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# What is a Comprehensive Plan?

## Why Cities Plan

A comprehensive plan is a tool that allows a city to anticipate future changes and to guide those changes in an effective, orderly manner that is consistent with the desires of the community. It acts as a tool for proactively managing and directing growth, lends predictability for developers by illustrating the types of development desired throughout the community, and identifies infrastructure needs. It gives legal backing to ordinances and development codes while mitigating arbitrary and capricious enforcement of these laws. With input from the community during the planning process, the document serves as a record of the community's collective vision and aspirations for the future. As such, this Plan articulates residents' goals for the community and serves as a tool to communicate desires regarding the City's decisions and future outcomes related to public and private investments.

In the face of constant change, this is the most important reason to plan. A comprehensive plan with extensive public input allows a community's residents to determine what factors will guide development decisions and gives them the opportunity to decide what the future of their city will be.

In particular, the City's goals for long-range planning and its Comprehensive Plan include:

- To provide a balanced mix of land uses and services throughout the community;
- To ensure that public amenities and facilities can meet the demands of future development;
- To achieve efficiency in development patterns that reflect community values;
- To protect and enhance the identity, character, and visual appearance of the community;
- To involve residents in visioning and decision-making processes that directly influence how the city will evolve
- To guide annual work programs, prioritize improvements, and direct resource use.

In 1997, the Texas Legislature added Chapter 213 to the Local Government Code allowing cities in Texas the option to develop and adopt comprehensive plans. The Code establishes that the plans must consider land use, transportation and public facilities, and distinguishes between land use plans and zoning regulations. The state statute allows cities to define the relationship between the plan and any ordinances and development codes, but specifically requires that zoning regulations must be adopted in accordance with a comprehensive plan. This also leaves cities with creative freedom to determine the level of detail of the plan's contents. Comprehensive plans across the state typically include topics they deem relevant, such as environmental constraints, demographic projections, infrastructure data, and housing in addition to the required land use and transportation topics.

## What is City Plan?

City Plan — Vision 2045 (City Plan) is a long-range plan that creates a strategic framework to balance equitable growth, quality of life improvements, and public and private investments in Amarillo over the next two decades. City Plan will replace the City's current Comprehensive Plan, which was originally adopted 14 years ago. This new vision and growth policy framework was developed through an extensive resident-driven process and now reflects the current needs and desires of the community.

The updated and unified policy direction will guide implementation tools such as zoning, economic development initiatives, and infrastructure and amenity investments. It also outlines new strategies for addressing citywide opportunities and challenges, centered around several priority topics and considerations, including Growth Management and Capacity; Making Places: Neighborhoods & Districts; Community Character; Mobility; and Parks and Cultural Resources.

The Plan provides guidance on how the City will evolve to take care of the development we have and plan for new development to come. Overall, this Plan will help shape the future of the places we work, live, play, and visit by preserving what's important to our community and guiding investments that help make Amarillo a vibrant and attractive city.



## A Brief History of Amarillo

### Founding

Located in both Potter County and Randall County, Amarillo is situated in a geographically strategic location. The City was established as the administrative center upon its founding in 1887. The first railroad freight services also arrived in 1887. Approximately two decades later, Amarillo became the fifth city in the nation to adopt a City Commission and City Manager form of local governance. Since 1913, Amarillo has developed as an economic hub, allowing it to become one of the largest urban areas in the Texas Panhandle. There are direct highway connections to Oklahoma City to the east, Denver to the north, and Albuquerque to the west. These links to multiple states and the larger region help support the local economy. Amarillo's community and decision-makers can continue to shape the direction of growth and build on the City's assets to strengthen its natural and built landscapes for future generations.

