

COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION PLAN

BALCONES HEIGHTS, TEXAS

PREPARED FOR:
CITY OF BALCONES HEIGHTS

PREPARED BY:
PEGASUS PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

DECEMBER 2012



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INTRODUCTION

Pegasus Planning and Development was engaged to facilitate and develop a Community Revitalization Plan (CRP) for the city of Balcones Heights, Texas. In its broadest definition, a community revitalization plan is intended to provide a coordinated and comprehensive approach to addressing the problems in a community's distressed areas, and to foster healthy and vibrant residential and commercial opportunities.

The specific goals of this community revitalization plan include:

- ***Determine demographic and economic makeup of the Balcones Heights community and study area.***
- ***Analyze existing structures, crime and safety, transportation infrastructure, adverse environmental conditions, access to healthcare, parks and recreation, law enforcement, schools, social services, and local business environment.***
- ***Develop a plan that the city of Balcones Heights can use as a framework to revitalize the study area including implementation strategies, budget and staff required, funding opportunities, timelines, and economic value of improvements.***

This report is divided into several sections - Historical Context, Current Demographic and Economic Conditions, Observations and Analysis and Summary and Conclusions. The Historical Context and Current Demographic and Economic Condition sections will provide a spotlight on the need for revitalization as well as an understanding of the study area. Observations and Analysis will address specific aspects of Balcones Heights the city can target implementation strategies and direct redevelopment towards. The Summary and Conclusions Section will detail those strategies and provide policy recommendations for financing redevelopment, engaging current and future stakeholders, and develop a realistic timeframe for implementation.

This CRP builds upon the main policies adopted by the City and found in the City's 2009 Master Plan:

- 1. Initiate Bus Rapid Transit and Fredericksburg Road Improvements***
- 2. Development of the Crossroads District***
- 3. Development and Redevelopment of the Fredericksburg Road Corridor***
- 4. Development and Redevelopment of the Higher Density Residential Zone along Gentleman Road***

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Balcones Heights needs to revitalize nearly half of the community to address issues of crime and safety, dilapidated housing, insufficient local jobs and a stagnant tax base.

Balcones Heights is a small land-locked, incorporated city in Bexar County, Texas with a current population of 2,905. Since its inception, the City has been linked to the growth of the City of San Antonio and shaped by the intense transportation network in and around the City. As the map on the following page illustrates, Interstate 10 and the 410 Loop intersect within the City limits and Fredericksburg Road is one of the major arterials leading out of downtown San Antonio to major employers such as the Medical Center just north of the City. Balcones Heights is equidistant between San Antonio's two UTSA campuses, the downtown business district, and the South Texas Medical Center.



In the 1840s Fredericksburg Road was surveyed through what would become Balcones Heights as a major stagecoach route for mail and passengers.

Source: City of Balcones Heights Master Plan

This study has found that the City is largely a commercial community with nearly all of its commercial base at the Wonderland of the Americas and along Fredericksburg Road. Most of the community's older residents live in the older single family housing, while the largely blue-collar and service-based residents live in dilapidated multi-family housing. Commercial structures are also dilapidated and sales and property taxes have stagnated over the last few years.

This CRP builds upon the main policies adopted by the City and found in the City's 2009 Comprehensive Plan:

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- 2. *Development of the Crossroads District***
- 3. *Development and Redevelopment of the Fredericksburg Road Corridor***
- 4. *Development and Redevelopment of the Higher Density Residential Zone along Gentleman Road***

The strategies found in this plan will help Balcones Heights address the issues discussed in this plan and revitalize the areas identified in the Community Revitalization Plan Study Area found on the following page.

STUDY AREA

The Study area for the CRP includes:

- Wonderland of the Americas
- Fredericksburg Road Corridor from 410 to Siesta Lane
- Hillcrest Drive southwest to Crestview Drive, then south to Leisure Drive
- Leisure Drive northeast to Gentleman Drive
- Gentleman Drive southeast to Siesta Lane
- Siesta Lane east to Fredericksburg Road

Community Revitalization Plan Balcones Heights, TX



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- Planning Area
- Balcones Heights City Area
- Bus Rapid Transit Stops

SECTION 1: HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF BALCONES HEIGHTS

THE NEED FOR REVITALIZATION

Throughout its history, Balcones Heights has been a unique and resilient community. As a suburb of San Antonio, it has strong ties to the larger metropolitan area, yet retains its individuality that the initial Spanish explorers envisioned upon settlement in 1765. As transportation became more advanced, the development of Fredericksburg Road became a main thoroughfare connecting San Antonio to the southern region. What started as a stagecoach road, Fredericksburg Road was one of the first main roadways leading out of downtown San Antonio. It is now a major thoroughfare with three lanes for cars both northbound and southbound, with a center turn lane. Traffic is heavy on this roadway throughout the day and remains the backbone of commercial activity in Balcones Heights and is a main target for revitalization in this plan.

