

City of San Marcos Neighborhood Planning Workshops



7/13/15

Report of Workshop Process & Outcomes

The following report provides details about the City of San Marcos Neighborhood Planning Workshop Process entitled “Plan Your Neighborhood” conducted in the six neighborhood character study areas during the spring of 2015.

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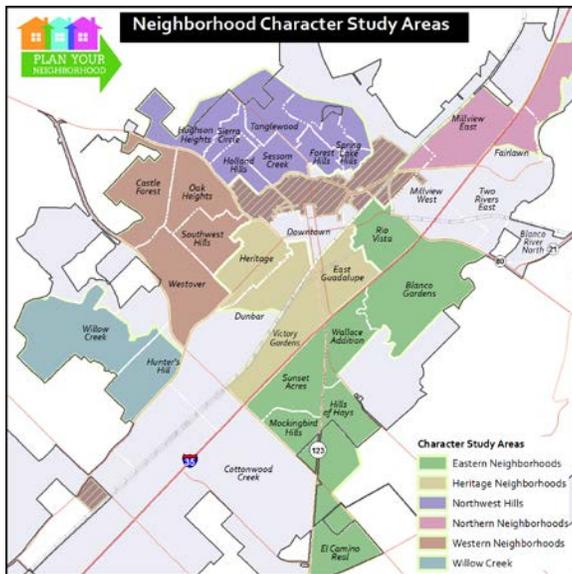
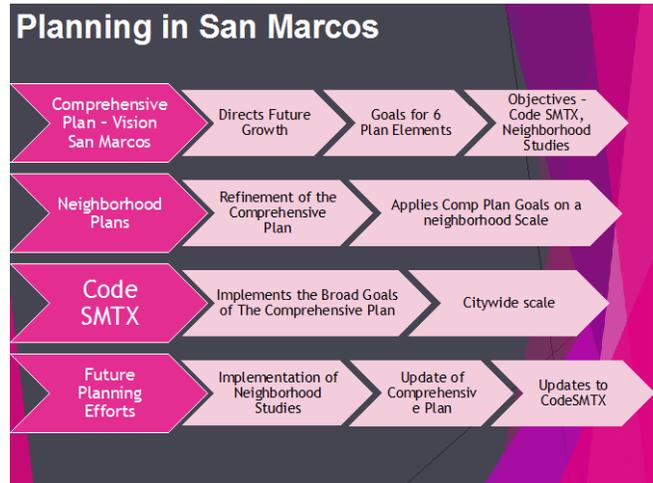
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ABOUT THIS EFFORT

Background

In 2013, the City of San Marcos adopted *Vision San Marcos: A River Runs Through Us*, the City's comprehensive plan which lays out a vision, goals and objectives for how to shape future growth in the city. Soon after adopting the comprehensive plan, the City began CodeSMTX, the process of revising the land development code. As part of the comprehensive planning work, there are ongoing neighborhood character studies to ensure that each neighborhood maintains its existing character and follows development and redevelopment patterns desired by the residents.

Beginning in the summer of 2014, the City began gathering data for the character studies, including the *Brand Your Neighborhood* process, which gathered 428 individual comments from residents on the assets, constraints and opportunities in their neighborhoods. Per the comprehensive plan, neighborhood character studies will result in specific guidelines for each neighborhood, which are created by the public with technical and professional input from city staff.



Neighborhood Planning Workshops

Because San Marcos neighborhoods have unique qualities and characteristics, the form of development and public improvements should preserve and enhance each area's unique character. During the spring of 2015, the City of San Marcos Planning and Development Services Department began *Plan Your Neighborhood*, a neighborhood planning process to ensure residents would have a proactive role in envisioning the future of their neighborhoods. The aim of this process was to gather resident's ideas about how to improve the quality of life in their neighborhoods and outline specific ways to apply the goals of Vision San Marcos at the neighborhood scale. Workshops were held in each of the six neighborhood character study areas, attendance ranged from 5 to 50 per workshop for a total of 180 workshop participants. Details about the workshops are provided in this report.

Integrated Planning Efforts

The Neighborhood Character Plans are proposed to be adopted as part of *Vision San Marcos*. Broad ideas recently gathered about the general character and needs of each of the 6 Neighborhood Areas will be used to update the Neighborhoods & Housing chapter of *Vision San Marcos*. The new Transportation Master Plan and CodeSMTX will provide the necessary tools and framework for incorporating appropriate standards in existing neighborhoods.

