

Effectively Engaging Your Community About the Texas Legislature

TML Conference 2025

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Georgetown 101

- 30 miles north of Austin
- Rapid growth and development in City and ETJ:
 - 2020 census 67,000
 - 2025 population estimate: 101,000
- Most Beautiful Town Square in Texas (we're not biased!)
- Sun City Texas – very involved political powerhouse
- Huge water CCN service territory
- Electric Utility
- State Senator lives here; 2 state reps live here



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Legislative Task Force

- 9-member board of volunteers appointed by City Council. Tried to have each Council district represented.
- Prefer applicants who have previously served on a City board or commission or have gone through our Georgetown Civic Leadership Academy so they have some understanding of city government.
- From May-July 2024 met 4-5 times to hear presentations from City departments on issues we believed were most important and hot topics being discussed during the interim.
- Task Force developed the legislative agenda, which was then approved by City Council in August.
- Legislative Agenda is the foundation of our advocacy activities and allows everyone to understand the areas we need to focus on.

2025 STATE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA



City of Georgetown
89th Legislative Session



2025 Legislative Agenda:

- Preserve Local Control
- Plan for Growth
- Preserve a High Quality of Life



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Legislative Advocacy

- Full-time staff (Leah) monitoring all bills and committees; directly contacting our delegation at the Capitol and talking with other offices
- 2 contract lobbyists who helped extend our reach
- Members of TML, TPPA, TWA
- Mayor, David, 2 councilmembers & fire chief testified on various bills during session
- Leah and Mayor followed up with staff and members before any big votes
- Have great relationships with our 3 elected officials...but that wasn't enough



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Traditional Advocacy No Longer Works

- All those best practices aren't getting desired results
- Pre-NIL recruiting vs. post-NIL recruiting—totally different game
- If we want to get wins for our residents, have to engage differently
- We can call legislators with no impact, but when 20 residents call, their ears perk up and they do listen and engage
- So, we shifted our approach—engaging directly with residents
- Weekly meeting with our Communications and Public Engagement team to utilize all their brilliance and resources
- ***It starts with going where the people are!***



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Community Engagement

- Councilmember Pitts and David led Town Halls on land use and package plants (very relevant to his district)
- Met with our county commissioners to discuss ways to collaborate
- Mayor and David presented Legislative Agenda to several civic groups, including Sun City Republican Club (800 members), Georgetown Area Republican Women, Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, and neighborhood groups
- Leah presented Legislative Agenda at Chamber of Commerce, Civic Leadership Academy, Neighborhood Roundtable Group, and Sun City Neighborhood groups, as well as internal staff presentations
- Utilized 1st FlashVote on Planning and Zoning issues in August
- Promoted our Legislative Ambassadors Email and FlashVote at all events via QR codes and also on social media
- Discussed relevant bills during State of the City address



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How We Did It:

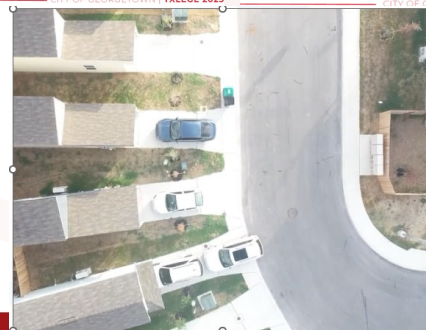
- Guiding principle was to give people distilled, easy to understand info in **NON-CITY** terms so they could understand why the bill would impact their property rights and pocketbook
- Give people easy on ramps to get engaged!
- Clear calls to action in all our posts and outreach!



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How We Did It:

- Social Media Posts and Advertising
 - 41 posts on social media garnered 154,357 impressions and 19,888 engagements
 - Included several videos shot on cell phones and edited in Canva
 - Reminded residents they overwhelmingly told us they wanted more information AND that they believed the City was the best decider of zoning issues
 - Banner ads in Community Impact directing people to our IGR site
- We also used other entities materials to further prove our point
 - Lennar video helped us show people what density would look like
 - Shared news stories from various media outlets



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How We Did It:

FlashVote

Survey Results: Zoning

Survey Info - This survey was sent on behalf of the City of Georgetown to the FlashVote community for Georgetown, TX.

