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MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT

City of Rockdale, Texas

2050 MID-CENTURY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Adopted July, 2024

— TEXAS —

ROCKDALE

— EST 1874 —

July 15, 2024

Dear community members, today and tomorrow,

I firmly believe that while Rockdale has had great days in the past, our best days are truly ahead of us! I cannot think of a better way to celebrate Rockdale's sesquicentennial than by setting a new vision for our shared future via this Comprehensive Plan.

Rockdale has seen much over the last 150 years, from its formative years as an agricultural hub and the arrival of the railroad, to the discovery of lignite coal and the coming and going of industries. The consistent thing that has made Rockdale great through every change has been its people. This Comprehensive Plan is a celebration of Rockdale's people, from its founding to today, and for those that choose Rockdale in the future. It highlights our resilience, our potential and our hopes.

You see this in the stated vision to "be a resilient city, honoring its fighting spirit and holding pride in its history, culture and access to nature. Rockdale will be a place in which people will choose to live, work and stay." We lift our bootstraps, and we help our neighbors lift theirs. We recognize strength is best measured in how you bounce back from challenges—our resilience.

This Plan seeks to support opportunity at its core. The opportunity to have an outstanding quality of life. The opportunity to have high-quality development and great places to live and work for all. The opportunity to stay and thrive in a city you love.

I end this with a thank you. A thank you to all of the residents, business owners, community leaders and local organizations that contributed your ideas, passions, challenges and hopes for Rockdale. The robust participation of our community gives leaders like me, and your Rockdale City Council, the confidence to know we're working towards a future the community wants to see. We seek your support and promise our accountability to you as we embark on this exciting new future together!

Here's to the next 150 years, and may they be even brighter than those years that brought us to today.

Ward Roddam, Mayor



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A photograph of a large, light-colored concrete sign with the word "ROCKDALE" in raised, blue-grey letters. The sign is set against a backdrop of dense green trees and a brick building with a white roof. The foreground features a stone wall and some rocks. The image is framed by a white border with rounded corners on the left side.

ROCKDALE

The background image is a photograph of a community area. On the left, there is a stone pillar and a concrete wall with a large letter 'E' on it. In the center, there are green bushes and a yellow flag. On the right, there is a flagpole with a red and white striped flag. The entire image is framed by a white border with rounded corners.

COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT

Past

Pre-Rockdale

The land that Rockdale, Texas now stands on was once the homeland of the Tonkawan Indians, who inhabited Central Texas in the sixteenth century. They were known as the Tonkawa, which derived from the Waco Indian word "tonkaweya," meaning "they all stay together," while they referred to themselves as "tickanwatic." The Tonkawa comprised independent bands such as Mayeye, Yojaune, Erviame, and others. However, they faced challenges from the Lipan Apaches and Spaniards before contending with Anglo-American encroachment in the nineteenth century.

In the early eighteenth century, Spanish missions were established near Rockdale. These included Mission San Francisco Xavier de Horcasitas, Mission San Ildefonso and Nuestra Senora de la Candelaria, situated at the junction of Brushy Creek and the San Xavier River. The missions encountered difficulties, enduring Apache attacks and internal disputes. In 1755, they were ultimately abandoned due to unfavorable conditions and conflicts, bringing an end to Spanish occupation in the area.

Following the mission era, there was a historical gap until the early 1820s when American settlers arrived, seeking land grants from Mexico. Figures like Robert Leftwich and Sterling C. Robertson explored the region and established settlements in Milam County, where Rockdale is located. By 1836, over 120 families had settled in the county, with the first town, Nashville, emerging on the west bank of the Brazos River, near Little River's mouth.



Acequia de Mission San Francisco Xavier de Horcasitas, Milam County, Texas.
Source: Christopher Talbot. Courtesy of NPS.

In the ensuing years, pioneers like Captain B. M. Hutchinson and Dr. T. E. Riddle settled near Rockdale, laying the foundation for the town's growth. The area faced occasional Indian raids but experienced relative peace after Texas attained statehood in 1845. With steady development, Rockdale became a thriving settlement, adding to the rich historical heritage of Central Texas. Over time, the town's story unfolded, shaped by the interactions of diverse cultures and communities. The early presence of Tonkawa Indians, Spanish missionaries, and American pioneers, each contributing to Rockdale's unique history.¹

¹ Hodgeo, S. (n.d.). "INDIANS, "JARS AND ANGLO-AMERICANS".
[Http://www.Usgwarchives.net/](http://www.Usgwarchives.net/). <http://www.usgwarchives.net/tx/milam/history/pg007.htm>

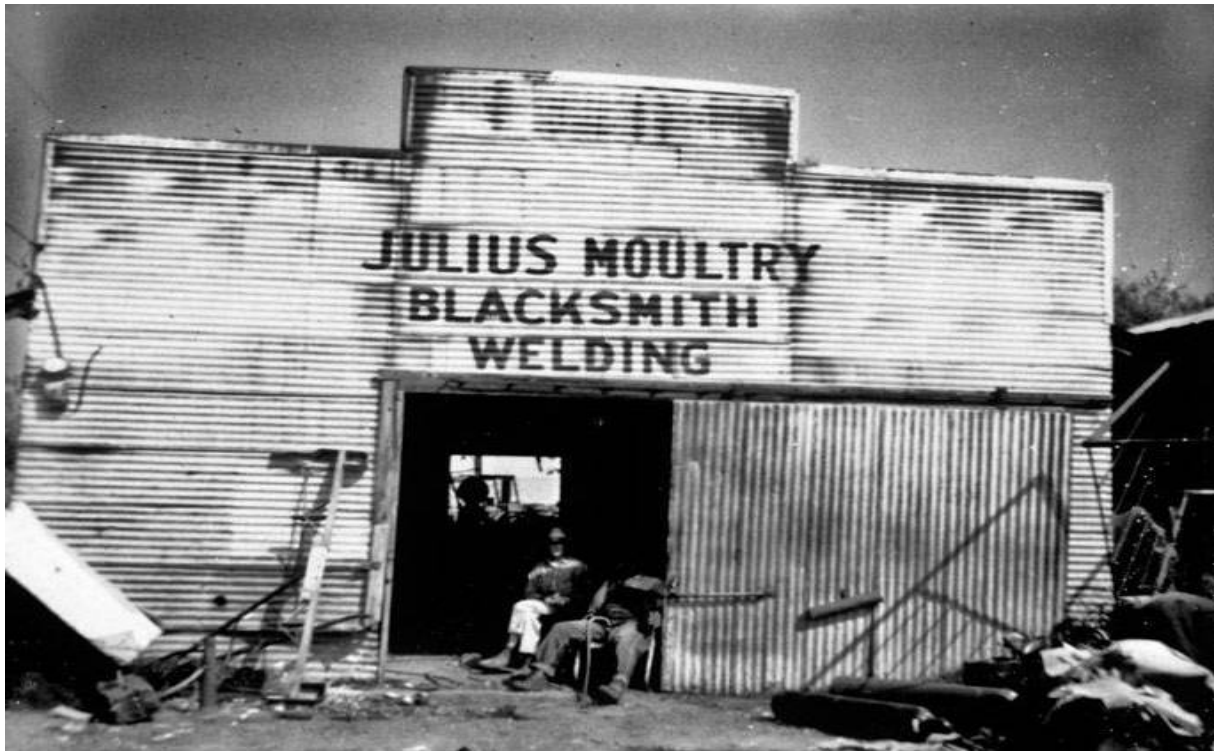
Early Rockdale

Rockdale was founded during the construction of the International and Great Northern Railroad. Settlers arrived in 1873 upon learning about a potential town along the rail line. It quickly developed into "Tent City" and was reported as a bustling frontier settlement in 1874. Following an election on May 18, 1874, Rockdale was incorporated, with the official declaration made shortly thereafter. On June 14, 1875, the city council, led by Mayor Alfred Bruck, passed an ordinance changing the name to the "City of Rockdale."

In 1882, a formerly enslaved person named Paul Moultry embarked on a journey to the fledgling City of Rockdale and became a blacksmith for the Valentine and Hooks general store, which happened to be the only store in the Rockdale area at that time. By 1885, Paul had managed to save enough money to purchase the shop, thus establishing the first Black-owned business in the City's history. Throughout his life, Paul had a total of 13 children, four of whom he imparted his blacksmithing skills to from a young age.

Out of these four children, one went on to establish a blacksmithing shop in Calvert, Texas, and two pursued different professions in Rockdale. Julius, the fourth of Paul's children, initially operated a shop in Thorndale but eventually returned to Rockdale, opening up a shop at the location of the Gaither Motor Company, but later moved about one block west of South Main Street.

