed along the eastern edge of the Alamo (Mission San Antonio de Valero).

The history of Garden Ridge is also intricately linked with that of New Braunfels, and especially to the immigration of German settlers to Texas between the time of Texas Independence and the Civil War (1836-1860). The first settlement of note in the area of what is now Garden Ridge was Haag's Settlement, which began in 1851. In 1865, a school was built in the settlement. The name of the community and the school changed to Schoenthal ("Beautiful Valley" in German) shortly after the Civil War. The approximate location of the settlement is shown on the Texas General Land Office Map from 1862 (Figure 3) on land belonging to M. Gallardo and various Haag family members.

Another historic settlement in close proximity to Garden Ridge is Bracken which is southwest of Garden Ridge. This settlement was founded in 1890 when the International & Great Northern Railroad was completed. Originally the settlement was named Davenport, after one of the principal landowners at the time, but since another town had already claimed the name for a post office designation, the settlement was renamed for William Bracken, the first Anglo-American grantee of the land in 1850. Prior to Bracken, the land was

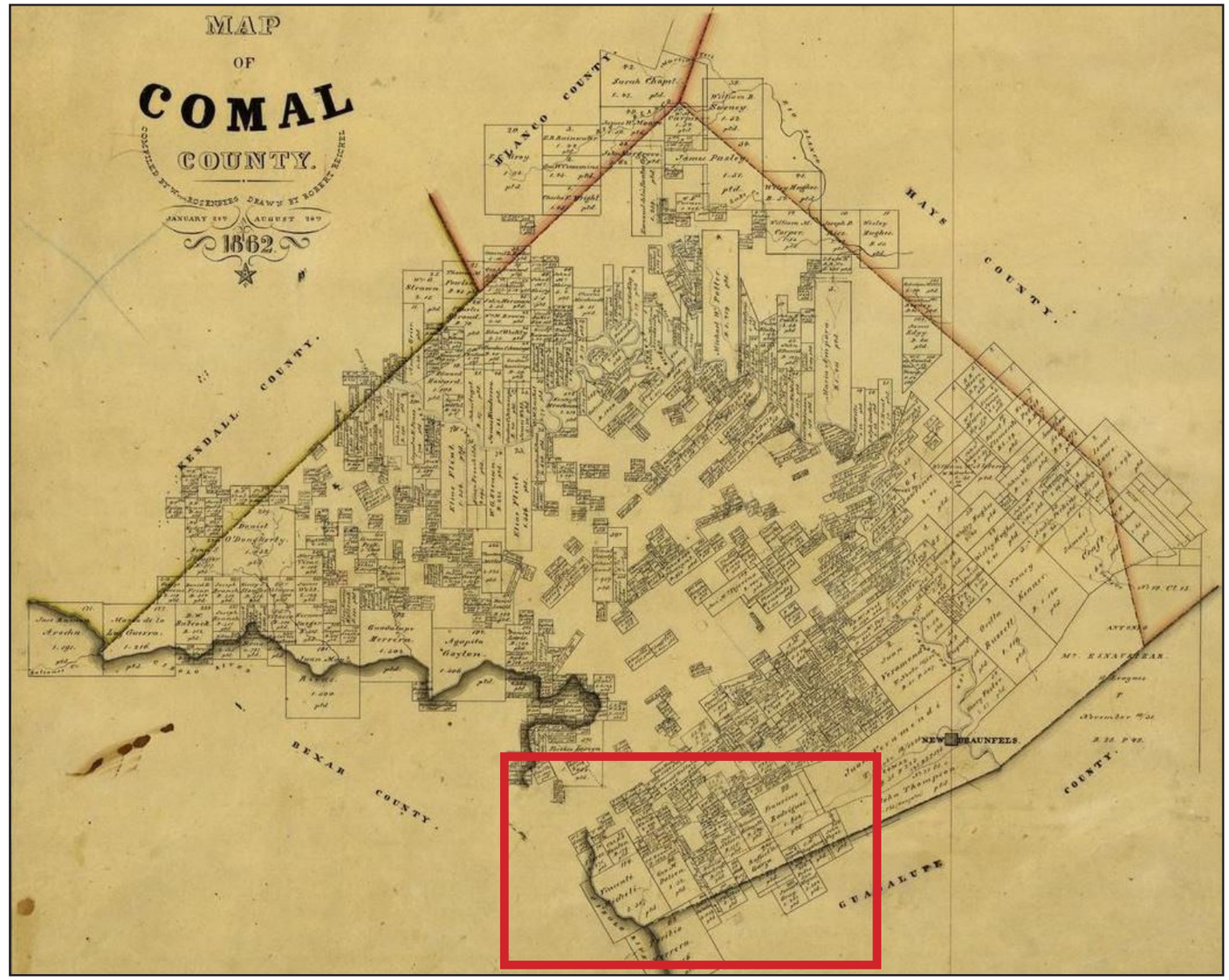

Figure 3: Map of Comal County, 1862. Area of Map Detail Outlined in Red

Source: Texas General Land Office; Portal to Texas History

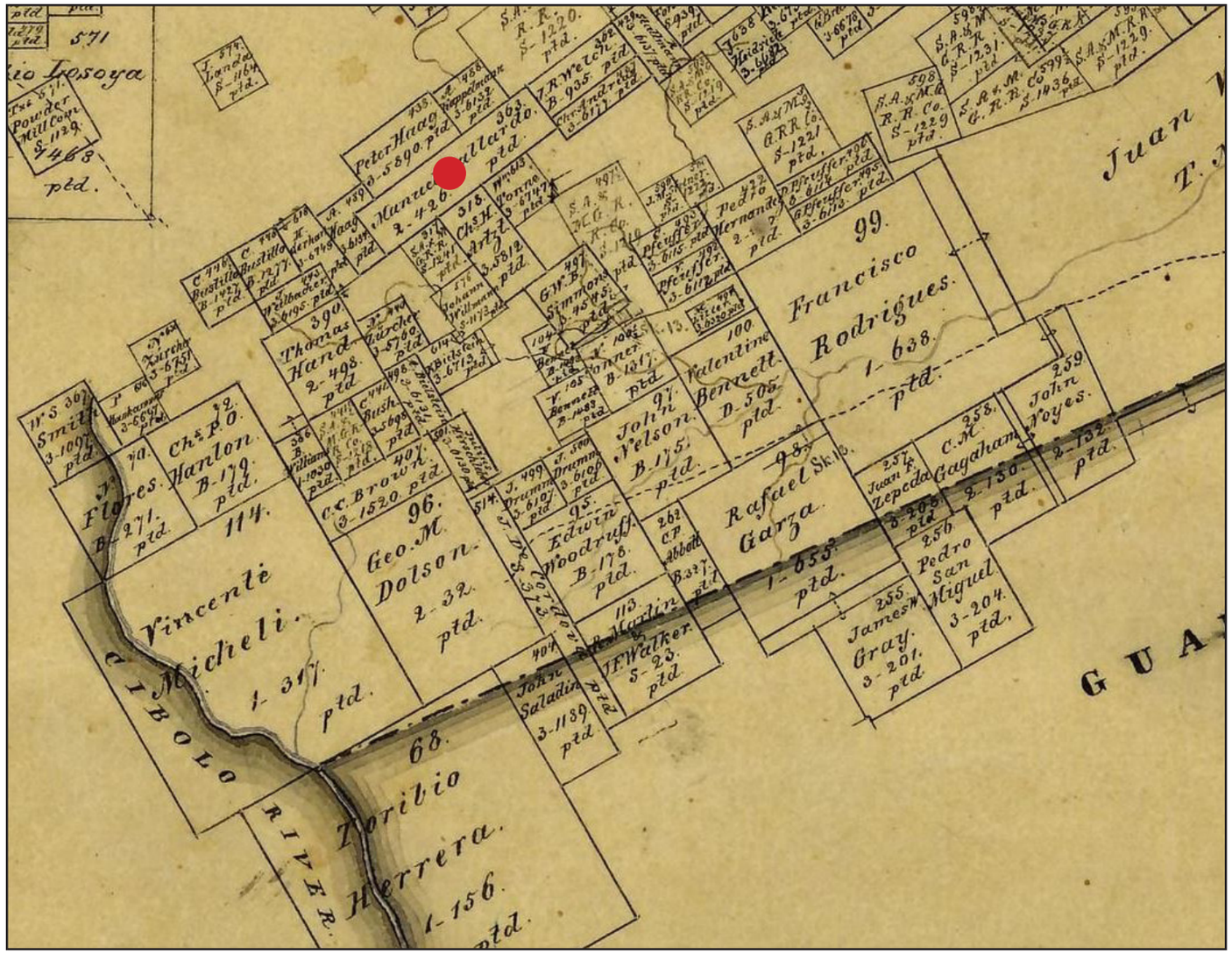

Figure 4: Detail of Map of Comal County, 1862. Red Circle Marks Approximate Location of Haag's Settlement (later Schoenthal)
Source: Texas General Land Office; Portal to Texas History

Figure 5: Picture of Schoenthal School (Private Residence)
Source: Comal County Historical Commission

owned by the estate of Vicente Micheli, who was granted the land when he emigrated from Italy to Texas in the late 1700s. Vicente Micheli was a French-speaking Italian immigrant and one of the earliest Italian merchants to settle in Texas.

A major historical anchor of the German community was the Zions Kirche, built in 1872 of native limestone (Figure 6). The land for the church was donated by various community members, and it has since been enlarged and remodeled, with a brick façade and bell tower added in 1913. The interior was renovated after World War II. Services were held primarily in German up to World War II. At that time the switch was made to primarily English. By the time Garden Ridge incorporated in the early 1970s, the church was known as Bracken United

Figure 6: Zions Kirche (now Bracken United Methodist Church)
Source: Comal County Historical Commission

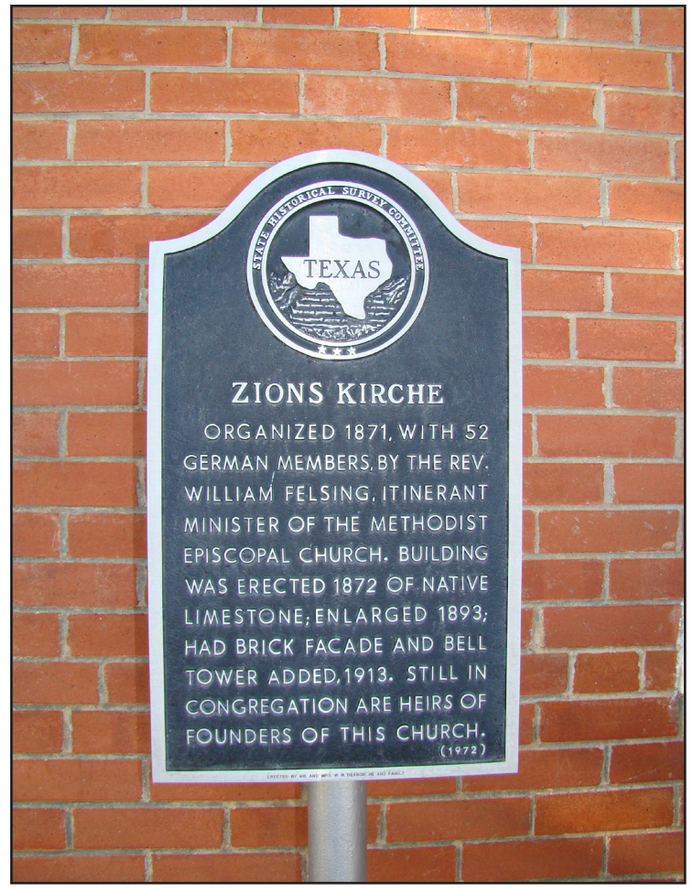

Figure 7: Historical Marker of Zions Kirche (now Bracken United Methodist Church)
Source: Comal County Historical Commission

Methodist Church, after the nearby unincorporated, but long-standing settlement of Bracken.

In 1931, the Servtex Materials Company established a small settlement at Ogden, just to the southeast of the quarry (See Figure 8). The settlement was intended to provide low-cost housing for quarry workers and to consolidate ties to the Missouri Pacific Railroad (formerly International & Great Northern). Servtex mined limestone at the quarry, which is situated at the edge of the Balcones Escarpment where the limestone can be accessed most efficiently. In 1977 Servtex was acquired by Lehigh Hanson Aggregates, an American multinational corporation. In 2007 Lehigh Hanson was acquired by Heidelberg Cement, a German multinational corporation.

The area remained primarily rural from World War II to the 1960s, at which time the rapid population growth and suburbanization of the San Antonio metropolitan area brought the San Antonio urbanized area to within a few miles of Bracken and the newly built subdivision of Garden Ridge. The construction of I-35 was a major factor in linking San Antonio and New Braunfels together economically. Additional residential and commercial development along the I-35 corridor followed soon thereafter. It was at this point that San Antonio became as important an influence as New Braunfels on the daily lives of the residents in the area.

Before construction of I-35, the earliest settlements had clustered along Old Nacogdoches Road (FM 2252) and the Union Pacific Railway line in Bracken (where the two intersected). The interstate highway and the new subdivision changed the settlement pattern, as the number of residences in formerly rural properties steadily increased in the late 1960s. By 1970 there was a large enough population in the subdivision that the residents began to consider incorporation (in order to avoid annexation by San Antonio or Schertz). Formal incorporation occurred in 1972.

During the 1970s and 1980s, San Antonio annexed land along Nacogdoches Road all the way to the Comal County line (see

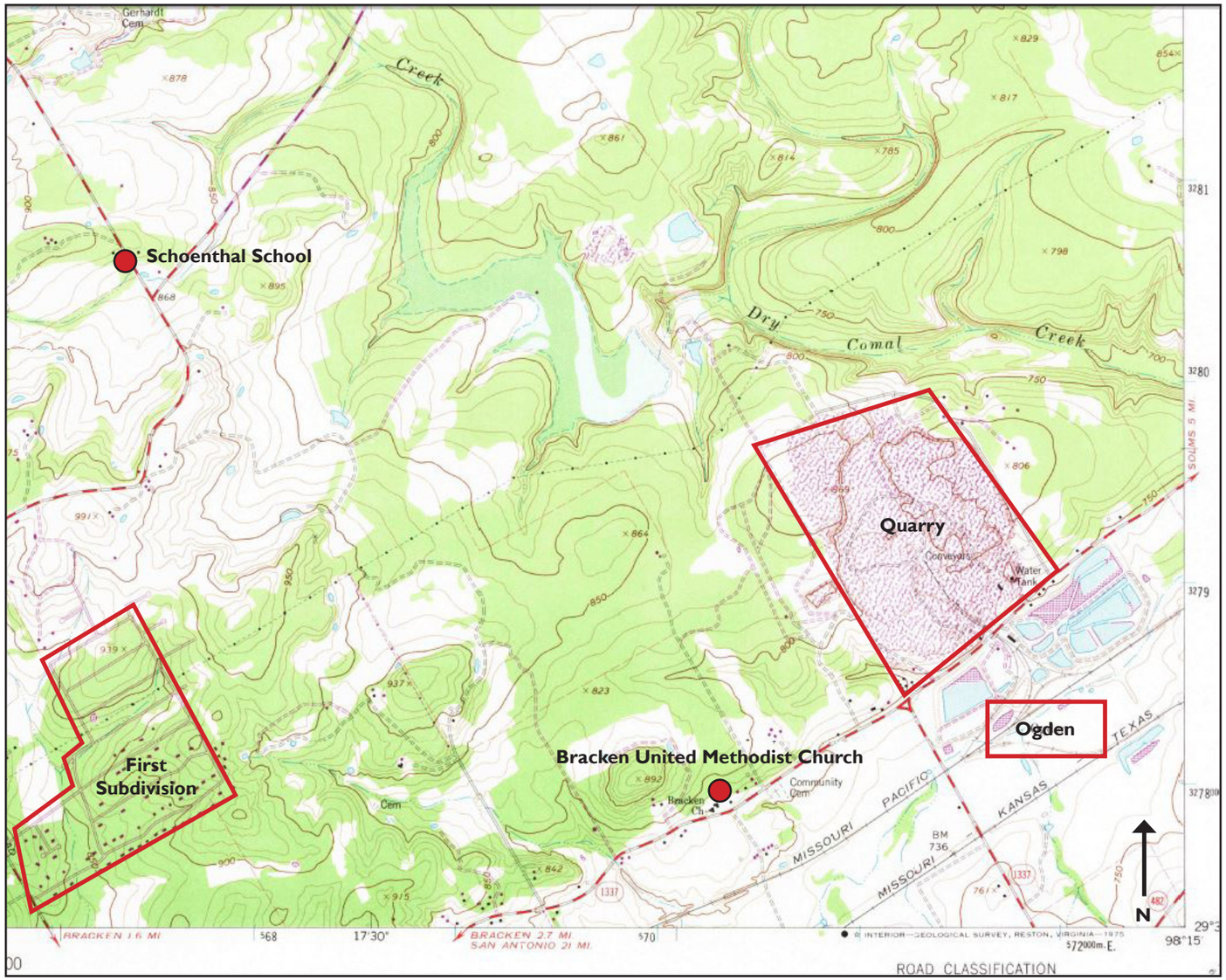

Figure 8: Detail of Quadrangle Topographic Map (1967; updated 1975)

Source: U.S. Geological Survey, CURPR

Figure 9). The City of Schertz also annexed the land to the south of the Union Pacific Railway (west of the FM 1337/FM 2252 intersection) and Southern Pacific Railway (east of the FM 1337/FM 2252 intersection) lines. Garden Ridge has continued to grow within a complex patch work of communities, farm lands and unincorporated areas that characterize this portion of the I-35 corridor.

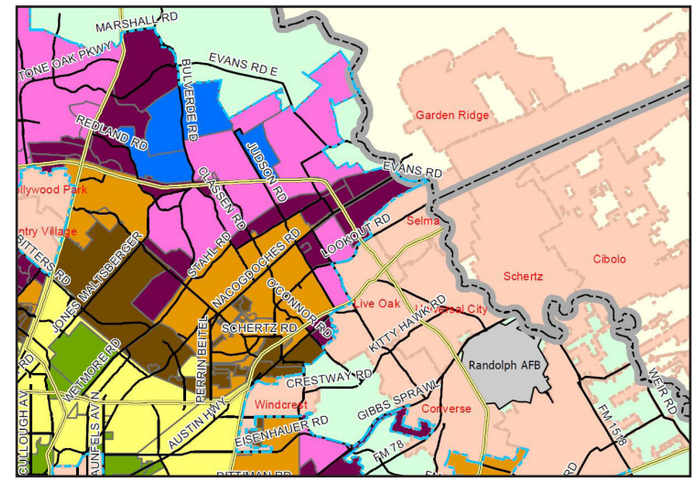

Figure 9: Location of Garden Ridge in relation to San Antonio Annexations by Decade. Land annexed in the 1940s is green; in the 1950s, yellow; in the 1960s, brown; in the 1970s, orange; in the 1980s, purple; in the 1990s, pink; and in the 2000s, blue

Source: City of San Antonio

Background Assessment

Regional Context

Garden Ridge is located in the southwestern portion of Comal County (Figure 10). Its municipal center is approximately 19 miles northeast of downtown San Antonio but only three miles from Cibolo Creek, which represents the Bexar/Comal County boundary. Garden Ridge is also about 12 miles southwest of downtown New Braunfels, the county seat of Comal County. The land surrounding Garden Ridge to the west, north, and east is largely unincorporated, but the land to the south is almost all within the City of Schertz. As a result, the primary market area of Garden Ridge (within a five-mile radius of the municipal center) overlaps the primary market area of Schertz and includes almost all of Selma. Garden Ridge itself lies just beyond the primary market area of Schertz.

