



2. City Context

2.1 Introduction

The recreational opportunities and needs of a city are intrinsically linked to the context that shapes the community. This includes the image and physical characteristics of the city, the history of the city, the local economy, and the city's demographics. Recreation constitutes an integral part of the community and, as such, is key to the success and health of the entire city.

2.2 City Image and Unique Physical Features

The physical features of a city determine its visual character and the way in which it is experienced. However, it is the manner in which such features are respected, celebrated, and protected by the community that determines the city's image, which in turn is the essence of what differentiates one city from another.

Waxahachie's character is defined by the rich history and unique ambiance of the downtown area, ample rural open space, four major creeks and Lake Waxahachie, which is visited by Waxahachie residents as well as visitors from neighboring cities.

City Approach

Very little of the rich character of Waxahachie is noticeable from the main Interstate Highway 35E. Even though this road stretches through the full north-south length of the City, nothing announces the City on either the north or south side entries. In addition,



the unique historic downtown is bypassed with only glimpses noticeable to the observant traveler.



For many travelers along IH 35, this image of industry is their only introduction to the City of Waxahachie.

The two most impressive city approaches are along FM 287 from the west and FM 77 from the south. The railroad bridge along the former creates a dramatic entering experience. At the intersection of FM 77, FM 66 and FM 877, the physical approach is downwards towards the Waxahachie Creek with the view towards the impressive Ellis County Courthouse to the front and the historic causeway to the left. Most other entryways are rather nondescript and undefined.



The railroad bridge over FM 287 creates a unique sense of gateway to the City.

Inspiration for the development of future entryways and gateways may be found in the unique physical features that make up the image of the City.



Image Defining Features

A closer look at the City's image-defining features reveals the following:

Downtown Waxahachie:

The Waxahachie historic downtown area, known as the Ellis County Courthouse Historic District, is one of the best-preserved historic sites in the State of Texas. Visitors come from afar to visit and enjoy the ambiance of a city center that reflects the charms of a by-gone era, while functional for today's commerce and entertainment. The beautiful and historic courthouse itself is a landmark that is seen from many vantage points within the City, even from as far as IH 35. It is apparent that the residents of Waxahachie take great pride in this Texas jewel.



A compelling view of the Ellis County Courthouse as seen from IH 35 by the observant traveler. The Parks Master Plan recommends actions to protect this City defining image and view.

Neighborhoods:

Waxahachie has various older neighborhoods. It proudly boasts four Historic Districts: West End Historic District, North Rogers Street Historic District, Oldham Avenue Historic District, and Wyatt Street Shotgun Historic District. Some are characterized by relatively small houses, narrow and shaded streets, and intimate communities; while others consist of large and imposing historic houses particularly along West Main Street. In all these neighborhoods, people typically *perambulate*, walking their streets to attend church and visit neighbors. Today's new residential developments typically do not support such activities; thus, where it does exist within a community, it should be celebrated and supported. During the public meeting a young girl remarked: "*I wish to see our sidewalks fixed so that, when our family walks to church, we do not trip on the sidewalk.*"



An imposing historic home along west Main Street in the West End Historic District. A trail of historic significance runs by this beautiful and stately old house.

“I wish to see our sidewalks fixed so that, when our family walks to church, we do not trip on the sidewalk.”

Young girl attending the public meeting; 2006.

A gateway is an important element to give definition and add pride to a neighborhood. The Halff team identified an opportunity for a gateway at a particular location, which will enhance the surrounding neighborhood. This location is at the corner of Wyatt and East Main Street. The existing structures surrounding this intersection have a scale and charm that are conducive to creating a retail/commercial node that will act as an inviting entryway to the neighborhood particularly along Wyatt Street. The proximity to Freedman Memorial Park with a link to Jefferson Street Park and trail provides additional impetus to consider this particular intersection as an important node and gateway.



The view along Main Street towards the Ellis County Courthouse provides an important link between Downtown and this intersection with Wyatt Street that acts as a gateway to the local neighborhood.



Residents of Waxahachie take great pride in the appearance of their houses as seen across the way from Jefferson Street Park.



