

# Current Characteristics of Abilene



# Chapter 2 :: Current Characteristics



## A Brief History of Abilene



The following is a brief summary of the historical, economic, demographic and educational conditions in Abilene today. These elements significantly influence the recreational environment in the City, and should be considered as key park priorities are determined.



The land that Abilene rests on was once occupied by nomadic Indians. By 1870, ranchers had taken over the land and drove the Indians out so that they could graze their cattle here. By 1880, the Texas and Pacific Railway was moving westward and bisected the cattlemen's land. The railways established a new town and the name Abilene was suggested after the Kansas cattle town. The railways promoted Abilene as the "Future Great City of West Texas" and people arrived when town lots began to be sold. The lots were auctioned on March 15, 1881 and the town was officially established in just two days with churches, schools, and businesses quickly constructed.



In 1940, the City acquired Camp Barkeley Army Post. During World War II, 1.5 million soldiers trained at Camp Barkeley. After the war, local officials pressed hard to keep the military in the City because it provided a great deal of money to the local economy. In 1952, congress established the Dyess Air Force Base just west of Abilene.

The City flourished in the oil industry after World War II and became the oil center of West Central Texas. During Abilene's centennial celebration in 1981, the City set up a demonstration oil rig to represent the petroleum influence on the region. Surprisingly it actually struck oil, just enough to make a small profit. The oil bust in the 1980s had a hard impact on Abilene, almost crippling the City. In order to ensure the City's survival, Abilene adopted a half-cent sales tax to fund economic development. It was the first city in Texas to create such a tax.

## The Economy of Abilene

When the City was first settled, Abilene was mainly home to ranchers and cattlemen that would have their livestock graze on the land. Soon after the City was founded, townspeople also turned to agriculture and cattle production. Abilene held annual fairs starting in 1884 to celebrate their agricultural products such as corn, wheat, oats, pecans, fruits, and grain sorghum. However, there were severe droughts in the 1909-1910 and 1917-1918 growing seasons. This almost brought the agricultural community to a cease entirely.

The railway provided a great form of transportation, and so Abilene city officials worked hard to add even more railway connections. The Abilene Northern and Abilene Southern railroads offered north-south connections in the early 1900s. The Abilene Street Railway offered streetcar line transportation throughout the City from 1908 to 1931.

As mentioned previously, the army had a base training camp, Camp Barkeley, in Abilene during World War II. The Dyess Air Force Base today still provides a great deal of income for the City and is the largest employer in Abilene (see Table 2-1).

The oil industry really took off in Abilene after World War II. Exploration, drilling, refining, and oil field services expanded significantly until the 1980s. It is still a substantial industry.

Current health care facilities in Abilene that are also major employers include two hospitals, over 200 practicing doctors, and 19 nursing homes, retirement centers or assisted living facilities. Other employers include several banks, two public school districts, several universities and junior colleges, and local governments (City of Abilene and Taylor County).

To attract tourists the City offers a variety of museums, theaters, historic villages, arts galleries, visitors' centers, a state park, local parks, a zoo, and visitation to the air force base.

**Table 2-1 Major Employers in Abilene**

Employer	Industry Type	# of Employees
Dyess Air Force Base	Military	5,406
Hendrick Health System	Hospital	2,869
Abilene ISD	School District	2,413
Abilene State Supported Living Center	School for Disabled	1,472
TX Department of Criminal Justice	Correctional Facility	1,128
City of Abilene	Municipal Government	1,200
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Texas	Claims Center	1,050
Abilene Christian University	University	772
Abilene Regional Medical Center	Hospital	750
Teleperformance USA	Telemarketing	600
Taylor County	County Government	550
Eagle Aviation Service, Inc.	Aviation Maintenance	450
Smith Pipe	Oilfield Supply Manufacturer	435
First Financial Bank	Financial Institution	405
Wylie ISD	School District	400