Along with other incorporated and unincorporated areas in Comal County, Garden Ridge is part of the San Antonio-New Braunfels Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), an eight-county region which includes about 2.3 million people. In addition, it is part of the rapidly-forming Austin-San Antonio corridor. A 13-county region which includes five urban counties at its core: Bexar, Comal, Hays, Travis, and Williamson Counties.

Over the next fifteen years, the population of this 13-county area is projected to grow from around 4.3 million people to 5.7 million people, representing an increase of nearly 33%. Hays County is expected to grow the fastest, increasing by almost 70%. Williamson County, which includes the city of Round Rock, is expected to be the second-fasted growing county in the Austin and San Antonio corridor, increasing by about 62%. The rapid population growth in this corridor will undoubtedly have a great impact on the economic well-being of the residents of Garden Ridge.

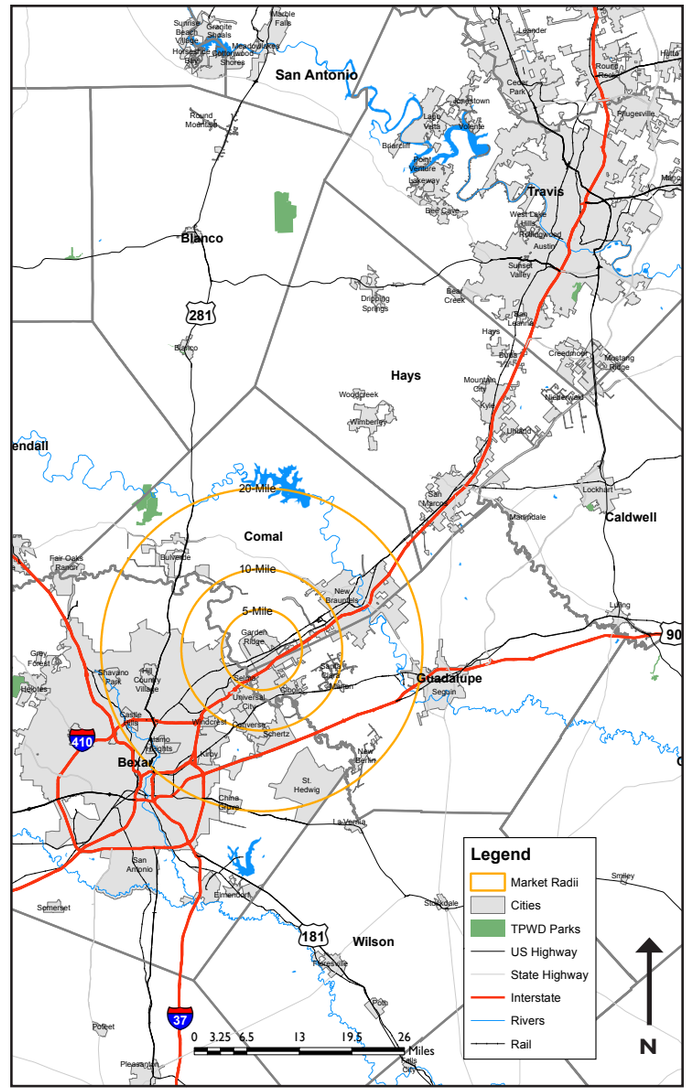

Figure 10: Regional Context Map - Garden Ridge, TX
Source: ESRI, U.S. Census, CURPR

Growth within the Interstate Highway 35 (I-35) Corridor between 2000 and 2010 is a good indication of how quickly the population of the San Antonio-New Braunfels and the Austin-Round Rock-San Marcos Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) are growing. The population density maps in Figures 12 and 13 show that the urbanized areas of the two MSAs are both expanding into the rural areas surrounding them, and expanding along I-35 toward each other. By 2010, only a small area along I-35 between New Braunfels and San Marcos remained relatively rural. However, that area will certainly be urbanized by 2020.

The implications of this growth is also important for Garden Ridge. Not only will it impact its future development it will have an effect on its local economy. Moreover, it will most certainly affect its place in the region.

Figure 11: City Limits sign on Doerr Lane Source: CURPR

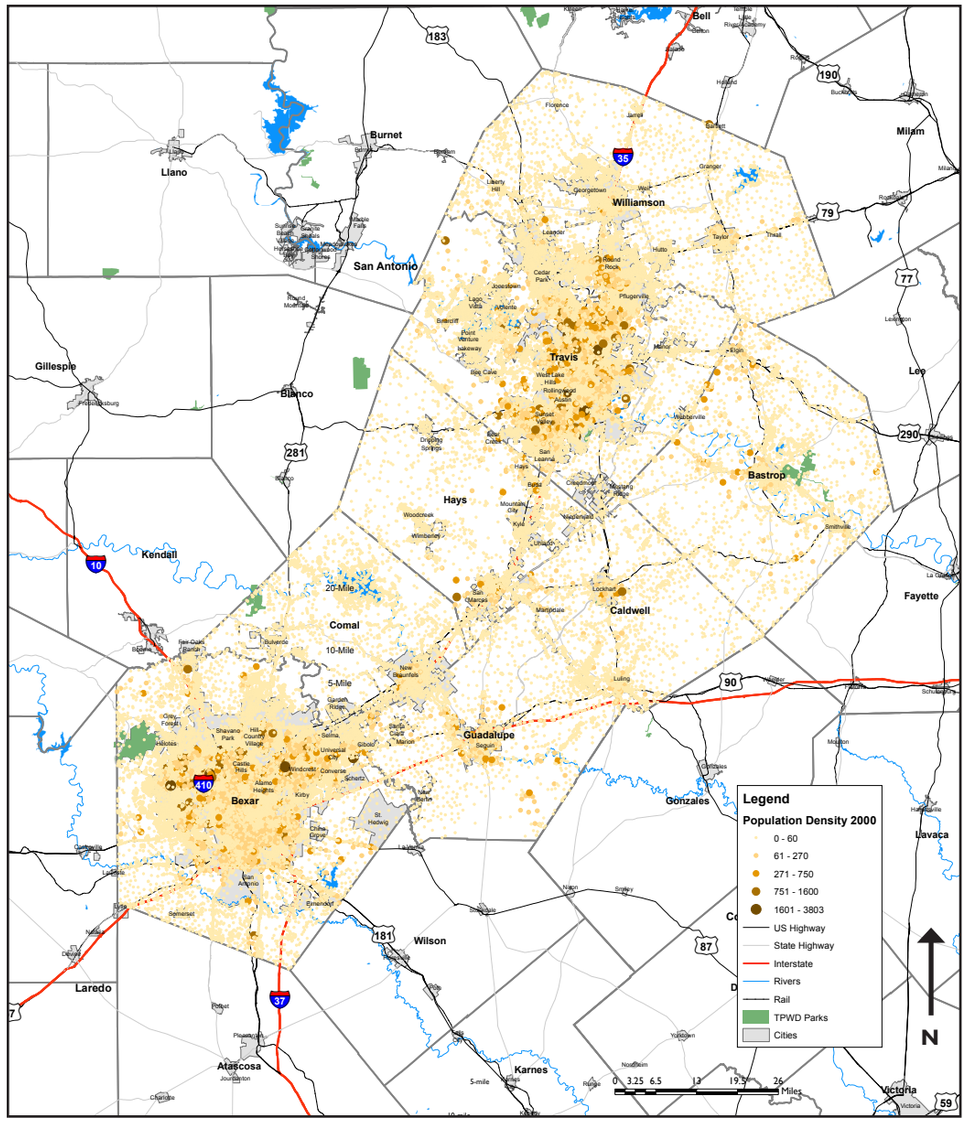

Figure 12: I-35 Corridor Population Density - 2000 Source: ESRI, U.S. Census, CURPR

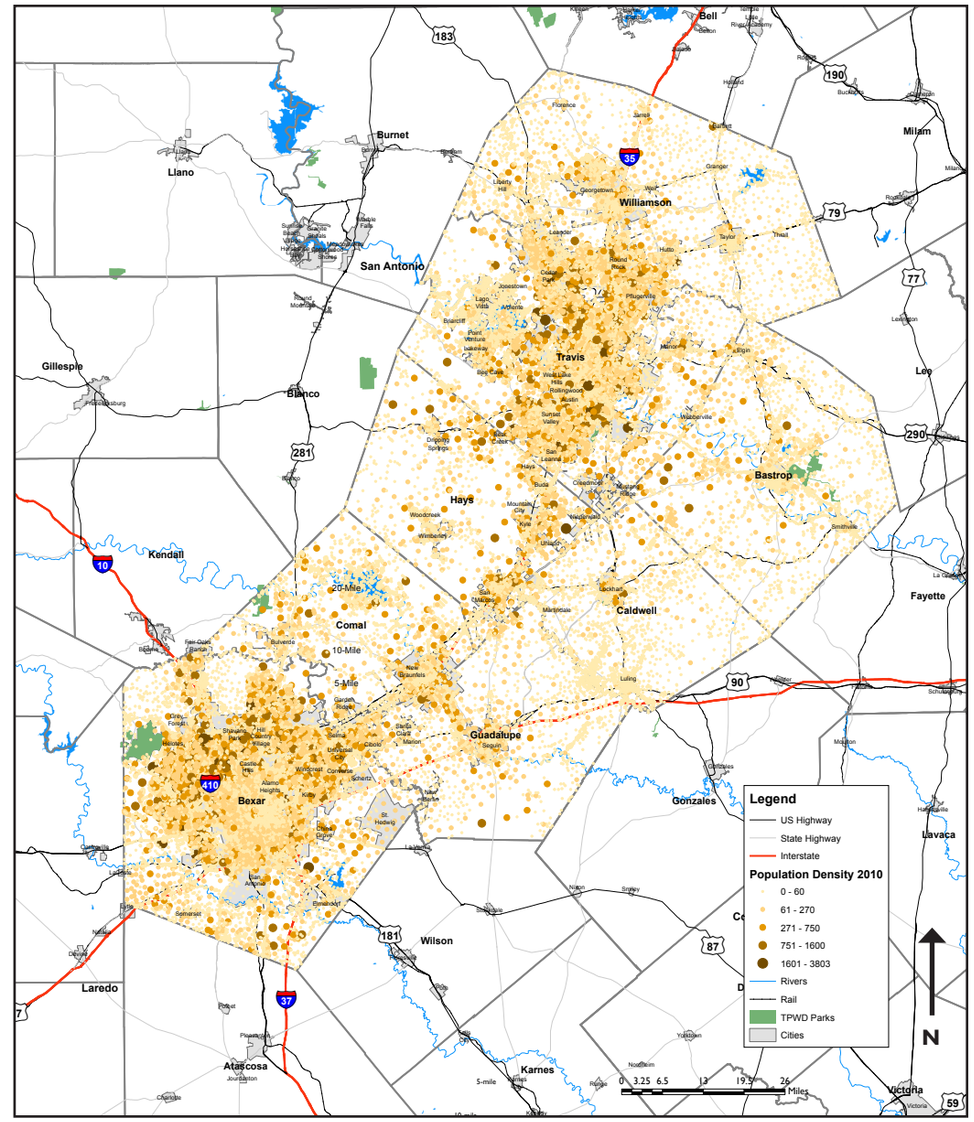

Figure 13: I-35 Corridor Population Density - 2010 Source: ESRI, U.S. Census, CURPR

Demographics

Population Growth and Age Structure

Garden Ridge's population in 1980 (8 years after incorporation) was 647 people. It was also around this time that the suburbanization of the San Antonio Metropolitan Area was bringing its urbanized area to within a few miles of Garden Ridge (as seen in Figure 14).

In 1990, the population of Garden Ridge more than doubled from 647 to 1,450. After a relatively small increase between 1990 and 2000 (of about 450 people), it grew by about 1,400 people between 2000 and 2010. Based on that increase and an assumption of an in-migration rate of 0.5 (half the rate of 2000-2010), the population of Garden Ridge is expected to grow at a fairly steady rate. Between 2020 amd 2030 Garden Ridge will soon reach a population threshold of 5,000 and thus become eligible for home rule.

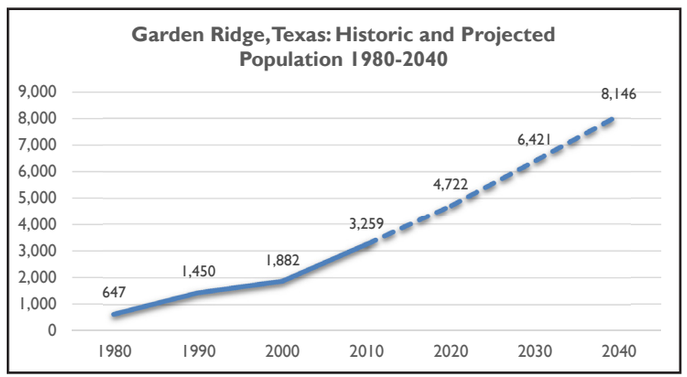

Figure 14: Population of Garden Ridge, Texas, 1980-2040
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Texas Water Development Board

Comal County added over 15,000 people between 1980 and 1990. The country grew at a faster rate between 1990 and 2010 (see Figure 15). While the Texas State Demographer projects the population of Comal County to grow at a somewhat slower rate (in the 0.5 migration or "middle" scenario), it will still grow by about 20,000 people each decade between 2010 and 2040. The "ex-urban" character of the county—that is, suburbs with non-urban land between them and urban sprawl—will transform to a suburban character by 2020 as the urbanized areas of San Antonio and New Braunfels begin to overlap and merge.

Today, Garden Ridge has a very distinctive population pyramid, which reflects a large gap for the college-age years and immediately after (i.e. young families or singles). There is a small bulge at the base of the pyramid in the 10-14 age cohort, and a large bulge in the upper half of the pyramid between ages 45-69 (see Figure 16).

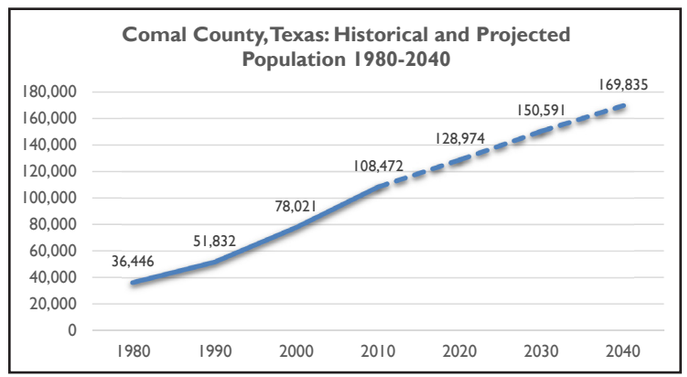

Figure 15: Population of Comal County Texas, 1980-2040
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Texas Water Development Board

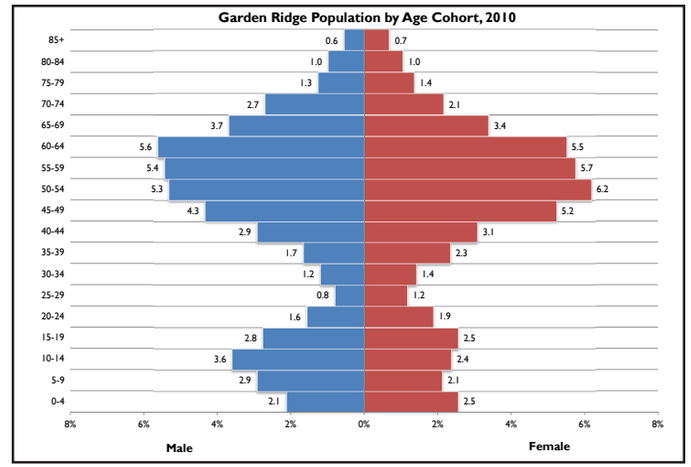

Figure 16: Population by Age Cohort for Garden Ridge, TX, 2010
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

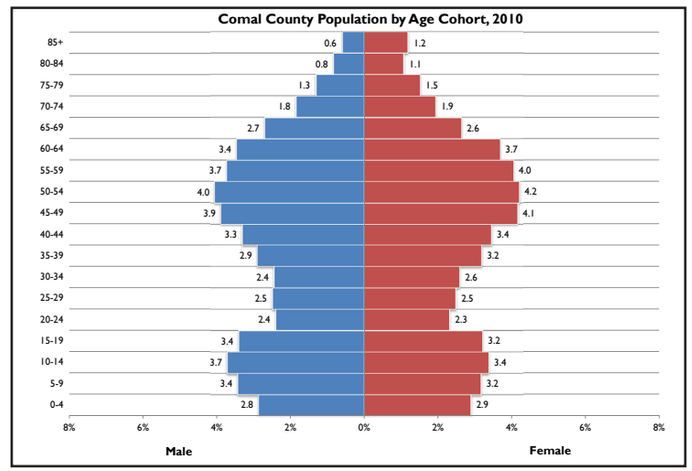

Figure 17: Population by Age Cohort for Comal County, TX, 2010
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

The largest gap is in the 25-29 age cohort, and the largest peak is in the 50-54 age cohort (which also has a large imbalance

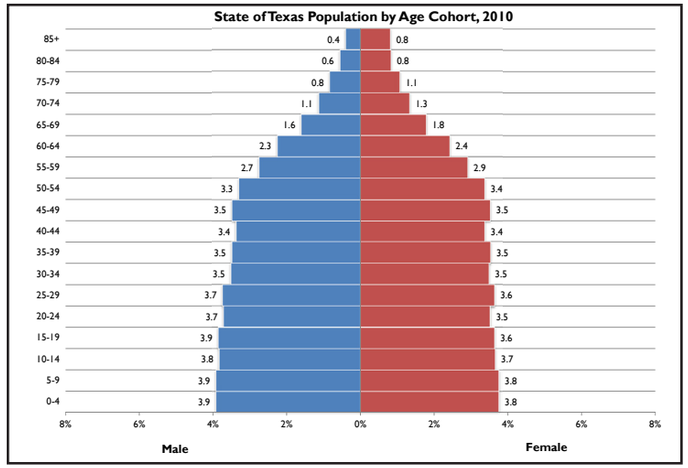

Figure 18: Population by Age Cohort for State of Texas, 2010
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

between male and female, with many more females). In general the four cohorts between ages 45-64 represent the Baby Boomer Generation, and this is where the bulge in the upper part of the pyramid is located. The four cohorts between ages 20-39 represent the two youngest cohorts of Generation X and the two oldest cohorts of the Millennial Generation (or Generation Y). This demographic profile suggests that Garden Ridge is primarily a community of older couples and retirees. The median age of the population in 2010 was 50.6 years.

Comal County exhibits the same sort of demographic phenomena, but not as drastically as Garden Ridge. There is still a bulge at the 10-14 age cohort and the 50-54 age cohort, and a trough between ages 20-34, but neither of these is as pronounced as the bulges or the trough for Garden Ridge. Comal County as a whole has become part of the Greater San Antonio metro area, as indicated by the Census designation of "San Antonio-New Braunfels Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA)" (See Figure 18). However, New Braunfels retains a specific identity as a town separate from San Antonio, of course, but functionally it has become linked with San Antonio and is a key part of the metropolitan economy.

Race/Ethnicity

The population of Garden Ridge is very similar to Comal County in terms of race and ethnicity. The non-Hispanic White share of the population in Garden Ridge is 73%, while in Comal County it is 71.3% (see Figure 19 and 20). However, there are noticeable differences in the other categories. For example, the Hispanic (of all races) share of the population is almost 10% lower in Garden Ridge than in Comal County (15.1% to 24.9%), while the non-Hispanic Black share of the population is over five times as large in Garden Ridge than in Comal County (8.4% to 1.5%). Thus, while Garden Ridge accounts for 3% of the population of Comal County, it has 17% of the non-Hispanic Black population of Comal County.

