

Memorandum

Fair Park

Ideas for its redevelopment as a catalyst for South Dallas growth

This memo is submitted to the Foundation for Community Empowerment which has conducted numerous interviews and convened a group of stakeholders, activists, and civic leaders with a long standing commitment to the betterment of Fair Park and its environs to discuss the future of the park and the surrounding community. The participants have been working in the park and the neighborhoods of South Dallas for decades and believe there is an opportunity for real, dramatic change. This memorandum summarizes the main points discussed with and by this group, and provides a consensus articulation and visualization of the scenario that emerged from their discourse.

The meetings began with a review the history of Fair Park and the past plans focusing on the site. The group also completed a review of a Master's Thesis written in 2013 by a student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on the redevelopment of Fair Park. The thesis provided criteria for the redevelopment of Fair Park, and explored opportunities that few in Dallas ever examined: what could be done in Fair Park if the State Fair were to relocate and the site could be looked at without the Fair's myriad constraints. A summary of this thesis is attached as Exhibit A.

Ultimately, however, this convened group preferred a solution that allows the State Fair and Texas/OU game to remain, but revitalizes the remainder of the park and surrounding neighborhoods. What follows is a summary of the topics discussed, and a detailed description and visualization of the plan that emerged.

A Brief History of Fair Park

Since its inception in 1886, Fair Park has been a financial sink hole. Developed by wealthy leaders and businessmen, Fair Park lost money year after year, despite being home to the beloved State Fair of Texas. In the early 1900s, the City of Dallas essentially bailed out the site's developers by cancelling their debt in exchange for the donation of Fair Park to the city. This transaction created a seemingly unbreakable link between Fair Park and the State Fair of Texas. It also foreshadowed a financial relationship in which the city would find itself supporting the fairgrounds despite the Fair's ability to generate significant revenues.

The park as it is known today exists largely as the result of the 1934 Texas Centennial, for which the park was designed by George Dahl and built by more than 8,000 workers. With its new buildings, halls, and entertainment venues Fair Park grew as did the neighborhoods around it.

Beginning then in the 1960s and 1970s, Fair Park began a decline that would last for decades to come. The areas surrounding the park fell victim to many poor planning and political decisions that cities around the country experienced. Highway infrastructures divided neighborhoods and industries started to relocate to places where labor was cheaper. Other noxious uses were allowed to continue, and crime increased. During this time the city seized acres of land adjacent to Fair Park for extra parking during the Fair. These parking lots, which were used only four weeks per year, created an even greater divide between the Fair and the

community. They, along with the numerous new roadways, contributed to the vast physical and economic decline of South Dallas.

Most of the cultural institutions in the park have moved out, including the science museum, symphony, art museum and opera, and others closed, including the women's museum and the automobile museum.

As South Dallas declined, Fair Park became the "hole in the donut". While the surrounding neighborhoods fell apart, Fair Park became the recipient of attention and investment for occasional entertainment and historical preservation of little used buildings. Since 1980 the park has been the subject of over 40 plans (many of which have contemplated the same challenges addressing the park today, such as the "1969 Master Plan for Year Round Uses"). The last comprehensive plan was completed in 2003 – but most of it has not been implemented. While the communities of South Dallas fought for every penny to rebuild homes no longer fit for human habitation, Fair Park received more than \$260 million over two decades from public and private funders alike. Buildings were restored only to sit empty most of the year. Lawns were maintained for people that drove or strolled by on their way to a museum. And despite all of the uses that call Fair Park home, the city still requires an operation budget of \$8 million per year for the park, while the site nets only approximately \$2.5 million per year in revenue.

Today, Fair Park is not on the outskirts of the city as when it was originally developed. It lies in the middle of a city. Just as it is negatively affected by the decay of its surroundings, the neighboring communities are negatively affected by the inactivity at Fair Park and the way in which it consumes resources from the city and the philanthropic community.