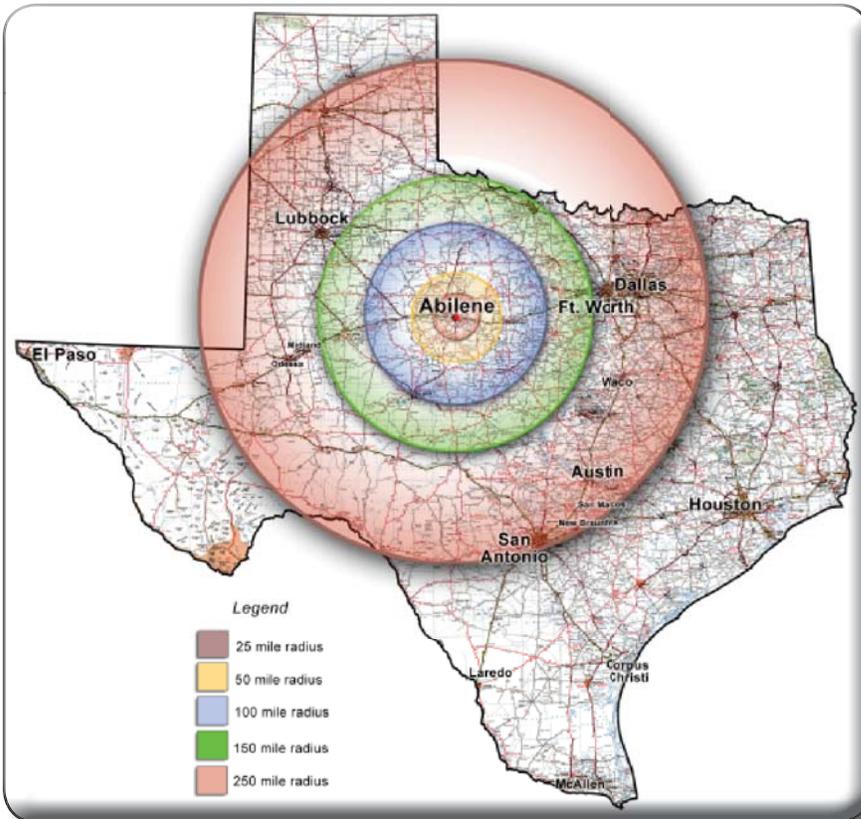
Source: Abilene Industrial Foundation, 2013

## Regional Context of Abilene

Abilene is located mostly in Taylor County with a small portion of the northern area and Lake Fort Phantom located within Jones County. Abilene is also the county seat of Taylor County. Abilene is in the

West Central region of Texas. This region tends to have usually short grasses, sparse and scrubby tree growth, and limited rainfall. The city limits of Abilene includes approximately 112 square miles with 6 square miles of water and 106 square miles of land, and the ETJ encompasses an area of 264 square miles. The elevation of Abilene is 1,719 feet above sea level.

Abilene is located along IH-20, and is approximately 160 miles west of Dallas/Fort Worth, 245 miles north of San Antonio, and 160 miles southeast of Lubbock. A 30 to 45 minute drive time (or 35 to 50 mile travel distance) service area is not uncommon for facilities in the wide open West Central Texas country. For example, parents may choose to enroll their children in sporting leagues in Abilene to compete at a higher level, even if they live in the surrounding areas such as Clyde or Sweetwater. Participation rates will always be highest for facilities and programs that are most convenient and accessible. Therefore, it is not uncommon for Abilene's parks and recreation programs to serve people living in the surrounding Taylor County cities and areas.



