

Chapter 3

Context of the City



3.1 Introduction

Creating a Community Development Master Plan requires a thorough understanding of the City's *context* – the city's physical and cultural history. Many factors comprise the context of a city and can be categorized as follows:

- **Land** – The City's physical features such as its lakes and streams, hills and valleys, and forests and plains – those things which depict the city's environmental qualities.
- **People & Urban Form** – The City's cultural history, history of development, and history of settlement.

Each of these categories are discussed in further depth below and are followed by a demographic analysis, which further explores the context of The Colony's cultural history and present condition.

3.2 Land¹

In prehistoric times, the entire North Central Texas area – including The Colony – was covered periodically by inland seas. This area underwent a cycling of these seas retreating toward what is now known as the Gulf of Mexico and then returning,

¹ Sources:

<http://www.tarleton.edu/~range/Grasslands/Tallgrass%20Prairie%20%28Interior%29/tallgrassprairieInterior.html>

http://www.worldwildlife.org/wildworld/profiles/terrestrial/na/na0814_full.html

http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/habitats/cross_timbers/ecoregions/blackland.phtml

<http://www.npsot.org/symposium2007/home/BlacklandPrairie.shtml>

http://www.worldwildlife.org/wildworld/profiles/terrestrial/na/na0814_full.html

http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/habitats/cross_timbers/ecoregions/blackland.phtml

depositing eons of mud and sand across Texas. The result of this periodic inundation is a varied and fascinating soil profile under North Central Texas that ranges from limestone and sandy soils to highly plastic clay soils such as that found in The Colony.

The Colony is located in what is called the Blackland Prairie ecological region (unlike most of Denton County, which is in the Cross Timbers and Prairies ecological region). This region, which constitutes 6% of Texas' land area, was historically characterized by prairie grasses and clayey soils (of the order vertisol). These soils are considered to be highly fertile both for native vegetation and for agricultural uses. Because of their plastic nature, the soils shrink and swell with varying periods of rain and dry spells, which causes the soils to form deep cracks often extending several feet into the ground. Such a process allows organic matter to fall deep within the soil, boosting the soil's nutrient level. This process, however, has also been a detriment to many homeowners because of the damage to building foundations caused by this shrink-swell process.



The prairies of the Blackland Prairies were varied and remarkable, containing a multitude of grasses, flowers, and other plants blooming throughout the year and being subjected to regular prairie fires (either started by lightning or purposefully by Native Americans to aid in hunting) which helped increase the fertility of the region. An early settler once described the Blackland Prairies as "...the finest sight I ever saw; immense meadows 2 or 3 feet deep of fine grass & flowers. Such beautiful colours I never saw..." (Brook, 1848). Dominant native grasses of the original prairie (prior to settlement) included Big Bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii gerardii*), Switch Grass (*Panicum virgatum*), Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), and Indian Grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*). Because of the fertility of this region and the high quality of the soil for agricultural uses (especially when irrigated), much of the native prairie lands were converted to farms during and after the settlement of Peters Colony in the mid 1800's.

In addition to forming fertile soils, the history of the Blackland Prairie also includes streams and topography. During the Pennsylvanian Period (320 to 286 million years ago), plate tectonic movement caused the formation of the Ouachita Range of mountains, which ran north-south along the Blackland Prairies from central Texas into Oklahoma. Through years of erosion, these mountains were worn to rolling hills and, as the inland seas had retreated and returned, depositing sediments, the remnants of the Ouachita Range were covered. The resulting byproducts of this erosion and sedimentation are the rolling hills seen in North Texas and underground oil, much of which was extracted in the early part of the 20th century.

Prior to the massive public works projects completed during the first half of the twentieth century there were no lakes or other large bodies of water present in North Central Texas. The primary source of water for animals and early inhabitants were the area's numerous creeks and, of course, the nearby Trinity River. Three such creeks flowed through present day The Colony – Stewart Creek, Office Creek, and Indian Creek – while a fourth creek (McWhorter Creek) flowed nearby through present day Lewisville, probably fed in part by rain and spring water flowing from The Colony. All of these creeks fed into the Elm Fork of the Trinity River, which flows southeast through Dallas, meeting the West Fork of the Trinity River, and eventually heads east of Houston emptying into the Gulf of Mexico by way of Trinity and Galveston Bays.