### Driving Industries

Since its founding in 1887, the City of Amarillo has been one of the top commercial centers for the Texas Panhandle. After it was established, Amarillo became a prime cattle marketing center and the hub for freight movement. Amarillo also became a hub for health and educational services with the establishment of St. Anthony's Hospital in 1901 and West Texas State College in 1910. Amarillo quickly became a key retail trade center for the Panhandle area, the State of Texas, and the surrounding multi-state area. By 1915, Amarillo began establishing itself as a natural resource hub. Gas and oil were both found in Amarillo, leading the community to add a zinc smelter, oil refineries, and oil-shipping facilities. In 1928 Amarillo established the United States Helium Plant, due to the high helium content near gas fields.

In 1942, the Amarillo Army Air Base was established, resulting in a sudden population spike. The base was in use for over twenty years. With the growth of large industries, Amarillo opened its international airport, increasing traffic from visitors and growing business opportunities. By the 1980's, the City's airport was serving five major airlines, and the Santa Fe and Burlington National railroads were serving the region. This Plan builds on the historic and existing industries in Amarillo and addresses opportunities to strengthen them while identifying new and burgeoning opportunities.

### Eras of Development

**Establishment Era** – Ellwood Park was established as Amarillo's first city park in the 1890s. In 1901, Amarillo opened the St. Anthony's Hospital, representing the first medical center in the Panhandle region. Positioning itself to become the region's leader in education and medicine, the City also founded West Texas State College in 1910. By this time, the City's population had reached almost 10,000 residents.

**Peak Development Era** – The largest population growth in Amarillo occurred between 1930 and 1960, when the Amarillo Army Air Base was established, and the international airport was opened. By 1960, many organizations and corporations moved their headquarters to Amarillo and the population reached over 130,000 residents. Population continued to increase in both Potter County and Randall County. By 1970, the Army Air Base was closed, and Amarillo's population decreased for the first time. Nevertheless, the community continued to build significant infrastructure, such as a municipal building, a civic center, and High Plains Baptist Hospital.

**Recent Growth** – Amarillo has experienced most of its slow but steady growth in recent years as greenfield single family and retail development to the southwest, an expansion of medical and professional services industries in the northwest and important economic anchors locating east near the airport and in Centerport Business Park. Downtown revitalization efforts around 2010 began to gain momentum while other core neighborhoods experienced decline and disinvestment proportional to new development in the southwest.

Amarillo is now facing growth concerns that it has never had to address before, reinforcing the need for the community to evaluate trends and plan for the future:

- The median home sale price exceeds the affordability level for the median household income.
- Economic Development recruitment successes will bring 4,000 jobs to the city in the next five years, more new jobs in a shorter period than the city has seen in decades.
- Amarillo Independent School District is losing population because of natural birthrate declines, creating challenges to retain schools that are vital community resources.





- Recent analyses of parks and public infrastructure illustrate inadequate funding for maintenance and operations. Much of this maintenance has been deferred for many years, and its cost is competing with growth and expansion for new development.
- Finally, the disparity between Potter and Randall Counties has never been greater, and with continued population decline in Potter, quality of life measures all continue downward trends as well.

## Coordination with Other Plans: Building From a Strong Foundation

City Plan builds upon prior planning initiatives and citizen engagement efforts, including the most recent Comprehensive Plan, neighborhood plans, Parks Master Plan, and more. These other plans provide critical context from which City Plan evolved, including changing trends, conditions, community visioning, challenges, barriers, goals, and strategic actions. Furthermore, understanding the implementation progress of these plans highlights both goals still to be addressed and opportunities to celebrate achievements.

The following plans represent those that directly influenced City Plan; additional information about these plans can be found in the Appendices. These plans are also publicly available on the respective jurisdictional websites:

- 2010 Amarillo Comprehensive Plan
- Neighborhood Plans
- Public Arts & Beautification Plan
- 2021 Parks & Recreation Master Plan
- Amarillo Metropolitan Planning Organization TIP & RTP documents
- 2019 Regional Multimodal Mobility Plan
- 2017 Align Amarillo Economic Development Strategic Plan
- 2019 Downtown Amarillo Strategic Action Plan
- Partnership for Development Progress Strategic Plan

A comprehensive plan is unique in that it takes a truly holistic view of the City, including objectives and recommendations across a broad spectrum of topics and considering all areas of the community. However, this precludes a certain level of specificity and focus – a gap that other topical or area plans fill. The following provides a snapshot of priorities and recommendations from Amarillo’s adopted plans that have informed the development of City Plan.

