

# **10 BIG IDEAS** *for* **Eastern Plano**



**EAST PLANO DEVELOPMENT TASK FORCE**  
May 1997

# 10 BIG IDEAS for *Eastern Plano*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Eastern Plano contains the origins of the City and some of its oldest neighborhoods. It therefore contains properties which are aging and retail buildings which are no longer in demand. But the area also contains a wealth of resources including major parks and open spaces, an historic downtown, excellent regional access, some attractive neighborhoods, and opportunities for new development. At this point in time, however, the future for this special area of Plano is not clear.

### Creation of East Plano Development Task Force

In the spring of 1996, concerned about eastern Plano, the City Council created a work group to make recommendations regarding what actions should be taken in structuring a Task Force to address the issues facing eastern Plano.

**The Mission.** On August 20, 1996, the work group recommended that an "East Side Task Force would provide the catalyst for action to strengthen our community." The work group recommended a clear mission and charge—

"To develop a strategy for building and maintaining strong viable neighborhoods and business centers in east Plano. This strategy should recognize and reinforce the unique character and lifestyle of east Plano and stimulate public involvement in creating public/private partnerships to achieve community goals."

**The Charge.** The work group further recommended the Task Force, when established, accomplish the following—

- Organize a work program and schedule, and complete it with public hearings for community input.
- Study and refine the area's strengths, weaknesses and opportunities.
- Focus on broad issues, leave the details to others.
- Develop ten big ideas that would stimulate interest and investment.
- Submit the final report to Council in 90 days.

The charge was to develop ideas which would be further vetted, refined and implemented. The Task Force was not

asked to provide analysis and detail, but rather to provide ideas and concepts that would lead to revitalization of eastern Plano.

**Task Force Composition.** The Task Force was comprised of 15 members and 3 Council liaisons representing a broad range of interests in eastern Plano.

## Study Process

During the study process, the Task Force held a bus tour of the entire area, and 8 work sessions including two advertised public meetings for input. In fact, the public comments have materially contributed to the recommendations of this report

## Background of Conditions in Eastern Plano

Eastern Plano is distinctly different than other areas of the City—it has a small town atmosphere, combining diverse aspects of history, accessibility and country amenities which are not offered anywhere else in the Metroplex. In fact, people familiar with the area have identified the following attributes of the area:

- Strong sense of community
- Historic Downtown and surrounding residential areas
- Extensive public open space and recreation facilities
- Good local and regional access—roadways, Dart
- Some strong neighborhoods
- Lower land prices
- Opportunities for new development

This means that eastern Plano has a lot to offer the City in terms of cultural and economic diversity. However, several issues affect the attractiveness of the area to residents and businesses, and should be addressed in order to both maintain and attract new investment to the area.

- False perceptions about the quality of life and investment opportunities in eastern Plano
- Few large parcels for major new development
- Vacant retail centers
- US 75 / Parker Rd. interchange needs reworking to improve E-W access
- Some properties are not being maintained well
- Some neighborhoods are in transition
- Dart station location and line design issues need resolution
- Perceptions of school quality and safety
- Wastewater treatment plant occasionally breaks down
- Downtown is not as vital as it should be
- Day labor pick-up areas affect investment in the area, and cause uneasiness among residential and business property owners.



## Keys To Success

If eastern Plano is to change for the better, then there are some key things that must happen—

- **Investment and Reinvestment.** An environment which attracts and protects investment must be created. This means that financial incentives must be packaged and promoted to target investment in new businesses (jobs) and problem properties. It also means that maintenance standards should be strictly enforced. Protection of one's investment is secured when all property owners in an area must meet similar high level of development and maintenance standards.
- **An increase in home ownership.** In older neighborhoods, there is a high ratio of rental to owner-occupied residences. When people own their own home, they have a greater stake in the home, neighborhood and community.
- **Infrastructure Enhancement and Maintenance.** In older parts of cities, the infrastructure—streets, sewers, drainage, schools and park facilities—age and become sub-standard in comparison with newer areas. If these older parts of the City are to compete, then their infrastructural facilities must be aggressively upgraded and maintained.
- **Low Crime.** For an area to retain residents and businesses, and to attract new ones, there must be both a perceived and actual low crime rate. Crime has spread out to previously "safe" suburban areas, and for people who are looking to make major investments, crime is a key consideration.
- **Follow-Through.** For any long term plan to be successful, it is necessary to have an advocate whose sole responsibility is to ensure that elements of the Plan are refined and that key actions are taken, and further, that all interested parties will be involved in the process of planning and implementation.