Julius was nationally recognized for his horseshoeing ability. He was often recruited to shoe famous race horses across Texas and New Mexico. He was also highly renowned for his skill in making branding irons, trailers and barbecue pits. In 1968, Julius received a request from the Institute of Texas Cultures in San Antonio, asking for information on the history of blacksmithing within his family. Currently, the Institute of Texas Cultures houses an anvil, picture and resume of Paul Moultry's blacksmithing career. Julius blacksmithed until the age of 72 and passed away in 1978 at the age of 84.¹

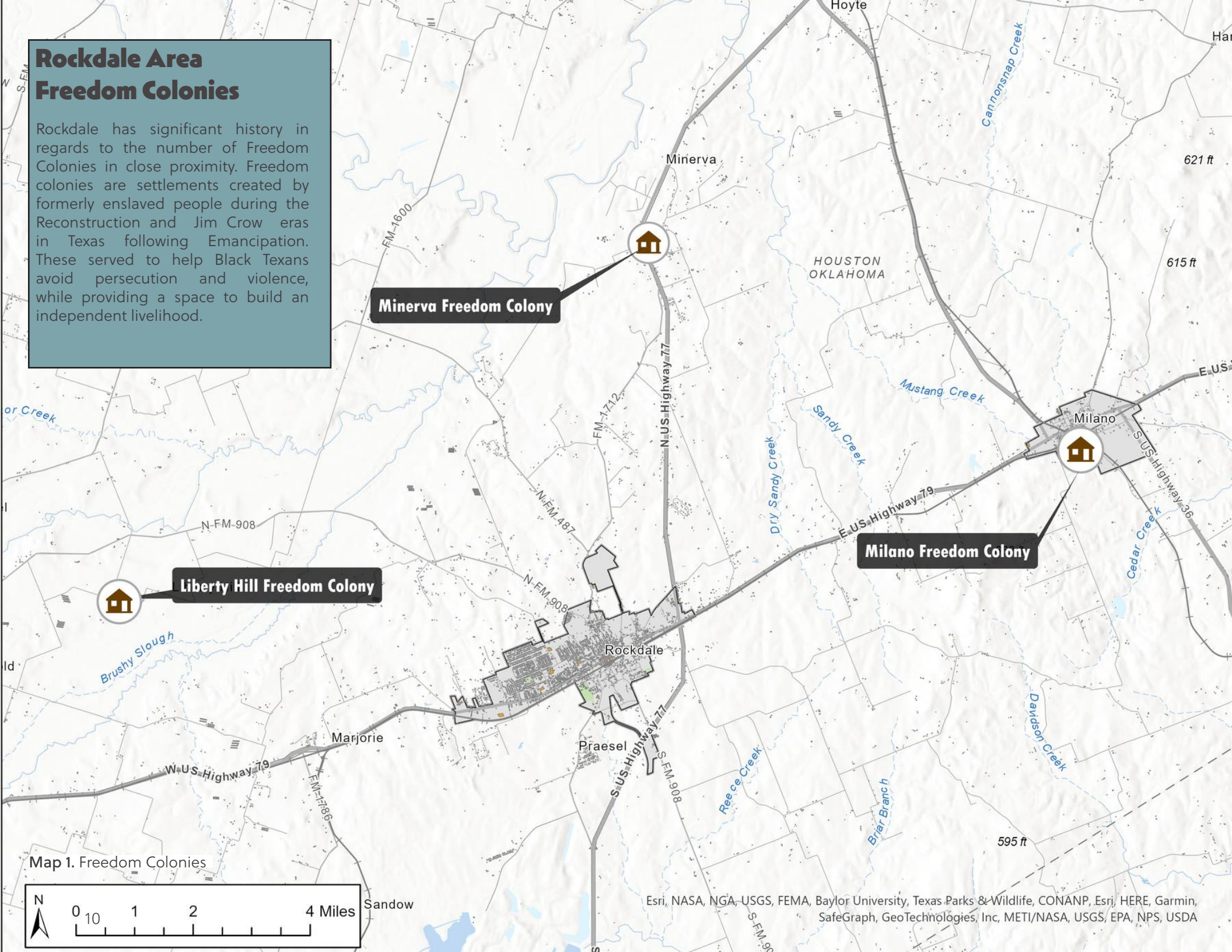


Julius Moultry Welding Shop (circa 1960)
Source: University of Texas San Antonio

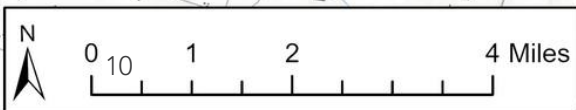
¹ Piper, S. (n.d.). The Story of Paul Moultry First Rockdale Blacksmith. Milam County Historical Commission. http://www.milamcountyhistoricalcommission.org/newspaper_128.php

Rockdale Area Freedom Colonies

Rockdale has significant history in regards to the number of Freedom Colonies in close proximity. Freedom colonies are settlements created by formerly enslaved people during the Reconstruction and Jim Crow eras in Texas following Emancipation. These served to help Black Texans avoid persecution and violence, while providing a space to build an independent livelihood.



Map 1. Freedom Colonies



Industrial Revolution

In 1867, state geologists made a significant discovery in Rockdale: lignite coal. This find sparked a wave of interest and development in the area, leading to the establishment of the Vogel Mine just three years later. Herman Vogel, a prominent figure at the time, founded the slope mine on the eastern outskirts of Rockdale, near the International Great Northern railway.

As the years passed, the coal industry in Rockdale continued to flourish. By 1895, a total of six coal mines were in operation, each with its own mining area accompanied by a camp, store and saloon. The demand for coal was high, and Rockdale became a hub for employment opportunities. Notably, many Mexicans who were fleeing the Mexican Revolution sought refuge in the Rockdale area and found work in these mines.

Mining rapidly transformed into a prominent industry in the region, leading to increased recognition and representation within the state political system. Two Rockdale residents, E. A. Camp and N. M. Bullock, even served on the Texas State Mining Board, further solidifying the town's significance in the coal mining sector.

By 1914, Rockdale's coal production had reached astonishing levels, with an impressive 7,000 railroad cars of lignite coal being shipped out every week. This remarkable output demonstrated Rockdale's pivotal role in supplying this vital energy resource to meet the growing needs of the nation.

However, the rise of another energy source would eventually impact the coal industry in Rockdale. In 1920, a shallow oil field was discovered near the town, prompting the establishment of an oil refinery on its outskirts.

The subsequent growth of oil and natural gas between 1920 and 1940 gradually undermined the demand for lignite coal in the energy market. As a result, Rockdale lost many of its coal mining leases, and the industry came to a halt.

In the early 1950s, the Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA) discovered a method to use lignite to generate power to refine aluminum. This would change the economic trajectory of Rockdale for decades to come.¹

¹ (n.d.). History of Rockdale, Texas. Rockdale Chamber. <http://www.rockdalechamber.com/history-of-rockdale>



Downtown Rockdale, 1948
Source: University of North Texas Libraries

ALCOA

ALCOA's presence in Rockdale had a profound impact on the City's economy and the aluminum industry. In the 1950s, ALCOA constructed a state-of-the-art aluminum plant and a 1.1-gigawatt coal power plant southwest of Rockdale, capitalizing on the high demand for aluminum during the Korean War and the Cold War.

By implementing continuous smelting and electrolysis processes, ALCOA significantly reduced the cost of producing pure aluminum, making Rockdale's plant the largest aluminum smelter in the Western Hemisphere. This achievement brought immense economic benefits to the City, creating job opportunities and increasing the tax base. It also provided incredible social benefits as ALCOA was a common link and identity that everyone in the town could share and celebrate.

However, the use of lignite as a fuel source in the plant's power generation had its drawbacks. The burning of lignite produced substantial pollution, particularly flyash, which affected the surrounding environment. The closure of Lake ALCOA for public use due to contamination highlighted the environmental concerns associated with the plant's operations. Despite these challenges, ALCOA's substantial investments in the community and the plant's continuous operation provided sustained prosperity for Rockdale over several decades.

Nevertheless, in 2008, ALCOA made the unexpected decision to shut down the Rockdale smelter. Pollution concerns, coupled with an unstable power supply, were cited as reasons for the closure.



