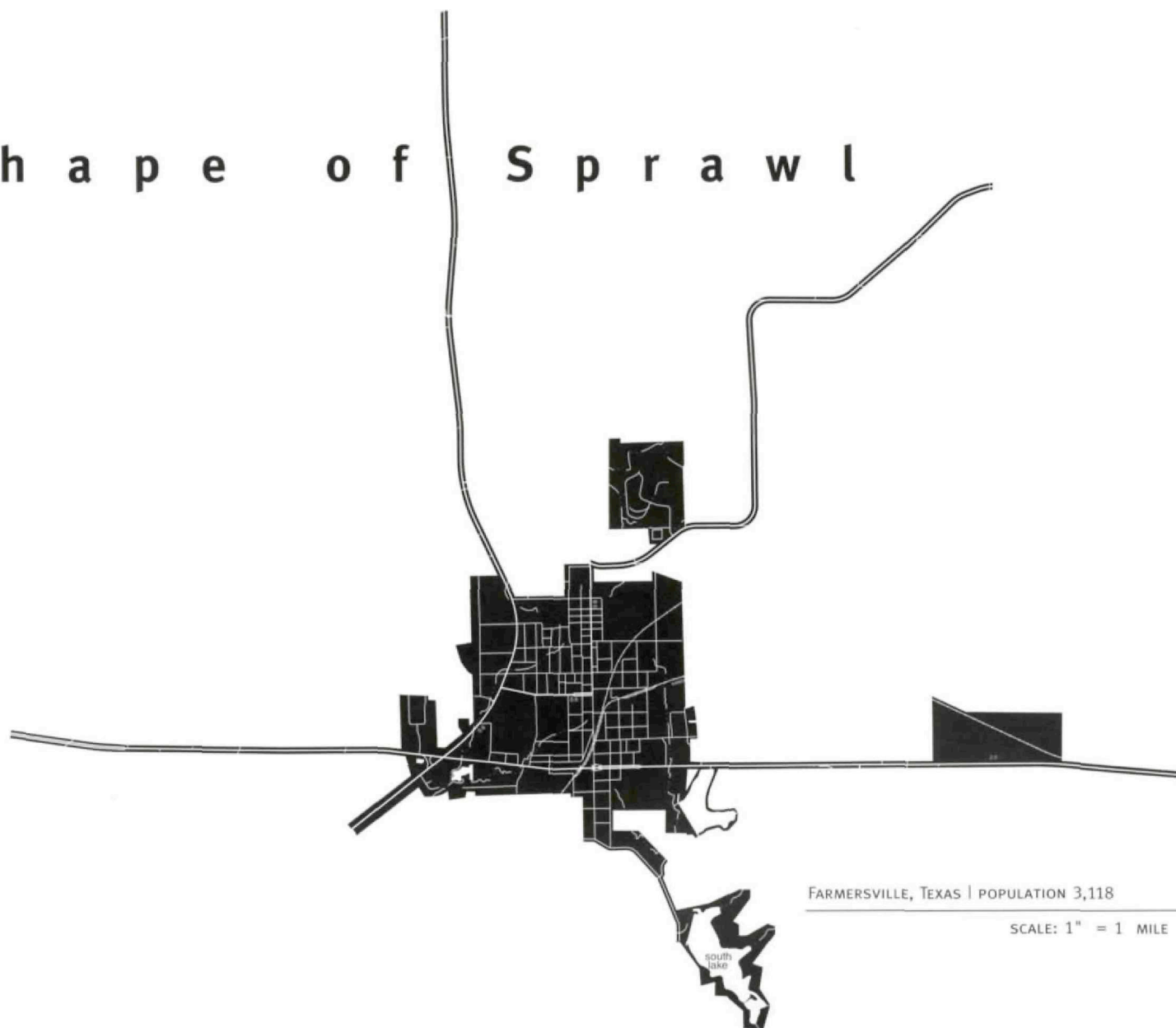


The Shape of Sprawl



FARMERSVILLE, TEXAS | POPULATION 3,118

SCALE: 1" = 1 MILE

BY KEITH KRUMWIEDE

THE STRANGE SHAPES ON the following pages are those of cities — Texas cities, to be specific, as they looked in the year 2000.

