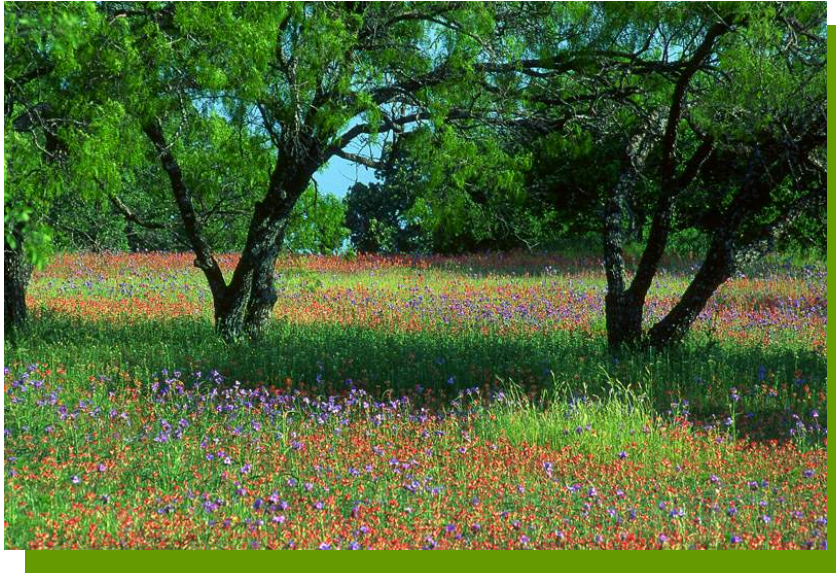


ROCKWALL COUNTY, TEXAS

OPEN SPACE GOALS AND FINANCE ASSESSMENT



Prepared by:
The Trust for Public Land
Conservation Vision Program



In cooperation and consultation with:
The North Central Texas Council of Governments



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Executive Summary

The Trust for Public Land (TPL) conserves land for people to improve the quality of life in our communities and protect our natural and historic resources. Founded in 1972, TPL works to protect land to enjoy as parks, gardens, playgrounds, greenways, recreation areas, historic buildings, archaeological sites and wilderness areas. To date, TPL has helped protect over 3,300 properties, totaling more than two million acres with a fair market value of more than \$5 billion in all 50 states.

TPL was engaged to perform an Open Space Goal and Finance Assessment for Rockwall County, Texas. This assessment utilized a variety of tools to uncover current trends and attitudes with regard to citizen priorities and level of support for open space conservation within the county.

The goal of this project was to assess priorities, opportunities, and strategies for open space and natural resource protection. This was a collaborative effort, involving active participation by County staff, North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) staff, TPL, and the citizens of Rockwall County. The information gained from this effort will assist the county as it moves forward with developing goals and financing options for open space protection.

While the majority of cities and towns within the county all have parks and trails and recreation programs of some kind, there is a general need for enhanced coordination of these open space planning efforts at the county level. Analysis of the various plans and policies of the municipalities within the county revealed issues similar to those identified at the public workshop, including pedestrian access and trails, connectivity of those trails, and the development of new parks and open spaces in the region.

The public surveys and workshop revealed a desire among residents to protect open space in order to protect water resources. Protecting drinking water sources and floodplain are among the most pressing issues in Rockwall County, in addition to creating new parks, trails and ensuring trail-community connectivity.

Through our participatory workshop, the citizens of Rockwall County specifically identified several goals for protecting open space in their county. These include:

- Create New Parks
- Provide Recreational Trails and Enhance Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety
- Provide Recreational Opportunities/Activities
- Preserve Farms and Farmland
- Preserve Water Resources
- Protect Cultural Resources
- Preserve Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat
- Enhance Our Community

Our research identified the finance mechanisms most commonly and successfully utilized by counties to secure funding for land acquisition and open space protection in Texas: general obligation bonds and property tax measures. Initial support for a conservation bond referendum in Rockwall County was not strong enough to recommend proceeding with a ballot measure at this time. However, once county voters surveyed were provided with specific information about where the bond funds would go (to protect open spaces, water resources, and enhance parks), their support for such a ballot measure increased dramatically.

Given that planning for the county is occurring within multiple jurisdictions with little coordination of those efforts, and given the strong desire of Rockwall County residents to see open their space goals addressed, three direct recommendations have resulted from the assessment process.

1. *Enhance County-wide Open Space Planning Efforts*
2. *Educate the Public about the Benefits of Open Space Protection*
3. *Explore Existing and New Sources of Funding to Create Additional Parks and Trails in Rockwall County*

In conclusion, Rockwall County is poised to achieve its goal of enhanced greenspace protection, improving its green infrastructure, and ensuring a livable and desirable community for many generations to come. The citizens have voiced their support and interest in protecting a variety of key natural resources, open spaces, parks and trails and are willing and able to help guide the county toward this pursuit. Rockwall County will have future successes with improved public education about the values of protecting natural resources, cultural resources, and parklands. These successes will help ensure that the strong sense of community that ties and draws residents to this unique area is preserved.

Current Conditions Report

Introduction

In the fall of 2007, The Rockwall County Commissioners Court approached NCTCOG about providing assistance with the open space needs of the fast growing county. The Commissioners Court was interested in protecting natural areas and creating connected trail corridors between the cities in Rockwall County.

To begin to determine what the open space priorities are for Rockwall County, relevant background information related to conservation priorities has been gathered and examined in this report. This background is described as “current conditions.” A description of the current conditions within Rockwall County, with emphasis on demographics, land use, water, previous planning and public attitudes towards land conservation is included. This entails providing background on city and county parks and trails, and providing an inventory and description of major local and county planning documents to explain the role open space and associated development regulations can and could plan the landscape in Rockwall County.

Additionally, findings from two surveys of Rockwall County residents are included. The first was a professionally administered, statistically valid telephone survey of Rockwall County voters. The second was a more qualitative online survey and incorporated phone interviews conducted with local stakeholders. Participants in the online survey included elected officials, city employees, and citizens from the following communities in Rockwall County: City of Rockwall, Heath, Wylie, Royse, Rowlett, McLendon-Chisholm and Fate. For a complete list of online survey interviewees/participants, please see Appendix A.

Finally, a public workshop was held to solicit the input and participation of the citizens of Rockwall in order to identify the primary goals for open space preservation and resource protection in the county. Over 40 interested citizens attended the workshop to voice their opinions and participate in setting open space priorities for the county.

The People of Rockwall

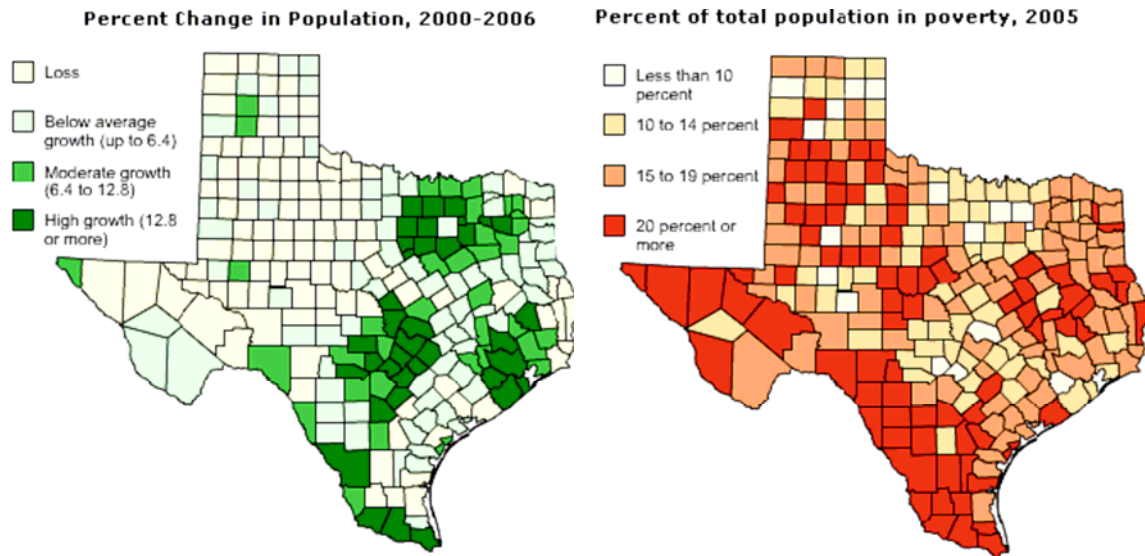
After the construction of Lake Ray Hubbard in 1964, the county’s population began to grow and Rockwall County became a bedroom community for the continuously growing Dallas Metropolitan area. Many newcomers moved to Rockwall County for the more rural pace and setting.¹

Today, Rockwall County is one of the fastest growing counties in Texas. Between 2000-2007 it was ranked the third fastest growing county in the United States and the fastest in Texas.² Rockwall is located in north central Texas, and is part of the Dallas Primary Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). The population increased 68 percent between the 1990 and 2000 Census years and has grown another 59 percent between 2000 and 2007. The 2008

¹ NBC News: Urban flight creates ‘rural rebound’ – Millions trade city life for the country’s wide open spaces – <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/7350590/>

² Dallas Morning News, March 20, 2008 – “Dallas-Fort Worth area population growth cools a bit but still steady” - http://www.flower-mound.com/econdev/articles/dfw_population.pdf

population is estimated to be 76,000.³ With the population explosion, the county's full property tax base valuation has also increased substantially, averaging a 12 percent growth rate annually for the last five years. In fiscal year 2007, the tax base grew 15.4 percent reaching a sizable \$5.6 billion. County officials estimate that similar growth will continue considering ongoing new construction of single-family homes, retail centers, and warehouses.



Population Growth in Rockwall County

Population	2000	2007	2008	% Change 2000 - 2008
Rockwall County	43,080	73,500	76,000	76%
Fate	463	4,200	4,800	937%
Heath	4,149	6,350	6,650	60%
McLendon-Chisholm	914	1,550	1,600	75%
City of Rockwall	17,976	30,750	31,400	75%
City of Royse*	2,957	9,300	10,100	242%
Remainder of County	9,432	14,550	14,950	59%
Split Cities**	7,189	6,800	6,500	-10%

Source: NCTCOG 2007 and 2008 Estimates and 2000 U.S. Census

** Represent cities with partial boundary in another county.

³ NCTCOG estimates

2030 Demographic Forecast: Rockwall County				
	2000	2010	2020	2030
Population	42,492	78,162	118,546	144,976
Households	14,530	27,152	41,525	50,793
Employment	17,025	22,980	29,007	48,466
*NCTCOG estimate adjusted from 2000 Census count. Does not include group quarters.				

According to a March 27, 2008 Census Bureau report, more people moved to Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area than to any other metropolitan area in the United States in the 2006-2007 period.⁴ Housing construction has reached record highs. Growth has been so dramatic that in Wylie in 2006, for example, a new home was built every ten (10) hours.⁵

Commuting patterns contribute partially to the traffic congestion between Rockwall County and Dallas. In 2000, approximately 64 percent of employed Rockwall County residents had more than a 20-minute commute to work, suggesting that they were not working locally. Of those, 30 percent were traveling between 40 to 60 minutes.⁶

Geography & Land Use

Rockwall is the smallest county in Texas with just 148.7 square miles, of which twenty is covered by water. Collin County to the north is 886 square miles and Dallas County to the west is 880 square miles. Hunt County is located to the east, and Kaufman County is southeast.

