

# Stakeholder Interviews

February 2024



City of Tomball

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

## **ABOUT THE STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS**

Four stakeholder interviews were conducted on February 5, 2024, to gather feedback from community stakeholders, including residents, business owners, property owners, and other participants with a stake in the future of Tomball. The four meetings revolved around the following categories: community members and local organizations, downtown business owners and residents, the business community, and the development community. The stakeholder interviews were conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams. Each session included multiple participants, and during the discussions, the consultant team led participants in discussions related to future land use, transportation, economic development, and downtown preservation. The key takeaways from the interviews are summarized in the following sections.

## **STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW FEEDBACK**

### **Interview 1 – Community Members and Local Organizations**

#### **What are some of the biggest assets in Tomball?**

- Small town atmosphere
  - Maintain this as we prosper, especially in the Old Town area.
- Community-driven, sense of serving each other and growing together.
- Education is important as this community grows.
  - Tomball School District's strong performance and a strong Lone Star College branch are assets.

#### **What do you think should be the biggest priorities for the future of Tomball?**

- We need to maintain and improve infrastructure as the City grows.
- We need to think about transportation, housing, and job options, especially for low-income communities.
- How do we keep people in Tomball?
  - Once people graduate from Lone Star College in Tomball, they move away.

#### **What are the biggest challenges facing Tomball today and in the future?**

- Healthcare
  - Although we have a hospital here, getting practitioners to work or live in Tomball is very difficult.
  - There is a struggle to create a comprehensive medical center.
  - Lack of preventive care
  - Tomball is lacking in terms of healthcare and supportive services
  - We need to develop a comprehensive medical center.
  - We need to implement strategic actions to bring in better medical services.
- Small-town community aspect
  - As the community grows, retaining the same small-town tone will be difficult.
  - We need to define what growth looks like for Tomball.

- When we bring business and development to Tomball - where will the newcomers live, and how do those people contribute to the community?
- Business environment
  - Continue to grow jobs and be able to provide low-skilled type jobs.
    - Examples: Retail, restaurants
  - Make sure that we are growing in the business arena and creating job opportunities.
  - We need skilled jobs in the community; otherwise, we will lose people who grew up here.
    - Macy's distribution center is an opportunity for people who understand supply-chain logistics.
    - Engineering firms
    - Other related higher-skilled offerings for skilled workers and professionals
- People like the idea of Tomball, but it is difficult to get them to move here.
  - Many people live in Spring, Woodlands, or Heights and Downtown and work here (mostly in their early 20s).

### **What is important to the community and what is the vision for the future?**

- Small-town feel
- Strategic growth
- Keeping the heart that is very strong and unique to Tomball.
- Old Town - continue Old Town feel.
- Ensuring growth provides opportunities even for people who don't live in the community.
- Take advantage of growth opportunities - bringing in more retail, restaurants, and businesses.
- School district as a draw for families
- Supporting existing business community - engaging them in local business relationships.

### **What type of residential development is needed in different areas in Tomball?**

- Patio homes
- We don't need too many apartments. We will lose the small-town feel.
- Condos
- Brownstones seem to be very popular.
- Young families need to be able to afford home ownership.
- There are affordable housing options in proximity to Tomball.
- Low-income housing - many folks have limited transportation options - need public transportation in the area to support this need.
- Need transit services in the Old Town.
- Special transit services can be an option - consider creative with transit options.

- Last-mile connectivity could be a good solution. (ex., ride-share, bike share, etc.)

### **What is missing in your neighborhood and what needs to be added?**

- Tomball is a ghost town after 8:00 or 9:00 PM.
  - Need options for young families with kids and teenagers.
  - Teenagers only have school activities.
  - Need indoor-type adventure activities.
  - The only activities are on Sunday and Saturday mornings.
- Parking
  - Need more accessible parking.
  - Parking is an issue and should be a priority, especially in Downtown.
    - Many people are unable to attend events (German fest) because of lack of parking.
  - Parking is a challenge most days at most times.
  - Parking in Downtown
    - Challenges are related to the amount t and location of parking
    - There is a lot of parking at the First Baptist Church, but people have to walk a lot, which can be difficult.
    - Access is an issue -
      - There are no good places for people to walk.
      - Lack of sidewalks - people have to walk on the street.
      - There is no shuttle service.
    - We need more signage for where the parking is.

### **What type of commercial activity, amenities, or improvements would you like to see more of in Tomball?**

- Town center type of development
  - Need synergy between the town center and Old Town.
  - Little nodes around Old Town
  - Extension of more traditional retail in the Old Town area
  - High-quality multifamily might be okay (for young professionals, doctors, etc.)

