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WHAT IS THE LAND USE PLAN?

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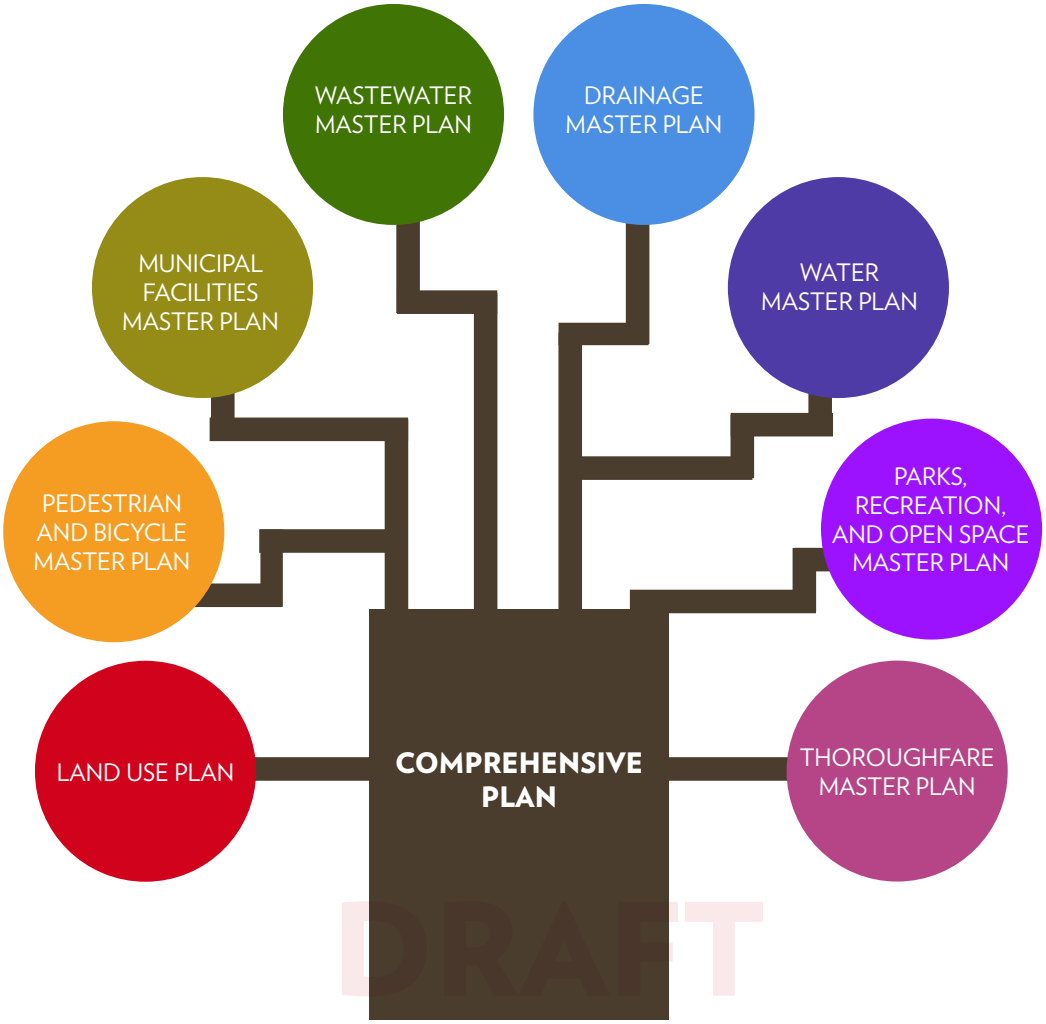
The Land Use Plan is one of the City's eight official master plans and a component of the City's Comprehensive Plan. The City of Sugar Land updates all of its Master Plans regularly, evaluating them annually and typically completing updates within a five to ten-year period. Though the Future Land Use Map was last updated in 2012, the remainder of the Land Use Plan was last updated in 2004. The Plan is intended to guide the development and redevelopment of Sugar Land into the future. The Land Use Plan outlines policy direction and guidance for making land use decisions and reaching the City's long-term vision. The Land Use Plan furthers the overall Vision 2025 and Goals, A-K, as adopted in the Comprehensive Plan in 2012. The Land Use Plan is a high level document that lays out the city's preferences for development. It sets out a vision and goals for the city and outlines actions that will achieve those goals. It does not adopt development ordinances, revise zoning maps, or approve specific developments. However, state law requires that the City adopt a Comprehensive Plan in order to have zoning. Changes to development ordinances will require additional public input and separate processes that will include review and approval by the Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council. Instead, this document provides guidance that the City Council, Planning and Zoning Commission, and city staff will use to ensure that the city's land use decisions work together to achieve the overall vision for the city.

