



WILLIAMSON COUNTY GOVERNMENT

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Williamson County Planning Commission  
**FROM:** Mike Matteson, AICP, Planning Director  
**DATE:** March 2, 2020  
**SUBJECT:** Comprehensive Plan Update

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At your March 12 meeting, you will be asked to adopt the update to the Williamson County Comprehensive Land Use Plan. Although I know you have seen the online version of the Plan, I have included a hard copy with this memorandum for your review. Please also take some time to review the following information regarding the process and the proposed Plan.

**Background**

**Current Plan:**

The Current Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 2007 following a very extensive public input process. During that process, the community expressed a strong desire to preserve rural character and to focus the majority of growth in and around the cities. That concept became a predominant policy of the Plan. To help implement that policy, the idea of reducing allowable residential densities in rural areas was considered and, in fact, was incorporated into preliminary recommendations. However, in response to concerns expressed late in the process by a number of large property owners who were concerned about a potential loss in value, a decision was made at that time not to reduce the fundamental densities that have been in place for many years.

**Recent History:**

Since the adoption of the current Plan, the unincorporated County has experienced unprecedented growth, fueled by strong development demand, favorable zoning, a large quantity of available land and the proliferation of non-traditional wastewater treatment and disposal systems. As a result, while the 2007 plan recommends that most of the growth in the unincorporated County should take place in the Urban Growth Boundaries (UGB's) instead of in rural areas, the opposite has largely occurred. In fact, for the most part, development has been "leapfrogging" the UGB's and settling into rural areas.

This development pattern, which resulted from the decision in 2007 not to reduce rural densities, is a concerning trend that has led to a loss of rural character as well as an exacerbation of a

growing traffic concern in the County. This trend is particularly concerning in light of growth projections that predict the population of Williamson County will more than double by the year 2040.

### **Comprehensive Plan Update:**

The County has been working with a consultant team to update the Comprehensive Plan, which is the County's chief policy document regarding growth and development issues. The consultant team is comprised of McBride Dale Clarion (land use) KCI Technologies (traffic and roadway) and TischlerBise (fiscal impacts). The County has also been working with an Advisory Committee, consisting of elected officials, appointed officials, and other stakeholders.

### **Fork in the Road:**

As a result of the development trends and population projections highlighted in this memorandum, Staff and the consultant team believe we are truly at a "fork in the road" moment from a policy standpoint, where the County needs to determine whether we:

- Still want to preserve rural character in outlying areas by focusing the majority of growth in and around the municipalities (which we have not been effective in doing); or
- Conclude that the continuation of suburban development sprawling into rural areas is acceptable and that the previous policies are no longer appropriate.

### **Public Input:**

The process has included a very robust public involvement component, resulting in hundreds of citizens providing meaningful input at two well-attended public meetings as well as numerous online input opportunities. The public comments received have overwhelmingly confirmed that the preservation of rural character is still very important to the community. In fact, that sentiment has been expressed even more strongly than it was back in 2007.

### **Growth Scenarios:**

During the process, the consultant team developed a couple of different growth scenarios for the County to consider, which are

- **Business As Usual** – what if the County built out under the current trends, development policies and densities; and
- **Town and Country** – what if the areas outside the UGB's that are currently zoned 1 unit per acre were to be changed to 1 unit per 5 acres, and the UGB's were developed according to the Cities' plans and/or prevailing densities

These scenarios were extensively evaluated based upon three key criteria:

- **Community Character** – how closely does the scenario align with the type of character desired by the community as expressed in the public comment?
- **Impact on Roadway Improvement Needs** – what roadway improvements would be needed to accommodate the growth under each scenario?
- **Overall Fiscal Impacts** – what are the overall fiscal impacts (capital, operating, maintenance) to the County of each scenario?

The analysis showed that the Town and Country scenario fared much better in each of above the criteria.

### **Response to Scenarios:**

The scenarios were presented to the public, both at a public meeting held in Franklin and online. As of this writing, approximately 92% of respondents have indicated support for the Town and Country Scenario. Additionally, the consensus of the Advisory Committee was to support the Town and Country scenario. Finally, the direction provided by County Commission and Planning Commission members has been to pursue the Town and Country scenario. It is important to note that the Town and Country Scenario is not envisioned as a “stop growth” scenario. Rather, it is a scenario that advocates distributing growth in a logical, fiscally responsible way and in a way that better preserves the rural character that is valued by citizens.

### **Draft Plan:**

Based upon the direction from citizens, the Advisory Committee, the Planning Commission and the County Commission, the Plan has been developed and has been made available for public review. The Plan will be considered by the County Commission for its endorsement and the Planning Commission for adoption at their respective meetings this month.

The central theme of the Plan is to preserve rural character and to focus the majority of future growth in and around the existing municipalities where infrastructure to support development is in place, or can be readily made available (the Town and Country scenario). To achieve this desired result, the Plan recommends that areas of the unincorporated County located outside the Urban Growth Boundaries (UGB's) and outside of designated Villages and Hamlets, be rezoned from their existing 1 dwelling unit per acre designations to a 1 dwelling unit per 5 acre designation. Additionally, to help encourage growth in the UGB's, the Plan recommends that the County partner with the various municipalities to jointly plan these areas so that the UGB's can function as they are intended.

Based upon extensive analysis, the Plan demonstrates that the development pattern described above (as opposed to the pattern that current zoning and development policies would create) will:

1. Help to preserve rural character, which citizens overwhelmingly feel is a vitally important community asset;

2. Result in lower traffic volumes on County roads and significantly reduce the need for expensive roadway improvements; and
3. Result in a far lower overall fiscal impact on the County, and by extension, taxpayers.

Staff recommends adoption of this updated Comprehensive Land Use Plan. Please let me know if you have any questions.