The 10 Big Ideas address these issues and, if achieved, will result in an attractive area with strong neighborhoods and business areas which will attract resident and business investment.

## II. 10 BIG IDEAS

The Ten Big Ideas which follow are based on the following vision

Eastern Plano should maintain a small town atmosphere of friendliness, cooperation and ease of circulation while—

- Offering urban employment centers,
- Providing for mixed use development such as office, residential and cultural facilities adjacent to North Central and the DART stations;
- Supporting a thriving historic downtown, and
- Providing recreationally oriented residential neighborhoods which focus on the most extensive and high quality open space and recreation area in the region.

10 Big Ideas:

1. Create a Front Door Initiative
2. Institute a Neighborhood Renaissance Program
3. Build on the Recreational Environment
4. Enrich the Downtown Area
5. Create a City Center
6. Create a Technology Center
7. Attract a Community Health Facility
8. Develop a Program of Incentives for Investment
9. Utilize a Community Development Corporation
10. Initiate an Advocacy Program

## 1. CREATE A FRONT DOOR INITIATIVE

Improve entrances and corridors to create attractive inviting gateways and roadways, and to make eastern Plano's charm obvious.

---

The objective of this Idea is to make eastern Plano attractive and inviting along its borders and its main streets, just as any comprehensively planned community accomplishes through its infrastructure. Attractively landscaped entries would also extend the open space and recreational theme of eastern Plano. The Front Door Initiative should include:

Entries, extensive streetscapes, and clean-ups should be given immediate and highest priority due to the poor image now projected. The work should begin with a pilot project, for example— Avenue K at Parker Rd. extending east to Avenue P.

Other gateways could include:

- From the south, Plano Parkway at Avenue K and Jupiter at Plano Parkway,
- From the west, Park Blvd. and Parker Road at Avenue K
- From the east, Park Blvd. at Rowlett Creek and Parker Rd., at Los Rios, and
- From the north, Spring Creek at Avenue K.

The 13<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> Street Connector is also an important roadway in the area, and is the northern boundary of the light industrial / employment center district. It should be widened from Avenue G to Avenue K, and enhanced with streetscape treatments to reflect its role as an important corridor.

