

CITY OF PORT ISABEL

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

PLANNING PERIOD 2005-2015

APRIL, 2005

A. 4. LAND USE

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The data, information, analysis, and recommendations presented herein are exclusively for planning and budgeting purposes and do not constitute engineering analysis or detailed cost estimates. Engineering for each of the recommended tasks are beyond the scope of these studies and should be performed in the customary fashion as projects are defined and implemented.

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A.4.1 INTRODUCTION

This Chapter of the Plan addresses the goals, objectives and policies for land use that are interrelated with other aspects of a master plan for the City. The data collected is analyzed and is the basis for the presentation of current land use and recommendations for future land use and development of the City. Future land use projections are presented and maps depicting the land use are also included in this Chapter.

A.4.2. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The formulation and maintenance of a clear statement of land use goals and objectives is critical in the development of a master plan for the City. A properly planned land use program will significantly reduce the possibility of conflicts in land use and facilitates integration of new developments into the Plan. The establishment of milestones for measuring progress in dealing with expected population growth is also important. Focusing efforts on such goals will enhance the City's ability to maintain a plausible program to meet its future needs. The City's goals and objectives are presented below:

A.4.2.1 Goals

- 1) Continue to support sound use of land by balancing man-made and natural environments making the most effective use of existing infrastructure.
- 2) Promote the development of urban land in a manner consistent with attracting residents, visitors, and desirable commercial investments, while at the same time conforming to desired land growth restrictions and goals.
- 3) Encourage and implement a promotional program utilizing local resources for the attraction of quality developments.

A.4.2.2. Objectives

- 1) Develop and implement a program designed to monitor, evaluate, and promote expedient use of existing resources through annexations and ordinances, such as zoning regulations.

- 2) Encourage development on existing lots utilizing existing resources in established neighborhoods and maintain ordinances for regulations of trash, abandoned vehicles and other nuisances in neighborhoods.
- 3) Define annexation plans with areas identified specific for commercial use in support of residential growth.

These objectives, which are in support of the goals defined above, should be incorporated into the City's Plan and implemented as an integral part of the Plan. Further, the Plan should be considered to be a general guide and be flexible. Periodic updates to the Land Use Chapter of the Plan should be made in order to ensure compliance with the City's ordinances and shifting growth patterns.

A.4.3. COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING STUDY AREA

The City limits of the City of Port Isabel are traversed by State Highway 100 on and east-west axis and State Highway 48 running north from Brownsville. The City's incorporated boundaries consist of a total of 41,906 square acres, including all water bodies. Without these water bodies, the City has a total of 6,443 square acres.

A.4.3.1 Extraterritorial Jurisdiction (ETJ)

When used in this section, the term Extraterritorial Jurisdiction (ETJ) means that area that is contiguous to the corporate boundaries of the municipality and that is located within one mile of those boundaries and does not include any area in the existing extraterritorial jurisdiction of another municipality, *for the purposes of annexation*.¹ For the purposes of clarification in issues *relating to subdivision of land*, the term Extraterritorial Jurisdiction (ETJ) will mean a municipality's area outside the municipal limits but within five miles of those limits.² The ETJ of the City of Port Isabel extends in varied distances due to its proximity to the City of South Padre Island, the City of Laguna Vista and the City of Brownsville's ETJ. In all cases, except Brownsville, the land use of the neighboring ETJ's is similar to that of the adjoining City of Port Isabel land.

¹ Texas Local Government Code § 42.021.

² Texas Local Government Code § 212.001.

A.4.3.2 Zoning and Subdivision Regulations

The City currently enjoys the benefit of both zoning and subdivision ordinances. These are important to help ensure that future development activities are consistent with local development objectives. Subdivision regulations have provided the City with control over development practices with both the City and the ETJ. A zoning ordinance is used to regulate the type of land use that can occur on specific pieces of land, generally for the protection of the public's health and safety. Zoning ordinances should not be passed or enforced without first adopting a Comprehensive Plan. Several ordinance updates and amendments have been made to the Zoning Ordinance of the City of Port Isabel. Although they do not present a hindrance to the present development activity, they are confusing and difficult to read and enforce. However, an update is warranted and is presented later in this Plan.