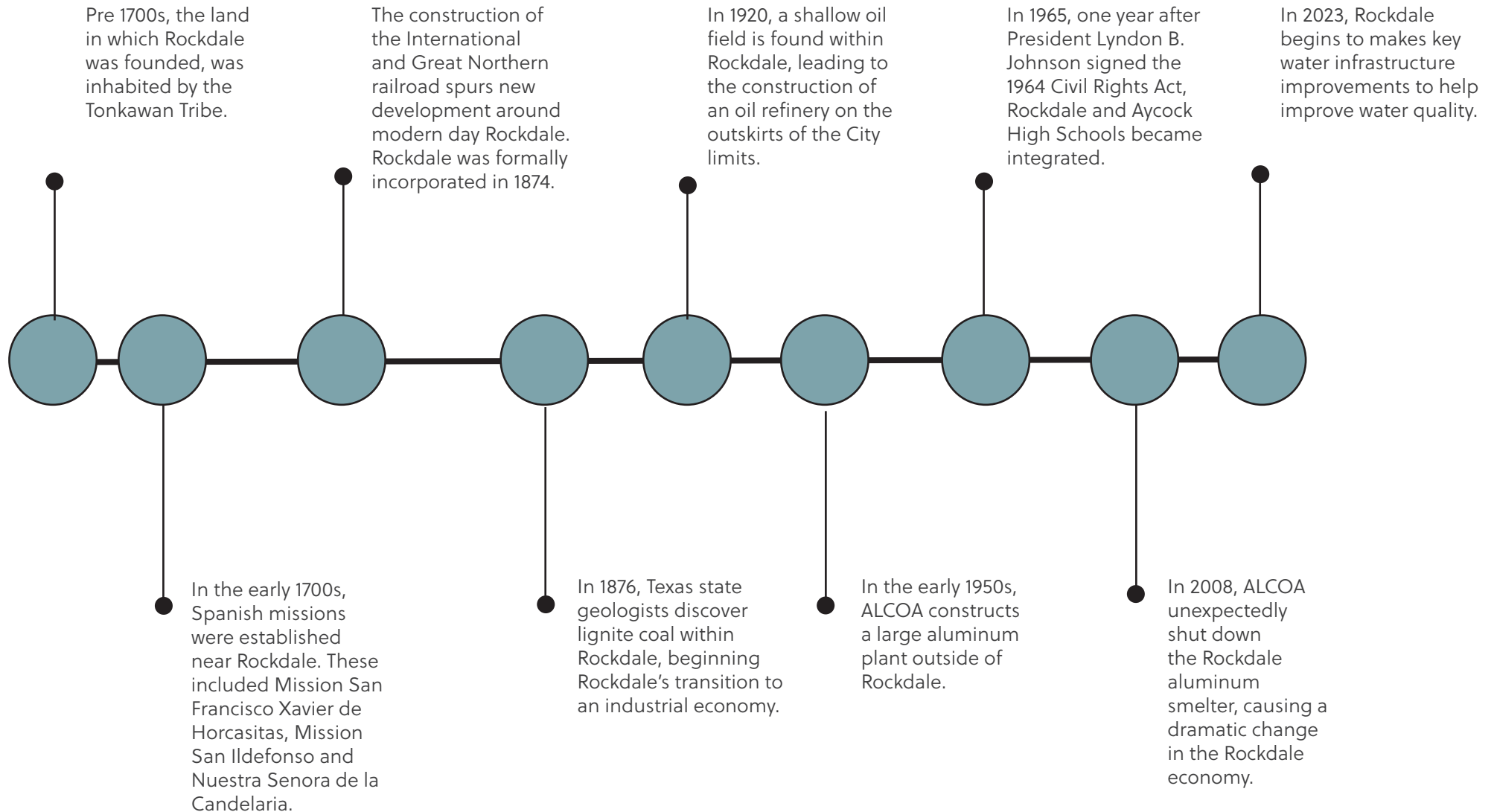
ALCOA Rockdale Aluminum Plant, 1952
Source: Dallas Morning News

Six years later, in 2014, the plant was fully shut down, eliminating another 450 jobs between the onsite power plant and the coal mine that supported it. This marked the end of an era for Rockdale, as the City's significant ties to the aluminum industry were severed. However, ALCOA's impact on the City's economy, its role in establishing Rockdale as a major aluminum producer and its pioneering work in refining aluminum remain lasting legacies in the history of both Rockdale and the aluminum industry as a whole. In 2018, Bitmain, a Chinese cryptocurrency mining company, revealed intentions to convert

ALCOA's former smelter into one of the most extensive Bitcoin-producing facilities globally. However, due to a significant drop in the cryptocurrency's value, Bitmain postponed its planned \$500 million investment and initiated a scaled-down operation, which is estimated to create 200 jobs.¹

¹ Dallas Morning News (n.d.). Their coal plant is gone, the golden age is over. What's next for the people of Milam County, Texas? <https://www.dallasnews.com/business/energy/2018/07/08/their-coal-plant-is-gone-the-golden-age-is-over-what-s-next-for-the-people-of-milam-county-texas/>

Rockdale Timeline



Place

Regional Context

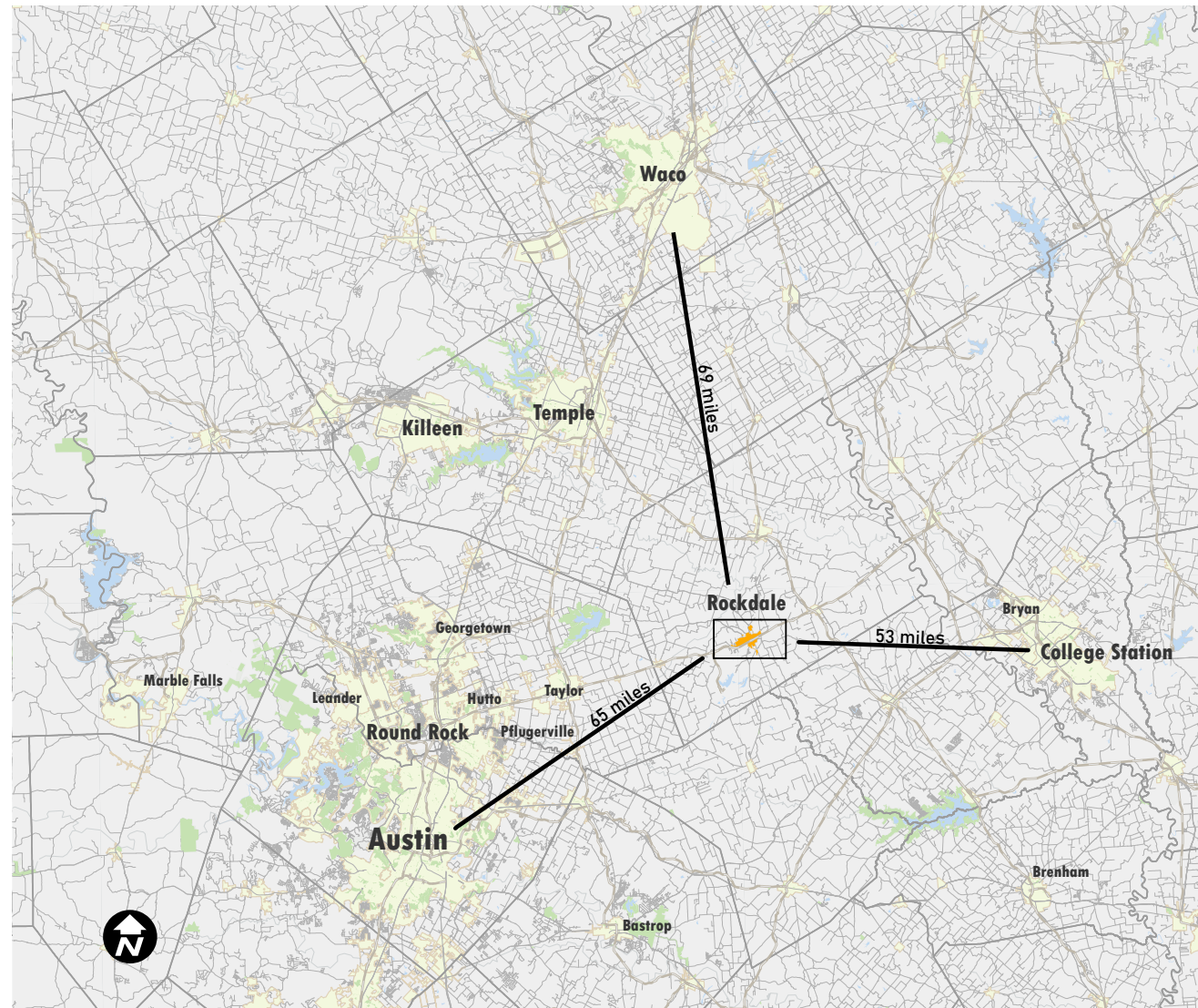
Rockdale is strategically located within the educational triangle that is formed by Texas A&M in College Station, Baylor University in Waco, and University of Texas at Austin.