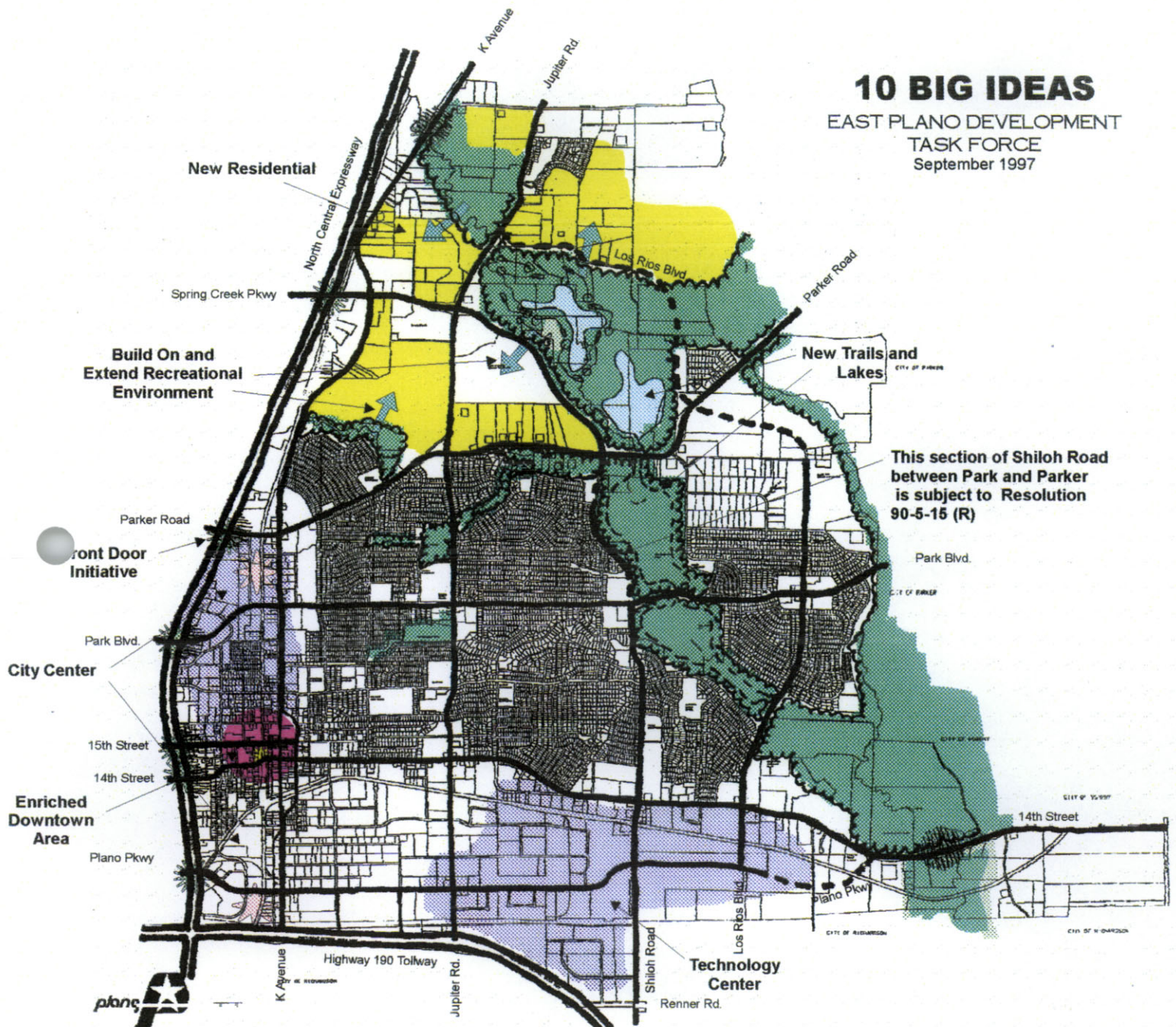
Entry treatments should include burying utilities, landscaping, enhanced paving materials, signage, and possibly, public art.

Streetscapes along all major roadways in the area. This could include a tree planting program, enhanced street lighting, the burying of overhead utilities, and improvement of major intersections with additional landscaping and special paving material.

Neighborhoods could also benefit from clarifying their identity. Entry features such as portals and special landscaping could bolster neighborhood identity and pride, especially in older neighborhoods which are in transition. Neighborhoods could also assume the name of their subdivision or the name of their local school or park. This would allow them to achieve an identity without relying on a geographic location, such as "east" or "west".



EAST PLANO DEVELOPMENT  
TASK FORCE  
September 1997





## 2. INSTITUTE A NEIGHBORHOOD RENAISSANCE PROGRAM

Develop a program that incorporates a neighborhood policing program, increased home ownership, and proactive, consistent and expeditious code enforcement. In addition, increase the level of neighborhood services such as after school programs, libraries and athletic activities.

Cities throughout the Metroplex have had great success in coordinating and targeting services to neighborhoods to turn them around. The key is to focus on entire neighborhoods at a time. Keep Plano Beautiful and the Parks Foundation offer programs that can be used to add enhancements to neighborhoods such as matching funds for neighborhood entrance features and neighborhood park amenities.

A Plano Neighborhood Renaissance Program should apply to business areas as well as residential areas, and include such things as—

- **Crime busting.** A police program that focuses on two things—weeding out locations where drug related activity exists, by putting a policeman on a neighborhood beat.

Constant pressure on drug activity has been shown to be effective as a lasting deterrent to drug related crime.

Placing a policeman on a neighborhood beat helps to build positive relationships between the police and neighborhood residents. Such relationships will serve to prevent crime before it happens. The Police Department has tried this in some neighborhoods, with excellent results; and the City should consider expanding it to other areas.

