



Cibolo beefs up its economic development efforts

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Editor's Note: The City of Cibolo, northeast of San Antonio, recently established the City Economic Development Corp. The Business Journal recently asked Nancy McBeth, director of community development, to talk about the goals of the new Cibolo Community Development office.

Q. What prompted Cibolo to establish a community development division?

A. Cibolo is the fastest growing city in the fastest growing state in the nation (October 2006 U.S. Census). Cibolo projected its population at 14,400 by December 2007. In January 2007, population was already 11,400, experiencing a 20 to 25 percent growth for five years. In two years, Cibolo expects to have more than 20,000 residents. This phenomenal growth began in 2000 with the housing boom. With its access to IH-35, FM 78 and IH-10, Cibolo residents can reach local, regional and statewide jurisdictions easily. Its population includes a median age of 34 with higher than average incomes, a populace of entrepreneurs and above average educational attainment.

City Manager Todd Parton saw the need for economic development and the potential for fast growth. Before she was mayor, Jennifer Hartman spearheaded the Cibolo Land Use Master Plan, as well as Cibolo's New Town Center. Planning and economic development go hand-in-hand, but most cities separate them, creating internal battles and slowing down progress. With our hybrid division, we are a team, coordinating our efforts into a seamless transition.

To keep up with overwhelming growth, the city manager recruited me to create a new community development division in 2006. A 4-B sales tax to fund the Cibolo Economic Development Corporation (CEDC) was implemented on April 1, 2007. The Cibolo Community Development office encompasses all land-use planning and economic development. In 2006, Blue Clover was hired to create a new brand identity for Cibolo; the city's new Web site is expected to go live by mid-October.

Q. How did the development of the city's master plan fit in with the development and establishment of the community development office?

A. In 2007, the city council adopted a master plan update, including a new mixed-use development designation, defined interconnectivity, and expansion of roadway infrastructure, including an urban section of FM 1103 from IH-35 to IH-10, as well as a FM 1103 bypass. It explores several core areas of mixed-used, commercial and industrial developments, and a variety of housing. A \$100-million development on IH-35 will offer plazas, hotels, offices, retail and possibly a residential component. This project is the beginning of an exciting vision for the future of Cibolo -- the gateway of what is to come.

The city's master plan focuses on the 1,000-acre new Cibolo Town Center -- a central point that partners old town with new town. It will feature natural elements, culture, open spaces, civic and cultural centers, retail, businesses, corporate headquarters, single-family homes, public structures, and plazas -- all in a walkable location adjacent to rail. We are working with the Austin-San Antonio Corridor Council for a future commuter rail along FM 78.

Q. What expectations does the city have from the master plan?

A. Cibolo hopes to bring a wide range of jobs, residents, retail businesses, industrial and corporate offices to its community through a partnership with the city, CEDC, and master and specific-use developers. The Cibolo New Town Center features a 300-acre park that will connect several sections of the city to other parks, trails and cultural activities. With our athletic population, the center will welcome these outdoor enthusiasts with activities, hotels, outdoor auditoriums, a conference center, sports and local/regional events.

Q. Other cities have well-developed EDFs. How do you plan to set your development office apart -- and compete with -- surrounding destinations?

A. Cibolo partnered with TIP Strategies to establish a Target Market Study and Economic Development Strategic Plan. The plan has an implementation guideline to identify development and business prospects by establishing non-traditional opportunities. There is a place for tradition here, but Cibolo is creating uniqueness.

Q. What are the successes the community development division has had thus far for the City of Cibolo, and how do you plan to capitalize on those?

A. In the last 12 months, Cibolo has seen a 20 percent increase in commercial development -- most in small businesses -- without any business-related incentives. Owners saw the investment that planting roots here could bring. Many mentioned they like Cibolo because we bend over backward to help them. We try to find different ways of looking at projects, becoming partners in the development.

We have found that little things make the biggest difference. A mixer in May to give business owners the opportunity to network and chat in an informal setting ended up a celebration of community. It was so well-received that we are planning the next one for late October.