This advantageous positioning brings a considerable amount of university-related traffic to Rockdale via U.S. 79. However, the town has yet to establish itself as a compelling destination that would entice people passing through the City to stop and visit.

Between 2010 and 2020, the populations of Austin, Waco and College Station experienced growth ranging from 11 percent to 28.4 percent. As a result, these metropolitan areas witnessed substantial suburban expansion, furthering Rockdale's central position in the region.

Furthermore, the Central Texas Region has become increasingly attractive to prominent employers in the semi-conductor industry, with significant developments taking place near the City of Taylor. These advancements raise the potential for significant growth in Rockdale within the next five to 10 years.

Map 2. Regional Context Map



Physical Features

Physical features are broadly defined as the natural and built environmental factors that impact how the City of Rockdale grows and develops. Overall, the City of Rockdale does not have any significant constraints on its growth or development; the terrain is relatively flat, there are no significant flood zones, and there is significant space in the Extra-Territorial Jurisdiction (ETJ) for future expansion.

Elevation

The City of Rockdale has very little topographic variation, with only a 170 ft difference between the highest and lowest points within the City and ETJ. Most of Rockdale's land is relatively flat or just slightly sloped, which does not pose any significant limitations on the ability and cost to develop the land.

Floodplains

The 100-year or one percent chance floodplain runs through Downtown Rockdale and extends south toward the Rockdale Waste Water Treatment Plant. The 2018 Milam County Hazard Mitigation Plan analyzed the risk posed by flooding within the City of Rockdale, and it was concluded that the potential impacts would be relatively limited because critical facilities would be shut down for 24 hours or less and less than 10 percent of property would be destroyed or damaged.

Historically, Rockdale has had at least 12 recorded flood events causing approximately \$222,494 in damage. Of these 12 recorded flood events within the City of Rockdale, there were zero recorded deaths or injuries.

Existing Road Network

The City is located along two significant highways. The first being U.S. 79 which runs west-east through Downtown Rockdale along Cameron Avenue. This thoroughfare is a convenient route between the Austin Metropolitan Area and the College Station-Bryan Metropolitan Area. Due to its location, Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) counts reach 16,707 along some sections of Cameron Avenue. The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) projects the AADT to grow to 23,390 by the year 2041.

U.S. 77 is located southeast of most of Rockdale and runs north-south connecting a large number of rural towns in Central Texas to Waco and Dallas-Fort Worth. This highway serves as a key connector to Corpus Christi and the Brownsville metro. This highway receives significantly less traffic than U.S. 79, with AADTs that are around 4,199. The 2041 AADT projections show only a modest increase in daily traffic counts to 5,879.

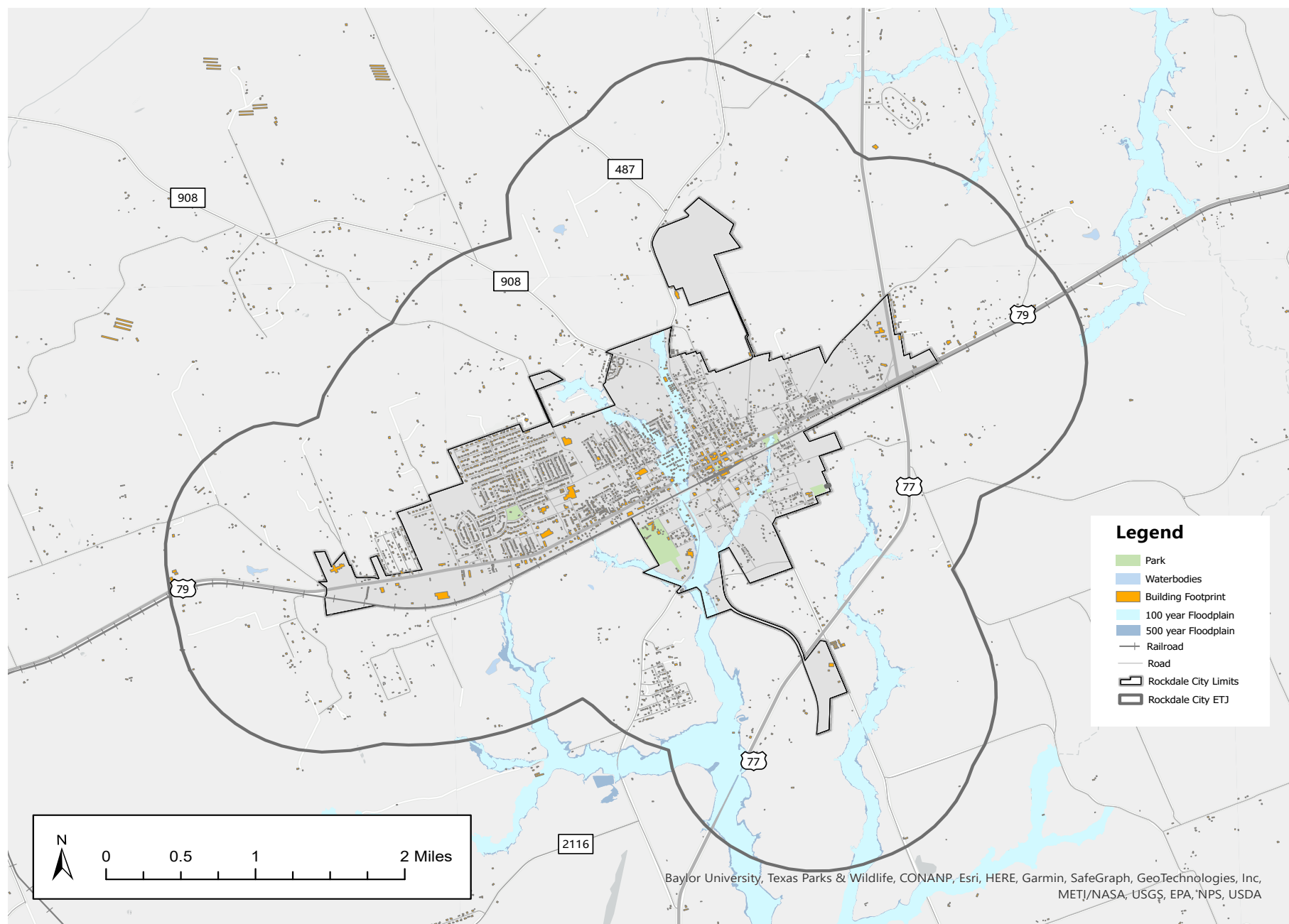
Railroad

Union Pacific Railroad is actively operating the railroad line that runs parallel to Cameron Avenue. This line is largely used for freight transport, though historically at this line's founding passenger rail was available.

What is an ETJ?

The ETJ is an area adjacent to a community's city limits where the community may enforce its subdivision regulations but not zoning regulations. This is also the area in which a community has the opportunity to annex, in accordance with state law. The size of the ETJ depends of the population of the community and proximity to other ETJs.

Map 3. Physical Features



Planning Framework

When developing a comprehensive plan for the study area, it is crucial to consider previous local and regional planning efforts. This ensures that the recommendations provided are coordinated and aligned. This section offers an overview of relevant plans.

Rockdale Comprehensive Plan (2018)

As a vision of the City's future physical form, the Comprehensive Plan sets forth a generalized pattern of land use areas and transportation corridors. It represents a long-range statement of public policy with respect to how the community should grow, develop and mature over time.

This plan had a significant focus on quality of life, with recommendations to help preserve Rockdale's historic character as well as its ecological features and habitats. The plan also outlined a more proactive economic development strategy, placing increased focus on retaining and recruiting businesses, while also maintaining the community's unique character.

In regards to land use, the plan recommended a significant amount of land along F.M. 908 and U.S. 77 be utilized as high intensity commercial corridors. The majority of residential land that was allocated in the future land use map was low intensity R-1 in the northwestern portion of the Rockdale ETJ.

Some higher intensity residential land uses were distributed along the north-central areas of the ETJ. This vision for the future of Rockdale's development had the goals of supporting a diverse local economic base and developing high quality residential neighborhoods that would enhance the overall quality of life of the City.

Master Plan for Downtown Rockdale (2012)

The Downtown Master Plan outlines a vision for the future of Downtown Rockdale and proposes a framework of actions to realize that vision for a 10-year period. While that 10-year period passed in 2022, much of the plan remains relevant. The recommendations were in four primary categories: improving appearance, building restoration and occupancy, creating a "Destination Downtown," and staffing and funding. All four remain highly relevant to this day.

Rockdale Reborn (2022)

This document initiates a dialogue on utilizing tourism to bolster Rockdale's local economy. It presents strategies to enhance Rockdale's competitiveness in the regional market through downtown improvements, arts and culture initiatives, and sports tourism.