A.4.4. PREVIOUS LAND USE PLANS

Several land use plans have been developed for the City of Port Isabel. In 1984, the City commissioned in plan entitled the City of Port Isabel 1984 Comprehensive Community Profile. The study was conducted by Buchen Wells & Associates, Inc. and was funded by the City using Hotel/Motel Occupancy taxes. The intended purpose of the study was "...evaluate the existing Health Services, Demographics, Educational Facilities, Housing, Municipal and Emergency Services, Transportation, Quality of Life, Land Availability and Navigation...and is intended for the use as a reference source only."³ According to said study the City had a "...permanent population in excess of 5,000..." The study states that the average household was six and similarly estimated a population rate increase of 3.3 percent annually. The Study is a compilation of facts, but does not identify problems, needs or goals. It appears to be a good "Chamber of Commerce" document or fact sheet. It is in fact a city PROFILE.

On December 20, 1994, Hejl, Lee & Associates from Austin, Texas completed the City of Port Isabel Planning Study. Said study was funded by the Texas Department of

³ City of Port Isabel, Community Profile 1984.

Housing and Community Affairs, (this program is now administered by the Office of Rural Community Affairs, ORCA) in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development through provisions of a Texas Community Development Program Grant.⁴ This Study followed the basic forms, rules and requirements that are currently used by the ORCA. The Study however was limited to Basic Planning Activities which included, Base Mapping, Housing Inventory, Analysis and Plan, Population and Land Use Inventory, Analysis and Plan. It also included a Zoning Ordinance and a Subdivision Ordinance section.

The Study presented good quality base maps. No problems, needs or goals are stated with regard to land use. Although the section on Housing does offer some suggested goals, few, if any, of the suggestions mentioned were followed by the City. What is interesting in this Study is that very little was done to analysis the zoning and subdivision topics. In both cases, the Study simply copied the ordinances that existed and inserted them with little or no recommendation. As with the recommendations in the housing section, it appears the City failed to follow them. In essence, very little or nothing worthy was accomplished.

A.4.5. EXISTING LAND USE INVENTORY

An inventory of all the lands and their existing uses within the limits of the City of Port Isabel was conducted by **RICARDO GOMEZ & ASSOCIATES** during the latter part of 2004. All streets and roads were traveled and a visual inventory was taken. Land uses in the City were classified as being one of six major types including the following:

- | | |
|-----------------|--|
| 1) Agricultural | -cultivated and range land |
| 2) Residential | -single/multi-family conventional & manufactured homes |
| 3) Commercial | -retail and service oriented businesses |
| 4) Industrial | -light and/or heavy industry or manufacturing |

⁴ City of Port Isabel Planning Study, 1994.

- 5) Vacant -undeveloped parcels within the City limits
- 6) Public & Semi-Public -schools, public buildings, churches and Parks
- 7) Water/Waterways -Bay and water channels

The estimated total area of existing land use within the corporate limits of the City for each category of land use is summarized in Table A.4.1 below.

TABLE A-4-1		
2004 Existing Land Use for City Zones used in Study		
Type of Use	Estimated Acres	Percent of City Land
Agricultural	4,933.00	11.77%
Residential	243.87	0.58%
Commercial	81.31	0.19%
Industrial	62.87	0.15%
Vacant	182.01	0.43%
Public & Semi-Public	569.00	1.36%
Waterways/Street ROW's	35,833.94	85.52%
TOTAL	41,906.00	100%

A. 4.5. LAND USE DESCRIPTIONS

This section provides descriptive details pertaining to each of the categories presented in the previous section. The total acreage within the City limits is approximately 41,906 acres. Approximately 40,396 of the total acres are undeveloped and 1,150 are developed. However, of the 40,396, 4,933 acres are land and the difference is water. The total land acreage is approximately 6,083. These areas represent an even allocation between developed and undeveloped land inside the City limits. The undeveloped lands include mainly vacant and agricultural lands. The developed lands include residential, commercial, industrial, and public/semi-public areas.

A.4.5.1 Agricultural

The largest single land use category is Agricultural. This area consists of 11.78% (4,933 acres) of the total acreage. Since this acreage is interspersed throughout the City, some of the portions surrounding the more developed areas are suited for use as new developments. Some of the areas however, are not as

readily accessible to utilities therefore their development may be further in the future.