In addition to the issues described above, there is one that has too often been overlooked. The **opportunity cost** of leaving Fair Park in its current state is enormous. This opportunity cost is not pulled from thin air. Fair Park is a centrally located, well served municipal site with tremendous possibilities less than one mile from downtown Dallas. Aside from the fact that redeveloping Fair Park would trigger much needed redevelopment in the surrounding areas and reverse the trends of blight and decay, redeveloping Fair Park will create millions in revenue for the city and the private sector. Continuing the status quo is leaving millions of dollars on the table, hardly the Dallas thing to do.

The fact too often overlooked, and the reason that Fair Park has not been able to achieve its full potential, is that the operational requirements of the State Fair as it is run today have placed a chokehold on the city or any agency's ability to reprogram the site or redevelop it to its highest and best use. For four to six weeks every year, the State Fair takes over the entire grounds through parking and access control, and exercises parking and other controls for a four month period. As a result, the only uses (aside from the permanent museums and music hall) are temporary ones that come for a day, sometimes a few days, and rent out buildings or outdoor areas. Such uses, which include concerts, dog shows, 10K runs and the like, provide minimal revenue to the city, and negligible economic benefits to the surrounding communities, especially when compared to the highest and best uses (or even higher and better uses) that could be developed on the site. For the majority of the year, however, the site is largely empty, surrounded by swaths of empty parking lots, and inhabited by few employees and the token police detail. The current situation cannot be sustained in the long term.

Despite the efforts of Friends of Fair Park, Fair Park currently lacks a volume and vibrancy of year round activity. It is not a park. Over 80% of its area is covered with pavement (mostly for parking). As a result, the surrounding communities suffer. While the decline of the surrounding neighborhoods is not entirely the fault of Fair Park, the continued depression is significantly attributable to the state of the site. As the city has made major efforts to revitalize downtown

Dallas, many of the uses at Fair Park have relocated. As they have, fewer and fewer people have had a reason to come to South Dallas outside of fair time. This has contributed to the dismal economy of the surrounding neighborhoods. Fair Park is at the core of South Dallas communities. It is like the heart that should pump blood and life throughout its surroundings. However, it is currently paralyzed. It needs a jolt, a bold and dramatic change for it to once again reach a steady rhythm. Only then will Fair Park prosper, and only then will it be possible to truly revitalize the rest of South Dallas and tie the community into the burgeoning downtown revitalization.

Criteria for Redeveloping Fair Park

To envision alternatives that will be both successful and feasible, it is important to first develop criteria or set of goals that such schemes should meet. Given the history and the current context, the convened groups adopted the following six criteria for the redevelopment of Fair Park:

1. **Financial Self Sufficiency** – New uses located in Fair Park should cover their own costs and not depend on the city for landscaping, utilities, and the like. The upkeep of the public realm should be a condition of any lessee of park land. Tenants should provide revenues to the city that result in positive net income.
2. **Maximization of Site Beneficiaries** – Fair Park is a public asset, and therefore it should be utilized to maximize all its beneficiaries. Any redevelopment of the site should insure that tangible benefits are provided to the city and its taxpayers and to the park’s neighbors and visitors alike.
3. **Creation/Provision of Jobs** –New development within the site will need to create/provide good, year round jobs to jump start economic growth. New development must both employ people around the site and draw new people to the area.
4. **Year Round Activity/Intensity of Use** –Redevelopment must provide more consistent volumes of visitors/inhabitants and increase the energy felt within and around the park on a daily basis.
5. **Positive Reintegration with the Surrounding Neighborhoods** – Fair Park must physically and economically reintegrate with its surroundings. In addition to reprogramming the site with synergistic uses, urban design interventions will be needed to create a perception that Fair Park is an assimilated park of the South Dallas urban fabric. And like any redevelopment, major mitigation measures (and investments) should be provided to the surrounding communities.
6. **Retention, Reuse, and Enhancement of Historic Structures** – Any redevelopment within Fair Park must maintain the architectural and artistic jewels located there. Buildings, unlike statues, however, are meant to be inhabited and provide space for people to work, learn, live, and exist. Therefore, it is imperative that plans for Fair Park utilize these assets, while making earnest efforts to preserve them.