The document also discusses funding projections and serves as a starting point for discussion between the City Council and Municipal Development District Board regarding Rockdale's economic strategy. Specific recommendations in this plan focus on making downtown Rockdale a destination that is aesthetically pleasing, authentic and economically generative.

City of Rockdale CASU Report (2022)

The Communities as Start Ups (CASU) model incorporates principles used in the start up business community to help facilitate growth within municipalities. The City of Rockdale's CASU report documented the current economic state of the community and facilitated its future state by defining the community's identity and developing implementation strategies. The community's identity, aspirations and strategic actions are essential to enhancing quality of place and the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

This effort aligns community priorities with emerging entrepreneurial opportunities, enhances resources and infrastructure, and prepares for future business and economic development. The CASU report aims to drive diverse economic development within the City. In the near term, this project supported economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and it provided recommendations for building resilience against natural disasters or changes in the community's economy.

Critical Water System Improvements (2023)

Rockdale is in the process of addressing key water quality issues, totaling more than \$27 million, by replacing cast iron lines throughout the City. The grand total includes a \$15,715,000 loan and \$500,000 grant from the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund, and a \$10,825,000 loan and \$400,000 grant from the Clean Water State Revolving Fund, with loans being repaid via utility rates and revenue bonds.

Water Conservation Plan (2019)

This plan outlines a variety of short-term and long-term water conservation goals so that the City of Rockdale is able to meet future water demands. It also establishes a multi-faceted water conservation program to help pursue and accomplish the goals that are outlined in the conservation plan. Additionally, the Water Conservation Plan includes a regulatory component for amending/adopting the plan.

Vision 22 East Cameron (2022)

The Vision 22 plan was designed to assess existing conditions and their impacts on development and quality of life along the East Cameron Avenue corridor. It provided recommendations implementing pedestrian-oriented measures such as medians, large sidewalks and significant landscaping between the police department and Bridge Park.

City of Rockdale Goals, Objectives, and Actions

The Rockdale City Council created a comprehensive set of Goals, Objectives, and Actions (also known as the GOAs) for the City. The GOAs are intended to be “the basis for growth and development decisions and serve as the foundation to protect, maintain, and enhance the quality of life in the City.”

The City Council’s GOAs address goals, objectives and actions related to the following:

- Quality of Life
- Economic Development
- Future Land Use
- Residential Development
- Nonresidential Development
- Infrastructure and Utilities
- Transportation
- City Services
- Historic Preservation
- Capital Improvement Programming

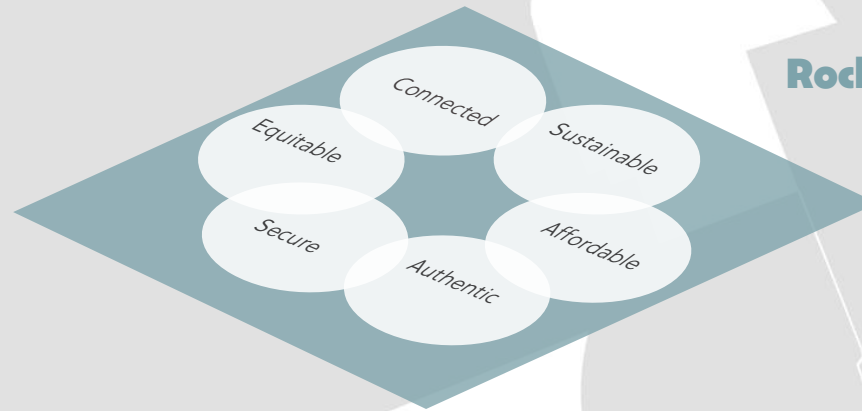
While these provide a strong starting point for the planning team in creation of this Comprehensive Plan, there are two main ways that this Plan supplements and enhances the Council’s GOAs. First, is the broader community outreach process that this Plan undertook and second, is the process of linking these GOAs back to a larger, more holistic vision and mission based on community input.



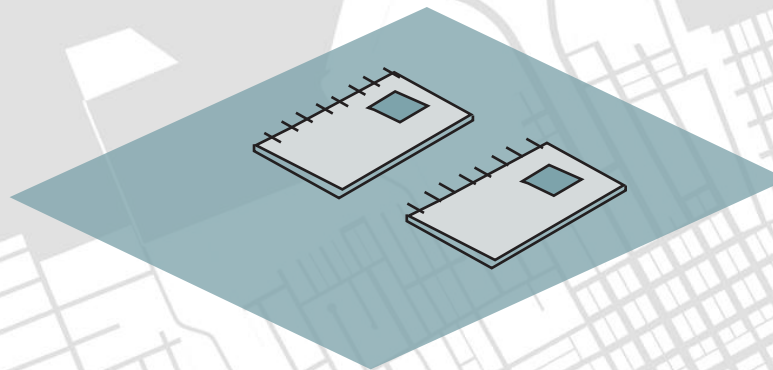
Vision 22 East Cameron Streetscape Enhancement Recommendations

Relationship of City Plans

It is helpful to understand planning as a layered hierarchical process, with each plan being contained within or relating to future and past planning projects. This Comprehensive Plan will chart a vision that will guide more specific plans, such as neighborhood plans or studies. This vision and subsequent recommendations from City and area level plans will influence the City's codes and regulations. Codes and regulations directly impact city investments and private development within the municipality.



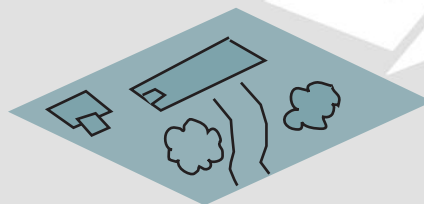
Rockdale's Comprehensive Plan and Vision



Neighborhood Plans, Special Area Plans and Hybrid Plans



Capital Improvement Plan, City Code and Regulations



Public Investments, Development Review and Annual Budgeting

People and Patterns

This community demographic profile is an essential part of the comprehensive plan process, helping decision makers gain a deeper understanding of the City’s residents and how their lifestyles may impact the urban form.

By analyzing demographic data and trends, we can uncover key insights into the composition, characteristics and needs of the community. This knowledge empowers the community to develop targeted strategies and initiatives that address the specific challenges and opportunities presented by Rockdale’s diverse population.

The demographics of Rockdale play a significant role in shaping the urban landscape. Factors such as age distribution, ethnicity, income levels and household types all influence the demand for various services, infrastructure and amenities.

For example, an aging population might require age-friendly design elements and accessible transportation options, while a young and diverse population may necessitate vibrant cultural spaces and recreational facilities.

Understanding these demographic nuances allows us to create a more responsive and inclusive urban environment that caters to the needs and preferences of residents. By examining indicators such as education levels, employment rates and income disparities, we can identify areas of opportunity and areas that require targeted interventions.

This information will also guide the decision-making process in terms of resource allocation, economic development strategies and social equity initiatives. By addressing these socio-

economic factors through the Plan, we can strive to create a more equitable and thriving community for all residents.

Population

The City of Rockdale’s population has stayed relatively steady aside from two notable events which have caused significant fluctuations. In 1952, the ALCOA aluminum smelting facility was constructed in Rockdale. This factory changed the City’s character from a primarily agricultural town to a key component in the nation’s post-World War II Industrial economy. The ALCOA plant nearly doubled the City’s population between 1950 and 1960, and provided significant economic benefits that fueled Rockdale’s growth until the early 2000s.

However, the growth trajectory took an unexpected turn when the ALCOA plant abruptly closed its doors in 2008. This sudden closure dealt a severe blow to Rockdale, resulting in the elimination of a substantial portion of its workforce and triggering an economic downturn. Consequently, the City experienced a decline in population over the last decade, with an estimated loss of approximately 5 percent.

Figure 1. Rockdale Historic Population

Year	Population	Change
1900	2,515	+67.1%
1910	2,073	-17.6%
1920	2,323	+12.1%
1930	2,204	-5.1%
1940	2,136	-3.1%
1950	2,321	+8.7%
1960	4,481	+93.1%
1970	4,655	+3.9%
1980	5,611	+0.5%
1990	5,235	-6.7%
2000	5,439	+3.9%
2010	5,595	+2.9%
2020	5,323	-4.9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census

Population Projections

Town and city planning relies on population projections to anticipate future population trends, enabling effective allocation of resources, development of sustainable strategies for housing, transportation, and infrastructure, and creation of livable and resilient communities. The projections developed by the Texas Water Development Board anticipate that both Milam County and the City of Rockdale's population will stay constant going toward the year 2050.