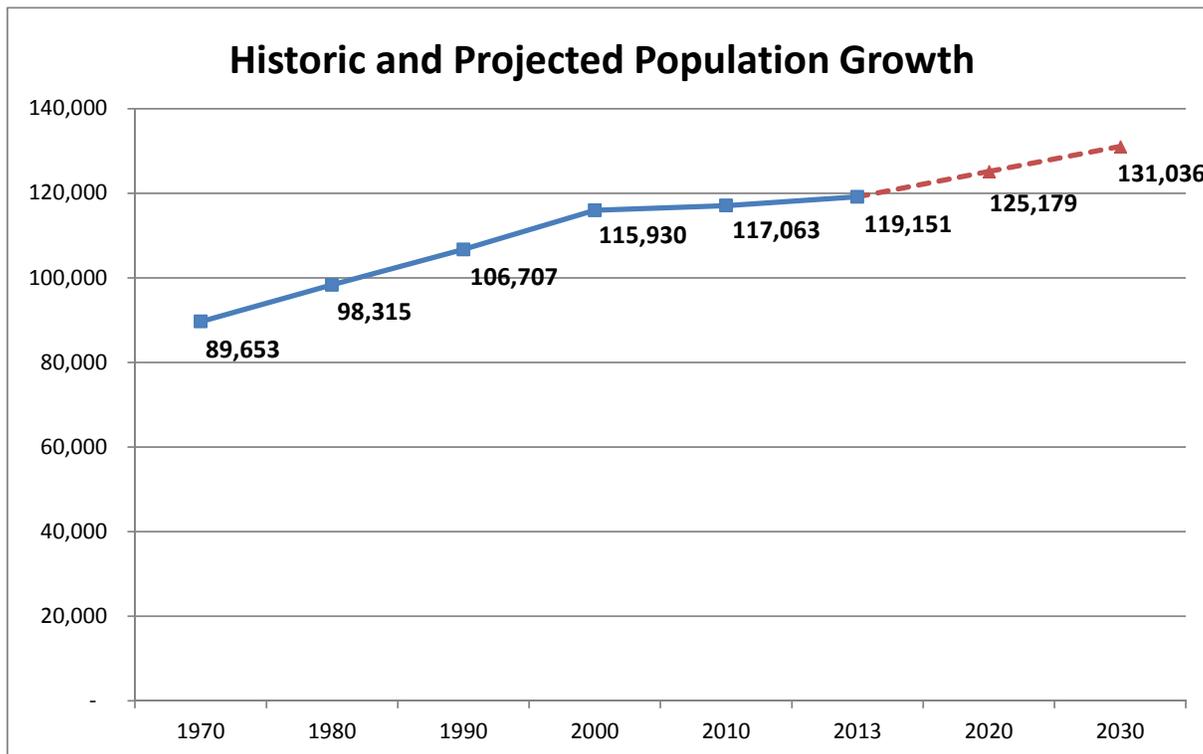
## Demographic Characteristics

Understanding the current and future size and characteristics of the population to be served is a key part of the park planning process. Abilene's parks, trails and open spaces provide recreation facilities for the citizens of the City, and for a significant number of persons living in nearby communities within Taylor County. Establishing a base population for today is the foundation from which the projection of population growth extends and influences the demand and needs for future parks and recreational facilities.

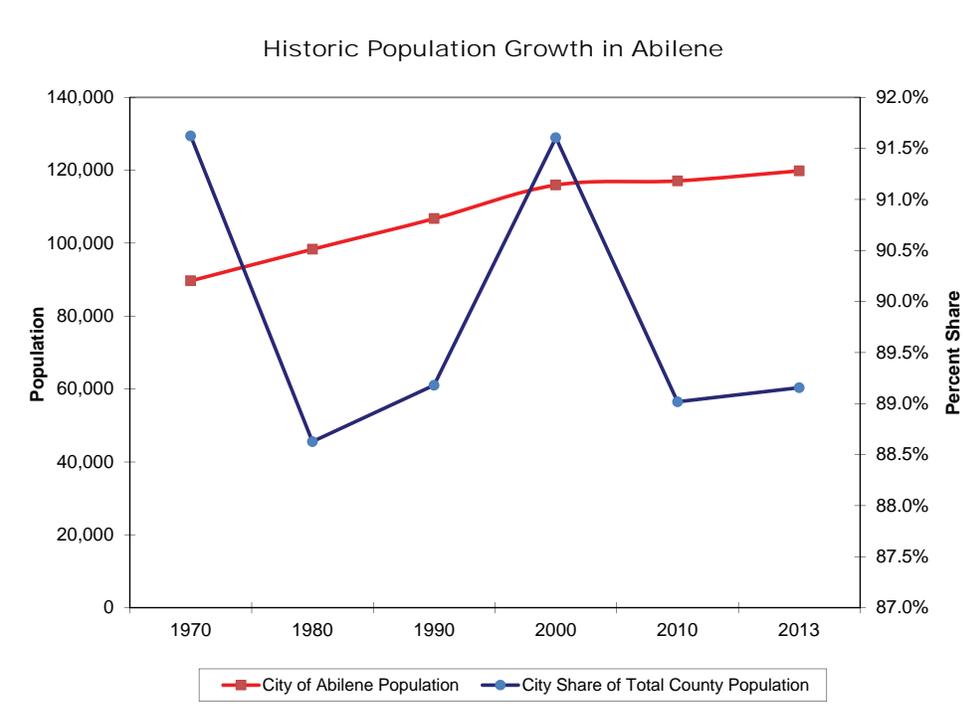
This chapter examines historical growth in Abilene, reviews recent growth trends, and establishes a potential population projection ranges for the plan. The US Census Bureau is the primary source for population estimates used by government entities across the nation. Not only does the US Census Bureau estimate the population, but they also collect detailed characteristics of population that often have planning implications. However, the US Census does not provide future population projections. The primary source used to project future populations for the region is the Texas Water Development Board. Other demographic characteristics contained in this section are derived from the City of Abilene 2013 population estimates.

