

**Development District of Central Texas  
Board of Directors**

Central Texas Council of Governments 2180  
North Main Street, Belton, Texas 76513

**Thursday, April 6, 2023—9:30 AM**

**Board Members Present:**

Jamie LaDuke: Hamilton EDC

Ted Gonzalez: Central Texas College

Dean Roome: Bartlett Municipal Development District

Cheri Shepherd: Gatesville Convention and Visitor's Bureau

Jim Gibson: Rockdale Municipal Development District

Jason Johnson: JJ Realty Group

Ginger Watkins: Cameron Industrial Foundation

**Others Present:**

Anna Barge: CTCOG

Dominic Elizondo: CTCOG

Hope Geiger: KTMPO

Connie Quinto: CTCOG

Anita Janke: KTMPO

**MINUTES**

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1. **Call to Order.** The meeting was called to order by Ginger Watkins, Chair of the Board, at 9:30 AM. A quorum was present.

2. **Public Comments.** No public comments were made.

3. **Staff Updates.**

Dominic Elizondo gave an update about CTCOG activities, including the advertising of the Discover Central Texas website and social media, administration and application for EDA and TxCDBG Community Development Fund grants, and the Central Texas Public Transportation Summit. Mr. Elizondo also provided economic updates for Q1 2023, noting that the unemployment rate for the region had been dropping three consecutive quarters.

4. **Discussion and Action Item:** Regarding Approval of Meeting Minutes from the January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2023 Meeting.

Ted Gonzalez made a motion to approve the minutes, and it was seconded by Jason Johnson; the motion passed unanimously.

5. **Discussion and Action Item:** Regarding Approval of New Board Members

Two new members were before the Board for approval-Dexter Morris, the city manager of the city of Mullin, and Stacey Ybarra, the economic development director for Lampasas.

Cheri Shepherd made a motion to approve their applications to the Board, and Jim Gibson seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

**6. Discussion and Action Item:** Regarding Approval of 2023 Leadership Central Texas Applications

Dominic Elizondo provided an overview of the Leadership Central Texas and Rural Internship programs advertising, including \$1000 spent on Facebook boosting for advertisement posts, emails sent out to regional contacts, and public notices posted in county courthouses. Mr. Elizondo noted that the list of applications were in the packet. 14 applications were received, which was 6 higher than the 8 received for 2022. Dean Roome made a motion to approve the applications, and it was seconded by Ted Gonzalez; The motion passed unanimously.

**7. Discussion Item:** Regarding Approval of 2023 Rural Internship Program Applications

Dominic Elizondo explained that at the last meeting the Board approved up to two applications for the Program, but if there were more then they would approve based on funding availability from the EDA planning grant budget. Mr. Elizondo showed that if three applications were approved, the Other line item would run out of funds for advertising Discover Central Texas the week of Nov.15-22, but the DDCT would receive a new EDA planning grant for 2024-26 beginning January 2024. The three applicants were the Hamilton EDC, San Saba EDC and Chamber, and the San Saba Chamber for social media marketing and event planning. Ted Gonzalez made a motion to approve the applications, seconded by Jim Gibson; Ginger Watkins and Jamie LaDuke abstained, with the rest of the Board voting to successfully pass the motion.

**8. Discussion Item:** Regarding 2022-2026 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDs) Implementation

Dominic Elizondo discussed how the Board decided at the CEDs workshop in January to continue discussions on coordinating implementation of CEDs objectives and strategies and metrics to measure success by changing the CEDs agenda item to be a mini-workshop focusing on one objective at a time rather than a staff update on implementation with input from the Board on what to change or new actions to take. The objective the Board was tasked with discussing was to "Develop a strong regionally-based business marketing effort." Mr. Elizondo demonstrated that staff had addressed the strategy to "Develop a regional brand and marketing plan and unified business attraction messaging effort" by adding industry, workforce, demographic, educational attainment, median income, and other economic data to the CTCOG and DDCT website, including through a Community Profiles document which highlighted the economic assets (e.g. is the city in an Opportunity or Enterprise Zone, what tax incentives are available for new businesses?) of all 32 cities in the region. Mr. Elizondo noted that a previous idea for this strategy at the workshop was to incorporate this data and information into a business section of Discover Central Texas, and opened the floor for any discussion on implementation and metrics for the strategy.

