

Georgetown's Growth: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly

Over the past five years Georgetown has been among one of the fastest growing small cities in the U.S. with an estimated population of 66,000 in 2019 and with even a larger estimated population of 95,900 in the surrounding Extra-Territorial Jurisdiction in Williamson County (properties adjacent to the city limit boundaries). The following table shows the population increases over the past decade for both the City and the ETJ:

Year	City Limits*	ETJ (incl. City)	Building Permits
2000	28,339	36,231	
2010	47,400	68,821	439
2015	54,689	81,376	744
2016	58,085	82,673	663
2017	59,910	86,985	841
2018	61,876	89,839	1,215
2019	66261	100561	1437

(as of 1/5/20)

A population study in 2017, indicated that 26,644 persons were age 55 and over, representing a significantly higher percentage of older adults- 42.3%- than the U.S. average of 27.6% and the Texas average of 22.8%. Georgetown's growth in population and residences reflects the larger regional growth patterns for Williamson County and counties surrounding Austin due to the economic vitality that has been taking place in Austin for more than two decades. Most of the population growth in the City of Georgetown is reflected in the increasing number of single family homes and a growing number of multifamily residential units with additional commercial development. This community-wide development has also created more transportation corridors and traffic, expanding infrastructure and public safety requirements, and the need for more schools, health care facilities, commercial locations, and public spaces.

Anticipating the opportunities and challenges of this growth has been a key part of the City's efforts to up-date its long-range planning instrument called the Georgetown 2030 Comprehensive Plan with the following goals:

- Promote development patterns with balanced land uses that provide a variety of well-integrated housing and retail choices, transportation, public facilities, and recreational options in all parts of Georgetown.
- Reinvest in Georgetown's existing neighborhoods and commercial areas to build on previous City efforts.
- Provide a development framework that guides fiscally responsible growth, protects historic community character, demonstrates stewardship of the environment, and provides for effective provision of public services and facilities.
- Guide, promote, and assist the preservation and rehabilitation of the City's historic resources.
- Ensure effective communication, outreach, and opportunities for public participation and community partnerships to foster a strong sense of community.
- Ensure access to diverse housing options and preserve existing neighborhoods, for residents of all ages, backgrounds and income levels.
- Maintain high-quality infrastructure, public safety services, and community facilities.
- Actively partner with GISD, Williamson County, other governmental agencies, and local organizations to leverage resources and promote innovation.

- Maintain and add to the existing quality parks and recreation.
- Improve and diversify the transportation network.

The Georgetown City Council and the various Boards and Commissions in our City government have been working during the past year to up-date the 2030 Comprehensive Plan by engaging the community and collecting meaningful data that will guide recommendations for future planning. This includes examining recent population growth and demographic shifts, which can change a community's needs and priorities; considering recent developments or opportunities that may not have been known during the previous plan process; and assessing the progress that the City has made since the 2030 Comprehensive Plan was originally adopted.

As an urban planning process, the City charter calls for a Comprehensive Plan for the future that considers a wide range of important issues- Future land use ? Traffic circulation and public transit ? Infrastructure, including wastewater, electric, solid waste, drainage and potable water ? Conservation and environmental resources ? Recreation and open space ? Housing ? Public services and facilities, which shall include but not be limited to a capital improvement program ? Public buildings and related facilities ? Economic development ? Health and human services City of Georgetown 2030 Comprehensive Plan 1.2 ? Historic preservation ? Citizen participation ? Urban design, and ? Public safety.

One of the development guidelines often mention for Georgetown is the concept of "Smart Growth". Smart growth conserves resources, protects nature, strengthens local businesses, and creates vibrant neighborhoods. Smart Growth promotes "mixed land use" and aims to keep homes, jobs, and stores close together. This makes it practical for people to get around by walking, cycling, and mass transit instead of having to drive everywhere. It also helps keep money within the local economy and contributes to a bustling town center where people can meet and greet their neighbors. When applied to Georgetown, a number of planning strategies are considered, including availability and access to infrastructure needs, promoting varied housing choices, managing development within existing communities, protecting and preserving distinctive neighborhoods, promoting a variety of transportation choices, and creating appropriate land use patterns, requirements, and decision-making by City government.

A number of economic development challenges have also accompanied Georgetown's rapid growth. To offset a tax-base that relies heavily on residential property assessments and to provide jobs and consumer services, the City's Economic Development goals have included attracting more commercial businesses and industry to our community. Economic development studies indicate that retail and institutional employers often have difficulties attracting and retaining lower wage workers primarily due to the high cost of housing in Georgetown requiring many workers to commute to work in our community (70% of workers in Georgetown live in the northern labor shed). Georgetown's large population of seniors age 65+ who have specific tax exemptions also create some unique challenges and opportunities for the City, County and School District. The rapid growth of Georgetown has also necessitated careful planning and funding for the City's expanding infrastructure demands (roads, utility services, public safety personnel, etc). These growth issues, in turn, create political issues related to taxation policies, offering tax incentives to potential large scale employers, keeping lower and fixed income residents from being property taxed out of their homes due to escalating home values, providing residents with adequate city services and recreational spaces, etc. The increased volume of traffic in Georgetown over the last decade has placed strains on transportation corridors (complicated by the interstate highway that divides the City) and prompted planning for a public transportation system. The public and civic debates over how best to manage and fund these growth issues often reflect "the good, the bad, and the ugly" in Georgetown's population growth.