In the late 1920s, Lake Dallas was constructed on the Elm Fork of the Trinity River. This dam was located near the town of Garza (renamed Lake Dallas in 1929) running between the present-day locations of the US Army Corps of Engineer's Westlake Park (in the Town of Hickory Creek) and the City of Lakewood Village. In order to further address flood control, construction of the Garza-Little Elm Dam (now called the Lewisville Lake Dam) was begun in 1948 and completed in 1955 by the Corps. Upon completion, the Lake Dallas Dam was breached, creating the Garza-Little Elm Reservoir (now called Lewisville Lake). Through these and other improvements to the Trinity River Basin, a chain of lakes was constructed throughout the Dallas / Fort Worth Metroplex to supply drinking water and provide flood control. Upon the completion of these projects, the threat of flooding was greatly reduced and additional habitat and recreation opportunities were created. The courses of Stewart Creek² and Office Creek were altered to flow into Lewisville Lake while Indian Creek and McWhorter Creek continue to flow into the Trinity River, south of the dam.

Today, the Lewisville Lake Dam creates a large reservoir used for various recreation activities, supports soil conservation, and is a drinking water source for many cities in the region, including Dallas, Denton, and The Colony. The surface area of the lake is approximately forty one (41) square miles, making it 2.6 times the size of The Colony's 15.8 square miles of city limits and almost one fifth of the land area of Denton County. The Colony is situated on the east shore of Lewisville Lake – in fact, almost twenty six (26) miles of the Lake's 183 mile shoreline are within The Colony's city limits. Another

² Stewart Creek does not directly flow through present day The Colony; rather, it enters a small cove of Lake Lewisville, which lies under Main Street near the Blue Sky Soccer Complex, just before entering The Colony city limits.

way to look at this is that The Colony has almost as much of its city limits as shoreline as it does city limits that are not shoreline (26.72 miles).

While the changes caused by the construction of the Lewisville Lake Dam are the most dramatic changes to the land and natural environment surrounding The Colony, there is another major change that has been occurring incrementally since the middle of the twentieth century. Just as the native prairies were slowly converted into agricultural land, changing the face of North Central Texas, these agricultural lands have been changed gradually but constantly into residential, industrial, and commercial lands (and typically in that order). As time progresses, the image of agriculture will most likely fade away from this landscape, being found only in small pockets or on the outskirts of the Metroplex.

3.3 People & Urban Form³

North Central Texas shows archeological evidence of human life dating back to the end of the last ice age. At the beginning of recorded history and prior to European arrival, this area, including the land from Kansas to San Antonio, was part of the territory of the Wichita tribe of Native Americans. The Wichita were a semi-nomadic tribe, living in villages from spring until fall and traveling, following game, from fall until spring. The Wichita's villages were permanent – that is, while they lived there only during the summers, they returned to the same villages each year. Though they lived in tepees while following game during the winter, their permanent shelters in the village were grass huts shaped like a beehive. These huts are recorded as being fifteen to thirty feet in diameter and able to contain ten to twelve beds each [cite].

French and especially Spanish explorers – Coronado being one of the more notable – traveled through Oklahoma and Texas in the 1700s, interacting with the Wichita, and though their routes probably did not pass through the North Central Texas area, their presence in the Wichita's tribal lands arguably affected this region. Specifically, it is argued that the presence of explorers and the early settlers of the plains states north of the Red River gradually caused the retreat of many Wichita into Texas (then a part of Mexico), eventually resulting in the largest presence of Wichita being centered around the present day city of Waco [cite]. The Wichita were gone from Texas by the mid 1800s, driven out of the newly formed republic to the United States' "Indian Territory" in present-day Oklahoma by the beginning of the 20th century. Today, the Wichita tribe has practically vanished – the last recording of the Wichita tribe was the 1937 Indian Census which listed only 385 tribal members.

