

SECTION 2: PLANNING PROCESS

PHASE 1 PROCESS

Phase 1 of the Town Center Study planning process was designed to be inclusive, not simply allowing for, but actively soliciting public input through each part of the process. As a result, the process captured valuable public input while still capitalizing on the professional expertise of City Officials and hired consultants. The strength of the process will be fully realized in a plan which captures the shared vision of the community.

As a first step, City Staff posted a “Request for Qualifications,” soliciting private planning and design firms to assist in carrying out the Study. In August 2006, the City contracted with four private planning and design firms. Gateway Planning Group was awarded the role as lead consultant, with HNTB Corporation, Mesa Design Group, and Civic Design Associates also hired to play active roles in the Town Center Study process. The selected firms represent a wide range of talents, including planning, engineering, architecture, landscape architecture, and urban design. As such, the broad range of talents that the firms represent supported a process that allowed different perspectives to be brought to the table. With the selection of these firms, the City began its work on a planning process that was not only inclusive but also interdisciplinary in its approach. Along with helping to facilitate input from McKinney stakeholders, these firms have played an integral role in helping to conceptualize visions for the future.



OPEN HOUSE

On Tuesday, August 29, 2006 the Planning Department hosted a public open house to kick off the Town Center Study at the McKinney Performing Arts Center at the Historic Collin County Courthouse. City Planning Staff hosted the Open House Kickoff as a way to inform and involve public stakeholders in the Town Center Study Process. The primary goal of the Open House Kickoff was to set the stage for information sharing and involvement.

A diverse group of well over 200 people attended the open house. Throughout the event, attendees had an opportunity to view a video and hear what local residents were saying about the Town Center. Additionally, the open house was set up with 7 “stations”, with each station having a different purpose. Six of the stations were manned by Planning Staff, with the other station being covered by members of the consultant team. This set-up allowed participants to wander around to each station at their own pace, gather information, participate in the image preference survey, read posters, collect handouts, fill out workshop sign-up cards, and engage Staff members/consultants in a face-to-face discussion. Some of the station topics included:



Stakeholders review an exhibit during the Open House Kickoff, held August 29, 2006.

Image Preference Survey: This station gave participants the opportunity to view a series of images and score each image based on how aesthetically pleasing they found it to be. Results of the image preference survey can be found in Appendix B.

Overview of the Town Center Study: This station allowed participants to learn more about the Town Center Study and the design workshop process.

Existing Conditions: This station allowed participants to learn general characteristics such as existing land uses, zoning, and demographic information found in and around the Town Center Study area.

Overview of Design Workshops: This station was set up to inform participants of what they could expect during the design

PUBLIC DESIGN WORKSHOPS

The Public Design Workshops represent the heart of Phase 1. A successful design workshop is as much about the process as it is about the product. In other words, the process of sitting around a table discussing ideas is just as important as the shared vision that is reached.

In a design workshop, after participants present their ideas, the professional designers and facilitators help the participants to identify key concepts that lead to the development of a preferred option and move the community in the direction of a shared vision. At the end of the design workshop process, the shared vision belongs to the larger collective group rather than to any one individual.¹

In Phase 1, there were a series of 3 hands-on public design workshops each held at the McKinney Performing Arts Center and City Hall and each focusing on a different area of the Town Center. During these workshops, stakeholders were asked to describe their vision for the Town Center area in 10-20 years. With the help of the consultants, these visions were put into words and images. This format allowed stakeholders the opportunity to personally contribute to the future of the Town Center community. Because planning for the future entails many complex challenges, especially in a fast-growing community like McKinney where new development must be balanced with preservation and revitalization of older areas, City Staff went to great lengths to educate and inform workshop stakeholders in order to help them be more effective participants in the process.



Several weeks in advance of each workshop, City Staff compiled a “Participant’s Workbook” and mailed them to each participant, asking each participant to review the information in the workbook ahead of time. The workbook included the workshop agenda as well as various materials that helped participants become more acquainted with basic planning and urban design principles. It also provided background information about the study area and several maps to orient participants to the characteristics of each focus area. City Staff also recommended that participants walk around each focus area simply to explore, make observations and “get a feel for” particular places and spaces they liked or did not like.

