



Buda Bond Advisory Committee
Summary Findings and Recommendations
July 1, 2014



The Buda Bond Advisory Committee (BBAC) is recommending the City Council call a bond election for November 2014, to give voters in the City of Buda the opportunity to pass judgment on several long-range capital improvements for the City.

With this report, the BBAC is presenting that recommendation, along with a series of recommendations to the City Council, prioritizing projects that might be developed as part of a bond package, estimating the cost (or cost ranges) for these projects, and laying out ideas about how the projects might be grouped on a bond ballot.

These recommendations were developed by the BBAC after more than four months of study and analysis of existing plans and capital improvement needs. As part of their deliberations, BBAC members and the consulting team working with them, spent many hours reviewing data, considering alternatives, and engaging citizens of Buda about their needs and preferences.

Among the plans reviewed by the BBAC planning team as part of this work:

- Comprehensive Plan, developed 2011
- Parks and Recreation Plan, developed 2012
- Library Long Range Plan, developed 2012
- Transportation Plan, developed 2013
- Downtown Plan, developed 2014
- Drainage Plan, developed 2014
- Facilities Plan, developed 2014

From late February through June, there were frequent opportunities for Buda citizens to engage with the planning consultants, and with the committee members as they developed their recommendations:

- An initial meeting with the City Council and the Gap Strategies/ECM consulting team hired to assist the committee.
- Two follow-up briefings to City Council.
- An online community survey.
- A paper survey, available at city offices, the Buda Public Library, and distributed at various public meetings.
- A stand-alone website at "BuildingBuda.com," with information, links to the online survey, a "virtual open house," and opportunities for citizen comment.
- A presentation to a joint public meeting to consider facilities and the downtown issues, where a representative for the bond committee made a short report and plea for comment.
- Two community public meetings dedicated specifically to community input on the development of a bond package.
- Presentations to City commissions, including (so far) the Planning and Zoning Commission, the Parks Commission, the Library Commission

and Historical Commission, all open to the public, where commission members and citizens were asked for feedback.

- One-on-one contact at a City public meeting in Bonita Vista, called to consider other road projects.
- Presentations to civic organizations, including (to date) the Onion Creek Senior Citizens and the Buda Lions Club.
- Outreach via email to Buda Homeowners Associations, and to any citizens who requested additional information.
- Six meetings of the bond advisory committee, all open to the public.

The final recommendations owe a debt of gratitude to the hundreds of Buda citizens who participated in one way or another, through surveys or in person. In addition, the work of the BBAC was built on foundations laid by dozens of volunteers, and hundreds more citizens who participated in the earlier planning efforts that developed initial goals and projects from which the BBAC sifted and refined these final recommendations:

- 54 Buda citizens served on the special committees that developed the plans referred to above, such as the Transportation and Parks plans, with dozens more citizens from Buda commissions participating. A few of these did double-duty, bringing valuable history and insights to the BBAC.
- The City received 1,565 survey responses to a combined five different surveys that helped inform the initial subject area plans developed between 2011 and 2014, plus an additional (approximately) 301 surveys were received as part of the BBAC effort.
- At least 13 City staff members were directly involved in various planning stages, including serving on the building/facilities committee.
- At least 49 public meetings – including stakeholder groups, town hall meetings, and public hearings at City Council – to develop the various plans that the BBAC used as basis for developing its bond recommendations. Hundreds of citizens participated in those meetings combined.

These planning efforts resulted in detailed plans that addressed how Buda citizens would like to see the City look, feel, and operate as it adapts to unprecedented growth. But most of the plans were unfunded. Meanwhile, between 2010-2013 the City of Buda grew at a faster percentage rate than any town in Texas with a population of at least 10,000 people. Most demographers expect rapid growth to continue. As a result, the Buda City Council went through a public process to hire a planning team with experience in high growth communities, and experience with both project cost estimating and public involvement, to help a citizen committee assess options as the City seeks to maintain efficient services, plan for the future, and ensure the kind of quality of life that seems to attract people to Buda. The Council charged staff with providing internal documents and information, and asked a group of citizens, designated the Buda Bond Advisory Committee (BBAC) to oversee the effort.

