“A city on a hill cannot be hidden”.....Mathew

Some Thoughts of Kenneth Benson, April 2014

Those of us who came of age in 1960’s and 70’s. Harlingen remember the challenges we faced as the world we were born into was changing. We remember teachers like former city commissioner, J. D. Warner, who made us memorize the first verses of the Declaration of Independence. We remember learning even as we believed that as Americans, we were free. And as free men and women we had certain rights and responsibilities for being good stewards of what we had inherited from those who came before us.

Harlingen’s’ leadership was not deficient in moving and looking forward. A city faced with the closing of an airbase which led to the loss of over 30% of the population, job and economic base, Harlingen was a city with the leadership and vision to plan and execute for not only the restoration of those things catastrophically lost, but for future growth as well. So it was that the citizens of Harlingen worked together for common good. Harlingen was the respected leader, envied and pursued by every other community in the four (4) county Rio Grande Valley. A city on a hill

One of the most precious possessions of a free people is property rights. That is why all zoning, land use and planning are subject to the requirement that such decisions and policies must conform to a Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan itself must be developed by wide spread community involvement and adopted with general consensus and public approval.

As it was during the days of “GO HARLINGEN”, the community is again faced with enormous challenges. As we develop and prepare to make public the Comprehensive Plan, NorCAM, LLC a private locally owned economic development and planning consulting firm, offers as citizens and residents of Harlingen some ideas and suggestions which it is hoped the city commission will adopt and implement as measures to help kick start and stimulate local interest as well as spur private investment.

We offer these ideas, proposals, and recommendations because we believe they are common sense, easily implemented, and cost effective ways for current commissioners to build on the infrastructure and past public and private investment by “connecting the dots” to create the Harlingen of tomorrow. “A city on a hill”

The following is a list of projects and recommendations which we believe the city commission should act as recommended in each item to immediately implement as short term action items pursuant to the newly developed Comprehensive Plan.

- **Name, create and direct the 4b EDC to help implement the “Harlingen The PLACE FOR VETERANS”**

- **Convene a stakeholder / land owner series of meetings and planning workshops in order affect and implement a series of land use planning districts.**
• Adoption of a resolution in support of redeveloping the former sewer plant and surrounding property at S. Commerce Street and Taft Ave. Direct planning staff, parks and recreation and the 4B EDC working with the P & Z, Parks and Rec Board to develop requests for proposals for redeveloping the target site as a part of the THICKET

• Adopt a resolution in support of Harlingen Water Works board and staff efforts to acquire the CCN or merge with the Rio Hondo Water Supply Corporation
Short Term Actions by city commission which will help propel the Comprehensive Plan Implementation with little or no cost

- “Harlingen The PLACE FOR VETERANS”

As far back as the TIP Strategies Consultants report and recommendations, Harlingen has been advised to develop “place” in order to drive the tourism element of its economic development strategy. As it was during the GO HARLINGEN campaign, it is but a short emotional decision to go from “tourist” to permanent resident. The city commission needs only to act by passing a resolution and direct staff to work cooperatively with other “dots” or in place elements to drive the program and receive the economic development benefits of adopting the avenue to creating PLACE.

Among the “dots” which we can connect are:

- Veterans Health Care Cluster
- Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Hotel Motel Tax funds
- Health Care / Retiree land use district
- Potential partnerships with airline and bus companies
- Loaves and Fishes / Continuum of Care Grant support

By developing a plan to incent airlines and bus carriers to bring eligible veterans to Harlingen to have their health care needs taken care of instead of going to Houston or San Antonio we achieve a national marketing and city promotional platform for very little cost. Local hotels will directly benefit from the additional health care tourism, while VIA and partner carriers will help the city get its message out to millions of travelers each day.
2. Land use planning districts

- medical / retiree which will extend from treasure hills cc to valley greyhound park
- Equestrian - which will extend from 801 (Ed Carey) to Rangerville and north along Dixieland to Lincoln. Detailed reasons for this assuming my hands let me write.
- 3. Commerce Street corridor
- 4. F Street Corridor
- 5. The Harlingen Aerotropolis - port, airport and ftz
3. Adoption of a resolution in support of redeveloping the former sewer plant and surrounding property at S. Commerce Street and Taft Ave.
4. Adopt a resolution in support of Harlingen Water Works board and staff efforts to acquire the CCN or merge with the Rio Hondo Water Supply Corporation