



Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

## 2015 Local Government Excellence Awards Program Program Excellence Awards Nomination Form

(All programs nominated must have been fully operational for a minimum of 12 months, prior to January 31, 2015)

**Deadline for Nominations Extended to March 30, 2015**

Complete this form (sections 1 and 2) and submit with your descriptive narrative.

### SECTION 1: Information About the Nominated Program

Program Excellence Award Category (*select only one*):

- Community Health and Safety
- Community Partnership
- Community Sustainability
- Strategic Leadership and Governance

Name of program being nominated: A Tale of Two Neighborhoods and a City: Building a Strong Community Partnership for Annexation and the Future

Jurisdiction(s) where program originated: Cedar Park, Texas, U.S.A.

Jurisdiction population(s): 67,537

Please indicate the month and year in which the program you are nominating was fully implemented. (Note: All Program Excellence Award nominations must have been fully implemented for at least 12 months prior to January 31, 2015, to be eligible. The start date [on or before January 31, 2014] should not include the initial planning phase.)

Month: April Year: 2013

Name(s) and title(s) of individual(s) who should receive recognition for this award at the ICMA Annual Conference in Seattle, Washington, September 2015. (Each individual listed MUST be an ICMA member to be recognized.):

Name: Brenda Eivens

Title: City Manager Jurisdiction: City of Cedar Park

Name: Katherine Caffrey

Title: Director of Community Affairs Jurisdiction: City of Cedar Park

Name: JP LeCompte

Title: City Attorney Jurisdiction: City of Cedar Park

## **SECTION 2: Information About the Nominator/Primary Contact**

Name of contact: Jennie Huerta

Title: Media & Communications Manager Jurisdiction: City of Cedar Park

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**A Tale of Two Neighborhoods and a City:  
Building a Strong Community Partnership for  
Annexation and the Future**

The City of Cedar Park's partnership with the residents of Twin Creeks and Bella Vista via their homeowners associations, Special Districts/Municipal Utility Districts, Emergency Services District and the State of Texas exemplifies a program that demonstrates innovation, excellence and success in multi-participant involvement between a local government, other governmental and quasi-governmental entities, and a group of individuals to improve the quality of life and provide the residents much-needed and desired City services, especially fire and first responder service.

The problem

In 2011, after Travis County Emergency Services District 14 (ESD 14) canceled its contract for professional fire service from the nearby City of Cedar Park, residents of the Twin Creeks and Bella Vista neighborhoods approached the City of Cedar Park and requested to be annexed. These two neighborhoods were currently in a special district and only served by Travis County. Annexation would allow these residents the opportunity to continue to receive service from the professional, ISO 1-rated Cedar Park Fire Department's station just 1.2 miles away. ESD 14 had not been able to provide adequate fire services to this area, which is located 6.5 miles from the ESD's single fire service provider.

However, these neighborhoods are also part of a Special District/Municipal Utility District, and there was no way that the City could afford to service their debt under City's existing tax rate. Also, they were part of an established ESD. If we, the City of Cedar Park, were to annex them, we would have to first dis-annex them from the ESD and their respective Special Districts/MUDs and also find a mechanism for them to continue to service their own debt.

Nothing quite like this had ever been done in the State of Texas and it would require a strong partnership along with a great deal of creativity, innovative thinking, patience and willingness to collaborate and compromise among all parties to come up with an ideal solution.

#### Program implementation and costs

This community partnership program was first implemented 2011. City staff took a strong leadership role by bringing together the residents' HOAs, Special Districts/MUDs, ESD 14, and the State of Texas for formal and informal discussions. Over the next three and a half years, City staff kept open the lines of communication with these stakeholders by providing them a City staff liaison, sending regular updates via mail and e-mail, attending and speaking at various meetings and effective media relations outreach. This partnership cost nothing but significant staff time, and the results would eventually prove to be worth the effort.

### Tangible results or measurable outcomes

There would be several roadblocks along the way. Our first attempt at a solution was a “voluntary limited purpose annexation,” solely for the purpose of fire protection. This solution would have provided the residents many of the essential city services other Cedar Park citizens receive, such as fire and police protection and trash and recycling pickup, however, they could only vote in the City’s general election and not vote in bond elections or serve on City Council. With limited purpose annexation, the residents would continue to pay the same amount that they were currently paying to service their debt, along with what they had been paying to the ESD—only that would now be paid to the City instead of the ESD. The mutual goal would be eventual full annexation of these neighborhoods once their debt was paid down. In the meantime, it would have provided a much-needed fire service solution to the residents of these two neighborhoods.

In late 2013, negotiations fell apart after new data came to light about the districts’ financial practices. In order to not raise their tax rates, the districts were using their fund balance each month to cover their operating expenses. In order for the City to accept these districts for annexation, they would have had to raise their tax rates in order to cover their ongoing operating expenses, in addition to what they were already paying to service their debt.

There was a lot of frustration and disappointment, but everyone was determined to “go back to the drawing board.” In early 2014, all parties began meeting and negotiating again. This time, we found ourselves working towards a full annexation of these neighborhoods. Full annexation would be much more beneficial to everyone involved. After all, the City and these neighborhoods’ districts had long partnered on roads, drainage, utility and fire service infrastructure, with this eventual goal in mind – and culturally and geographically, most of the residents already considered themselves and their homes part of the City of Cedar Park.

After collaborating with multiple financial analysts and City Finance staff, these Special Districts/MUDs agreed to strategically restructure their debt, and the City agreed to assess residents a monthly fee – ranging from between \$22 and \$44, each depending on their respective district’s debt - for a period not to exceed 15 years in order to pay off this debt. The fee would be assessed by the City on the residents’ Utility Billing statements each month.

As a result of this strong community partnership the City was able to gain cooperation from all parties so that these neighborhoods could be annexed to the City of Cedar Park. In late 2014, more than 3,000 residents – representing about 80 percent of the Twin Creeks Water Control Improvement District (WCID) F1 residents, 72 percent of the WCID 1G residents and 59 percent of the Bella Vista MUC residents – signed a petition

to be fully and voluntarily annexed to the City of Cedar Park. They were officially annexed on December 23, 2014. More than 3,200 people benefited with improved safety and overall well-being as a result of this partnership. They are now receiving Fire, Police and other essential City services. This partnership also resulted in measurable efficiencies and cost savings, as these new citizens are enjoying a lower tax rate than they paid as part of these Special Districts/MUDs.

#### Lessons learned during planning, implementation, and analysis

The most important lesson learned is that creativity and willingness to collaborate go a long way. When great minds come together and remove “jurisdictional ego,” it can ultimately lead to excellent public service. Patience and attention to detail were key, but no one ever lost sight of the ultimate goal - to provide these residents the public safety services they wanted and needed.

In summary, this partnership embodied our own core values of Community, Service, Innovation, Professionalism, Integrity, Leadership and Fiscal Responsibility. We believe this partnership also demonstrates the ICMA Core Beliefs, especially those of representative democracy; the highest standards of honesty and integrity; and the value of professional management as an integral component of effective local government.