Figure 1: Relationship of Master Plans to Comprehensive Plan



What is Land Use?

Land use makes up the basic structure of the city: what kinds of homes, businesses, institutions, and amenities the city has, the form they take, and where they are located relative to each other.

Land use shapes the everyday lives of the residents of Sugar Land. It determines the kinds of places in which they can live, the kinds of jobs they will find in the city, and where they can shop and eat. Land use creates a sense of place and gives our community a unique character. It also determines how far people must travel to accomplish their daily activities, and what choices are available in how to get there.

Figure 2: Land Use

How to Use the Land Use Plan

The Land Use Plan is not a series of regulations; this guiding document should be understood holistically. The overall intent of the Plan is as important as the individual words. The different goals and action items are complementary and supportive of the overall vision. In many cases, different recommendations intertwine to create a livable city. For example, the land uses proposed here only make sense if the public spaces and transportation measures also proposed are implemented with them. Thus, no individual recommendation can be isolated from the rest of the Plan recommendations without understanding the broader context.

Purpose of the Land Use Plan

The purpose of the Land Use Plan is to document the vision and policies that are shaped by community preferences and values, which guide the land use-related decisions made by private property owners and the City.

Free Market Influences Land Use

The majority of land uses in the city – residences, retail, and employment – are privately owned. Individual property owners make decisions on when and how to develop property, who to sell or rent to, and how to maintain buildings. All of these decisions are made in the context of a free market shaped by the residents of Sugar Land and the surrounding area. These residents decide where to live and how much to pay, where to spend money, and where to work. Their collective decisions drive the market which determines if new development is economically viable. Regardless of what this Plan may envision, no development will happen in the city unless the property owner concludes it makes economic sense.

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Land Use Affects City Revenues and Expenditures

Land use planning influences the quality of life for the City's residents because it shapes the economics of city government. A municipal budget is set by two things: the revenues the city collects and the cost of providing services. Both are shaped by land use. Providing high quality services and ensuring well maintained infrastructure at a low tax rate depends on balanced land uses and a vibrant local economy.

Nearly half of the City's general fund revenue comes from sales tax which is generated by commercial properties. Therefore having places to eat, shop and do business within the City provides opportunities for residents and visitors to spend their money in the City, which in turn generates city revenue. Another quarter of the City's general fund revenue comes from property taxes. Different land uses vary dramatically in taxable value and therefore generate varying levels of revenue for the City. The revenue generated by the taxes on a single-family house is generally less than that by office or commercial properties. Similarly, a multi-story office building would likely produce a higher taxable value than a single-story office. For example, Sugar Land Town Square has the highest value per acre in the City: over ten times the City average taxable value per acre.

Providing high quality services and ensuring well maintained infrastructure at a low tax rate depends on a vibrant local economy.

Land use decisions impact the cost of providing city services. Public safety – police, fire and EMS – accounts for approximately half of the City's general fund budget, which is mainly supported by tax dollars. Different land uses have different needs for public safety services. Moreover, the arrangement of uses across the city can impact public safety costs. Public Works makes up approximately 10% of the budget; while many of the city roadways were originally built by developers, the City is responsible for creating additional capacity, maintaining, rehabilitating, and even