A.4.5.2. Residential

Residential land use is approximately .58% (243.87 acres) of the total area. This category consists of occupied lots and small tracts of land. Most of the vacant lots in this category are in close proximity to utilities and are readily available for development.

A.4.5.3 Commercial

Approximately .19% (81.31 acres) of the land was identified as commercial.

A.4.5.4 Industrial

The industrial category constitutes approximately 0.15% (62.87 acres) of the total land area. Most of this area is located in the Navigation District area, while some is found along the ship channel on South Shore Drive.

A.4.5.5 Vacant

Vacant lots consist of 0.43% (182 acres) of the total land. Most of this land area is located in the residential areas of the City. The remainder is located in commercial areas and most of the land has existing utilities which would make the lots easy to develop.

A.4.5.6 Public and Semi-Public

Public and Semi-Public lands include all City, School, Water District, etc, and identifiable churches. The total area in this category is 1.36% (569 acres).

Map A.4.1. Existing Land Use Map depicts the existing land use of all lands located in the City of Port Isabel as per visual drive-by survey conducted in November, 2004.

A.4.6. POPULATION DENSITY

The estimated population of the City of Port Isabel is 5,319.⁵ The 2000 population was 4,865 as per the U.S. Census. For every 100 persons within the City

⁵ See Chapter 3, Population

Limits, 114.36 acres exist, based on 6,083 approximate land acres. In comparison, Cameron County’s population of 335,227 yields approximately 221.3 acres for every 100 persons, based on Cameron County’s 741,760 acres. As mentioned in the previously Chapter, **Map A.3**, shows the existing and projected population distribution for the City.

In order to evaluate the City’s land use distribution, a representative “ideal use” model as defined in Table A-4-2 was used.⁶

TABLE A-4-2 Standard Planning Model—Estimated Land Use Requirements ⁶	
Category	Acres Per 100 Persons
Residential (Single and Multi-Family)	12.3
Commercial	0.8
Industrial	3.0
Public & Semi-Public & Streets	16.0
Agricultural	n/a
Total Developed acres/100 persons	32.1

Table A-4-3 lists the City’s current land use and its distribution. Since the vacant land is mostly ready for development, it was included in the “Residential” category. Table A-4-4 makes a comparative presentation of the model value, 4.58 acres/100 persons verses 12.3 acres/100 people. However, the remaining four categories show substantial differences between the base “ideal model” and the current distribution. The shortfall in the non-residential categories is sufficient that even including “vacant” land as Residential; the total developed land is still nearly 14/100 persons short of the model.

The development of land use ratios are complex and are affected by many factors. Adjustments to the above “model” values are developed in the following sections.

⁶ Land Use in American Cities, Harland Bartholomew

TABLE A-4-3 Existing Land Use Acreage			
Category	Area in Acres	Acres/100 Persons	% of Total
Residential	243.87	4.58	4.1%
Commercial	81.31	1.53	1.4%
Industrial	62.87	1.18	1.1%
Public & Semi-Public	569	10.70	9.7%
Agricultural (Undeveloped)	4933	92.74	83.75%
Sub-Total Developed Acres	957.05	17.99	16.25%
Total Acres (excludes water)	5890.05	110.74	100%

TABLE A-4-4 City versus Standard Planning Model (Acres/100 persons)		
Category	Standard Model	City of Port Isabel
Residential	12.0	4.58
Commercial	0.8	1.53
Industrial	3.0	1.18
Public & Semi-Public	7.0	10.70
Agricultural	n/a	n/a
Total Developed Acres/100 Persons	32.1	17.99

A.4.7. INFLUENCES AFFECTING LAND USE

A.4.7.1. Population

A driving force behind the development of residential areas is population. The City of Port Isabel currently has approximately 1,803 occupied dwelling units. Based on the City's estimated vacant lot count of 329, it may be possible to accommodate the addition of approximately 971 persons assuming the proper development of these lots, based on the 2000 Census average household size of 2.95. This is based on 329 vacant lots x 2.95 persons per household = 971 persons. Using expected growth patterns, this

availability would provide sufficient capacity for population growth through the year 2015. Since this is a logical use for the vacant lots, their remaining in the residential category is a reasonable expectation.

Areas for multi-family dwellings could provide for additional population if some of the existing vacant lots were used for this type of development. Multi-family dwellings can be used to leverage housing capacity as the City plans for orderly growth. Land for housing use is plentiful for current development but limited for future growth.