The City selected the team of Gap Strategies / ECM International to lead the planning effort. The team had five staff members who worked regularly on the project, with additional specialty resources used on occasion, organizing research, facilitating meetings, preparing background papers and briefings for BBAC members, assessing phasing opportunities, ground-truthing and updating old cost estimates, and ensuring that escalators and “soft costs” were included in the final cost projections – inflation, professional fees, bond issuance costs, and so on. In addition, a half dozen City staff members provided additional support and information, when requested, for the BBAC, and served as a liaison committee with the City. Consultants from the subject-area planning efforts (Drainage Plan, Downtown Plan, Facilities Plan) also contributed time and valuable data, as did the City’s independent bond counsel, and the City’s independent financial advisors. Finally, the Gap Strategies/ECM team had five staff members who worked regularly on the project,

The BBAC was appointed by the City Council in the late winter of 2014 and specifically tasked with assessing whether a bond election for Buda would be warranted, and, if so, what types of projects should be addressed – and what size the bond package should be.

The Council appointed 12 members to the BBAC:

- Sue Bellows
- Nancy Brinkley
- Freddy Cantu
- Diane Falcon
- Wayne Harned
- Bob Killam
- Vincent Lecca
- Beth Martinez
- Tommy Poer
- Josue Sanchez
- Wendy Scott
- Colin Strother

In all, BBAC members deliberated more than 15 hours together, not counting the many hours various committee members spent preparing for meetings, reviewing data, or attending public forums where they listened to citizens. Not every member was able to attend each meeting, but every meeting had at least two-thirds of the committee present. At the June 25, with 10 of 12 members present, the BBAC agreed UNANIMOUSLY to forward this report to City Council.

Findings of the BBAC

Finding # 1: Yes To A Bond Package

The City of Buda has kept its property tax rate among the lowest in the region (at least for those towns the provide full City services). With high growth and low interest rates, now is the time for the City invest in significant, long-range infrastructure improvements. The Buda Bond Advisory Committee recommends calling a bond election this November to address long-term investments in several areas. The planning team working on behalf of the BBAC conducted extensive research and cost projections to estimate the probable “total project cost” of projects being considered by the committee, and what the effect would be for Buda taxpayers. Committee members considered many more projects in each subject area than they are recommending to City Council, and believe those priorities selected offer valuable public benefits that are worth additional taxes, if that proves necessary.

Finding # 2: Address Three Critical Areas

While there are other needs in the City, and it may be appropriate for the City to issue Certificates of Obligation or Revenue Bonds for some items, such as water and sewer improvements, the committee agreed on a number of projects that members feel should be addressed by voter-approved General Obligation bonds. The committee divided these into three major topics or subject areas:

- Facilities
- Basic infrastructure: roads, sidewalks, drainage and flooding
- Parks and trails

Each of these areas is affected by population growth and current trends that project Buda at least tripling, perhaps quadrupling in size within the planning life of a bond package.

Finding #3: Present Voters With Several Propositions

In addition to public comment on projects themselves, the BBAC took comment on how a bond question should be structured on the ballot. Based on comments from the public, and interviews with the City’s bond counsel, the BBAC recommends that the projects be grouped as several propositions – probably four, but at least three.

Finding #4: Dollar Range Up to \$55 Million

BBAC members and the planning team started with approximately \$100 million worth of projects – projects already vetted and recommended by City plans and/or other citizen committees during the last three years. The BBAC narrowed this to a little more than \$60 million in projects that were presented at the final public discussion meeting on June 19. Based on comments from that meeting, intensive additional analysis by the planning team, and, finally, three hours of

additional deliberation among themselves, the BBAC made a number of final amendments and cuts, eliminating some projects, expanding others.

BBAC members also considered the possible tax impact of a proposed bond election when considering what projects to include, and considered variables such as the likely growth rate of Buda's taxable property values, possible inflation rates in the construction sector of the economy, and future interest rates. In the final analysis, BBAC members were comfortable – unanimously so – in recommending the projects detailed below in the section titled Recommended Projects.

The final recommendation is for a bond package in a range up to (and probably slightly less than) \$55 million.

All BBAC members understood that the final decision about what projects to include will be made by the City Council. Council may decide to add other priority projects, or to trim BBAC recommendations further.

Recommended Projects

The BBAC recommends specific projects in each of the following categories.

Recommendation #1: Facilities

Build new facilities for the police, the library, municipal court, and a number of city functions now located in the existing city hall, an annex, and other locations spread around town.

Police: The police department is currently badly crowded into a marginal building with an existing business, with leaks, repair problems, and no adequate facilities for interviewing victims of crime, temporary holding space for prisoners before transfer to the county jail, or other secure areas. There is no room for expansion. The committee recommends new space for a police station that can grow with the City.

Library: The current library was built in 1993 when the population was less than one fifth what it is today (Buda, 1990 census: 1,795). It was heavily funded by donations from the broader surrounding community, including a fundraising effort at Santa Cruz Catholic Church, and has served the City well, but every facet of the library operations are now limited by space demands, and there is no adequate place for the many community groups, popular summer programs, or even computer expansion that many citizens have asked for. Library planners (including the work of citizens and architectural consultants) have concluded that there is not adequate space to expand for the long-range future at the current location, nor ways to use the current building (at least for a library) efficiently. The committee recommends a new library facility, similar to that recommended by the Facilities committee.

