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City of Port Isabel  
Comprehensive Plan Workshop  
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Prepared by:  
Jill Francisco, Assistant City Manager

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### **WHAT IS A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?**

A comprehensive plan can be defined as an officially adopted, long-range plan used to guide or direct the growth and physical development of a community for an extended period of time. It can be considered a road map leading public decisions to the achievement of community goals. The Plan will guide policies relevant to diverse elements including but not limited to land use, transportation, public facilities & services, economic development, environment & natural resources and housing. The plan's directive is sustained by goals and objectives extracted from present conditions, the needs of the citizens, existing policy plans and future forecasts. A comprehensive plan should further represent a community's vision addressing desirable future development of a community. This vision is best constructed through a government and community consensus and it is required to be all encompassing in scope, general in nature and long-range in perspective. In the case of Port Isabel an extensive visioning process was just completed in 2005, this should serve as the basis for the comprehensive plan. Furthermore, in order to remain effective, a comprehensive plan will require periodic updating and revisions.

#### ***TEXAS LOCAL GOVERNMENT PROVISIONS***

Texas Local Government Code, Chapter 213 gives both general law and home-rule cities the authority to adopt a comprehensive plan and to define the content and design of the comprehensive plan. A comprehensive plan shall not constitute zoning regulations or establish zoning district boundaries. However, the plan may be used to coordinate and guide the establishment of development regulations. A municipality may define the relationship between its comprehensive plan and the development regulations; standards may also be provided in order to determine concurrency between the plan and the development regulations. A comprehensive plan may be adopted or amended by ordinance following a public hearing and review by the municipality's Planning commission or department. A municipality may also define the relationship between the plan and development regulations through revisions to the Charter or by ordinance

## *COMPARABLE COMMUNITIES*

Despite the fact that Texas law does not require communities to adopt a comprehensive plan, many municipalities throughout the state have realized what a profound result a master plan can have on the future of their community. Realistically, the comprehensive planning process is often more effective when the community or local public officials call for it, rather than when it is mandated by the state government. A few of the comparable Texas Gulf coastal communities that have chosen to adopt and follow comprehensive plans are Port Aransas (pop. 2,507), Rockport (pop. 7,950), Portland (pop. 14,000) and Galveston (pop. 59,700). The Town of South Padre Island is also working on the preparation of a Comprehensive Plan.

## **WHY PREPARE AND ADOPT A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?**

A comprehensive plan is one of the most important tools for managing the physical growth of a community. It allows government officials and taxpayers to have control on what, where and when funds are spent with common direction and long term purpose. Orderly development can help a community absorb population increases, provide for needed infrastructure enhancement and maintain or increase the quality of life while maximizing limited resources. Comprehensive planning coordinates the separate decisions of individual city officials, whereby individual projects are based on researched criteria as opposed to the reaction of day to day crises. Long-term planning will save the tax payer money by increasing the efficiency of decision making. For example, necessary drainage projects or funded landscaping enhancements can be planned accordingly with paving projects in order to achieve improvements most economically. Another potential benefit from a comprehensive plan is increased eligibility for available money. Most grant applications require that funds are allocated on projects or enhancements, concurrent with a municipality's comprehensive plan. Additionally, a comprehensive plan provides credible objectives that current and future elected officials inherently support, since the plan is created through, a joint effort between citizens and the government official's participation. Without a plan there is always the danger that each individual council or new staff members will disregard established projects, vision statements and/or community priorities created by costly studies dedicated citizen efforts or the tedious work of a previous administration. Finally, bond ratings are also influenced by the existence of a comprehensive plan. The city's bond rating will be improved if a well-written plan is implemented for the enhancement of the community.