## Population Growth

Abilene experienced steady population growth from the 1970s to 2000. However, population growth has been minimal since the turn of the century, gaining only 3,200+ residents. This minimal population growth is expected to continue over the next two decades with a projected population of 131,000 by the year 2030, only 12,000 more residents than today. Historical and projected population growth is shown by the chart below.



1970, 1980, 1990, 2000 Source: US Decennial Census; 2013 Source: City of Abilene Nielsen 2013 Report; 2020, 2030 Source: Texas Water Development Board 2016 Regional Water Plan



## Age and Gender Characteristics

Evaluating the population by age helps the City understand what the needs and lifestyles are of its residents. The Abilene population is comprised of a majority of families with working adults ranging from 35 to 54 years of age and children under the age of 17, both categories totaling 24% of the population. Abilene also has a significantly larger portion of young adults when compared to the State of Texas overall, ages 18 to 34, which is largely because of the universities and colleges located within the City.

### Table 2-2 Age and Gender Characteristics

Age Range	City of Abilene			Taylor County	State of Texas
	Female Population	Male Population	Total Population	Total Population	
0 - 17	24%	24%	24%	28%	30%
18 - 34	28%	32%	30%	24%	22%
35 - 54	22%	24%	23%	24%	27%
55 - 74	18%	15%	17%	17%	16%
75 and over	8%	5%	6%	7%	5%
Median Age	34	32	33	33	34
Average Age	37	35	36	n/a	n/a

Source: City of Abilene Nielsen 2013 Report; Taylor County and State of Texas Source: US Census 2008-2012 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

## Racial Characteristics

The table below portrays the racial and ethnic distribution for the State of Texas, Taylor County, and the City of Abilene. The population estimates illustrate that Abilene has a lower percent of the population that is Black or African American, and a lower percent that is of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity when compared to the State of Texas overall.

According to the US Census demographic categories, a person of Hispanic or Latino heritage can be of any race. Therefore, the percentages add up to more than 100% in the table below.

### Table 2-3 Racial Characteristics

Race		City of Abilene	Taylor County	State of Texas
Racial Distribution	White	74.9%	83.0%	74.1%
	Black or African American	9.4%	7.4%	11.8%
	American Indian or Alaska Native	0.7%	0.5%	0.5%
	Asian	1.7%	1.6%	3.9%
	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%
	Some other race	9.7%	4.8%	7.5%
	Two or more races	3.5%	2.6%	2.2%
Hispanic or Latino of any race		25.7%	22.2%	37.6%

Source: US Census 2008-2012 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

## Educational Attainment

When the educational attainment for Abilene is compared to Taylor County, the percentages are relatively similar. However, when compared to the State of Texas overall, Abilene has a lower percent of the population that has either a Bachelor's degree or Graduate/Professional degree. The percent of the population with less than a high school diploma is slightly less when compared to the State of Texas overall. The percent of people in Abilene that have some college education but no degree is higher when compared to the State.

