

Themes from the Deep Ellum Stakeholder Survey
NCTCOG
November 15, 2007

1. Streetscape improvements: landscaping, lighting, paving, connectivity improvements.

Comments:

“For Deep Ellum to fulfill its potential, it needs to become a vibrant, pedestrian-oriented community.”

“Noted as a problem that may be in the process of being corrected. City has allocated funds to fix sidewalks, install landscaping. Long over due. Sidewalks in front of now vacant (but previously popular places on Elm Street (East Wind, Deep Ellum Café, others) have had broken sidewalks / missing parts / pieces for a long time. A little urban grit can be part of the Deep Ellum experience. Watching pierced and tattooed patrons enter a club while enjoying a meal at Deep Ellum Café was part of the ‘cool factor’. However, break a heel or twist your ankle in one of the sidewalk gaps, and one is not coming back. So fixing the sidewalks, finally, great. What is the budget? What is the timing? And most importantly, WHAT IS THE DESIGN??”

“My concern (NOW) is that the ‘fix’ and improvements may be a one size fits all solution. Deep Ellum does NOT need a homogenous path of boring sidewalks and mind numbing repetition mosaic landscaping. The ‘client’ of the designer should not just be public works. Including some area artists along with real estate owners as part of the ‘client’ team will make a world of difference. And the plans should be prepared by someone that offices in the area, or at least in downtown. Also, the landscaping needs to be tough enough to handle lots of abuse. I would be glad to offer some anecdotal stories regarding Deep Ellum residents and their desire to use their green thumbs. A small herb garden (adopted by residents of the adjacent building) could be part of the public landscaping.”

Background:

Dallas County has committed \$1.61 million for bridge removal at US 75 and Bryan to accommodate the DART line. The City of Dallas has committed \$234 million for capital improvements within 1,000 feet of Deep Ellum. Among other things, this includes: \$6 million for streetscaping along Good Latimer, Elm, Main, and Commerce, \$1.1 million for Santa Fe trail development, \$70 million for storm drainage improvements along Mill Creek and Middle Peaks Branch, \$3.8 million for Central Service Center facilities.

Suggestion:

It appears that improvements in this category are on the way. Communication between the City and area landowners may need to be improved in order to clarify that this process is taking place. Many landowners feel that the City is not committed to improvements in the area. Communicating a schedule on

which improvements are slated to take place may address some of these concerns.

City Input:

City plans related to streetscape improvements, which include landscaping, lighting, paving, etc, have always been bond related projects and funding. When those bond related projects begin the City will hold community meetings to get the communities insight and suggestions, however anything connected with that activity will not occur anytime in the immediate future.

The streetscape improvements have not been designed and cover areas not included within TIF Boundaries. The design process for the improvements needs to include a public participation component. There are several critical issues to address during this process:

1. Pedestrian Lighting. Light standards installed during the initial public improvements on Main Street in Deep Ellum probably need to be replaced. The 'acorn' style lights do not direct light to the sidewalk areas and instead disperse the light in all directions – including into residential windows above ground level. New standard light fixtures used in the downtown and Cedars area are better suited for similar mixed-use areas.
2. Sidewalk width. Existing sidewalks do not meet standards for pedestrian oriented streets. It may not be appropriate to add additional street trees in areas where the existing sidewalk width is less than 7 feet.
3. Special Paving Features. Safety, cleaning/maintenance and accessibility concerns need to be balanced design considerations.
4. Parking meters. Newer metering systems allow the placement of a single meter that controls several parking spaces, reducing street clutter. This system should be investigated for this area.
5. Tree Grates. In areas where additional street trees are appropriate, design standards should specify tree grates NOT constructed of metal materials. Metal grates have been 'harvested' for recycling purposes by criminals in similar neighborhoods.

2. Addition of a trolley route to connect DART line with core of Deep Ellum

Comments:

“Adding a trolley and making the general landscape of the neighborhood more visually attractive (brick paths, nicer and more streetlights, etc.) would go a long way towards making the area more pedestrian-oriented, reducing vehicular traffic, and making the area generally more pleasurable to be a part of.”

“Alternatively, an out of the box idea, have a small fleet of hybrid, or all electric vehicles functioning as downtown (and immediate area) cabs/ taxis. Not just for Deep Ellum. \$5.00 for here to there. The challenge would be having enough so the service is dependable. For a long enough period of time to get people using the system. Service area would be downtown/ Victory/ Uptown to the Crescent, Deep Ellum & Baylor. Just a thought.”

Background:

With the DART rail line so close to many areas of Deep Ellum, and three area stations planned, NCTCOG does not feel that investment in a trolley is a necessary investment in the near term from a transportation provision standpoint. A trolley would provide a measure of branding for the area, but ridership levels would most likely not warrant the service for quite a while. Focus on creating an inviting pedestrian realm is more important—if people feel comfortable walking, they will walk.