While trying to dig water wells in 1851, settlers discovered an underground rock wall. Because of its man-made appearance, there has been much discussion about how the wall came into existence. Settlers believed it was a man-made barrier defining territory. Geologists believe it is the result of weather sand dikes formed along the Balcones fault line. There is still evidence of the rock wall system, which outcrops at several points within the county.⁷ Whether manmade or natural, this discovery gave the county its name.

Rockwall County was once a predominately agricultural area. Today the area is much more urbanized, especially compared to its neighbors north. Agricultural activities that remain include heavy row crop cultivation. Along the creeks and river there are hard and softwood trees, some of which include elm, oak, mesquite, and pecan.⁸ There are a few native grass hay meadows, but most of the pastureland is in bermuda, clover, or Johnsongrass. All parts of the county are well watered by springs and small lakes.

Prior to 1970, the area did not have a large, navigable body of water. At that time the East Fork of the Trinity River, which runs north to south along the western border of the county,

⁴ http://money.cnn.com/2008/03/26/real_estate/Metropolitan_Population/index.htm?cnn=yes

⁵ <http://www.wylietexas.gov/> - Fast Facts.

⁶ Heath Comprehensive Plan, p. 1-12 and 1-13

⁷ From the City of Rockwall webpage.

⁸ *Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. "," <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/RR/hcr10.html>

was dammed to form Lake Ray Hubbard. Except for a small section of the northeastern part of the county, which drains into the Sabine Creek, all streams empty into the East Fork.

The region is home to several federally listed threatened and endangered species. These include the Piping Plover, Whooping Crane and red wolf. Those proposed for federally delisting as a result of population comebacks include the Peregrine Falcon, American Peregrine Falcon, and Bald Eagle. In addition, there are several species that are threatened in the state of Texas and have habitats that cover parts of Rockwall County. These are the Texas horned lizard, alligator snapping turtle, timber/canebrake rattlesnake, White-faced Ibis, and the Wood Stork.⁹

Water Supply & Water Quality

Rockwall County gets its drinking water through the North Texas Municipal Water District (NTMWD). Rockwall City, Royse City, and Wylie City are all members of the NTMWD. The water utility districts within Rockwall County all receive treated water from NTMWD, which is supplied by the following sources: Lavon Lake, Lake Texoma, Jim Chapman Lake, Lake Tawakoni, and the East Fork Raw Water Supply Project. All supplies are piped into Lavon for treatment and delivery to the member cities and customers of NTMWD. Most of these watersheds lie outside Rockwall County jurisdictions.¹⁰

Lake Ray Hubbard is not a water source for NTMWD, it is a water source for Dallas Water Utilities.¹¹ Lake Ray Hubbard sits on the western border of Rockwall County, covering almost 14 percent of the county. The City of Dallas owns and was responsible for building this lake.¹² Appendix B shows a map of Lake Ray Hubbard in relation to Rockwall communities.

Lake Lavon was constructed in the 1950's and is operated as a federal reservoir by the Army Corps of Engineers. The lake is located on the East Fork of the Trinity River in Collin County, which lies north of Rockwall County. The lake was built to serve two purposes – to protect the river valley from flooding and to increase the available water supply in the region. Interestingly, it also gave Rockwall County a way to increase revenue through the recreation and tourist industry.¹³

Lake Lavon and Lake Ray Hubbard have significantly different surrounding landscapes. Lake Lavon is surrounded by rural land with cropland agriculture while much of Lake Ray Hubbard's watershed has been urbanized. It should be noted, however, "both reservoirs receive significant inputs from municipal wastewater discharges."¹⁴ Water system construction projects were underway in 2006 and 2007 to include the "Bonham Water Treatment Plant; the Wylie to Lavon Pipeline; and the Rockwall Eastside Ground Storage Reservoir and Pump Station."¹⁵

⁹ Texas Parks and Wildlife website

¹⁰ Communication with Denise Hickey, Public Relations Coordinator – North Texas Municipal Water District

¹¹ Communication with Denise Hickey, Public Relations Coordinator – North Texas Municipal Water District

¹² Dallas Water Utilities - <http://www.dallascityhall.com/pdf/dwu/lakes.pdf>

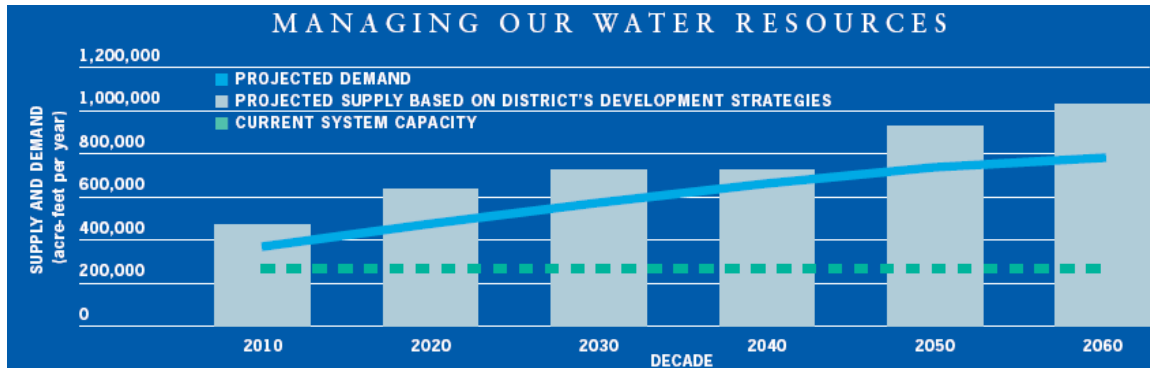
¹³ *Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. "," <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/RR/hcr10.html>

¹⁴ "East Fork Subwatershed" – University of North Texas Center for Remote Sensing

¹⁵ NTMWD 2006-2007 Annual Report -

http://www.ntmwd.com/downloads/annualreports/NTMWD_AnnualReport2006-2007.pdf

It is not surprising that the demand for water in the NTMWD is projected to increase dramatically by the year 2060. The graph below illustrates the districts current system capacity, projected supply based on development strategies and the projected demand by 2060.¹⁶



Development strategies include adding raw water supplies through the Upper Sabine Basin River Water Supply Project (50,000 – 80,000 acre-feet per year additional water) and the East Fork Raw Water Supply projects (80,000 – 102,000 acre-feet per year additional water). These were scheduled to begin in early 2008.¹⁷ The water supplies for both of these projects lie outside the Rockwall County boundaries.¹⁸ To compare the volume of water these projects will add, it is interesting to note that Lake Lavon produces 104,000 acre – feet per year.

If these strategies are not successful, the NTMWD does not have the legal authority to issue a development moratorium. Today and in the past, the district has implemented water-saving strategies to deal with increased demand, which has much less impact on the local economy than a moratorium.¹⁹

Existing Parks, Open Space & Trails

Rockwall County: Rockwall County does not have a Parks and Recreation Department nor does the county have existing county parks, open space or trails.

City of Heath: The City of Heath is approximately 51% developed and 45.7% vacant. Heath has several city parks and one trail system. These include Towne Center Park and the Towne Center trail system, and Terry Park.²⁰

City of McLendon-Chisholm: The City of McLendon-Chisholm has approximately 9 miles of pathways and trails.²¹

¹⁶ North Texas Municipal Water District, 2006-2007 Annual Report - http://www.ntmwd.com/downloads/annualreports/NTMWD_AnnualReport2006-2007.pdf

¹⁷ IBID, p. 3

¹⁸ Communication with Denise Hickey, Public Relations Coordinator – North Texas Municipal Water District

¹⁹ IBID, p. 7

²⁰ City of Heath website - <http://www.heathtx.com/index.asp?NID=18>

²¹ McLendon-Chisholm Comprehensive Land Use Plan and Thoroughfare Plan, June 2007, p. 4.

City of Rockwall: The Rockwall City Parks and Recreation Department offers programming for both youth and adults and operates a large community center at Harry Myers Park, two public swimming pools, and several other city parks. In 2001, the city held a bond election that failed. If it had passed it would have provided funds for new neighborhood and community parks. Since then a third phase of Harry Myers Park was completed in 2004 and the first phase of the Park at Hickory Ridge was completed. A survey, conducted in August 2003 by the research firm, Turco and Associates revealed that there is a need for more public park space in the north and south portions of the community. Heath and Fate rely heavily on the City of Rockwall to provide athletic fields and other open spaces.²²

In 2005 residents passed a \$5.9 million bond for parks, trails and open space. The measure passed with 59 percent support.²³

City of Rowlett: The City of Rowlett straddles Dallas and Rockwall Counties. It is interesting to note that in 2002 residents passed a \$520,000 bond for recreation and parks, however in 2006 a \$13.4 million bond measure for parks, open space, trails and recreation failed with only 38 percent support.²⁴

City of Wylie. The City of Wylie has a Park and Recreation Department that maintains one of the fastest growing parks systems in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex. There are more than 330 acres of city parkland. In addition Lavon Lake is located in a portion of the city and is approximately 21,400 acres in size. The city estimates that 1.6 million people visit Lavon Lake each year.

Inventory of County and City Planning Documents

To discern the degree to which cities in Rockwall County have addressed open space planning and acquisition it is important to understand existing open space plans or regulations, such as those expressed in a comprehensive or master plan. This section will explain the role open space and development regulations play throughout county and city documents.

Rockwall County

The State of Texas does not require counties in Texas to develop comprehensive planning documents. Rockwall County does not have an open space or land conservation plan by which to judge conservation planning efforts. However, in February 2008 the Rockwall County Commissioners Court released their position on open space planning. The position is summarized to say, “The dynamics of Rockwall County’s geography and its rapid population growth present a very small window of opportunity to act on the quality of its future. Therefore, Our Future Is Now.”²⁵ Three key objectives are also identified. These are to preserve storm water quality along corridors, acquire land for a major Central Park, and to protect or establish open space connectivity throughout the county. This document is included in Appendix C.

²² City of Rockwall – Parks and Recreation Department Business Plan- p. 19, 24, 33

²³ Trust for Public Land’s LandVote Database (www.landvote.org)

²⁴ Trust for Public Land’s LandVote Database (www.landvote.org)

²⁵ Rockwall County Commissioners Court, February 2008 – See Appendix C

Additionally, the Thoroughfare Plan provides background on the county's planning efforts. Completed in 2000, this document helps us gauge that traffic congestion was a major concern. In 2004 a county bond package was approved to fund interchanges. A consortium is now working to create a second road bond program.²⁶ More recently, an "Outer Loop," surrounding the Dallas Metroplex was proposed and will pass through the city of Fate and Royce City. Rockwall County placed a \$100 million road bond on the 2008 General Election ballot, which was approved by the voters.

Counties in Texas have very limited subdivision authority and no zoning power. Land use regulation is limited to only what is specifically allowed by State law.²⁷

City of Fate

The City of Fate does not have a citywide planning document. It should be noted that the city has a mandatory parkland dedication and fee ordinance.

City of Heath

The City of Heath has a documented strategy for open space in its comprehensive plan as well as a formal trail plan, the *Ten-Year Pathways Implementation Plan*, which was approved in 2004. One motive for the creation of this plan was the city's recognition that proximity to parks creates added property value and tax base.²⁸ The main purpose of the trail plan was "to identify and measure distances for a set of high priority non-motorized pathways, which could enhance existing pathways, as well as those that have been or are anticipated to be developer-built."²⁹ High priority is given to those areas that provide connectivity from residential areas to schools, parks, Town Center, and other important destinations within the city. Furthermore, the City of Heath is presently in the process of revising the City's Comprehensive Plan, including the trails and open space sections.

