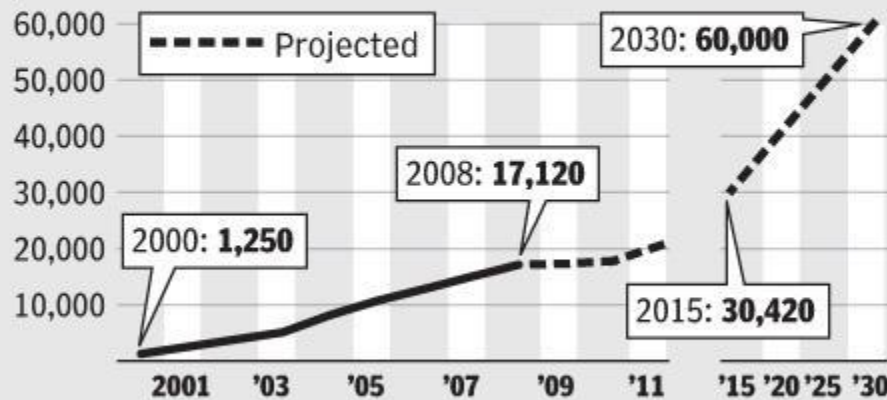


Hutto's population growth

Hutto has seen a boom in population in the past several years — enough to warrant its first bond election, which is planned for November.



Source: City of Hutto

AMERICAN-STATESMAN

WILLIAMSON COUNTY

Hutto seeks to hold first bond election

Despite being a century old, city taking many first steps.

By [Melissa B. Taboada](#)

AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

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Hutto became a city nearly a century ago but is just now taking many first steps.

Once a tiny town, the city of about 17,000 residents is on the cusp of calling its first bond election for November. The election, which would pay for major city projects such as roads and parks, will shape the direction of this bedroom community, which had a mere 1,000 residents a decade ago.

"With the 100th anniversary looming on the horizon, we're looking at downtown and preserving our heritage (and) embracing the old and new," said City Manager Ed Broussard.

Hutto, incorporated in 1911, lies about eight miles east of Round Rock along Texas 79 amid the still largely rural landscape of eastern Williamson County. The city's historical character is largely intact north of the highway, and subdivisions of modest middle-class homes have sprouted all around.

The city recently completed its first long-range capital improvement plan, a list of water, wastewater, road, transportation and other infrastructure needs the city will have in the next five to 10 years.

Micah Grau, the city's finance manager, said the decision to call a bond election evolved from completing the long range plan in 2006. "Since then, we've done surveys and focus groups to find out what (residents) want the municipal government to provide," Grau said.

In the past five years, growth also has prompted the city for the first time to adopt a unified building code for projects that combine housing, retail and office space. Previously, new developments were approved without planning for how they might affect other projects or affect the city as a whole.

The city's staff also is growing: 10 years ago Hutto had four employees; now it has 84, including a new city engineer. And in the past two years, city staff for the first time have received training regarding sexual harassment and violence in the workplace.

"It's difficult to think of something we haven't had as a first in the last couple of years," Broussard said.

Despite the national housing slump, Hutto has seen a steady influx of new residents. Fifteen to 20 new homes are built a month in Hutto, Broussard said.

City officials are focused on bringing in commercial and retail businesses, which will help take the tax burden of paying for growth off the shoulders of homeowners. Right now, 24 percent of Hutto's \$15.5 million operating budget is supported by residential and other property taxes, city officials said. Sales tax supports about 10 percent of the budget. The remaining revenue comes from water, wastewater and other fees.

Townwest Commons, a 300,000-square-foot development on U.S. 79, east of the Texas 130 toll road, opened its first phase in 2007 with a Lowe's Home Improvement store and a Holiday Inn Express. A Kohl's department store is also expected to open at Townwest.

The Crossing at Carmel Creek, planned to be near Texas 130, FM 685 and U.S. 79, could bring the city 1.5 million square feet more of shops, hotels and entertainment —rivaling the size of Austin's Southpark Meadows, which has 1.6 million square feet of retail. However, the initial phase of the Crossing was to open in 2010, but the soured economy has delayed the project indefinitely, city officials said.

With growth comes growing pains. Despite protests by Hutto residents and city leaders, the expansion of the Williamson County landfill, just north of Hutto, was approved by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and the county in February.

And in September, state officials approved projects that will put a switching station for high-voltage electric transmission lines in Hutto. Residents and city officials said the lines, which will be elevated on single poles, would be a blight on the landscape and would hamper growth.

The city also has grappled with negotiating water contracts, establishing a water supply sufficient to handle the area's growth and finding a suitable location for a wastewater treatment plant.

"Because of the intensity of growth in Hutto, we've had an intensity of issues as well," Broussard said. "A lot of the difficulties cities see over time, this city has had to deal with in a short time."

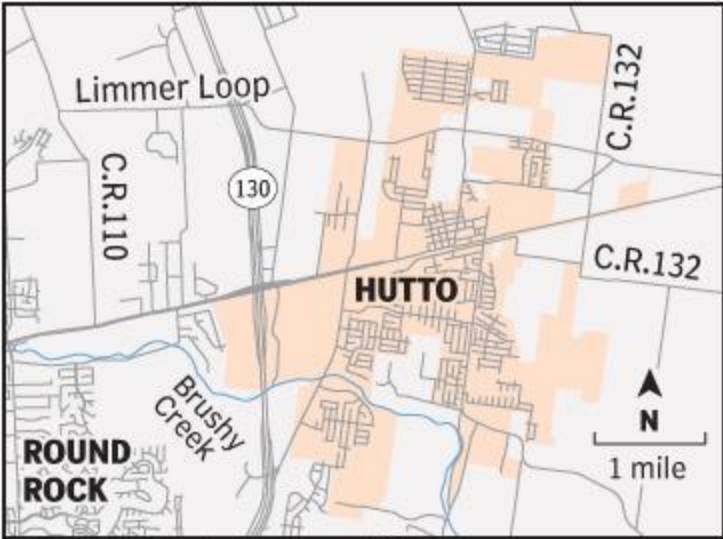
Scott Martinez, director of the city's economic development corporation, which works to create new job opportunities in the city, said Hutto's future has more challenges in store.

The city still needs its own grocery store — most residents travel to Round Rock to stock up — and needs to lay water and wastewater lines for land extending to Texas 130 to bring in commercial development, Martinez said.

Money from the bond election probably will allow some of the infrastructure, transportation and recreational projects to be built.

"Now that we've got the city on good ground, it's time to look at the projects we've looked at for 10 years," Broussard said. "Everything is up in the air with what could happen."

Courtesy of JB Goodwin



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