### Table 2-4 Educational Attainment

Education Level	City of Abilene	Taylor County	State of Texas
Less than 9th grade	7.2%	6.4%	9.7%
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	10.8%	8.3%	9.6%
High school graduate, GED	26.6%	28.2%	25.3%
Some college, no degree	26.7%	26.0%	22.8%
Associate's degree	6.2%	6.9%	6.4%
Bachelor's degree	15.2%	16.6%	17.5%
Graduate or Professional degree	7.6%	7.7%	8.7%

Source: City of Abilene Nielsen 2013 Report; Taylor County and State of Texas Source: US Census 2008-2012 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

## Household Income Distribution

The household income for Abilene varies from the State of Texas overall. Both the average household income and the median household income are lower for Abilene and Taylor County when compared to Texas. The percent of households in Abilene with an income over \$100,000 is significantly less than when compared to Texas, 13% compared to 21.5% respectively. The percent of households with an income less than \$25,000 is higher for the City of Abilene (30.1%) than it is for Texas (23.8%). Household income is shown in the table below.

### Table 2-5 Household Income

Household Income Level	City of Abilene	Taylor County	State of Texas
Under \$15,000	16.7%	14.2%	12.8%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	13.4%	12.5%	11.0%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	12.5%	13.2%	10.9%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	16.7%	15.1%	13.9%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	17.0%	19.9%	18.0%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	10.8%	10.1%	11.8%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	8.7%	9.8%	12.4%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	2.6%	2.9%	4.6%
\$200,000 and more	1.7%	2.4%	4.5%
Average Household Income	\$55,092	\$60,518	\$71,651
Median Household Income	\$41,612	\$44,372	\$51,563
Households below poverty	13.9%	12.1%	13.5%

Source: City of Abilene Nielsen 2013 Report; Taylor County and State of Texas Source: US Census 2008-2012 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

## Employment by Industry

The employment by industry percentages are calculated based on the population over the age of 16 that is employed. The primary employment by industry for the City of Abilene is office/administration support with over 16% employed in this field. The next highest industry by employment is sales with just over 11% of population employed in this industry. Other industries with high levels of employment in Abilene are management (7.75%) and education/training/library (7.6%). Employment by industry is summarized in the table below.

<b>Table 2-6 Employment by Industry</b>	
<b>Occupation</b>	<b>City of Abilene</b>
Architect/Engineer	0.88%
Building Grounds Maintenance	4.36%
Business/Financial Operations	3.99%
Community/Social Services	1.91%
Computer/Mathematical	1.30%
Construction/Extraction	6.17%
Education/Training/Library	7.60%
Farm/Fish/Forestry	0.36%
Food Prep/Serving	5.32%
Health Practitioner/Technician	5.90%
Healthcare Support	4.10%
Life/Physical/Social Science	0.20%
Management	7.75%
Office/Administration Support	16.65%
Production	4.81%
Protective Services	2.37%
Sales/Related	11.23%
Personal Care/Service	4.27%
Transportation/Moving	4.76%
<i>Source: City of Abilene Nielsen 2013 Report</i>	

## Travel Time and Transportation Mode to Work

The average travel time for people living in Abilene is seven minutes shorter than the average travel time for the overall State of Texas. There is a smaller percent who use public transportation or car pool in Abilene when compared to Texas, and a higher percent that drive alone or use other means.

<b>Table 2-7 Travel Time and Transportation Mode to Work</b>			
<b>Transportation to Work</b>	<b>City of Abilene</b>	<b>Taylor County</b>	<b>State of Texas</b>
Public transportation	0.42%	0.7%	1.6%
Drive alone	80.82%	80.6%	79.5%
Car pooled	10.69%	10.6%	11.4%
Other (walk, bicycle, work at home, etc.)	8.08%	8.1%	7.5%
Average travel time to work (in minutes)	17.54	15.9	24.9
<i>Source: City of Abilene Nielsen 2013 Report; Taylor County and State of Texas Source: US Census 2008-2012 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates</i>			

## Trends in Parks and Recreation

The parks, open spaces, and recreational offerings of a city play a large role in defining quality of life and a city's image. Relative to the mobile nature of society today, these offerings play a large role in determining where people choose to reside, which consequently affects population and economic growth. It is therefore important to understand regional and national trends related to parks and recreation facilities. Below are several of the most prevalent trends in parks and recreation. These are expected to carry forward into the near future and to be relevant for the lifespan of this plan.