While developing the comprehensive plan residents identified both best and worst characteristics of the city. The best characteristics were open space, residential large lots, Lake Ray Hubbard, small town rural atmosphere, good schools, and quality services. The worst characteristics were traffic, lack of retail, lack of pedestrian access (trails/sidewalks/lake), and the missing "town plaza." Looking into the future the top six issues facing Heath identified in the planning process are the ability to: 1) deal with traffic congestion; 2) manage population growth and new development; 3) recognize how to take advantage of the lake; 4) develop more trails and open space; 5) find appropriate retail; and 6) manage the shortage of housing for seniors.

²⁶ Power Point Presentation "Mobility in Rockwall County: Challenges and Progress" by Lorie Grinnan – February 2007

²⁷ Thoroughfare plan, Introduction, p. 1-2. Subdivision authority for counties is in Chapter 232 of Local Government Code.

²⁸ City of Heath Comprehensive Plan - "Livability Strategy", p. 4-6, 4-7

²⁹ Ten-Year Pathways Implementation Plan

More specific land conservation goals are to require the following when or wherever possible.³⁰

- Pedestrian access in new developments and to adjacent development.
- Development proposals to consider the environment and open space conservation to preserve natural areas and functions.
- Create strategies to increase pedestrian and bicycle access and routes as an alternative form of transportation. As a part of this goal the city would like to investigate how local, county, state and federal funds could be combined to support transportation needs.
- Floodplains are preserved and serve as the core of the community public open space and trail system.

To implement its park, trail and open space initiatives, the city has adopted a park dedication ordinance. Going forward, the city would like to review regulations to allow for more clustered, mixed use development by creating new land use categories – mixed-use residential and mixed use nonresidential.³¹

City of McLendon – Chisholm

The City of McLendon – Chisholm has an approved Comprehensive Land Use Plan and Thoroughfare plan from June 2007.

As the city faces growth pressure and increased development the land use plan indicates that the rural character of the city must be preserved and encouraged when considering future development.³² Land use principles outline three different development densities for the city. These include rural residential, urban low-density residential and urban high-density residential.³³

Additionally, smart growth principles or “New Urbanism” development are a part of the cities urban design elements. Smart growth encourages increased density of land uses in order to “conserve on utilities and natural resources.”³⁴ According to the Congress of New Urbanism primary characteristics of smart growth are “connectivity, mixed use, mixed housing, quality architecture and urban design, smart transportation and sustainability.”³⁵

City of Rockwall

Rockwall City (county seat) has an approved 2002-2012 *Parks and Open Space Master Plan*, and a Parks and Recreation Department Business Plan, which were both jointly developed with the *Home Town 2000 Comprehensive Plan* to ensure a compatible long-range plan.

Land conservation goals include: 1) expanding trail system; 2) providing lake access; 3) expanding the neighborhood parks system; and 4) developing large community parks in the

³⁰ City of Heath Comprehensive Plan, p. 2-32, 2-36, 3-9

³¹ City of Heath Comprehensive Plan, p. 3-9 to 3-13

³² McLendon-Chisholm Comprehensive Land Use Plan and Thoroughfare Plan, June 2007, p. 2.

³³ McLendon-Chisholm Comprehensive Land Use Plan and Thoroughfare Plan, June 2007, p. 5.

³⁴ McLendon-Chisholm Comprehensive Land Use Plan and Thoroughfare Plan, June 2007, p. 3.

³⁵ IBID

northern and southern portions of the city where growth has been outpacing infrastructure development. In addition, the city would like to identify opportunities for adding athletic fields and expanding facilities as well as creating a common “green” in the Courthouse Square.³⁶

The City of Rockwall has a mandatory parkland dedication and fees ordinance. However, these dedication requirements need to be updated. As of 2004, the parkland dedication requirements of the Park and Recreation Master Plan and the Mandatory Park Land Dedication Ordinance present conflicts when developers are asked to comply.³⁷ The comprehensive plan recommended changing the zoning ordinance “to allow for the modified standards so that the development community can rely on the broad implementation.”³⁸

In 2004, a Unified Development Code (UDC) was written to create one document that contains regulations more typically located in separate ordinances (e.g., zoning or subdivision) and also implements policies and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan, Thoroughfare Plan, and Open Space Plan.³⁹ The open space requirement states that, “all projects in the city must reserve, dedicate and/or develop public open space consistent with the Open Space Plan, subdivision standards and development agreements.”⁴⁰ Additionally, the UDC contains a Tree Preservation Ordinance and a Planned Development Zoning district, which provide for “increased recreation and/or open space opportunities for public use and to protect or preserve natural amenities and environmental assets” by requiring a minimum of 20 percent open space be set aside.⁴¹

As the city plans for its future and looks to implement policies outlined in their planning documents ArcView Geographic Information System software was identified as a valuable tool. Therefore, the city began building a parcel map and integrating the related database information. Phase I of GIS implementation was scheduled for completion in January 2005.⁴²

City of Rowlett

The City of Rowlett overlaps Dallas and Rockwall Counties. The city has a Comprehensive Plan that outlines conservation goals. These include increasing recreational opportunities through developed parks, trails, and community and cultural facilities. More specifically, the city would like to focus on conservation/incompatible uses in residential areas, ensure bike/pedestrian connectivity throughout the community, and that lake views are preserved. To begin to address these needs the city would like to go through the exercise of identifying the “most appropriate land use for all undeveloped parcels in Rowlett, making sure to identify environmentally sensitive areas, specifically floodplains and wetlands.”⁴³

³⁶ Downtown Village Plan, November 2004

³⁷ City of Rockwall Parks and Recreation Department Business Plan, p. 38

³⁸ City of Rockwall Comprehensive Plan Policies, January 2007, p. 6,7

³⁹ Unified Development Code, June 2004, p. 2

⁴⁰ Unified Development Code, June 2004 - Article V. District Development Standards, Section 1 General, p. 1

⁴¹ Unified Development Code, June 2004 - Article X. Planned Development Regulations, Section 1 Planned Development – General, p. 1

⁴² Planning and Zoning Strategic Plan, p. 33

⁴³ Rowlett Comprehensive Plan, p. 10

In order to implement these policies the city recommends creating impact fees to help pay for cost of growth, develop a parkland dedication requirement policy for new development (or cash in lieu of land), and develop a donation/purchase policy to acquire parcels within the 100-year floodplain.⁴⁴

Royse City

Royse City has a City Master Plan, completed in 2004, which contains conservation goals. Because of the rapid rate of growth, one of the main priorities in planning for their future is to ensure “that the rural character and unique heritage of the City [is] preserved and protected”.⁴⁵ The plan promotes “pedestrian friendly neighborhoods” and states that new development “must indicate how it plans to utilize the existing flood plain area for pedestrian purposes.”⁴⁶

The city has implemented “Density Equivalent Development” in new residential developments where there is an established density per acre requirement. This concept is intended to help the city protect and preserve the open space ranch characteristics that residents enjoy.⁴⁷ Going forward Royse City recommends that there not be restriction on the size of lots and that development standards within the county be consistent with those of the city as “it is likely that much of the extra-territorial jurisdiction (ETJ) will need to be incorporated into the corporate limits of the city.”⁴⁸

City of Wylie

The City of Wylie has an adopted Comprehensive Plan from 1999 that includes a Land Use plan and map. The Comprehensive Plan’s Land Use Distribution Philosophy aims to “determine how best to utilize Wylie’s only nonexpendable resource – our land.”⁴⁹ In the Philosophy Plan the city indicates that it should remain a bedroom community and keep residential as the principal land use. In 2003, the Wylie City Council approved a Parks Master Plan that now serves as the blueprint for Wylie's park system development.⁵⁰

It should be noted that the City of Wylie does have a Parkland Dedication fee and ordinance that sets out minimum requirements of land dedication and/or fees for developers.

Conclusion

Rockwall County is one of the fastest growing counties in the country, while being the smallest county in Texas. The area is quickly transforming from a largely agricultural economy to a more urbanized economy of residential neighborhoods, goods and services.

⁴⁴ Rowlett Comprehensive Plan p. 13, 18, 19

⁴⁵ Royse City Master Plan p. 2 to 3

⁴⁶ Royse City Master Plan p. 4

⁴⁷ City Master Plan p. 5 and 6

⁴⁸ Royse City Master Plan p. 4, 49

⁴⁹ City of Wylie Comprehensive Plan Land Use Distribution Philosophy, 1999, p. 1.

⁵⁰ City of Wylie website - <http://www.wylietexas.gov/Parks/>

In general, regulations regarding open space, trails and recreation are limited to within city and town boundaries. The communities within Rockwall County have undertaken a variety of planning efforts including the creation of comprehensive plans, land use plans, parks and trails master plans, transportation plans, and development ordinances. In fact, all communities in Rockwall County have subdivision and zoning ordinances, and the majority of them have adopted parkland dedication ordinances. Three of the local municipalities, Wylie, Heath and Rockwall, have gone even further with the creation of Park and Recreation Advisory Boards. These boards provide a forum for park and open space issues and make recommendations to their respective city councils on matters relating to the establishment, maintenance, and operation of city park and recreation programs.

In addition, similarities exist among the goals of the various communities who have done open space planning. Recurring themes among the various open space and park planning efforts of the jurisdictions within the county are: developing trails, protecting floodplains for recreation as well as flood control, preserving community character and quality of life, increasing bike and pedestrian connectivity, protecting visual and physical access to the lake, developing new parks in currently underserved areas of county, and increasing recreational opportunities in general. There also is a heavy reliance on parkland dedication fees from new development as a significant source of local revenue for these programs.

Thus, there is great interest in planning throughout the county and the basic building blocks for a countywide open space planning effort exist. The opportunity for the county coordination of this effort is ripe.

Conservation Finance Assessment

The Trust for Public Land performed a conservation finance analysis to explore Rockwall County's funding options to protect land in order to preserve its natural character and develop parks for current and future residents. This research primarily investigated the authority and capacity of the county to raise funds for a parks and recreation land acquisition program. This includes the legal authority and revenue raising capacity of conservation finance mechanisms.

Creating a larger revenue stream with a dedicated, long-term funding source would enable the county to protect important natural areas and open space currently being lost to development. It would also enable the county to continue to preserve its character, and to provide additional recreational opportunities to residents.

In Texas, the public financing options typically utilized by counties to fund parks and land conservation are local sales and use taxes, general obligation bonds, and property taxes. This assessment explores these options—from taxes to bonds—as tools for financing land conservation in Rockwall County.

General Obligation Bonds

Rockwall County could hold a general obligation bond referendum. To raise funds for capital improvements, such as land acquisition or building construction, counties may issue bonds. There are two types of bonds: general obligation bonds, which are secured by the full faith and credit of the local property taxing authority, and revenue bonds that are paid by project-generated revenue or a dedicated revenue stream such as a particular tax or fee. A \$30 million bond for land conservation would cost the average household approximately \$56 per year. The governing body of any county, municipality or flood control district may issue bonds to acquire lands for park or historic purposes.⁵¹ Counties, municipalities and flood control districts may not issue general obligation bonds that are to be paid from property taxes without approval by the voters in an election.⁵²

As of October 2007, Rockwall County had \$30,367,561 principal and interest outstanding, and a debt margin of roughly \$250 million.⁵³ As of August 2007, the net assessed valuation of the county for bond purposes was \$6.7 billion.⁵⁴ The county has an A+ and an Aa3 bond rating from Standard & Poor's and Moody's respectively. These are ratings of "upper-medium" to high grade/high quality.⁵⁵ Both ratings were increased in April 2007. Rockwall County could issue new debt for parks and recreation purposes upon garnering the approval of voters.