- **Code Enforcement.** Review codes to ensure that they are adequate to cover such things as the number of people in a residence, structural integrity, building and fence maintenance, outside storage, vehicle parking, inoperable vehicle storage, and weed, trash and litter standards.

Review the procedures for citations to ensure a minimum time between citation and correction of the offense, while providing the offender with adequate time to correct the problem. Also, ensure that repeat offenders face an escalating fine structure.

Codes should be summarized and distilled into a checklist or pamphlet and distributed to property owners and tenants in order to increase awareness of the rules. Any revised Code Enforcement strategy should be developed using public meetings to ensure neighborhood and business comment.



- **Volunteers Linked to Home Owners in Need.** Formalize and market a program that identifies homeowners who are physically and financially unable to carryout basic maintenance on their property, and links them with volunteers. This program may involve securing donations of materials and supplies from local retailers and providing support organizational functions for volunteer groups similar to the Center for Housing Resources in Dallas.
- **Home Ownership Program.** Expand and market a home ownership program that is targeted to neighborhoods with high levels of rental homes. This program could be applied to moderate income families who do not qualify for Federal Assistance. It could involve local financial institutions and possibly, a local Community Development Corporation.
- **Neighborhood Based Services.** Organize services such as after school programs, libraries and athletic programs around neighborhoods so that they can respond directly to local needs.
- **Award Program.** Focus an award program on eastern Plano to highlight "Most Improved", "Yard of the Month", "Most Attractive Renovation", "Most Improved Community" and others.
- **Community Kiosk.** Create a free standing outdoor shelter/kiosk in a central location for the exchange of information concerning neighborhoods and businesses, including a "life-size suggestion box".
- **Day Laborer Situation.** Resolution of the day labor situation and its impact on local neighborhoods and businesses must be resolved, or the renaissance program will not be successful.

### 3. BUILD ON THE RECREATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Enhance and expand existing recreational sites and programs, consider developing undeveloped park land northeast of Spring Creek/Jupiter, with such facilities as additional golf facilities, a new lake, equestrian facilities and hike/bike/equestrian trails which could extend along greenbelt areas. Tie these amenities into Plano Centre and the Collin County Community College.

Complete the area's roadway network to allow accessibility by all City residents. Provide a recreation and open space oriented setting for small to medium sized businesses and residential development along greenbelt areas.

---

The development of open space and recreational amenities is seen as a fundamental building block for eastern Plano. It will attract new residential neighborhood development; it will create an attractive environment for business; and, it will support the use of Plano Centre and the Collin County Community College.

Development and Protection of Rowlett Creek Basin. The undeveloped Rowlett Creek basin east of Jupiter and Spring Creek Parkway is mostly owned by the City, and provides an unusual opportunity to create magnets for attracting residential and business development. Some ideas for creating such a magnet include expanding hike/bike trails, creating a large lake and botanical garden, and constructing an executive 9 hole/3-4 par golf course that could be used not only for executives during the week, but also by children and beginners.

Roadway Connections. Completion of the roadway connections in northeast Plano will greatly increase accessibility to the vast amounts of open space in the area, and greatly enhance the image of eastern Plano as an open space/recreationally oriented community.

Concerns have been raised in the past about the potential harm of roadways to our natural resources. In fact, properly designed and located access can benefit the preservation and enhancement of natural areas in an urban environment by increasing their availability and visibility to the public.



#### 4. ENRICH THE DOWNTOWN AREA

Develop a comprehensive program that not only preserves Plano's link to the past, but which attracts economic development such as new restaurants, businesses and housing, and provides expanded cultural and social opportunities.

---

The historic Downtown is an important attraction for Plano, and an important ingredient in the City of Plano's identity. It could become a much more vital attraction with more restaurants, housing and cultural facilities.

A package of incentives and initiatives could stimulate business activity in the Downtown—such as new residential development, restaurants, additional tax incentives, and special loan programs. In addition, the use of appropriate development standards would preserve the historic character of the district, and protect property owner investments in renovations and enhancements. Any standards should address both large scale and infill development.

The Downtown Merchants Association is currently undertaking initiatives to expand the commercial and residential base in the district. These initiatives should be supported and expanded to include the attraction of more restaurants, and possibly a major performing arts center in conjunction with the City Center project.