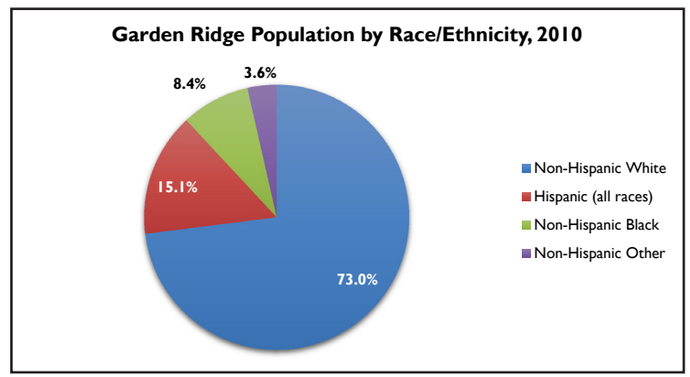

Figure 19: Garden Ridge Population by Race/Ethnicity, 2010
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

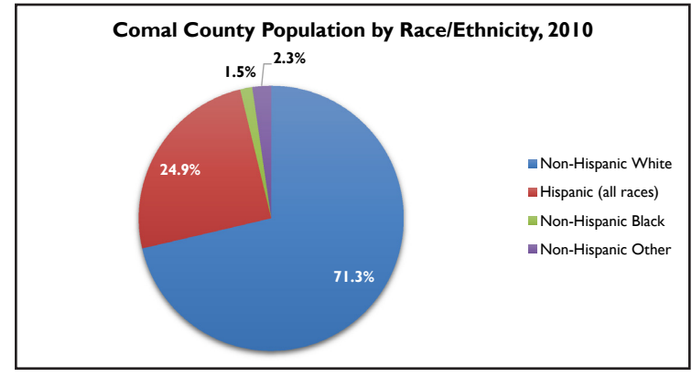

Figure 20: Comal County Population by Race/Ethnicity, 2010
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

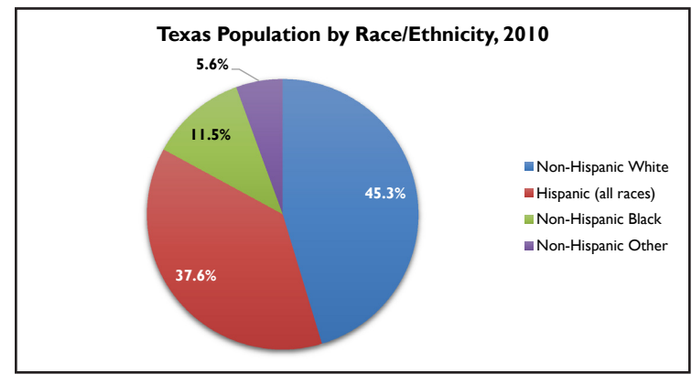

Figure 21: Texas Population by Race/Ethnicity, 2010
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

In comparison to Texas, Garden Ridge and Comal County both have a much lower share of Hispanic/Latino population (of all races), and a much higher share of non-Hispanic White population. Garden Ridge is closer to Texas than to Comal County in its share of non-Hispanic Black and non-Hispanic Other population (See Figure 21).

Educational Attainment

The level of educational attainment in Garden Ridge among the population 25 years of age and older is significantly higher overall than Comal County as a whole, and even higher still when compared to the State of Texas as a whole. In particular, 64.7 percent—almost two-thirds—of Garden Ridge's residents 25 and older have a bachelor's degree or a graduate/professional degree as their highest level of educational attainment. This is compared to 33.3% of the Comal County population 25 and older with a bachelor's degree or professional degree as their highest educational attainment, and 27% of the Texas population with a similar level of attainment (see Figure 22).

When added to the 6.9% with an associate's degree as the highest attainment, and the 15.3% with some college education but no degree, this means that nearly 87% of the population of Garden Ridge has some educational experience beyond high school. Conversely, only 1.4% of the population has less than a high school diploma or GED equivalent. This is dramatically lower than the 10.5% share of Comal County's population—and the 18.5% of the Texas population—with less than a high school diploma or equivalent.

Housing Characteristics

Housing occupancy and vacancy rates in Garden Ridge are very similar to those in Comal County and Texas (88.2%, 87.7%, and 88.5%, respectively). This indicates that Garden Ridge has a generally healthy housing market, with enough vacancies to satisfy demand but not so many as to cause a price collapse.

In terms of housing tenure, Garden Ridge is overwhelmingly owner-occupied: 97.7% of housing units are owner-occupied, while only 2.3% of all occupied units are rented. By comparison, Comal County has 75.8% of its occupied housing units owner-occupied, and Texas has 62.7% of its occupied housing units owner-occupied. The predominance of resident homeowners in Garden Ridge corresponds to the age profile and educational attainment of its population: generally middle-aged and college educated (See Table 1).

Of the owner-occupied housing units in Garden Ridge, just under two-thirds (63.5%) are owned with a mortgage, while 36.5% are owned free-and-clear. Comal County and Texas have a similar division of mortgage status: the county share of owner-occupied homes with a mortgage is 61.4%, and the state share is 60.6%.

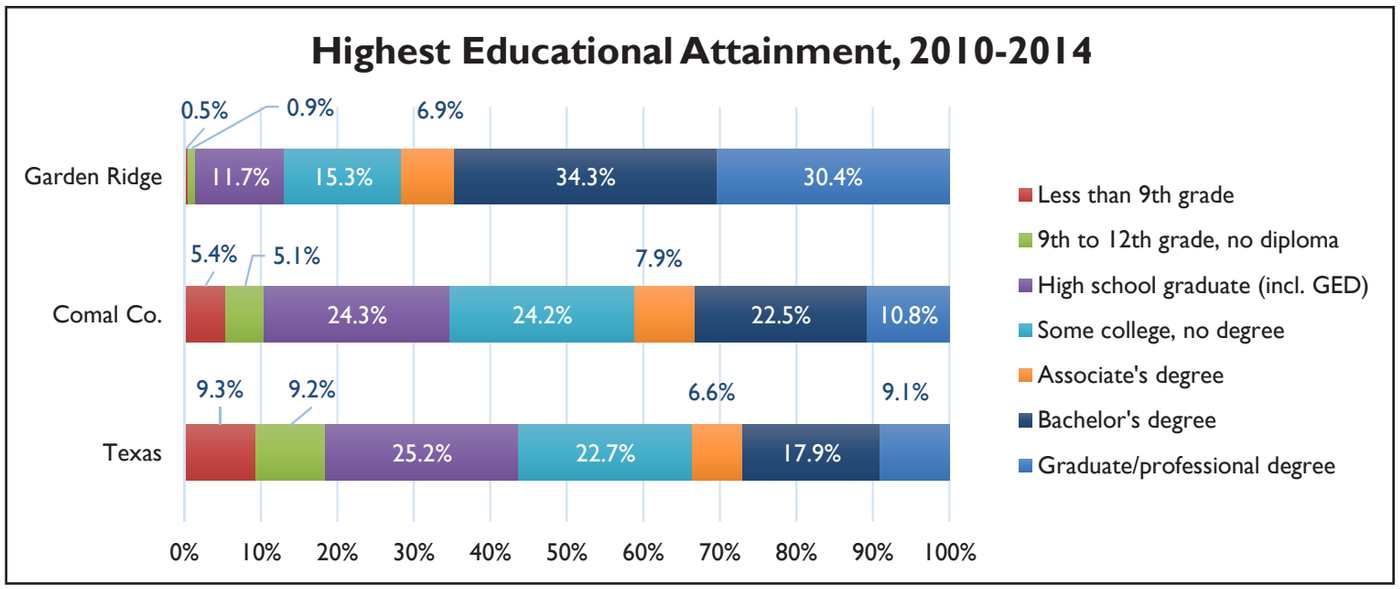

Figure 22: Educational Attainment Comparison of Garden Ridge, Comal County, and Texas, 2010-2014 Source: American Community Survey

Table 1: Comparison of Housing Characteristics in Garden Ridge, Comal County, and Texas, 2010-2014

HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS						
Subject	Texas		Comal County		Garden Ridge	
HOUSING OCCUPANCY	Estimate	Percent	Estimate	Percent	Estimate	Percent
Total housing units	10,187,189	100.0%	49,095	100.0%	1,488	100.0%
Occupied housing units	9,013,582	88.5%	43,063	87.7%	1,312	88.2%
Vacant housing units	1,173,607	11.5%	6,032	12.3%	176	11.8%
HOUSING TENURE	Estimate	Percent	Estimate	Percent	Estimate	Percent
Occupied housing units	9,013,582	100.0%	43,063	100.0%	1,312	100.0%
Owner-occupied	5,652,542	62.7%	32,645	75.8%	1,282	97.7%
Renter-occupied	3,361,040	37.3%	10,418	24.2%	30	2.3%
MORTGAGE STATUS	Estimate	Percent	Estimate	Percent	Estimate	Percent
Owner-occupied units	5,652,542	100.0%	32,645	100.0%	1,282	100.0%
Housing units with a mortgage	3,423,338	60.6%	20,028	61.4%	814	63.5%
Housing units without a mortgage	2,229,204	39.4%	12,617	38.6%	468	36.5%

Source: American Community Survey

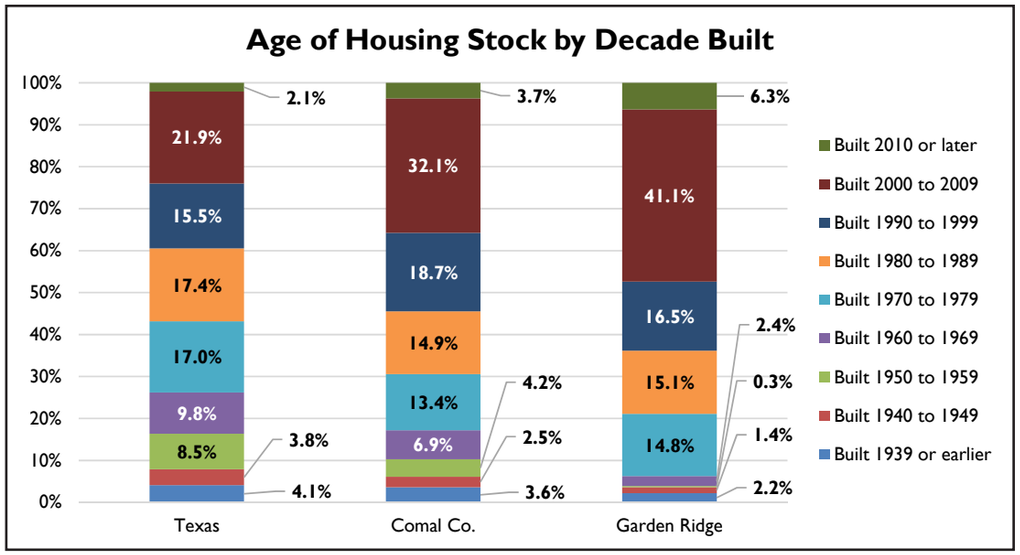

Figure 23: Age of Housing Stock Comparison of Garden Ridge, Comal County, and Texas
Source: American Community Survey

There is an equally stark difference between city, county, and state in terms of the age of the housing stock for each jurisdiction. For example, 47.4% of the existing housing stock in Garden Ridge has been built from the year 2000 to the present. For Comal County, the corresponding figure is 35.8%; for Texas, it is 24.0% (See Figure 23).

Parks and Recreation

There are two public park spaces and one private recreational club in Garden Ridge (Figure 24). Paul Davis Park is located at the intersection of Blue Bell Drive and Grass Creek Road. It is located along the tributary of Cibolo Creek. It has picnic benches, a pavilion, a softball field, a playground, and a small community building. It is the former location of Garden Ridge City Hall. Garden Ridge's annual 4th of July Celebration is held at Paul Davis Park. Park Lane Park is a small pocket park tucked into the corner of Bat Cave Road and Park Lane. It has some picnic benches and a gazebo.

The Club at Garden Ridge is a privately-owned recreational facility. Formerly known as the Forest Waters Club, the facility has outdoor tennis courts, an outdoor basketball court, indoor racquetball courts, an indoor swimming pool, a fitness gym, yoga and other fitness classes, and wedding/special events facilities. Membership is open to residents of Garden Ridge and the nearby area.

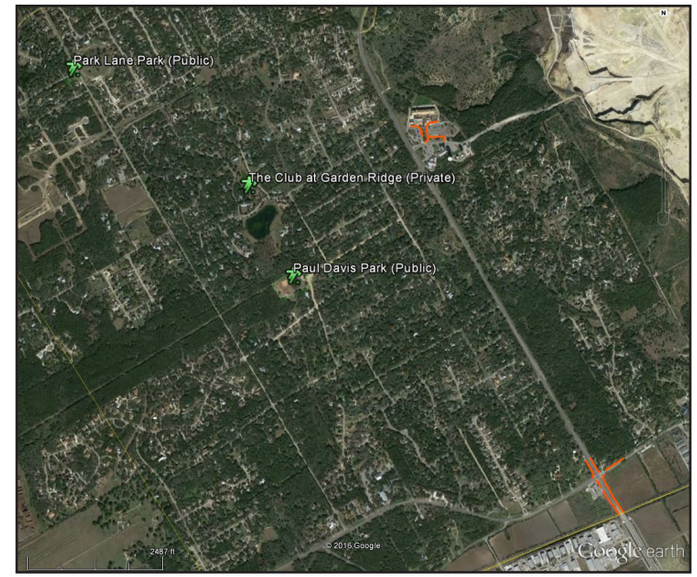

Figure 24: Google Earth View of Public Parks and Private Recreation Clubs (shown in green), and Public Sidewalks (shown in orange).
Source: Google Earth, CURPR

Figure 25: Paul Davis Park Source: CURPR

Economic Characteristics

The comparison in Table 2 of economic data between Garden Ridge, Comal County, and Texas is made using American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates for 2010-2014 (the most recent available as of January 2016). Note that ACS estimates are not as accurate as the Decennial Census, and thus the estimates of total population or of total households should not be used in comparison with official population and household counts from the Decennial Census. However, ACS estimates encompass a wider range of topics than the Decennial Census and provide a basis for comparing two or more study areas on a range of different characteristics.

Garden Ridge is economically much better off than Comal County, which in turn, is much better off economically than Texas as a whole. Most notably, the 2010-2014 Median Household Income of Garden Ridge is over 2 ½ times that of Texas ($134,309 to Texas's $52,576).

The percent of Garden Ridge's population not in the labor force (47.9%) is much higher than the corresponding share in Comal County (39.1%) and in Texas (35.1%). This is directly attributable to the demographic profile, specifically to the relatively high share of the population 65 years and older. Likewise, the unemployment rate of those in the labor force (5.1%) is a full percentage point lower than the countywide rate (6.1%) and over 2 ½ percentage points lower than the statewide rate (7.7%).

Finally, the share of households in Garden Ridge receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as Food Stamps) benefits is only 1.4%, compared with a countywide share of 7.0% and a statewide share of 13.5%.

Table 2: Comparison of Economic Characteristics in Garden Ridge, Comal County, and Texas, 2010-2014

ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS						
Subject	**Texas**		**Comal County**		**Garden Ridge**	
EMPLOYMENT STATUS	Estimate	Percent	Estimate	Percent	Estimate	Percent
Estimated Population 16 years and Over	19,858,082	100.0%	92,147	100.0%	2,800	100.0%
In Labor Force (incl. Armed Forces)	12,889,163	64.9%	56,137	60.9%	1,458	52.1%
Civilian	12,791,590	64.4%	55,931	60.7%	1,451	51.8%
Armed Forces	97,573	0.5%	206	0.2%	7	0.3%
Not in Labor Force	6,968,919	35.1%	36,010	39.1%	1,342	47.9%
Estimated Civilian Labor Force	12,791,590	100.0%	55,931	100.0%	1,451	100.0%
Percent Unemployed	(X)	7.7%	(X)	6.1%	(X)	5.1%
INCOME AND BENEFITS	Estimate	Percent	Estimate	Percent	Estimate	Percent
Estimated Median Household Income*	$52,576	(X)	$64,987	(X)	$134,309	(X)
Estimated Total Households	9,013,582	100.0%	43,063	100.0%	1,312	100.0%
With SNAP Benefits in Past 12 Months	1,218,803	13.5%	3,034	7.0%	18	1.4%
** = 2014 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars*						

Source: American Community Survey

Sales Tax Revenue (Gross and Taxable)

Garden Ridge has seen a steady increase in Gross Sales Revenue over the past five years, ranging from 2010 to 2014. In fact, Gross Sales Revenue has about doubled during that time span, from about $68 million in 2010 to about $131 million in 2014. Despite this, the Taxable Sales Revenue has remained comparatively flat, fluctuating around the $10 million level (Figure 26).

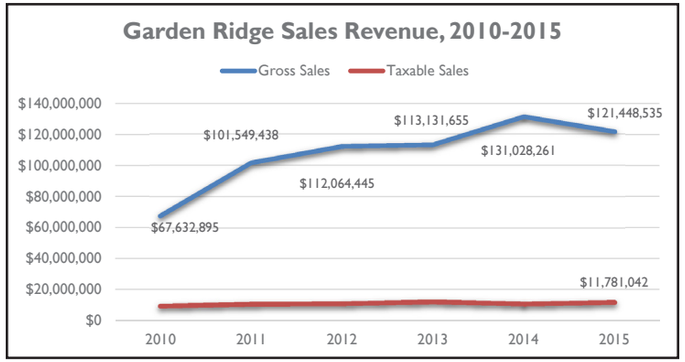

Figure 26: Gross Sales and Taxable Sales for Garden Ridge, 2010-2015

Source: Texas State Comptroller

Garden Ridge Gap Analysis

A retail gap analysis was done for the City of Garden Ridge and also for the City of Schertz, using data from ESRI Community Analyst software. Table 3 shows the summary information of the two analyses, including the standardization of some of the measurements using per household figures.

Table 3 shows that both Garden Ridge and Schertz have retail market gaps; Garden Ridge has a gap of about $84 million, while Schertz has a gap of about $277 million. On first appearance, it may seem that Schertz is in a worse situation in terms of its market opportunity. This is not the case. When the population and/or number of households is taken into account—and the measurements being standardized per household—it is clear that the retail gap is larger in Garden Ridge; about three times larger, in fact.

Both Garden Ridge and Schertz could be said to have "trade deficits": more money is going out than coming in. This is not unusual, especially for suburbs or cities that are primarily residential with little commercial or industrial activity.

Table 3: Comparison of Basic Data and Retail Market Gap Analysis Data by Market Area

Subject	Garden Ridge	Schertz
Estimated Population 2015	3,606	36,726
Estimated Households 2015	1,374	13,324
Consumer Expenditures	$108,411,261	$637,777,506
Retail Sales	$24,665,425	$360,754,617
Retail Gap or Surplus	$83,745,836	$277,022,889
Leakage or Surplus Factor	62.9	27.7
Number of Businesses	13	186
Consumer Expenditures per household	$78,902	$47,867
Retail Sales per household	$17,952	$27,076
Retail Gap or Surplus per household	$60,950	$20,791

Source: ESRI Community Analyst

A detailed look at the retail markets of Garden Ridge and Schertz by three-digit NAICS industry group (Tables 4 and 5) shows that there are three sectors projected to have no sales revenue in 2015 in Garden Ridge: Motor Vehicle & Parts Dealers; Furniture & Home Furnishings Stores; and General Merchandise Stores. There is only one such sector in 2015 in Schertz: Nonstore Retailers. These industry groups have a market gap of 100%, meaning a complete loss of sales revenue. All the consumer spending of residents in those industry groups occurs outside the respective city, and thus no tax revenue accrues to the city.