Platted as squares, most early townships in Texas were founded at the intersections of local, regional, and national transportation routes. They were, essentially, transportation hubs that connected local agricultural production to the national market via a railroad. In this way, each town secured an economic territory many times larger than itself. A simple, stable geometry clearly delimited a town center that functioned as the focal point of commercial and civic activity for a larger rural community.

But after the Second World War, Texas' population shifted from mostly rural to predominantly urban. According to the Texas Legislative Council, between 1940 and 1960, the fraction of Texans living in urban areas rose from 45.4 percent to 67.3 percent, while the rural population fell from 54.6 percent to 32.7 percent. This migration changed the way metropolitan regions developed. Suburbs

sprang up around larger cities. Rivers were dammed to create reservoirs. New highways cut across the landscape, and retail development rose up in their wake. Small cities and towns were forced to adapt.

To survive in this new, more complex geography of competing economic, environmental, and political interests, those cities began to mutate and sprawl. Simple geometric boundaries could no longer guarantee a small city's economic security. The small cities you see here — most of them in the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex — exhibit an almost biological pattern of growth.

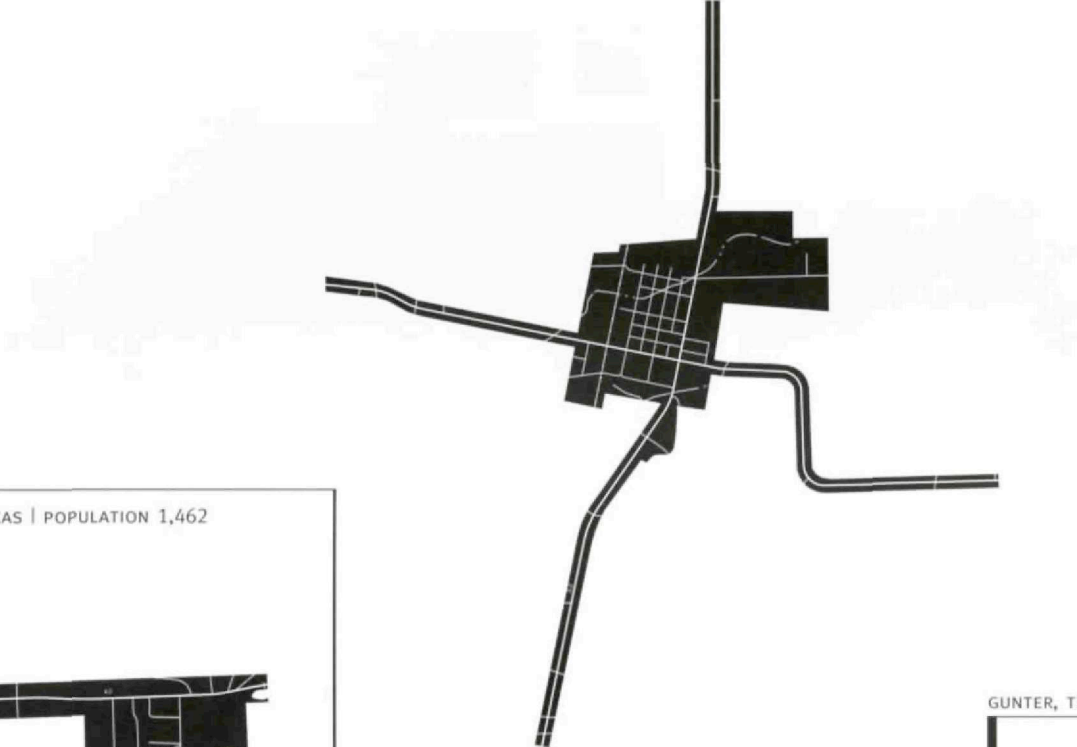
Their boundaries function less as stable edges defining a fixed center than as elastic membranes capable of absorbing the resources necessary for survival.