Property Taxes

A property tax increase could be used to finance land acquisition and recreation in the county or maintenance and operational needs. A \$.04 per \$100 property tax increase would

⁵¹ Texas Constitution, Article XVI, §59(c-1); Local Gov't Code § 331.004(a); *Id.* at (c).

⁵² Gov't Code § 1251.001.

⁵³ Personal Communication with Bill Sinclair, County Treasurer.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Rockwall County Treasurer Website

generate about \$2.7 million annually and would cost the average homeowner about \$62 each year.

Property taxes provide more revenue for local services in Texas than any other source. The local governing body establishes the property tax rate each year. The state may not levy or collect property taxes.⁵⁶ The county portion of the property tax revenue may be directed to acquire parkland and open space and obtain conservation easements.⁵⁷ However, other than the local governing body passing a resolution there is no statutory procedure for dedicating property tax revenue for specific purposes.⁵⁸ So the decision to allocate property tax for conservation purposes would need to be made annually during the budgeting process. Rockwall County has capacity to levy a property tax for parks and recreation purposes.

The information provided will inform the county's consideration of new funding for parks and open space conservation by identifying potential funding mechanisms and determining the fiscal capacity and legal requirements of various approaches. Funding options were narrowed to those that matched the needs identified by the county and a public opinion survey was conducted to test voter attitudes toward a specific funding proposal.

⁵⁶ Texas Constitution, Article VIII, § 1-e.

⁵⁷ Telephone conversation with State Property Tax division, 30 July 2002.

⁵⁸ Telephone conversation with State Property Tax division, 31 July 2002.

Overview of Surveys

Telephone Survey

As part of its work in Rockwall County, the Trust for Public Land (TPL) oversaw a professionally administered, statistically valid telephone survey of Rockwall County voters to assess attitudes towards land conservation and the feasibility of a potential ballot measure to provide dedicated funding for land conservation in Rockwall. TPL contracted with the nationally recognized polling firm, Public Opinion Strategies, to conduct this survey. Three hundred (300) randomly sampled Rockwall County voters were interviewed by telephone on August 11 and 12, 2008. The margin of error for this survey is plus/minus 5.66 percent. Interviews were conducted proportionally throughout the county.

Key findings from this survey were as follows:

- Traffic and over-development topped the list of concerns in Rockwall County, with 36 percent naming traffic or roads-related issues as the most important problem facing the county. This is three times higher than any other issue category. An additional 13 percent named growth and over-development issues, followed closely by taxes (12 percent) and economic concerns (10 percent).
- Therefore, it was not surprising that Rockwall county voters are most likely to support a proposal to fund roads in the county. A majority (51 percent) indicated that if the election were held today they would vote Yes in favor of the following measure:

51 percent Yes, 40 percent No

“Proposition One would ask voters to consider whether or not to allow the issuance of one hundred million dollars in road bonds for the construction of roads throughout the county, including participation in joint state, city and regional government projects and the levy of a tax in payment thereof.” (In fact, in November 2008 Rockwall County voters approved a \$100 million road bond by 68 percent.)

- County voters were less inclined to support a parks and open space measure when the poll was conducted:

36 percent Yes, 58 percent No

“Proposition Two would ask voters to consider whether or not to allow the issuance of a twenty million dollar permanent improvement bonds for the acquisition and improvement of land for park and open space purposes, and the levy of a tax in payment thereof.”

- This dynamic was born out in a follow-up question that gave voters the potential to support both, just one or neither of the ballot measures if forced to choose. Notably just one-in-five said they would not support either one.

- 34 percent A 100 million dollar bond for roads
- 23 percent A 20 million dollar bond for acquiring land for parks and open space
- 17 percent Support both
- 21 percent Support neither

- It is worth noting that once respondents heard specific information about where funds might go, their support for a parks and open space ballot measure increased dramatically.
- In fact, after hearing more about the measure, support for the parks and open space measure matches the support for the roads measure, as 52 percent say they would vote Yes and 42 percent No.

Given the strong concern expressed about roads in the county and the presence of a tax proposal to fund roads already on the ballot, TPL recommended that November 2008 was not an appropriate time to ask voters to fund both roads and parks and open space.

However, there is overwhelming support for funding a number of parks and conservation-related items in the county. Rockwall voters were asked if they would be more or less likely to vote in favor of a parks and open space funding proposal if they knew it would fund specific types of land conservation projects. The following table shows Rockwall County voters open space priorities (ranked by those that would make them most likely to support the proposed ballot measure). The table shows both the percent that responded “Much More Likely” to support as well as a “Total More Likely” percentage, which includes both those who responded “Much More” and “Somewhat More Likely” to support.

Proposal Funding	Much More Likely	Total More Likely
Protect drinking water sources	57%	81%
Acquire land to protect the water quality of rivers, lakes and streams	42%	74%
Improve air quality	41%	72%
Preserve working farms and ranches	38%	65%
Preserve wildlife habitat	37%	67%
Protect land for outdoor recreation	36%	69%
Protect natural areas to help separate fast-growing communities	36%	66%

Online Survey

As part of the research for the Current Conditions report, the Trust for Public Land (TPL) conducted an online survey (reviewed and approved by both the NCTCOG and the Rockwall County Commissioners Court) of stakeholders to gauge readiness and interest of county stakeholders in protecting open space. The survey was conducted online during March 2008, and stakeholders included elected officials, city staff and community leaders. There were a total of 57 stakeholders invited to participate and 38 stakeholders answered the survey. The results of this more qualitative survey highlight how the Rockwall County community, as represented by the stakeholders identified by the Commissioner's Court, feel about specific areas of interest related to open space, trail connectivity and recreation in the county.

The stakeholders' survey indicated strong support for a number of conservation and open space issues in Rockwall County, including protecting stormwater/drainage corridors, connecting existing public parks along drainage corridors, the potential multiple use of drainage corridors for flood control, recreation, and wildlife habitat.

The stakeholders' survey also revealed that stakeholders felt that natural areas make good linear parks and that they are comfortable with public trails close to residential areas.

Among conservation goals, the stakeholders rated protecting the natural environment in and around our communities and providing additional land for parks and open space as their highest priorities.

Regarding specific conservation goals, like voters in the telephone survey, the stakeholders ranked protection of water resources, including conservation of stream and lakes and protection of water quality and quantity highest.

The stakeholders survey showed a great deal of interest in the economic benefits of land conservation.

Among recreational uses, the stakeholders showed a strong preference for hiking, biking and jogging trails in the online survey.

Open Space Goal Identification Workshop

As part of the overall assessment process, Rockwall County, the NCTCOG, and TPL hosted an Open Space Goal Identification Workshop for Rockwall County. This workshop took place at the new Rockwall County Library on the evening of December 16, 2008 and was open to the public. The goal of the workshop was to solicit the input and participation of the citizens of Rockwall in order to identify the primary goals for open space preservation and resource protection in the county. Over 40 interested citizens attended the workshop to voice their opinions and participate in setting open space priorities for the county.

During the workshop, attendees were asked to break up into groups for a brainstorming activity and discussion on the priorities for resource protection within the county. The small groups were asked to complete the following statement:

“We need to create parks and preserve natural resources in Rockwall County in order to...”

Participants came up with a variety of responses that articulated their priorities for future open space protection within the county. The eight overarching goals that emerged at the workshop included:

- create new parks within the county,
- provide recreational trails (hiking, biking) with enhanced safety,
- provide additional recreational opportunities and activities within the county,
- preserve farmland,
- preserve of water resources,
- protect cultural resources,
- preserve of wildlife habitat, and
- enhance the Rockwall community.

Another important issue raised by the public at this meeting was the idea that Rockwall remain a good place to raise a family. Also, a general need to protect the environment and to build and enhance the community’s green infrastructure was expressed. Citizens were also interested in examining the idea of clustering development, as well as improving the management of future growth in the county. A complete list of all the open space goals and priorities identified by county residents at the workshop can be found in Appendix D.

Conclusions and Recommendations

As one of the fastest growing counties (2000-2007) in the United States, Rockwall has a distinctive challenge with regard to open space protection. Many county citizens, and particularly those who attended the open space goal identification workshop, already recognize the inherent value of conservation and have expressed a strong desire to enhance the green infrastructure of their community.

Our research revealed strong support for conservation in the county as many municipalities are already actively involved in open space planning efforts, such as adopting parkland dedication ordinances, developing Park and Recreation advisory boards, and the establishment of a variety of parks, trails and recreation programs. The basic building blocks for a countywide planning effort exist. There is a great opportunity for Rockwall County to consolidate this information, in order to enhance the coordination of these conservation planning efforts.

Municipalities and citizens alike have indicated strong and vocal support for the creation of new trails, both for hiking and biking, and particularly those that offer connectivity within the community. There is an overwhelming desire for the creation of a variety of new parks and open spaces within the county, from dog parks to ball fields to nature parks. Rockwall County voters also expressed a strong desire to protect drinking water sources as well as to acquire land to protect water quality of rivers, lakes, and streams. Some basic awareness of environmental and conservation issues is present among the population. With additional education of Rockwall County residents about the benefits and uses of parks and open spaces in the region, support for a potential county funding measure for open space could broaden significantly.

Overall, the research and processes utilized to create this Open Space Goals and Finance Assessment support several recommendations for Rockwall County to continue to advance and promote the protection of open space within the county.

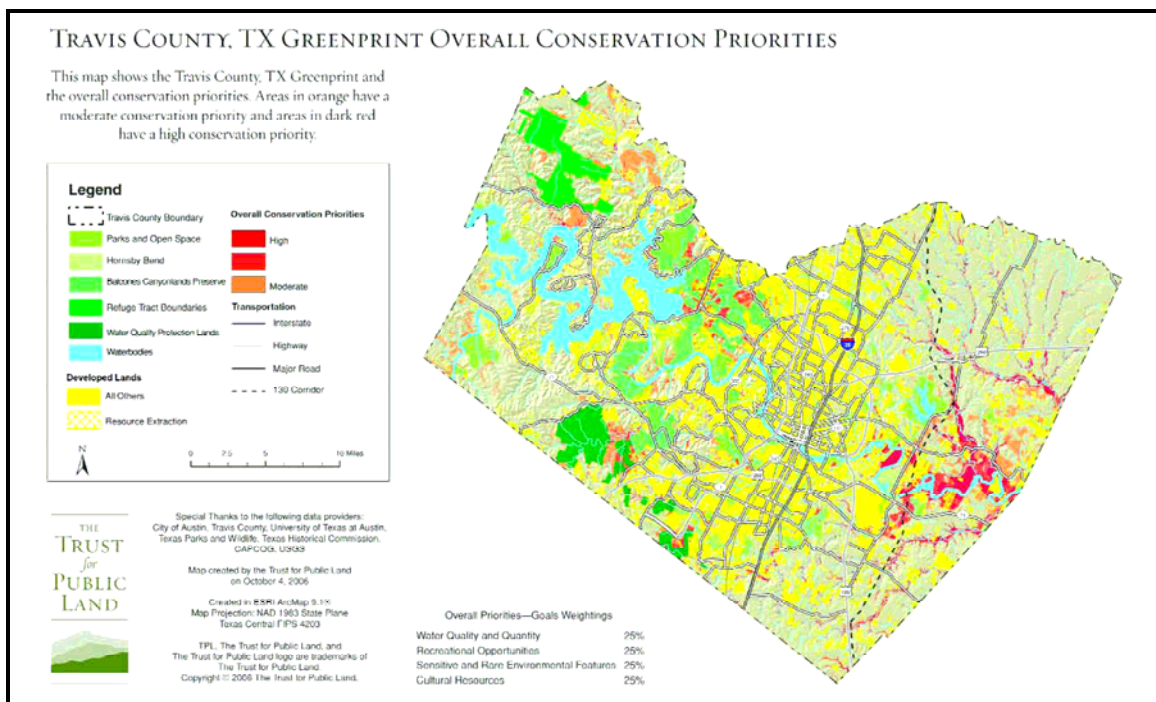
1. Enhance County-wide Open Space Planning Efforts

Rockwall County has an opportunity to better coordinate the various land conservation efforts within its boundaries. Rockwall County should take the lead in forming an Open Space Planning Committee or a Conservation Task Force with representatives from the various municipalities and other interested parties within Rockwall County. Representatives from the various municipal and other relevant jurisdictions and private nonprofit organizations, such as the Connemara Conservancy Foundation, could be invited to participate on such a committee. Organizing this type of group would help the county to better realize a vision for conservation that is in concert with ongoing open space planning efforts within the county.