However, it should be noted that comparable Central Texas towns, such as Taylor and Elgin, are experiencing high growth, attributed to recent industrial development and the outward expansion of the Austin metropolitan area. These local trends indicate the potential for the City of Rockdale to see much greater growth than is anticipated by these TWDB projections. Exploration of additional growth projections have been done as part of the Land Use and Development chapter.

Figure 2. 2010-2050 Population Projections, Regional Comparison

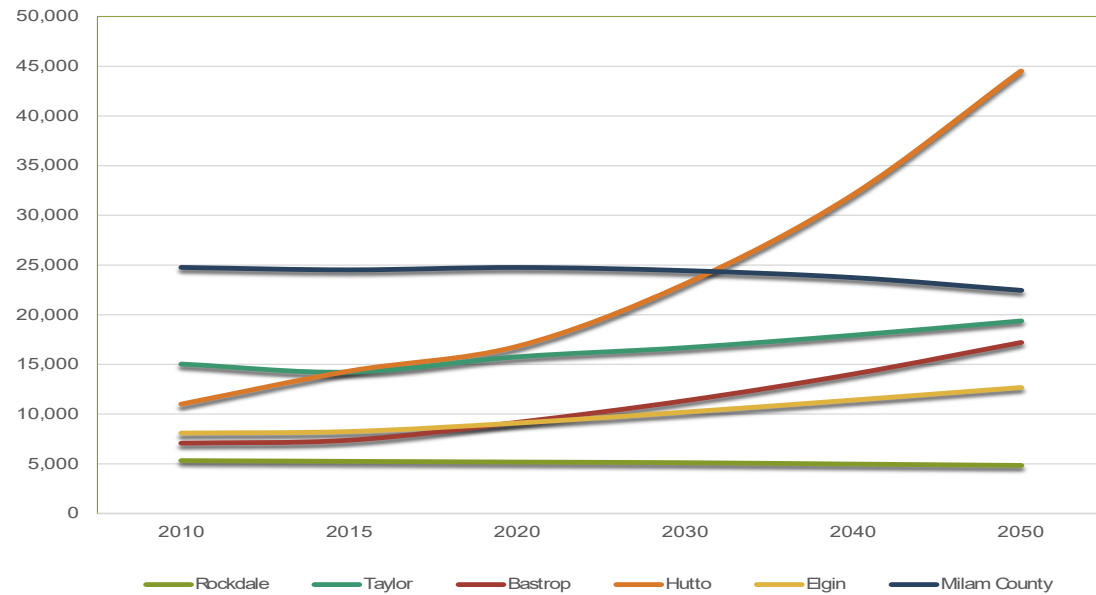


Figure 3. Population Projection 2010-2050

Year	Rockdale	Taylor	Bastrop	Hutto	Elgin	Milam County
2010	5,326	15,036	7,062	10,998	8,097	24,757
2015	5,251	14,231	7,368	14,323	8,252	24,513
2020	5,180	15,767	9,164	16,813	9,103	24,754
2030	5,113	16,686	11,346	23,100	10,204	24,434
2040	4,972	17,940	14,029	32,069	11,410	23,734
2050	4,835	19,378	17,208	44,520	12,667	22,450

Source: Texas Water Development Board, 2026 RWP Municipal Data

Race and Ethnicity Trends

The Texas Demographic Center projects that by the year 2030, Milam County will see a slight decrease in total population, but it will see new growth in some racial and ethnic categories. Between 2010 and 2030, the non-Hispanic white and non-Hispanic Black populations in Milam County are projected to decrease by 18 percent and 25 percent, respectively. In this same time period, the Hispanic population is slated to see a nearly 50 percent increase from 5,780 to 8,622 individuals within the county.

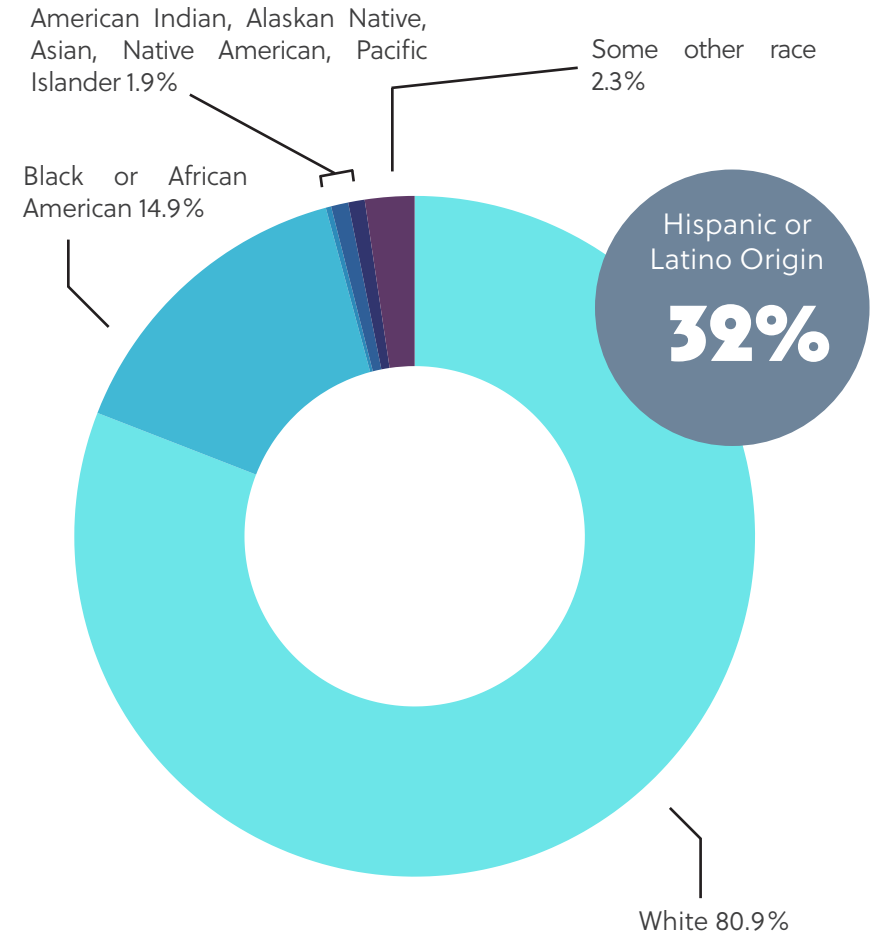
The City of Rockdale has witnessed significant fluctuations in race and ethnicity trends, with recent growth observed, particularly among the Hispanic and Latino population, which accounted for 30 percent of the total City population in 2010 and increased to 32 percent in 2020.

Figure 4. Total Population by Race, 2010-2020

Race	2010	2015	2020
White	4,005	4,378	4,444
Black or African American	899	514	818
American Indian and Alaskan Native	108	13	14
Asian	16	82	45
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander	0	0	43
Some Other Race	129	400	129
Total	5,766	5,507	5,505

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates 2010, 2015, 2020

Figure 5. 2020 Rockdale Demographic Breakdown



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates 2010, 2015, 2020

Age

Understanding age demographics is important for a comprehensive plan as it helps local decision makers anticipate the needs of different age groups, develop targeted strategies for healthcare, education, housing, and transportation, and ensure inclusive environments that promote the well-being of all residents throughout every stage of their lives.