Until recently, Texas law placed few restrictions on a municipality's ability to annex adjacent territory. Whether to capture nourishment in the form of tax revenue, or to defend against the predation of other nearby municipalities, both large

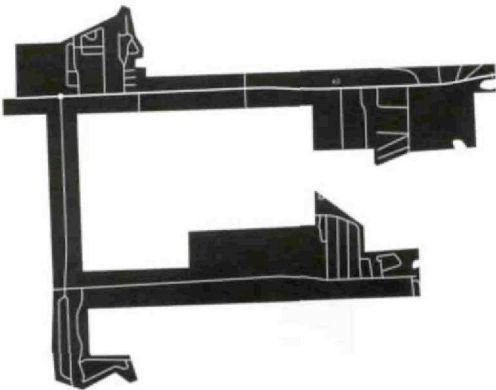
and small, cities exploit their annexation powers tactically. New suburban housing developments are ensnared; emerging revenue sources along highways and interstates are absorbed; natural resources are consumed; and unincorporated land is blockaded to prevent the encroachment of neighboring cities. In some cases, cities have annexed strips of land as little as 10 feet wide but several miles long. Cities are no longer fixed legal entities, but mutable, aggressive fiscal organisms. In all likelihood, some of the boundaries shown here have changed in the two years since these maps were platted.

Such urban planning is not confined to Texas, but it is here that the practice is pushed to its extreme. It is here that a sprawling, predatory landscape emerges — a landscape of municipal self-interest blind to any larger, more comprehensive vision of city form and life. ■

This catalog of plans is taken from the author's ongoing research project examining the economic and political dimensions of metropolitan growth and form.

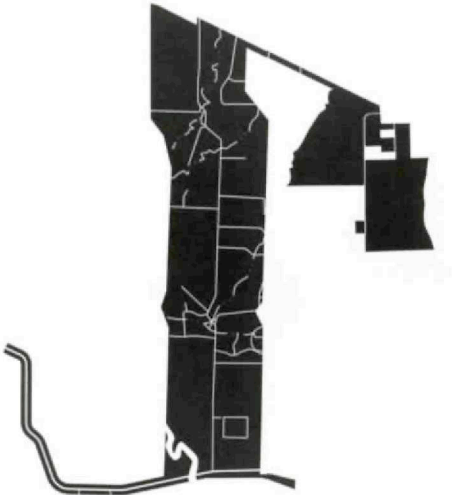
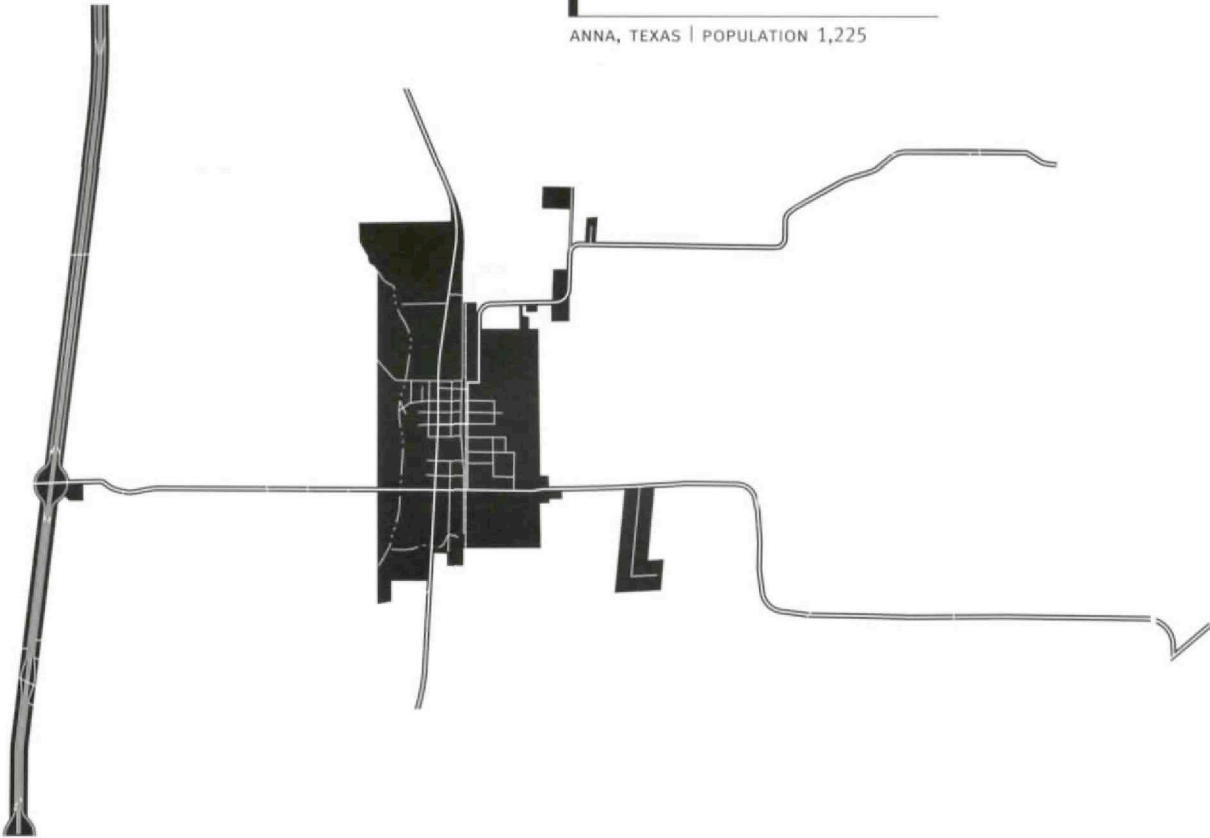