Following the pattern of many suburban communities after World War Two, single family subdivisions sprouted in Balcones Heights. This development was driven by government loans to veterans, the advent of the automobile, and boom in employment of soldiers returning home. The city was incorporated in 1948 after pressure of annexation from San Antonio. The cities grew independently from each other for the next decade until the sprawl of San Antonio reached the boundary of Balcones Heights.

With the advent of interstate expansion and widespread automobile transportation advancements, the 1960's brought an influx of commercial development. I-10 and I-410 further connected Balcones Heights to San Antonio and the region at large. Wonderland Mall was the crowning point of commercial development, providing a regional destination point for consumers that resulted from the interstate expansion. The mall was renovated in 1987 and currently exists as mostly office space, rather than the retail destination it once was. Despite Balcones Heights continuing to develop its own infrastructure in the following decades, the need for redevelopment of aging building stock and infrastructure has come. Like many American cities, Balcones Heights took its own economic hit from the market collapse in 2008. Most recently, the city has taken action through long term planning initiatives, including this plan, to strategically leverage its position after the Fredericksburg Road corridor through Balcones Heights was chosen as the region's BRT pilot route due to its proximity to downtown, both UTSA campuses, the South Texas Medical Center, and the existing bus ridership along this corridor.

SECTION 2: DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC SNAPSHOT

Population

According to US Census American Community Survey Estimates from 2007-2011, the current population in Balcones Heights is 2,905. The population has remained relatively flat for the last 30 years. The main economic drivers of the city include the Medical District, Data Point District, the City of Balcones Heights, University of Texas San Antonio, and the San Antonio Central Business District.

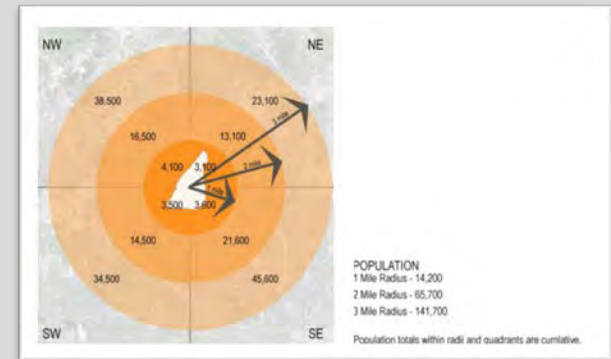
Regional Growth and Local Shrink

The engine for revitalization in Balcones Heights is largely dependent on population and employment growth. The market to attract and incentivize mixed use development to the community will draw largely on the regional characteristics, as Balcones Heights has not seen substantial growth in population or employment over the past 10 years. From 2000-2011, the total population has decreased by nearly 4% and lost 168 households in the 11 year span. From a regional perspective, Balcones Heights is in a strategic position to capture the growth of San Antonio and communities extending northwest.

As stated in the Balcones Heights Master Plan, the 2000 census indicated that there are over 140,000 people living within a 3 mile radius of the city as well as over 65,000 people living within a 2 mile radius. The northwest quadrant of that radius has the largest number of households, while the second largest quadrant is the southeast, which also lies along the BRT line.

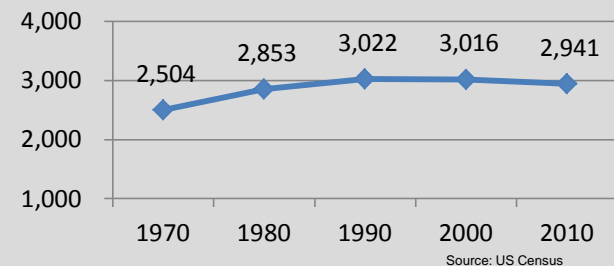
Age and Education Segments

US Census Data from the 2007-2011 American Community Survey shows that Balcones Heights has a fairly young but uneducated population. The median age of the community is 32.9 and over 54% of the population is between the ages of 20-54. Despite this younger workforce, the market for higher wage jobs is driven by an educated workforce. Balcones Heights is struggling in this regard, as only 11.4% of the population has a bachelor's degree or higher.



