
Community Agenda Project Findings & Recommendations

United Way Capital Area Community Briefing

Bass Lecture Hall

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Purpose

To set the stage for building a '*community agenda*' for the 10-county Central Texas region by—

- Documenting underlying trends affecting health and human services through existing data, studies and reports
- Identifying and articulating high-priority health and human services issues, root causes and action steps for a broad array of stakeholders across the region



Methodology and Scope

PHASE I

- November 2005 - February 2006
- Synthesized existing data, studies and reports about each of the Central Texas region's 10 counties

⇒ *A Profile of the Capital Area Community* report (March 2006) that outlined region-wide and county-specific trends and issues.

Methodology and Scope ...

PHASE II

- February - July 2006
- Conducted 37 focus groups and conversations in the region involving 279 people
- Surveyed 2,000+ people online: 302 responses, 234 from Travis County
- Synthesized recent community needs assessments

⇒ *Toward Equity for All* report (July 2006) that summarizes shared regional vision, pressing issues and root causes, and recommends solutions based on stakeholder input.



Regional context shaped by ...

- **Rapid growth** in population and jobs — especially high-skill, high-paying jobs — creating a core of economic strength along the Austin-Round Rock corridor with a ‘ring effect’ for the surrounding communities.
- **Devolution** of social service responsibilities from federal and state governments compounds health and human service challenges for local communities.
- Social service **funding cuts** have created additional bureaucracy and service barriers.

Big-Picture Observations

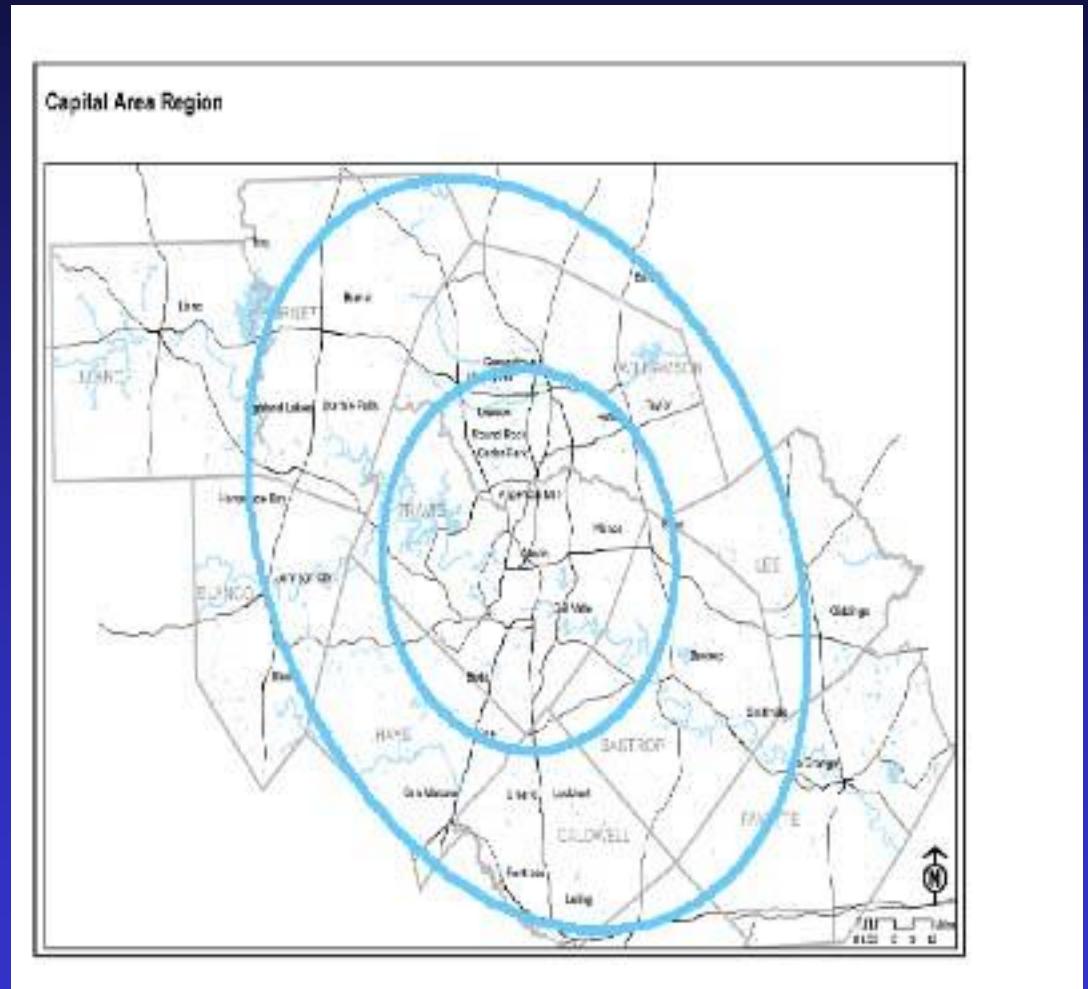
- Dramatic, pervasive **changes underway** in every corner of Central Texas, much of it related to rapid economic and population growth and diversification of its population.
- Though not fully embraced, **shared regional vision emerging**.
- **Austin/Travis County shares consensus on issues**, but is less likely to have a regional focus. They are also more ready to act than continue studying/talking.
- There is a pronounced '**ring effect**' around Austin/Travis County.