To meet these criteria, **the convened group felt there were only two real options for redevelopment. This first was proposed in the MIT thesis. The other emerged during our working sessions in Dallas. Scenario 1, while reviewed here, was not recommended due to the political and historical positions of the State Fair. The group consensus rested with Scenario 2.**

Scenario 1: Fair Park as an Educational Center and Innovation/Manufacturing District

The MIT thesis scenario is based on the assumption that the State Fair is relocated to another site. Given its programmatic requirements, it could easily find an alternative location in a less densely populated location with good freeway access, like other seasonal fairs around the country.

Without the constraints of the State Fair, the park is envisioned as a center for innovation and the economy of the future anchored by educational consortia, light manufacturing, R&D and job training facilities. As shown in Figure 1, the historical areas and architecturally significant buildings are repurposed for university and educational facilities; additional university buildings can also be added. The parkland and museums are retained. The southern parking lots are redeveloped with high density housing for existing or new residents, or as student housing. The Cotton Bowl is replaced with public open space, and to its north, existing buildings are repurposed to house community college uses. The eastern edge of the site, including the empty parking lots, are subdivided into parcels and redeveloped as an innovation district with R&D facilities, as well as with clean manufacturing jobs of the future. While this scenario recommends the removal of the Cotton Bowl, it could be maintained and integrated with the educational facilities to be located on the site.