### Land Use, Neighborhoods & Job Centers

- Promote greater diversity in land use and establish higher-density mixed-use urban centers
- Continue to implement an enhanced conception of the Neighborhood Unit Concept
- Invest in the revitalization of older areas of Amarillo and protect economic anchors and investment areas
- Promote Amarillo as a City comprised of strong neighborhoods, providing adequate variety in housing options, amenities, and connectivity to employment and services
- Promote stability in older and/or underserved neighborhoods
- Infrastructure needs are underfunded, leading to deferred maintenance and implicating capacity challenges to accommodate future growth; pursue strategies to ensure long-term sustainability and appropriate contribution from new development activity

### Economic Development

- Grow economic development through support of applied education and workforce training, entrepreneurship, and agriculture and life science industries, downtown investment, activity, and vibrancy, and enhancement of Amarillo as a great place to live, work, and play

### Community Character

- Continue to cultivate and invest in Amarillo’s character, aesthetics, history, heritage, and identity



## Mobility

- Promote greater safety and comfort for all types of mobility, particularly along high-traffic corridors and intersections, and following priority bicycle, pedestrian, and transit routes outlined in the Regional Multimodal Plan; recent transportation investments (federal and local) have focused on expansion and realignment of major highways to increase capacity, Amarillo Blvd., E. 10th Ave., intersection improvements, and transit operations

## Parks & Cultural Resources

- Prioritize investment in existing community amenities, and add variety across Amarillo’s public space and park amenities, particularly to fill gaps in underserved areas
- Foster partnerships, collaboration, and innovation to promote tourism through art, entertainment, events, economic development, public space activation, and recreation.

## Implementation

- Continue to proactively and extensively engage with the Amarillo community to ensure that residents have opportunity to influence decisions and outcomes

## The Planning Process

An integral part of City Plan was to design and implement a robust engagement process that truly captured and reflected the community’s perspectives, concerns, needs, and desires, establishing a collective Vision for 2045. The City has never undertaken an engagement effort of this duration and magnitude. This comprehensive approach to engagement signifies a purposeful shift toward a more community-centric process. This section outlines the outreach efforts and community input that directly shaped this Plan. An expanded summary is available in the Appendices.

## City Plan Project Team

In collaboration with many partners, the City of Amarillo led efforts to create City Plan. The project team included City staff and a consultant team led by MIG, Inc. and also including Economic & Planning Systems (EPS), Clarion Associates, and Walter P. Moore. Together, this team managed the design and facilitation for engagement activities, events, and media throughout the City Plan development process.

In addition, the City Plan Steering Committee – a diverse collection of community members representing different districts and varying demographics within the City – met regularly throughout the planning process to provide input and feedback that directly shaped the Plan’s deliverables and outcomes. This group played a critical role as ambassadors and champions of City Plan.



## Engagement Process

The project team developed a Public Participation Plan that outlined numerous opportunities for residents, property owners, youth, the development community, business owners, and representatives to shape and provide feedback on City Plan. This engagement approach emphasized specific outreach activities aiming to incorporate the variety of viewpoints from the community, with a focus on ensuring ample opportunities for various demographic groups to participate and have a voice in the City Plan process. The process involved interacting with representative community members, actively reaching out to traditionally underrepresented groups, engaging residents from all areas of Amarillo, and gathering meaningful and actionable feedback from all engagement activities. The project team and Steering Committee dedicated significant effort to ensure that community input directly influenced and informed the Plan's outcomes so that participants could clearly see how their involvement and input shaped the concept, policies, and strategies recommended in City Plan.