## 5. CREATE A CITY CENTER

Enter into public private partnerships to facilitate the creation of a new mixed use commercial employment district around Downtown, in the vicinity of Dart stations and cross-city transit routes. This development should include innovative new housing, and possibly, a new performing arts center and major hotel.

Prepare an Urban Design Plan for this area which provides for mixed use (New Urbanism) style development, and creates an attractive pedestrian and vehicular environments to support new residential and business development. The boundaries should include 15<sup>th</sup> Street to the south, Avenue K to the east, Central Expressway to the west, and Parker Road to the north.

---

There is an extraordinary opportunity to create a major activity center for Plano which includes a significant employment base, housing and cultural facilities. Under-developed land in the vicinity of North Central, Parker Rd., Avenue K and Park Blvd., and the location of a future DART stations in the middle of this area, affords the key ingredients of availability and accessibility to create major center using public/private partnerships between DART, the City and property owners.

If comprehensively planned, the new City Center could take advantage of shared parking between different land uses, a high level of pedestrianization, and joint development of DART land around the station. This model has been successful in many cities where transit has been introduced such as Washington DC, Calgary, Atlanta and currently, Dallas and Richardson.

In order to facilitate such a development program, an Urban Design Plan should be prepared for this area which creates attractive pedestrian and vehicular environments to support new residential and business development. Commercial and entertainment development in this area must be compatible with existing neighborhoods and historic areas. In addition, the City should work with DART to address rail crossings.

A Community Development Corporation could play an important role in realizing the City Center by providing a vehicle for direct involvement in facilitating development through creating public/private partnerships and applying appropriate incentives.



## 6. CREATE A TECHNOLOGY CENTER

Work with property owners in the 190 Tollway/Plano Parkway area to prepare a plan and put in place zoning and development incentives that would assist the private sector in attracting high tech businesses, and which would result in a high number of jobs to this part of Plano.

---

There is a large amount of vacant commercial and industrial land adjacent to Hwy. 190, Plano Parkway and 14<sup>th</sup> Street. The successful location and expansion of high tech businesses immediately south in Richardson, presents an opportunity to attract both further expansion and secondary businesses to this area of Plano. Adjacency to North Central Expressway, Hwy. 190 and a DART rail line and station provides a high level of accessibility to the region, and would be very desirable for such companies.

A key to creating such a district would be working with property owners to create a package of incentives and land use and development standards which would aid those property owners in attracting such businesses.

## 7. ATTRACT A COMMUNITY HEALTH FACILITY

Encourage the development of a health care facility, which may be located in a recycled commercial building, using incentives if necessary. As a minimum, provide for a full service out-patient medical and dental facility including doctors offices, diagnostic services and allied health care.

---

There is not a hospital in close proximity to eastern Plano. In fact, according to residents, it is often quicker to drive to McKinney's hospital than it is to get to Columbia Medical Center in western Plano. Availability of medical facilities, including general and specialty Doctors, Dentists, diagnostic facilities and possibly hospital beds, is an important consideration for residents and businesses—especially those where manufacturing and assembly are involved.

Vacant and under-utilized retail buildings could be appropriate for such facilities due to their central location and accessibility. Financial and development incentives could facilitate the conversion of such resources.



## 8. DEVELOP A PROGRAM OF INCENTIVES FOR INVESTMENT

Develop and market a broad package of incentives for new investment that could include roadway, utility, and streetscape enhancements, as well as financial incentives for homeowners and small to medium size businesses for their improvements. The importance of this overall program, can not be over emphasized, and the success of eastern Plano will be dependent upon a comprehensive incentive program.