These FlashVote results are shared with local officials

819 Total Participants
791 of 1334 initially invited (59%)
28 others
Margin of error: ± 3%

Applied Filter: All Responses

Response Time (hours)

Started: Aug 26, 2024 11:06am CDT
Ended: Aug 30, 2024 11:00am CDT
Target Participants: All Georgetown

Q1 Right now the City of Georgetown has zoning authority over development regulations for new housing in Georgetown and has set a minimum lot size of 5,500 square feet for new single family lots (at least 45 feet wide with 6 foot setbacks on each side). The Texas Legislature is considering legislation that would require cities to allow lot sizes for new housing that are 1,400 square feet (at least 20 feet wide, and at least 60 feet deep) or about 31 units per acre.

Prior to reading this, what did you know about this potential change to allowable housing density by the Texas Legislature?
(818 responses)

- FlashVote let us get rapid, statistically valid feedback directly from OUR residents that we could share with our elected officials
- 3 surveys before 89th legislative session started and 1 follow up to gauge how we did
- We use FlashVote in multiple ways throughout the year, but also to get rich data to share directly with legislators
- \$14,900/year; we send 10-12 a year
- Targeted information based on our council districts, in/out of city residents
- Question 5 always has an open ended “anything else” that provides lots of rich information on residents thoughts



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Home Audience Campaigns **Response** Automation Insights City Managers Office

10 Mailing Score

Total open rate **79.6%**
500 recipients opened
186 verified opens

Click-to-open rate **11.0%**
55 people clicked
46 verified clicks

Delivery rate **99.5%**
628 successful deliveries

Bounce rate **0.5%**
0 hard bounces
3 soft bounces

Opt-out rate **0%**
0 opt-outs

OPENS BY DEVICE: 84.6% Desktop, 15.4% Mobile

CLICK ANALYSIS: Highlight click activity

How We Did It:

- Legislative Ambassadors email had specific calls to action asking our residents to get involved
 - Legislative Ambassadors Newsletter: Sent 16 e-newsletters with an average open rate of 72%. The average open rate for government-related newsletters is 19.4%. Started the year with 110 subscribers and grew to 533
- City email newsletter has huge open rate; reached a lot of our population through this weekly update
- Every email contained links to find out:
 - “Who Represents Me”
 - Google sheet of all bills on our watch list
- We pay about \$13,000 a year for our entire Emma contract, which allows for multiple newsletters. If you only had 10,000 contacts the price ranges from \$99 a month to \$249 a month depending on your needs



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How We Did It:

- Filmed a 30-second spot on the Georgetown Square featuring the Mayor and Councilmember French, called "Protect Georgetown"
- Primary call-to-action: Scan QR code or visit the IGR website and sign up for the Legislative Ambassador Newsletter to stay informed

Targeting & Distribution

- Aired across Fox, CNN, MSNBC, NewsMax, TLC, and HGTV to reach a broad audience
- Managed through Spectrum, which handled targeting and placement
- Flexible budget options:
 - **Total spend:** \$3,000
 - The more money you spend, the broader the reach

Results & Metrics

- Reach (unique viewers): 25,831
- Impressions (total views): 96,351
- Ran for one month



Follow us to keep up with the Texas Legislature



TheCityofGeorgetown
1.86K subscribers

Subscribe

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Share



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Putting the Plan into Action-Case Study on SB 840

- We knew lot size/density bill was coming from watching interim hearings (if you only have time for a few, watch House Land & Resource Management, House Intergovernmental Affairs, and Senate Local Government!)
- We asked residents for their opinions in a Flash Vote Survey to backup what we expected to hear
- Kept talking about this whenever we had an audience; at our State of the City, we had an IGR booth and people were asking about the status of bills

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FlashVote Survey Results: Communications

Q: How important is it to you that the City of Georgetown engages with the Texas State Legislature on items that generally impact cities in Texas and their citizens?

