

SECTION 5: NEXT STEPS

Adopting the report by reference into the Land Use Section (Section 7) and Urban Design Section (Section 11) of the Comprehensive Plan enables the initiative to serve as a meaningful policy guide for city officials, staff, property owners, and private developers when considering proposals for development/redevelopment in the Town Center.

The illustrative nature of the shared vision creates the need for choices to be made for implementation. In order for the vision to become a reality, Phase 2 of the initiative will be utilized to evaluate, craft, select, relate, and phase the appropriate implementation components into a comprehensive implementation program or Action Plan. The long-term success of the Town Center Study initiative will depend on the degree to which each component of the vision is implemented. Market acceptance and continued stakeholder buy-in will be critical in that regard.

In other words, Phase 2 will involve taking a more detailed look at the preferred concepts, studying specific aspects to determine if change is warranted, and prioritizing a set of specific tasks (Action Plan) for implementing critical components of the vision. Existing implementation tools will be reviewed and potentially refined, and new tools and strategies may be developed so that the City's future choices are consistent with the vision. (Beyond Phase 2, implementation will also involve the monitoring and amending of the plan as necessary over the years)

Action Plan: To help manage implementation of the vision, an Action Plan will be developed that identifies and evaluates specific tasks, recognizes unique opportunities, establishes priorities, and sets a timeline. Some actions may be set in motion right away (1-2 years); others may be implemented in the intermediate term (3-5 years); still others may be implemented over a much longer period (5-20 years). The Action Plan will be comprised of the following primary components:

1. Marketing, Public Outreach and Awareness component

Implementation of the vision will depend on whether citizens, city staff, elected and appointed officials, developers, property owners, builders, investors, real estate professionals, lending professionals, neighboring communities, and other government agencies are aware of the vision and the goals, objectives, and concepts contained therein (especially if they have particular interest or expertise in the type of development that is consistent with the vision). As with the other components of implementation, marketing and public outreach will be an ongoing process. This is especially true in McKinney, given the rapid growth being experienced. Without an aggressive, ongoing campaign to increase awareness about the vision, many people will not be able to contribute to the implementation process. In order to become active in participating in local government, people will need to understand the direction and course the City has set for the Town Center.

2. Physical component

Public Improvements: The City owns and controls a significant amount of property in the Town Center, including not only buildings, parks and parking lots but also street rights-of-way. Therefore, any changes the City makes to the public realm can have a

tremendous impact on the physical look, feel, and function of the Town Center. One of the primary strategies for revitalizing the Town Center will likely be for the City to continue to provide targeted capital improvements (upgrades to roads, sidewalks, water systems, wastewater systems, drainage systems, parks, municipal buildings, parking facilities, etc.). Implementation of the vision will also depend on continued and targeted public improvements in streetscapes, pedestrian plazas, pocket parks, gateway features, and wayfinding signage to enhance aesthetics, transit access, and the pedestrian experience.

In recent years, the City has been investing significantly in public improvements in the Town Center (fire station; library; eventual relocation of City Hall and municipal offices to county courthouse; renovation of historic courthouse into a performing arts center; infrastructure initiative; downtown infrastructure project; parking lot reconstruction; wayfinding signs). These efforts should obviously continue, but programming for future improvements will need to be adjusted for consistency with the vision.

Making future public improvements in accordance with the urban design concepts of the vision will make it more likely that ongoing public investments will be leveraged instead of isolated. Such maximization of public improvements will then create a more positive image and climate to consistently attract additional private investment for redevelopment. Additionally, providing on-site improvements to support a specific private sector catalyst development may also be considered.

Development Regulations: Realization of the vision also largely depends on the City's utilization of appropriate development regulations (zoning, subdivision, building). Phase 1 has revealed that certain aspects of current development regulations may be ineffective at not only addressing unique redevelopment challenges but also at achieving the desired form and character of the vision. Additionally, while it is acknowledged that development regulations cannot solely address the redevelopment problem (land use controls cannot compel anyone to invest in an area), development regulations can be cumbersome, conflicting, and redundant. A city that proactively improves its development regulations and removes regulatory impediments can help to entice investment and redevelopment.

Most current zoning regulations in the Town Center are oriented to a conventional low-density suburban development pattern. This study confirmed that the City needs to be very careful not to undermine the eclectic charm and placemaking character of the Town Center with generic development regulations. Therefore, Phase 2 should be used to explore form-based development standards which may be better suited to produce the community's desired outcome (the vision) by achieving synchronization between zoning and the surrounding context (street types, building form, lot size). In other words, instead of continuing with conventional regulations that only prohibit extremely undesirable outcomes, it may be better to use regulations that actually produce the types of development that have historically shown to be economically sustainable and attractive.

