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ORIGINAL ZONING ORDINANCE AND MAP

As a rapidly growing Houston suburb of 12,000 residents, Tomball desired quality development and planning and the certainty of future land use through zoning. However, prejudices against zoning in the Houston area, where suburbs routinely defeat zoning initiatives through referendum forcing the issue of zoning into citywide votes, posed a significant obstacle in the creation of a zoning ordinance.

The City had tried previously to implement zoning, but previous initiatives have been defeated. The City then hired the Sefko Group of Freese and Nichols as consultants. In early 2006, the firm surveyed and analyzed existing land use throughout the City to prepare a draft future land use and thoroughfare plan. A nine-member Planning Committee appointed by the City Council held numerous meetings to reach consensus on the map.

In late 2006, a zoning ordinance draft was prepared to determine the new districts and area requirements. Existing zoning-type provisions in the Code of Ordinances addressing residential lot sizes and setbacks, landscaping, parking, sexually-oriented businesses and alcoholic beverages had to be adapted into the new ordinance.

The resulting 190-page ordinance merges existing provisions into a state-of-the-art zoning ordinance with a land use matrix that includes parking standards for individual land uses and an area requirement matrix.



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In order to assist the City in this first zoning ordinance, it also includes a traditional district list with general purpose statements, use descriptions, area requirements and landscaping provisions. Graphics are provided to demonstrate how to implement the standards. It is one of the first zoning ordinances in Texas to address detailed vesting and completeness determination procedures related to the new state statutes.

After numerous meetings with the Planning Committee to finalize the draft ordinance in late 2007, a draft zoning map was prepared using the new ordinance's districts. The Committee agreed to zone most property as close to the actual existing use as possible in order to adopt zoning. A special district was created to reflect the unique character and mixed use of the downtown area.

Town hall meetings were held with the public to review the draft zoning ordinance and map and resolve most issues prior to the required public hearings. As a result, opposition was limited at the Council public hearing. Supporting petitions were submitted asking that zoning be adopted without a referendum.



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The adoption of the new Zoning Ordinance in early 2008 was the result of an organized campaign on the part of the City with numerous citizen meetings to reach compromises. Tomball's process of analyzing existing land use, developing a future land use plan, drafting the text and finally drafting the zoning map is transferable to any community. The City's adoption of the first zoning ordinance and map will have far reaching effects on the quality of life for all citizens in Tomball.

The Tomball Zoning Ordinance and Map was selected as the recipient of the Texas APA 2008 Current Planning Award.