Each workshop consisted of a Day 1, Day 2 (Design Studio), and a Day 3. On Workshop Day 1, participants heard an introductory presentation explaining the objectives of and instructions for the workshop as well as some basic guiding planning principles. Then, the participants were broken out into smaller groups each led by an appointed facilitator. Over the course of the evening, each facilitator led his group through a series of brainstorming/visioning exercises and a discussion of ideas about how the participants would like the focus areas to look and feel in 10 to 20 years. Illustrators and recorders were also on hand to sketch visuals and take note of the ideas generated. At the end of Workshop Day 1, each breakout group had the opportunity to select its preferred ideas/concepts.

¹ This information has been adapted from *Community Participation Methods in Design and Planning* by Henry Sanoff, AIA

On Day 2, each design team (the facilitator, illustrator, etc) assembled in a Design Studio that was set up in the City Council Chambers at City Hall. Each design team compiled and reviewed the input gathered during the breakout sessions from Day 1. Then, each design team created preliminary illustrations to reflect the ideas and concepts generated by the public input. During this internal design studio, the lead consultant team facilitated a process with the other consultants to compare and contrast each design team's approach. This process both reinforced unique strategies by the respective teams and also provided synergy for particular collective solutions that no one design team would have identified on their own.

For a short time on Friday afternoon, the Design Studio was opened to the public, and participants were invited to wander through Council Chambers to explore the design process, look at what the design teams were doing, and engage the designers in discussion. This window into the consultants' design studio provided participants with an even greater sense of ownership of the process.

On the morning of Workshop Day 3, the participants returned to the Council Chambers to meet again with their breakout group to recap the ideas and concepts generated on Day 1 and to see the preliminary illustrations produced by the design team during the Design Studio on Day 2. Then, each group presented its illustrations and explained the associated ideas and concepts to all of the participants at the workshop. Also during the group presentations, the lead consultant facilitated a question/answer session while also helping to identify key concepts and themes on which to build consensus for a vision and a framework for a preferred option.

In the weeks following Day 3, the lead consultant team reviewed and synthesized the key concepts and common themes from all groups. Under the guidance of City Staff, the lead consultant used the key concepts and themes to create composite illustrative plans. The composite illustrative plans bring together and visually represent the key concepts and themes for each focus area. To supplement and further explain the illustrative plans, the lead consultant also prepared brief written narratives.

Throughout Phase 1, City Officials provided oversight and guidance to City Staff and the lead consultant. After each workshop, City Staff presented an update to a joint work session of the City Council and the Planning and Zoning Commission. In these sessions, City Staff introduced the composite illustrative plans and explained many of the key concepts. Council members and Planning & Zoning Commissioners asked questions, discussed concerns, and generally expressed support for the direction and progress of Phase 1. These joint work sessions were open for the public to attend. In addition to these presentations, City Staff also provided the City Council with several written monthly updates.

CREATING THE PLAN

The Phase 1 Report generally serves as the conclusion to the Phase 1 process. Following all three of the public design workshops, the preferred concepts were reviewed and discussed at length by City Staff, City Officials, and the consultant teams. These results, including the composite illustrative plans and the supplemental narratives, are included in the latter sections of this report.



It is the goal of this report to create a sound basis and framework for future phases of the Town Center Study. To accomplish this goal, the Phase 1 Report is intended to:

- (1) discuss and describe the series of urban design workshops that were held over the past year,
- (2) describe the shared visions and preferred concepts that were developed during each workshop, and
- (3) provide a stepping stone (including general recommendations and strategies) for moving forward with the next phase of the Town Center Study.

PUBLIC OUTREACH, COMMUNICATION, AND INVOLVEMENT

An important component to any planning process is establishing a method of communication to inform stakeholders (residents, property owners, business owners, etc.) and solicit public input. City Staff realized early on that public outreach, communication, and involvement were key components to a successful Town Center planning process. Without the active participation from the stakeholders of the area, it would be impossible to create a shared vision for the future.

The Town Center is a diverse mix of neighborhoods, governmental complexes, businesses, transportation corridors, civic spaces, cultural centers, and even industrial sites (such as the historic cotton mill, flour mill and ice house). More importantly, it is the part of town that still maintains the historic character of old McKinney. With such a distinctive quality, there are many different stakeholders invested in the future of the Town Center. Because of this, City Staff recognized the need for a unique planning approach that would allow active stakeholder participation and consensus building. Using the public design workshops as an integral part of the planning process, the City was able to create an opportunity for different stakeholders to come together and generate valuable discussions about what needs and issues were really important to the Town Center.