Creeks:

Waxahachie's creek system consists of four main creeks from north to south: Grove Creek, Mustang Creek, Waxahachie Creek, and Prong Creek. All of these creeks run generally in a southeastern direction.

Grove Creek runs partially through the City for a distance of about 3 miles. A stretch of about 2.5 miles runs along the City's eastern edge. Sections of this creek are beautiful with exposed limestone and its characteristic white color. In some areas, housing and roads have encroached dangerously close to the creek and it is important that every effort be made to prevent this in new areas to be developed. In addition, future "road improvements" should be kept well away from the delicate and sensitive stream edge.



Grove Creek is characterized by numerous limestone outcroppings.



Mustang Creek originates in the City and runs for a distance of 6 miles through the City where it is bordered by many new developments that cause increase in run-off peaks and volume. The creek is further relatively heavily impacted by infrastructure that intersects with the creek at various points.



Mustang Creek is characterized by developments that caused destruction of the riparian vegetation and surface runoff from fertilized turf resulting in excessive algae growth.

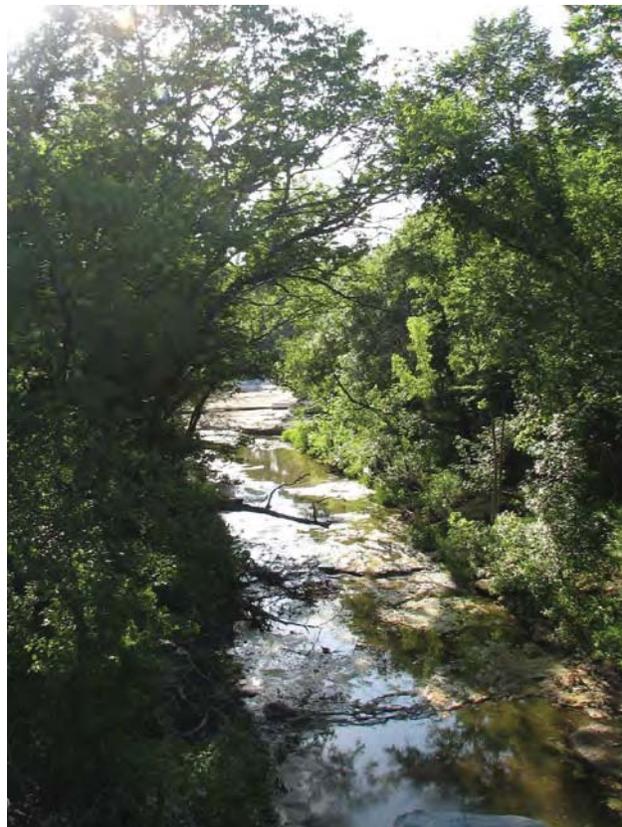
Waxahachie Creek runs through the city for a distance of about 9 miles. It borders the city for a distance of 4 miles on its western edge. This creek is the very reason for the location and name of the City of Waxahachie. Various City facilities and parks are located on its banks, the most important one from a recreational point of view being Getzendaner Park and the more than 4 miles long Waxahachie Creek trail.



Development with increased pervious paving is the reason for the undercutting of the creek banks of Waxahachie Creek. The end result is a deeper cutting streambed and the loss of trees along the creek banks.



Prong Creek is a tributary of Waxahachie Creek. It runs for a distance of about 4.5 miles through the City of which 3 miles are inundated by Lake Waxahachie before it enters Waxahachie Creek.



Prong Creek is generally in a healthy condition. However it requires a commitment from City leadership to protect the watershed and to prevent destruction of the crucially important creek associated vegetation.

As is the case with creeks in urban environments, Waxahachie and Mustang creeks generally suffer from more than natural concentrated and higher volume floodwater, causing the creeks to erode excessively. Sections of the banks along the Waxahachie Creek are relatively unstable with trees precariously holding on with their root system.