City Plan's engagement strategy included a series of meetings, public events, small-group activities, stakeholder meetings, online and mobile engagement, and social media and email communications. A broad range of coordinated approaches and techniques were used to engage people during each phase, corresponding to each general phase of the Plan's development. Each phase included priority messaging and objectives for that portion of the planning process.

## Process Objectives

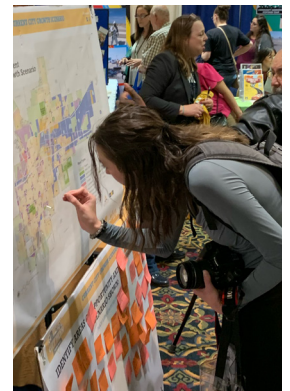
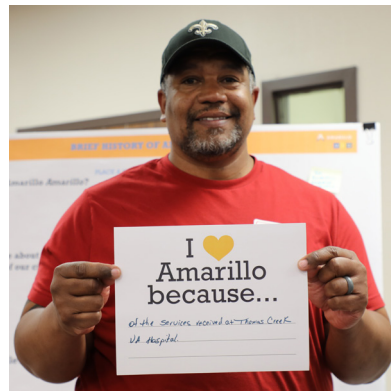
The following objectives guided the Plan's development and engagement process.

### Planning Objectives

- To foster excitement for City Plan
- To establish a vision and goal framework for the Plan
- To receive input on Growth Scenarios
- To educate the community on plan elements to be incorporated into City Plan
- To develop sound policy content upon which implementation strategies can be developed

## Engagement Objectives

- To educate the community on City Plan
- To foster excitement for City Plan
- To establish a community-based vision for the future of Amarillo
- To energize and inform the community about next steps
- To engage the community and solicit input on plan elements, growth scenarios, and overall City Plan recommendations
- To gain participation
- To listen
- To garner feedback
- To create advocates





# Engagement Impact Summary



103,380

Postcards Sent



500+

Poster and Print Materials



10+

Email Blasts and Newsletters



198,140

Social Media Impressions



6,841

Webpage Unique Views



7,456

Student Platform Views



6

Media Coverage Outlets



3,497

Survey Responses



6

Community Workshops



1

Virtual Community Workshop



9

Developers Meetings



4+

City Council Presentations



8

Steering Committee Meetings



16

Community Outreach Events



54+

Neighborhoods Represented



72

Draft Plan Comments

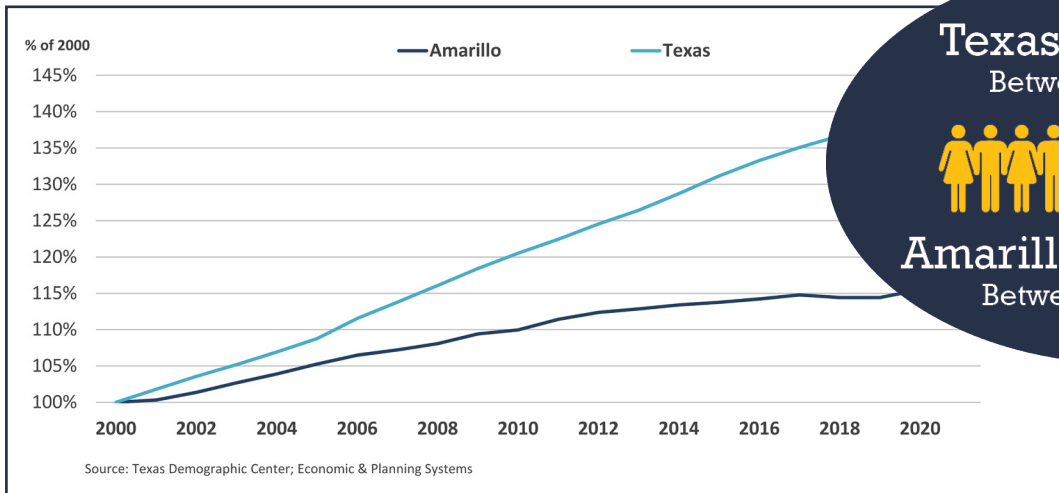
**OVER 4,000 ACTIVE COMMUNITY PARTICIPANTS & 31,000 ENGAGEMENTS**

Developers, Students, Realtors, Neighborhood Associations, Families, Teens, Community Organizations, Seniors, Business Leaders, School Administrators, Workforce, Residents, Property Owners

