

Neighborhood Integrity

I believe that neighborhoods must be viewed as inviolable. They are the places where we spend most of our daily lives. They are the foundation of a community's quality of life. A community is the sum of its neighborhoods. The first priority of those elected to the council should be to do no damage to existing neighborhoods.

Established neighborhoods in the city are threatened by developers in a variety of ways including: proposals to direct traffic through them; inappropriate development being proposed within them; proximate commercial development without sufficient buffering; single family homes being transformed into commercial properties for rental use; and inappropriate behavior by some tenants of rental properties.

Progress Report (June 2007 – Present)

1. Established two single family home overlay district¹ options:
 - a. Neighborhood Prevailing Overlay District
 - b. Neighborhood Conservation Overlay District.

These give older established neighborhoods the option of requiring any new or renovated structures to be consistent with the existing standards and character of the neighborhood. Thus, if existing homes are razed and replaced with new homes or are substantially renovated, an overlay district ensures the changes will be consistent with the character of the neighborhood.

2. Successfully moved to change the definition of "neighborhood" from "subdivisions" to "30 contiguous lots", making overlay districts accessible to more homeowners.
3. Supported a comprehensive new neighborhood initiative which includes:
 - a. Universal rental registration requiring all single family home rental properties to be registered. Registration will be renewed annually and mandate provision of a local point of contact, together with the current number and names of tenants on the lease.
 - b. Refocus city planning so it is directed to neighborhood protection and promotes neighborhood stabilization, appearance, public infrastructure, and compatible land use.
 - c. Establish a Neighborhood Relations unit, analogous to community policing, whose mission will be to become well acquainted with residents in the neighborhoods, enforce codes, proactively address parking issues, and mediate disputes.
 - d. Provide continuous education and implement the Aggieland Solution mediation program.
 - e. Rigorously enforce code ordinances. Currently, this has been limited to physical code violations identified by driving past properties in the city two times a week. The revised emphasis will be on rigorously enforcing codes relating to inappropriate behavior in neighborhoods.
 - f. Implement civil penalties for code violations instead of relying only on criminal penalties.

¹ An overlay district is an optional planning zone offering additional protection to established neighborhoods which they may elect to adopt if 60% of homeowners agree.

4. Commissioned a study to document the historic nature of the Southside area. This is a legal prerequisite to enacting an ordinance to protect historic structures in the Southside area, which will be presented to council in summer 2008.
5. Requested ordinance revisions to establish height buffers for residential buildings similar to those that exist for non-residential buildings.
6. Removed on-street parking in several neighborhoods around campus at the request of residents in those areas.
7. Initiated a review of ordinances to revise what is permitted under an active construction permit to minimize the adverse impacts of quality of life on neighborhoods by contractors during construction periods.

Proposed Future Agenda (2008 – 2011)

1. **Reject any actions which will result in non-local traffic being directed through an established neighborhood.** Any purported “solution” to a traffic problem that lowers the quality of life in a neighborhood, is an exacerbation of the problem not a resolution of it. If one neighborhood is breached to expediently “fix” a traffic problem, a precedent is set and provides the conceptual rationale to breach other neighborhoods.

The opening of Munson Street in the College Hills neighborhood to through traffic was the most controversial issue relating to neighborhood preservation in College Station between the late 1970s and 1999. The Crompton family lived on Munson Street during that 20 year period and we were centrally involved in it. What happened on Munson Street provided useful insights into the impact of traffic on neighborhoods. The following lessons were learned:

- a. **The city (and its consultants) are likely to grossly underestimate the negative impact of the traffic on a neighborhood.** In 1980, the projected maximum number of cars per day ever to use Munson Street was 700. Fifteen years later, over 7,800 crossed the city’s traffic counter. This is likely to occur because:
 - (i) The city is likely to view the impact in the context of current traffic counts, ignoring the inevitability of substantial increases in the future; and
 - (ii) It is likely to seek to minimize the controversy such decisions will generate.
 - b. **It is politically non-feasible to go back and mitigate or fix** a traffic problem in a neighborhood after it has been created, because a substantial constituency of those using the “cut-through” are likely to support its continuation.
 - c. **Opening neighborhoods to traffic has only a marginal and short-term impact on alleviating a traffic problem.** It is unlikely to be an effective long-term solution.
2. **Provide neighborhoods with the opportunity and the tools to preserve and direct how their areas look and function.** This will require full implementation of the Neighborhood Initiative (#3 in Progress Report above) that the council has approved in principle.