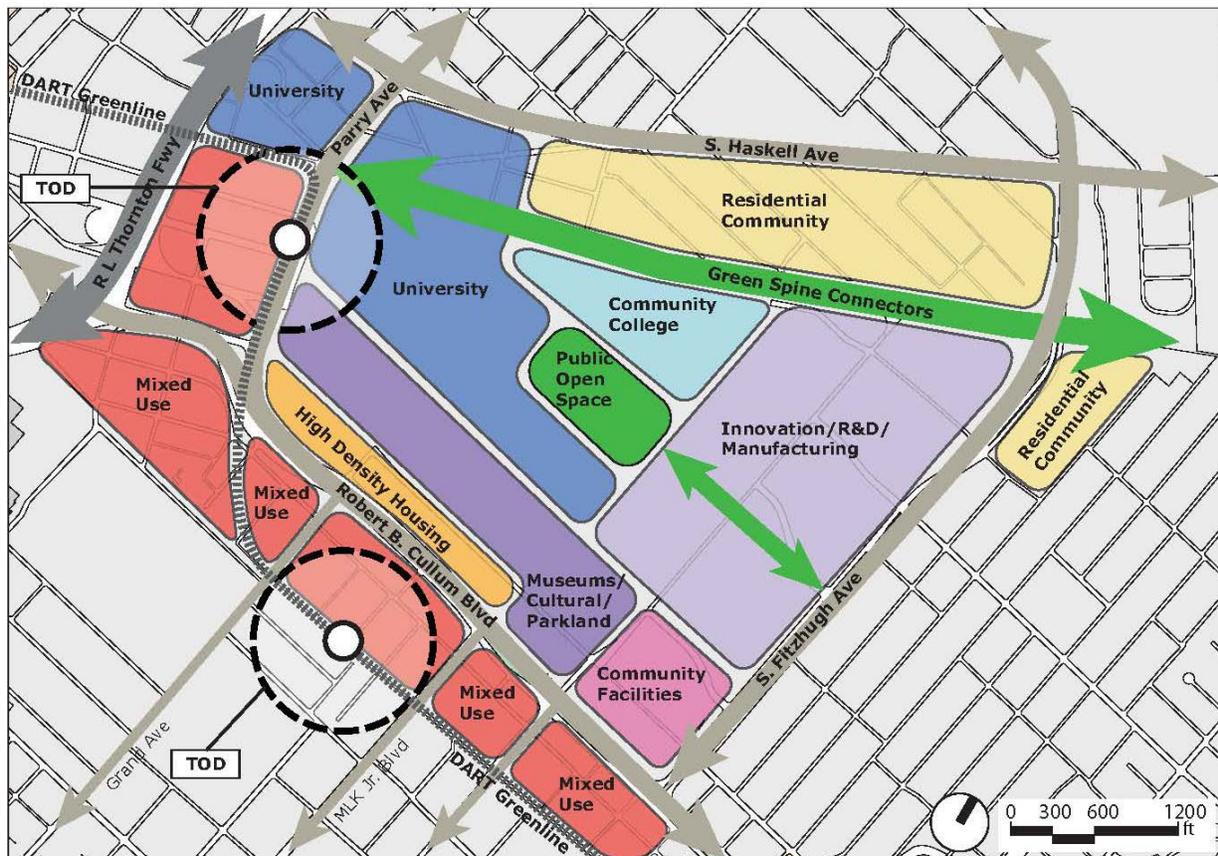


Figure 1 – Scenario 1 Proposed Land Uses

In addition to changes within the site, this scenario recommends the redevelopment of the edges along Fair Park. To the north, residential communities are rebuilt and repopulated. To the east, some of the parking previously seized via eminent domain is returned to the community for housing. Along the southern edge, between the site and the DART line, substantial mixed use

development is proposed. This development is continued along the western edge of the site, where additional university facilities are also suggested. Planning development both inside and outside of the site ensures the ability to reknit Fair Park into its surrounding fabric.

This mix of uses will have a transformational effect on the park and a catalytic effect on the surrounding neighborhoods. The combination of these uses is ideal for this location given that Baylor medical campus and other important employers are nearby. Developing a cluster of educational facilities not only provides jobs and job training, but attracts other employers and investments. Given the low levels of education in South Dallas, the area is in need of local, affordable education options. While one or more major universities would synergize with an innovation district, the community college would train people young and old for the jobs of the future. As skilled labor increases, industries that have often gone elsewhere could be enticed to relocate to South Dallas. Moreover, with the influx of employment opportunities, more and more people will relocate to South Dallas to live, densifying the neighborhoods that have been losing populations over the past 50 years, without gentrifying and threatening current residents.

In total, this scenario proposes over **10 million square feet of development within Fair Park**, and over **15 million square feet of development along its edges**. With this density of development, over **20,000 permanent jobs** could be created, and over \$1 billion in of tax value added.

Evaluating this scenario against the criteria described above, this option becomes increasingly attractive.

- **Financial Self Sufficiency:** The introduction of educational facilities, light/clean industrial uses, and research/innovation centers passes the maintenance and operation of the park over to the institutions and the private sector. By leasing parcels of Fair Park to such customers, the city can insure that the area will be maintained to the highest standards (i.e. via lease covenants) without having to provide the financial and human resources required today. In addition to removing the financial obligations of the city, leasing parcels to institutions and the private sector will provide positive net income to the city. Moreover, corporate, payroll, and other taxes generated by the jobs and products created on the site would contribute even more to the Dallas economy.
- **Maximization of Site Beneficiaries** – This scenario transforms Fair Park into a vibrant place to live, work, play, and learn. Thousands of jobs are provided, and thousands of students can come to Fair Park to receive an education and improve their futures. Nearby residents, many of whom are isolated from employment opportunities, will have the ability to work within their own community. The site becomes a place that people from near and far can enjoy every day.
- **Creation/Provision of Jobs** – By creating over 20,000 permanent jobs, this scenario meets this criteria. Moreover, this scenario provides a range of jobs for skilled and unskilled laborers, ranging from custodial positions to professors, to researchers. Jobs are critical to the success of the site and of South Dallas. With the influx of permanent jobs, along with job training facilities, the populations surrounding Fair Park will have a much stronger chance of sustaining any and all improvements to the neighborhood associated with the redevelopment of Fair Park. In addition to permanent jobs, the proposed development will provide immediate employment opportunities through construction jobs.
- **Year-round Activity/Intensity of Use** – The mix of educational and employment facilities will bring thousands of people to Fair Park and its surroundings every day. An educational consortium of both traditional universities and community colleges will mean that learning takes place year round – not just nine months a year. Research and manufacturing facilities too will bring people to the site very day. The new vibrancy and activity within the site will

also provide the critical mass of people that will be necessary to support development of the neighborhoods around Fair Park.