City Hall and Annex: The current City Hall was built 1992, when, as noted above, the City was less than 2,000 population, compared to more than 10,000 today, with projections that Buda will grow exponentially over the next 25 years, to a population of 40,000 – 50,000 residents, or more. City Hall was expanded in 2003, when the population was approximately 2,404 (2000 census), and has now been expanded and reconfigured as much as the building and the land will efficiently allow. In recent years, the City has used space in several other buildings for administrative offices, including the City Hall Annex on the other side of the railroad tracks, using part of a converted commercial/industrial building. This building is not efficient to operate and is overcrowded for current uses, with no room for programs and staff needed as the City continues to grow. The committee recommends a new city hall to combine operations and staff from the existing city hall and annex, and possibly other locations.

Should The Facilities Be Combined? Overall, the BBAC was unanimous in its recommendations that Buda invest in owning new building space as it grows. Whether the building facilities being recommended should be combined into one building, with the efficiencies of shared common space and parking areas, or constructed as two detached buildings, to segregate certain uses such as the police function, was one of the few divisions on the committee:

- All BBAC members agreed that the library and city hall should be combined, echoing the opinion of the Facilities study completed earlier this year, and the majority of comments received from City residents
- All BBAC members agreed that the police department needs more and better designed space.
- A two-thirds majority of the Committee expressed concern about co-locating the police station within a joint city hall/library complex, even though that would probably save money. While all members indicated they would support a Facilities Proposition no matter how it is finally phased, the majority felt strongly that City Council should at least consider a stand-alone option, and should not co-locate the police function within the same building without further deliberation with the architects who conducted the Facilities study, including further questions about such joint use has fared in other cities and how such a building might fit on construction sites that are under consideration.

Members did not object to locating a police station on the same site, provided it was carefully designed, or provided that its concerns about use and siting were addressed. Members also felt the City Council should consider a wholly different site location from the city hall/library complex, using cheaper land and placing an emphasis on security and access.

Recommendation #2: Infrastructure on the Ground: Roads, Sidewalks, Drainage

The committee agreed unanimously to recommend several high-priority transportation projects be included in a bond proposal. These would address

traffic and pedestrian safety, congestion relief, and road surface improvement – while maintaining or enhancing Buda “character.”

- Main Street and FM 967 intersection,
- Main Street between Cabela’s,
- Old Goforth Road near Tom Green Elementary, and
- San Antonio Street, improvements, parking, etc.

Grouped with these would be six drainage projects that would help ease flooding in various neighborhoods across town.

The committee recommends these be grouped as one proposition.

Recommendation #3: Parks and Trails

- Address all the first three phases of improvements in the City’s park plan for City Park. These are identified in the city park plan, adopted in 2012. The BBAC recommends the council be guided by these with freedom to shift projects as construction efficiencies or problems arise, since that plan was conceptual in nature. The BBAC recommends the City consider a bond advisory committee to help with all projects and that they use that bond advisory committee and the parks commission as sounding boards for this area. Address key issues from Phases 1-3, but not require addressing in that order.
 - Phase 1
 - Phase 2
 - Phase 3
- Trail Development – Spend \$2.5 million on additional trail development in the City, based on the trails identified in the parks plan. Trail development would be limited to work on some or all of the following trails:
- Recommends these be grouped together.

Conclusion

BBAC members were dedicated and involved. The 11 members who attended one of the last two meetings achieved a strong consensus, and the 10 members at the final meeting were unanimous in their core recommendations. Committee members differed on one final detailed recommendation – whether to locate a new police station in the same building as the library/city hall complex – but even there all agreed on the overall need, and members were unanimous in the decision to present their recommendation in support of a building project and the majority’s recommendation that the Council consider a co-located police function only after further study, and only after exploring a separate facility.

The BBAC reached strong consensus on the need for key projects in three separate areas, projects that will implement the proposals made by several overlapping plans – among them, the Comprehensive Plan, the Transportation

Plan, the Parks Plan, the Long Range Library Plan, the Drainage Plan, the Downtown Plan, and the Facilities Plan.

After months of research and deliberation, the BBAC unanimously recommends that the City Council prepare a bond proposal in the approximate range of \$55 million to put before voters in November, to address the needs specified in this report. The BBAC's findings and recommendations are fully supported by the professional planning team hired by the City to assist the BBAC and provide expertise and technical support for its efforts.