'Ring Effect'

Inner ring (Bastrop, Hays, Burnet, parts of Williamson) 50+% of employed residents commute to Austin/Round Rock for work. Bedroom communities have lower economic base, lower-paying jobs, fewer sources of tax revenue ... but *increased service needs.*

Outer ring (Blanco, Caldwell, Lee, Fayette, Llano, parts of Williamson) experiencing increased cost of living and population growth, while rural infrastructure largely unchanged.



Observations ...

- Pressing issues confront the region's stakeholders, many systemic and highly interrelated. Tackling them appears daunting.
- *Systemic issues call for systemic responses.*
- Much energy and related activity to build on throughout the Central Texas region and openness to change that can be leveraged.

⇒ *The Central Texas community as a whole is primed, ready for action.*

Emerging Shared Vision

A community where people are self-sufficient and have equal opportunities for good health and for quality of life.



Pressing Regional Issues, Part 1

Based on our Phase I scan of existing studies and data:

- Lack of affordable, accessible health care for all ages (all counties)**
- Increasing wage/economic disparity despite growth**
- Lack of affordable housing (8 of 10 counties)**
- Lack of affordable, quality pre-school and child care, as well as quality/equity of education and related issues**
- Domestic violence and child abuse/neglect**
- Heavy traffic/better roads**
- Basic needs generally (e.g., utilities, rent, food, shelter)**



Pressing Regional Issues, Part 2

Based on our Phase II focus groups and conversations across Central Texas:

- **Growth and increasing equity gap**
- **Distorted resource allocation mechanisms, public and private**
- **State health and human services cutbacks**
- **State mental health services cutbacks**
- **Health care system inadequacies**
- **Information/eligibility barriers**
- **Lack of regional transportation system**
- **Lack of affordable housing**
- **Isolation of seniors and young people**



Issues ...

- Reflect **basic needs** — think Maslow's 'hierarchy' — clustering around health/mental health needs (5 of 9), plus housing, transportation and jobs.
- Highly **interrelated, systemic**.
- **Bolster other study results**, including **Equity Commission, African-American Quality-of-Life Study and Envision Central Texas**.
- Point towards a **shared regional vision**.

⇒ Taken together, suggest **urgent need for systemic, regional solutions** for lasting impacts. Easy to get weighted down by issues; important to **stay focused on shared vision**.



Selected Recommendations

Based on initial scan, plus focus groups and conversations across the 10-county Central Texas region:

- **Regional collaborative effort needed for a common vision and strategy for balanced growth and development, with living-wage jobs and benefits, esp. health insurance, part of the business recruitment bargain.**
- **Local one-stop shops needed to reduce bureaucratic red tape and provide timely services, particularly in rural and suburban areas.**
- **Regional task force should examine root causes of and solutions for drug and substance abuse.**



Recommendations ...

- An information clearinghouse or central location needed to allow service providers and potential clients to access accurate, current services information.**
- Partnerships and collaboration among existing transportation providers needed across all counties to provide seamless linkages in routes and schedules.**
- Create community centers and public spaces, have organized activities for both seniors and youth, and foster community involvement and civic responsibility among young adults.**



Thoughts on Strategies

- Address basic needs — Maslow's 'hierarchy' — **and** expanding opportunities so people can reach for the emerging regional vision.
- Build on **recent/ongoing initiatives**, e.g., C.A.R.T.S., 2-1-1, Equity Commission, African-American QoL, Envision Central Texas.
- Foster and expand regional **partnerships**, meaningfully engaging stakeholders from **all** outlying counties.
- Secure and maintain broad-based **commitment** to implementing a '**community agenda**'.



For More Information

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