In the early years of the Republic of Texas, it was decided that in order to ensure the longevity of the new nation, the vast territory of North Texas would need to be colonized rapidly. In order to do this, the Fifth Texas Republic Congress passed the "Land and Colonization Law" which allowed, in 1841, the nation to contract with William S. Peters

³ Sources:

<http://www.accessgenealogy.com/native/tribes/wichita/wichitaindianhist.htm>

<http://www.texasindians.com/wichita.htm>

<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/PP/uep2.html>

(an English immigrant to the United States) and his associates (some of them American, some English) to offer free land to settlers from the United States. In a format similar to the Mexican Empresario system, Peters and his associates (later known as the Texas Emigration and Land Company) were given responsibility to recruit settlers and administer the promotion and distribution of 16,400 square miles of land, which included all or part of twenty six (26) present-day counties.

While most of the colonists lived in small houses on farms and ranches, at least eighteen small communities were established in Denton County during the 1840s and 1850s. One such community was Bridges Settlement⁴, named after the family of John and Mildred Bridges, which was founded in 1843 and is said to be the oldest settlement in Denton County. The Peters Colony offices were moved to Bridges Settlement sometime in the mid 1840s and positioned on Office Creek. A small community formed around the Peters Colony office and was named Stewartsville after the company's principal investor Willis T. Stewart. Due to the practices of the Texas Emigration and Land Company and their agent (Henry O. Hedgecoxe), the colonists became disgruntled, protested the company's actions, and eventually raided the Peters Colony offices stealing and reportedly burning the company's records and driving Hedgecoxe out of the county. This event became known as the Hedgecoxe War. Afterwards, the legislature amended the Empresario contract to allow the landowners to file their claims and deal directly with the Texas General Land Office rather than through the land agent.

Other small settlements appeared through the 1800's including Stewarts Creek, Rector and the most successful – Camey Spur (formerly located in what is now The Legends development east of Bridges Cemetery). Each eventually faded away from existence though the area remained populated by farmers and ranchers. During 1972 and 1973, Fox and Jacobs, a residential land developer, purchased much of the land in present day The Colony and began building track houses. Many of the streets, as well as later parks, were named after the original settlers and landowners. The first houses were built in 1974 and the development, named The Colony by Fox & Jacobs, grew rapidly and had a population of over 5,000 residents by 1977. The residents voted to incorporate as a city in 1977 and chose to retain the name The Colony, named of course after Peters Colony. In 1987 the small lakeside community of Eastvale and The Colony voted to merge.

Much of The Colony's housing stock was built in the late 1970s and 1980s, but construction continued in the 1990s and 2000s with construction continuing today at The Tribute, Austin Ranch (a mixed-use development at the southern edge of the City), Stewart Peninsula, The Cascades, and The Legends. Commercial growth began significantly later for The Colony with much of the City's retail areas being developed in the 1990s and 2000s. The two main commercial corridors within the city are the north/south Farm-to-Market Road 423 (FM 423, also known as Main Street) and the east/west State Highway 121. South of SH 121, several corporate offices have been developed as part of the Austin Ranch Development. To date, several companies have located headquarters, offices, and distribution centers in this part of The Colony, including Edward Don, Inc (a restaurant supply company) and Pizza Inn.

In 2001, the Texas Department of Transportation began a project to convert the existing four lane divided State Highway 121 into a limited-access freeway. Because of shortcomings in funding and delays in schedule, the decision was made to build SH 121 as a tollway and the authority to construct and operate the facility was purchased from the State by the North Texas Tollway Authority (NTTA) in 2007. Due to this transition and the redesign of certain aspects of the roadway to accommodate toll infrastructure, the completion date of the roadway is now January 2012.

As The Colony moves into the future, its urban form will be shaped largely by the City's Comprehensive Plan, completed in July of 2007. Key elements of this plan include managing growth in terms of its quality, quantity, location, and timing, encouraging development to be high-quality, denser, and sited in such a manner that infrastructure is used efficiently and views to the lake are preserved and enhanced. The Plan calls for more land devoted to non-residential uses (including commercial and industrial), redevelopment of older areas, and the implementation of urban design principles in order to create a "sense of place" for residents and improve quality of life.

The Comprehensive Plan intends to achieve these outcomes by implementing programs for the development of a Town Center and walkable commercial nodes, office parks and industrial parks, and specialty retail districts. Other steps to improve the quality of life in The Colony include working with the Texas Department of Transportation in reconstructing and redeveloping along FM 423 and encouraging waterfront redevelopment, including the new Shoreline Trail and commercial development.



