

As the first phase of our work with the City of Benbrook on its community marketing initiative, Hahn, Texas has completed a research and discovery program including the following components:

- Reviewing existing research and data.
- In-depth interviews with 18 key community stakeholders.
- Peer city benchmarking of seven comparable communities — two in the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex and five elsewhere in the United States.
- Image analysis of Benbrook’s visibility and presence in news and social media
- Brand audit of Benbrook’s current communications and marketing materials.

Detailed reports on our findings are being provided to the City of Benbrook; key themes are summarized below. These findings have informed the development of our needs assessment (also contained herein) and preliminary message platform and creative brief.

### **Research and Discovery: Key Themes**

#### **1. Benbrook loves Benbrook.**

A major, and perhaps underutilized, brand asset of Benbrook is the commitment of its own citizens to the community’s ongoing success. Confirming and extending the findings of Benbrook’s 2009 community survey, our stakeholder interviews illustrate that the people of Benbrook have a solidly and uniquely positive view of their city and a strong community spirit, which is also perceived by external stakeholders working with the city and its residents.

Several tangible factors can be discerned as contributors to this positive self-image — including a consistently high opinion for the quality of city management and services, particularly in comparison to surrounding communities, both Fort Worth and nearby booming suburbs. The general appeal of Benbrook’s location and access to the amenities of both urban Fort Worth and the lake and countryside, also explains some community perceptions. However, there is also an intangible variable of “friendliness” or “neighborliness” that defines community life in Benbrook and makes its positive image self-reinforcing.

#### **2. People want more out of life in Benbrook — and think they can get it.**

Given Benbrook’s highly positive self-image, it is noteworthy that the community readily acknowledges ways in which life there could be better. One commonly expressed desire is for more retail and other services, and particularly higher-quality options, than are currently found in Benbrook’s core shopping district along

Highway 377. (In tandem with this is a desire for the highway itself to be improved — not just functionally but also aesthetically.) The untapped potential of Benbrook Lake is also a salient factor for the community, although there is recognition of the constraints involved in lake management and development.

This theme is significant in several ways. Most basically, it suggests that the community is willing to consider interventions that would *deliberately*, if modestly, change the character of Benbrook — an implication of the repeated expression of desire for more “sophisticated” options — which is certainly not true in many places, including some of the cities included in our peer city benchmarking. The fact that Benbrook is changing now — as younger families and more urban lifestyles blend with the rural character and significant retired population — does not appear to be perceived as threatening. This is a huge asset.

It also illustrates that, despite Benbrook’s proximity to other communities that offer the desired services and amenities — including other lakes — the community sees potential and feels that the effort to bring these things to Benbrook would be worthwhile. They do not feel having these things close by is good enough. Again, this is a point on which similar communities differ, and the fact that Benbrook’s constraints are real and recognized (landlocked status, developable land in the hands of reluctant-at-best owners, the management of the lake) makes it more significant that the community still harbors a vision of improvement.

Finally, it’s worth noting that the areas of potential improvement that appear to be most important to the people of Benbrook largely speak to lifestyle and quality of daily life in Benbrook. Goals for economic development, job creation or increasing the tax base are not unimportant, but not the primary motivation.

### **3. There’s more to Benbrook than “Benbrook.”**

The portion of the community that’s most readily identified as the “core” of Benbrook — primarily south of I-20 and east of Highway 377 — actually includes only about half of the city, and the other parts of Benbrook have distinct characters that could form the basis for a more multifaceted appeal to a broader spectrum of audiences. Our stakeholder interviews included representatives from all parts of Benbrook, who shared the positive self-image and desire for investment in quality that characterizes the community as a whole — even though their neighborhoods and presumably their daily experience of Benbrook are different from those of the community’s core.

Benbrook’s general lack of visibility among Metroplex audiences no doubt contributes to a lack of clarity about what exactly comprises Benbrook, and thus to

unfamiliarity with this diversity of community environments. (Notably, engaged citizens in Benbrook concede that their own concept of what constitutes Benbrook is also often vague.) Our image analysis and stakeholder interviews suggest that a great deal can be achieved simply by making Benbrook more familiar to audiences elsewhere in the region and highlighting its unique offerings.

### **Needs Assessment**

#### **1. Getting the word out — establishing identity and increasing visibility of Benbrook within the region to both general audiences and key communicators.**

It may seem self-evident that this would be a need — isn't that the point of a community marketing initiative? But higher visibility is not necessarily the foremost goal of every community; for some, being a "secret treasure" offers marketing advantages, particularly if they're seeking to establish a narrative of exclusivity or they only want very specific kinds of growth and development.