## **Interview 2 – Downtown Business Owners and Residents**

### **What are your biggest priorities for the future of Old Town Tomball?**

- Walkability in the Old Town needs to be improved.
  - There is an opportunity to add sidewalks on the east side of Downtown.
  - Downtown needs both better and more sidewalk connections.
  - There is a need to improve pedestrian connectivity over the railroad.
  - Older sidewalks in downtown need improvement (TxDOT has a plan), especially on Cherry Street.
- We need more green spaces for people to come in and enjoy themselves as a family.
  - There is no place to bring your kids.
  - Expand and improve existing green spaces.
  - They do not necessarily need to be playgrounds; they could be green spaces where people can hang out and enjoy the downtown ambiance.
- We need a Pleasantville vibe in the backstreets.
  - The roads need improvement.
  - The houses are old and need improvements. The Downtown does not seem welcoming anymore.

### **What type of development would you like to see and what type of development would you like to preserve in the Downtown?**

- City as a whole
  - Need more mixed-use options.
    - Potential for boutique hotels
    - Commercial kitchens
    - Expand the farmer's market.
    - Vegetable farm (ongoing effort)
- Downtown
  - Multifamily is not needed in Downtown as it will take away from the warm feeling.
  - There could be a benefit for higher density housing like townhomes, patio homes, or multifamily on the outskirts of Downtown.
    - We don't really see a need for townhomes.
    - Multifamily housing may detract from the character of Downtown.
  - Single-family homes are the only option for the Old Town.

### **What type of commercial activity, amenities, or improvements would you like to see more of in Old Town Tomball?**

- Commercial activity in Downtown
  - Industrial uses are detracting from Downtown.
  - Industrial uses south of Downtown take away from the feel of Downtown since Downtown has expanded.
- There needs to be more of a vision for what can help the City grow.

- North of Cherry Street towards the baseball field
  - Multiple people own the land parcels – the land has been that way forever.

### **What type of economic incentives can businesses benefit from?**

- Economic incentives
  - Small business grants
  - EDC does a lot for businesses.
    - People need more awareness of what the EDC has to offer.
  - Very few people are owner-operators of businesses in Downtown – most people are renting (~60%)

### **Other concerns that we should consider as we are updating the comprehensive plan.**

- Transportation
  - There are some dead-end spots east of Downtown
    - There is a lot of potential for improvements in the area
  - Street to Walmart in the medical center area is a dead end (School Street). If it were to cut through, it would help the congestion.
  - Need bike infrastructure.
    - We need to make sidewalks wide enough for people to ride bikes.
- The City needs some more vibrant nightlife.
  - There is nothing to keep people downtown.
  - We need more options for people to come to.
  - Lack of lighting—We need the space to be more well-lit.
- Tomball has the potential to be like Fredericksburg.
  - Walkable
  - Cool unique shops
  - Nice restaurants
  - Capitalize on the existing businesses with better lighting, and improved amenities.
- Parking
  - Parking is an issue.
  - Location of parking is an issue.
    - There is no parking north of Downtown on Commerce Street.
  - Parking is available south of Main Street.
    - Safety needs to be improved for people walking from parking to destinations.
  - Need more parking distributed throughout Downtown.

## Interview 3 – Business Community

### What are some of the biggest assets in Tomball?

- Businesses on Main Street
  - Bringing patrons to these businesses is a challenge.
  - Retail is being replaced by an office - need an ordinance against this - can't replace biggest assets with offices.
  - There has been some turnover in Downtown in the last few years, which is a concern.
- Historic district and character
  - It is a challenge to maintain the feel but also an asset to draw people to town.
  - The existing downtown business is geared toward weekend traffic. They aren't open later for local patrons.
- School district
- Transportation access to neighboring communities

### What do you think should be the biggest priorities for the future of Tomball?

- Office space in Downtown
- Affordable housing
  - There is no desire to see apartments in Downtown, but need multifamily adjacent to Old Town.
  - Rental homes
  - High-quality apartment developments for young professionals
  - Patio homes and Townhomes
    - Great draw at appropriate places
- We need to manage Tomball's growth in a smart way.
- Future growth is most appropriate north of FM 2920.
- The Woodlands is a good example of how development can occur in Tomball.
  - Retail is closer to feeder roads.
  - They don't have a lot of business development in neighborhoods.
  - Preserving the trees
    - Trees are not preserved in Tomball when new development comes in.

