The second installment of the community's Comprehensive Plan development process was completed this morning. About 50 "regulars" were joined by 10 new comers all of whom worked together to share ideas with each other, elected city officials, and department staff.

After again expressing my displeasure with the process, arguing for a larger outreach effort by having these meetings, or some sub groupings, be held in neighborhood schools and churches, instead of or in addition to the current proceedings, I was still happy that we are working on a plan and to see so many come and participate. I just wish more of you would join us.

The reason why this comprehensive planning effort is so important is that Harlingen is at a cross roads and the decisions we make, the actions we take will determine what city is inherited by future generations. Will it be the Harlingen of old, decayed, dilapidated structures that is named over and over as America's poorest city or will future generations live in a prosperous, attractive, low crime, great schools and neighborhoods city?

The Comprehensive Planning process gives us the chance to envision or imagine that future city. Its effective implementation today gives us the chance to give residents, business leaders, developers and elected officials the guidance, tools, resources and mandates, to work together to help make it so. That is, we can not only dream and envision such a Harlingen, we can work to make it so.

Why is it important to create a land use overlay district along Dixieland from Rangerville Road, you ask? Isn't that just more government regulation? Yes and no, not if the land and property owners can come to the planning sessions and see for themselves why and how this area impacts on protecting and supporting efforts to clean up the Arroyo and its watershed. Then we can envision, imagine and plan for say a green belt where dog park meets horse back riding trail and a stable located near the Walmart, the mall and Bass Pro. We can plan for upscale, large lot residential developments with some clusters of multifamily residential developments near the lake, which we will improve and beautify. Matching funds, public and private, set aside, for completion in 5 to 6 years budgeted and supporting grant applications written and submitted.

Its much easier to do land use planning, attract qualified developers and investment when the community has a workable plan in place and staff is
helping rather than hindering. That happens when we are led by a broadly supported comprehensive plan. Goal: "We must attract more and better industry and better paying jobs. That will drive residential developments and attract quality retail." Thank you Harlingen Board of Realtors for your vision.

Like many at today's meetings, I envision many things. I envision yet another land use overlay district running from the Treasure Hills Country Club to Valley (why not Harlingen?) Greyhound Park. I can imagine an effectively implemented Retirement Community Marketing Plan that focuses on working with the airlines and developers to build a retirement / health care district with recreation, medical services and facilities and some targeted entertainment facilities supporting over $ billion in new developments and a like amount of new income attracted here. Then maybe the state will relent and we can even have some 8 liners, limited gaming or what ever at the track.

Did I say the plan needs to be implemented?

I believe in Harlingen and its future. That and the need for an entrepreneurial platform which allows me to support my loved ones and provide for their education are the reasons I started NorCAM and have applied for an allocation of New Market Tax Credits, which were designed to attract private investments into low income community's such as Harlingen and its neighbors.

Harlingen's new Comprehensive Plan I hope will focus the 4A EDC on primary job development in and around the port, airport and foreign trade zone, by creating an Aerotropolis in the 455 vacant acres at the airport, a rail based multi modal supply chain management platform at the port and using our FTZ to help market and attract businesses, air traffic, additional small private plan business and more ULA'S; while directing the 4B EDC,its leadership, and sale tax receipts to support revitalization of the original town site. If my goals for NorCAM are to realized then I must find business people with ideas and plans which will benefit from the improvements a properly done and implemented plan. I share one more here now with you. I do so with hopes it will spur you to express your own with the confidence that si se puede. Yes Harlingen can.

Like Dr. Martin Luther King, I have a dream. Only my dream is anchored in community economic development and Harlingen's revitalization. There are many opportunities to achieve such a dream
and in that our community is in the midst of developing our comprehensive plan and we are currently engaged in "visioning" the possibilities, I shall share some things that NorCAM envisions.

The opportunity to relocate the existing bus station is a development and investment which would help achieve the goal of original town site revitalization. It will positively impact both districts, 2 and 4, or more commonly referred to as the central business district and the F Street Corridor, and create jobs while stimulating additional private investment around it.

The original vision / idea / plan was to develop a landmark facility on the entrance to the city at F Street. There are many positive outcomes from a carefully integrated, comprehensively planned facility at that location that will stimulate and create all of the positive spin offs that bus intermodal planners hope will be the result and benefits to communities.

As we dared dream a little bigger we thought of another F Street location that would allow us to begin planning for a regional rail trolley which would be connected to the bus facility, a new office facility for Valley Transit Service / Greyhound and a place to locate the bus repair shop. The blight and poor neighborhoods surrounding the former canning facility located at F and W. Jackson Street would be direct beneficiaries especially if the city's plan included a housing renewable plan.

NorCAM sees its role, outside being a local participant of Harlingen's Comprehensive Planning effort, as helping to evaluate the business model and options for funding and operating the various elements of a rail / bus intermodal operations along the former MP / UP branch line which parallels business highway 83 and extends to the port / FTZ area on the east side along the HISTORIC Cottonbelt mainline. I share this vision with you in hopes that as the needs to cut federal government budget spending means we become more creative and efficient. One option is obviously privatization or a public / private model leveraging local, state, federal and perhaps even international (EB-5, Nadbank) in partnership with New Market tax Credit investment.

I have a dream. Please bring yours to the next planning session.

James "Jim" Carrillo is a very important person "VIP". His email address is: jcarrillo@halff.com and he was hired by the city to update the Comprehensive Master Plan.