---

Incentives should focus primarily on four objectives:

1. Filling or redeveloping vacant and deteriorating buildings
2. Attracting and retaining businesses and employment
3. Upgrading building facade treatments and landscaping
4. Increasing home ownership

Tax and Financial Incentives. Tax and financial incentives could include such things as—

- Property tax abatement or phase-ins. This could be based on the amount spent on rehabilitation, enhancement or expansion; or, it could be based on the number of employees attracted. The City has used this incentive to help attract major business operations to Plano over the last several years. A special abatement program should be established for small businesses to expand or to relocate their operations within Plano.
- Tax Increment Financing Districts (TIF). A TIF District is based on constructing improvements such as infrastructure or public amenities that will result in increased private sector investment leading to an increased tax base. When the district is established, the base level of taxes is established. Then, improvements are made which are funded by bonds, that are paid for through the increase in taxes over the base rate. This method of funding works best where there is a ready market once improvements are in place. The City Center area could be a good candidate for such a financing method.
- Public Improvement Districts (PID). A PID is a district where properties are assessed a fee to provide improvements or services. Funded items can include an increased level of maintenance, security, promotion and marketing, programming of events, landscaping improvements and other amenities or services. The historic Downtown, High Tech Center and City Center could be candidates for this financing method.

- Low interest loans. Special rate loans could be offered by local banks as part of their obligations under the Community Reinvestment Act. Such loans can be used where there is a stated public purpose such as home ownership, and rehabilitation of store fronts and building maintenance in areas needing revitalization. Almost all banks have staff specifically assigned to working with communities to establish such programs and participate their operation. As an added incentive, the municipality often contributes funds from general revenue or CDBGs to reduce the loan rate further, cover closing costs for mortgages or provide an outright grant. Similar programs have been established in Irving, Dallas and other cities in the Metroplex.

Another method is to create a revolving loan pool of funds created by the City or CDBG funds. This would be self-perpetuating, and the loan interest rate and terms could be responsive to market or public needs.

- Property "Recycling" Assistance. Since new development on vacant land is generally much less expensive and involves fewer problems with land assembly and acquisition, and demolition of existing improvements, an assistance program should be established to make redevelopment as attractive as new development. The City, or a Community Development Corporation, could assist land consolidation and clearing, and in utility upgrades and connections. The City can also facilitate the approval, permitting and construction process for such projects by assigning a knowledgeable City Hall Ombudsman.

Other Incentives. Other incentives could include —

- Roadway improvements such as widenings, turn lanes, and signalization.
- Streetscaping, and the creation of public open space and recreational facilities.
- Burying of overhead utilities, and increased utility capacity.
- Review of zoning to ensure that the broad range of allowable land uses, or development standards do not serve as a deterrent to business relocation or new investments.



## 9. UTILIZE A COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Utilize a non-profit Community Development Corporation to facilitate public/private partnerships, and to focus on recycling vacant and substandard commercial buildings. It would have the ability to hold, develop and manage property, enter into joint development ventures, administer home ownership loan programs and other entrepreneurial activities in support of public objectives. It should administer loan programs, aggressively recruit businesses, and employ tax abatement and other financial incentives to achieve the desired public purposes in eastern Plano.

---

Community Development Corporations (CDCs) have the ability to hold, develop and manage property; to enter into joint development ventures; to administer home ownership loan programs; and to undertake other entrepreneurial activities in support of public objectives within the limits of its charter. It's specific purpose would be to stimulate public/private partnerships.

A CDC is a commonly used vehicle to facilitate development and redevelopment, and to administer certain community oriented programs. It provides a means by which public objectives can be achieved without the direct involvement of the City and without triggering all of the procedural, financial and bidding requirements which constrain municipalities. It can, in effect, act very much like a private developer in pursuit of public goals. Because it would be a non-profit 501.C.3 corporation, it can also be the recipient of grants, donations and public funds. Further, it is a generally accepted vehicle to channel bank participation required by the Community Redevelopment Act.

A new CDC could be established which is constituted specifically to be a pro-active development/joint development initiator and participant. This CDC could be consolidated with the Plano Housing Corporation, but it should be adequately funded and staffed.

## 10. INITIATE AN ADVOCACY PROGRAM

In order to ensure that there is progress in eastern Plano, an advocacy program must be created with a paid advocate. Its charge would be to aggressively market the area, develop a positive image, identify and implement various incentives for new investment, secure improvements for the area, and monitor progress toward the goals of this Plan. It would also ensure responsiveness to evolving issues by maintaining community involvement throughout the process.

The Advocacy Program could result in a community based organization with membership from individuals, organizations, businesses and neighborhoods, similar to the Central Dallas Association, Downtown Fort Worth Inc., or the Uptown Association in Houston. These groups have proven to be effective in representing their respective areas.