### What are the biggest challenges facing Tomball today and in the future?

- There has been a lot of turnover in Downtown in the last 15 years.
- Many small businesses close around 5:00 PM during the weekdays.
  - This has dissuaded local traffic.
- We can't survive as a town if we only bring in small or mercantile-type businesses.
- Hard to find location for new businesses in Old Town (2-3,000 sq ft office space)
- There is space for medical care but no commercial space for a small business.
  - Commercial uses can be located just outside of Downtown and preserve Downtown for small businesses and small offices.

- Commercial businesses can be located out of Old Town so Old Town can be preserved, but small businesses can be in proximity to the Old Town
- Up and down the SH 249 corridor – good space for commercial
- The business park is a big draw.

### **What is important to the community and what is the vision for the future?**

- Need branding and wayfinding signage in downtown (better and more signage)
- Need more campaigns, such as Sip and Stroll to encourage people to come and visit Downtown.
- The farmer's market is amazing.
  - Need to encourage people to stay and shop and eat in Downtown.
- Need a better way of marketing downtown businesses and festivals/ local events.
- Love the beautification project that is going on Downtown (trees, signs, alleys, etc.)

### **What type of commercial development is needed or would you like to see in Tomball?**

- Some downtown businesses are better looking than others. Need to maintain the character of Downtown.
- Office space
- Need growth but need to manage it in a smart way.

### **What type of economic incentives can the local businesses benefit from?**

- EDC helps a lot of businesses.
  - The issue is businesses are not aware of these incentives and resources available.
- Anything that promotes small businesses in the area and helps existing businesses.

### **Other concerns that we should consider as we are updating the comprehensive plan.**

- The pocket park by Sysko is going to be great.
- Consider restroom solutions in Downtown.
- Alleys are planned Downtown, which will be great.
- Sidewalks and accessibility
- Parking
  - We have lots of parking spaces, however, people don't know where the parking is.
  - Sometimes, it's a challenge to find parking during the weekdays.
- Update old buildings in Downtown while preserving the historic character.
  - For example, The doughnut shop on Pine Street could have been made to look more in character.
- Increasing green space requirements; requirements for preserving green spaces and trees.
- Putting a cap on subdivision size

## **Interview 4 – Development Community**

### **What are some of the biggest assets in Tomball?**

- Access to thoroughfares
- Small town feel makes it attractive for families.
- Safety
- Schools
- Old Town hearty feel
- Variety of residential options at different price points

### **What do you think should be the biggest priorities for the future of Tomball?**

- Focus on the Main Street.
- Focus on the development beyond the train tracks to the east.
- Revamp Downtown
  - More restaurants
  - More retail
  - Make it more walkable.
- Bring more residential closer to Downtown.
  - Single-family homes
  - Nicer townhomes to get more density.
  - Housing at different price points
  - Housing in Tomball is pretty affordable compared to other areas.
- Parking
  - Providing more locations for parking
  - We might need to go vertical for parking in Old Town
- Downtown
  - Some buildings need a facelift.
  - The City can have incentives for improving these older buildings in Downtown.

### **What are the biggest challenges facing Tomball today and in the future?**

- Increase in impact fees for a small development in Old Town
- Development regulations
  - The requirement for engineering can be an issue (for small businesses).
- Competing against a lot of the nearby suburbs can be challenging.
  - Need to make Tomball attractive (people are moving to Kingwood - more affordable, more experiential retail, more walkable, more middle-income housing like townhomes and Magnolia - for moving out further, plenty of trees, natural beauty)
  - Make it attractive to families.
- Destination retail in Tomball is lacking.
  - We need more dining and retail destinations (e.g., putting a "The Rustic" in Tomball).
- The new development in Friendswood is a good example - built on an old church.

- Need more density.

**What type of residential development is needed in different areas in Tomball?**

- Density
  - Either multifamily or townhomes - whichever is supported by the transportation network.
  - We need a mix of price points for housing.
  - Nicer upscale multifamily development

**What areas are anticipated for future growth?**

- We can expect people moving in from Cypress and Katy because of the schools.
- We can expect a lot of growth along Huffsmith - larger distribution and manufacturing.

**What trends do you see in future development for Tomball?**

- Retail, multifamily, and distribution centers
- We don't see any big offices coming to Tomball.
- Industrial development along Huffsmith-Kohrville

**Other concerns that we should consider as we are updating the comprehensive plan.**

- It would be good if the EDC or the City could put the opportunities and needs in front of local developers to see how the developers can help meet those needs.
- There is a scarcity of hotels—Downtown could be a suitable hotel/ convention center location so people can walk.