In addition to a more general coordination effort, the county might choose to develop a strategic land use-planning tool called a greenprint. Greenprinting combines Geographic Information System (GIS) technology, local demographic and geographic data, and community input to create a visual analysis of a community's land and conservation priorities, as defined by community representatives. The result is a map –or greenprint– of

the county that highlights the lands whose protection could meet the multiple conservation priorities identified by the community. The greenprint is a powerful interactive tool to guide local growth management efforts, illustrating where the county might most efficiently and effectively spend its limited resources for land acquisition. It can help a community to clearly define where it makes sense to steer growth and development, as well as where it is most important to protect open space and natural resources.

The production of a greenprint would tie into ongoing regional efforts of NCTCOG to provide region-wide greenprinting in order to enhance planning and assist communities as they work to accommodate future growth. Benefits can be achieved through ongoing partnerships with NCTCOG and organizations like TPL to provide these critical, proactive planning tools.



The Travis County Greenprint for Growth, 2007.

The county’s role as leader in such a countywide, multi-jurisdictional open space planning effort is critical and will lead to greater coordination and implementation of important goals that transcend jurisdictional boundaries, such as water and natural resource protection and trail connectivity. These were raised as issues of importance by county residents, as evidenced by results from the community workshop and public survey.

Our research demonstrates a strong need for countywide coordination of open space, parks, and trails efforts. Citizens are extremely interested in creating new parks and trails and in ensuring that those recreational resources are connected with each other and with the greater Rockwall community. With enhanced support of this issue, the Rockwall County

Commissioners Court could provide important leadership in this endeavor, as well as provide an avenue for bringing the cities together to work towards a common goal.

2. Educate the Public about the Benefits of Open Space Protection

The county is now equipped with the information gained from the financial research, public opinion surveys, citizen workshop, as well as the conclusions in this report. The brochure that accompanies this report will also serve as an educational tool that can be utilized to present a unified vision for parks and conservation in the county, emphasizing key issues that residents care about. This brochure can be distributed broadly and used as a tool to educate the public on how conservation dollars (through a bond or property tax revenue) could be spent to address important open space concerns.

Through this process, the county has begun a dialogue with the community about priorities for land conservation and resource protection within Rockwall County. The county and other open space advocates should utilize this information to continue this conversation and better educate the general public on these issues, to build support for open space protection, including a possible dedicated source of funding.

3. Explore Existing and New Sources of Funding to Create Additional Parks and Trails in Rockwall County

Rockwall County residents and stakeholders are strong advocates for parks, trails – especially trail connectivity – and open space. A strong desire for a variety of additional recreation areas within the county is clear. In addition, research shows that open space protection and trail systems are good for a community's health, economic and social stability, and quality of life. Parks reduce crime, promote fitness and outdoor activity, and provide increased economic value to a community.⁵⁹

Citizen priorities for new park, trail, and open space development have been clearly defined and articulated. Residents want to protect their water sources—rivers, lakes and streams—as well as create new trails and other parks in their communities. Specific ideas were wide ranging and encompassed a variety of interest areas, from new and safe bike trail development, to farmland preservation, to the creation of a large-scale nature park. Issues of waterway and floodplain protection were important to citizens and government agency stakeholders alike. In general, the protection of environmental resources and the creation of new parks surfaced as strong concerns of the citizens and municipalities of Rockwall County.

Initial survey results indicated that when respondents were educated as to the uses of bond funds, for parks and open space protection, support for those bonds increased substantially. This indicates that Rockwall County could be ripe for an open space bond issue, after time is taken to educate the community on the need for and purpose of such funding. The county should pursue a conservation ballot measure in the near future.

⁵⁹ *The Economic Benefits of Parks and Open Space: How Land Conservation Helps Communities Grow Smart and Protect the Bottom Line* (http://www.tpl.org/tier3_cdl.cfm?content_item_id=1145&folder_id=727)

Creating a larger revenue stream with a dedicated, long-term funding source, would enable the county to protect important natural areas and open space currently being lost to development. It would also enable the county to continue to preserve its rural character, and to provide additional recreational opportunities to residents. The Conservation Finance Assessment (Appendix E) is meant to inform the county's consideration of new funding for parks and open space conservation by identifying potential funding mechanisms and determining the fiscal capacity and legal requirements of various approaches.

In addition to potential bond funding, several existing sources of funding are available to local governments in Texas for the acquisition and development of new parklands and public recreation areas. Rockwall County should investigate federal and state grant programs such as the National Park Service Land and Water Conservation Fund, as well as those administered by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.⁶⁰

Trails and open space conservation need not be viewed as an expense but rather an investment that produces important economic benefits.⁶¹ Making the financial investment to create parks and open space in Rockwall County will be critical to preserving that sense of community that citizens have come to appreciate, and expect, in Rockwall. The creation of new parks will result in a direct, positive impact on the community for generations to come.

Final Conclusion

Rockwall County is poised to achieve its goal of enhanced greenspace protection, enhancing its green infrastructure and ensuring a livable and desirable community for many generations to come. The citizens have voiced their support and interest in protecting a variety of key natural resources, open spaces, parks and trails and are willing and able to help guide the county toward this pursuit. Rockwall County will have future successes, with improved public education about the values of protecting natural resources, cultural resources and parklands. These successes will ensure that the strong sense of community that ties and draws residents to this unique area is preserved.

⁶⁰ For more information online visit: <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/business/grants/>

⁶¹ *The Economic Benefits of Parks and Open Space: How Land Conservation Helps Communities Grow Smart and Protect the Bottom Line* (http://www.tpl.org/tier3_cdl.cfm?content_item_id=1145&folder_id=727)

Appendix A: List of Participating Stakeholders

Gayle Mueller	Rockwall
Michael Sferra	Wylie
Bruce Paton	Rockwall
Connie Jackson	Rockwall
Scott Self	Rockwall
Mindy Manson	Wylie
Forest Murley (Councilman)	Fate/Royse City
Glen Farris	Rockwall
Bart Davenport	McLendon-Chisholm
Sheri Fowler	Rockwall
Paul Fisk	Royse City
Jim Melody (Mayor Royse City)	Royse City
Andy Hesser, (City of Rockwall PARD)	Rockwall
John E. Harper (Mayor of City of Rowlett)	Rowlett
Mike Donegan (Mayor McLendon-Chisholm)	McLendon-Chisholm
David Butler	McLendon-Chisholm
Mitchell Smartt (City of Heath, Park Board)	Heath
Garvin Tate	Rockwall
Joel Palin	Heath
Lori Lawing	Heath
Rich Krause	Heath
Larry Parks (Heath EDC)	Rockwall
Becky Burkett	Heath
Brad Glover	Rockwall
Chuck Todd	Rockwall
William Cecil (Mayor City of Rockwall)	Rockwall
Bill Broderick (Mayor of City of Fate)	Fate
John Browning	Rockwall
James "Jim", A. Eidson	Rockwall
Beverly Stibbens	Rockwall
Margo Nielsen (Rockwall City Council)	Rockwall
Lisa Palomba (City of Heath Planning Technician)	Heath
Kathleen p. Evans	Rockwall
Kim Dobbs (City of Heath - Assistant City Manager)	Heath
Margie Hooper	Heath
Brad Lamberth	Rockwall ISD School Board
Jerrell Baley	Royse City
Robert A Hille (Council Member, City of Heath)	Heath
Sherry Frenza	Rockwall

Appendix B: Rockwall County Area Map

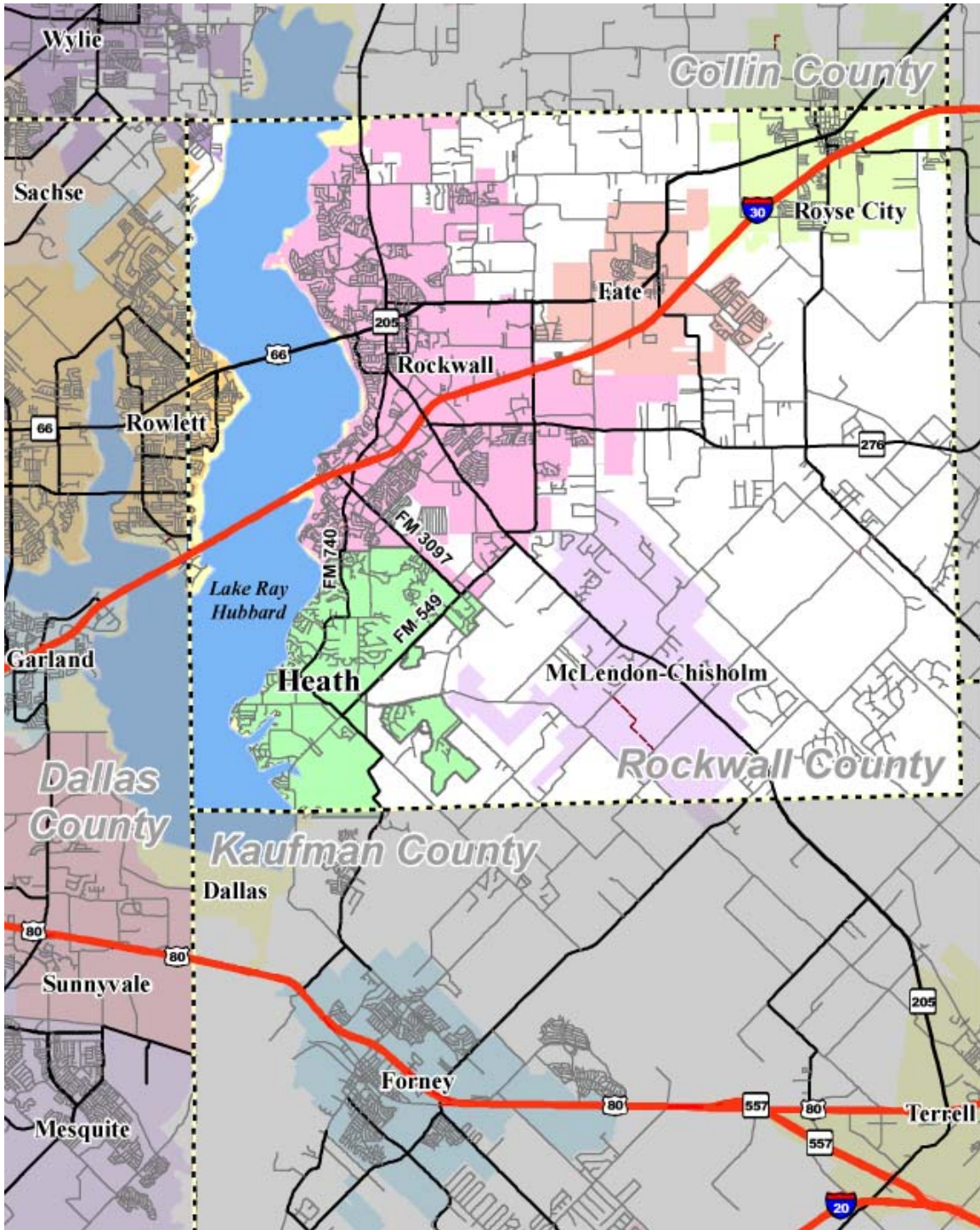
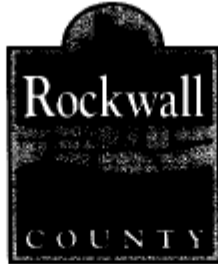


Image courtesy of NCTCOG, 2008.