In an effort to reach as many stakeholders as possible, the City used various communication tools to get the message out about the Town Center Study initiative. Methods used to promote and solicit public input included the following:

Local and Regional Media

City Staff took advantage of local and regional media outlets by posting meeting notices for upcoming events on the local cable channel (McKinney 15) and in local newspapers. Additionally, throughout Phase 1, the Town Center Study received significant media attention with articles published in the McKinney-Courier Gazette, Dallas Business Journal, and the Dallas Morning News.²

McKinney City Times / McKinneyINFO.mag

The City of McKinney’s City Times newsletter (now known as McKinneyINFO.mag) ran several stories regarding the Town Center Study. The stories ranged from the Study’s initial Open House Kickoff to the visions and progress made following the public design workshops.



² Scanned copies of the meeting notices and article clippings are attached as Appendix A.

Town Center Study Website

The Town Center Study website is linked from the City’s homepage on the Internet. The web page is a comprehensive site that provides information ranging from the historical background of the Town Center, the planning process, workshop updates, illustrations and pictures, and City Staff contact information. The web page is updated regularly and is a convenient source of information for the public. The public can access the Town Center Study website by visiting www.mckinneytexas.org and clicking the “Town Center Study” link located on the left panel of the McKinney Homepage.



Stakeholder Invitations

Staff’s extensive public outreach efforts also included a mail out of almost 1,000 personalized invitation letters to stakeholders within each focus area and nearly 10,000 postcard invitations to every possible address in the entire study area. Along with the personal invitations, City Staff has maintained an extensive list of contact information for those that expressed interest in staying involved with the Town Center Study.

Planning Department
Telephone: 972-547-7432
Fax: 972-547-2804
Email: kspath@mckinneytexas.org

August 8, 2006

Greetings!

You're invited to attend an Open House to kick off the **Town Center Study**, an important upcoming city planning study that will look at the older areas of McKinney, focusing on issues such as the compatibility of land uses, enhancement of the downtown area, revitalization of the State Highway 5 corridor, and the potential for transit-oriented development just east of S.H. 5.

As a stakeholder, your input is important. During this study, you will have the opportunity to be an active participant in the planning and design process. Take the first step toward making your vision a reality by attending our public Open House.

The Open House will introduce the study process, and you will learn how you can help plan for the future of McKinney. You will have the chance to sign up to participate in any of the 3 hands-on design workshops that will take place in the coming months as part of the study process. City Staff will be available to answer any questions. The Open House is scheduled for:

Date: Tuesday, August 29th, 2006
Time: 5:00 – 8:00 pm (feel free to come and go at your convenience)
Place: McKinney Performing Arts Center at the Historic Collin County Courthouse, 111 N. Tennessee Street, (First Floor)

Should you have any questions or comments, please contact me by mail, phone, fax, or e-mail. See you at the Open House!

Regards,
 Kevin Spath, Long Range Planner

Para más información, llame 972-547-7571

What Do You See?
 Town Center Study
 City of McKinney
 Planning Department

What do you see?
 Take the first step toward making your vision a reality. Help us kick off the Town Center Study by attending our public Open House.

Where:
 The McKinney Performing Arts Center at the historic Collin County Courthouse, 111 N. Tennessee Street.

When:
 Tuesday, August 29, 2006 from 5 to 8 pm. Come and go at your convenience. City staff will be available to answer your questions.

For more information about the open house contact Planning at 972-547-7432 or kspath@mckinneytexas.org
 Para más información, llame 972-547-7571

Other communication tools used to get the word out ranged from time-tested methods such as official press releases and briefings to City-affiliated groups (Tourism, Chamber of Commerce, Main Street, Planning and Zoning Commission, Historic Preservation Advisory Board, McKinney Economic Development Corporation, McKinney Community Development Corporation, PRIDE neighborhood groups, etc.) to more sophisticated methods such as cable channel videos/interviews and an email contact list. In addition, both City Staff and the consultants were available for interviews to reporters from the local and regional media.

Additionally, City Staff and the lead consultant were always available by telephone, email or in person so McKinney stakeholders could ask questions or provide input any time they desired.