Fiscal Conservatism

The fundamental principle of fiscal conservatism is that those who benefit from services should pay for them. This philosophy permeates the previous five elements of my platform. I believe that by making growth pay for itself and revising the city's economic development policies, substantial savings in city expenditures and enhancements to the tax base will be forthcoming.

Fiscal responsibility extends beyond fiscal conservation to embrace transparency in financial matters, especially those relating to council members' actions.

Progress Report (June 2007 – Present)

1. Initiated a requirement that financial reports of all city council election candidates should be posted on-line as soon as they are received.
2. Initiated limits on expenses, travel costs and conference costs incurred by city council members.
3. Initiated abolition of the council's policy of sponsoring tables at community events at the city taxpayers' expense.
4. Championed the acquisition of fiscal impact analysis software which will enable much more accurate projections to be made about the fiscal costs and benefits to the city imposed by specific development.
5. Initiated meetings between the city council and College Station ISD to discuss the potential of joint projects.
6. Moved to restore Arts Council funding after additional safeguards had been implemented to ensure financial proprietary.
7. Initiated reduction of funds to "outside service organizations" from approximately \$600,000 (FY 2007) to \$127,000 (FY 2008). The council has no authority to allocate taxpayers' resources to non-city functions.
8. Rejected staff proposal to fund a new city hall by selling other city land assets. Required that funding for this project be voted on at a referendum.

Proposed Future Agenda (2008 – 2011)

1. **Insist that those who benefit from services be required to pay for them.**
2. **Partner with the College Station independent School District** to jointly invest and share in facilities rather than duplicate them. Potential joint projects include a performing arts center, athletics fields, libraries and gymnasiums.

Make Growth Pay for Itself

College Station taxpayers provide massive subsidies to developers by paying the costs of the infrastructure to accommodate new homes. The current bill that taxpayers will be asked to pay is \$150 million for new and expanded roads, fire station, police building, city hall, parks, library, community center, et al. Developers reap the profits, while taxpayers pay the bills. I estimate that each residence built in the past 5 years has resulted in a \$16,000 cost subsidy in new infrastructure requirements being imposed on existing College Station residents. That is not fair.

In addition, the city estimates that to “break-even” on the cost of delivering city services, a home must be valued at approximately \$180,000. When taxpayers’ costs associated with the school district and the county are included, this “break-even” figure is likely to exceed \$250,000. The average home value in our market is \$149,600. This means that most new residential homes result in higher taxes for existing residents because the cost of servicing them in most cases exceeds the property taxes and sales tax revenues they generate.

The city is in a strong position to require future growth to be on terms laid down by current residents, because demand for the College Station “product” far exceeds the supply. We are consistently informed by the city’s Development Services Department that College Station will continue to grow rapidly and that such growth is “inevitable.” If it is (and I am not convinced it is inevitable), then clearly we must dictate the nature of the growth, and insist that developers and new homeowners pay its costs. If as a result, some developers elect not to build in College Station, so be it!

Progress Report (June 2007 – Present)

1. Initiated an increase in the park land dedication payments paid by developers from \$540 to \$900 per residence. My full proposal of \$1,900 per residence, which would cover the cost of providing new parks for new development, was rejected by council.
2. Initiated the extension of park land dedication fees so that for the first time they applied to new residential developments in the city’s Extra Territorial Jurisdiction (ETJ) area.
3. Supported annexation of 3,200 acres so land on periphery of the city could be zoned for agriculture use and released for development in accordance with the city’s Comprehensive Plan. A zoning change from agricultural use would not be granted unless the infrastructure was in place to accommodate it. The council voted to annex 1,600 acres.
4. Supported large lot (20 acre) zoning in the ETJ to prevent residential development occurring on the periphery of the city until the infrastructure was in place to accommodate it. The council rejected this proposal.
5. Initiated a proposal for more rigorous requirements for Traffic Impact Assessments (described in the following Alleviating Traffic Congestion position paper).
6. Initiated the process for developing an impact fee schedule so new homes will pay the full cost of water and wastewater services. This will ensure that the capital costs incurred to deliver these services to new homes will be borne by those residences. Authorized a water facilities’ master plan by consultants that will provide the cost data needed to accomplish these impact fees.