### Outdoor Recreation Trends

One of the most important and impactful trends in parks and recreation today is the increased demand for passive recreation activities and facilities. Passive recreation, as compared to active recreation, includes activities such as walking on trails, bicycling, picnicking, enjoying nature and bird watching. It focuses on individual recreation rather than organized, high-intensity pastimes like league athletics (which has long been the focus of parks and recreation departments nationwide). People desire opportunities to use parks and open space on their own time and in their own way.

Across Texas, the provision of trails is the top priority for citizens. Numerous surveys, public meetings, questionnaires, and interviews have shown that people, on average, place the importance of trails above the provision of any other single type of recreation amenity or facility. Many factors contribute to this, including the demand for passive recreation (as discussed above), greater focus on health, rising transportation costs, and increasing funding opportunities for bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

Related to the previous two trends, the protection of and access to open space and natural areas is growing in popularity across the nation. As people are increasingly using trails, they generally prefer to use trails that are located in scenic areas in order to enjoy the outdoors.

While passive recreation is in greater demand, active recreation activities still play a large role in city parks and recreation systems. One major trend over the last few years has been changing participation rates in various city-sponsored league sports. Examples of these changing participation rates include decreased participation in youth softball, dramatically increased participation in youth soccer, and the emergence of new league sports such as adult soccer and youth lacrosse. That said, it continues to be the case that league sport participation rates vary greatly from city to city depending, in part, on demographics and activities offered by the school district and other organizations such as the YMCA, Boys & Girls Club, and in some cases churches.

### Indoor Recreation Trends

There is a movement away from providing multiple smaller recreation centers to providing a single large center that is within a 15 to 20 minute travel time of its users. This trend responds to increased diversity of programming that can be provided at these larger centers, while also being more convenient for families to recreate together. These types of centers will also provide increased staff efficiency.

There is a trend of combining separate senior activity areas within a large community center. Such an area with a distinct entrance separate from the main center entrance provides the desired autonomy of seniors while providing convenient access to the various opportunities in a recreation center including indoor walking tracks, warm water exercising, and adequately sized exercise areas.

Many cities today are seeking a higher fee structure to help offset operational costs. Observation reveals a range from a 50% to 60% operational cost recapture rate all the way to a 100% recapture rate in some Texas cities.

## General Trends

As cities continue to grow and expand, citizens are becoming increasingly aware of the diminishing amounts of open space and natural areas in and around their communities. Similarly, this increased awareness parallels an increased interest in preserving open spaces, rural landscapes, and natural areas along creeks, lakes, wooded areas, prairies, and other environmentally and culturally significant locations.

Related to this increased interest in the preservation of open spaces and natural areas is an increased interest among citizens to consider alternative development strategies within their communities in order to preserve and provide access to natural areas, decreased traffic congestion, encourage walking and bicycling, enhance property values, and increase and enhance recreation opportunities within their community. Alternative development strategies often considered include mixed-used development, new urbanism, and conservation development.

The attributes of a community play a large role in attracting (or detracting) people to a city or region. Research shows that the quality of a city's environment (its climate, park space, and natural resources) is one of the most significant factors in attracting new residents. As such, high-quality, high-quantity parks and open space systems will attract people while low-quality, low-quantity parks and open space systems will detract people.

We have many more leisure activity choices. Greatly increased at-home leisure opportunities are available today, such as hundreds of channels on television, sophisticated game consoles, smart phones, and the internet. Through the media and internet, we are exposed to the best from around the world. Because of this, we expect our facilities and activities to be of the highest quality possible.

We live in an era of instant gratification. We expect to have high quality recreation, and to be given activities that we will like. Cities must be willing to provide a much broader menu of recreation activities, but must draw the line if those activities become too costly, especially in areas where poverty levels are high.

Concern over the health of our population is growing. Obesity is now recognized as a nationwide problem. Funding to reduce obesity rates by increasing outdoor activities may be more readily available in the future. It may also be a source of grants for parks and recreation programs and facilities.

New revenue sources for public funding are difficult to come by. The federal surpluses briefly experienced at the turn of the century are now a thing of the past. As a result, little help can be expected from the federal government, and even popular grant programs such as enhancement funds for trails and beautification are not always available.