- **Positive Reintegration with Surrounding Neighborhoods** – This scenario provides uses that serve and benefit the surrounding neighborhoods, namely education and employment. Fair Park will no longer be seen as a drain on precious resources or a gated community, but rather it will become the heart that will pump life and vitality back into South Dallas.
- **Retention, Reuse, and Enhancement of Historic Structures** – The educational facilities that will locate in Fair Park’s Art Deco buildings will both retain and enhance these special structures, and they will use them. Countless students will be able to study or work in these buildings rich with history.

While the convened group found this scenario innovative and dramatic, it felt it was important to offer a scenario that would, in a re-organized way, retain the Fair and simultaneously free the majority of the site for revitalization.

Scenario 2: Coexistence of Fair Park and State Fair

The following plan, considered more feasible in Dallas, suggests that the park be separated into two distinct but compatible use areas: one for the fair and one for comprehensive revitalization. The State Fair would be consolidated in the northeast corner of site into an area of approximately 138 acres, comprised of three parcels, as illustrated in Figure 2. This area includes the following:

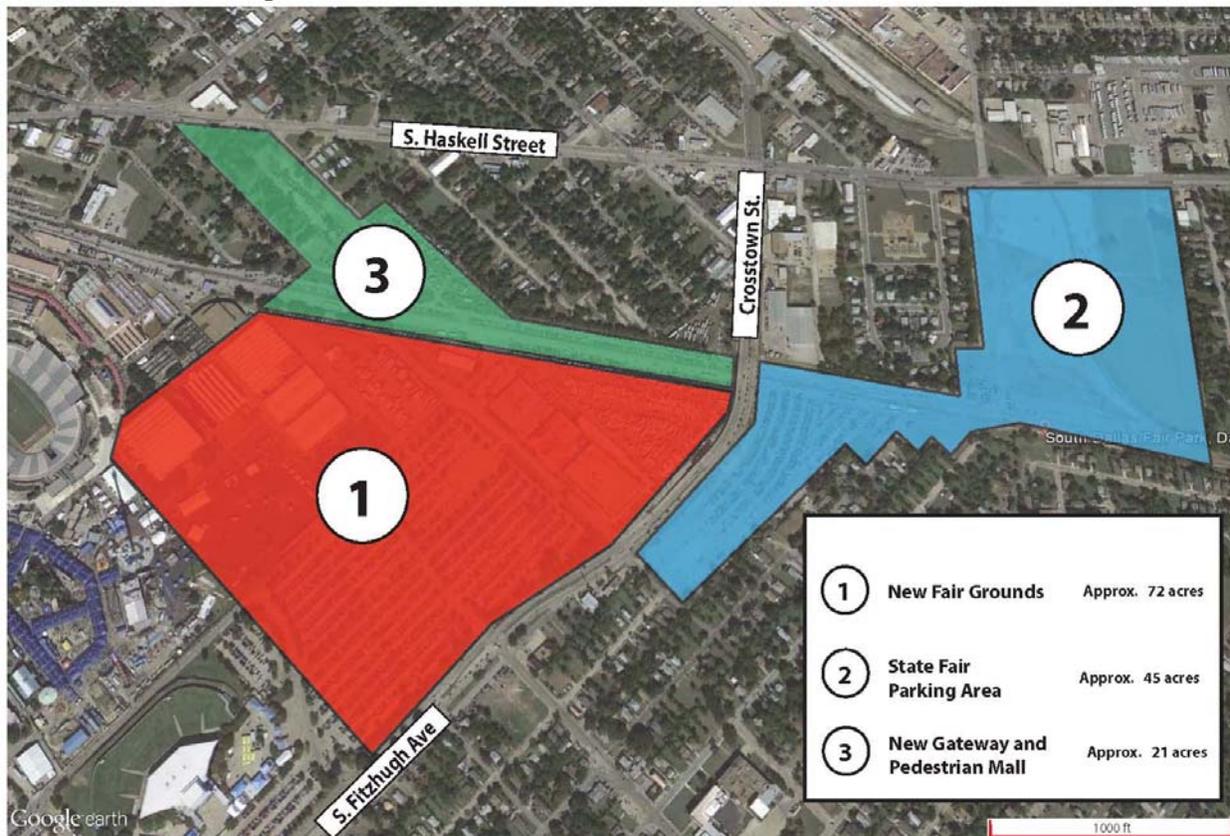


Figure 2 – Proposed Fair Grounds Parcel Plan

- Parcel 1 – Approximately 72 acres, currently includes the Coliseum building, livestock housing, maintenance sheds, and large impervious parking areas (asphalt) which are underutilized most of the year.

- Parcel 2 – Approximately 45 acres includes State Fair parking areas outside of Fair Park. These too are fenced off and underutilized for the majority of the year (including during most of the fair).
- Parcel 3 – Approximately 21 acres includes part of the decommissioned rail corridor and an area defined by Bank and Fleetwood streets accessed from S. Haskell Street. (We understand the State Fair has already aggressively been purchasing houses and vacant tracts in this adjacent neighborhood.)

The State Fair can be consolidated within these three parcels and continue its seasonal activities. Having to reprogram and rethink its spatial uses will provide the opportunity to “rebrand” its purpose and functions to include other year-round events.

The site plan in Figure 3 illustrates the proposed reorganization of the new State Fair area, which will retain its entrance from S. Fitzhugh Ave, though its primary dedicated vehicular access will come from S. Haskell Ave. Visitors would park in Parcel 2, the large areas east of S. Fitzhugh Ave and Crosstown Street, and enter the site via a landscaped promenade with a significant water fountain feature. Pedestrian access to the fairgrounds is also provided from Pennsylvania Ave. (the DART station). Increasingly, fair attendees are already accessing the park by DART rail.