Suggestion:

It may be worth examining the feasibility of a DART rail stop at Commerce and Good Latimer or Main and Good Latimer once the 2nd Downtown Alignment is constructed. This stop would provide a gateway to the heart of the Deep Ellum and would increase pedestrian traffic in the area. In addition, operating a shuttle that mirrors the eventual LRT route may generate ridership along the line in advance of the line opening.

City Input:

In the near term, DART should provide shuttle service on weekend nights to shuttle patrons between parking facilities and entertainment venues in the Deep Ellum area. This shuttle should be rubber-wheeled to maintain maximum flexibility in route design. An existing shuttle service operated by the City of Dallas showed strong ridership activity.

Longer term, DART should re-evaluate shuttle service routing after the opening of the new line in 2009. In addition, DART should evaluate the possibility of adding a light rail platform station at Eastside. The potential redevelopment of the City of Dallas Central Service Center site can provide key residential density needed for a successful rail station.

Other options, such as zipcars should be considered for the area.

When the City discussed a trolley system with Deep Ellum, we were referring to a rubber wheel trolley. The idea was that this shuttle trolley would connect key areas and destinations and still be flexible enough to adjust to address construction activity related problems. Research has shown federal funding that would support the purchase of environment friendly transport systems (electric).

3. Public safety/perception of the area must be improved**Comments:**

“I think the main obstacles towards that goal are public safety and perception of the area. The fact of the matter is that all the money in the world can be spent on new developments, but it wouldn't matter much if people still perceive that they wouldn't be safe walking through their neighborhood at night. In our opinion, a greater police presence wouldn't necessarily be the solution because in some

ways it adds to the perception that the neighborhood isn't safe. What would have the largest effect is if the landlords made a proactive, concerted effort to shift their buildings' usage towards more daytime, pedestrian-oriented businesses.”

“Does Deep Ellum really need another bar and tattoo parlor? If the city is serious about changing the neighborhood, it needs to start by rejecting SUP applications at the P&Z level.”

“Jane Jacobs said it best, ‘put the eyes and ears of the residents on the street and the bad elements will know they are being watched. They will move on.’ Until we have a true community, with sufficient density and good design, we need something additional. Per comments from Meadows Foundation, cameras they purchased for use downtown Dallas have had a significant effect on crime. It is down substantially. Cameras cost less than police. Cameras aren't as visible. Monitoring station is already up and running downtown. Monitoring some additional cameras would not be that expensive.”

Background: By creating a more pedestrian-friendly environment and increasing residential densities, some of the safety concerns may eventually resolve themselves. Higher densities will demand more diverse daytime building uses. Rental rates for streetfront spaces will increase, which will help keep undesirable uses to a minimum. Until the critical mass of density/pedestrians is achieved, however, supplemental measures will need to be taken. Also, dealing with special use permits is also not a good use of City time and resources.

Suggestions: Police presence, on foot or bicycle, could be increased slightly. Better lighting and security cameras may also help, especially with an initial push to provide more safety. Implementing a private service to escort people to their vehicles at night might help patrons feel safer as well. To help the issue of undesirable uses, it may be necessary to rewrite the zoning code so as to disallow any special use permits. Removing certain uses from the ‘conditional’ uses designation and making them unallowable may have an effect on encouraging more ‘daytime’ uses in the area. In addition, the creation of attractive amenities like good schools can help attract the needed density to the area. For example, Baylor might look into creating a charter school that would draw students from the area. Respected institutions such as hospitals and schools can help bring up property values and attract quality development.

City Input:

Currently Deep Ellum has a large police presence, to the point that the City has received feedback that the amount of police in the area during key activity hours is hurting business. Also, a proposal was submitted by the Downtown Dallas Association, on several occasions, to use Downtown Dallas Safety Patrol to supplement additional desired safety presence. This patrol would be funded with PID funds. Deep Ellum rejected this proposal.

4. Problems with TIF administration/access to funds

Comments:

“The TIF administration is terrible..We opted out of using it because the City couldn’t get their act together..they also caused a year of delays due to the old “point system” of development in the PD from 1984 that needs radical modifications.”

“Institutional investors will not be able to take advantage of the TIF funds under the current structure. The expected payout of 10 years is too long for investors.”

“It does not help either that rent growth is also restricted when accessing TIF dollars. At the prices required to acquire land in Deep Ellum, tying rent increases to the CPI index does not allow prospective developments to access TIF funds.”

“The zoning in Deep Ellum is controlled by PDD 269. The zoning strongly favors mixed use and high density urban development. The zoning was put in place in 1984. The zoning was recently modified regarding clubs, and now requires them to have a Special Use Permit that must be renewed every so often. The points system had a good intent. It is time for a review and update of the point system and the rules regarding the bricks and sticks. I am aware of specific problems that have been encountered by developers.”