WORKSHOP PROCESS

Convening Residents

In April and May of 2015, San Marcos residents were invited to join their neighbors for a fun, interactive workshop to explore ideas about how to improve the quality of life in their neighborhoods and apply the big-picture goals of *Vision San Marcos* to their neighborhood. Building on the engagement work done during *CodeSMTX* and *Brand Your Neighborhood*, broad outreach was conducted to raise awareness and foster participation (more details in the Outreach and Engagement section). Accessible, central locations within each study area were chosen for the workshops. They were held on Saturdays, refreshments were provided as well as activities for children, in order to garner as much participation as possible. By partnering with community volunteers, the Texas State Student Urban Planning Organization, CONA and others, the City was able to expand its outreach efforts.

Eastern - Saturday, April 11
Northwest Hills - Saturday, April 18
Northern - Saturday, April 18
Western - Saturday, May 2
Heritage - Saturday, May 9
Willow Creek - Saturday, May 23

Process Details

Each *Plan Your Neighborhood* workshop was two-hours long and began with an overview of the City's planning efforts, enabling each participant to understand the purpose and status of these efforts, even if they had not previously been involved. Additional detail was provided on the neighborhood character studies, the purpose of this workshop, how their input would be used and a timeline of upcoming activities. Participants received instructions for the two hands-on workshop exercises and worked in small, facilitated groups for the majority of the workshop. The meetings concluded with a summary from Staff regarding next steps.

The first exercise was a mapping process designed to understand resident's views about 1) areas that make up the character of their neighborhood and are important to preserve; 2) areas that are susceptible to change; 3) appropriate places for improvements that implement the policies of *Vision San Marcos*; and 4) pedestrian, bike and auto connections and corridors. Before beginning, they were provided with images and information gathered during the *Brand Your Neighborhood* studies about assets, constraints and opportunities. The meetings had an overall process facilitator, as well as volunteer facilitators at each table (approximately 5-8 participants per table). The role of the facilitators was to make sure the process was clear, help everyone contribute, capture participant ideas, remain neutral on content, and help the group stay on track. City Staff circulated between tables to answer technical questions.

The second exercise asked participants to formulate specific objectives that would apply policies from four key areas of *Vision San Marcos* plan to their neighborhood. These topic areas were 1) Protect neighborhoods by directing growth to activity centers; 2) Multi-modal and bicycle friendly transportation options; 3) Diversified housing options; and 4) Collection of connected parks and greenspaces. Each topic rotated between participant tables, enabling each table to review and build on their neighbor's ideas. At the end of the workshop, each



participant was provided four green stickers so that they could rank which ideas (one per topic) they were most excited about. Workshop handouts are provided in the Appendix.

