



Conroe's Downtown Revitalization Project

In the summer of 1999, the City of Conroe developed and began implementing a plan to revitalize its downtown. Because of difficulties with parking, traffic flow, business retention and recruitment, and necessary physical improvements, the Conroe City Council decided an enhancement strategy was needed.

The city council took advantage of America's Downtown—New Thinking, New Life, a technical assistance program offered by the National League of Cities and HyettPalma, Inc., a national consulting firm specializing in the economic renaissance of downtowns. The city and the Greater Conroe/Lake Conroe Area Chamber of Commerce began a partnership focusing on the downtown's economic needs, and together began implementing the recommendations of the HyettPalma study, the Conroe-Downtown Action Agenda 1999. This partnership and commitment are resulting in millions of dollars being invested in downtown Conroe, says Mayor Carter Moore.

The city worked with two local banks to set up a loan program with favorable interest rates for building owners who want to renovate building interiors and make other improvements. A broad array of investments and improvements has occurred in downtown Conroe.

Many new establishments have opened downtown, including a Wells Fargo Bank, a Sonic Drive-In, a Walgreen's, and several new dining establishments. Two new law offices, a property tax and title research firm, a book store, a few gift stores, and boutiques have opened up as well. Several long-established businesses have relocated and seen success in the revitalized downtown.

In 2000, nine new businesses opened in the revitalized downtown area, employing over 30 people. A subcommittee of the Chamber's Downtown Revitalization Committee started a newsletter, *Downtown Conroe*, which announces events and tracks the revitalization process, including the problems needing resolution.

The City of Conroe has invested approximately \$3.7 million in new streetscape improvements, which include new curbs and gutters, brick paving for sidewalks, electrical upgrades, and a streetlight banner program. A façade loan program, created by the city through its federally funded



Community Development Block Grant Program, has given buildings throughout the city a facelift. Gateways were also designed for six locations into the downtown area.

All programs are the result of a series of discussions, focus groups, and meetings held to define the city's preferred vision of downtown Conroe, as it would ideally exist in the year 2007. Community members determined that by 2007 downtown would be a well-rounded area of retail boutiques, specialty shops, restaurants, entertainment and recreations venues, loft apartments, and a suite hotel. They envisioned a friendly, clean, and comfortable downtown with a diversity of businesses, restaurants, and attractions that appeal to everyone.

By the end of 2007, 50,000-70,000 square feet of additional office space and 64,000-88,000 square feet of retail space will be developed. Several other projects are in the works as well.

Expansion to Heritage Park, located downtown, includes an amphitheatre to accommodate over 750 people, a pavilion, public art, restrooms, and a water feature. Concerts were held the first Thursday of every month, helping to promote the expansion.

Because a downtown church relocated, Montgomery County purchased the building to be used for court-related services and other purposes designed to meet the ever-expanding demands of a growing county. A parking garage was also developed to accommodate approximately 389 vehicles, which helps with the increasing number of county employees needing to park downtown.

As a result of the city's initiative, the growing public-private partnership has been bolstered by local optimism and enthusiasm. Given these investments and improvements, as well as plans for future developments, spirits remain high.★