Appendix C: Rockwall County Open Space Planning Position Document



ROCKWALL COUNTY COMMISSIONERS COURT

FEBRUARY 5, 2008

ROCKWALL COUNTY OPEN SPACE PLANNING POSITION

The dynamics of Rockwall County's geography and its rapid population growth present a very small window of opportunity to act on the quality of its future. Therefore, Our Future Is Now.

Open Space Planning/Conservation Visioning Objectives:

- * **To Preserve Quality Storm Water Corridors.**
- * **To Secure A Major Central Park.**
- * **To Protect/Establish Corridors Essential For Open Space Connectivity County Wide.**

Appendix D: Rockwall County Community Goals and Priorities for Open Space Protection

Create New Parks

- a. Dog park
- b. Team sport complexes
- c. A large scale nature park
- d. Swimming hole (natural)

Provide Recreational Trails and Enhance Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety

- a. Provide for a trail along shoreline/ public access to the lake
- b. Hiking trails
- c. Biking trails/paths/sidewalk connections
- d. Preserve right of way for bike trails along roadways
- e. Provide connectivity to/from schools, parks, community
- f. Provide adequate signage for bicyclists
- g. Encourage public transportation use and alternative transportation
- h. Fill the funding void left by TXDOT

Provide Recreational Opportunities/Activities

- a. Encourage physical activity, exercise and wellbeing
- b. Provide educational activities/opportunities for adults and children
- c. Provide structured recreation opportunities
- d. Provide local recreation opportunities
- e. Encourage exploration, experience with nature
- f. Enable relaxation, provide natural “retreat”
- g. Facilitate outdoor special events

Preserve Farms and Farmland

- a. Preserve agricultural land, pastures, cornfields
- b. Create opportunities for local food production

Preserve Water Resources

- a. Preserve our watershed
- b. Preserve wetlands and floodplain
- c. Preserve small lakes and ponds
- d. Preserve lake coves and inlets
- e. Value the natural function of water/ecosystems

Protect Cultural Resources

- a. Historic sites (Zollner Ranch, “The Rock Wall”)
- b. Protect viewshed west of Ridge Road

Preserve Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat

- a. Migratory butterfly habitat
- b. Native Prairie, specifically the Wallace Tract

Enhance Our Community

- a. Maintain a high quality of life
- b. Enhance property values
- c. Avoid complete urbanization (“rooftops over entire community”, “concrete jungle”)

- d. Effectively utilize waterfront resources
- e. Rockwall as an outdoor park “destination” (attract revenue to community)
- f. Create a community culture/personality surrounding outdoor activities
- g. Provide opportunities for social interaction
- h. Neighborhood connectivity
- i. Enhance safety for community; for bicyclists and runners, pedestrian friendly
- j. Create sense of community (“keep Rockwall, Rockwall”)

Appendix E: Conservation Finance Options

To help public agencies or land trusts acquire land, TPL assists communities in identifying and securing public financing. TPL’s conservation finance program offers technical assistance to elected officials, public agencies and community groups to design, pass and implement public funding measures that reflect popular priorities.

In Texas, TPL has helped protect over 32,000 acres. Since 1996, TPL also has supported 17 local conservation finance ballot measures, and 16 of these have passed generating almost \$500 million dollars for parks and land conservation purposes. TPL most recently helped Hays County pass a \$30 million general obligation bond for open space, watershed protection, and wildlife habitat in May 2007. The measure was approved with 68 percent support.

The objective for this study is to research the most viable local funding options for long-term land conservation in Rockwall County and provide analysis of which local options and funding levels are economically prudent and likely to be publicly acceptable.

Local Conservation Financing Options

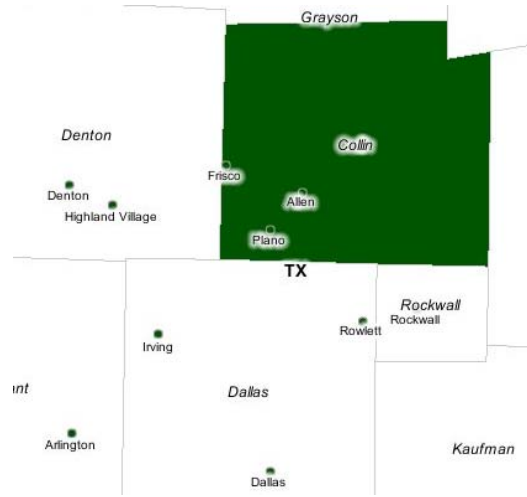
The State of Texas authorizes and enables public bodies to acquire land and interests in land for conservation, parks, and recreational purposes. To do so, public bodies, including counties and flood control districts, may appropriate funds, levy taxes, and issue general obligation bonds.⁶² This report provides information related to the use of property taxes and general obligation bonds for parks and open space purposes by Rockwall County.

The most popular funding mechanism in Texas for land conservation has been general obligation bonds. Since 2000, there have been 11 county bond measures for parks, open space, farmland protection, and watershed protection. All 11 were successful.

Jurisdiction Name	Date	Finance Mechanism	Conservation Funds Approved	%	
				Status	Yes
Bexar County	11/4/2003	Bond	\$3,700,000	Pass	58%
Collin County	11/4/2003	Bond	\$5,500,000	Pass	63%
Collin County	11/6/2007	Bond	\$17,000,000	Pass	68%
Harris County	11/6/2001	Bond	\$15,000,000	Pass	63%
Harris County	11/6/2007	Bond	\$38,000,000	Pass	52%
Hays County	6/2/2001	Bond	\$3,500,000	Pass	70%
Hays County	5/12/2007	Bond	\$30,000,000	Pass	68%
Kendall County	11/2/2004	Bond	\$5,000,000	Pass	62%
Travis County	11/6/2001	Bond	\$28,600,000	Pass	57%
Travis County	11/8/2005	Bond	\$40,000,000	Pass	66%
Williamson County	11/7/2006	Bond	\$10,000,000	Pass	61%

⁶² Texas Constitution, Article XVI.); Texas Local Gov’t Code § 331.004(a) (“A municipality or county may issue negotiable bonds for the purpose of acquiring or improving land, buildings, or historically significant objects for park purposes or for historic or prehistoric preservation purposes, and may assess, levy, and collect ad valorem taxes to pay the principal of and interest on those bonds and to provide a sinking fund.”); *Id.* at (c) (“There is no limit on the amount of taxes that may be levied for the operation and maintenance expenses of parks or for the payment of the principal of and interest on the bonds except for the limits provided by the Texas Constitution.”); Gov’t Code §1435.003 (“A municipality or county may:

Collin, a neighboring county with successful conservation finance measures since 2000 is shown in the map below.



Bonds

To raise funds for capital improvements, such as land acquisition or building construction, counties may issue bonds. There are two types of bonds: general obligation bonds, which are secured by the full faith and credit of the local property taxing authority, and revenue bonds that are paid by project-generated revenue or a dedicated revenue stream such as a particular tax or fee. The governing body of any county, municipality or flood control district may issue bonds to acquire lands for park or historic purposes.⁶³ Counties, municipalities and flood control districts may not issue general obligation bonds that are to be paid from property taxes without approval by the voters in an election.⁶⁴

Pursuant to the Texas Constitution, counties may issue general obligation bonds payable from property taxes for general fund, permanent improvement fund, road and bridge fund, and jury fund purposes.⁶⁵ Property taxes levied to pay the debt service on the bonds are limited to \$0.80 per \$100 of taxable value with majority approval of the qualified voters. Counties may also statutorily issue general obligation bonds for a county courthouse or jail; schools or homes for dependent or delinquent children, bridges, and public roads.⁶⁶

To acquire land for parks, counties may also issue revenue bonds with a maturity date of 40 years. The county may, without an election, issue revenue bonds payable from a pledge of net revenue from one or more of its park facilities or from leases or contracts from the

(1) construct, acquire, repair, improve, or enlarge a park facility; or (2) acquire additional land, if needed, for a park facility.”).

⁶³ Texas Constitution, Article XVI, §59(c-1); Local Gov’t Code § 331.004(a); *Id.* at (c).

⁶⁴ Gov’t Code § 1251.001.

⁶⁵ *Id.*; [Comprehensive Annual Financial Report](#), at Table 13. Counties may also issue bonds payable from property taxes for the construction and maintenance of roads, which is limited to 25 percent of assessed value in the county. Texas Constitution, Art. III, §52.

⁶⁶ Gov’t Code §1301.001 to .004.

operation of park facilities.⁶⁷ In the alternative, either through the Commissioners Court or an appointed Parks Board, park revenue bonds may be issued for acquiring, improving, equipping, maintaining, or operating public parks with majority approval of voters.⁶⁸ Such park revenue bonds are secured by a pledge of revenues from the operation of the parks or from the properties or facilities, but may not be pledged from tax revenues.

Rockwall County Bonding

As of October 2007, Rockwall County had \$30,367,561 principal and interest outstanding, and a debt margin of roughly \$250 million.⁶⁹ As of August 2007, the net assessed valuation of the county for bond purposes was \$6.7 billion.⁷⁰

The county has an A+ and an Aa3 bond rating from Standard & Poor’s and Moody’s respectively. These are ratings of “upper-medium” to high grade/high quality.⁷¹ Both ratings were increased in April 2007.

Utilizing GO Bonds for Parks and Recreation

Rockwall County could issue new debt for parks and recreation purposes upon garnering the approval of voters. The chart below illustrates the estimated annual debt service, required property tax levies, and annual household cost of various general obligation bond issue amounts. A \$30 million bond would cost the average household about \$56 each year.