WEST TAWAKONI, TEXAS | POPULATION 1,462



GUNTER, TEXAS | POPULATION 1,230

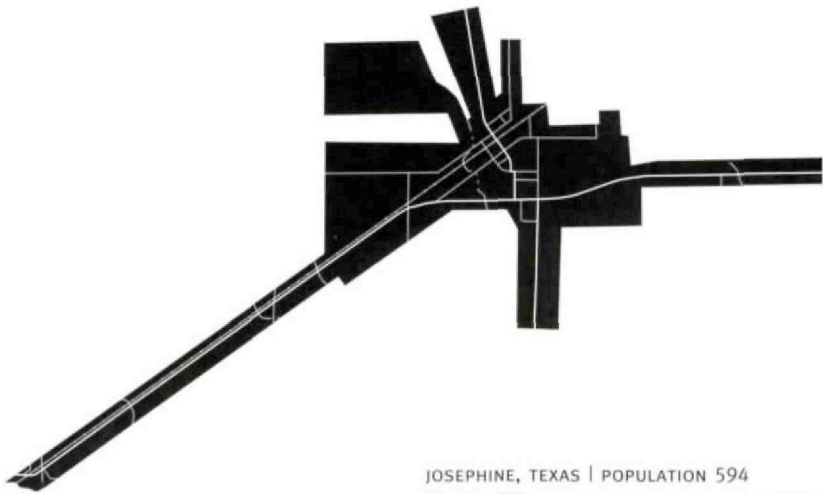
ANNA, TEXAS | POPULATION 1,225



LOWRY CROSSING, TEXAS | POPULATION 1,229

VAN ALSTYNE, TEXAS | POPULATION 2,502