More notably, two additional industry groups in Garden Ridge have market gaps (leakage factors) of 90% or more: Food Services & Drinking Places; Clothing & Clothing Accessories. There are no such industry groups for Schertz; the next largest market gap is 57.4% (Clothing & Clothing Accessories). Schertz also has a market surplus in one industry group: Building Materials, Garden Equipment & Supply Stores.

The two industry groups in which Garden Ridge comes closest to meeting the consumer demand of its residents are Miscellaneous Store Retailers (a gap of only 13.6% between demand and sales) and Health & Personal Care Stores (a gap of only 18.7%).

Table 4: Garden Ridge Retail Market Gap Analysis by Industry Group

Industry Group	Demand (Spending)	Supply (Sales)	Retail Gap or Surplus	Leakage or Surplus
Motor Vehicle & Parts Dealers	$22,438,714	$0	$22,438,714	100.0
Furniture & Home Furnishings Stores	$2,813,957	$0	$2,813,957	100.0
Electronics & Appliance Stores	$4,919,528	$1,531,177	$3,388,351	52.5
Bldg Materials, Garden Equip. & Supply Stores	$5,689,762	$2,853,277	$2,836,485	33.2
Food & Beverage Stores	$17,310,123	$8,599,849	$8,710,274	33.6
Health & Personal Care Stores	$5,401,495	$3,700,717	$1,700,778	18.7
Gasoline Stations	$6,291,337	$2,957,144	$3,334,193	36.1
Clothing & Clothing Accessories Stores	$4,347,070	$105,121	$4,241,949	95.3
Sporting Goods, Hobby, Book & Music Stores	$2,888,292	$903,658	$1,984,634	52.3
General Merchandise Stores	$18,914,618	$0	$18,914,618	100.0
Miscellaneous Store Retailers	$4,345,982	$3,306,683	$1,039,299	13.6
Nonstore Retailers	$2,184,864	$582,817	$1,602,047	57.9
Food Services & Drinking Places	$10,865,519	$124,982	$10,740,537	97.7

Source: ESRI Community Analyst

Table 5: Schertz Retail Market Gap Analysis by Industry Group

Industry Group	Demand (Spending)	Supply (Sales)	Retail Gap or Surplus	Leakage or Surplus
Motor Vehicle & Parts Dealers	$135,618,545	$43,006,860	$92,611,685	51.8
Furniture & Home Furnishings Stores	$16,669,419	$4,534,834	$12,134,585	57.2
Electronics & Appliance Stores	$28,226,999	$15,346,309	$12,880,690	29.6
Bldg Materials, Garden Equip. & Supply Stores	$27,059,579	$32,873,314	($5,813,735)	(9.7)
Food & Beverage Stores	$103,877,494	$69,718,015	$34,159,479	19.7
Health & Personal Care Stores (4461)	$30,558,418	$11,624,587	$18,933,831	44.9
Gasoline Stations (4471)	$39,688,021	$21,385,362	$18,302,659	30.0
Clothing & Clothing Accessories Stores	$25,373,819	$6,868,891	$18,504,928	57.4
Sporting Goods, Hobby, Book & Music Stores	$17,137,406	$6,764,343	$10,373,063	43.4
General Merchandise Stores	$113,425,235	$96,373,204	$17,052,031	8.1
Miscellaneous Store Retailers	$25,273,452	$9,483,834	$15,789,618	45.4
Nonstore Retailers	$11,765,368	$0	$11,765,368	100.0
Food Services & Drinking Places	$63,103,751	$42,775,064	$20,328,687	19.2

Source: ESRI Community Analyst

Existing Land Use and Zoning

The City of Garden Ridge covers 4,688 acres of land within the boundaries of its existing city limits. The Hanson Materials Quarry on the north side of the City occupies 1,718 acres or about 36% of the total area of the City. When the quarry ceases operations and becomes available for other uses, a large quantity of valuable land will be available for future residential and commercial development.

The next largest land use category is single family residential which covers 1,647 acres and is about 35% of the land area in the City. Currently there are around 1,500 single family residential units in the City with the majority of lots relatively large in size (3/4 acres). There are no multi-family housing options within the City which presents a problem for younger families who want to live in Garden Ridge and eventually own a single family house. Older residents who want to move out of a larger single family home but maintain their presence in the community would also be prospective occupants of multi-family housing. Consideration should be given for developing additional assisted living and nursing home living options as well within the City.

Agricultural land occupies 440 acres and is 9% of the City land area. As Garden Ridge continues to develop, much of this agricultural acreage will be transformed into other uses. Some of the agricultural land in the southwestern corner of the City lies within a floodplain and may evolve into recreational open space as the surrounding areas fills with both residential and commercial development. The large agricultural land base in the eastern portion of the City is currently an effective buffer between the quarry and residential neighborhoods.

A small commercial land use corridor exists along Old Nacogdoches Road (FM 2252). The two potential major commercial nodes within city limits are both in the western portion of Garden Ridge: (1) the intersection of Old Nacogdoches Road and FM 3009; and (2) the intersection of Old Nacogdoches Road and Batcave Road. The intersection of Old Nacogdoches Road and FM 1337, in the eastern portion of town at the Hanson Materials entrance is occupied by industrial uses.

Educational, health care, and other public land uses in Garden Ridge represent a small share in terms of acreage but these land uses help give the city its identity. The municipal center, including City Hall and Garden Ridge Elementary School, is the foremost among these. The former City Hall location is now part of Paul Davis Park and open to community use. In addition, there are two churches and one health care institution (an assisted living facility).

The acreage (12.3 acres) set aside for public parks is very modest in Garden Ridge and needs to be increased. Two of the four recreation areas are private (one a membership-only facility, one specifically built for a subdivision). Paul Davis Park and Park Lane Park are the only municipal properties open to the public. San Antonio provides 17.8 acres per 1,000 residents and Austin has 34.7 acres per 1,000 residents.

Assuming a projected population of 4,722 residents (Texas Water Development Board) Garden Ridge will need 83 acres (San Antonio standard) to 163 acres (Austin standard) of park land. Parks should serve all age cohorts within the City from young children to seniors.

Much of the transportation, communication, and utility land use is represented by flood control, and power lines.

A relatively small share of the acreage of Garden Ridge is vacant, 242.82 acres of 4,688.57 acres total, or about5%. is listed as vacant. Of that land, just over 200 acres is zoned as residential.

Figure 29 describes the current zoning for Garden Ridge. The largest zoning categories are Single Family Dwellings, Industrial, and Agriculture. Another large area described on the map is its Extra Territorial Jurisdiction or ETJ. Very little land is zoned as commercial. The large area zoned as industrial encompasses the quarry site. The current land allocation by category is described below.

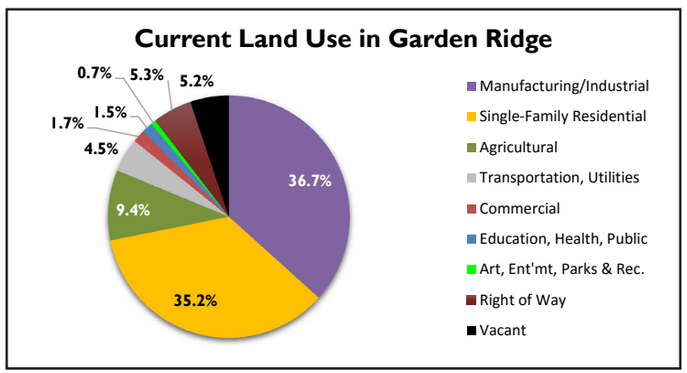

Figure 27: Current Land Use in Garden Ridge Source: CURPR

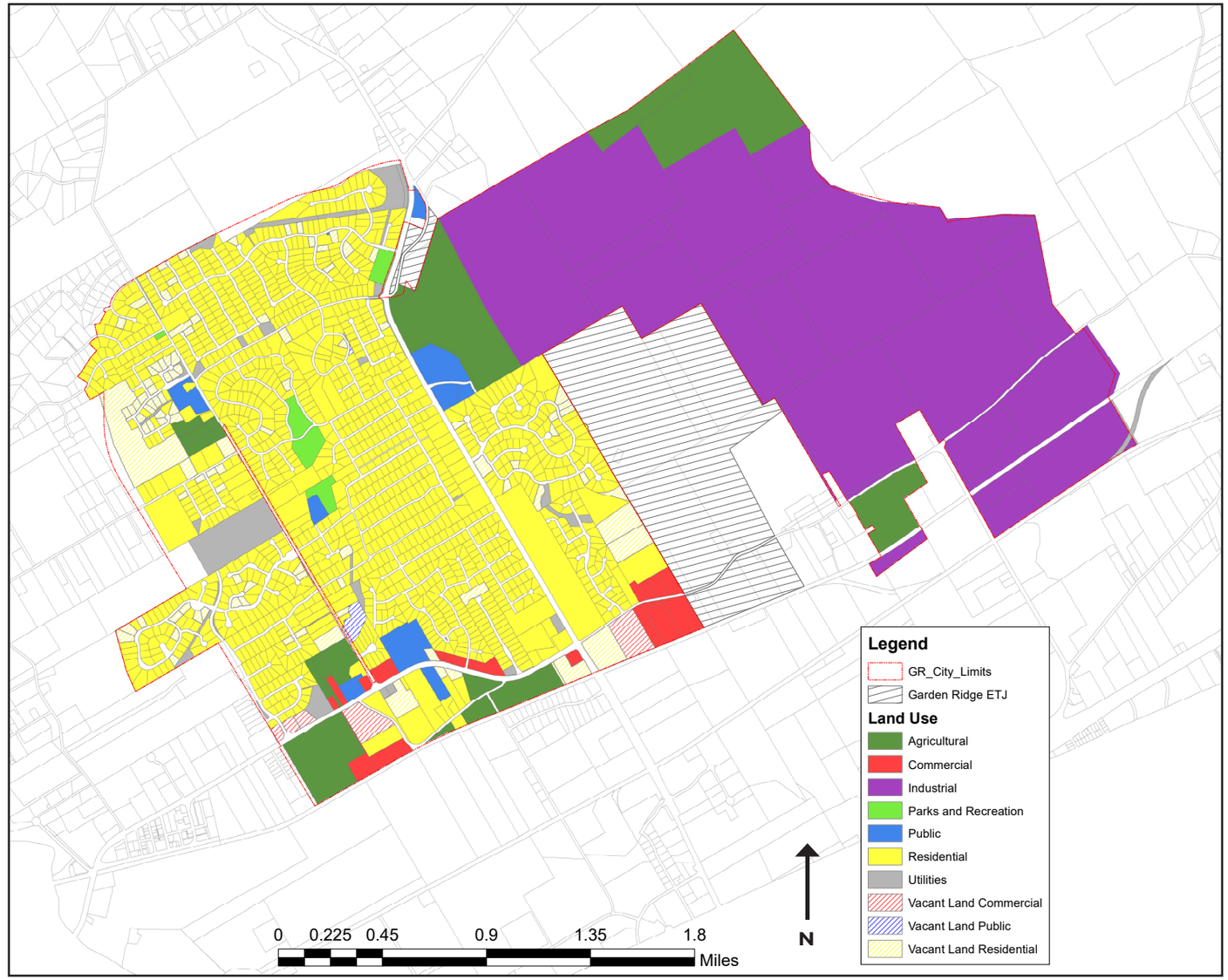

Figure 28: Existing Land Use Source: CURPR

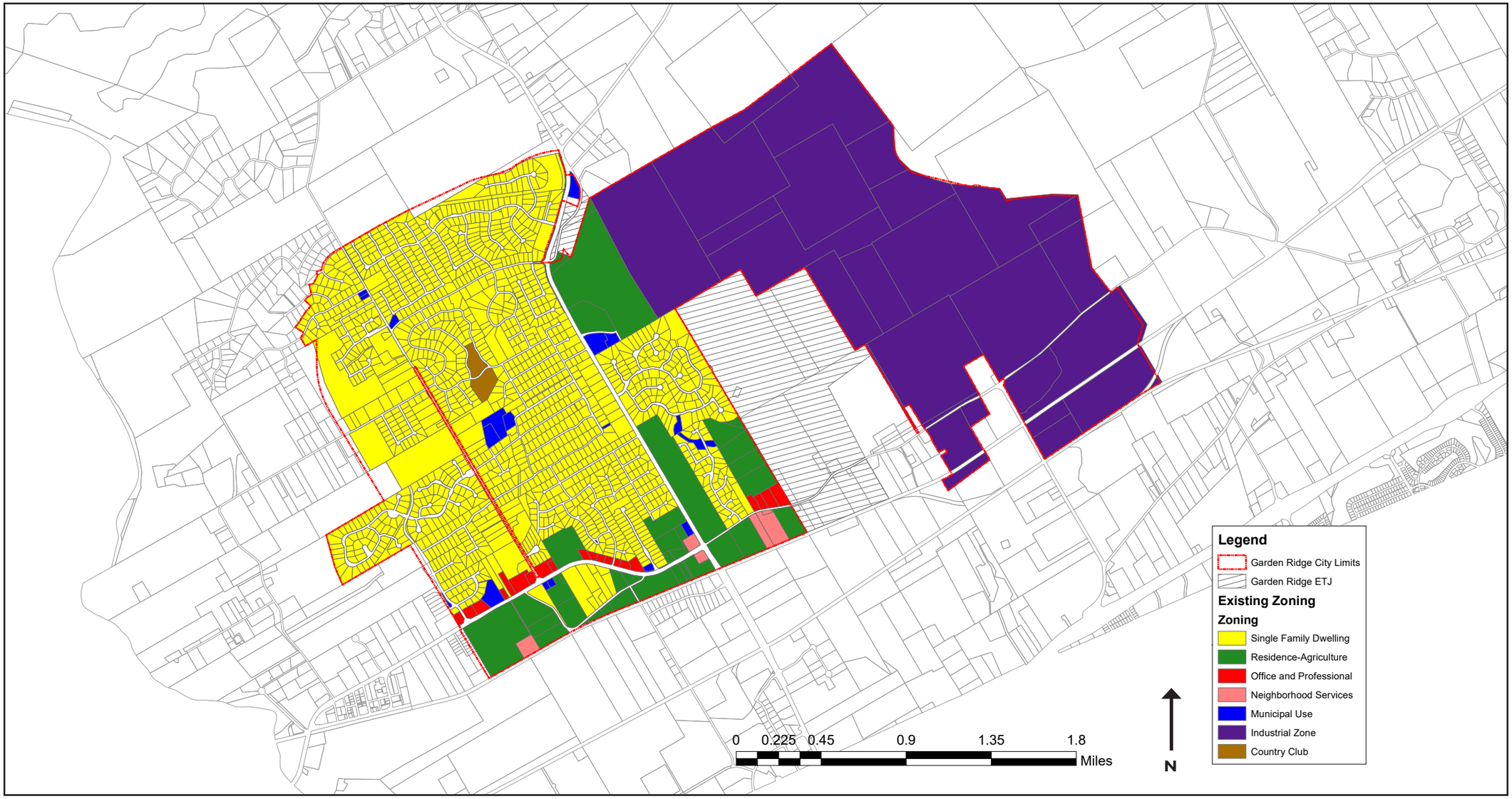

Figure 29: Existing Zoning

Source: CURPR

School District

One of the major developments associated with the increase in population in Comal County after World War II was the need for a school. The Comal County Rural High School District was formed in 1956-1957, and became the Comal Independent School District (ISD) in 1968.

Comal Elementary School served the area of Garden Ridge from its opening in 1957 until the opening of Garden Ridge Elementary School in 2010. The Comal Elementary School campus on Old Nacogdoches Road, which had opened in 1965 as the population began to grow, is now John Paul II Catholic High School. Garden Ridge public school students then attend Canyon Middle School and Canyon High School several miles to the east.

Garden Ridge Elementary School has grown significantly since 2010 increasing its enrollment from 440 students in its first year (2010-11) to 512 students in (2011-12), to 536 students in (2012-13), to 606 students in (2013-14), and 625 students in (2014-15). The Texas Education Agency (TEA) designated it an Exemplary School in 2010-11, and it has met TEA standards under the new rating system.

Voters in Comal ISD passed a $147 million bond proposition in May 2015 which will fund construction of two middle schools, one of which will be in the Garden Ridge area on Hubertus Road just north of I-35, about 4 miles east of Garden Ridge Elementary School. The school will technically be within the City of Schertz but it is located within both Comal County and Comal ISD boundaries.

Figure 30: Garden Ridge Elementary School

Source: CURPR

Floodplain

Garden Ridge is affected by the drainage basins of Cibolo Creek and Dry Comal Creek. In general, the 100-year floodplains of the tributaries of Cibolo Creek affect Garden Ridge west of FM Road 3009, while the Dry Comal Creek tributaries affect the area to the east of FM Road 3009 (with the quarry situated adjacent to the reservoir and floodplain).

The floodplain that would most affect the residential area of Garden Ridge is the (usually dry) tributary of Cibolo Creek that runs roughly south from the intersection of Schoenthal and Batcave Roads through Paul Davis Park and the original location of City Hall, and then roughly southwest parallel to Grass Creek Road to the city limits, and eventually to Cibolo Creek just south of Bracken. This tributary is shown by the red arrow in Figure 31.

The floodplains of Cibolo Creek itself and Dry Comal Creek are primarily in non-residential areas such as farmland or industrial land and so pose less risk of flooding for residential areas. New residential and commercial development in the drainage basins of the creeks could increase the flood plains in future years. The drainage impact of development should be taken into consideration when areas are platted and changed from rural farmland.