Source: City of Balcones Heights Master Plan

Balcones Heights Historical Population



Source: US Census

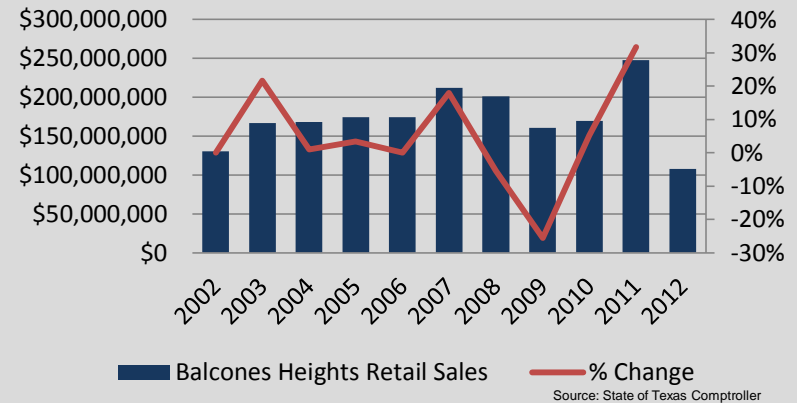
SECTION 2: DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC SNAPSHOT

Economic Conditions

Retail Sales Trends

After following national and state trends during the recession, Balcones Heights has seen considerable retail sales growth over the past 3 years. As illustrated in the trend chart, the city's retail sales have seen an increase of 55% since 2009. Despite this relatively robust growth as of late, the community has underperformed compared to county growth. From 2002-2011 the city retail sales have grown at an average rate of 6% while the county has grown at 9%.

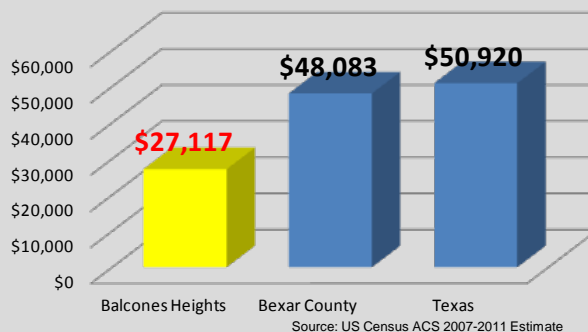
Balcones Heights Retail Sales



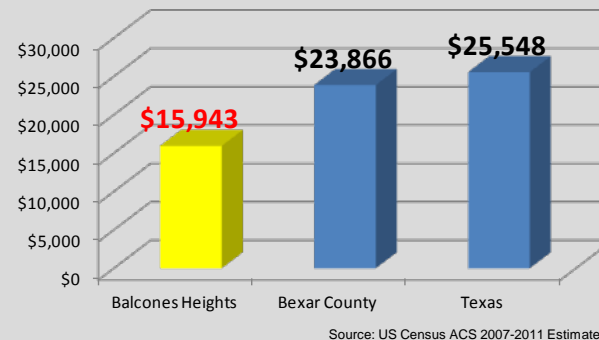
Disposable Income Trends

Balcones Heights has significantly underperformed relative to state and county income levels. Median Household Income for the community is \$27,117 which is 44% lower than Bexar County and 47% lower than state of Texas levels. Per Capita Income for Balcones Heights show the same trend, as the city's levels are 33% below county and 38% below state figures.

Median Household Income



Per Capita Income



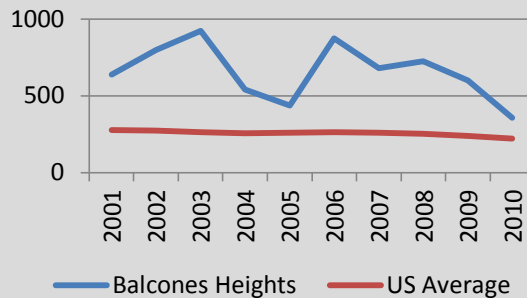
SECTION 3:OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS

The recommendations and strategies found later in this report are based on data analysis, interviews of major stakeholders, a public input meeting and site visits. The main issues that this CRP addresses are: Crime and Safety, Blighted and Dilapidate Structures, Low-Income Community, Drainage, Commercial Accessibility by Residents, Need for Land Aggregation, and need for revision of Land Development Code.