Figure 3 – Proposed Fair Grounds Site Plan

The main feature of this reorganization is the large green mall that is developed as a flexible, multipurpose area where various activities can be programmed throughout the year. This area is envisioned as a green mall, detailed like the monumental mall in Washington, DC, to sustain heavy pedestrian use.

New ancillary buildings are suggested along the eastern edge of the site, which would be directly accessible from S. Fitzhugh Ave. Additional buildings are suggested near the Coliseum and livestock buildings, creating another green space to be used for livestock shows and other fair events. A new iconic central plaza (see Figure 4), on axis with both S. Haskell and the pedestrian promenade, would provide a powerful visual image at the entry of the State Fair. This plaza could include an interactive fountain and some other structure or public art.

Extensively landscaped, tree lined pathways would provide shaded areas for the thousands of visitors during the summer months and the State Fair (see Figure 5). This upgraded public realm will also improve perceptions of the State Fair grounds and reknit the site with its neighboring community.



Figure 4 – Rendering of Proposed Fair Grounds looking towards downtown

This reorganization and consolidation of the State Fair will free the rest of the site from the onerous constraints and allow for it and its surrounding neighborhoods to be conceptualized in a new way. Historical buildings and the current Midway can then be inhabited by year round occupants such as an educational consortium, a community college, specialized or magnet Dallas ISD schools (like Irma Rangel, etc.) or other recreational facilities. This reorganization would also permit the exploration of new uses along the edges of the site including mixed income housing, retail and restaurants (perhaps a restaurant park like Trinity Groves) and within the parking lots on Robert B. Cullum Blvd. These improvements could add over \$1 billion in tax base to Dallas.



Figure 5 – Rendering of Fair Grounds Entrance from Haskell Street

The last issue to be addressed in this plan is the future of the Cotton Bowl. This facility is severely underutilized and expensive to use and maintain. It could remain within the park if sufficient uses can be programmed. If, however, that remains a difficult or unaffordable task, relocating its limited uses to some other more appropriate site should be considered. If this suggestion is appealing to the stakeholders, its implementation would open up further opportunities for rethinking the entire Midway and other areas of the park which could be programmed for intense development or an expansion of the beautiful landscape currently in the parkland.