“In addition, the PDD 269 should be expanded to match the TIF boundary. To the east of the DART line. This should be done by the city. A change in zoning won’t happen waiting for individual property owners to come to an agreement.”

Background:

The TIF structure for the Deep Ellum area allowed the City and County to not pay into the TIF for the first two years of operation. The TIF currently has no funds, and the projected allocation of funding is not irrevocably set; it is just an estimate. There is confusion among area developers about the structure of the TIF and access to funding.

Suggestion: The TIF board needs to reach out to developers and improve communication. A workshop could be conducted to explain access to TIF funds and answer questions. The PDD points system needs to be updated with input from developers, and the TIF boundary should be expanded to match the PDD and the area bounded by Hall, Elm, and I-30 if possible.

City Input:

The TIF program has nothing to do with zoning in the area or the development point system. To date, only one application for TIF funds was submitted; this funding request was approved by City Council. Another application was discussed but never filed due to the City Council requirement for the provision of affordable housing as part of the project.

TIF funds accrue as property value in the area increases. Initial projects may have a longer wait to be completely reimbursed by the TIF for eligible

expenditures – although some reimbursement will begin upon completion of the project. TIF Bonds can be sold, once a few significant private development projects are complete, to speed up TIF reimbursement.

City staff has a backlog of requests to change area zoning. To accomplish rezoning in the area, it will need to be land owner initiated.

With the new Comp Plan, the City is moving away from additional or expanded Planned Development Districts. They are confusing and there are much better ways to insure that zoning will allow appropriate land uses for the area.

5. Assembly of Land Parcels

Comments:

“I would like to see them work hard to move the service yard, and provide it to some developer, or partner with someone. The opportunity to have a large chunk of land where a sizeable MF/MU project can be executed would be great. This is the largest land mass in the area, and the least desirable, i.e., lowest and worst use. The kick start for the area would be huge.”

“High end housing and retail needs to go in at Good Latimer and Elm.”

“Several points worth considering. Lots of the land is improved with an existing income stream such that the underlying land may have a value of \$50 psf. Example, mini warehouses, manufacturing, etc. So buying these sites and taking down a viable economic business, albeit one that does little for the neighborhood or a holistic economic development plan is a challenge coming out of the gates. The value ‘as is’ is higher than the land value. Factor in 1. multiple owners, 2. each using the 3M method of property valuation & 3. very limited use of eminent domain powers post Kelso, and one has a real challenge coming up with enough land to have an impact development. Easier to go to the ‘burbs and do a Greenfield deal. Sprawl to Oklahoma. Dallas loses a very desirable tax base.”

“Several people have made note of the city service yard as a potential development site. The city is in the process of possible expansion, taking over Trunk Street. BIG CONCERN. In driving through the service yard at various times, much of the property is used to park trash trucks (and police cars) during the evening hours. This land is too valuable for that. The sanitation department has an office building as part of this campus. As well as truck repair facility. And since there are more people today than yesterday in the city of Dallas, the Sanitation Department is probably saying we need more office space and more truck parking space. And the building next door, say code enforcement, also probably needs more space.

A. The city should do a needs assessment of EACH department. What does EACH individual department that is located here need in the next 2-5 years. And also A NEEDS ASSEMENT ON A COMBINED basis. Which departments actually benefit from being located in close proximity to the others?? Is there any synergy? Or is the only common thread that they are city departments? Maybe

sanitation department and their trucks could move to less valuable land, and the code enforcement department could expand into the now vacant sanitation department building. And a development site could be created from the area now used to store trash trucks at night. This would be at least a triple bottom line win.

B. Are there some city uses that could be located for a 3-5 year term in some of the Deep Ellum buildings that have long been vacant? Example, the SWC of Good Latimer and Elm, (vacant for 3-4 years, formerly Articles furnishings, I have no ownership interest in the parcel). It is a highly visible corner that as it sits empty screams 'nothing is happening in the area'. It could easily handle a 20 person department (work group) creating some daytime activity. Especially beneficial if it were a department that had outside visitors/ customers, etc coming and going on a regular basis.

C. Create a funding mechanism to assist the land assemblage. But who funds? Who controls? Who benefits? How fast can it occur? These are all real questions.”

Background:

The City of Dallas has already committed \$3.8 million in improvements and expansions for the Central Service Center. This includes an additional 4 acres of surface parking. Area stakeholders are concerned about the best use of this land being to park sanitation vehicles when they are not in use. Land assembly issues in the area are a big concern; as it is difficult to have catalytic developments without adequate square footage.

Suggestions:

If it is not possible to relocate the Central Service Center, the City may consider separating some of the departments and relocating them to other areas inside Deep Ellum, as was suggested above. Other ideas might be to integrate other types of development on the Central Service Center site, such as structured parking enveloped with mixed use/residential (while still maintaining City functions on the site).