

## COASTING FORWARD: Construction projects humming along in Brazosport area

By SHANNON DAUGHTRY | Posted: Sunday, January 1, 2012 2:00 am

While tight purse strings had cities preparing slim budgets for their cities, plans to expand the local economy plus a major Texas Department of Transportation project kept the Brazosport area humming with both life — and growth — in 2011.

Officials say 2012 could be one of the most promising years yet for the area.

With a centennial year on the horizon for one city and the completion of a major highway project for another, residents can expect to see many road and building improvements across the Brazosport area in Freeport, Clute, Lake Jackson and Richwood.

“I think 2012 is going to be one of the more exciting years for Lake Jackson and the rest of the Brazosport area,” Lake Jackson Mayor Bob Sipple said. “There’s a lot to look forward to.”

### LAKE JACKSON

City officials will begin planning for the rest of the year in January, Sipple said.

“We do that every year in order to set our direction for the budget and the new year,” he said.

The city is anticipating completion of the Highway 332 project in March, Sipple said.

“The highway being completed will be a big situation for us,” he said.

Completion of the downtown project is another top priority, Sipple said.

Phase two of the downtown revitalization project began in January of 2011. The \$4 million project is set to complete and remodel This Way, Parking Way and portions of Center Way and That Way from drainage below the streets to lamps above them.

“The completion of that area will be a great opportunity for residents and tourists,” Sipple said. “It will be a great place for people to visit. It will enhance the whole environment down there.”

The city is also planning to continue working on street repairs across the city that have been the result of the drought in the past couple of years.

Lake Jackson also is looking into a new phase of the downtown area near the historical offices on South Parking Way.

“We can’t say much about it yet,” he said. “But what we have planned for it will absolutely make that area a place people will want to go.”

Officials are excited about some new business and entertainment opportunities, as well.

“It’s something I’ve been lobbying for about three or four years,” Sipple said. “But it looks like 2012 might be the year of fruition.”

Improvements to the downtown area could draw new businesses and tourism to Lake Jackson, he said.

“2012 is going to be about finishing big projects and starting new ones,” Sipple said. “... We’re in the progressive stage again.”

## **BRAZOSPORT COLLEGE**

As 2010 and 2011 were about construction for Brazosport College, 2012 will mark completion of the college's bond project, spokeswoman Patty Sayes said.

As school comes back into session from winter break, Sayes said those offices that temporarily were displaced during the major construction projects and renovations will return to their "new homes" on campus.

"They're in the process of completing the renovations of the H wing and they're in the process of completing the Community Education wing," Sayes said.

The grand opening for the Community Education wing is Jan. 19, she said.

With the spring semester beginning in 2012, Sayes said the college is anticipating enrollment to surpass its record fall enrollment.

"Students can register all the way through the Friday after classes begin," she said. "We're hoping to continue to grow each semester."

## **FREEPORT**

Preparations are underway in Freeport for the city's 100-year celebration, City Manager Jeff Pynes said.

"We have been doing a whole lot of planning for that," Pynes said. "It's a big year for Freeport."

The Freeport Historical Museum also has additions planned for 2012, based on a number of fundraising efforts in 2011, he said.

"We're hoping to be adding on to the museum," Pynes said. "We're wanting it to continue to grow."

The city is eyeing potential purchase of the building adjacent to the museum in the downtown area, Pynes said.

In addition to the museum, Pynes touched on a number of projects that will be new or expected to gain momentum in 2012: A continued push to get businesses to move into the historic downtown area, a planetarium exhibit at the Freeport museum and continued work on the city's roads and infrastructure.

Pynes said the city is working with the Economic Development Commission to develop matching grants to encourage businesses to move to the downtown area.

"We're also looking at facade grants," he said. "We want to encourage them to come down there."

"We want to continue focusing on our history as well as bring history to our area," Pynes said.

"Freeport is a city that has so much history of its own, it's important we preserve that."

## **RICHWOOD**

The city expects to begin its much-anticipated sidewalk construction project soon, City Administrator Glenn Patton said.

The project will come in phases through money the city obtains annually from the Community Development Block Grant program, he said.

The first of the year also marks the beginning of drilling for the city's two new water wells, Patton said.

"Having the two new wells will make us not in the position where we were last year," he said.

"We won't have to worry every day about whether or not we have enough water for our citizens."

One of the water wells being replaced was from 2005, Patton said.

"We were worried that at any minute it could shut down," he said.

City officials hope 2012 will be about continued growth.

Now that alcohol sales are legal within city limits, Richwood plans to continue negotiations with an icehouse-type restaurant.

"We would like to say we'll have hundreds of businesses coming to Richwood in 2012," Patton said. "And we're working hard to get some here."

The city is in negotiations with a home developer from the Beaumont area looking to build a subdivision in the Brazos Crossing area near Highway 288-B and FM 2004.

"We have a lot of stuff on the table for 2012," Patton said. "Some that we're still in the early negotiation stages of, but I think it's going to be a good year."

## **JONES CREEK**

The last year was about community involvement in Jones Creek and in 2012, the city is hoping to encourage the same things, Marshal William Tidwell said.

"Last year we started a couple of community events," Tidwell said. "The most successful being National Pie Day."

This year National Pie Day will be on Jan. 22, he said.

"The pie day is really getting to be a big thing," Tidwell said. "We have people calling from all over the state making sure we're going to have it."

Along with National Pie Day, Tidwell said the city is working to make its National Night Out events better and to add another one for children of all ages.

"We're planning on having an Easter egg hunt for the community," Tidwell said.

Having these kinds of events is something the city thinks is truly beneficial for the community, he said.

"It just brings the community together," he said. "It gets people who thought they knew their neighbors to better know one another. It makes it a better place for everyone to live and keeps everyone involved."

## **CLUTE**

Extension projects on the city's drainage system will top the priority list this year, City Manager Gary Beverly said.

“This is something we’ve been budgeting for the last two years,” Beverly said.

Clute plans to continue trying to make improvements on the Temple ditch.

The city is looking to make improvements to water and sewer line piping in 2012, he said.

“A lot of the piping we have in the ground is older and crumbling,” Beverly said. “It either needs work or to be replaced.”

The city also has the \$1.68 million combination parks office under construction.

“We think it’ll be something good and offer a lot to the community,” Beverly said.

The new parks building is equipped with an exercise room, something Beverly said will be an added service for residents.

Economic development is another top priority.

“We just hired a company that is going to help us with some marketing efforts for the city,” Beverly said.

Beverly hopes residents take notice of the addition of a turn lane at Brazoswood Drive and Old Angleton Road.

“We’re hoping it’ll look a little better than just a functioning turn lane,” he said.

The city is in early negotiations of replacing or improving the fire department building.

The economic development board paid off a certificate of obligation last year, Beverly said.

*Shannon Daughtry is a reporter for The Facts. Contact her at 979-237-0152.*