Railmen working near Camey Spur

3.4 Demographic Profile

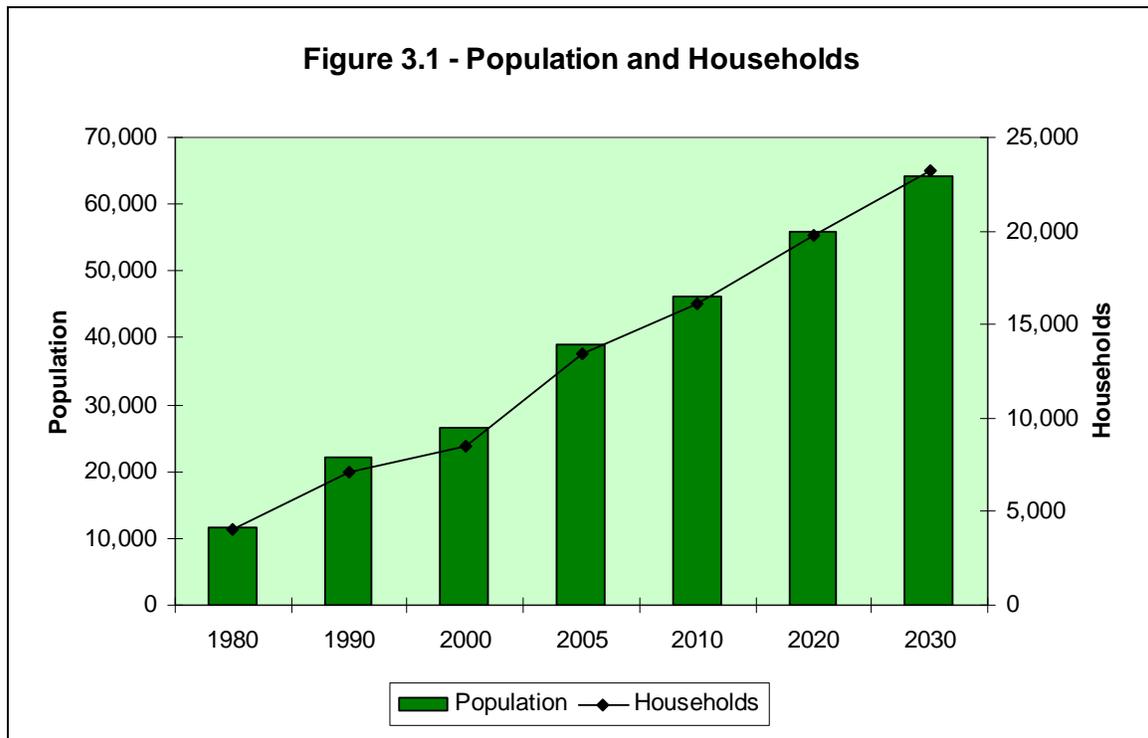
The following is a review of past and present demographic data, including population, housing, and employment growth forecasts for the City of The Colony. Understanding who lives in The Colony informs direction for future decisions and actions.

Table 3.1 Population History and Forecast 1970 - 2030								
	1970*	1980	1990	2000	2005	2010	2020	2030
Population	0	11,586	22,113	26,519	39,148	46,131	55,916	64,216
Households	0	4,006	7,151	8,462	13,462	16,141	19,806	23,199
Employment**	0	--	--	3,510	6,749	8,919	12,462	13,002