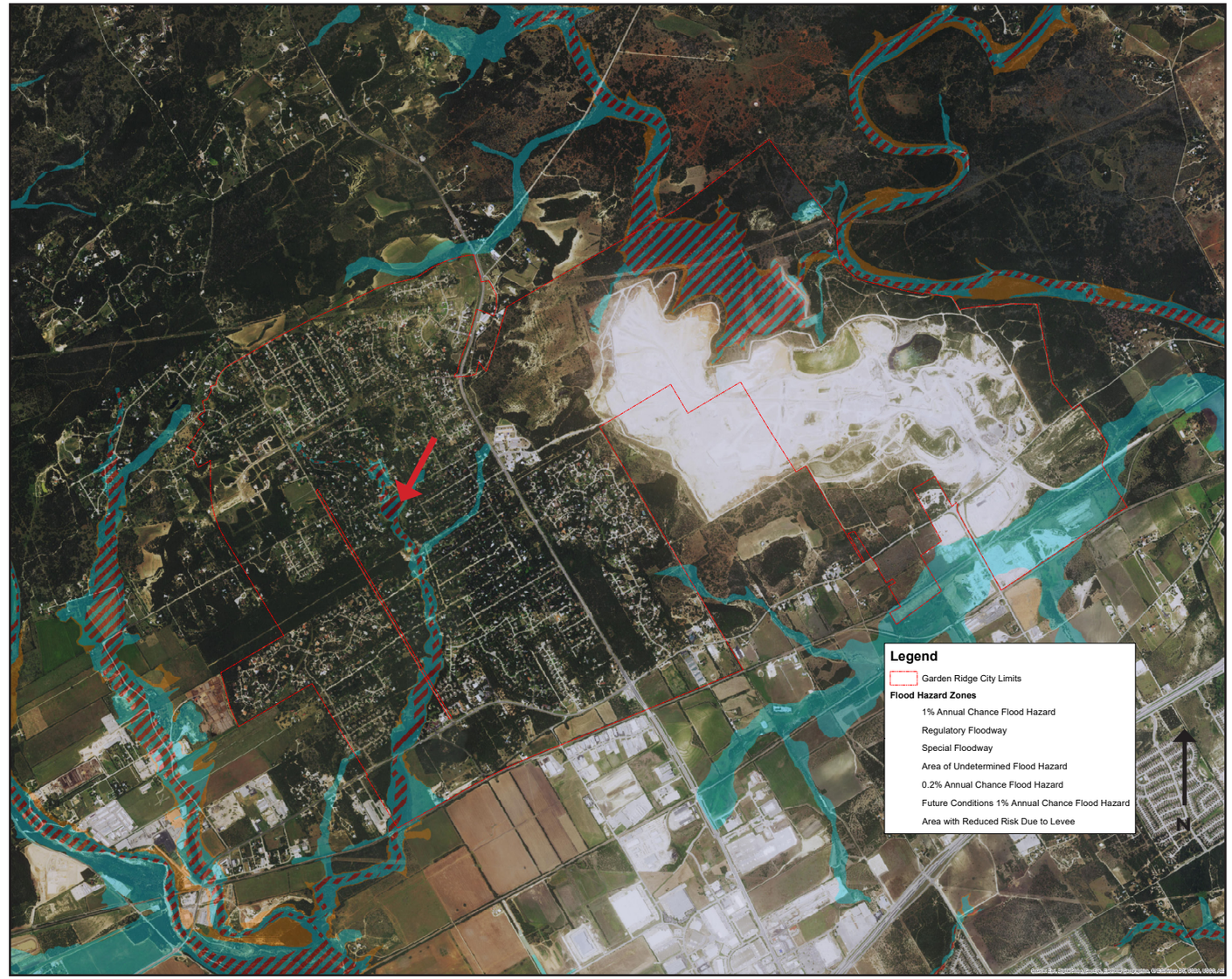

Figure 31: 100 Year Flood Zone - Garden Ridge, TX

Source: ESRI, U.S. Census, CURPR

Union Pacific Freight Tracks

According to a study commissioned by the Texas Department of Transportation in 2008, the "base" level of rail traffic between San Antonio and New Braunfels is 32-36 trains per day (see Figure 32). This averages to more than one per hour. The same study evaluated the possibility of constructing a rail bypass between San Antonio and Austin that would re-route all through freight traffic and potentially allow for a commuter rail system.

Over the past decade, the Lone Star Rail District has conducted research on the viability of a commuter rail system between Georgetown (north of Austin in Williamson County) and Port San Antonio (the former Kelly Air Force Base), with a possible extension to the Texas A&M-San Antonio campus and Toyota auto assembly plant to the south of San Antonio. The bulk of the service would use the former Missouri-Pacific line, as opposed to the Missouri-Kansas-Texas ("Katy") line. Both lines are now part of the Union Pacific system.

One of the stops is proposed for FM 3009, a short distance south of the intersection with FM 2252. The Missouri-Pacific line represents the boundary between Garden Ridge and Schertz, and as of this writing there is no specific location chosen for the Lone Star Rail station. However, in 2013 the Schertz Sector Plan created by the firm Gateway Planning recommended that the Lone Star station be moved to a location along the Katy line via construction of a new spur between FM 3009 and Cibolo Valley Drive (where a transit-oriented development is recommended).

If Garden Ridge wants to derive some economic benefit from the Lone Star Rail Stop, it will be necessary to make sure that the stop remains where it is currently proposed. Some of the development associated with the station would certainly take place in Garden Ridge, and increase the city's tax revenue. It should be noted, however, that as of June 2016 work on developing the corridor rail line has been put on hold until its routing is clarified

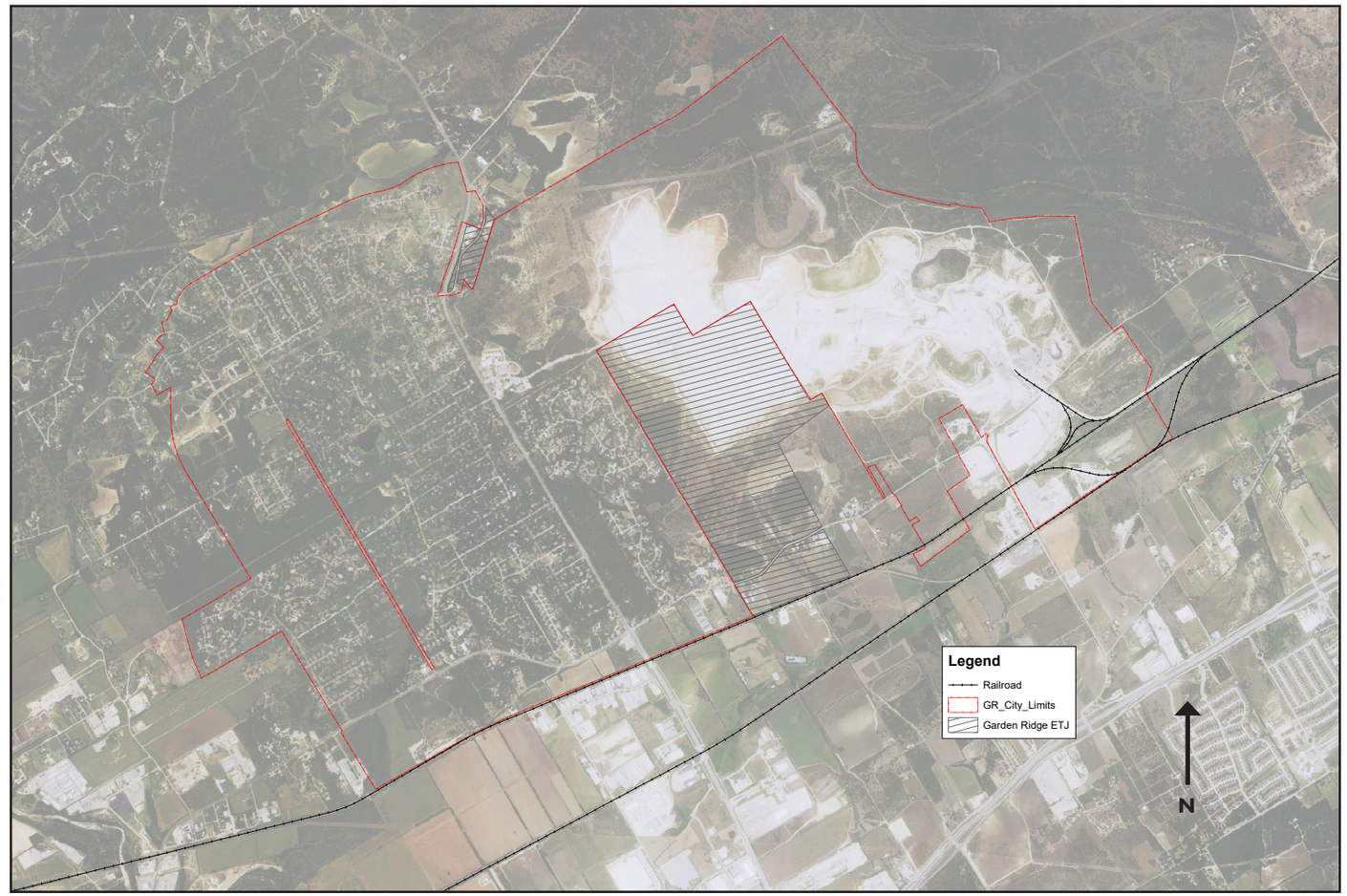

Figure 32: Existing Railways adjacent to Garden Ridge City Limits

Source: ESRI, U.S. Census,CURPR

Traffic and Circulation

Garden Ridge is located 1.75 miles north of Interstate Highway 35. The heaviest traffic in Garden Ridge and its immediate vicinity is along Old Nacogdoches Road (FM 2252) and Natural Bridge Caverns Road (FM 3009), as seen in Figure 33.

As a primarily residential suburb with few commercial districts, the traffic seems rather evenly distributed along the two Farm to Market Roads. The street network more or less jumps from local roads to arterial roads (the latter being represented by the Farm to Market Roads). Schoenthal Road, Batcave Road, and Bindseil Lane are the only clear examples of the intermediary collector roads.

Over the five-year period 2010-2014 the highest traffic counts in the vicinity were along FM 2252 near Bracken (the unincorporated community about a mile west of Garden Ridge). Counts began in 2012 for a new location along FM 3009 just south of FM 2252. In 2012 and 2014, this location was the busiest in Garden Ridge and the vicinity, with an AADT of 15,009. (see Table 6 and Figure 33).

Table 6: Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) Counts in Garden Ridge and Vicinity, 2010-2014

Location	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
FM 2252 at 5th St (Bracken)	12,900	11,400	11,500	15,844	13,051
FM 2252 west of FM 3009	10,000	10,000	10,000	12,010	11,174
FM 3009 north of FM 2252	12,200	10,900	11,000	11,634	12,656
FM 3009 at Schoenthal Rd	9,400	9,200	9,400	9,293	10,006
FM 3009 north of city limits	5,900	5,800	5,900	5,571	6,387
FM 2252 at FM 1337 (Ogden)	3,700	3,400	3,500	3,920	4,628
FM 3009 south of FM 2252			12,300	12,362	15,009

Source: Texas Department of Transportation

Figure 33: Detail from Map of Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) Counts in San Antonio District, 2014

Source: TXDOT

Sidewalks

As a suburb that developed entirely after World War II, and specifically since 1970, the infrastructure of Garden Ridge is specifically designed for the automobile rather than for the pedestrian. Combined with a relatively low population density, this has resulted in a street network with very few sidewalks. In total, 3,963 feet (or just over ¾ of a mile) of sidewalk has been built, and that since 2009. Of this total, 2.655 feet (just about ½ a mile) is located at the intersection of FM 2252 and 3009 (the main traffic intersection in Garden Ridge), and 1,308 feet (just about ¼ a mile) is located near Garden Ridge Elementary School (shown in orange in Figure 35). However, the sidewalk at the elementary school is aligned to the parking areas for the school and not to the street or right-of-way.

Figure 34: Sidewalk Ending. Viewing West on FM 2252
Source: CURPR

TXDOT Projects

There are two TxDOT projects scheduled for construction in Garden Ridge. The first is the installation of pavement markers on the shoulders of FM Road 3009, north from the intersection with FM Road 2252 to the city limit and beyond, to Texas State Highway 46. The Second is the widening of 2252 from FM3009 to Evans Road.

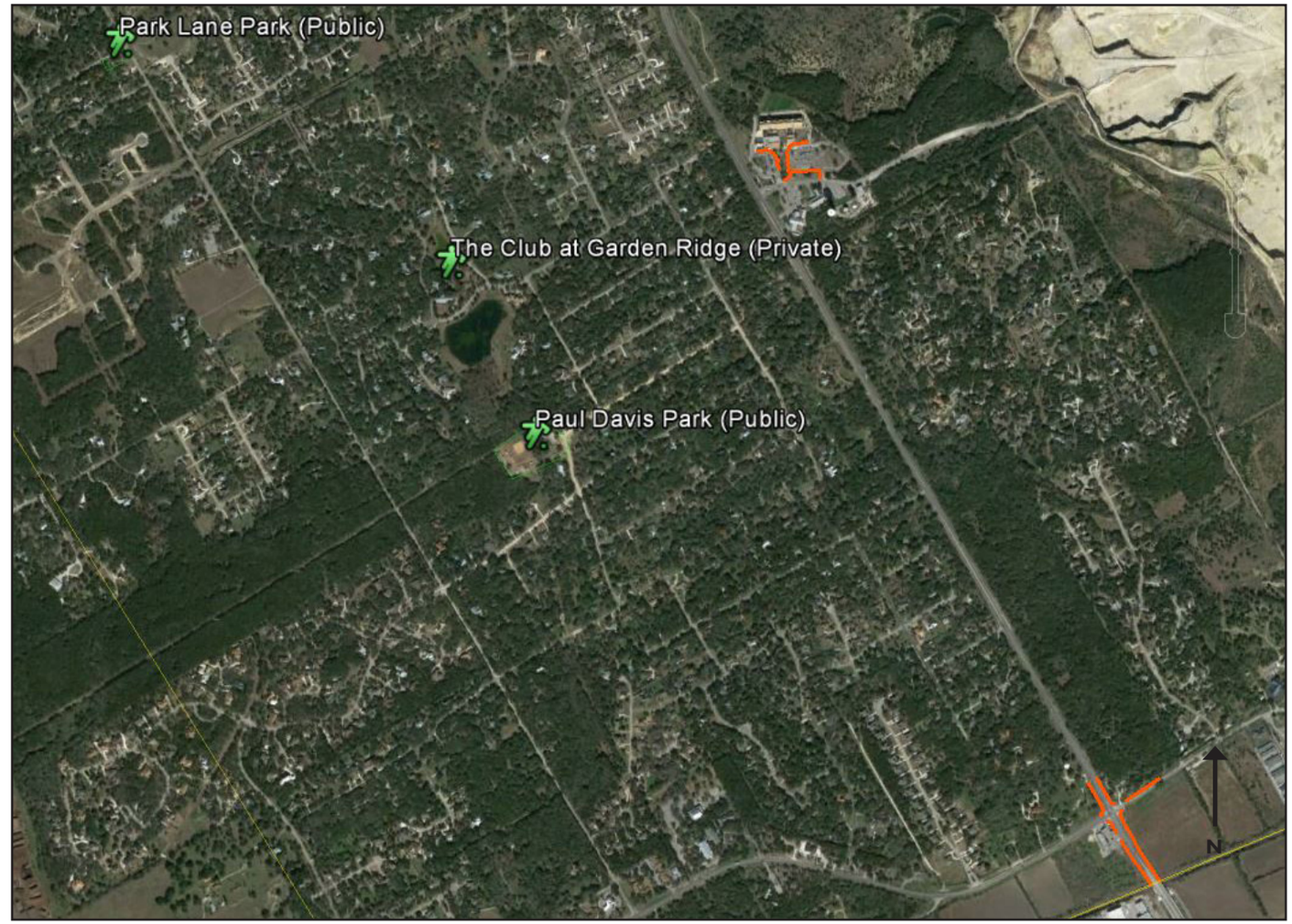

Figure 35: Existing Sidewalks in relation to Public Parks
Source: Google Earth, CURPR

SA Tomorrow - Rolling Oaks Urban Activity Center

The City of San Antonio is in the process of developing a comprehensive plan (SA Tomorrow) to guide its development in the decades ahead. Thirteen existing and emerging urban activity centers have been identified in the planning process that will be nodes for concentrations in employment, and residential and commercial development. Rolling Oaks at the intersection of 1604 and Nacogdoches Road has been identified as one of the emerging urban activity centers. Garden Ridge is only a short distance away and will be part of this urban activity center as it develops and expands. Mass transit, roads, land use and other infrastructure will be planned and coordinated by the City of San Antonio to guide and enhance the development of this urban activity center over the next 10 to 20 years.

These urban activity centers will be mixed use developments blending residential, office, and commercial activities together in a closer proximity along with recreational open space opportunities for residents. The Rolling Oaks urban activity center will increase economic activity in the area, create job opportunities, and produce a demand for additional and varied housing options. As show in Figure 36, the northern boundary of the Rolling Oaks Urban Activity Center is located on the Bexar County line, but the economic impact will extend to Bracken and Garden Ridge. In addition, it will most certainly impact its overall development as the activity center takes shape and grows. This impact, while difficult to determine at this point in time, will be significant not only in terms of economic development, but in terms of population growth and traffic flows.

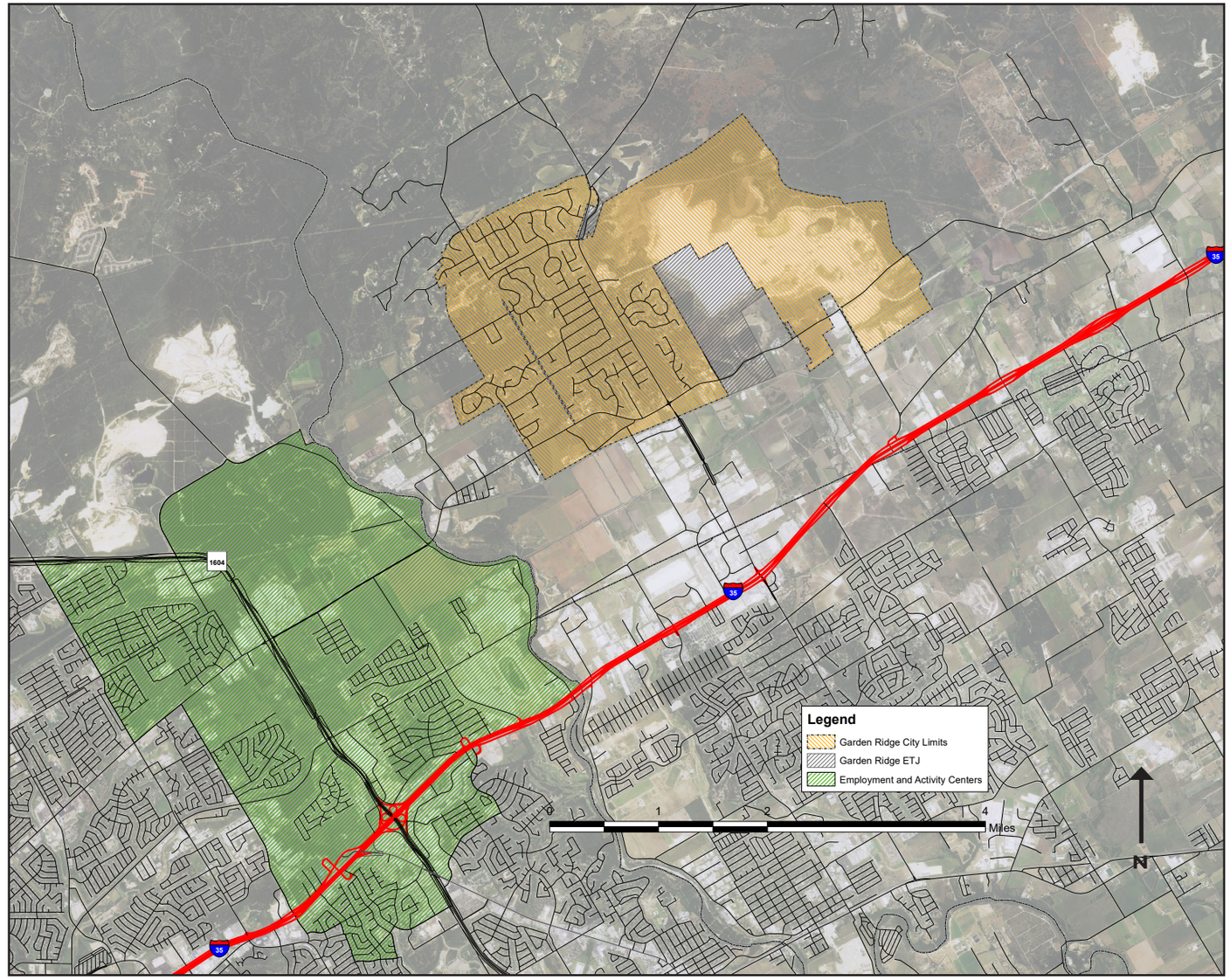

Figure 36: Proposed Rolling Oaks Employment and Activity Center - City of San Antonio

Source: CURPR, City of San Antonio

Options for the Future

Putting in Place a Development Strategy for Garden Ridge

In devising a long-term strategy it is important to keep two things in mind. First, the recommendations included in this study are only a start. Second, the development process is always ongoing. Planning by its very nature is a continuous process that constantly builds upon past successes and ongoing changes in the environment. The first step in this process is to carefully address the recommendations being proposed. Once this is done, the next step is to make adjustments as needed. As this is done, it will be important to establish priorities for development. This is critical because recommendations are always governed by the availability of resources to carry them out. As priorities are decided on, the next step is to put together an implementation strategy and a plan of action to carry them out.