CRIME AND SAFETY

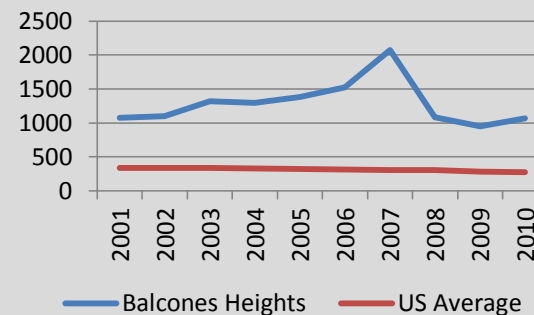
- Since 2007, violent crime and property crime in Balcones Heights have leveled off substantially.
- In the past 10 years, both crime indices have been 2-6 times higher in Balcones Heights than the national average.

Violent Crime Index



Source: city-data.com

Property Crime Index



Source: city-data.com

SECTION 3: OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS

CRIME AND SAFETY

The two (2) tables to the right illustrate the crime statistics for both Business and Residential from 2007 thru 2012.

- **Charges associated with businesses and in business parking lots comprises 91% of all crime in Balcones Heights.**
- **Business crime has steadily increased since 2007 but has begun to level off.**

Business Crime Statistics

Charge	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	TOTALS
Assault - Felony - aggravated assault		2		1	1	1	5
Assault - Sexual assault							0
Assault - simple - Misdemeanor			2			2	4
Burglary of a vehicle - Misdemeanor	5	3	1	7	10	11	37
Drug possession – Controlled substance	1		2	2	2	3	10
Drug possession – Marijuana					3		3
Robbery			1	1			2
Retail theft - Felony	3	8	6	9	2	7	35
Retail theft - Misdemeanor	6	12	6	10	8	8	50
Vehicle theft - Felony			2	2	2		6
Total Cases:	15	25	20	32	28	32	152

Residential Crime Statistics

Assault – aggravated	1	2		3	2		8
Assault – sexual							0
Assault – simple						1	1
Burglary of a vehicle						1	1
Drug offense – controlled substance – felony							0
Drug offense – Marijuana – misdemeanor							0
Burglary – habitat	3	2		1	1	1	8
Robbery							0
Theft – Felony							0
Theft – misdemeanor							0
Vehicle theft – Felony							0
Total Cases:	4	4	0	4	3	3	18

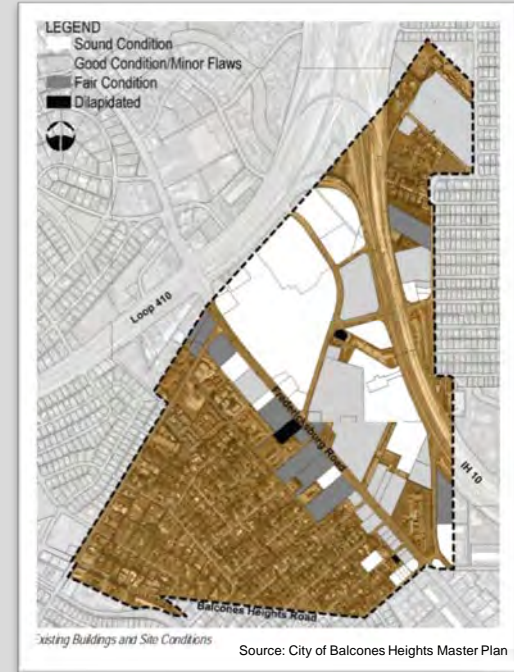
Source: City of Balcones Heights



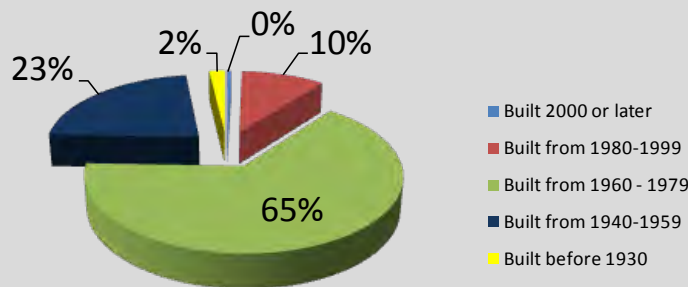
SECTION 3:OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS

BLIGHTED OR DILAPIDATED STRUCTURES

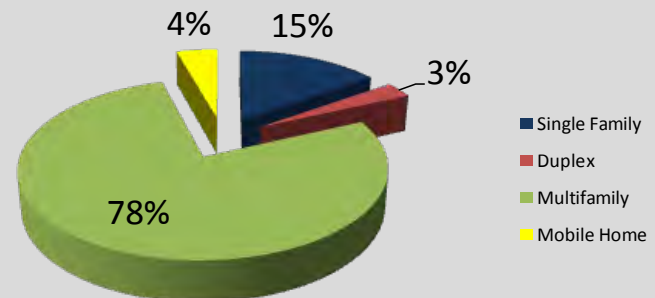
- **Commercial Buildings along Fredericksburg Road and within the Crossroads Mall area are in poor condition and need to be revitalized. As the map to the right illustrates nearly all commercial buildings along Fredericksburg Road are in Fair or Dilapidated Condition.**
- **Residential structures are also old, within 25% of residential stock built before 1960 and 65% built from 1960-1979.**
- **Most of the residential stock is multifamily (78%) and in need of major structural and cosmetic work.**



Balcones Heights Housing Stock



Housing Units in Structure



Source: US Census 2011 ACS-Estimates



SECTION 3:OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS

DRAINAGE

- **Woodlawn Creek runs through Balcones Heights. The map to the right illustrates the location of the creek and its associated floodplain.**
- **Currently there are 14 residential units that lie within this floodplain.**
- **The existing concrete drainage system shown to below right is old and beginning to cave in due to ground pressures.**
- **Upstream development and corresponding impervious cover has increased the amount of water that flows downstream and increased the number of structures in the flood plain.**
- **A drainage study has been undertaken yet the improvements necessary will involve Bexar County and adjacent communities.**



Source: City of Balcones



Source: Pegasus Planning

SECTION 3:OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS

ACCESSIBILITY / PEDESTRIAN FRIENDLY

- **A new Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) System has recently opened in Balcones Heights along Fredericksburg Road after being chosen as the pilot program for the regions first BRT system.**
- **Most residents are cut off from the BRT and business services due to a lack of connectivity from Gentleman Road to Fredericksburg and Crossroads Mall.**
- **The Fredericksburg Road, a TxDOT highway owned by Bexar County has a right-of-way that is very wide. Sidewalks, crosswalks and landscaping are much needed.**
- **Significant streetscape improvements from Gentleman Road and along Fredericksburg Road is needed to make for a much more inviting and safer pedestrian experience.**



Source: Google Images

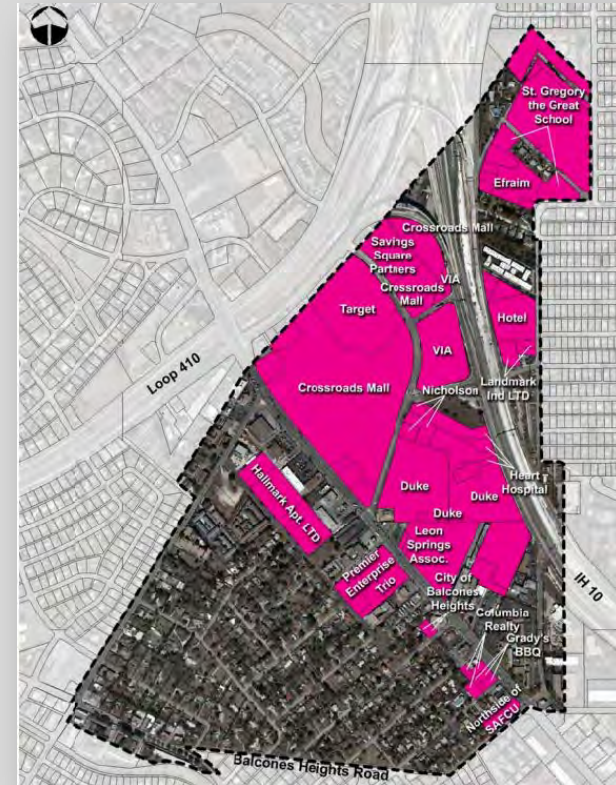


Source: Google Maps

SECTION 3:OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS

LAND AGGREGATION

- The map to the right displays the different ownership of all of the large tracts of land in Balcones Heights.
- Many landowners are absentee or “out-of-town” owners with very little vested interest in the community, but more concerned about lease revenue for their existing dilapidated buildings.



