



# GOLD CITY STATUS



## City of Buda maintains small-town appeal, wins award



PHOTO BY MOSES LEOS III

Chance Sparks, Director of Planning for the City of Buda, (above) shows off exceptional landscaping work done in the Cabela's parking lot in Buda. Parking lot landscaping, as well as sign and policy ordinances, allowed Buda to earn "Gold" status from the Scenic City Certification Program in 2011.

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What happens to a small town when it is bombarded with growth? In many cases, the town loses its identity, its quaintness. Ask residents of Buda what they want for the future, and most will say, "Preserve our small town atmosphere."

Buda's small, sleepy town atmosphere is quickly diminishing. Growth in the number of residents and businesses is taking its toll. However, even with the expansion, Buda continues to make sure that parks, landscape and the overall appearance of the city are well maintained.

The result of this work is an award given to Buda in 2011 acknowledging the accomplishments made in trying to find a balance between urbanization and the

natural aesthetic of the city.

That year, the Scenic City Certification Program awarded Buda "Gold City Status," the second highest status given by the program. Buda is in select company, as only 11 other cities across Texas have earned Gold status.

The Scenic City Certification program is a project of Scenic Texas, which has as its goal to preserve and enhance the image of Texas by limiting billboards and other modes of urbanization. The program is a partnership between multiple entities at the state and national levels, including Texas Municipal League, Texas Historical Commission, Keep Texas Beautiful and Scenic America.

To achieve award status, the Scenic City Certification Program looks at three basic scenic standards:

- A system for issuing permits for on-

premise signs;

- A landscaping or tree planting program;

- A prohibition on new billboards.

Cities are also judged on specific elements, such as streetscape and lighting standards, parks and trails maintenance and ordinances, on and off premise signage, landscaping in parking lots, utility line maintenance and historic district. There are a total of 11 sub-categories, with specific guidelines for each.

Scenic City gives points to cities that apply, based on policies and ordinances that a city has in place, and how effective the standards are in maintaining the city's character.

"The target is to assess cities for municipal standards," said Anne Culver,

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PHOTO BY DAVID WHITE

Landscaping ordinances and sign regulations were a large reason for Scenic City awarding Buda Gold Status. Buda's adherence to policies has helped the city maintain a pristine look.

## Scenic Gold Award

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executive vice president of Scenic Texas. "It is to find out what makes them appealing."

To reach Gold Status, cities must score 270 out of a possible 338 points. Buda received 269 points, but obtained merits for innovative landscaping design in parking lots, as well as meeting the recommended standard of ten acres of park land per 1,000 people.

Buda will retain the award through the year 2016. To continue beyond that date, the city must continue efforts to maintain the city's appearance so that it attracts new businesses, increases tourism, and enhances economic development.

According to Chance Sparks, director of planning for Buda, the city, "does not want to be just another stop along the IH-35 corridor."

Sparks said the city wants to convey Buda as a place where people want to go. "(This award) sends a message to people from out of town that Buda is a place they want to be, a place they want to visit."

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"The City of Buda has done a great job of keeping up with the landscaping ordinances," Sparks said. "We have many restrictive codes and ordinances in place, such as what plants are acceptable and other regulations." Sign regulations, both on and off premises, also helped Buda keep up its image – and thus win the award. But with the ever growing number of businesses, the city has decided it must keep strict sign ordinances in place for the future of the town. Buda's growth in business, though, is a plus for the city. "(Expansion) allows Buda a chance to apply some of the goals of scenic city," Sparks said. "It allows us to develop in a way that helps further the goals of Scenic City." In Sparks' mind, Buda's goal is to create "a sense of place," for future businesses. "We would like to have a

predictable environment to conduct business. To have predictable regulation, which is something all businesses enjoy," he said. Tourism is one of the boons of the Scenic City award. Buda has seen a great increase in tourists in the past few years. "While there are a variety of reasons for the increase in tourism, Scenic City has definitely played a role in the boost in tourism" said Sparks, saying that Buda has seen the largest increase in nature and heritage tourists.

Ultimately, reaching the "Platinum City" level is the goal for Buda. In 2016, Buda must reapply with the Scenic City Certification Program. To be named a Platinum City, Buda must receive 304 or more points. Sparks said he felt it would be a "team effort" from Buda's leadership to maintain the city's policy to reach that level.

"I am so proud of our staff in all of our departments," Buda Mayor Todd Ruge said. "They have helped create this. They are the heart and soul of our city."