It is also important to emphasize that the team or working group that will be responsible for spearheading and carrying out the plan will need to be aware of its constraints. Moreover, adjustments and changes in the plan are likely as the community moves forward with its implementation. In other words, whatever plan is ultimately decided upon, that plan will probably have to be modified as needs dictate over time. As a result, it will be very important to carefully monitor the plan's implementation to make sure that its stays on track. The plan's ultimate success, however, will depend on the kinds of leadership that is provided over the course of its implementation. In the end, leadership more than anything else, will drive this effort.

Proposed Annexation of Bracken

The annexation of unincorporated Bracken just southwest of Garden Ridge should be given careful thought by the City of Garden Ridge. As noted earlier, Bracken already has a physical and historical connection to Garden Ridge. If annexed it could provide Garden Ridge with both a connection and a buffer to San Antonio's growth in the area. In its newly drafted comprehensive plan the City of San Antonio has designated the Rolling Oaks Mall area as one of 13 regional centers with a high potential for economic and employment growth. Having Garden Ridge in close proximity to the Rolling Oaks Mall Regional Center could help it to take advantage of any spillover effects generated by that center.

Figure 37: Council Meeting Presentation by Dr. Tangum
Source: CURPR

The annexation of Bracken by the City of Garden Ridge could also create a buffer zone to protect its own assets in the area. By carefully planning the annexation process, assuming of course, that the residents of Bracken would agree to be annexed, the City of Garden Ridge would be able to expand its own incorporated area and population. In addition, it would provide Garden Ridge an opportunity to include this area into its comprehensive planning process. It would also increase its tax base, create new investment possibilities, and generate additional options to strengthen its local economy. Finally, it would enhance the proposed Development District and Main Street Corridor ideas discussed earlier, and elaborated on below. We believe that the annexation of Bracken would be a win-win proposal for the City of Garden Ridge if it proves to be feasible.

Figure 38: Community Discussion after Presentation
Source: CURPR

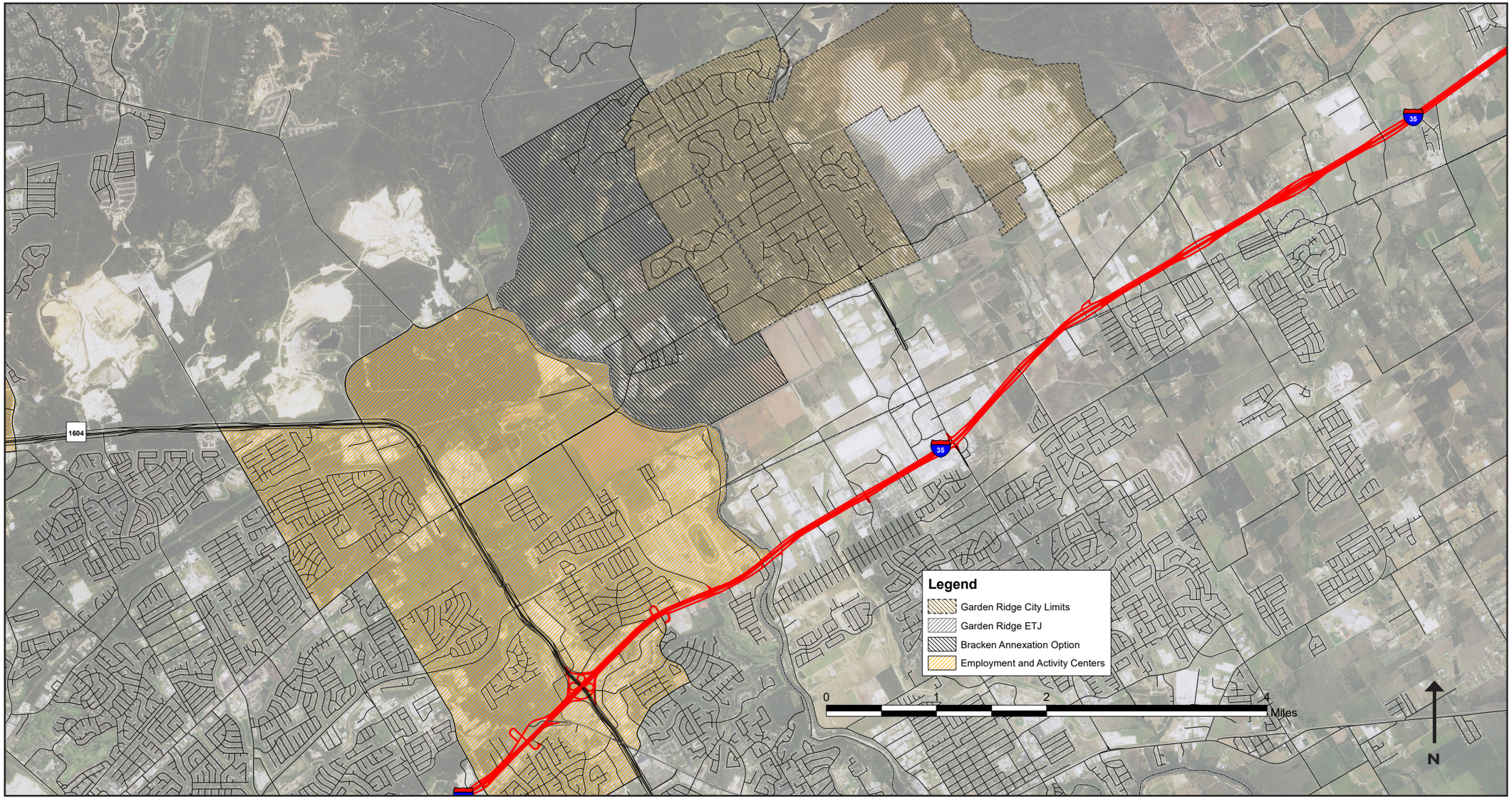

Figure 39: Proposed Bracken Annexation between Garden Ridge City Limits and the Proposed Rolling Oaks Employment and Activity Center

Source: CURPR, ESRI, City of San Antonio

A Proposed Garden Ridge Development District

The Lone Star Rail District has been conducting research on the viability of a commuter rail system connecting Georgetown, north of Austin in Williamson County with Port San Antonio (formerly Kelly Air Force Base) with a possible extension to the new Texas A & M San Antonio campus located in south Bexar County. As envisioned in their plan the bulk of the proposed commuter rail line would use the existing Missouri-Pacific line that borders Garden Ridge on its eastern boundary with the City of Schertz. A number of station locations have also been proposed by the Lone Star Rail District. One of these stations has been slated for Schertz. All will be located along the railway just east of Garden Ridge. If the plans for the rail connection becomes a reality the location of the station in Schertz will also have a major impact on Garden Ridge because its proximity. To take advantage of this possible development it is recommended that Garden Ridge designate a special zone along the track within its incorporated area. That zone will not only provide a buffer between the rail line and proposed development along FM2252, it will also set aside valuable land for additional development should the plan being proposed by the Lone Star Rail District become a reality.

If that plan does not materialize the proposed zone will still be in place. That zone can be developed to include several planned areas involving mixed use facilities. The proposed zone can also include apartment complexes, new retail/commercial development, professional offices and light industrial sites. The key here is the planned development of potentially valuable property which is currently largely undeveloped or underdeveloped in a strategic corridor centered on FM 2252. This development will also increase the community's tax base, foster new investment, and strengthen the local economy.

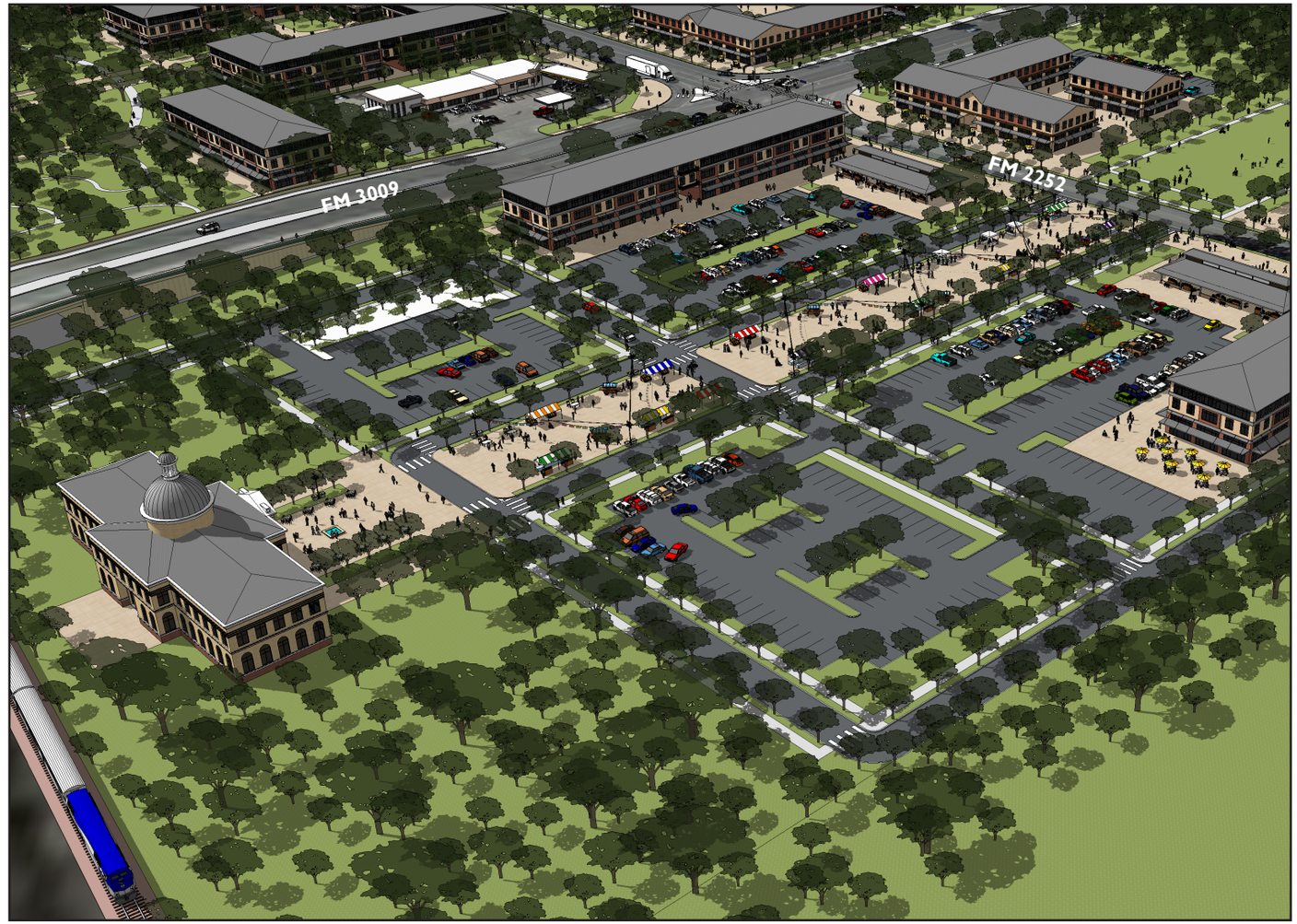

Figure 40: Potential Future Passenger Rail Termnal and Mixed Use Development Source: CURPR

Figure 41: Proposed Mixed-Use Development along FM 2252

Source: CURPR

Develop a Main Street Corridor Centered on FM 2252

An important component of any community growth strategy is to expand the local economy and bring in new investment. A key part of this strategy is to bring in new businesses, expand existing businesses, and encourage local entrepreneurial development. The business sector in Garden Ridge not only creates the basis for the local economy, it also generates valuable tax revenue for the community to build its infrastructure, improve its streets and maintain its services. Residents in Garden Ridge also need local businesses to purchase the necessary goods and services they need to maintain and enhance their quality of life. However, as noted earlier, many residents in Garden Ridge are forced to shop elsewhere. This means they are also spending much of their income in other communities. This results in what is known as income leakage. This leakage, in turn, also results in lost tax revenue for Garden Ridge.

One way to counteract this outward flow of revenue is to create more local businesses that can service the resident population. These businesses also generate new job opportunities for residents. In addition, they bring in new investment that can expand the local economy and create new tax revenues for the community. To facilitate this growth it is recommended that the City of Garden Ridge take steps to designate a Main Street Corridor centered on FM 2252. This corridor would stretch from Evans Road on its southern boundary to the city limit near the existing quarry site on the north side of Garden Ridge. This corridor will, in effect, become its downtown district. It will also mesh with the proposed Development Zone discussed previously.

To finance the development of this Main Street Corridor it is recommended that the City of Garden Ridge also put in place a Tax Increment Finance (TIF) District encompassing the proposed corridor. The creation of a TIF District would be part of a long-range plan to develop the corridor. It will not only provide additional revenue to build the corridor, it will also generate additional investment options to attract new businesses to the area. In addition, it will help businesses already in the proposed corridor by providing new infrastructure, marketing opportunities and improved access.

The idea underlying the creation of a TIF District is that the cost of public improvements in the area can be covered by future tax revenue. It will also provide an ongoing revenue stream that will provide additional financial resources over time to construct new improvements in the proposed corridor and the adjacent development zone. In addition, the establishment of the TIF District will provide an identifiable framework to foster long-term development in the corridor.

Figure 42: Proposed Streetscape Along FM2252

Source: CURPR

Figure 43:Visualization of Future Intersection at Old FM 2252 and FM 2252

Source: CURPR

Expand Park and Recreational Opportunities in Garden Ridge

Garden Ridge currently has two public parks – Paul Davis Park and Park Lane – and a private recreational club. As Garden Ridge continues to grow the need for additional park and recreational facilities will grow as well. For the short-term it is recommended that the community set aside land adjacent to FM 2252 in the proposed Development Zone and elsewhere for new parks and recreational uses. The goal here is to set the stage for additional development over the next 3 to 5 years in the zone. The land set aside for these uses will be part of a broader development process that will include mixed-uses, new residential areas and updated infrastructure improvement.

Figure 44: Park Lane Source: CURPR

The potential exists for development of a large City Park on a tract of land fronting on FM 2252. Over the longer term – 5 to 10 years – portions of the existing quarry could be used for additional parks and recreational facilities when it plays out or is no longer feasible to mine the site. That site, given the many examples of quarry related development sites in San Antonio and elsewhere, will provide Garden Ridge with a tremendous opportunity to expand its economy and create additional amenities for its residents. Underscoring this kind of development is the need for a comprehensive land use and zoning plan for the community that will set the stage for its long-term growth.

A Level-of-Service (LOS) Analysis has been conducted to compare the park acreage of Garden Ridge to San Antonio and other similar-sized cities in the San Antonio metropolitan area. Garden Ridge's current park and recreational facility acreage of 31 acres equates to 9.51 acres per 1,000 residents. Although not a specifically-stated rule, most municipalities generally aim for a ratio of 10 acres per 1,000 residents or more. With Garden Ridge's current land use, the city would fall beneath that threshold, and their ratio would shrink further with projected population increases in the coming decades. San Antonio—thanks in large part to annexation of Government Canyon State Natural Area, consisting of 12,085 acres of parkland—leads the list of nearby cities in terms of LOS, with 13.77 acres per 1,000 residents. Schertz follows San Antonio, with 11.89 per 1,000 residents. Garden Ridge is ahead of the nearby cities most similar in terms of population—Live Oak, Universal City, and Selma—but still falls below the ideal ratio.

As the LOS is based on population, the efficacy of a city's park acreage changes depending on its population. Garden Ridge is projected for significant population growth in the next few decades. The 2010 population of 3,259 is projected to increase to 4,722 in 2020, 6,421 in 2030, and 8,146 in 2040, which is a 250% increase over those three decades. It is clear that the LOS ratio, already below the goal proportion, will shrink with this population increase without a corresponding acreage increase. Indeed, using the 2040 population estimate, the city of Garden Ridge would have a LOS of 3.81, lower than every city on the list above.

However, with a proposed major park along FM 3009, the LOS for Garden Ridge would be greatly increased, going beyond the 10 acres per 1,000 resident's threshold for the foreseeable future. The new park would increase park acreage in the city to 94 acres, an increase of 63 acres. Immediately, the current LOS would be 28.84—by far, the highest LOS of cities in the area. Moreover, the construction of the park would allow for the city to reach its projected growth estimate while still maintaining the preferred ratio. By 2040, the ratio would still be at 11.54 acres per 1,000 residents. Seen another way, by 2040, the acreage needed to reach the 10.0 threshold would be 81.46 acres—with the new major park, Garden Ridge would still have an acreage surplus of more than 12 acres in 2040.

Figure 45: Paul Davis Park Source: CURPR

Figure 46: A Proposed New City Park

Source: CURPR

Develop a Unified Development Code

Crucial for the future development of Garden Ridge is the creation of an updated land use and zoning plan. This plan, once completed, will provide a framework to guide the community's long-term growth. Equally important, it will provide the citizens of Garden Ridge with a tool to align their planning efforts to control development, preserve key environmental assets, and set the stage for new investment in the community. It will also guide the siting of new infrastructure and transportation corridors within the community. Finally, it will be an important statement as to how Garden Ridge should grow in the years ahead. Without it, the community will be faced with the prospects of unplanned development within its boundaries and extra-territorial jurisdiction. There are also policy, taxing and funding requirements that will need to be taken into account as the plan is developed. Indeed, the plan will not only serve as a guide, it will also be an important policy document.

Garden Ridge will experience rapid growth in the next decade since it is located in one of the fastest growing metropolitan corridors in the United States. It also needs to look for a more comprehensive approach to economic development and land use regulation. A Unified Development Code (UDC) would be an effective tool to help Garden Ridge in dealing with existing and future land development issues.

A Unified Development Code (UDC) combines existing zoning and subdivision regulations, street design, along with other desired city regulations. Other regulations could include sign regulations, design guidelines, flood plain and storm water management and historic preservation. By combining all regulations in a single UDC, the development process is streamlined, coordinated and becomes more efficient. Inconsistencies in ordinances and outdated policies can be eliminated as well. A UDC also makes it easier for developers, builders, and residents to understand local requirements related to landuse and development. The UDC should incorporate clear, concise and direct language along with appropriate definitions, tables and illustrations that help readers to clearly understand the regulations. The primary purpose of the UDC is to implement the City's comprehensive plan policies. The UDC should be updated periodically (every 5 years) as updates are made regarding comprehensive and master plan policies.

A law firm experienced in writing a Unified Development Code should be retained by Garden Ridge to undertake the task of writing a unified code. Ordinance issues that will need to be addressed include historic preservation and mixed-use.

Historic Preservation

Garden Ridge's current zoning ordinance also needs to be updated and expanded to include a historic preservation ordinance that protects historic resources within existing city limits and its extra territorial jurisdiction area. A historic preservation committee should be formed to identify and survey historic properties and places. National and state historic site lists should be reviewed as a starting point. Historic preservation ordinances address the alteration, movement and additions to historic properties to insure that the property is not destroyed or degraded.

Figure 47: Historic Structure located at Northwest corner of FM 2252 and FM 3009
Source: CURPR

Mixed-Use Zoning

A category that is missing in the current zoning ordinance is mixed-use zoning. One option is to have a commercial zoning classification that permits a vertical mix of commercial, office, and residential uses within the same building. Buildings can have retail, service and office uses on the ground floor with residential units above. This type of building footprint creates a pedestrian oriented street environment with store-front shopping and services. There are current residents in Garden Ridge who no longer desire to own or maintain a detached single family home on a large lot but want to remain near friends. Mixed use developments would provide a much needed new housing option.