THEMES FROM THE WORKSHOPS

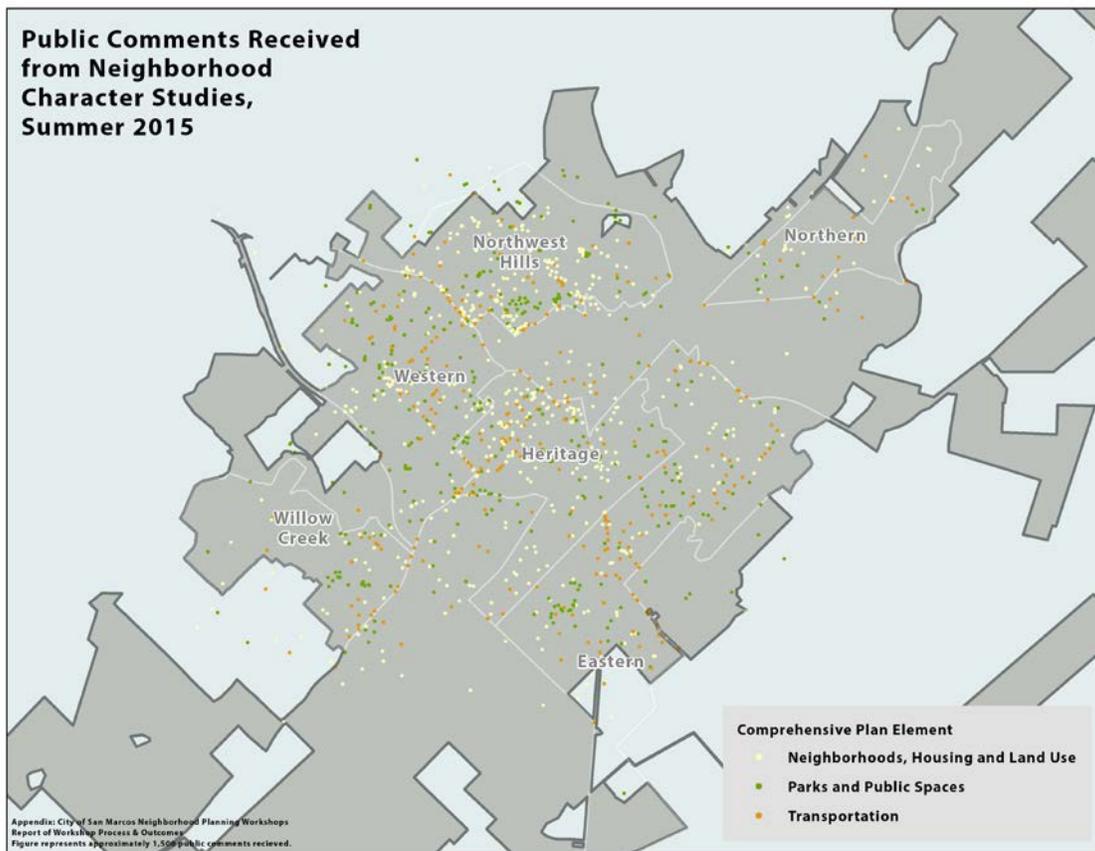
Detailed input was gathered during the workshops during the two exercises of 1) mapping and 2) objectives. While more time is required to finalize the analysis, the following provides baseline categorization and general themes that emerged from the process.

Broad Themes across the Community

There were many themes in the objectives that resonated from workshop to workshop. The community as a whole indicates a desire to:

- *Maintain Predominately Single Family Neighborhoods*
- *Improve the connectivity of Sidewalks and Bicycle Facilities*
- *Improve the Public Transportation Service*
- *Encourage multi-family that is small in scale and in appropriate locations*
- *Protect and Improve Parks*

(These themes were summarized for this report and will be presented to the community for further discussion and refinement at a later date.)



Specific Themes for Neighborhood Study Areas

Each Neighborhood Study Area had unique ideas for the future of their part of the City. Some of those ideas include:

EASTERN NEIGHBORHOODS

- Encourage small, local businesses and mixed-use along major roads
- Focus on maintenance of existing roads and utilities
- Encourage mixed-use and live/work housing options
- Create new public spaces such as – dog park, children’s park, community garden, greenspaces

HERITAGE NEIGHBORHOODS

- Encourage small, character appropriate multi-family & commercial along corridors and at nodes
- Implement traffic calming measures
- Encourage affordable housing as infill development
- Create pocket parks within walking distance of neighborhoods

NORTHERN NEIGHBORHOODS

- Encourage the development of mixed-use centers
- Increase bicycle and pedestrian signage
- Encourage a mix of housing types near schools
- Provide ADA accessible trails