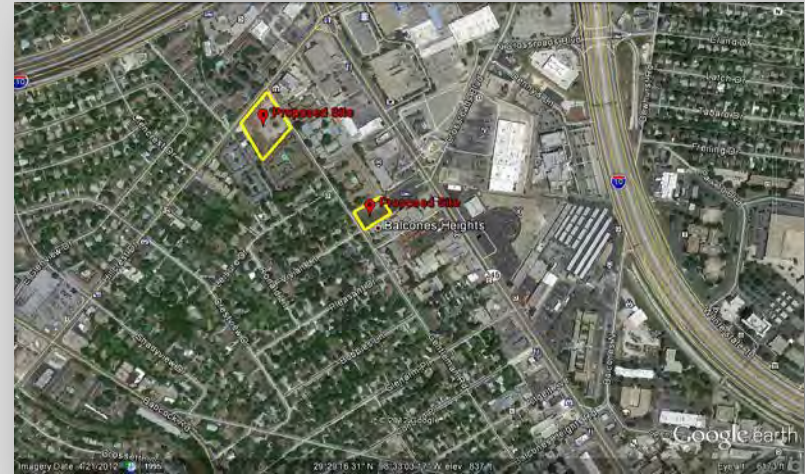
Source: Balcones Heights Master Plan

SECTION 4: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The following strategies will assist Balcones Heights in revitalizing the study area identified previously in this Community Revitalization Plan:

Encourage new Multifamily and Mixed-use developments within the study area

- Several vacant sites exist throughout the city that could be used to stimulate new development or redevelopment, including affordable housing. The map below illustrates two primary sites: 1) across from the Balcones Heights Justice Center, and 2) behind and adjacent to an old motel. Additionally, the city owns the property behind the motel and could leverage that to be combined with the motel property for a larger project. A pedestrian pathway from Fredericksburg to Gentleman Road could be designed through this new development to address the lack of pedestrian connectivity from residential area to Bus stops and commercial services.



Source: Google Earth

SECTION 4: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Code Enforcement and Land Development Code Rewrite

- Enforce existing codes with aggressive code enforcement
- Develop a building improvement program to provide incentives for business owners to make improvements
- Utilize funds from CPS Energy (approximately \$400,000) to seed this incentive program.
- Examine programs in the region, such as Universal City's streetscape and façade enhancement program as a model for program development.
- Incentivize and aggregate by adjusting land development code such that a developer can receive increased entitlements (more height or building square footage) if parcel size is above a certain threshold – thus incentivizing the developer to acquire adjacent lands.

Master Plan Mall Area and Create a Transit Station

- Continue to work with the Wonderland of the Americas owner and adjacent landowners to create a Master Plan for the entire Crossroads Mall area.
- Further implement the Transit Station that builds upon the existing small-scale Bus Rapid Transit Stops.
- Encourage intense mixed-use development at this station stop in within the Redeveloped Mall.

APPENDIX: IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

Task	Priority Ranking	Stakeholders	Timeline	Cost Estimate	Potential Economic Value	Potential Partners	Potential Sources of Funding
New Multifamily and Mixed Use	1	City of Balcones Heights / Private Developers	2013	None to City	\$3-10 Million	Private Developers	HUD HOME Funds / Private Investment
Fredericksburg Road Building Enhancement Program	2	City of Balcones Heights	2013	\$400,000	\$400,000	Bexar County	TxDOT
Crossroads Mall Redevelopment Master Planning	3	City of Balcones Heights / Property Owners / Private Developers	2013 / 2014	\$300,000	\$5 Million	Private Developers / VIA	Private Investment / City of Balcones Heights
Drainage	4	Balcones Heights	2014 / 2015	\$2-10 Million	\$4-12 Million	Bexar County	Bexar County SEID / City of San Antonio