A: 60% say extremely important, 28% say very

Q: Which of the following, if any, do you think are the best options for adding more housing in Georgetown? (Choose all that apply)

A: 63% single family homes; duplexes, triplexes, and fourplexes (31%) and tiny home communities (31%)

Q: When it comes to new growth and new infrastructure such as new roads and new pipes for water and sewer that enable building new homes and other new buildings, which best describes who you think should pay to build those roads and pipes?

A: 71% believe landowner/developer should pay all the costs.



Flash Vote Survey Results: Housing/Density

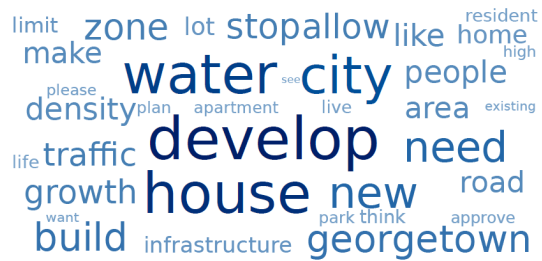
Key Takeaways-Zoning

Q: When it comes to the types (single family, multi-family, townhomes, duplexes, etc.) and amount (density) of housing in a neighborhood, who do you think should be able to make most of those decisions?

A: 57% of respondents believe city government should make zoning decisions; only 1% believe the state should make that decision.

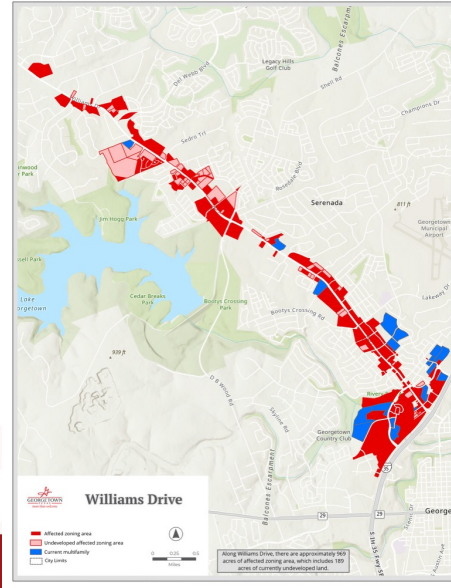
Q: When it comes to development standards (like single family housing requirements, parking space requirements, parks and green space requirements, building height restrictions, road width restrictions, set back requirements, planning for future water and wastewater connections, etc.), which of the following are TRUE for you?

A: 85% of respondents said city development standards should focus on managing traffic, parking, water and other service capacities.



SB 840-AKA Apartments Everywhere

- Gave this bill a very easy to understand, catchy name
- Didn't use technical terms – only things that lay people would understand
- Had GIS and Development teams pull all the possible areas to give us a rough number of units: up to a million new apartments possible
- FlashVote in January and February (housing density and communication preferences) to provide us with real data on residents views
- Tweet-a-long with the Mayor and David as they presented our Legislative Agenda and biggest concerns to our delegation at the Capitol
- 2 huge viral social media posts got people engaged in a big way
 - 1 of Josh outside the Capitol answering questions about SB 840 was picked up and shared by local news outlets and even other cities
- Mayor testified at the Capitol during Senate Local Government on SB 840

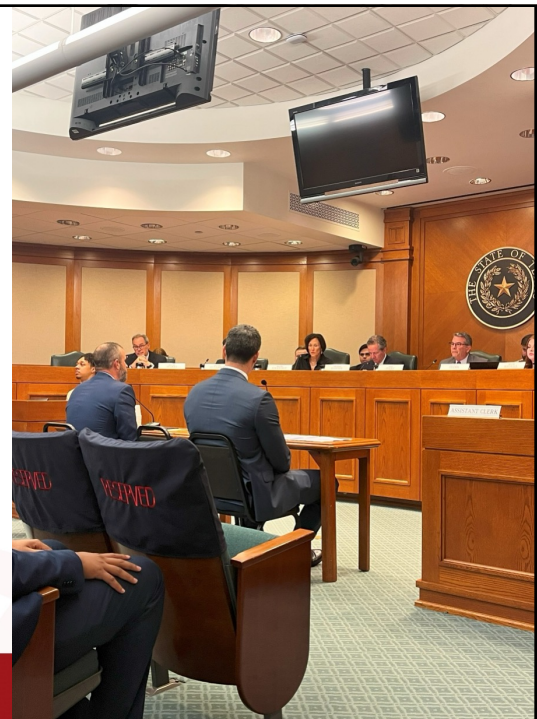


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Legislative Victories by Georgetown Residents!