Rockwall County Bond Financing Costs

Assumes 20-year bond issues at 5.0% Interest Rate

2007 Assessed Value = \$6.7 billion

Bond Issue	Annual Debt Svce	Property Tax Rate*	Cost/ Year/ \$100K House	Cost/Year/Avg/ Household*
\$5,000,000	\$401,213	0.005994	\$5.10	\$9.30
\$10,000,000	\$802,426	0.011988	\$10.19	\$18.61
\$20,000,000	\$1,604,852	0.023977	\$20.38	\$37.21
\$30,000,000	\$2,407,278	0.035965	\$30.57	\$55.82
\$40,000,000	\$3,209,703	0.047954	\$40.76	\$74.42
\$50,000,000	\$4,012,129	0.059942	\$50.95	\$93.03

*Per \$100 of taxable valuation.

*Based on 2006 US Census average residence value of \$170,200 less \$15K Homestead Exemption

Process for Issuing Bonds

Proper notice of a bond election to be held not less than 15 days or more than 90 days from the date of an election order must be given at least 14 days before the election.⁷² Proper notice includes posting of the election order at various public places and publication in a newspaper of general circulation.

⁶⁷ *Id.* at §1435.051.

⁶⁸ Local Gov’t Code §320.071 to .074.

⁶⁹ Personal Communication with Bill Sinclair, County Treasurer.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Rockwall County Treasurer Website

⁷² Gov’t Code §1251.003.

The proposition for “[t]he issuance of bonds”⁷³ must state (1) the purpose for which the bonds are to be issued; (2) the amount of the bonds; (3) the rate of interest; (4) the imposition of taxes sufficient to pay the debt service on the bonds; and (5) the maturity date of the bonds.⁷⁴ A majority of qualified voters must approve issuance of the bonds. TPL’s bond cost calculations provide a basic estimate of debt service, tax increase, and cost to the average homeowner in the community for potential bond issuances for parks and land conservation. Assumptions include the following: the entire debt amount is issued in the first year and payments are equal until maturity; 20-year maturity; and 5 percent interest rate. The property tax estimates assume that the jurisdiction would raise property taxes to pay the debt service on bonds, however other revenue streams may be used. The cost per household represents the average annual impact of increased property taxes levied to pay the debt service. The estimates do not take into account growth in the tax base due to new construction over the life of the bonds. The jurisdiction’s officials, financial advisors, bond counsel and underwriters would establish the actual terms of any bond.

Property Taxes

Property taxes provide more revenue for local services in Texas than any other source. The local governing body establishes the property tax rate each year. The state may not levy or collect property taxes.⁷⁵ The county portion of the property tax revenue may be directed to acquire parkland and open space and obtain conservation easements.⁷⁶ However, other than the local governing body passing a resolution there is no statutory procedure for dedicating property tax revenue for specific purposes.⁷⁷ So the decision to allocate property tax for conservation purposes would need to be made annually during the budgeting process. Counties may impose three individual rates of property taxes not exceeding a total rate of \$1.25 of \$100 of appraised value. Specifically, they may not impose a property tax rate in excess of \$0.80 on \$100 of appraised value in any one year for general fund, permanent improvement fund, road and bridge fund and jury fund purposes.⁷⁸ Counties have authority to levy a property tax not in excess of \$0.30 on \$100 of appraised value for the purpose of farm-to-market roads or flood control.⁷⁹ An additional property tax of up to \$0.15 per \$100 of taxable valuation may also be levied for maintenance of public roads with the approval of a majority of voters.⁸⁰

Homes in Rockwall are assessed at 100 percent of the market value. There are a few exemptions to the property tax provided in the state constitution and laws. The property tax code in Texas requires a county that levies a farm-to-market flood control tax to grant a \$3,000 residence homestead exemption to each qualified homeowner. Rockwall County

⁷³ *Id.* at §1251.005 (“At the election, the ballots shall be printed to permit voting for or against the proposition: “The issuance of bonds.”). The proposition for park revenue bonds must state: “The issuance of \$ ___ in park revenue bonds payable solely from revenue.” Local Gov’t Code §320.072.

⁷⁴ Gov’t Code §1251.002.

⁷⁵ Texas Constitution, Article VIII, § 1-e.

⁷⁶ Telephone conversation with State Property Tax division, 30 July 2002.

⁷⁷ Telephone conversation with State Property Tax division, 31 July 2002.

⁷⁸ Texas Constitution, Article VIII, § 9-a.

⁷⁹ Texas Constitution, Article VIII, § 1-a.

⁸⁰ Texas Constitution, Article VIII, § 9-c.

does not levy this tax.⁸¹ For school district taxes, homeowners may qualify for a residence homestead exemption on their principal residence. This is a general homestead exemption and is available to all homeowners who qualify. The exemption amount is \$15,000.⁸² About 60 to 70 percent of the homes receive the \$15,000 homestead exemption.⁸³

The total amount of property taxes imposed in any year may not exceed the amount imposed in the preceding year unless the governing body gives notice of its intent to increase taxes and holds a public hearing.⁸⁴

Rockwall County Property Tax⁸⁵

The amount of the property tax rate for any given year is determined by two components – M&O budget requirements and debt service budget requirements. Only the rate associated with the latter becomes a binding obligation on current and subsequent commissioners’ courts. The former is the result of the budgeting process whereby annual requirements are reviewed by the members of the court and must be voted on each year. The final property tax rate is thus the result of agreement on the amount to be funded for M&O plus the debt obligation amount. Rockwall County has an unwritten policy that \$0.0025 cents of the property tax rate will be allocated to the Road and Bridge Fund. The Court could consider a similar policy for parks and open space.

The table below lists the largest property tax appropriations in FY2008.

Purpose	FY2008
General Fund	\$18.579 million
County Debt Service	\$2.912 million
Road and Bridge Fund	\$0.155 million
Total Rockwall County Prop Tax Rate	\$0.3500

The following chart compares the 2007 property tax rates for the surrounding counties. As is demonstrated, Rockwall County has about an average rate (this does not include specific taxing jurisdictions such as school districts) in comparison to its surrounding counties.

County	Property Tax Rate /\$100
Hunt	0.568
Kaufman	0.562
Rockwall	0.350
Collin	0.245
Dallas	0.214

⁸¹ Personal Communication with Dennis Hart, State of Texas, Property Tax Division. Property Tax Code Section 11.13(a)

⁸² Texas Constitution, Article VIII, §§ 1-a, 1-c; Texas Tax Code § 11.13.

⁸³ Personal Communication with Ray Helm, Rockwall Central Appraisal District. Article 8 Section 1c of the Texas Constitution

⁸⁴ Id. at §21.

Utilizing the Property Tax for Parks and Recreation

Rockwall County has capacity to levy a property tax for parks and recreation purposes. The chart below illustrates the revenue and cost of various property tax rate increases as it affects residential properties in Rockwall County. A \$.04 per \$100 property tax increase could generate almost \$2.7 million annually and cost the average household about \$62 each year.

Estimated Revenue and Cost of Additional Property Tax

Prop Tax Increase*	Assessed Valuation	Annual Revenue	Cost / Year/ \$100K House	Cost / Ave./ Household**
\$0.01	\$6,693,323,474	\$669,332	\$8.50	\$15.52
\$0.02	\$6,693,323,474	\$1,338,665	\$17.00	\$31.04
\$0.04	\$6,693,323,474	\$2,677,329	\$34.00	\$62.08
\$0.05	\$6,693,323,474	\$3,346,662	\$42.50	\$77.60
\$0.07	\$6,693,323,474	\$4,685,326	\$59.50	\$108.64
\$0.10	\$6,693,323,474	\$6,693,323	\$85.00	\$155.20

*Per \$100 of taxable valuation.

**Based on 2006 Rockwall County Median Home Value of \$170,200, less \$15,000 homestead exemption.

Implementation Process for Property Tax Increase

Prior to increasing the total amount of property taxes imposed in any year over the amount imposed in the preceding year, the governing body must give notice of its intent to increase taxes and hold a public hearing.⁸⁶ Specifically, when a proposed tax rate exceeds the lower of the rollback tax rate (which allows an eight percent increase in revenue not devoted to debt service) or 103 percent of the effective tax rate, the governing body must pass a proposal by majority vote to increase the tax at a future meeting and schedule a public hearing.⁸⁷ The governing body must then publish a notice for the public hearing that contains the following statement:⁸⁸ SEE ADDENDUM B for legal notice.

If the governing body does not adopt a tax rate that exceeds the lower of the rollback tax rate or 103 percent of the effective tax rate by the 14th day after the meeting to propose a tax increase, it must give a new notice before it may adopt a rate that exceeds the lower of the rollback tax rate or 103 percent of the effective tax rate.

Election Analysis

Because bond measures ultimately require voter approval, an examination of recent election history and results on fiscal questions can be instructive.

Voter Registration & Turnout⁸⁹

As of January 2008 there were 40,261 total registered voters in Rockwall County. On November 7, 2006, Rockwall County voted to reelect Republican Governor Rick Perry with 54 percent support. In 2000 and 2004 the county supported President George W. Bush overwhelmingly with 77 and 79 percent, respectively.

⁸⁵ Personal Communication with Bill Sinclair, Rockwall County Treasurer.

⁸⁶ Texas Constitution, Art. VIII, §21.

⁸⁷ Property Tax Code §26.05.

⁸⁸ *Id.* at §26.06(b).

⁸⁹ Information gathered from Texas Secretary of State's website and Rockwall County election site.

Date	Regist. Voters	Ballots Cast	% Turnout
November 2000	29,470	17,652	39%
November 2002	32,431	14,087	32%
November 2004	38,126	25,581	52%
November 2006	40,137	15,705	39%
May 2007	41,184	7,246	18%
November 2007	36,999	6,737	18%

In order for a measure to be placed on the November 2008 ballot the Commissioner's Court would have to approve the issue. The Court usually works with an attorney on bond issues, and they would prepare the ballot language in English and Spanish. This would then be brought to the County Clerk for certification usually in July or August for inclusion on the November ballot.⁹⁰

Election Results

Voters in Rockwall County have decided a number of county referenda in recent years by which to gauge their support for public spending. Voters have not been averse to passing bond and other finance measures in the county. Since 2000, five out of eight measures passed.

On November 6, 2007 Rockwall County voters did support statewide Proposition 4, a constitutional amendment issuing bonds of \$1 billion for state capital improvements including upgrades to Texas state parks. About 65 percent of Rockwall County voters supported the amendment. A similar proposition in November 2001, garnered 48 percent of the county vote, though the constitutional amendment passed statewide.

Rockwall County Finance Ballot Questions					
Election	Measure Type	Description	Result	% Yes	% No
Nov. 00	Sales Tax	.5 of 1% tax to finance the Rockwall County Public Safety and Fire Assistance District	Pass	63%	37%
Nov. 00	Bond	\$3M for new courthouse	Pass	54%	46%
Nov. 00	Bond	\$900K to purchase site for county library	Pass	61%	39%
Nov. 00	Bond	\$1M for records storage	Fail	46%	54%
Nov. 04	Bond	\$17.25M for roads	Pass	75%	25%
Nov. 04	Bond	\$29M for county government complex	Fail	45%	55%
Nov. 04	Bond	\$11.5M for a new library	Pass	60%	40%
Sep. 05	Bond	\$29M for county government complex	Fail	47%	53%

The 2000 bond election was Rockwall County's first since 1994, when voters rejected a \$5.29 million package that included funds for courthouse renovations and jail expansion. The previous year (1993), county residents also turned down a \$ 1.75 million bond proposal to

⁹⁰ The County Clerk could not supply specific dates of certification at the time of the report.

renovate the courthouse. Commissioners had to issue debt that didn't require voter approval to purchase the government building and expand the jail.

