

Sidewalks will link parks, schools

By Britney Porter

Special to the Post-Register

Historic Lockhart will celebrate more than a 150th birthday next year. A new sidewalk system will link many of the small town's brightly-painted peach and green homes to its bustling schools and industrial parks. The thriving community received a \$1.3 million dollar grant from the Texas Department of Transportation to build the sidewalks next summer.

Of the 3,800 residential dwellings in Lockhart, the preliminary route for the TEA 21 sidewalk-trails project has approximately 600 residential dwellings, according to Assistant City Manager Vance Rodgers.

Rodgers said the main goal of the sidewalk-trails project is to connect parks and schools within the city. "But more importantly, the project is a public project that will be there for all citizens," he said.

The preliminary route for the sidewalks

starts at Pecos Park and runs south from Pecos Street to Nueces Park. Then it stretches west on Bois D'Arc Street to south of Rio Grande Street. From there, it will extend west of San Antonio Street, and hit south of San Jacinto Street. The sidewalk will then wind from the east of Park Road to Guadalupe Street, and reach to the north of Prairie Lea Street. From east of Prairie Lea to Main Street, then north to the downtown area, the sidewalk will arrive at North Town Branch Creek. Finally, it will hug the creek west back into Pecos Park.

Rodgers emphasized that the system is currently a preliminary route. The designing and engineering work will occur next spring; construction is planned for the summer.

The sidewalks may be permanent assets to Lockhart's unprecedented growth.

Rodgers, who has lived in Lockhart for 50

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years, has witnessed a 20 percent increase in population over the last decade alone.

"The city is definitely experiencing growth in population," he said. "Ten years ago, the population census was around 9,200. Lockhart now has 11,650 residents."

Rodgers said with that type of growth, there are a lot of demands. "That's why we apply for every grant we can for funding to address community needs," he said.

Students may especially benefit from the new sidewalk system. With an alternate method of transportation other than vehicles, students will have the option to walk or ride a bike to school.

Tony Jones, the superintendent for Lockhart ISD, said that since Lockhart has virtually no sidewalks, students have the choice of walking in residents' yards or in the street.

"During rainy weather the street is really the only practical alternative, Jones said. "Because of the lack of sidewalks and the danger of walking in the roadway, many parents choose to take their children to their school and drop them off on site."

In fact, the school district has to transport many students who live within the two-mile walk distance because of these hazards, according to Jones. Local taxpayers pay the full cost of transporting these close-in students because the state reimburses only for students who live over two miles from their school, he said.

"The sidewalk system the city is pursuing with grants is going to be very helpful and practical," said Jones, who is in his eleventh year in Lockhart as the school superintendent. "There will be safer routes for students to walk to school without getting into the traffic."

Rodgers said the city had to have a local match of around \$300,000 to operate the project, but the amount was approved in the October budget.

Locals have already backed the sidewalk-trails project. Lockhart ISD provided a \$500 donation.

"We (the school district) look forward to the completion of the project," Jones said.

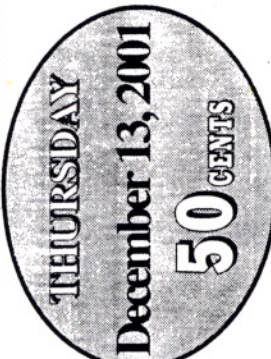
Wrought-iron fences and beautifully preserved homes may tower over concrete next year linking the schools and parks with the sidewalks, but the goal is not to leap from rural town to big-city.

"We want controlled growth," Rodgers said. "We want to maintain the small-town feeling."

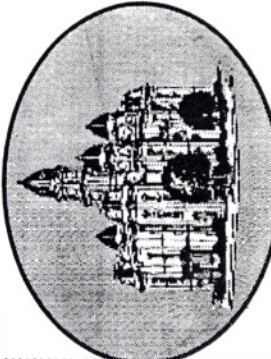
With Lockhart's sesquicentennial celebration looming around the corner, some residents may consider the sidewalk-trails project to be an early birthday gift.

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