A.4.7.2 Existing Land Use

Existing land uses is the largest influential factor for the land development of the City, because future growth is typically a copy or an extension of the current use. The City should use its Zoning Ordinance police powers more convincingly. It appears that some decisions on development are made as a direct result of influential personal pressures as opposed to sound planning principles. Zoning changes are sometimes necessary to accommodate an unusual use, but changes should not be made simply to accommodate one particular individual. If necessary, usually these changes can still be accomplished through the use of a Planned Unit Development District.

Existing land use has typically been more of a business and residential development. This is true of many communities and the trend will probably continue in Port Isabel. Although industrial development has increased substantially in the past few years, it has been within the Navigation District, which is a separate public entity in itself and thus the City does not benefit from its potential tax windfall.

A.4.7.3. Thoroughfares

The local thoroughfares provide the traffic flow through the community and the access to property, therefore, the thoroughfare network will affect the pattern and types of land use in the City. The City has basically only one major thoroughfare which is State Highway 100. It bisects the City from west to east. Highway 48 is another major thoroughfare in the City, although not an urban thoroughfare in Port Isabel because it dead-ends with Highway 100. It plays an integral part in the economics of the City because it brings visitors to the City from Brownsville and from northern Mexico.

A.4.7.4. Utilities

The availability of utilities is a major factor that determines land use development. Without adequate waste and sewer utilities, land development is not possible. The City is serviced with water and sewer services by the Laguna Madre Water District (LMWD). The District has taken a lead role in providing all necessary utility service for the City and appears to be in a position to serve the City for years to come in the future.⁷

A. 4.7.5. Public Facilities

Public facilities are seen by potential developers as the key ingredient for possible developments. The City offers adequate public facilities such as a good City Hall with an ample meeting room, a good Police Department and Fire Department, nice parks, a good Library and Community Center and exceptional public museums. The anticipated construction of a new Civic or Community Center will further enhance the City.

A.4.7.6. Storm Drainage

The City is currently listed in the FEMA data base under Community Panel Number 480109-0001 B. The most recent revision is dated June 1, 1983. Most of the “Old Town Site” area, from South Shore Drive to North Shore Drive, from the bay to Port Isabel Ship Channel is located within Zone B, with a few small areas in Zone C. All of the “Fingers” areas is located in Zone A6. Most of the “Derry” area is located in Zone B except for the northernmost part and the area just north of the present Wal-Mart Super-center site which is in Zone A6. The largest area with a Zone C designation is the area south of the Fingers towards the Navigation District. The rest of the City is currently not zoned.

The explanation of Zone Designations found in Port Isabel is as follows:

Flood-Zone A Areas of 100-year flood; base flood elevations and flood hazard factors not determined.

Flood-Zone B Areas between limits of the 100-year flood and 500-year flood; or certain areas subject to 100-year flooding with average depths less than one (1) foot or where the

⁷ Per personal interview with Mr. Guillermo “Memo” Perez, Interim Director, LMWD, January, 2005.

contributing drainage area is less than one square mile; or areas protected by levees from the base flood.

Flood-Zone C Areas of undetermined, but possible, flood hazards.

Flood-Zone A1-A30 Areas of 100-year flood; base flood elevations and flood hazard factors determined.

A.4.7.7. Soils

Soils in Port Isabel are of the Sejita-Lomalta-Barrada association which are sandy and clay soils of level slopes, poorly drained clays and silty clay loams. These soils exhibit a wide variety of characteristics and limitations to construction and urban development; however, the effect on the general type of land use is minimal.⁸ The soils on the areas located in South Padre Island are generally classified as Mustang-Coastal dunes associations: Nearly level to steep, poorly drained fine sands and sand dunes.⁷

A.4.8. LAND USE PLANNING PRINCIPLES AND PROCESSES

For many cities, most recent residential and commercial growth occurs in a fairly disorganized manner. These often develop in the form of suburban clusters of residences and shopping centers spread out over a wide area on the fringes of existing older urban centers. Such development typically places a burden on a community's infrastructure, including transportation systems, water and sewer facilities. This type of development process is undesirable in that it also places land in non-optimal uses and overtakes valuable open space, sometimes resulting in lower property values. The should not experience the kind of growth that will result from rapid disorganized sprawl because of the obvious physical constrains, such as the bays and limited developmental land. Nevertheless, the growth that is expected should be planned to be the extent possible by adherence to a plan of carefully selected areas in order to develop the proper growth of these lands. As such, the City should consider setting goals and objectives. The following principles are considered applicable to the proper designation of land for residential use:

- 1) Residential land should be well drained and free from danger of floods.