Figure 3: City of Sugar Land FY17 General Fund Revenues and Expenditures

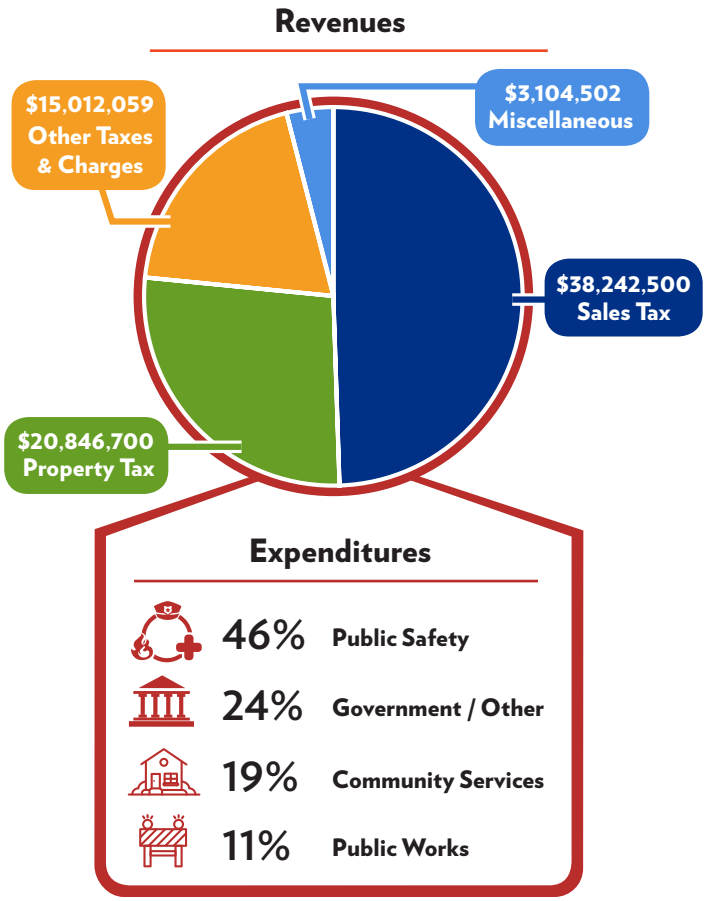
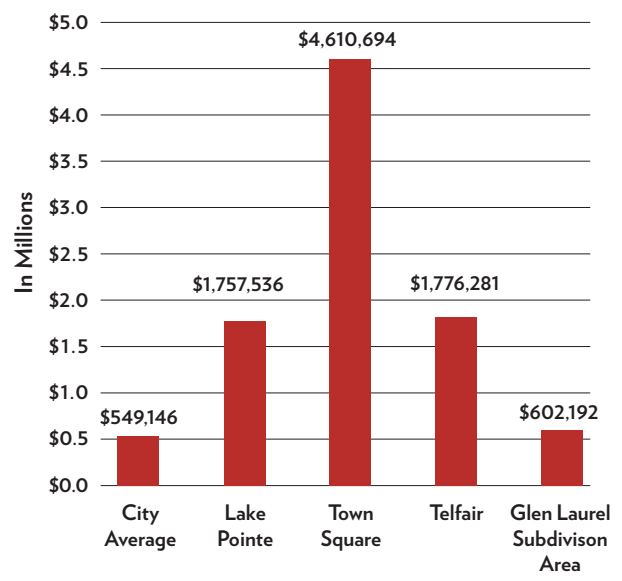


Figure 4: 2016 Taxable Value Per Acre



Source: Fort Bend Central Appraisal District

Sugar Land Town Square has the highest value per acre in the City: over ten times the City average taxable value per acre.

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eventually reconstructing existing roadways. The more roads the city has, the higher the City's maintenance costs. Land uses that generate many trips, and thus require wider roads, increase the demands on the City's budget. But for many local roads, access is more important than capacity – a neighborhood street must be maintained even if only a few dozen cars use it each day. Typically, lower density land uses require more roadway per resident. Community Services, including parks maintenance, facility maintenance, animal services and code enforcement, makes up another 19% of the budget. These expenses, too, are driven by land use decisions. Building more city parks, for example, increases both construction and maintenance; so new parks add value, but also increase costs. Development regulations can drive enforcement costs; lower quality buildings, or land uses that decline over time, will require more enforcement effort later.

Land Use Has Long-Term Impacts

It is important to realize that land use decisions have long term impacts. Decisions made on the size, form, type, and quality of development all drive later costs. Thus, every new development creates long-term commitments for the City. A development which seems like an asset at first – with immediate tax revenue – can be a long term liability as those costs come due. Land use requires thinking about long-term finances, not just short-term ones. The right land use mix will create a sustainable tax base long-term and help maintain or reduce costs, allowing the city to provide a high quality of services at a low tax rate.

City Decisions Shape Land Use

The City plays a significant role in shaping land use in a number of ways. City ordinances determine what uses are permitted where, and how much can be developed on each parcel. City services like water, sewer, storm water, and solid waste collection are essential to development. The City plans and maintains a transportation network that determines the feasibility and attractiveness of development. Other City services, like parks and community centers, make the city more attractive to live in and thus support residential development. In some cases, the City may give tax incentives or subsidies for a particular development that, for example, brings primary jobs into the community. This Land Use Plan is intended to guide all of these City decisions.

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