Proposed Future Agenda (2008 – 2011)

1. **Identify all the ways residential growth currently is subsidized, and develop policies that will remove this subsidy.** For example, impact fees for roads needed to serve new development should be implemented to cover the full costs associated with such roads. Property taxes have risen inexorably and will continue to do so as long as existing residents are expected to subsidize the costs associated with new residential development.
2. **Focus on infill development.** City data show that 35%-40% of the city's total geographical area has not been developed and is suitable for development. There is no need for the city to keep expanding south beyond its existing boundaries. This sprawl substantially increases our infrastructure costs.
3. **Require developers to adhere to the community's preferred standards and offer what the community desires.** In recent years more non-local developers have been active in College Station. They have no long-term commitment to the community beyond the life of their development. If, as a result, they elect to go elsewhere, so be it!
4. **Strengthen current ordinances to ensure that subdivisions in the city's Extraterritorial Jurisdiction (ETJ) meet the higher standard of the city when they are annexed.** State law gives the city the authority to regulate subdivisions in the ETJ which extends 3.5 miles out from the city limits.

Alleviate Traffic Congestion

The city's past failure to make new development pay the costs of providing the streets needed to fully accommodate it, means the city is now confronted with the need to find substantial funds to alleviate the traffic congestion which the new growth has created. The magnitude of the city's needs is now too large for them to be accommodated by the bond issue which is scheduled for November 2008. The city has to raise substantial local funds to both expand and improve city thoroughfares. This means that both alternative funding sources for streets and alternatives to automobile travel have to be explored.

Progress Report (June 2007 – Present)

1. Passed the East Side Transportation Plan hailed by all parties as a model process. It is now integrated into the city's Comprehensive Plan.
2. Staff are preparing for the council's review three proposals for funding road improvements using
 - a. Traffic impact fees.
 - b. Tax increment financing.
 - c. Traffic user fee (Percentage tax on utility bills).Details of these are scheduled to be on the council's agenda in Summer 2008.
3. Created a new position, Director of Capital Projects, to speed up new and renovated street capital projects. His 18 member team was carved out from the Public Works Division. By separating capital projects from the many other Public Works' functions, urgent street projects can be "fast tracked".
4. Initiated review of Traffic Impact Assessments (TIAs). These are used to ensure development is only permitted if road capacity is available to accommodate the traffic it generates. Currently, they are required only if more than 5,000 trips per day are generated. Few projects in College Station are this large. Hence, my proposal was to require TIAs on all developments generating more than 250 trips per hour of peak time. The council refused to support this.
5. Passed the Red Light Camera Program. This uses state of the art technology to enhance traffic safety. It is being pilot tested at four intersections and is intended to discourage drivers from running red lights.
6. Initiated a requirement that provision for bicycles and pedestrians must be incorporated in all street projects.
7. Initiated the inclusion for the first time of a bicycle representative to the council's Traffic Committee to ensure full consideration of provision for bicycles in all traffic projects.

Proposed Future Agenda (2008 – 2011)

1. **Impose traffic impact fees.** These would require all new homeowners to pay a fee which would cover the cost of new road infrastructure needed to accommodate the demand created by the new homes.

2. **Explore creation of a special fund where the money is designated exclusively for roads and could not be directed to other projects.** If money was raised from increases in property taxes, it would become part of the general fund and subject to being spent on other purposes. Further, the annual debt charges needed to service (say) \$30-\$40 million for new roads from property taxes would require raising the property tax rate by approximately 10 cents per \$100 valuation which is likely to be unpalatable to many. This special fund approach must meet at least four conditions.
 - a. It should be progressive, rather than regressive. For example, if it was proposed to add a tax to the utility bill, it should be based on a percentage rather than a flat rate.
 - b. There must be widespread citizen input and deliberation on which roads the money will be used to enhance before the money is spent.
 - c. There should be a public referendum to determine whether such a fund should be created. Thus, it should be treated similarly to a regular bond issue.
 - d. Projects should adhere to the other points in this platform e.g., neighborhood preservation, ecological sustainability, embracing hike and bike trails, etc.