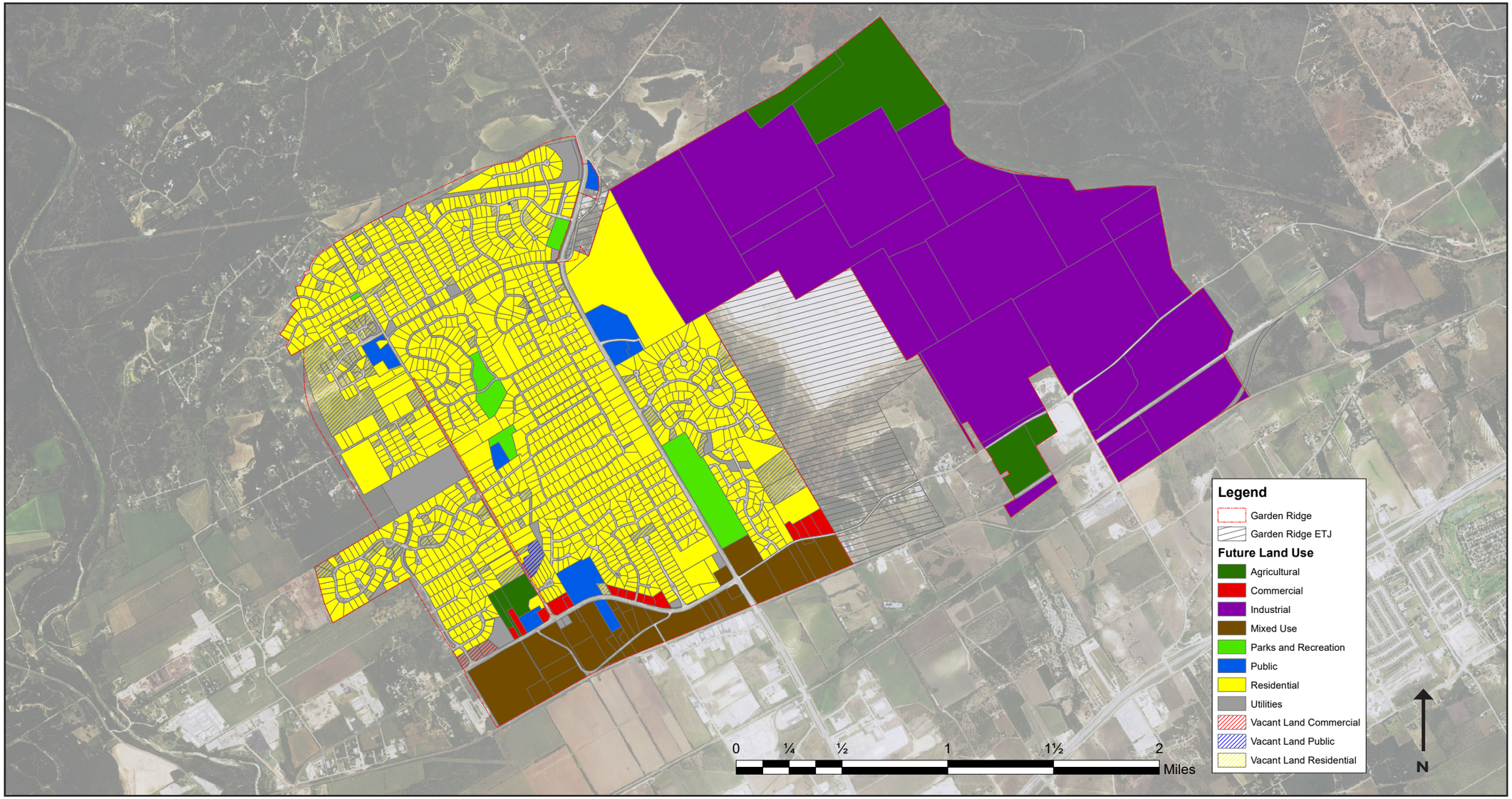

Figure 48: Proposed Future Land Use

Source: CURPR

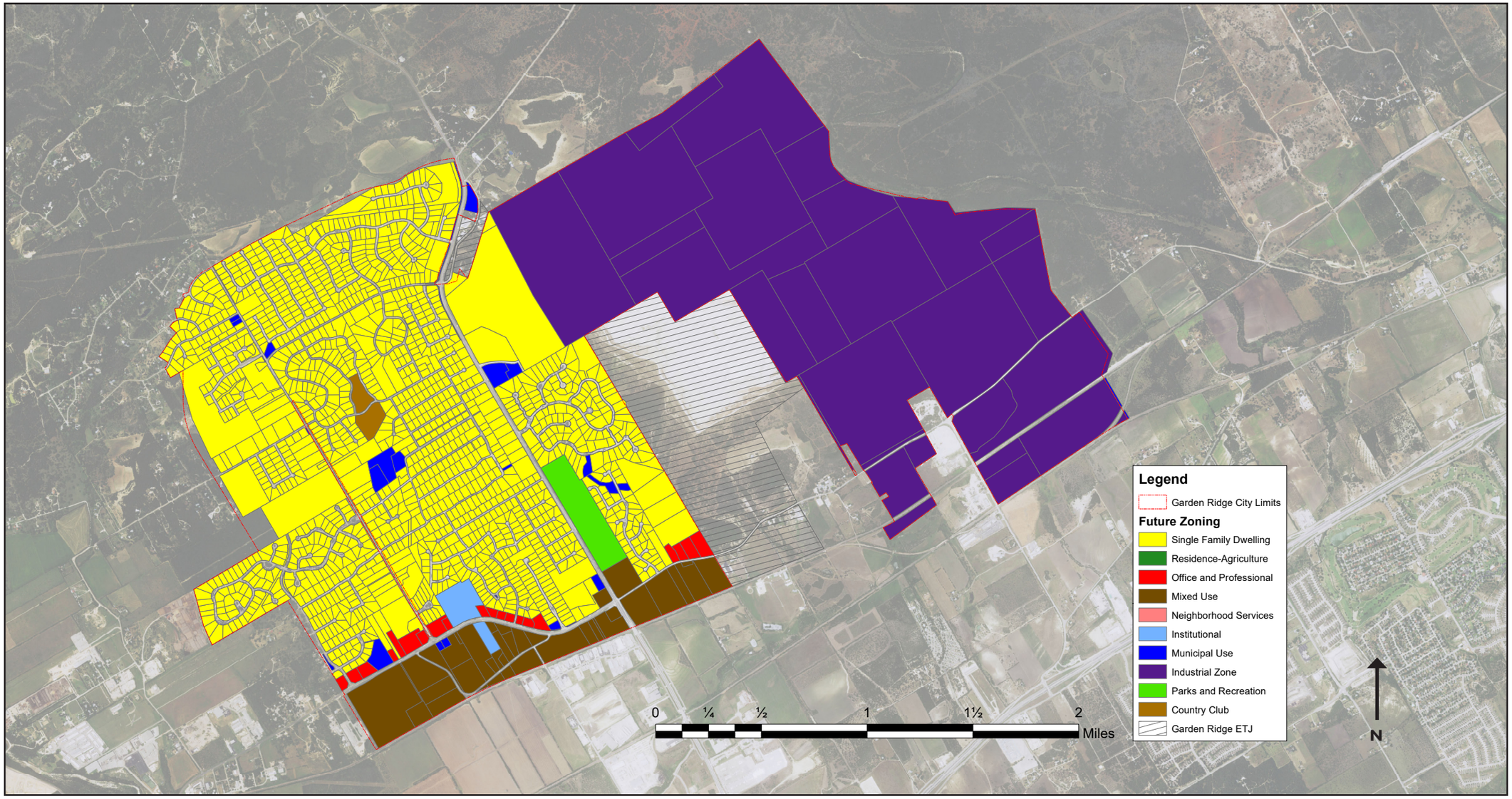

Figure 49: Proposed Future Zoning

Source: CURPR

Plan for the Future Development of the Quarry Site

The quarry in Garden Ridge is not only a major economic generator for the community it also serves as its most dominant feature. It presently occupies a large portion or 36% of the community's land base. Because of its size it also has significant environmental consequences for Garden Ridge. Present estimates regarding its useful life as an economically productive quarry site are vague. However, once it is no longer economically viable to mine the site it will be vacated. When that happens the community will have to decide on how best to use the site. Fortunately, there are numerous examples of successful alternative uses for quarry sites. The key here is to begin evaluating possible future uses for it. Because of its size and location this task becomes especially important. Some of the considerations already suggested include the siting of park and recreational areas, new housing, office development, mix use development, and the location for industrial/warehousing facilities. The important point here is to begin now to plan for its future so that appropriate steps can be taken when the site becomes available.

Figure 50: Entrance to the Hanson Quarry Source: CURPR

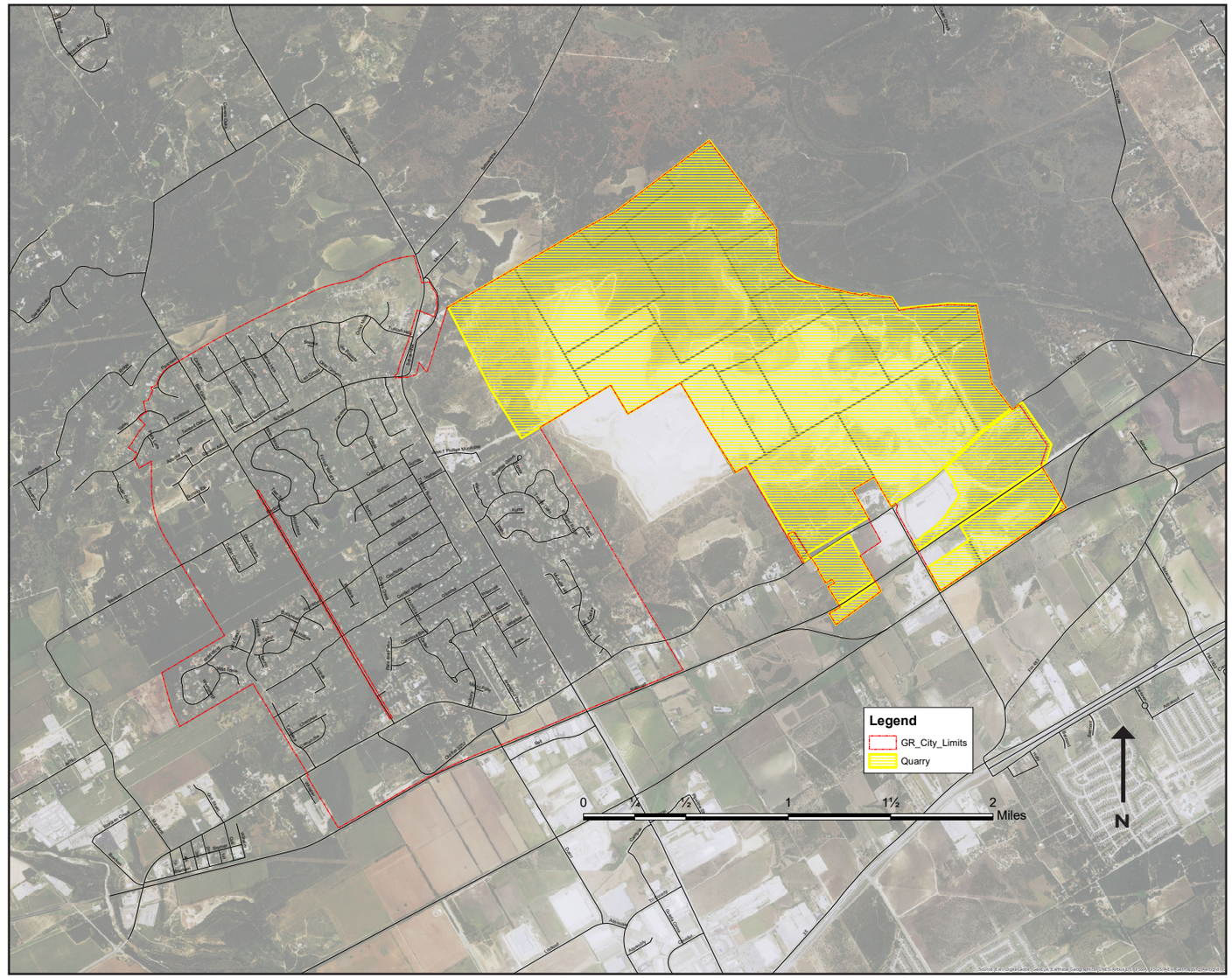

Figure 51: The Hanson Quarry Source: CURPR

Improve Pedestrian and Vehicular Circulation

Over the next 10 to 15 years the population of Garden Ridge is expected to grow to over 5,000 people. In addition, its location close to the rapidly growing northeast quadrant of Bexar County and the I-35 corridor will become more important as vacant areas in the region are filled in. This means that additional emphasis will need to be centered on improving pedestrian and vehicular circulation within the community and its ETJ. At this time the two major vehicular corridors in Garden Ridge are FM 2252 (Old Nacogdoches Road), and FM 3009 (Natural Bridge Caverns Road). There are also several intermediary collector roads and a street network that connects local roads in the residential areas to arterial roads. Traffic counts have remained relatively stable over the past five years. However, projected growth in these areas indicates that the counts will likely increase in the coming years. In order to prepare for these increases careful thought should be given to the long-term pedestrian and vehicular needs of the community. This will require careful planning and research. In addition, a long-term major thoroughfare plan is needed to ensure that Garden Ridge is prepared to address its future growth needs. This planning will also address the needs and requirements of the proposed Development Zone and the Main Street Corridor recommendations discussed earlier.

The City also needs to develop a system of interconnected continuous sidewalks and walking trails where feasible. Figure 52 shows where a sidewalk system could be added to the existing street network.

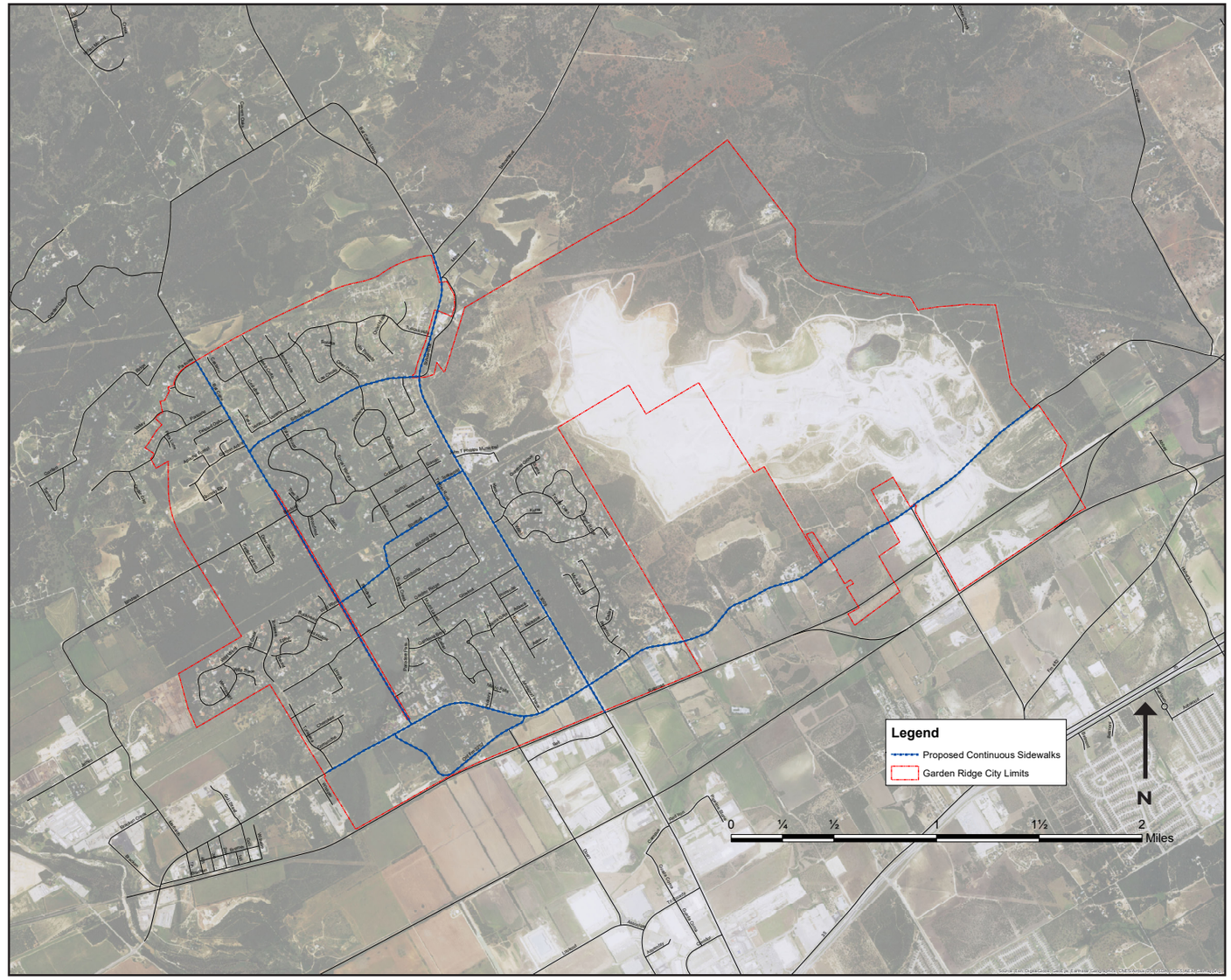

Figure 52: Proposed Continuous Sidewalks

Source: CURPR

Where Do We Go From Here?

Earlier we discussed the need for establishing priorities for development. The recommendations put forth in this section describes a number of options the City of Garden Ridge can explore and examine in depth as it moves forward with developing its priorities. These recommendations take into account both the changing demographics, economic conditions, and challenges Garden Ridge will continue to deal with over the next 10 to 15 years. The next section will outline and discuss, at length, an implementation strategy for Garden Ridge. That strategy will focus mainly on the process of carrying out Garden Ridge's planning process, and the need for establishing long-term goals. The key ingredient in the process will be the leadership factor. Equally important is the vision Garden Ridge creates for itself. We believe that the recommendations presented here could have a significant impact on Garden Ridge's future. However, the future of Garden Ridge really lies in the hands of those who live and work there. This means that the community, as a whole, must come together and discuss these and other possible recommendations to set the stage for its long-term development.

Implementation Plan

Putting in Place a Strategy

While this study outlines a long-term vision for Garden Ridge to pursue, the next and perhaps most important step is to put in place a workable course of action or strategy to help the city's leadership achieve its goals. This section proposes such a strategy and describes an overall implementation plan to assist the community in addressing its goals. It also provides a framework to help it accomplish its long-term growth and development.

As noted earlier, it is also useful to acknowledge that the team or working group responsible for carrying out the plan must always be aware of and accept the fact that adjustments and changes in that plan are likely to be made as it moves forward with its implementation. Because of this it will be important to carefully monitor the plan's implementation to make sure that it stays on course and remains relevant. The plan's ultimate success, however, will largely depend on the kinds of leadership provided by the city and the community at large over the course of its implementation. In the end leadership more than any other factor will drive this effort.

