



DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION SUMMIT

FOR RURAL AND SMALL TOWNS

Tuesday, October 26, 2021 -- 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

AGENDA

- 9:00 a.m. Welcome and Introductions**
Sarah Torresen, Houston-Galveston Area Council
- 9:05 a.m. Texas Small Land Market Developments – 2021**
Dr. Charles E. Gilliland, Texas Real Estate Research Center
- 9:30 a.m. Benefits of Trails and Trail Towns**
Liz Thorstensen, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy
- 9:55 a.m. Crosswalks to Boardwalks in the City of Liberty**
Laurie Lomas Gonzales, Trinity River National Wildlife Refuge
- 10:15 a.m. Nature Tourism Opportunities in Texas**
Shelly Plante, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
- 10:45 a.m. Village of Surfside Beach: Nature Tourism and Bird City Certification**
Sandy Shanks, Surfside Beach Tourism and Beautification Committee
- 11:00 a.m. Announcements and Closing**

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TODAY'S PRESENTERS

DR. CHARLES E. GILLILAND



Dr. Charles E. Gilliland, a native of Colorado, grew up on a cattle ranch and graduated from Regis College in Denver, Colorado, with an A.B. degree. After a stint as office manager and assistant assessor of the Hidalgo and Cameron Counties Water Control and Improvement District Number 9, an 80,000-acre irrigation district in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, Dr. Gilliland earned M.S. and Ph.D. degrees from Texas A&M University. Dr. Gilliland currently holds an appointment as a Research Economist with the Real Estate Center in the Mays School and an appointment as Adjunct Associate Professor of Agricultural Economics at Texas A&M University. At the Real Estate Center, Dr. Gilliland concentrates on research of appraisal issues, development issues, property rights, rural land markets, property taxation, water marketing, and associated issues.

LIZ THORSTENSEN



Elizabeth "Liz" Thorstensen serves as vice president of trail development at Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) where she shapes and oversees the organization's trail development projects and programs. Ms. Thorstensen has a broad background of experience in urban planning, with a focus on the intersection of sustainable communities and economic development. Prior to joining RTC, she served as vice president of knowledge management and economic development practice at the International Economic Development Council (IEDC). In 2010 she co-led IEDC's partnership with the White House and the U.S. Economic Development Administration to deliver immediate economic recovery technical assistance to 21 Gulf Coast communities impacted by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Ms. Thorstensen earned her bachelor's degree in Geography and GIS from the University of Maryland and holds master's degrees in Urban Planning and Local Economic Development from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the London School of Economics, respectively.

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TODAY'S PRESENTERS

LAURIE LOMAS GONZALES



Laurie Lomas Gonzales is the Wildlife Biologist at Trinity River National Wildlife Refuge in Liberty, Texas. She has lived in Liberty for 16 years, but prior to that she lived in Florida, New Mexico, California, and South Texas. Ms. Lomas Gonzales is from the Rio Grande Valley, and attended Texas A&M University-Kingsville where she double-majored in Animal Science and Biology. She holds a master's degree in Wildlife Science from New Mexico State University. Ms. Lomas Gonzales lives in Liberty with her husband, Chuck and their six-year-old twin boys, Jake and Andy. At Trinity River National Wildlife Refuge, she is responsible for habitat management, wildlife research, volunteer coordination, environmental education, hiking trails maintenance, and putting out whatever fires her boss needs to tackle to run the office.

SHELLY PLANTE



Shelly Plante is the Nature Tourism Manager for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, working in the Marketing Group. She believes community-based conservation, education, and partnerships are critical to the future of natural resources and has worked throughout Texas to connect people to conservation through birding, paddling, and other forms of nature tourism. Ms. Plante oversees the Great Texas Wildlife Trail program and has been a coordinator for the Great Texas Birding Classic for more than 20 years. She also coordinates and helped develop the Texas Paddling Trails Program. She markets and promotes state parks and works with private landowners and communities on nature tourism development. In 2013, she became an Adjunct Professor and Lecturer at Texas State University, teaching Planning and Development of Nature and Heritage Tourism. She holds a master's degree in Geography with a focus on Nature and Heritage Tourism from Texas State University and a bachelor's degree in Plan II/Geography from the University of Texas-Austin.

SANDY SHANKS



Sandy Shanks is chairperson of the Surfside Beach Tourism and Beautification Committee, through which she provides native plant consulting services for the Surfside Bird and Butterfly Trail. She is also a retired school administrative assistant, Certified Master Gardener, and vacation rental owner in Surfside Beach. As a committee member, Ms. Shanks has organized the well-attended annual Nature Fest in Surfside. Ms. Shanks also led the effort in 2020 to successfully apply for Bird City certification from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Ms. Shanks has her Level 3 Native Plant Certification training from the Native Plant Society of Texas. She fondly remembers visiting her granny's house in Freeport, strolling her gardens, and learning the names of the flowers.

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