3. **Create dedicated bike trails.** As an avid bike rider, I am aware that many of those currently in existence are unsafe. It is incredible that the city's major employer has 46,000 young people moving to and from the plant each day, and there is no comprehensive, safe bike trail network.

4. **Require developers of projects generating more than 200 trips per hour at peak time to accurately identify the impact their development will have on traffic flows by undertaking Traffic Impact Analyses.** Currently, Traffic Impact Analyses are required only of very large developments. The council recently rejected this requirement, but TIA analysis is essential to allow the city to look at ways to better assess traffic increases ahead of anticipated development.

Enhance Attractiveness and Ecological Sustainability

My department at TAMU is ranked #1 in the U.S. by its peers and our salaries are competitive with those of other institutions. Despite those advantages, recruiting top-class faculty is challenging because College Station is not perceived to be as attractive as the cities of our competitors. Those communities include: Fort Collins, CO; Boulder, CO; Raleigh, NC; Salt Lake City, UT; Clemson, SC; Blacksburg, VA; and State College, PA. These communities should be our "comparables" which we use to evaluate our quality of life, not Bryan, Temple or Huntsville.

There are no great cities in the world that do not have a great green infrastructure of streetscape landscaping, parks, historic districts and urban forestry ("great" is defined as a place you want to live). Green infrastructure is a city's "canary in the coal mine". It is the visible cue used by visitors to evaluate its quality and livability.

Attractiveness and ecological sustainability are both a moral imperative and the cornerstone on which the city's efforts to attract "high-end" economic development is dependent. Expenditures on enhancing a city's attractiveness and ecological sustainability are not costs to the city. Rather, they are an up-front investment which provides a substantial economic return. An attractive and sustainable community is not only an end in itself, it is a prerequisite for attracting talented people and "high-end" economic development.

Progress Report (June 2007 – Present)

1. Initiated a pilot program with the Utilities Department whereby they will invest \$50,000 for new tree planting to offset the "Heat Island Effect" and the visual and air pollution caused by utilities. The pilot venture is on William Fitch Parkway from Highway 6 to Pebble Creek Parkway.
2. Initiated public input into the planning of roads so there will now be public hearings on street capital projects before a professional services contract is awarded AND before the contract is bid out i.e. after the design is completed. In the past there was zero input and these were Consent Agenda items, approved without discussion. This input provides opportunities for the public to comment on landscaping and bicycle provision, as well as on a road's functionality.
3. Initiated the "College Station Green" initiative based on Austin's "Green Energy" program which will involve all departments revising their operations so they are state-of-the-art environmentally friendly. The effort will develop specific action plans for:
 - a. Implementing LEED standards to ensure energy efficiency in buildings
 - b. Air quality and reduction of HCF footprint
 - c. Renewable energy and energy efficiency
 - d. Water conservation
 - e. Reduction of pesticide and fertilizer use
 - f. Greenhouse gas emissions reduction
 - g. Recycling
 - h. Protection of open space and green areas
4. Initiated the council's endorsement of the "Cool Cities" program. Signatories to this national program pledge to reduce global warming pollution in their cities to 7 percent below 1990 levels by 2012.
5. Initiated integration of extensive green landscaping as a requirement in all city street construction and renovation projects.

6. Initiated a comprehensive Water Conservation Plan which was endorsed in principle by the council and will be implemented over the next three years.
7. Initiated the process to establish a tree preservation ordinance. The council endorsed this initiative in principle.
8. Initiated the council's new policy of zero impact on floodplain areas by any development. An ordinance to implement this policy is being prepared. The taxpayers have recently spent millions of dollars to keep floodwater out of homes on Bee Creek because the floodplain was not respected. This will prevent such costs being incurred in the future. There are many other benefits to protecting floodplains, including better connectivity of trails for transportation and recreation within the community.
9. Initiated a review of architectural design and landscape requirements for non-residential properties.