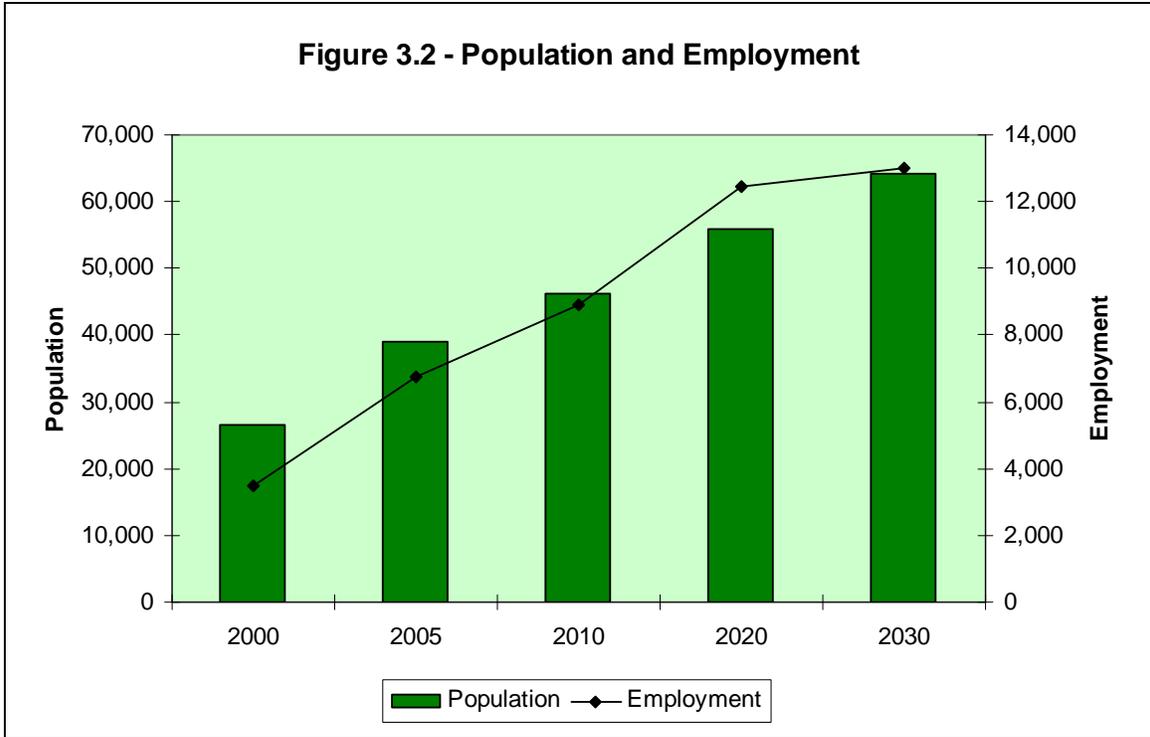
Sources: <http://www.nctcog.org/ris/demographics/forecast/query.asp?thefield=citycode&thevalue=4242>
<http://www.census.gov/prod/cen1990/cph2/cph-2-1-1.pdf>

*The Colony was incorporated in 1977.

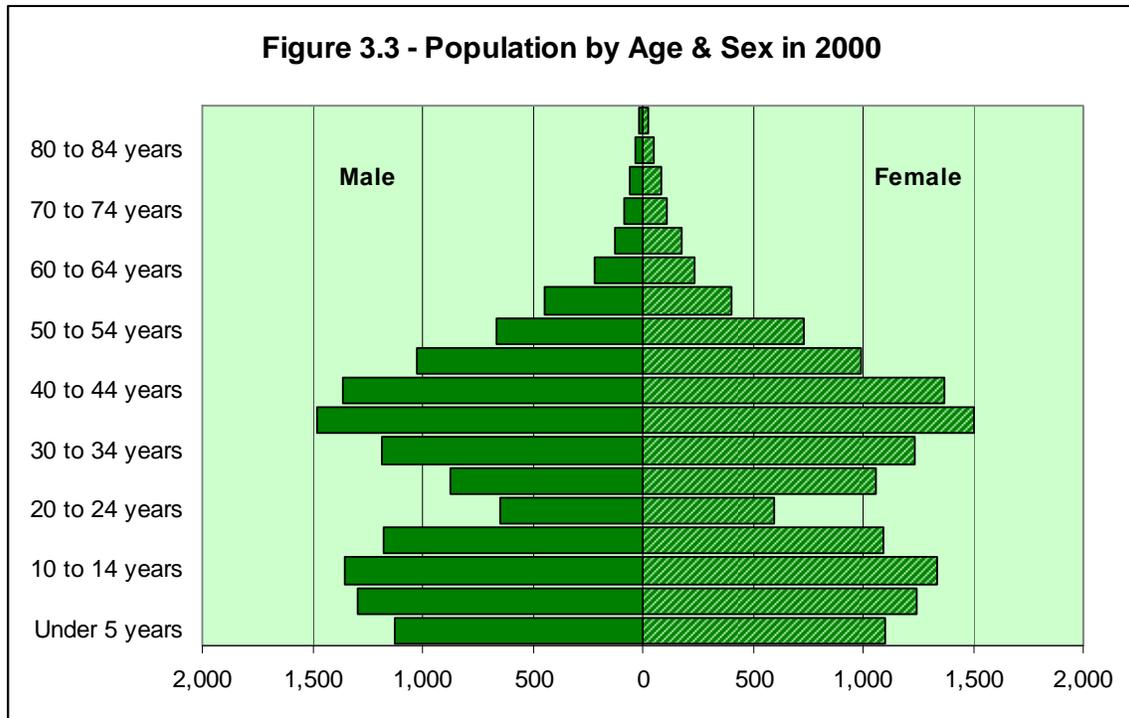
**Employment opportunities within the city, not total employees residing within the city (for this information see table 3.5)