NORTHWEST HILLS NEIGHBORHOODS

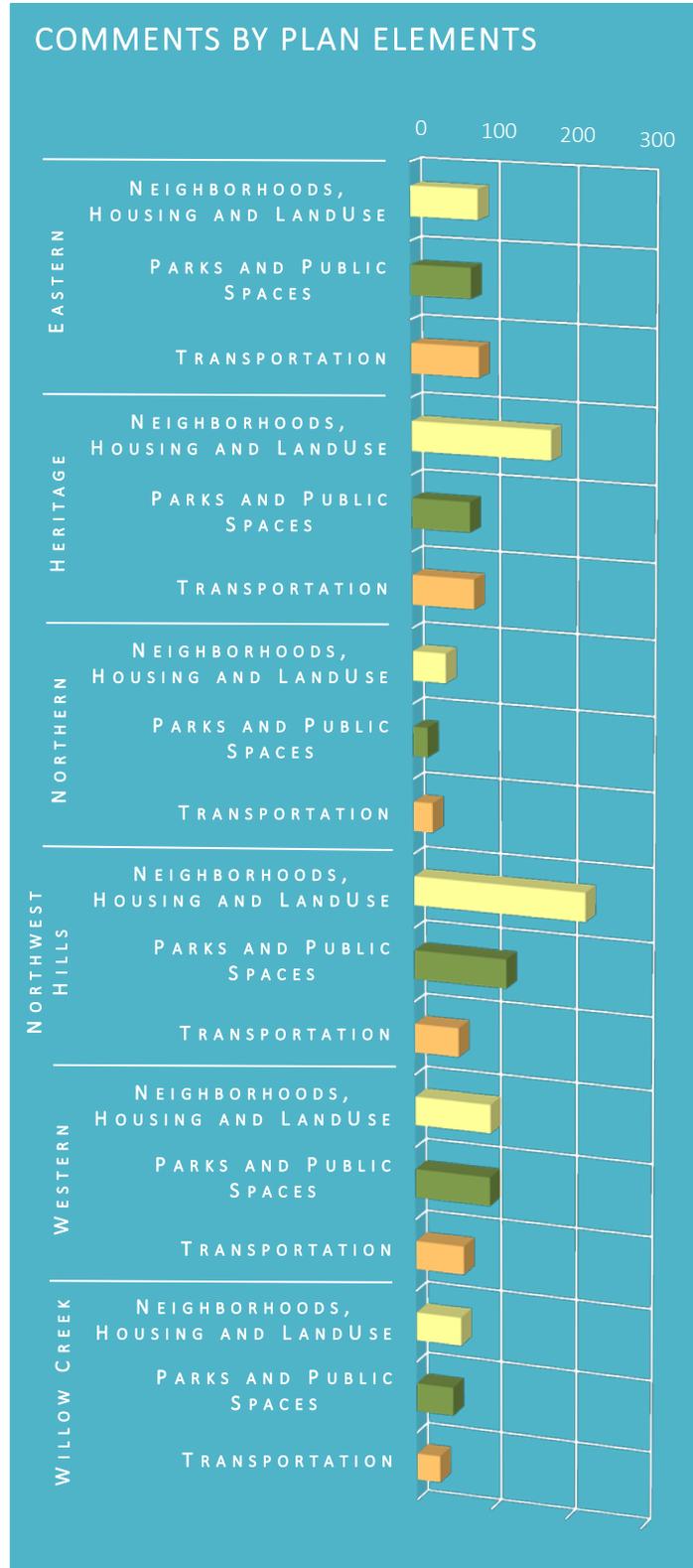
- Encourage older developments to redevelop with character appropriate standards
- Consider implementing the residential parking permit program
- Encourage diversified housing to accommodate multiple generations of residents
- Provide adequate parking and access to open spaces

WESTERN NEIGHBORHOODS

- Create detailed plans for neighborhood commercial developments
- Provide safe crosswalks, especially around schools
- Promote sustainable / green buildings
- Improve gateway signage for neighborhoods

WILLOW CREEK NEIGHBORHOODS

- Encourage the development of a grocery store or market
- Improve access from neighborhoods without requiring travel on Hunter Road
- Encourage townhouse development as a transition to single family neighborhoods
- Encourage dedication of floodplains



OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT

Outreach efforts for the *Plan Your Neighborhood* workshops began in the winter of 2014 with the development of a name, logo and messages about the process that would create visibility and foster interest. Numerous printed materials promoted the workshops, including posters, fliers, door hangers, post cards, yard signs, t-shirts and more. A myriad of communication channels and strategies were employed to build awareness and encourage attendance, including:

1. An informational video distributed on YouTube, City website and emails
2. Presentations to Boards and Commissions
3. Education and Outreach at Local Schools
4. Brand Your Neighborhood Activity
5. Volunteer recruiting through Texas State Student Urban Planning Organization
6. Information to *Brand Your Neighborhood* and *CodeSMTX* participants and Think Tank members
7. Press releases
8. Recruiting neighborhood volunteers to help with outreach to neighborhood associations
9. Emails to City of San Marcos contact lists and other networks
10. Stories in local media
11. Post card mailings and door hangers
12. Booths, materials and maps at community events and places, such as the Spring Concert Series, the Farmers Market, Party in your Park, the Activity Center, Library and at other City-sponsored events
13. Frequent e-newsletter blasts with meeting information and project updates
14. Dedicated page on City's website
15. Social media, including Facebook
16. Updates on the San Marcos Minute



In addition to the six workshops, engagement activities included placing large-scale 4 foot by 8 foot maps of the neighborhood study area at key locations in the neighborhoods in the weeks leading up to the workshops. Residents could write comments to some of the workshop questions directly on the maps themselves.