Proposed Future Agenda (2008 – 2011)

1. **Develop and implement action plans for each of the eight elements in the “College Station Green” initiative identified in #3 above.**
2. **Translate the council’s endorsement in principle of the water conservation plan, tree preservation plan, and zero impact on floodplain areas into meaningful ordinances.**
3. **Conceptualizing “Roads” as “Parkways.”** Extensive native plantings, green landscaping and tree planting should be an integral part of every street project. The city, for the most part, has failed to match the green infrastructure which has been incorporated in many neighborhoods by developers and residents. As a result, too many city streets are harsh, barren and ugly. The TAMU campus and the landscaping of streets such as Woodcreek, Emerald Forest and the west end of Rock Prairie Road should set the standard for the city's streetscapes.
4. **Initiating extensive tree planting by the utilities department to reduce residents’ electricity bills** by reducing the “heat island effect” and shading homes in summer. Much of the city’s natural tree canopy has been removed. The replacement of trees, grass and green landscape by development causes the city’s temperature to be **5° - 9°F higher** than the surrounding rural areas.
5. **Amending city ordinances to make it economically advantageous for developers to create “Conservation Developments.** These encourage preservation of green space rather than standard suburbia developments.

“High-End” Economic Development

The city’s economic development efforts have had limited success. The presence of a major science research university should have spawned a host of high-tech companies in the community. This has not occurred. The current economic development efforts should be redirected. Most of the top ten employers in College Station are governmental organizations. The private business sector is minimally represented on this list.

It is imperative that economic development is differentiated from corporate welfare. College Station has relatively full employment. If companies offering \$15 an hour (\$30,000 per year) jobs are given incentives to locate in College Station, it is likely that low income housing will be developed to accompany them which would likely result in existing taxpayers subsidizing growth. Too much of what is currently done under the heading of economic development, in fact encourages uneconomic development.

Progress Report (June 2007 – Present)

1. Initiated council workshop on re-evaluating city economic development policies. Voted against the present guidelines, which in my view are anachronistic. They reflect an approach to economic development which is 20 years out-of-date, and do not relate well to the contemporary context of College Station. They encourage corporate welfare. Council agreed to revisit this issue when a consultant’s report is presented in Summer 2008 as part of the Comprehensive Plan. They also agreed to move away from cash incentives for new businesses and towards viewing incentives in terms of staff consulting and expediting permit processes.
2. Initiated additional “high-end” target to focus more effort on recruitment of affluent retirees who are “positive” taxpayers (i.e. they generate more on taxes than they cost to service).

Proposed Future Agenda (2008 – 2011)

1. **A more selective economic development policy that focuses on:**
 - a. **Attracting companies involved in such activities as high tech, research and development, company headquarters, start-up incubations, and high-end services.** TAMU is a powerful anchor attraction for such companies. Their major asset is professionals and “knowledge workers.” Such workers favor attractive communities. Thus, effective economic development requires investment in such areas as parks, greenways, hike and bike trails, landscaping, tree planting, horticulture and beautification. If College Station is inferior to competitive cities in this respect, then the city, and any companies which locate here, will have to pay “disamenity compensation”, that is, a salary/benefit premium to offset the lower quality of life.
 - b. **High quality, market appropriate, retail development.** Since sales taxes are critical to the city’s financial viability, recruitment of new retail opportunities should be on-going.
 - c. **Attracting GRAMPIES** --- The Growing number of Retired Active Monied People in Excellent Shape. Their retirement incomes equate to new business payrolls moving into the community. The city should refocus its economic development investments to target this market.
 - d. **The following major projects:**
 - Hotel/convention center
 - Enhancement of the city’s position as a regional medical center
 - Enhancement and development of Northgate
 - Campus Pointe (joint development with TAMU)
2. **Substantially reduce monetary incentives provided for economic development**, because often the resultant economic development is transitory. When the incentives expire, companies too frequently move on elsewhere and there is no net economic gain to the city. The widespread use of tax abatements is especially problematic since they provide new businesses with a competitive advantage over existing businesses in the community which is unfair
3. **Nurture locally owned businesses**, since much more of their revenue recycles and remains in the community than the revenue of businesses whose headquarters are elsewhere.