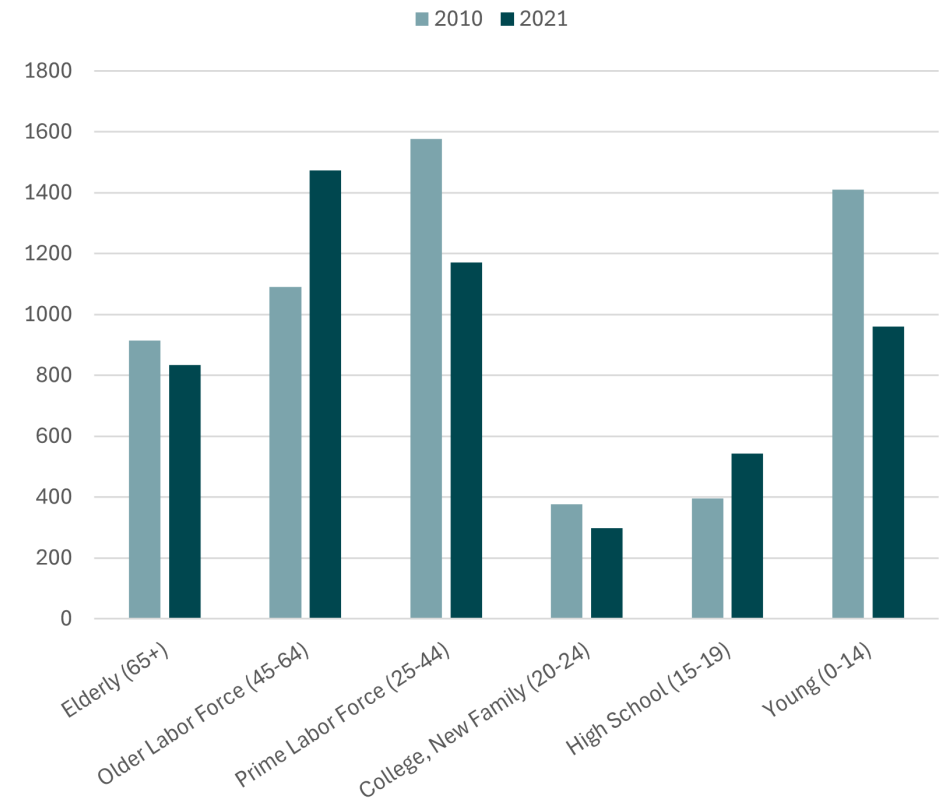
Rockdale's population has trended older in the last decade, with the median age increasing by almost five years in that time. Compared to Milam County, Rockdale's population is slightly younger, but it is still older than the state median. Comparing Rockdale's age distribution between 2010 and 2021, the population distribution within the City has started to skew older. Specific age categories include the college, new family (20-24) and prime labor force (25-44). These trends can occur for a variety of reasons, but the simplest is that often younger residents leave for jobs and opportunities in larger labor markets.

Figure 6. Median Age by City, 2010-2020

City	2010	2015	2020
Rockdale	33.5	41.3	38
Taylor	38	35.9	38.7
Bastrop	35.5	41.8	36
Hutto	29	31.2	35.5
Cameron	36.7	39.4	35.4
Milam County	39.8	41.4	41.8
State of Texas	33.4	34.1	34.8

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates 2010, 2015, 2020

Figure 7. Rockdale Age Distribution



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates 2010, 2021

Income and Opportunity

Income is essential for a comprehensive plan as it provides insights into the economic well-being and disparities within Rockdale. This data helps make informed decisions relating to housing initiatives, social service allocation, economic development strategies and infrastructure investments, ensuring that the needs of all income groups are considered and addressed in the comprehensive planning process.

Rockdale's median household income of \$38,636 is significantly less than the statewide median of \$67,321 in 2021. When household income is broken down by census block group, the disparities of incomes is more apparent within the City. Northwest Rockdale has significantly higher incomes, much closer to the statewide average, when compared to the southern portion of the City limits which has incomes that are nearly three times less than the statewide average.

Figure 8. Median Household Income

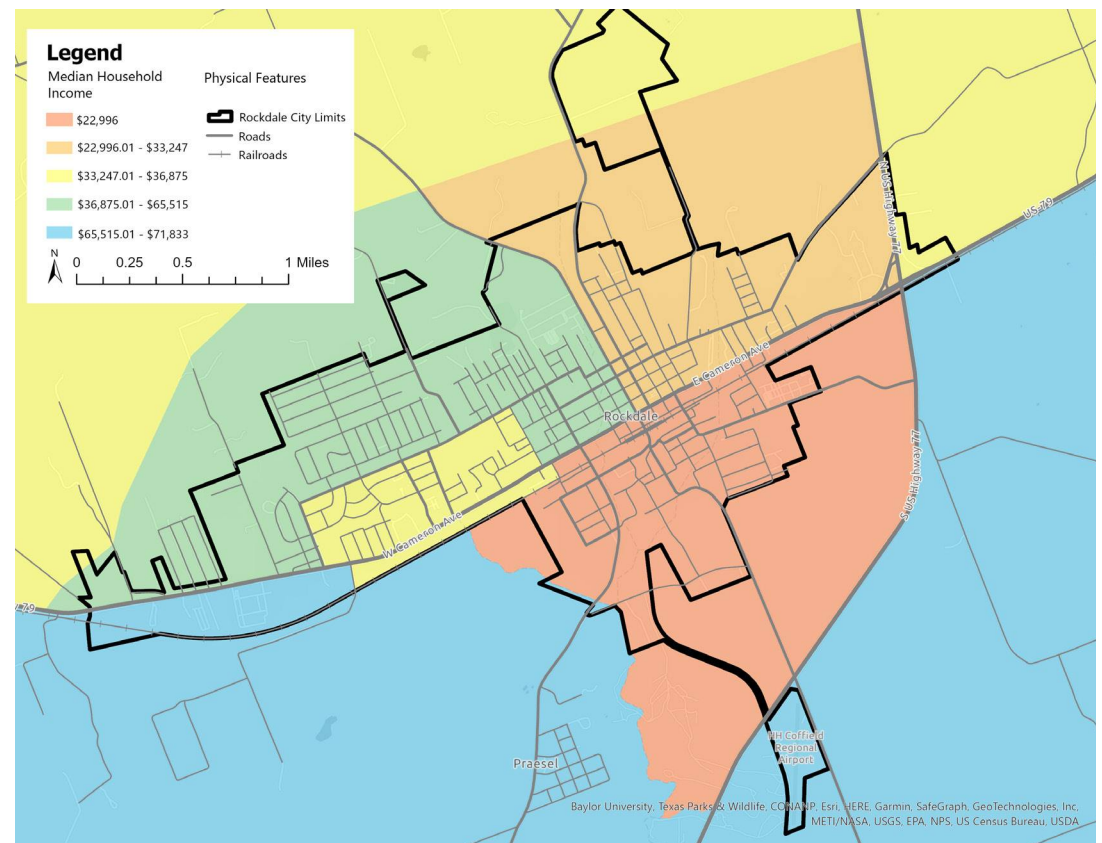
\$38,636
Rockdale

\$67,321
Texas

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates 2021

In addition to income data, understanding educational attainment is another crucial aspect for a comprehensive plan. In the City of Rockdale, educational attainment levels fall significantly below the state-wide average. Only 13 percent of the population aged 25 and older possess a bachelor's degree or higher, indicating a lower level of educational achievement. This figure contrasts with the state of Texas, where the educational attainment for the population aged 25 and older, stands at 32 percent in 2021.

Figure 9. Rockdale Median Household Income Map



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates 2021

Community Vision & Goals

The planning team balances the quantitative data and research presented in this chapter with qualitative information and the lived experiences of residents. This information forms the community vision that becomes the basis for the plan recommendations.

Community Engagement Efforts

Qualitative information is gathered from community members via community engagement efforts. A summary of these efforts is provided here, additional detail on engagement events and outcomes can be found in Appendix A.

Summary of Community Input

Overall, the community wants to see Rockdale encompass multiple aspects aimed at creating a thriving, interconnected community that offers a range of opportunities and amenities. Central to this is the desire to establish strong connections, both physically and on a deeper level, between the east and west sides of the community. The community places great importance on fostering a sense of togetherness and support, with a strong focus on future generations and nurturing future leaders. The aim is to ensure that Rockdale continues to be a caring and close-knit community that takes care of its own.

Rockdale is currently facing a divide between what it aspires to be and the reality it currently faces. Challenges include:

- Access to groceries and dining
- Economic disparities
- Homelessness and substance abuse
- Shortage of healthcare facilities and services
- “Curb appeal” and overall appearance

5

Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC) Meetings

The CPAC is a group of active community members who volunteered their time to work with the planning team throughout the process to ensure a variety of viewpoints was being considered and incorporated into the Plan recommendations. This group met five times over the course of the project and in addition to reviewing the plan recommendations, they discussed priorities and tradeoffs, community resilience and implementation.

10

Stakeholder Conversations

The planning team hosted targeted conversations with a variety of community stakeholders representing specific needs or viewpoints of residents. This included meetings with City staff, community leaders, City boards and commission members, high school students, local professionals, and small businesses.

2

Public Outreach Events

The planning team had three major community outreach events. At the beginning of the project, the team had a booth at the Chamber on Tap community event on June 22, 2023 where they spoke to community members about the project and encouraged participation in the survey. The team also hosted a project-specific Community Open House event on August 29, 2023, where they solicited initial input on the Comprehensive Plan topics.

2

Community Surveys

Two community surveys were done during the project. The first survey was at the outset of the project, open from June 16 to August 1, 2023, and asked community members to share what they saw as priorities, assets and needs in Rockdale. The second survey was specific to parks, open from October 5 to November 9, 2023, and asked the community about what they would like to see related to parks and recreation offerings in Rockdale.

The community input revolved around the central theme of “reinvention,” representing a collective willingness to embrace change and transformation.