## **WHY IS IT TIME TO PLAN IN PORT ISABEL?**

There are several indicators that identify when a community is ripe for comprehensive planning and Port Isabel is faced with more than one of them. The following are a few examples:

- ◆ **Major infrastructure investments are needed or discussed within the next 5 to 10 years -**
- ◆ **There has been a significant change in population -**
- ◆ **There has been a major increase or decrease in sales tax and/or property tax -**
- ◆ **The majority of a city staff and/or city council are new -**
- ◆ **There has been a loss of downtown businesses -**
- ◆ **A highway bypass or other major infrastructure investment is being proposed or built -**

## **THE COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING PROCESS**

### *DATA GATHERING AND ANALYSIS*

The first step of the comprehensive planning process is preparation of the community inventory or the "state of the community report," which analyzes and evaluates the current conditions of the community. Information included in the community inventory will reference the economy, the population, the physical environment, existing land use, traffic circulation, housing and public facilities. It is also necessary to obtain or create a base map which includes street as well as lot and blocks information, property lines and easements of record. Trends are established and projections are made according to the scope of the plan. The purpose of the community report is to establish and evaluate the condition of Port Isabel, note deficiencies and assess needs. The City of Port Isabel has an existing plan that was adopted in 2005. During this phase such plans should be identified and researched. The Comprehensive Plan will encompass all other categorical plans and provide a means for relating them to one another (concurrency). The Comprehensive Plan is not designed to replace existing studies, but should be used to compliment them and serve as a unified vision of the future of Port Isabel. Additional resources provided by organizations such as the U.S. Census Department, Texas Department of Transportation, Texas Park & Wildlife and the Texas General Land Office should also be consulted, as a well-written comprehensive plan must be developed in coordination with other state, regional and local government agencies.

### *FORMULATING COMMUNITY GOALS AND OBJECTIVES*

The goals or the "general needs" and the objectives or the "specific projects accomplishing the goals" will not only be developed by analyzing technical information and basic studies, but they will also reflect the local resident's needs. Therefore, this phase of comprehensive planning involves extensive community involvement by means of community workshops and surveys. The purpose of these meetings and surveys is to create a community consensus among all stakeholders which will establish recommendations for future development policy. All citizens, business owners and public officials are encouraged to actively participate and contribute personal viewpoints. Active participation during the comprehensive planning process will not only produce a better product in the end, but it will also ensure that the plan is implemented more effectively over time. The recommendations for future actions will be used to determine standards of service and the desired pattern of development, and this information will be used to form each element.

### *PREPARING THE PLAN*

The comprehensive plan must be based on the present and projected assets and needs of Port Isabel determined by the community inventory, combined with the goals and objectives established through a community consensus. It is not meant to be a wish list of civic improvements, but a broad-based blueprint used to help guide policy decisions regarding land use, infrastructure improvements, community enhancement, coastal preservation, emergency management and other development issues that are determined. The plan will be composed of several chapters, but they must form a single concurrent document.

### *ADOPTING THE PLAN*

Once the plan is completed, it is necessary for the preliminary product to be reviewed by several community entities. The City Commission, The Planning and Zoning Board, the Economic Development Corporation and city staff should extensively review the Plan for necessary revisions. Other community boards or committees are also encouraged to provide input. The document must then be available for public perusal as a public hearing is required prior to approval. Following this process the City is now able to establish, by ordinance, guidelines for adoption and future amendments of the Comprehensive Plan.

### *COMPREHENSIVE PLAN IMPLEMENTATION*

The implementation of an adopted plan is an ongoing task and it is also the most critical step of the comprehensive planning process. Once the plan has been adopted, the City's Boards, Committees and citizens will serve as the ambassadors of the Comprehensive Plan overseeing and monitoring ongoing and proposed project's concurrency with the plan. To better implement the Comprehensive Plan city officials also may choose to establish procedures for periodic revisions to the plan. They may opt to enhance or change development regulations for consistency with the provisions of the Comprehensive Plan. Additionally, a concurrency

management element or a capital improvement plan should be created and also adopted identifying funding sources, potential impact or user fees and public finance programs.