The following topics highlight the evaluation of the above scenario against the criteria and Scenario 1:

- **Financial Self Sufficiency:** This scenario achieves financial self-sufficiency, but provides fewer revenue generating opportunities than Scenario 1. Since the State Fair is a non-profit and would remain on site, the land it occupies would be unlikely to generate additional tax revenues.
- **Maximization of Site Beneficiaries** – This scenario provides similar beneficiaries to Scenario 1. However, Scenario 1 provides more jobs for community residents and economic stimuli for South Dallas.
- **Creation/Provision of Jobs** – Scenario 1 clearly provides more jobs. Scenario 2, however, could provide 5,000 – 6,000 jobs, while the rebranded State Fair could continue as it does today. Additional jobs could be provided in this scenario if the edges are redeveloped as proposed in Scenario 1.
- **Year-round Activity/Intensity of Use** – This Scenario will certainly increase the year round intensity of use, the extent to which will be largely determined by the success of the State Fair in providing year round programs. Even a highly successful revamped State Fair, however, would likely provide lower levels of activity than an employment center/innovation district.

- **Positive Reintegration with Surrounding Neighborhoods** – Provides positive physical reintegration with the surrounding neighborhoods as in Scenario 1.
- **Retention, Reuse, and Enhancement of Historic Structures** – Maintains and reuses historic structures.

This scenario, while requiring significant public, private and philanthropic investment, would also complement and accelerate other revitalization initiatives already underway in the Fair Park/South Dallas community, including:

- ICDC/Spring Street/My Children’s Clinic and beyond (Diane Ragsdale)
- SouthFair CDC (Hank Lawson)
- Lamar Street (Jack Matthews)
- St. Philips School & Community Center - Terry Flowers
- Forest Heights Neighborhood Development Corporation - Graham Greene / Jim Bovard / Richard Lapp / Margaret Cervin
- Bonton/Bexar Street/Buckeye Trail (Mixons, DHA, Habitat, City of Dallas)
- Habitat Homes (Bill Hall, Cyndy Lutz)
- Frazier Courts (DHA)
- FRI (the new Parkland facility)
- Jubilee (Tom Harbison, Dave Martin, Walt Humann)
- Cornerstone Baptist Church (Chris Simmons)
- Carpenter’s Point senior living (George King)
- CitySquare multiple services (Larry James)
- YMCA and other community centers/Exline on Dixon (Larry Johnson Center), Lawrence Park, Juanita Craft Center and ballfields
- Brent Brown/BC Workshop
- In the City for Good (Terry Kittleson)
- Reduction of liquor establishments (Neighborhood leaders/Commissioner Price)
- City Warehouse (Holt Lunsford)
- Schepp’s Dairy plant
- Eliminating blight (City code enforcement, demolitions and land bank)
- Social programming (neighborhood organizations, including ICDC, Dolphin Heights, True Lee Baptist Church, Baylor Hospital, FCE and others)
- Geriatric Facility (Baylor, CitySquare)
- Capacity building training (FCE)

Management Structure

Regardless of which scenario is chosen, implementing the redevelopment of Fair Park and managing its assets will raise many challenges. This section provides an alternative to the current situation that could be applied to either of the development scenarios described above.

Third Party Manager

History has shown that the city and the State Fair Association, despite their best efforts, have been unable to generate revenues sufficient to cover the operating expenses (not to mention capital improvement costs) of Fair Park. As with management of many public infrastructures, the private sector is likely better equipped to manage Fair Park in an efficient and effective way. The city’s success with private management of the zoo, farmer’s market and Klyde Warren Park

suggest the better course. There are many high quality, experienced organizations that could take on the role of managing Fair Park on behalf of the city. Such a third party manager (TPM) could not only remove the financial and operational burden from the city, but could provide the city with a positive net operating income.