Key Takeaways:

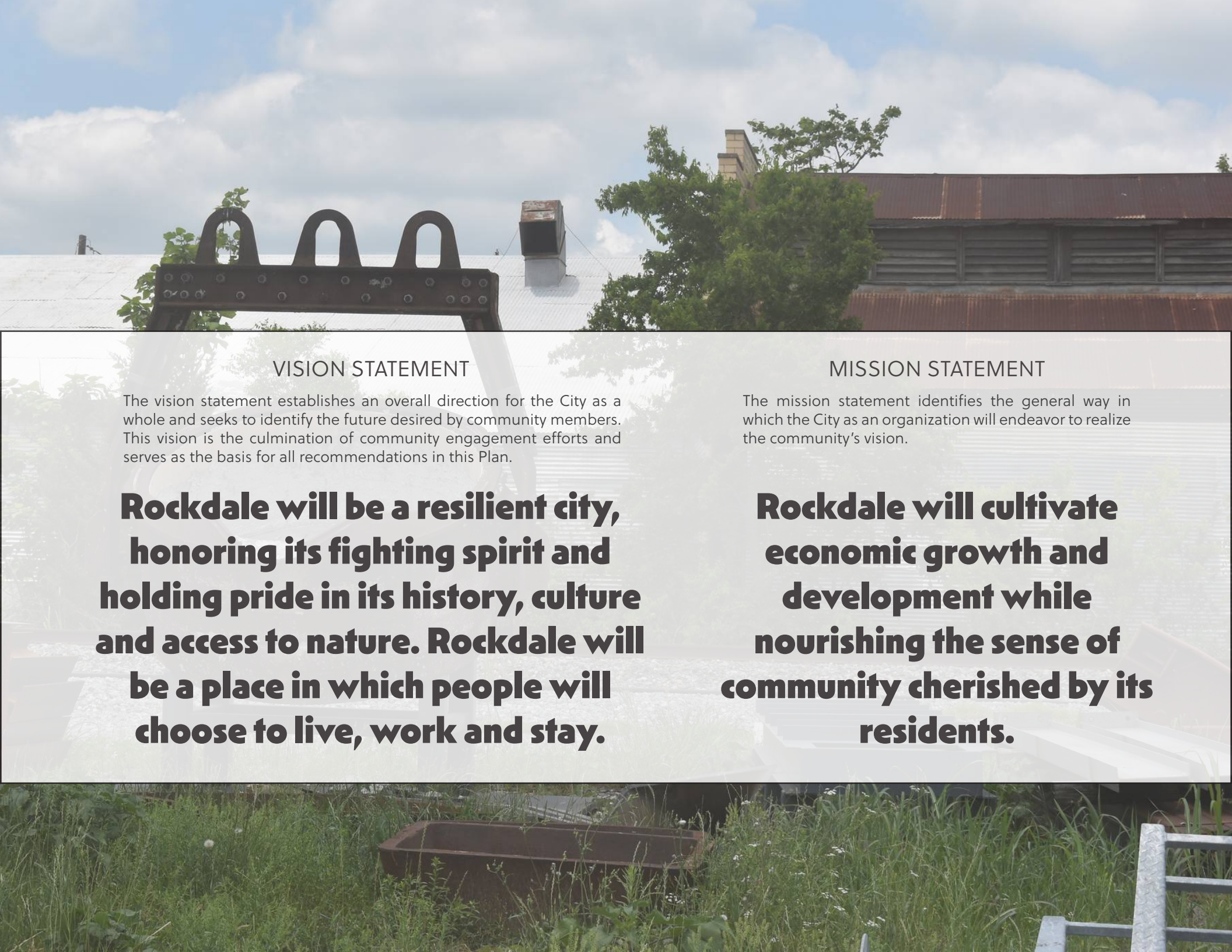
- Supporting small businesses to foster robust growth and ensure sustainable economic development
- Striking a balance between attracting new residents and supporting existing communities
- Overcoming obstacles including risk-averse mindset and perceived divides
- Actively seeking ways to enhance the community and its offerings while strengthening connections among its members

When asked what the City of Rockdale should prioritize, community members identified the following as the top five priorities:

1. Access to Healthcare
2. Infrastructure Condition
3. Appearance and Beautification
4. Roadways and Traffic
5. Entertainment, Activities, and Things To Do



Images from community engagement events, stakeholder conversations, and CPAC meetings.



VISION STATEMENT

The vision statement establishes an overall direction for the City as a whole and seeks to identify the future desired by community members. This vision is the culmination of community engagement efforts and serves as the basis for all recommendations in this Plan.

Rockdale will be a resilient city, honoring its fighting spirit and holding pride in its history, culture and access to nature. Rockdale will be a place in which people will choose to live, work and stay.

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission statement identifies the general way in which the City as an organization will endeavor to realize the community's vision.

Rockdale will cultivate economic growth and development while nourishing the sense of community cherished by its residents.

COMMUNITY GOALS

These goals have been established as the ways in which this Plan will seek to realize the community's vision. After confirming alignment with what was heard from the community, these goals were taken directly or adapted from the Rockdale City Council's GOAs, discussed previously in this chapter. These goals can serve as a mechanism in decision making for City staff and leadership. City objectives related to these goals can be found in Appendix E. These objectives served as a reference for the creation of recommendations and implementation action items throughout this Plan.

A major theme during community conversations was the idea of Rockdale retaining its small-town charm/feel in the face of growth and change. However, this means different things to different people. When asked directly what they meant by "small-town feel," it became clear that stakeholders were most often thinking about the intangibles of their community, such as pride, stewardship and neighborly interactions between people. If these things exist strongly within the community members and leaders, then it is expected that it will also be reflected in the built environment via investment and high maintenance standards.

The vision statement on the prior page begins to reflect this idea of small-town values. The goals outlined here continue to delve into how those are reflected in policies and actions within the City organization.



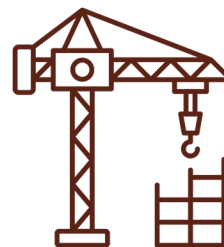
Goal 1: Enhance Quality of Life

Enhance and preserve recreational, cultural, educational, economic, natural and aesthetic resources to improve overall quality of life. Actions include neighborhood preservation, cultural promotion, infrastructure enhancement and community engagement.



Goal 2: Stimulate Economic Growth and Business Development

Preserve, protect and expand a diversified local economy through strategic initiatives and business development programs. Stimulating economic growth and fostering job opportunities while focusing on small and local businesses. Attracting investment and investors that are committed to enhancing opportunities for new and existing residents.



Goal 3: Promote High-Quality Development (Residential & Non-Residential)

Support orderly, well-planned development that enhances community livability and sustainability. Objectives include effective land development ordinances, property maintenance standards, future land use mapping and promoting infill development for the most efficient use of existing infrastructure.



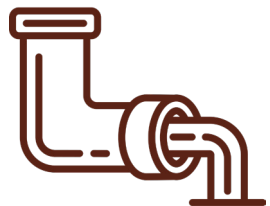
Goal 4: Cultivate a Vibrant, Economically-Productive and Diversified Downtown

Foster a vibrant, well-maintained historic downtown district offering diverse businesses, activities and services. Prioritize arts and cultural initiatives, market studies for targeted development and community connectivity enhancements to revitalize downtown areas.



Goal 7: Support Public Service Excellence and Fiscal Responsibility

Provide high-quality City services to meet current and future needs of residents and businesses. Focus areas include fiscal stability, utility service expansion, development information accessibility and sufficient staffing for public safety to ensure high-quality, efficient and effective service delivery.



Goal 5: Establish Infrastructure for Future Development

Manage infrastructure development to efficiently meet future growth needs. Goals include providing consistent utility services, fair fee structures and equitable access to water and wastewater services. Promote sustainable, resilient and energy-efficient infrastructure policies and municipal construction practices.



Goal 8: Attract and Retain a Competitive Workforce

Support the attraction and retention of a competitive, well-educated workforce to drive economic opportunity and growth. Prioritize collaboration with workforce development partners, job skills training and workforce recruitment efforts to upskill local residents and connect people to jobs.



Goal 6: Develop and Maintain a Safe & Efficient Transportation System

Develop and maintain a transportation system that can safely and efficiently accommodate future growth while providing additional mode choices for residents. Objectives include promoting walkable environments, upgrading street infrastructure, expanding public transportation options and developing aviation facilities in an orderly manner.



Goal 9: Support a Variety of Housing

Promote a variety of housing options to serve diverse demographics and income levels. Goals include accommodating diverse housing through zoning designations, encouraging residential development in areas with adequate facilities, promoting mixed-use development and supporting housing affordability initiatives.