The creeks in Waxahachie have tremendous aesthetical appeal including the excitement of running water, the peacefulness of quiet flowing water, the sound of water rushing or trickling down its course, and the sounds and movements of birds and animals associated with the water. Ecologically, the linear configuration of creeks makes them extremely valuable as landscape corridors for wildlife. Animals and birds move up and down these corridors for their protection and forage. Recognizing the ecological value of creeks leads to better management and the opportunity for education and various “nature experiences” for the citizens of Waxahachie.

Floodplains:

The floodplain is the area along the creek system that is defined by the 100-year flood line. Being flooded periodically, the area is typically unsuited for permanent buildings, but provides a nutrient rich environment for agriculture and environmental habitats for numerous plant and animal species. Most importantly, the area personifies and defines a valuable opportunity for recreation and open space, creating aesthetically pleasing



vistas and space that is enjoyed by all. Protecting this area is further essential to ensure proper and effective flood management of floods with a probability of 1% and more.



Naturally maintained floodplains are characterized by large mature trees and prairie grasses with root systems up to 12 feet deep, which is crucial in the prevention of surface erosion during flood events.

It is important to realize that there is a direct correlation between protecting floodplains and managing land uses within the watershed. The purpose is to prevent an increase of runoff volume and peaks, thus causing an increase of erosion and habitat destruction. Measures include protection of wetlands, preference of grass meadows versus turf, porous paving instead of impervious surfaces, “day-lighting” piped drainage channels, re-meandering of straightened channels, and the installation of vegetative bio-filters to filtrate sediments and pollutants before storm water runoff reaches the creek system. Furthermore, it is a fact that the 100-year flood line itself will rise in elevation with unabated development and increase of hard surfaces in the watershed.

Lake Waxahachie:

Lake Waxahachie is a tremendously valuable amenity for the citizens. It provides beautiful views over and physical access to the water. The Lake is relatively small and has a sense of intimacy, although it is large enough to provide for various recreational activities on the water and along its banks. Access to the waterfront land is ideal from a recreational point of view, especially, due to its linear nature that is ideally suited for hike and bike trails and occasional park sites. However, large stretches of lake frontage are inaccessible to the public due to exclusive private water access from the adjacent properties. Being a publicly funded amenity, Lake Waxahachie should ideally have unimpeded public access around its edge. A focused recreational study of Lake Waxahachie is required to ensure that its full potential as a public recreational facility is achieved.



Lake Waxahachie is a beautiful amenity enjoyed by many residents and non-residents.

Open Space and Rural Landscapes:

Agricultural activity and rural landscapes characterize Waxahachie in all its outlying areas; large areas of land are unspoiled by development. Such landscapes are fast vanishing from the urban environment. Yet, it is when such landscapes are offset by sensitive development that their real beauty is revealed. Very good models for such land development exist. One of these is Conservation Development.



Both nature and culture define rural landscapes. In this image it is characterized by agricultural activity including pastures, farm structures and animals. Such landscapes are successfully incorporated into residential development by means of the concept of Conservation Development.



The common mistake made by many city officials is that rural quality is maintained by low-density development with large lots, e.g. 1, 2 and 4 acre in size. The reality is that such measures only result in a bland uniformity causing the destruction of the very elements and features that contribute to the charm of a rural landscape. The antidote to this is smaller size lots with large areas (60-80% of the entire project development area) dedicated to communal open space. This is similar to a golf course estate, with natural open space containing unique features and vistas in place of the golf course. In short, it is important to understand that lot size should never be used to control density.

Conservation Development calls for studying and celebrating the quality of open space and preserves, establishing the most appropriate open space configuration and the development of a network of functional connections.

City Image Conclusion

The purpose of the 2007 Waxahachie Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan is to incorporate all the above-described elements and features in an intelligent manner to celebrate their uniqueness, enhance their appearance, ensure their preservation, and make their value known to the community. The City of Waxahachie is fortunate to contain so many of these important building blocks. The objective of the Halff consulting team is to produce a vibrant Park Master Plan that is practical in maintaining and enhancing the unique image and character of the city of Waxahachie.