The limited purpose (*i.e.*, the staging of the fair), the historically low net yield from operations, excessive overhead and the recent failure of the \$30 million Summer Adventures argue against the State Fair Association being the best steward of this vital city asset. Hence, a new public-private oversight entity should be created to plan, execute, revitalize, finance and manage the portion of the park not leased to the State Fair.

The city could lease the site, excluding the area in which the State Fair is consolidated, to a TPM (or potentially directly to a university that would act as the TPM). That TPM would then be responsible for executing the planning and redevelopment of the park. The TPM could lease parcels to uses such as universities, educational facilities, and other uses. The TPM would ultimately be responsible for all maintenance and upkeep of Fair Park to a level of quality set forth by the city. To accomplish this, the TPM could charge a common area maintenance fee to all its sub-lessees and use that fee to provide such maintenance and upkeep. Alternatively, as a condition of locating in Fair Park, lessees may be required to maintain certain areas of the public realm (just as many corporate tenants maintain the public realm surrounding office towers). The TPM would be paid a management fee out of the revenues it collected from organizations and institutions within the park. Any rent exceeding the sum of the lease payments made to the city, the management fee paid to the TPM, and the operating/capital costs of running the park could be applied towards other efforts to revitalize South Dallas.

In this Alternative management structure, the City would save \$8 million per year in operating budget that no longer needs to be spent at Fair Park, and it could receive a consistent, dependable revenue stream guaranteed by the TPM. The lease payments could ultimately increase the city's bonding capacity. This structure also allows the city to maintain ownership of the park and therefore set the quality standards for its upkeep. The city can also place requirements on public access to the facilities, ensuring that the site does not become a gated, closed off community.

The State Fair could continue its current relationship with the City for its area with the exception of the following changes:

1. The State Fair would be responsible for the year round operation and maintenance of the section of the park it inhabits. The city would no longer have any obligations to provide utilities, landscaping, or security services to the State Fair, unless they were provided a fee for doing so. The State Fair site would be subject to the same quality standards as the rest of Fair Park.
2. The State Fair would provide year round access and programming to the majority of its site. While certain sections could be used for the storage of items used only during fair time, the majority of the State Fair's site would need to meet minimum usage requirements set forth by the city. Given the prime location of Fair Park, and to be compatible with the overall revitalization and growth efforts, this minimum use requirement will be very important. Simply fencing off the area when the fair is not in session would not be a viable option.

We hope these scenarios will be presented to the Mayor's Task Force, the city, the State Fair Association, institutions and other tenants of Fair Park and more broadly so that they can be incorporated into the public debate that is going on now. The approaches outlined in this document will free the city from the financial burden so it can focus its economic resources to tackle the area immediately surrounding Fair Park.

Fair Park

Ideas for its redevelopment as a catalyst for South Dallas growth

Executive Summary

Commissioned by the Foundation for Community Empowerment, this document provides ideas and recommendations for the redevelopment of Fair Park as a well managed, financially sustainable, mixed use facility that will play a pivotal role in the renewal and growth of South Dallas.

The memorandum identifies critical site issues and outlines the redevelopment criteria that any reuse scenario must adhere to. It then discusses two conceptual plans that would meet the goals of the site revitalization. It also illustrates the preferred scenario and offers ideas for the management structure that must be in place for its successful implementation.

The recommended plan advocates that Fair Park be reorganized into two compatible yet separate use areas. One would include all the State Fair activities, the other would undergo a comprehensive re-planning to transform the park as a fully utilized iconic site that would include cultural, educational, and other mixed uses.

The area identified for the State Fair is in the northeast corner of the site and consists of three parcels totaling 138 acres. Within this area the State Fair can rebrand and expand its function and activities. It also proposes a new site entrance from S. Haskell Street separated from the remainder of the park.

The redevelopment scenario would generate approximately 6,000 permanent jobs and, most importantly, provide the synergy for \$1 billion edge development with complementary uses that would promote the reintegration of Fair Park with the communities of South Dallas.

Finally, recommendations are made to the City of Dallas to retain ownership of the site but to free itself from management responsibilities which would be carried out more effectively and efficiently by a third party manager.

FAIR PARK

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