In these cases, *what* the community is saying about itself, and *to whom*, is more important than *how much* it does to get that message out. Our feeling is that Benbrook's low profile does not work to its advantage in this way; instead, it contributes to a lack of appreciation of the opportunities that Benbrook offers for community and economic development that meets the desires of its residents. These go far beyond being "a nice quiet place by the lake," which would be our paraphrase of Benbrook's current identity within the region — to the degree it has one.

Benbrook has a great story to tell and much to celebrate; establishing a reputation for Benbrook as one of the Metroplex's best-run and most satisfied communities does not require much in the way of message and narrative development. It does require making getting the word out a priority goal, and the development of a communications and outreach strategy that wisely deploys available resources to that effect.

There are many strategies and tactics that can be directed toward this goal, some of which would fall outside the scope of the marketing initiative — from peer-to-peer networking with other civic leaders, to creating a major regional event that draws visitors to town. Given the crowded media and information landscape, we recommend Benbrook look at careful, but clever and creative, strategies to achieve communications impact, rather than a saturation marketing strategy that, even if it were affordable, could backfire.

## **2. Creating messaging and brand expression that supports an accurate, authentic sense of place for Benbrook.**

As noted, we feel a narrative that captures Benbrook's assets as a *community* is already at hand — “the best run and most satisfied city in the Metroplex” would only be slightly hyperbolic. What is lacking, however, is the narrative and messaging that captures Benbrook's character as a *place*, rather than an arbitrary geography out on the edge of Fort Worth.

The fact that Benbrook's geography is in fact arbitrary, and that those lines do include a diversity of environments, means that we cannot be too literal or descriptive if we aim to capture a core idea of Benbrook's sense of place. One starting point for this message development, and the accompanying creative development, could be that Benbrook is actually not “at the edge” of anything. Rather than being between town and country, it is *both town and country* — an inclusive container, rather than a transition zone.

This concept would allow for messaging and narrative that positions Benbrook's different environments as complements to each other, rather than existing in tension — from the low-to-mod-income apartments and moribund commercial strip on Camp Bowie West, to the older neighborhoods, to the newer planned communities such as Whitestone, to actual ranch land, to the de facto nature preserve created by management of the lake. It also creates ways to leverage Fort Worth's own increasingly positive reputation among regional and Texas cities while maintaining a separation that is no doubt important to many Benbrook audiences.

In the broader sense of community branding, Benbrook can deploy the messaging and brand expression that derives from this starting point in ways that go beyond marketing; it can, for example, inform commercial design standards, plans for developments like a Town Center, or even the selection of job-creation targets. As a component of the community marketing initiative, that messaging and brand expression can be quickly deployed to, for example, create a tagline or slogan for Benbrook (which we think is needed) and develop print and interactive content.

## **3. Building on existing community investment and brand equity while creating new directions of brand expression.**

One first-line question that needs to be addressed is whether Benbrook's branding and marketing needs require moving away from the current logo. Our current feeling — which may evolve during the creative process — is that the existing Benbrook brand, in its exact current form, probably needs to be reconsidered.

However, that reconsideration could take the form of a completely new brand identity or a reimagining of the current one.

Benbrook is a very satisfied community, many of its citizens have deep roots there, and— for all its limitations — the lake is still an important component of its traditional identity and sense of place. All of these are factors that make the decision to completely abandon the current lake-based branding one that should be made cautiously. As well, even though the current creative elements are in some ways dated, they are also distinctive — iconic within Benbrook and different from how comparable and competitor communities are generally branded.

At the same time, though, the current branding implies that the lake and its recreational assets are *central* to the Benbrook experience, and that's a promise the city simply cannot make — particularly given the proximity to other communities in the area that *can* make that promise. Nor does the current brand create very much energy that Benbrook can deploy to secure and capitalize on the *particular* development opportunities or areas of improvement desired by the community. (It doesn't have much to do with a mixed-use town center, for example, or more upscale dining options.)

Looking more broadly than just at these creative elements, the development of the Benbrook brand needs to be informed by respect for what Benbrook is and has been, rather than a spirit of wholesale reinvention. This is not just to ensure community (and political) acceptance and buy-in of the resulting brand expression (or of the concept of branding and marketing at all), though we've found that is a common need of communities like Benbrook. It's also to make the most of the community's positive self-image, validating it and equipping the very satisfied, spirited people of Benbrook to be the brand's best ambassadors.