⁸ General Soil Map, Cameron County, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service.

- 2) Residential land should be readily accessible from, but not necessarily facing, arterial streets.
- 3) Residential land should be free from the danger of encroaching incompatible land uses.
- 4) Residences should be within easy reach of such community facilities as parks, schools, playgrounds and commercial serving everyday needs.

The land use principles for public and semi-public uses, such as municipal buildings and schools, are similar to those listed for residential use.

Since few commercial areas are likely to develop as support for the residential developments, factors relating to the designation of land for commercial land uses should also be considered:

- 1) Commercial areas must be central to the population they serve.
- 2) Commercial areas should be limited and compact to minimize walking distances within.
- 3) Commercial areas must allow for safe pedestrian circulation in coordination with vehicular circulation.
- 4) Commercial areas must blend with the surrounding environment providing aesthetic transitions to adjacent land uses.
- 5) Commercial activities should be consolidated into a few well organized areas to take maximum advantage of utilities and services.
- 6) Adequate off-street parking and access should be utilized for commercial areas to decrease potential congestion and safety hazards.
- 7) Avoid commercial growth on both sides of heavily traveled streets unless traffic control can be provided.

Industrial activity normally develop in, or adjacent to, build-up areas where labor, utilities, transportation facilities and fire and police protection are most readily available. Although these resources are readily available in the City, the growth in industrial use is slow.

In order to formulate, adopt and implement a plan that accomplishes the overall goals and objectives, it is important to incorporate certain basic planning principles and process into future land use planning. The Future Land Use Plan expresses projections

that are based on objective principles, recognizing any supporting existing uses, community facilities, population estimates, budget constraints and physical features. The Plan should incorporate the community's vision for growth and quality of life. Existing land uses, existing structures, competing market areas, transportation patterns and natural or physical limitations all combine to affect the Plan and its realization. The needs addressed by the Future Land Use Plan reflect an evaluation of past needs and current trends, as well as the assumption that the City will grow in patterns predicated on those needs and trends. It is important to note the Future Land Use Plan is intended as a guide to organize the growth of the City and it should be guided and adjusted to conform to the affects of the following:

- 1) Existing land use characteristics.
- 2) Existing infrastructure, including streets, water, wastewater, and drainage.
- 3) Economic history and future.
- 4) Recognized planning principles.

Using the aforementioned principles and processes will establish a metric from which to evaluate the performance of the City's land use objectives as it grows.

A.4.9 LAND USE PLAN

Future land use requirements are based on population projections and the application of the principals presented in this Chapter. Broad goals for land uses and objectives are required planning elements. The following goals and objectives are proposed.

A.4.9.1 Land Use Development Goals

- 1) Sound development of local land resources required to achieve a balance between manmade and natural environments.
- 2) Continued development of community needs, retaining the community's character and scale.
- 3) Ultimate development of urban uses in a compatible arrangement which will make the community attractive to residents and visitors.

A.4.9.2. Land Use Objectives

- 1) Develop a local capacity to evaluate and promote sound development in the community.

- 2) Promote development standards and guidelines to minimize poorly planned subdivisions and to improve local resource utilization in a compatible land use relationship.
- 3) Coordinate with area-wide City, County, and State agencies which deal with land and resource utilization to eliminate substandard developments in the extra-territorial jurisdiction and to improve existing substandard areas.

A.4.9.3. Short Term Objectives

- 1) 1) Establish a planning process as routine municipal planning function.
- 2) Review current and past planning studies and evaluate and analysis efforts made to achieve stated goals and objectives.
- 3) Enforce existing Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances.
- 4) Make strict review of proposed subdivisions and ensure total compliance.

As mentioned earlier in this Chapter, **Map A.4.1. Existing Land Use Map**, depicts the land uses identified in the Study. **Map A.4.2. Future Land Use Map**, depicts the Consultants recommended land uses for the future. This future land use map should be used throughout the planning period of this Study as it becomes the guide for the City's future development growth.