



**GREATER FORT BEND
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
COUNCIL**

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FORT BEND COUNTY IS OPEN FOR BUSINESS!

**By Jennifer Raymond, Senior Vice President – Development
Greater Fort Bend Economic Development Council**

A place of Vision, Opportunity, Prosperity, Progression, Success, and Excellence... Fort Bend County. Where else can one settle where there are no boundaries on progression and success is awaiting? People from all backgrounds have come together to create the ultimate environment for businesses to prosper and families to grow.

Fort Bend County has grown to over 400,000 residents since Stephen F. Austin settled here well over 150 years ago; however, half of this growth has occurred in the past fifteen years. Now economists are projecting that the population will double in size in the next twenty years. How is this possible?

Visionaries in Fort Bend County have forecasted this explosion of growth through planning for capacity to be added to infrastructure, higher education, convention centers, mega retail centers, office and industrial parks, and planned communities. Today approximately 50% of Fort Bend County residents can work and live in the County, which currently employs roughly 200,000 people.

Several monumental achievements have been celebrated over the past 12 months and more are yet to come in the upcoming year. Cars are now flowing freely down the new

16 lanes of US 59 and frontage roads from the Harris/Fort Bend County line to State Highway 6. The Fort Bend Parkway Toll Road and Westpark Tollway are now under construction. Combined with the expansion of US 59, this will add 40% mobility capacity to existing Fort Bend roadways, providing citizens superior access to all areas of the region.

The highlight of the economic year in Fort Bend County was the attraction, creation, and funding of the Texas Energy Center (TxEC) and its first client, the Research Partnership to Secure Energy for America (RPSEA). These two organizations will drive Fort Bend County to the top in energy research and technology and will create an economic engine for the county, region and state. Both operations' headquarters are housed in the EDC offices. Please read subsequent articles in this section for more details.

Three higher education institutions: University of Houston, Houston Community College Southwest, and Wharton County Junior College/Fort Bend Technical Center, are now operating out of new facilities at near capacity levels. These institutions are providing training and higher education to over 10,000 Fort Bend citizens and work force. University of Houston opened its doors in the fall of 2002 for classes at its new campus at University Boulevard and US 59.

Fort Bend County is soon to be home to two convention centers, Sugar Land Town Square Marriott Hotel and Conference Center and Stafford Convention and Performing Arts Center. The Marriott Hotel, a 300-room first class full service hotel, will provide corporations and community organizations alike a central location to gather and utilize the full service amenities of the hotel and town square. The doors will open in the fall of 2003.

Stafford Centre, a 93,800 square foot convention center, is under construction at the southeast corner of Murphy and Cash roads in Stafford. The center will combine a performing arts facility that will seat 1,100 individuals as well as a convention center and meeting space, scheduled to be open at the first of 2004.

Both Sugar Land Town Square and Stafford Centre will attract global businesses, the arts, and civic organizations to the area, which will generate interest in our community as well as revenues to the local economy.

Plans are also underway for the future development of the prison property, formerly known as, “the TxDot land”. This site is located south of US 90A, west of Highway 6, and south of US 59 at University Boulevard. Newland Communities will be developing a new master planned community including space for retail development. The purpose of this community is to provide yet another choice for future residents in Fort Bend County.

Several first-class, brilliantly designed communities will be rolling out over the next five years. Over the last year alone, nearly 4,800 acres of land was announced to be developed for future planned communities. Fort Bend County will see additional new growth in the area that will rival what already exists.

Woods & Poole Economics of Washington D.C. ranks Fort Bend County in the **top 5%** for population and employment growth, mean household income, ethnic diversity, home ownership, and educational attainment in the United States.

So what does this all mean for Fort Bend's future...

Greater accessibility, new places to live, new jobs.

Long time commercial real estate broker and resident of Fort Bend County, Larry Indermuehle, President of Indermuehle Commercial Real Estate states:

“The hinges are off and the doors to the County have been expanded. The completion of the Highway 59 expansion in Sugar Land will serve as the new gateway to the future of Fort Bend County. The newly expanded hub for this region at Highway 59 and Highway 6, compared to that of Westheimer and Loop 610 in the Galleria area, is now complete. ‘Sugar Land Town Square’, new development of Sugarland Properties, Inc.,

will be Sugar Land's 'Galleria' – the optimal mix of work and play for everyone. Add in the new opportunities created by Newland Communities along Highway 59 and University Boulevard and the new job creation and new home opportunities will absolutely astound you.”

Indermuehle continues, “In addition to what is happening at Highway 59 and Highway 6, look at Johnson Development's new communities along Highway 6, the addition of Stafford's new Civic Center, and our second gateway, the Fort Bend County Tollroad, now under construction. The growth has been and will continue to be explosive.”

Grand re-opening of the office and retail markets and work force. The developer of Sugar Land Town Square and President, Sugarland Properties, Inc., Les Newton expresses his opportunistic views in stating, “Convenient freeway access is vital to any commercial development. With the opening of the Southwest Freeway, Town Square's upscale retail offerings will lure shoppers from across the Houston area into Sugar Land. Companies looking to relocate will be drawn to Sugar Land Town Square's prestigious 700,000 square feet of Class-A office space, not to mention the city's exceptional workforce.”

Granite Towers at Sugar Creek sets the tone and presents a grand entrance to the Fort Bend office market. According to Scott Martin, Managing Director of Granite Properties, “Our Class A Granite Towers at Sugar Creek office building is strategically located at the Gateway to Sugar Land.” Martin goes further to say, “With the completion of the 90A and Highway 59 Interchange and the fact that our existing Granite Towers building is 98% leased, look for more quality commercial development such as our proposed Phase II Office Tower.”

An experienced Colliers International broker, Charlie Herder, refers to the vision of opportunities that Fort Bend County has to offer. “I see continuing momentum in the single family development sector as the advantages of living in Fort Bend County continue to attract new development from all over the greater Houston region. We see

more and more corporations seeking to locate their 'home offices' closer to home and this, along with a terrific school system, seems to be driving this trend. We clearly expect to see some major office announcements in the Fort Bend area before the end of the year.”

Industry growth as a result of accessibility. “Improved ingress and egress accessibility to distributors, and manufacturers alike, is essential. Therefore, the Fort Bend market is poised to withstand the momentum of growth that the community has recently been experiencing. Additionally, the major industrial parks are located with a mile of US 59, which makes the area more appealing to local, regional and national companies,” states Mark Nicholas, Vice President, The Staubach Companies, a respected industrial broker with several Fort Bend clients.

Quality of Life. “Sugar Land has proven to be a great location for office and retail, which has everything to do with the quality of life in our city. Now, with the end of construction on US 59 and the opening of Sugar Land Town Square, the quality of life in Fort Bend County is getting even better,” Les Newton, President, Sugarland Properties, Inc.

Larry Indermuehle puts it best, “The doors are open, the wheels of opportunity are in motion and the people are coming – get ready! Fort Bend County is on the move.”

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