2.3 Brief History of Waxahachie

(Sources: www.waxahachiechamber.com/history/waxhistory.html;)

Since the town's founding in 1850, The City of Waxahachie's historical makeup played an integral role in the establishment and shape of the community.

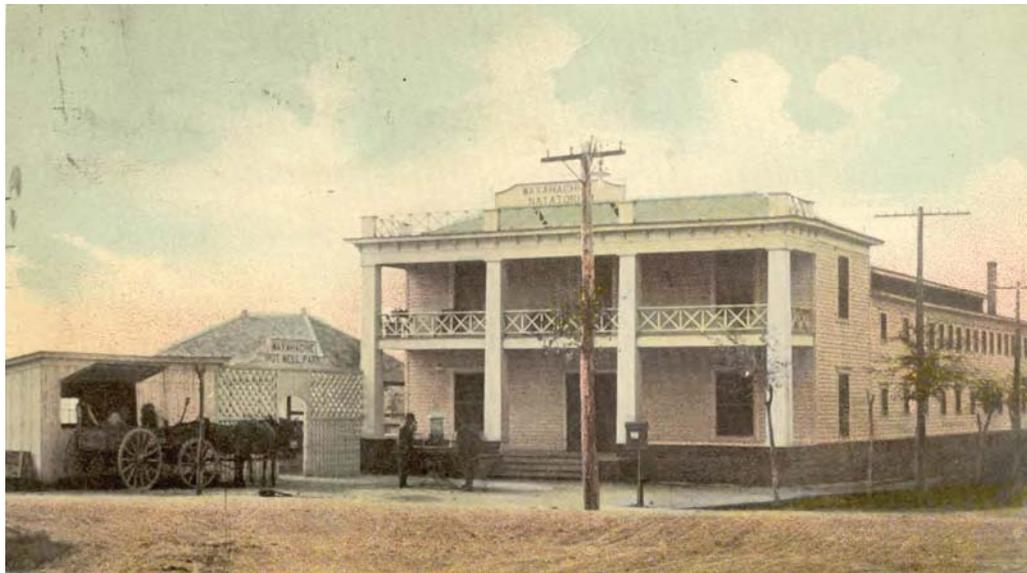


A picnic group on Waxahachie Creek ca. 1890.



In 1847, a pioneer named E.W. Rogers settled on what was a very opportunistic land. This land, located in the county's geographic center, seemed very favorable for settlement due to the two creeks that ran through the area, providing a good water source and a good source of timber. One of these creeks was known as *Waxahachie*, (meaning "female buffalo", coined by the Tonkawa Indians). In 1850, a man named Richard Donaldson began to survey a forty-block town site using Rogers' homestead as its primary orientation point, thus establishing the City of Waxahachie.

The establishment of railroads affected all aspects of life and meaning for the city. The first rail line reached Ellis County in 1871. The line ran 15 miles to the east, bypassing the City of Waxahachie. Realizing the importance and impact a rail line could make for the city, business leaders and citizens organized the Waxahachie Tap Railroad, which would establish a rail service directly into Waxahachie. The tap line was finally completed in September of 1879, running just north of the original town site. Through time, two other rail systems were established: One, operated by the Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad System, was developed and built on the south side of town, while the other, operated by the Trinity and Brazos Valley Railroad, established a line that connected Waxahachie and Corsicana to the east.



This image comes from a postcard that reads: Natatorium at Hot Well Park, Waxahachie, Texas.

The vibrant local economy of the 1900's was vital in the establishment of the city. Production, processing, and shipping of cotton formed the basis for the city's rapid growth during the 19th and 20th centuries. The cotton fiber helped weave the fabric of the city; thus, the establishment of warehouses, cotton yards, cottonseed compresses, and cotton gins were built around one of the three railroads that serviced the community. This was the basis for the rapid development of downtown and the establishment of local communities which still remain today.

Local cotton production began to decline during the 1930's, creating an abrupt end to a most prosperous era. Since then, Waxahachie has been at a slow and steady growth. With this growth, the realization of the importance of the "architectural legacy" is still



intact. Currently, there are numerous structures that have been established as State Historical Landmarks throughout the city and the importance of the five historic districts have been recognized by the National Register of Historic Places.