The failed bond measures mentioned above, were unsuccessful for a number of reasons including that the public was not well informed about the bond projects throughout the planning process. In addition, not everyone believed that the rapid growth of the County's population (and thus a need for a new government complex) would continue, which it has as mentioned in the introduction.

NOTE: Rockwall County does have an active anti-tax/anti-corruption group called The No Higher Taxes Group that actively opposed the 2005 county bond (and other tax measures) to build a \$29M government building. The measure ultimately failed. This group remains active. The group has several candidates on the primary ballot for County offices, including County Chairman of the Rockwall Republican Party. It is an outspoken group whose message has resonated with the voting public when it comes to the needs of County government. ⁹¹<http://www.nohighertaxes.org/>

This being said, in 2005, voters in the City of Rockwall, the County Seat, supported a nearly \$6 million bond for the creation of new trails and parks throughout the city. The measure passed with 59 percent support. The ballot language for this question was:

PROPOSITION NO. 4

Shall the City Council of said City be authorized to issue the bonds of said City, in one or more series or issues, in the aggregate principal amount of \$5,955,000.00 with the bonds of each such series or issue, respectively, to mature serially within not to exceed 40 years from their date, and to be sold at such prices and bear interest at such rates as shall be determined within the discretion of the City Council, for the purpose of constructing, improving and equipping municipal parks consisting of the Park at Foxchase, The Park at Emerald Bay, the Park at Hickory Ridge and the Park at the Shores, constructing, improving and equipping trails and trail connections and the acquisition of land and interests in land therefor, and the acquisition of land and interests in land for a community park in the northern area of the City and a community park in the southern area of the City, with any remaining bond proceeds to be used for improvement and equipment of existing parks, and shall said City Council be authorized to levy and cause to be assessed and collected annual ad valorem taxes in an amount sufficient to pay the annual interest on said bonds and provide a sinking fund to pay said bonds at maturity?

This proposition allocates \$5.955 million for the creation of new trails and parks throughout the city. Land would be acquired for a new North Community Park and a South Community Park, and new parks would be developed at Fox Chase, Emerald Bay, Hickory Ridge and The Shores.

⁹¹ Personal Communication with Bill Sinclair, Rockwall County Treasurer.

As illustrated by the chart below, most Texas counties that have passed conservation finance measures, overwhelmingly supported Republican President George W. Bush in the 2004 General Election. This follows a nationwide trend that shows support for land conservation regardless of political affiliation.

Texas County Conservation Measures Since 2000

Jurisdiction Name	Date	Finance Mechanism	Conservation		Bush	
			Funds Approved	Status	% Yes	Support 2004
Hays County	6/2/2001	Bond	\$3,500,000	Pass	70%	57%
Travis County	11/6/2001	Bond	\$28,600,000	Pass	57%	43%
Harris County	11/6/2001	Bond	\$15,000,000	Pass	63%	55%
Bexar County	11/4/2003	Bond	\$3,700,000	Pass	58%	55%
Collin County	11/4/2003	Bond	\$5,500,000	Pass	63%	72%
Kendall County	11/2/2004	Bond	\$5,000,000	Pass	62%	82%
Travis County	11/8/2005	Bond	\$40,000,000	Pass	66%	43%
Williamson County	11/7/2006	Bond	\$10,000,000	Pass	61%	66%
Hays County	5/12/2007	Bond	\$30,000,000	Pass	68%	57%
Collin County	11/6/2007	Bond	\$17,000,000	Pass	68%	72%
Harris County	11/6/2007	Bond	\$38,000,000	Pass	52%	55%

Addendum A: Local Financing Referenda for Parks and Open Space

Since 1998, 88 percent of Texas local conservation measures have passed generating over \$1 billion in new funds for land conservation.

Jurisdiction Name	Date	Finance Mechanism	Conservation Funds Approved	Status	% Yes
Allen	6/12/1999	Bond	\$22,000,000	Pass	71%
Allen	5/12/2007	Bond	\$8,000,000	Pass	71%
Alvin	11/6/2001	Bond	\$3,150,000	Pass	63%
Arlington	1/15/2000	Sales tax		Fail	43%
Arlington	5/2/1998	Sales tax		Fail	47%
Arlington	5/7/2005	Bond	\$3,375,000	Pass	59%
Austin	11/7/2000	Bond	\$13,400,000	Pass	65%
Austin	11/3/1998	Bond	\$7,997,231	Pass	57%
Austin	5/2/1998	Bond	\$61,000,922	Pass	53%
Austin	11/3/1998	Bond	\$40,583,575	Pass	59%
Austin	11/7/2006	Bond	\$20,000,000	Pass	73%
Austin	11/7/2006	Bond	\$50,000,000	Pass	69%
Bee Cave	11/7/2006	Bond	\$3,500,000	Pass	77%
Bexar County	11/4/2003	Bond	\$3,700,000	Pass	58%
Cedar Park	11/6/2001	Bond	\$10,600,000	Pass	59%
Cedar Park	11/6/2007	Bond	\$10,980,000	Pass	58%
College Station	11/3/1998	Bond	\$1,835,000	Pass	52%
College Station	11/3/1998	Bond	\$520,000	Pass	67%
College Station	11/3/1998	Bond	\$3,529,217	Pass	65%
Collin County	11/4/2003	Bond	\$5,500,000	Pass	63%
Collin County	2/20/1999	Bond	\$2,082,820	Pass	75%
Collin County	11/6/2007	Bond	\$17,000,000	Pass	68%
Dallas	5/3/2003	Bond	\$42,874,109	Pass	82%
Dallas	5/3/2003	Bond	\$3,667,144	Pass	77%
Dallas	5/2/1998	Bond	\$1,640,285	Pass	86%
Dallas	11/7/2006	Bond	\$36,750,000	Pass	81%
Denton	2/5/2005	Bond	\$7,000,000	Pass	54%
El Paso	5/6/2000	Bond	\$4,000,000	Pass	64%
El Paso	2/7/2004	Bond	\$2,089,198	Pass	64%
Frisco	9/14/2002	Bond	\$5,200,000	Pass	81%
Frisco	5/13/2006	Bond	\$22,500,000	Pass	72%
Grand Prairie	11/2/1999	Sales tax	\$75,907,860	Pass	67%
Harlingen	9/13/2003	Bond		Fail	44%
Harris County	11/6/2001	Bond	\$15,000,000	Pass	63%
Harris County	11/6/2007	Bond	\$38,000,000	Pass	52%
Hays County	6/2/2001	Bond	\$3,500,000	Pass	70%
Hays County	5/12/2007	Bond	\$30,000,000	Pass	68%

Highland Village	5/4/2002	Bond		Fail	38%
Highland Village	5/4/2002	Bond		Fail	40%
Highland Village	5/4/2002	Bond		Fail	38%
Highland Village	5/4/2002	Bond		Fail	45%
Highland Village	11/2/2004	Sales tax	\$3,750,000	Pass	61%
Irving	2/6/1999	Bond	\$5,500,000	Pass	73%
Irving	11/7/2006	Bond	\$5,000,000	Pass	69%
Kendall County	11/2/2004	Bond	\$5,000,000	Pass	62%
Lubbock	5/15/2004	Bond	\$340,000	Pass	71%
McKinney	2/20/1999	Bond	\$561,221	Pass	82%
Missouri City	9/13/2003	Bond	\$395,000	Pass	65%
Pasadena	8/1/2002	Bond	\$13,500,000	Pass	71%
Plano	5/2/1998	Bond	\$8,010,018	Pass	67%
Plano	5/7/2005	Bond	\$37,600,000	Pass	73%
Rockwall	11/8/2005	Bond	\$5,955,000	Pass	59%
Round Rock	11/6/2001	Bond	\$17,300,000	Pass	68%
Rowlett	5/4/2002	Bond	\$520,000	Pass	67%
Rowlett	5/13/2006	Bond		Fail	38%
San Antonio	11/4/2003	Bond	\$3,890,000	Pass	60%
San Antonio	5/6/2000	Sales tax	\$65,000,000	Pass	56%
San Antonio	5/1/1999	Bond	\$2,800,125	Pass	76%
San Antonio	5/7/2005	Sales tax	\$90,000,000	Pass	55%
San Antonio	5/7/2005	Sales tax	\$45,000,000	Pass	54%
San Antonio	5/12/2007	Bond	\$34,918,490	Pass	69%
San Marcos	11/8/2005	Bond	\$2,000,000	Pass	68%
Seabrook	11/6/2007	Bond	\$2,150,000	Pass	60%
Travis County	11/6/2001	Bond	\$28,600,000	Pass	57%
Travis County	11/8/2005	Bond	\$40,000,000	Pass	66%
Williamson County	11/7/2006	Bond	\$10,000,000	Pass	61%
TOTAL			\$1,004,672,215		

Addendum B: Legal Notice for Property Tax Increase

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING ON TAX INCREASE

The (name of the taxing unit) will hold a public hearing on a proposal to increase total tax revenues from properties on the tax roll in the preceding year by (percentage by which proposed tax rate exceeds lower of rollback tax rate or effective tax rate calculated under this chapter) percent. Your individual taxes may increase at a greater or lesser rate, or even decrease, depending on the change in the taxable value of your property in relation to the change in taxable value of all other property and the tax rate that is adopted.

The public hearing will be held on (date and time) at (meeting place).

(Names of all members of the governing body, showing how each voted on the proposal to consider the tax increase or, if one or more were absent, indicating the absences.)

The notice must also contain the following information:

- (A) the unit's adopted tax rate for the preceding year and the proposed tax rate, expressed as an amount per \$100;
- (B) the difference, expressed as an amount per \$100 and as a percent increase or decrease, as applicable, in the proposed tax rate compared to the adopted tax rate for the preceding year;
- (C) the average appraised value of a residence homestead in the taxing unit in the preceding year and in the current year; the unit's homestead exemption, other than an exemption available only to disabled persons or persons 65 years of age or older, applicable to that appraised value in each of those years; and the average taxable value of a residence homestead in the unit in each of those years, disregarding any homestead exemption available only to disabled persons or persons 65 years of age or older;
- (D) the amount of tax that would have been imposed by the unit in the preceding year on a residence homestead appraised at the average appraised value of a residence homestead in that year, disregarding any homestead exemption available only to disabled persons or persons 65 years of age or older;
- (E) the amount of tax that would be imposed by the unit in the current year on a residence homestead appraised at the average appraised value of a residence homestead in the current year, disregarding any homestead exemption available only to disabled persons or persons 65 years of age or older, if the proposed tax rate is adopted; and
- (F) the difference between the amounts of tax calculated under Paragraphs (D) and (E), expressed in dollars and cents and described as the annual increase or decrease, as applicable, in the tax to be imposed by the unit on the average residence homestead in the unit in the current year if the proposed tax rate is adopted.

After the hearing the governing body shall give notice of the meeting at which it will vote on the proposed tax rate and it must state the following:⁹²

⁹² Property Tax Code §26.06(c).

NOTICE OF VOTE ON TAX RATE

The (name of the taxing unit) conducted a public hearing on a proposal to increase the total tax revenues of the (name of the taxing unit) from properties on the tax roll in the preceding year by (percentage by which proposed tax rate exceeds lower of rollback tax rate or effective tax rate calculated under this chapter) percent on (date and time public hearing was conducted).

The (governing body of the taxing unit) is scheduled to vote on the tax rate that will result in that tax increase at a public meeting to be held on (date and time) at (meeting place).