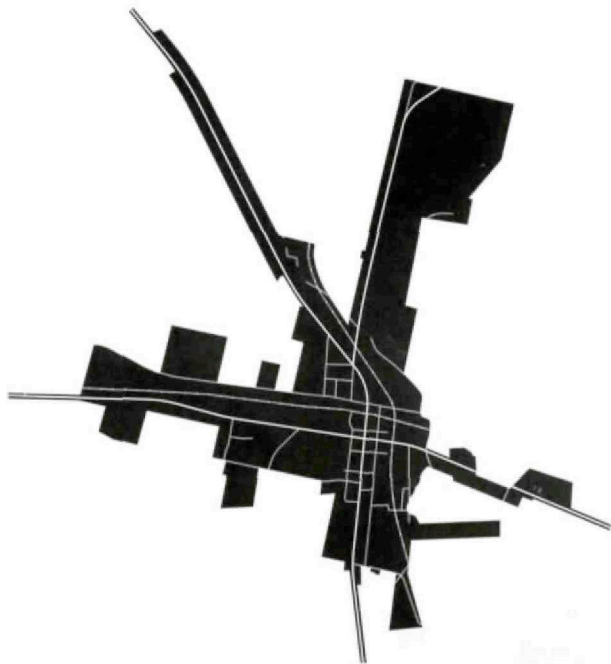




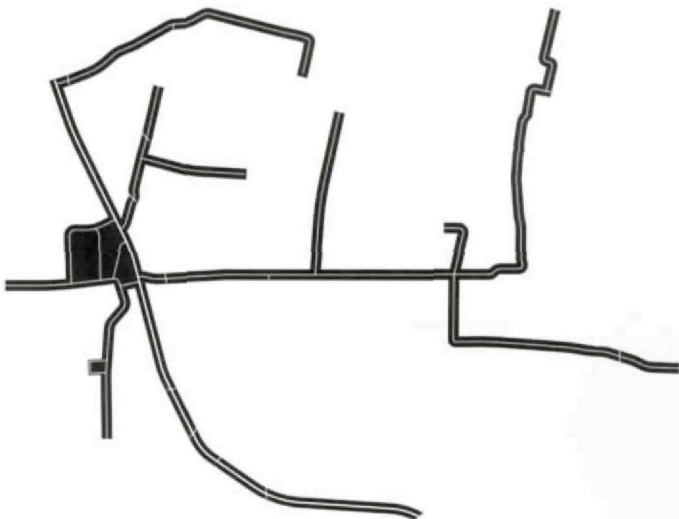
JOSEPHINE, TEXAS | POPULATION 594



ROYSE CITY, TEXAS | POPULATION 2,957



BELLS, TEXAS | POPULATION 1,190



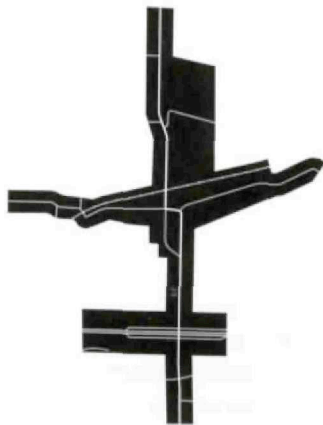
LUELLA, TEXAS | POPULATION 371