- SB 15 and SB 840, the two bills we focused a great deal of our messaging to residents on, were bracketed to populations of 150,000 or more
- SB 1883, on impact fees, was also amended to be less harmful to our residents
- SB 785 was amended to protect our neighborhoods
- Most importantly: member offices were frequently checking in with our team to make sure they were voting the way our residents wanted



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2025 TXLEGE SCORECARD

Bill Information	Sent to the Governor	On our task force agenda	Legislators heard your feedback	Bill Notes
SB 616: Aquifer Storage	✓	✓	✓	City supported. Allows Georgetown to pursue an ASR project to conserve water as part of our long-range water plan.
HB 517: HOA Watering Bill	✓	✓	✓	City supported. Protects homeowners in an HOA from being fined for brown grass during a drought and helps save water.
SB 1586: Package Plants	✗	✓	✓	City supported. Puts guardrails around the use of package wastewater treatment plants to protect neighbors and water quality.
SB 2858 & 3016: Super Preemption	✗	✗	✓	City did not support. State law would override City ordinances in all areas of law, eliminating local control. Did not pass!
SB 1883: Impact Fees	✓	✗	✓	City did not support. City can't raise impact fees more often than every 3 years; other versions of the bill would have eliminated our use of impact fees.
SB 15: Tiny lot sizes	✓	✗	✓	City did not support. Housing density putting up to 31 homes per acre on 5 acres or more; does not apply to Georgetown!
SB 840: Apartments everywhere	✓	✗	✓	City did not support. Apartments in any zoning category, creating very dense multifamily throughout the city; does not apply to Georgetown!

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Following Up Post Session

- Wrap up emails sent after each session with high level overview and thanks to our reps and residents
- Social media post congratulating residents on their impact
- Presentations to all the same civic groups providing them information on bills impacting the City

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Success, but still work to do: Flash Vote-Legislative Communications June 3

- Over half of respondents (51%) felt the City provided **about the right amount** of information about Legislature activities, indicating general satisfaction with current communication efforts.
 - **Opportunity to Increase Awareness:** A significant portion (29%) said they were *not sure or didn't really see the City's information*, suggesting a large segment of the community may be missing or unaware of the messaging.
- The City of Georgetown's main email newsletter was the top source of information, reaching 64% of respondents—showing it's the most effective channel for legislative updates.
- Majority Found the Information Helpful: A combined 64% rated the information as Good or Excellent, showing that most respondents found the City's updates useful for understanding legislative issues.
- **Most Residents Did Not Engage Directly:** 60% of respondents did not contact a state legislator or their office, indicating limited direct civic engagement during the session.
- **Nearly 1 in 5 Engaged Multiple Times:** 19% contacted legislators more than once, showing a meaningful segment of highly engaged residents who may be motivated to advocate on issues affecting Georgetown.
- **Those 19% had tremendous impact-lots of opportunity for more residents to contact their reps next session!**

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Citizen Engagement is VITAL in this Fight!

- Don't wait. Get started now.
- Invest in communications tools like FlashVote and Emma newsletter and give your residents the information on how bills will impact them directly
- Update them weekly on social media
- Create a Legislative Task Force and Legislative Agenda, mobilize your council and most involved citizens to get involved
- Engage someone on your team in watching the Legislature, joining TML Friday calls, and being at the Capitol at least a few times during the legislative session so you're aware before it's too late
- Check out USLege for video clipping and bill tracking; much cheaper than other vendors at this time
- Understand that you may face consequences; approach with attitude of partnership not threats



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Questions?

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