BY THE NUMBERS

of Workshop Attendees

Eastern – 20

Northwest Hills - 50

Northern - 5

Western - 40

Heritage - 40

Willow Creek - 25

of Online Comments

75

of Map Comments

1,049

During the workshop process, the Plan Your Neighborhood page of the City's website provided an open comment area for residents to ask questions or express concerns.

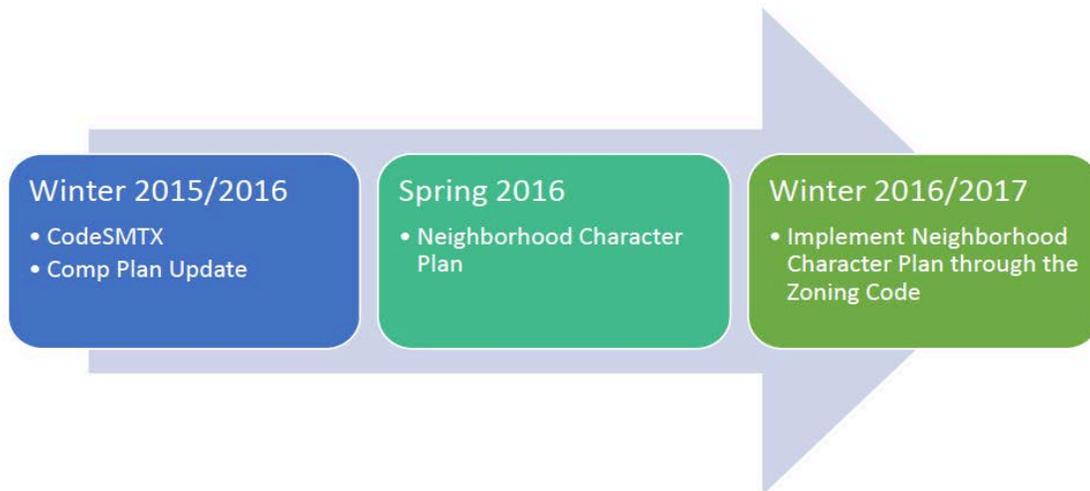
Following the workshops, a series of Mind Mixer questions (online idea-gathering tool) were blasted out to the City's contact list to gather input related to the work that was done during the workshops. Links were provided on the *Plan Your Neighborhood* page so that residents could see the results of the workshop exercises for each of the neighborhood study areas.

NEXT STEPS

The input received through the Neighborhood Planning Process has confirmed the importance of establishing and applying a vision in each neighborhood before a code can be properly written. The initial work done through the Neighborhood Planning process has laid the groundwork for the zoning and transportation related tools that can be applied in neighborhoods to achieve the vision that will be established through Neighborhood Character Plans. The initial Neighborhood Planning work fits into a larger Long Range Planning Road Map that is detailed below:

Process steps going forward include:

- Build a framework into CodeSMTX that allows for the incorporation of detailed regulating plans in each of the six Neighborhood Planning Areas.
- Update the Comprehensive Plan and Preferred Scenario Map to reflect the 6 Neighborhood Planning Areas and their general character.
- Amend select conventional zoning districts to improve development standards so that they are more compatible within existing neighborhoods.
- Draft a Neighborhood Character Plan for each of the 6 Neighborhood Areas identifying:
 - Areas susceptible to change that need additional planning and the vision for those areas
 - Measurable Objectives in each neighborhood area
- Implement the Neighborhood Character Plans utilizing the new tools identified in CodeSMTX



Timeline:

September 30, 2015	City Council Workshop
November 2015	Public Open House
February 2016	Planning Commission Adoption of Comprehensive Plan Update
March 2016	City Council First and Second Reading Comprehensive Plan Update
April 2016	Prioritize Neighborhood Character Plan Areas
May 2016	Begin First Neighborhood Character Plan (approx 4 months/ Area)
October 2016	Begin First Neighborhood Code (approx. 4 months/ Area)

APPENDIX