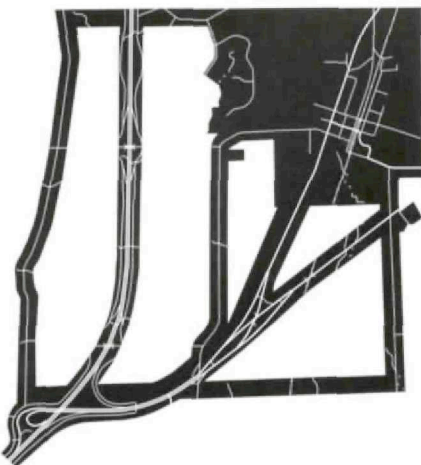
LUCAS, TEXAS | POPULATION 2,890



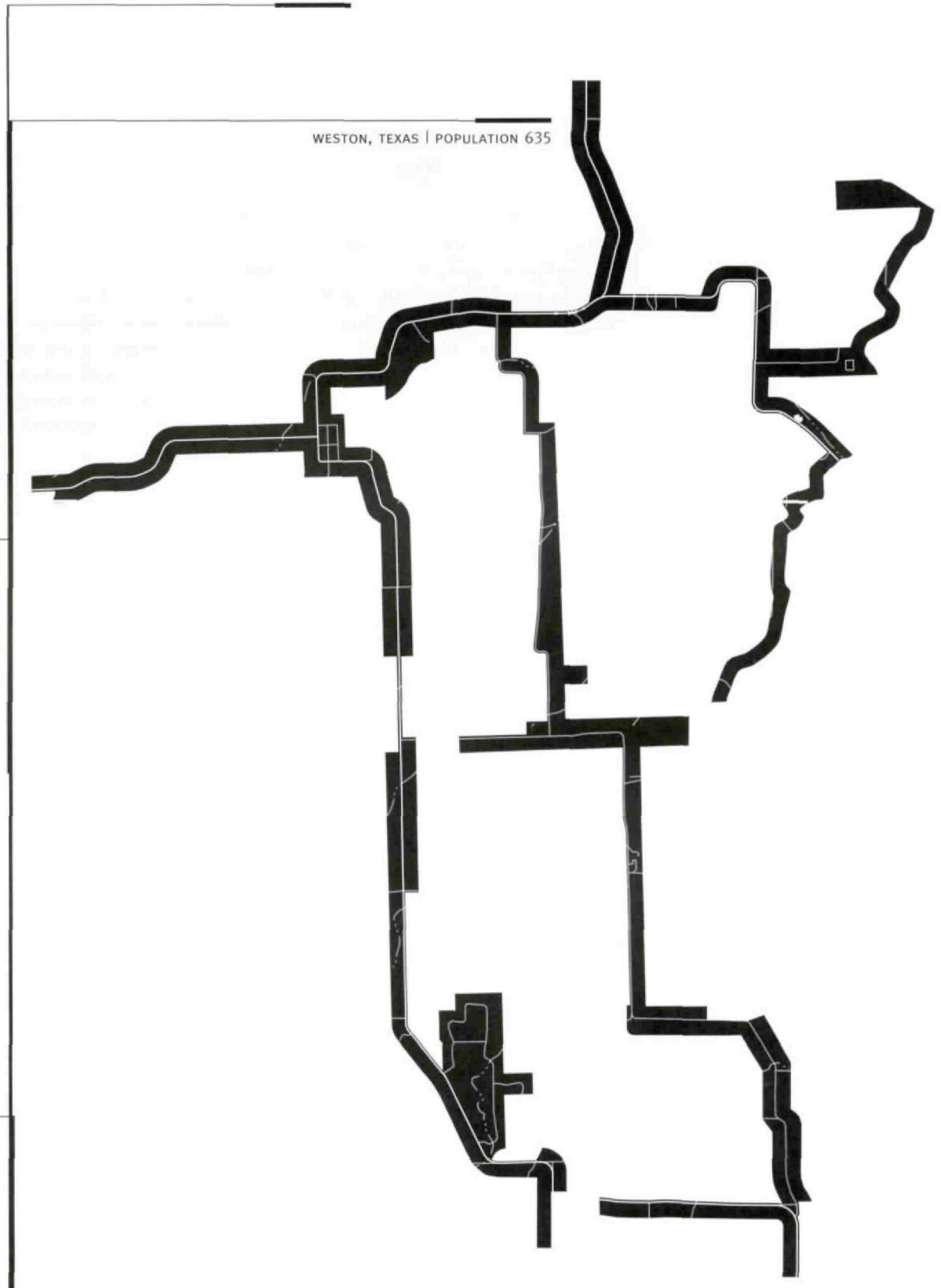
PROSPER, TEXAS | POPULATION 2,097



SADLER, TEXAS | POPULATION 404



MELISSA, TEXAS | POPULATION 1,350



WESTON, TEXAS | POPULATION 635