The City should provide seed funding for two to three years. Long term funding could come from several sources—e.g. membership dues, corporate donations, CBDG funds, or a PublicImprovementDistrict.

The Program should be established as a non-profit corporation so that it could receive funds. It should have a Board of Directors with representation from local businesses, neighborhoods, real estate, local organizations and other key interests.

The Advocacy Program should include an oversight function where it monitors the progress of implementation of the Plan and reports to City Council at least annually, on progress and any suggested modifications to the Plan.

The Advocate (or Executive Director) would work closely with the Chamber of Commerce, the Economic Development Board, the Downtown Merchants Association and neighborhood organizations. The Advocate would —

- Market the area to the real estate community, and work with the Chamber and Plano Economic Development Board to attract businesses.
- Coordinate special projects aimed at improving the appearance of homes, businesses, yards and parking facilities.
- Promote a positive image of the area.
- Work to develop and market incentives for development, jobs, facade upgrades and maintenance.
- Ensure that capital improvements and other initiatives necessary to the success of eastern Plano are carried out expeditiously.



### III. IMPLEMENTATION OF BIG IDEAS

The following are recommendations for action based on the ideas presented in this report.

- Annual Status Report. The eastern Plano Advocate and City staff should report to City Council at least annually regarding progress toward implementing the Plan and any suggested "course corrections".
- Strategic Initiatives. In order to begin the revitalization process it is recommended that the following actions take place within the first year—
  1. Hire Advocate who could lead the refinement and public discussion on detailed policies and programs, and begin the process of promoting the area with real estate agents and the general public.
  2. Establish a Cops/Security program for neighborhoods and business areas. This is a key element in the neighborhood renaissance initiative.
  3. Begin Gateway and streetscape improvements at Parker Rd., North Central and K Avenue. This is one of the most important, but least attractive, entries to the area.
  4. Assemble an incentive package that will attract investment and reinvestment in the area, and with the aid of the Advocate, the Chamber, the PEDB and others, begin promoting it.
  5. Begin negotiations to form a public/private partnership to develop a nine-hole executive golf course in the Rowlett Creek flood plain, that can also serve as a practice and training center for youths.
- Pilot Project. It is vitally important to see changes on the ground in a continuous manner for the public to believe that the program is credible. The following are three elements of a pilot project which should be begun immediately—
  6. Shawnee Park should be enhanced by giving it greater exposure and access from Parker Road in conjunction with the renovation of Barron Elementary, which the PISD is undertaking this year.
  7. The Parker Rd./Ave. K area should be improved because it forms an important part of the entry into eastern Plano, but currently contains vacant and under-utilized buildings, an unattractive streetscape, and a large collection of day laborers.
  8. The Parker Rd. streetscape would reinforce the first two pilot projects, and could provide a precedent for

#### IV. KEY CITY COUNCIL ACTIONS

The following are key elements of the 10 Big Ideas which should be implemented by City Council—

- Adopt the 10 Big Ideas
- Resolve the Day Labor problem
- Work with DART and property owners to ensure joint development opportunity around stations, and minimal impact of the line as it goes through the area.
- Provide seed funding for an Advocacy Program, and prepare a preliminary work plan.
- Request that the eastern Plano Advocate, in conjunction with the Plano Economic Development Board, prepare a program of incentives for eastern Plano to meet the objectives established in this report.
- Create and provide seed funding for Community Development Corporation.
- Place roadway extensions and recreational enhancements on Bond Program.
- Direct Community Development Department to
  - ⇒ Formulate a Neighborhood Renaissance Program.
  - ⇒ Review and make recommendations on current codes, procedures, programs and penalties relating to the maintenance of commercial and residential properties. Ensure adequate staffing.
- Direct the Development Services Department to
  - ⇒ Include the City Center Concept in the current study of land use concepts for areas surrounding DART Stations.
  - ⇒ Develop guidelines and standards for entry features and streetscapes for roadways.
  - ⇒ Make specific recommendations for land use changes and rezonings in eastern Plano.
- Report back to the Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council annually, with a report on the progress and status of the 10 Big Ideas, as well as any proposed modifications.