History is defined as “the continuum of events occurring in succession leading from the past to the present and even into the future.” This is true for the City of Waxahachie because if there is no past, there is no present; with no present, there is no future.

When considering the history of recreation in the City of Waxahachie the following is noteworthy: Erected in 1902, the Chautauqua Auditorium served as the meeting place for religious, educational, and musical events as part of the Chautauqua movement, which was popular in the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Still used and in relatively good shape, the Chautauqua Auditorium is the only surviving Chautauqua building in the state.



Early image of the Chautauqua Auditorium in Getzendaner Park.



This image comes from a postcard that reads: Getzendaner Memorial Park, Waxahachie, Texas.



Waxahachie served as the training site for a number of professional baseball teams, from such cities as Detroit in 1917-18, Cincinnati in 1919, Chicago in 1920, and Kansas City in 1921. While staying in Waxahachie, team members resided in the Rogers Hotel.



1953 photograph of Waxahachie looking west; note the winding creek and rural landscape in the background.

2.4 Waxahachie's Economy Today

The City of Waxahachie is located along a major artery (Interstate Highway 35) between the Cities of Dallas and Austin. The City has access to a railroad line as well as the Midlothian/Waxahachie Municipal Airport. These transportation resources afford numerous opportunities for travel and business connections to the surrounding communities and the Dallas Fort Worth metroplex.

Retail and office employment together with management and professional positions make up more than 60% of Waxahachie's work force. About 50% of the working residents receive a yearly salary of between \$35,000 and \$75,000. Pertaining to housing stock, 47% of Waxahachie's housing is in the \$50,000 to \$100,000 range.

(source: NCTCOG)

2.5 Demographic Profile of Waxahachie

A key part of the master planning process is to understand the size and the characteristics of the population to be served.

The population of Waxahachie has grown with a dramatically 33% increase during the last five years. This is a remarkable growth, which potentially has far reaching impacts on the ability of the City to provide adequate services and amenities. The expected



growth between 2007 and 2017 is projected to continue at a hearty rate of 33%. Considering the expected huge influx of new residents, it is the purpose of this Parks Master Plan to ensure that the current and future demand for parks and recreational facilities is sufficiently met.

For planning purposes, the 2007 population is taken at 26,700. The population estimate for the Year 2017, which is the end of the ten-year planning period for the Parks Master Plan, is 39,400.

Waxahachie is at present an ethnically diverse community with about 71% white (non-Hispanic), 16.7% African American, 1.4% American Indian and about 10% other. Individuals of Hispanic origin make up 19% of the community.

Children make up 22% of the population. Young adults 15 up to 34 years of age make up 32% of the population and adults between 35 and 59 make up 30% of the community. With children and young adults together about 54% of the community, Waxahachie is indeed an important place for the younger generations and thus the largest group with immediate recreation needs. In 10 to 15 years' time, many adults will have grandchildren, which emphasizes the need to plan for children. At present, adults make up approximately 46% of the population.

Projections and demographic characteristics contained in this section are derived from the NCTCOG estimate adjusted from the 2000 Census count.



“Children’s games are hardly games. Children are never more serious than when they are at play.”
Montaigne



Population

Table 2.1 City (Waxahachie) and County (Ellis) Past Populations Populations 1970-2002		
Year	City	County
1970	13,147	46,638
1980	14,624	59,743
1990	17,196	85,167
2000	21,426	111,360
2002	22,500	119,500

*Data Source: City of Waxahachie Economic Development Department
<http://www.waxahachie.com/EconDev/Demographics.htm>

Table 2.2 City of Waxahachie Population Projection*		
2000	20,030	
2005	26,420	
2007	26,700	
2010	32,600	
2011	33,700	
2015	38,260	
2017	39,400	
2020	43,970	
2025	48,480	
2030	55,860	
Build-out Population	125,000	