Sources: <http://www.nctcog.org/ris/demographics/forecast/query.asp?thefield=citycode&thevalue=4242>
<http://www.census.gov/prod/cen1990/cph2/cph-2-1-1.pdf>



Sources: <http://www.nctcog.org/ris/demographics/forecast/query.asp?thefield=citycode&thevalue=4242>
<http://www.census.gov/prod/cen1990/cph2/cph-2-1-1.pdf>



Source: United States Census Bureau; Census 2000

**Table 3.2
Racial Characteristics
Year 2000**

Race	Percent
White Non-Hispanic	84.5%
Black/African American	5.0%
American Indian and Alaska Native	0.6%
Asian	2.1%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0.0%
Some other race	5.4%
Two or more races	2.4%
Hispanic or Latino*	12.7%*

Source: <http://www.nctcog.org/ris/census/sf3/dp1.asp?Geo=City&Code=4242>

*Hispanic/Latino is considered an ethnicity, not a race by the US Census. This is the percentage of the total population that identify with the Hispanic/Latino ethnicity.

**Table 3.3
Educational Attainment by Sex
Year 2000**

Educational Level	Male	Female	Total
Less than High School Graduate	8.7%	10.0%	9.4%
High School Graduate (includes GED)	53.6%	60.8%	57.3%
Associate Degree	11.1%	7.8%	9.4%
Bachelor's Degree	20.9%	17.2%	19.0%
Graduate Degree	5.7%	4.3%	5.0%

Source: United States Census Bureau; Census 2000

**Table 3.4
Household Income, Housing Value, and Homeownership
Year 2000**

	Median / Average
Annual Household Income	\$64,080 / \$70,730
Value for Owner-Occupied Housing Units	\$95,700 / \$108,074
Gross Monthly Rent	\$986 / \$974
Number of Households	8,836
Homeownership Rate	82.2%

Source: United States Census Bureau; Census 2000

Table 3.5
Occupation of Employed Civilian Population Aged 16 Years and Over
(14,394 total employees)
Year 2000

Management, Professional and Related	37.2%
Service	9.3%
Sales and Office	34.4%
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry	0.1%
Construction, Extraction and Maintenance	9.7%
Production, Transportation, and Material Moving	9.4%

Source: <http://www.nctcog.org/ris/census/sf3/dp3.asp?Geo=City&Code=4242>

Table 3.6
Industry of Employed Civilian Population Aged 16 Years and Over
(14,394 total employees)
Year 2000

Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	0.2%
Construction	6.3%
Manufacturing	11.7%
Wholesale Trade	5.7%
Retail Trade	16.6%
Transportation and Warehousing, and Utilities	5.1%
Information	6.7%
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate, and Rental and Leasing	8.6%
Professional, Scientific, Management, Administrative, and Waste Management Services	14.5%
Educational, Health, and Social Services	12.2%
Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Accommodation and Food Services	5.5%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	4.2%
Public Administration	2.7%

Source: <http://www.nctcog.org/ris/census/sf3/dp3.asp?Geo=City&Code=4242>