Implementation Strategy

To carry out the proposed recommendations and action steps it will be important to make sure that the community's leadership is on the same track. In addition, the county should be a part of the process. The key players here should be Garden Ridge and Comal County. In developing the plan the community of Garden Ridge should establish a task force or committee composed of local citizens, business leaders, public officials, community leaders and others who have a stake to take charge of the planning process. As the planning process advances the creation of an implementation strategy will take on importance. This, in turn, will require other kinds of mechanisms and processes. At this point a strong public/private partnership will become crucial to carry out the implementation process. This partnership will also likely drive the implementation process as the plan is put in place.

Areas of Responsibility

In carrying out this plan a blend of both the public and private sector participation will be necessary. This public/private partnership is important because no one entity in Garden Ridge has all of the resources needed to fully implement this kind of plan over time. Each sector also has a set of primary responsibilities. These are briefly described below.

- Public Sector – City of Garden Ridge/Comal County
  Both of these entities have major responsibilities for planning and constructing infrastructure, the plating of land for various uses, zoning, and the development of ordinances and regulations to guide the community's long-term economic, housing, parks and recreational needs. Both are also responsible for developing and maintaining the community's streets, roads and highways. The City of Garden Ridge has the additional responsibility for providing planning and development services to meet the needs of the resident population. As envisioned here, the City of Garden Ridge will take on the primary role for coordinating activities associated with this plan. It may also want to organize a community planning/development committee or task force to spearhead this effort.

- Private Sector
  The private sector is the primary driver of the local economy in Garden Ridge. It also helps to generate the necessary revenue and investment assets to spur additional growth in the community and the surrounding area. It is comprised mainly of local businesses and entrepreneurs that produce and provide goods and services to the local population.

It is important to point out that communities are most successful when they can pull themselves together when they need to do so. Successful communities are also proactive. They seek to anticipate change rather than merely react to it. This plan also reflects the community's desire to create new opportunities for its citizens. To make this happen it will be important to involve them as much as possible in the planning and implementation phases. This can be accomplished by creating a mechanism such as a task force or working committee that can bring the public and private sectors in the community together to forge and implement a plan to transform the community.

Strategic Considerations

In putting together a community plan or downtown revitalization strategy the ability to think strategically and over the long-term is vital for addressing the needs of the community. This kind of thinking has several important components. First, by thinking strategically and long-term it becomes easier to align the community's vision with its strengths and opportunities.

Second, it takes into account the future and envisions the community in a way that is both comprehensive and sustainable. Third, it is centered on outcomes that are linked to the goals the community has set for itself. Fourth, it enables the community and its leadership to examine their options. This is vital because there is rarely one best solution. Usually there are several. The people of Garden Ridge and those involved with putting together an implementation strategy will have to decide which options provide the best solutions for them given their priorities and resources.

Organizing for Development

In pulling the community together to plan and organize its planning and implementation strategy several additional factors have to be taken into account. These factors are centered around a community's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Most communities want to build on their strengths, take advantage of their opportunities, reduce what they perceive to be their weaknesses, and mitigate or eliminate their threats. This can be done by carefully evaluating a community's overall environment, i.e., social, political and economic, its local economy, and the forces that are shaping it, as well as it overall environmental context. Once this is done the community and its leadership can begin to formulate appropriate policies, strategies and plans to address them.

In putting together an overall strategy to plan for Garden Ridge's future several themes become evident. First, the community of Garden Ridge is strategically located in an area that is rapidly growing. Second, its local economy is limited. There are few business enterprises located within the community itself. In fact, many of the residents in Garden Ridge are forced to shop elsewhere to get their basic goods and services. Third, there is no downtown district where businesses and the public sector come together. There is a well planned government center located on FM 3009 but that center lacks a small business presence. Garden Ridge is mainly residential but needs to put in place other uses such as parks, a connected street network, a downtown district, and mixed use facilities. From an investment standpoint, however, several key points are evident. First, the maintenance of the status quo in Garden Ridge is not tenable. Second, if the local leadership and the citizens of Garden Ridge want to grow their community they will need to make some important decisions regarding its economic base and local economy. Third, in order to move forward the community and its leadership will have to focus on the long-term and establish priorities. This plan tries to set up a framework to accomplish this. However, the community itself will have to decide on the direction it wants to take.

Equally important is the need to provide not only strong leadership, but strong management control and oversight to ensure that the development process stays on track over time. Because development is a continuous process it is recommended that the City of Garden Ridge either establish a planning/community development office within its municipal government structure, or bring on board a development coordinator to manage the process on a day-to-day basis. This oversight function would also serve to coordinate the city's various departments and community involvement activities related to the development process in Garden Ridge.

Funding Considerations/Resources

Financial resources and funding considerations are an important component of any long-term development effort in Garden Ridge. Financial requirements will always be a key factor in any business or community development project. As a result, priorities will need to be established, and a carefully defined plan of action put in place that will take into account these priorities. Equally important, is the need to devise an implementation plan that is both realistic and doable.

In Texas, property and real estate taxes are the main resources for funding local operations, services and capital improvements. Also important are local sales taxes, hotel occupancy taxes, state and federal grants, and the issuances of city and county bonds. Local governments also have the power to initiate special programs like municipal development districts, empowerment zones and tax increment financing districts to leverage additional financial resources. These resources, in turn, can be used to incentivize revenue generating development in a community or a special district within a community to improve the local economy, redevelop an area or neighborhood, or improve its quality of life.

The initiatives being proposed for Garden Ridge will likely utilize several types of funding to facilitate infrastructure upgrades, streetscape improvements, the development of new parks and economic development. For example, Garden Ridge could seek funding from the State of Texas and the Federal Government to develop projects within the proposed Main Street Corridor and the Development Zone along FM 2252. One possibility is the Texas Capital Fund – Infrastructure Program and the Texas

Leverage Fund. These could be used for specific projects in the Development Zone. At the federal level several programs administered through the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development can be looked into for additional funding. It is important to keep in mind that these funding sources are competitive. Because of this, additional research and project clarification on the part of Garden Ridge's municipal government will have to be contemplated before it can apply for state and/or federal grants.

Garden Ridge may also want to establish a Tax Increment Finance (TIF) District to cover both the proposed Main Street Corridor and Development Zone projects. Tax increment financing is a valuable tool that is being used by local governments in Texas to finance needed improvements and infrastructure upgrades in a defined area such as a downtown district or an industrial zone. It can also be used to promote existing businesses and for attracting new businesses to a particular area within a community. The statutes governing this form of financing for local governments in Texas can be found in Chapter 311 of the Texas Tax Code.

The underlying idea behind this type of financing is that the cost of improvements in a particular part of a community can be covered and repaid by future tax revenues raised by the City of Garden Ridge. The taxing unit, in this case Garden Ridge, can choose to dedicate all or a portion of the tax revenue generated resulting from an increase in tax revenues derived from improvements made in the designated TIF district. The additional incremental tax revenue that is received from businesses in the proposed district is referred to as the tax increment.

Another option the City of Garden Ridge may want to pursue is the establishment of a Public Improvement District (PID) for the proposed Main Street Corridor and the Lone Star Rail District Development Zone. The PID is designed to raise revenue to improve existing infrastructure or to build new infrastructure in a targeted area. It can also focus on other kinds of public improvements to facilitate economic and business development in the targeted area. A PID can either be initiated by the City Council or property owners in the area. If property owners take the lead they would have to start a petition process calling for the targeted area to be declared a public improvement district. The petition would also have to state the nature of the proposed improvements sought and the estimated cost of these improvements. In addition, they would have to include some kind of property assessment method and an apportionment strategy to allocate funds raised. Public improvement districts are especially effective for improving local infrastructure networks within a defined area. The key here is developing a plan of action and an assessment methodology that can work for property and business owners alike in the targeted area. That area could include the entire development zone, or a portion of it. The same applies for the proposed Main Street Corridor.

Still another option the City of Garden Ridge may want to consider is the creation of a Municipal Management District (MMD) to coordinate development within the proposed Main Street Corridor and/or the Lone Star Rail District Development Zone. The MMD is designed to help commercial property owners and local businesses to improve their physical environment and add amenities to a defined area to attract more visitors and shoppers. These kinds of districts are usually centered on established commercial areas. Once established they allow the community to finance the development of new facilities, infrastructure and services within a targeted area beyond those already provided. This is accomplished through a combination of self-imposed property taxes, special assessments and impact fees, or by other charges or fees imposed on property owners within the district. Chapter 375 of the Texas Local Government Code governs the creation and activities of these districts.

To establish a MMD the owners of a majority of the assessed value of real property in the targeted area, or at least 50 property owners within the area must sign a petition asking that such a district be created. At this point, the procedure for setting up a MMD is similar to that of the PID. The main difference, however, is that the Texas Commission on Environment Quality (TCEQ) must also approve the district's designation. Once empowered a MMD assumes the authority and functions similar to that of a conservation or reclamation district. The MMD can also impose ad valorem taxes, impact fees and special assessments against what are referred to as "benefited properties" within the designated district to finance development type projects such as street and sidewalk repairs, landscaping, drainage improvements, off street parking facilities and other improvements.

Regardless of the approach used both Garden Ridge and its development team will still need to put in place a plan that will finance its long-term development. Equally important it must also devise a strategy that will provide an ongoing revenue stream to continue to improve the community over time. However, in order to ensure success it will be important to get input from the local leadership and the larger community. The leadership factor is critical.

Development Timeline

While this study proposes a long-term vision for Garden Ridge, the next and perhaps most important step is to devise a plan of action and a timeline to help the community's leadership achieve its goals. This section suggests such a framework and provides a possible timeline for the proposed implementation strategy.

The overall development timeline suggested here is centered on three key phases: Planning, Implementation, Monitoring/Feedback. Each phase overlaps with the other as the implementation entity or team moves forward. While it is strongly recommended that the planning and implementation effort should be ongoing, it is important to begin the initial startup phase over a three year timeline in order to pull together the necessary staffing, financial, and organizational resources. For example, if Garden Ridge decides to set up a Public Improvement District or a Tax Increment Finance District to spearhead this effort, it will take time to go through the process of organizing it and getting it approved. Once this is accomplished, and with the organizational resources in place, planning can be ongoing. The implementation process can also move forward as the projects are defined. As development continues over time changes may be required in terms of timing, resource allocation and priorities. This will require the planning team/implementation entity to adapt to changes as they occur. If there is an ongoing monitoring/feedback mechanism in place the ability to respond and adapt to change becomes much easier.

This becomes especially important if Garden Ridge decides to move forward with either the proposed Main Street Corridor or the Development Zone recommendations. Both initiatives will require long lead times, and an ongoing implementation process. To ensure their success it will be necessary for Garden Ridge to initiate a substantial community planning effort. This effort will likely overlap with the implementation phase and take several years. In addition, the implementing/planning entity will have to work up a land use plan for the designated area, determine infrastructure needs and requirements for these areas, and initiate a number of other activities to support these initiatives. Indeed, to successfully move forward the City of Garden Ridge may have to build up the capabilities and put in place additional mechanisms to ensure that these and other initiatives get accomplished. In a very real sense planning is easy. The hardest part is implementation.

Figure 53, on the next page, provides a general scheme/timeline for the initial implementation effort. As development takes place in subsequent years changes in the original plan may be required. The important point here is that the process is ongoing and continually changing.

Economic Development/Investment Strategies

Equally important for the long-term development of Garden Ridge is the need to expand its local economy, generate new investment opportunities, provide more job opportunities for local residents, expand the community's tax base, and create a sustainable growth process for the community, as a whole. To achieve these aims it is recommended that Garden Ridge put in place a more aggressive economic and business development strategy centered on expanding its small business sector, bringing in new investment, and taking advantage of its strategic location within the rapidly expanding I-35 corridor. The city should also work more closely with existing local businesses to reinforce and build up their operations. To accomplish these ends several key initiatives are proposed. These are described below:

- In order to expand and diversify its local economy Garden Ridge should take steps to build up its small business sector by putting in place a Small Business Support Network. This network would involved several entities including the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) housed at the University of Texas at San Antonio's Institute for Economic Development, the Rural Business Program also housed in the Institute for Economic Development, and the City of Garden Ridge. In addition, representatives from businesses in Garden Ridge and other chambers of commerce in the area should be part of the proposed network. The goal of this network would be to strengthen existing businesses in Garden Ridge and to help grow new businesses by providing them with the support they need to take advantage of their market. In addition, it would

provide ongoing training, technical and marketing support to those businesses in the network.

- In addition to working with existing businesses and bringing in new businesses the proposed network would also be a key player in carrying out the Main Street Corridor and Development Zone projects recommended earlier. The intent of these projects is to grow the local economy in Garden Ridge and to bring in new investment. Business participation in these and other projects being proposed in this study is strongly encouraged. Equally important is the need to diversify the local economy over time. The diversification of the local economy is a key component in the long-term development of the community.

- The creation of a local chamber of commerce is also an important part of building an on-going support network for small businesses in Garden Ridge. Other chambers of commerce located in the area, i.e., Schertz Chamber of Commerce, Randolph Chamber of Commerce, North San Antonio Chamber of Commerce, etc., currently provide a venue for local businesses to expand their operations, market their products, and receive support. However, as Garden Ridge continues to grow a local chamber will be needed. The proposed small business support network could serve as a catalyst for this effort.

- One of the concerns impacting local businesses in Garden Ridge are the competing markets in the area. The markets in Schertz, Selma, New Braunfels, Universal City and San Antonio, to name only a few, tend to complicate local competition. Also, because of the limited number of businesses currently located in Garden Ridge many local residents must shop elsewhere to get their goods and services. This means that the City of Garden Ridge is losing valuable tax revenue to other communities in the area. To deal with this Garden Ridge should consider targeting certain types of businesses to set up shop in the community. If it decides to move forward with the proposed Main Street Corridor and Development Zone initiative this business targeting and marketing effort takes on added importance.

- In addition to the above, Garden Ridge may want to develop a range of incentives to attract new businesses and industries to the community. The goal here would be to promote and enhance economic and business development in the City of Garden Ridge. This program could involve a combination of tax rebates, a development fee reduction program, expedited permitting and a tax abatement program on certain types of businesses. The implementation of a Tax Increment Finance District or a Public Improvement District in the community centered

PHASE-TIMELINE	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	YEAR 4
PHASE I – PLANNING	X X X X	X X X X	X X X X	X X X X
***Define Issues/Needs/Concerns**	X X X			
***Analyze Data**	X X	X	X	X
***Conduct SWOT Analysis**	X X			X
***Set Goals/Priorities**	X			X
***Prepare Plan of Action**	X			
***Secure Funding/Resources**	X	X X X X	X	X
PHASE II – IMPLEMENTATION				
***Approve Plan of Action**	X	X X		
***Define Projects/Initiatives**	X	X X		
***Implement Plan**		X	X X X X	X X X X
PHASE III – MONITOR FEEDBACK				
***Review Status of Plan**		X	X	X
***Continue Planning Process**				X X X X
***Continue Implementation**				X X X X

Figure 53: Implementation Phasing Timeline Source: CURPR

on its proposed Main Street Corridor/ Development Zone initiative would also provide a revenue stream for the community to spur additional economic and business development in the area. The intent here is to put in place a range of incentives and programs to attract new businesses to the community, and to help existing businesses expand their markets. These incentives will also bring in new investment that will help to diversify the local economy.

Economic and community development are closely linked. Without a strong local economy it will be difficult to move forward in Garden Ridge. If Garden Ridge decides to develop a Main Street Corridor centered on FM 2252, and begin work on the proposed Development Zone it will have to create not only a long-range strategy to expand the local economy, it will have to put in place a mechanism to make it happen. The recommendations and strategies presented in this study provide a framework to make this happen.

Next Steps

The initiatives and strategies described in this section are designed to improve the sustainability, economic potential and investment prospects for Garden Ridge. They are also designed to foster small business growth in the community by fostering entrepreneurship, targeted development and the implementation of a business support network. To move forward with the implementation of these projects and initiatives a more detailed plan of action will be necessary. That effort, if it is to be successful, must be cost effective and incorporate realistic goals. The next step is to carefully review and evaluate the ideas, recommendations and strategies included in this Vision Study to determine their merit and feasibility. This will then set the stage for putting in place appropriate mechanisms at the local level to move forward with their implementation.

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Appendix A

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 start up or acquire a business if doing so will prevent employment loss and/or create employment opportunity. Funds can also 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 provides grants for the development of rural businesses, provides funding employment rated adult education programs, and funds 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 provided to community organizations for the establishment of revolving loan funds. These 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)

These 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. More information can be found at: http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/BCP_RBOG.html

Community Facilities Grants

This program provides grant funds to develop essential community facilities in rural communities and areas up to 20,000 in population. Funds may be used to build healthcare facilities, child care facilities and other public facilities. More information on the program can be found at: http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/HAD-CF_Grants.html

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

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 home ownership and affordable housing opportunities for low-income Americans. Funding can be used for the rehabilitation of housing, provide assistance to home buyers 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 EMT's 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 Department of Transportation and the Environmental Protection Agency for the development of affordable, economically vital, and sustainable communities. Funds can be used to modify master plans, zoning, and building codes to promote development and the re-use of older buildings with the goal of promoting sustainability at the neighborhood and community levels. More information can be obtained at: http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=HUDPrograms2013-85.pdf

Other Federal Agencies and Programs

U.S. 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 in new business and job opportunities to an area. They also provide planning and economic development strategies to designated Economic Development Districts, communities and councils of government. More programs and information are available at: http://www.eda.gov/

U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA)

The SBA offers a number of financial assistance programs for small businesses. They also 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 Historical Commission Programs

Texas Main Street Program

The Texas Main Street program was formed over 30 years ago and is operated through the Texas State Historical Commission. The programs goal is to provide technical expertise, resources and support to Texas communities to preserve and revitalize historic downtowns and commercial neighborhood districts. Communities can apply annually, 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 at (512)463-6092. (Texas Historical Commission)

Museum Services

The Texas State Historical Commission also helps small history museums through its Museum Services Program. Staff provides free consultations and assistance in a number of areas including museum development, strategic planning, exhibit design, fundraising and volunteer training. Additionally they offer training on various museum topics through workshops and online. More information can be found by visiting: 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 (HTC) designation provided through the Texas Historic Commission protects these cemeteries by recording boundaries in the county records to alert current and future owners of land surrounding these areas. This designation does not impose any restrictions on the 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 (THCP)

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 (CLG)

The CLG Program is a partnership for historic preservation 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

Texas Department of Agriculture Programs

Texas Capital Fund (TCF)

This program allocates funds to incorporated cities and county governments that do not meet the standards set by 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 also 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 can receive the special GO TEXAS label. More information is at: 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. It also assists healthcare providers through programs that provide information and referrals, medical licensing, grants, and educational awards. A complete list of programs can be found by visiting: http://www.texasagriculture.gov/GrantsServices/RuralEconomicDevelopment/StateOfficeofRuralHealth.aspx

Other State Agencies and Programs

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. More information is available at: 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 airport facilities. 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 the planning, design, and construction of water related infrastructure and improvement programs. They also offer grants to local governments 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 provided 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 provides 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 Conservation 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 Department (TPWD)
The TPWD offers 50% matching grant funds to municipalities, counties, and other units of government for the 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 .

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/tcagrant/TXArtsPlan/TAPTOC.asp

Economic Development

Type A and 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. (Office of the Attorney General of Texas) 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 activities. 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. (Office of the Attorney General of Texas)

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 or 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: 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. They must also fit into one of the nine statutory categories outlined in the tax code. These categories include the funding of a visitor's center, tourism related advertising, 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 (i.e. a business) that exempts all or part of the increase in property value from taxation over a period of up to ten years. (Texas Comptroller's Economic Development & Analysis Division)

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

The Texas Economic Development Act also 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.(Office of the Attorney General of Texas)More information on property tax incentives can be found by visiting: 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 by visiting: 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