## Community Overview

The population of Amarillo has steadily grown over the past two decades, reaching a total of about 201,000 residents as of 2021. Between 2000 and 2021, Amarillo added nearly 27,000 residents, which represents a growth rate of 16 percent, or 0.7 percent annually. However, this is a significantly slower growth rate than Texas as a whole over this timeframe. The majority of growth has occurred in Randall County, particularly on the southwest side of Amarillo. With a citywide area of 105.13 square miles, Amarillo currently has a population density of about 1,912 people per square mile.

The population of Amarillo is primarily White (77%), with a sizeable population of Hispanic and Latino residents (34%). Amarillo has a strong labor force, with about half of the population of prime working age (25-64), and a 65+ senior population (16%) slightly higher than the state as a whole. The median annual household income is \$55,174 which is about \$10,000 lower than the state median, indicating a concentration of lower income households who call Amarillo home. About 16 percent of Amarillo's population lives below the poverty line.



**Texas: 41% Growth**  
Between 2000 to 2021

**Amarillo: 16% Growth**  
Between 2000 to 2021

**Healthcare is the top sector for wages and salary**



**Accommodation & Food Services is the top sector for employment growth**



Amarillo has a strong economy, with job creation roughly keeping pace with population growth over the last two decades. The economic base of the Amarillo metro area is diversified across several sectors, with the largest by wage and salary including health care, retail trade, manufacturing, accommodation and food services, and educational services. Accommodation and food services, construction, retail trade, and transportation and warehousing have experienced the most job growth over the last decade.





## How to Use This Plan

City Plan is a policy document that is meant to guide the changes the community wants to see. Through a new vision, best practices, and a general “carrot” vs. “stick” approach, it provides a path towards a better Amarillo, but measurable change will be dependent on the continued efforts and engagement by the community.

This Plan will be referenced and used by an array of audiences, each with different perspectives, technical or experiential knowledge, and objectives, for purposes such as:

**Residents** – To understand the future vision for Amarillo and how the City plans to achieve that vision. Residents hold City staff and elected officials accountable to the vision and goals adopted within this Plan and participate in its implementation.

### **Developers, Investors, and Business**

**Owners** – To understand the community’s goals and objectives, especially opportunities, needs, and parameters for how development should occur. These stakeholders help to achieve the community’s future vision within the private sector.

### **City Staff and Elected or Appointed**

**Officials** – To implement the actionable policies laid out in this Plan that will help the community achieve its future vision and goals and to ensure that future decisions are compatible and aligned with the Plan.

Although many audiences may refer to this document for a variety of reasons, this Plan serves primarily as a roadmap for City officials and staff, who must make decisions on a daily basis that will determine the future direction, health, and character of the community. These decisions are carried out through:

- Targeted programs and expenditures prioritized through the City’s annual budget process, including routine but essential functions such as code enforcement.
- Major public improvements and land acquisition financed through the City’s capital improvement program and related bond initiatives.

- New and amended City ordinances and regulations closely linked to the goals and policies of this Plan (and associated review and approval procedures in the case of land development, subdivisions, and zoning matters).
- Departmental work plans and staffing.
- Support for ongoing planning and studies that will further clarify vision/goals, needs, costs, benefits, and strategies.
- Pursuit of external grant funding to supplement local budgets and/or expedite certain projects.
- Initiatives pursued in conjunction with other public and private partners to leverage resources and achieve successes neither could accomplish on their own.

The following chapter illustrates the overarching framework for City Plan – its core components and how they work together to present a versatile and user-friendly guide for all anticipated and intended audiences.