Ted Gonzalez asked how Central Texas was being defined as he discovered that there were different places designated as Central Texas by different entities, and Dominic Elizondo said that it was based off of the CTCOG and DDCT regional designations. Jim Gibson asked if there was any way to rebrand the region to distinguish it from the Greater Central Texas

region, and Mr. Gonzalez said that the greater investment and resulting business ecosystem from Temple to Copperas Cove and surrounding areas is apparent, and that the region's access to rail and proximity to the coastline as well as Fort Hood makes it an attraction. Mr. Elizondo asked if there were any thoughts on how to disseminate or centralize the economic and industry data for the region to market. Ginger Watkins said that without the budget to build a new website, including the data as a link on the Discover Central Texas website would be beneficial and that there is somewhat of a duplication of data, particularly demographic data that is duplicated. Ms. Watkins suggested that the data be centralized and merged so that it is linked to one place. The Board discussed different ideas for branding the region differently based on the centrality theme already used by different COGs and development districts. Jason Johnson noted that with the region's rail, airports and I-35 corridor it makes more sense for the DDCT region to be the Heart of Texas than other regions. Cheri Shepherd noted that the Community Profiles document did not link to EDCs and chambers for every city and Mr. Elizondo said that he would add that, and that the Board should let him know if there is any information in the document to edit or add. Dexter Morris added that Mills County also markets itself as the "True Center" of Texas. Ms. Watkins added that perhaps Discover Central Texas should indicate its association with CTCOG and DDCT so that the reason it is these seven counties is understood. Mr. Gonzalez mentioned that through his work he found that foreign companies had confusion over where they thought Central Texas was located. Mr. Johnson said maybe the branding can be centered around a unifying theme, such as how cities are branded "The music capital of \_\_\_\_."

Ginger Watkins noted that the Opportunity Zone and regional tourism effort strategies under the objective were complete or ongoing, but that the Fort Hood talent base marketing was a strategy that should be incorporated with the business attraction. Dominic Elizondo said that the unifying theme for the region could be the military talent base. Mr. Gonzalez said that businesses he sees that have a difficult time hiring employees turn to veterans since they are used to working in harsh conditions and dealing with responsibilities.

Dean Roome asked if staff had looked at what other regions are doing as far as marketing their region and if there is any avenue for doing a combined marketing effort. Dominic Elizondo said that staff had not directly cooperated with other COGs on projects, but would look at if there is any possibility for collaboration on marketing for the broader Central Texas region.

Ginger Watkins said that the TAP has good information regarding veteran talent. Anna Barge said that staff needed a good contact for the TAP and innovative ideas for working with Fort Hood. Ms. Watkins said the best partners for working with Fort Hood would be the Killeen Chamber.

Dominic Elizondo provided an overview of audience engagement and insights for Discover Central Texas, noting that the audience was largely women 35-54 located in Temple, Killeen, and out of region cities. The ads have reached 39,000 people and the Facebook advertisement has received 937 engagements, with the page receiving 1600 page likes over 60 days.

The next CEDS objective the DDCT Board will cover will be "Strengthen the conditions for growth of new and existing businesses."

**9. Discussion Item: Regarding Furthering TDA and TDHCA Fair Housing Efforts**

Dominic Elizondo explained that CTCOG was a recipient of TDA Community Economic Development Assistance Funds (CEDAF), and one of the eligible expenses for the funding was holding a fair housing event. The fair housing event can be a Board discussion of implementing and supporting fair housing efforts, so Mr. Elizondo provided a presentation on the Fair Housing Act and ways in which communities that receive TxCDBG funds must and ways non-recipients can further fair housing efforts in their communities, including by passing a fair housing resolution, including fair housing in the city code, and hosting a workshop for property owners. Mr. Elizondo asked what fair housing measures Board members have seen implemented in their city, what they might try and implement in the future, and what barriers they may see to fair housing in their community. Jason Johnson said that the biggest barrier Morgan's Point Resort faces is that most properties are on septic and there are lots that can't be used because of it. Dexter Morris said that Mullin's biggest issue is the complete lack of affordable housing; it is difficult to address fair housing if the supply is not there in the first place. Jamie LaDuke noted that Hamilton had 77 lots but they have no infrastructure for city utilities, so cannot yet be used for housing. Mr. Johnson said that when it comes to fair housing one of the biggest issues low opportunity people face is that for most of the loans they are able to obtain to purchase homes the house has to be in good shape. There may be homes available but low-income people will not be able to afford a conventional mortgage and options such as FHA loans will not cover dilapidated properties. Mr. Johnson suggested cities provide an opportunity for sellers to fix their house with an incentive, and that that would massively improve the supply of affordable housing. Stacey Ybarra suggested compiling a list of dilapidated properties in a city and ensuring that a property is up to code or otherwise would qualify for loans for low income people. Jim Gibson stated that fair housing was a little different from affordable housing, and that many cities simply pass a resolution recognizing Fair Housing Month. Dominic Elizondo said that affordable housing was definitely a topic that needs to be addressed and could be in conjunction with fair housing; cities can add a fair housing component to their city code to be able to have the issue addressed whenever their affordable housing efforts bring in more low income/opportunity buyers and leasers. Ted Gonzalez asked if CTCOG took the lead on implementing fair housing efforts or cities and counties, and Dominic Elizondo said it would be entirely up to cities and counties though CTCOG disseminates information on what activities could help in those efforts and what resources are available, as well as declare Fair Housing Month for April. Ted Gonzalez said that when he first moved into the area around Baylor the city had passed a law helping homeowners secure a certain mortgage interest rate, and it helped him and others in deciding to live there. Cheri Shepherd said that in her community there are a lot of landlords that own one or two properties that sometimes are not professional and aware of fair housing laws. Ms. Shepherd asked if there are some resources to tap into for consultants to use to conduct Fair Housing workshops, and Mr. Elizondo said that he would look into it to provide for the Board, but the city is able to run those workshops themselves as well.