* Rounded to the closest 10

** City of Waxahachie Economic Development Department <http://www.waxahachie.com/EconDev/Demographics.htm>

Age of the Population

Table 2.3 Year 2000 Age Characteristics	
Age	Percent
0-14	22.2%
15-34	32.1%
35-59	29.6%
60-74	9.9%
75-85+	5.9%

*Data Source: NCTCOG <http://census.nctcog.org>



Racial Characteristics

Racial Characteristics for Waxahachie are shown below. The U.S. Census Bureau considers race to be separate from ethnicity. Because the two are distinct concepts, persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

Table 2.4 Year 2000 Racial Characteristics*	
<u>Race</u>	<u>Percent</u>
White Non-Hispanic	71.3%
Hispanic	19.0%
Other	8.2%
Black/African American	16.7%
Two or More Races	1.9%
American Indian	1.4%
Asian	0.6%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0.0%

*Data Source: NCTCOG <http://census.nctcog.org>

Population, Households, & Employment

Table 2.5 Waxahachie Population, Households, & Employment 2000-2030**					
	2000	2005	2010	2020	2030
Population	20,030	26,419	32,600	43,970	55,861
Households	7,325	9,585	11,737	15,688	19,856
Employment	16,045	18,901	21,041	30,140	41,930

*NCTCOG estimate adjusted from the 2000 census count. Does not include group quarters.

**Data Source: NCTCOG <http://nctcog.org>

Housing in Waxahachie

Table 2.6 Waxahachie Value of Housing 2000*	
<u>Value</u>	<u>Percent of Population</u>
- \$50,000	21.0%
\$50,000-\$99,999	47.4%
\$100,000-\$199,999	27.4%
\$200,000-\$499,999	3.9%
\$500,000-\$1,000,000+	0.3%

*Data Source: NCTCOG <http://census.nctcog.org>



**Table 2.7
Waxahachie Household Size 2000***

Average Household Size	2.73
Average Size of Owner-Occupied Units	2.75
Average Size of Renter-Occupied Units	2.69

*Data Source: NCTCOG <http://census.nctcog.org>

Employment

**Table 2.8
Waxahachie Household Income**

Income	Percent of Population
-\$24,999	27.7%
\$25,000-\$34,999	12.8%
\$35,000-\$49,999	16.0%
\$50,000-\$74,999	23.7%
\$75,000-\$99,999	10.9%
\$100,000+	8.9%

*Data Source: NCTCOG <http://census.nctcog.org>

**Table 2.9
Waxahachie Major Employers**

Employer	Employees	Industry
Owens-Corning Fiberglass	500	Manufacturing
Tyler Refrigeration Corp.	500	Manufacturing
Wal-Mart Supercenter	494	Retail
Dart Container Corp.	470	Manufacturing
Baylor Medical-Ellis County	403	Health Care

*Data Source: NCTCOG <http://nctcog.org>

**Table 2.10
Waxahachie Business Occupation by Type**

Management, professional, and related Occupations	28.7%
Service Occupations	16.8%
Sales and Office Occupations	25.5%
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations	0.4%
Construction, Extraction, and Maintenance Occupations	10.1%
Production, Transportation, and Material Moving Occupations	18.5%

*Data Source: NCTCOG <http://census.nctcog.org>



Education

Table 2.11 WISD Racial Characteristics*	
African American	15.3%
Hispanic	26.2%
White	57.5%
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.5%
Native American	0.5%

*Data Source: WISD <http://wisd.org/>

Table 2.12 Waxahachie Educational Attainment	
Population 25 years and over	100%
Less than 9 th Grade	10.2%
9 th to 12 th grade, no diploma	13.1%
High School Graduate (includes Equivalency)	29.4%
Some College, No Degree	24.2%
Associate Degree	4.8%
Bachelor's Degree	12.9%
Graduate or Professional Degree	5.4%
Percent High School Graduate or Higher	76.7%
Percent Bachelors Degree or Higher	18.4%

*Data Source: NCTCOG <http://census.nctcoq.org>



Waxahachie's Sims Library is an important public library to consider as a destination of cultural and historical interest, along the City's future trail network.