Additionally, Phase 2 should include an evaluation of the synchronization between development regulations and public capital investment. It is possible for a community's land use and capital investment policies to be at odds with one another and for each to undermine and frustrate the intent of the other. Along those same lines, it is also important for guiding policies to be consistent and complementary. Phase 2 should further explore existing inconsistencies and recommend ways to reconcile them

(for instance, does the City's existing Multi-Family Policy need to be revised, given the vision of the Town Center to realize residential growth in the two urban villages?).

Revising development regulations to ensure consistency with the Town Center vision should send a signal to the private sector and go a long way toward establishing a level playing field for developers and investors. It is possible to revise development regulations in such a way to insure that realization of the vision will not depend on future political pressure or discretionary design review by city officials or staff. More predictability in the development process translates to less risk for the private sector and comfort in knowing that adjacent property owners will be held to the same set of standards.

3. Funding/Partnerships/Management component

Achieving success with revitalization plans most always require that the City play an active role in funding and managing key pieces. In Phase 2, the City needs to evaluate to what extent it is willing to enter into partnerships with property owners and private developers to insure realization of the vision. The City may consider collaborating with developers/investors on specific private sector catalyst developments (helping the economic feasibility of a catalyst project by filling a financial gap with incentives or by facilitating development approvals). To insure that the City is a major controlling player when the market ripens for a catalyst project in the transit village, the City may also explore a proactive strategy of land assembly.

To be able to determine the appropriate level of public/private partnership, a fiscal impact analysis of “trends development” versus “redevelopment under the new vision” would provide detailed insight about the capacity for attracting new capital and investment into the Town Center. From there, a detailed program for value capture could then be crafted. Phase 2 should answer questions such as: Would Tax Increment Financing be appropriate, and to what geographic scope and to what level? What about the utilization of a Public Improvement District? Would a parking authority be appropriate? And, how should all of these programs be related and phased? For successful implementation, the development of these fiscal and management tools must be undertaken.

The Town Center vision contains ideas and goals that are also shared by several other City-affiliated entities (McKinney Economic Development Corporation; McKinney Community Development Corporation; McKinney Housing Authority) and departments (Code Enforcement; Community Services). Realization of the vision will require internal cooperation between these different groups.

Realization of the vision will also require ongoing external cooperation between property owners, the City, and a wide range of other public agencies. Every level of planning and construction will be affected, from the site design of small individual projects to the construction of significant public facilities. Ongoing coordination with the Texas Department of Transportation (TXDOT), Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART), and the North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) will be critical to ensuring that future transportation facilities are properly integrated into the overall vision.

FINAL REMARKS

The McKinney Town Center is blessed with and well-positioned to leverage its location, physical assets, history, community pride, existing base of tourism, many vibrant businesses, cultural arts facilities, diverse demographic composition and a robust municipal tax base. Extending this sector planning initiative into Phase 2 should provide the Town Center with the strategies and tools needed to compete with other areas and continue to attract and guide reinvestment.

The only way to fully realize the vision and insure the future economic vitality of the Town Center is for revitalization of the Town Center to continue to be a goal over the long term. Realization of the vision will require patience and a long-term commitment. A sustained effort from city leaders and staff, in conjunction with property owners, will help the City build on its previous investments and fully capitalize on the unique opportunities presented by the Town Center (future rail transit, residential and commercial historic areas, diverse socioeconomics, regional destination, etc.).

The vision needs to become ingrained in the City's institutional memory like the Comprehensive Plan. Perhaps a task force (comprised of City Council members, Planning and Zoning Commissioners, Historic Board member, City Staff and key citizens/property owners/business owners) should be created to champion the vision, keep stakeholders engaged, and steer the implementation process?

The vision is balanced—not too modest but also not too far-fetched. All of the concepts are implementable—some concepts can be achieved with little change in current practices and some concepts may require significant changes in funding routines, development standards, and organizational structure. Sustaining implementation over the long-term will undoubtedly be challenging. Realizing the vision may require city leaders and staff to push beyond their comfort zones and consider implementation strategies that may be innovative and unfamiliar.

Given the general demographic shifts (back to the city movement; aging baby boomers seeking low maintenance housing that is conveniently located close to activity, diversity and vibrancy of urban living; single parent households; multi-generational households, etc.) and emerging retail and office trends, McKinney's Town Center is poised to fill a unique niche for people who want the urban lifestyle but with a small town feel. If the vision is fulfilled, the Town Center could prove to be an appealing alternative to generic suburban subdivisions, strip shopping centers, and congested auto-oriented roads, offering many of the positives of a big city lifestyle without many of the negatives that typically come with a big city.

In his article, *Economics and Historic Preservation*, Donovan Rypkema (1995) observes that “[i]f in the long run we want to attract investment to our communities to have community rebirth, we must differentiate them from anywhere else. It is our built environment that expresses, perhaps better than anything else, our diversity, our identity, our individuality, our differentiation.” In the context of the uniqueness of the Town Center, McKinney offers what no other community in the Metroplex can. But realizing redevelopment and new investment that complements this uniqueness will require a sustained and comprehensive effort for many years.