**10. Discussion Item: Regarding Updates on Regional Broadband Initiatives**

Anna Barge discussed the Texas Broadband Development Office's Bringing Online Opportunities to Texas (BOOT) program, which does not have any DDCT communities eligible to apply based on the state broadband maps, which indicate what Census blocks have less than 25 Mbps/3 Mbps speeds. Ms. Barge noted that Milam County had done a good job of facilitating broadband development, and that there are other broadband resources available for funding.

Jamie LaDuke asked why there were no areas eligible in our region, and Ms. Barge and Dominic Elizondo said that data from the service providers indicated no Census block met the 25 Mbps/3 Mbps threshold and that a dispute process is open for the maps.

**11. Discussion Item:** Regarding Federal and State Legislative Updates Pertaining to Economic Development

Anna Barge discussed the opening of the Texas legislature session and several bills of relevance to economic development, including HB 2127 relating to State preemption for regulations on agriculture, finance, labor, and natural resources, SB 42 for allowing call ins to meetings to count for quorum under the Open Meetings Act, HB 3812 for establishing a Texas Infrastructure Fund for water, ports, broadband, highways, toll roads, bridges, aviation, rail and more, SB 28 for additional funding for the Texas Water Development Board.

**12. Discussion Item:** Regarding Updates on Grant Opportunities

Dominic Elizondo provided an update on State and Federal grant opportunities and their eligible projects and match, including the TxCDBG Community Development Fund and Downtown Revitalization Program, the EDA Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance Programs, and the USDA Community Connect Grant.

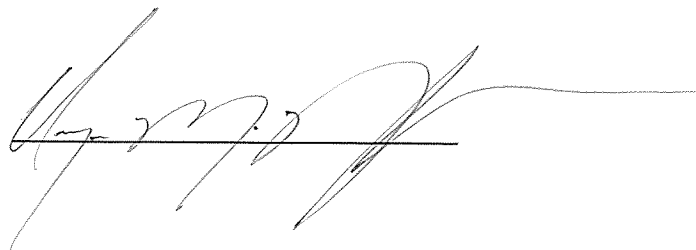
Ted Gonzalez asked what the deadline for the EDA Public Works grant and Dominic Elizondo responded that applications were accepted on an ongoing basis. Mr. Gonzalez asked if CTCOG would be able to assist with applications or working out projects for the grant, and Mr. Elizondo said that staff could definitely assist in any way possible.

**13. Board of Directors' Comments.**

Ginger Watkins welcomed the two new members to the Board and thanked everyone for coming in person. Dexter Morris thanked the Board and stated that Mullin was working on a five-year plan, and that the DDCT's work went nicely with their efforts. Mr. Morris discussed ranch land being divided up into multi-acre parcels for the development of the city. Jim Gibson noted that Rockdale had been utilizing ChatGPT for a targeted industry analysis. Dominic Elizondo noted that in research for Quiet Zone efficacy ChatGPT provided incorrect or non-existent data, and said that people should be wary of taking information as true every time AI is used. Cheri Shepherd said ChatGPT had provided inaccurate but very fast information for articles as well. Ginger Watkins said she used the Buffer app to post on all social media platforms simultaneously, and it helped saved time in her marketing work for Cameron.

**14. Discuss agenda items for next meeting on Thursday, July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2023, at 9:30 AM.**

**15. Adjourned at 10:54 AM**



Ginger Watkins, DDCT Chair

Uryan Nelson, Planning Director