



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

In far east Dallas there is the need and the desire for better neighborhood-serving commercial establishments, particularly a grocery store, more places to eat, and quality shopping. Over the past two decades, businesses have moved away leaving neglected buildings and high vacancies. The replacements are auto-related, lower tier retail, and social services. Absentee owners and changing demographics precipitated some of the downward trend for what was once a very viable commercial area. Market demands have diminished or changed over time—leading to the exit of larger chain stores and emergence of lower rent apartment complexes. For the White Rock East study area, there are many similarities to the southern parts of the City with the appearance of abandonment or lack of interest. The area’s location close to downtown Dallas, accessible by car and transit, deserves to have its economic potential explored and addressed as it is a gateway into the City from the east.

Impediments to a more robust economy in the study areas are less restrictive commercial zoning districts, unsafe pedestrian crossings, unappealing appearance of the major boulevard, lax code compliance, negatively perceived market conditions, ill maintained apartment complexes and a lingering perception of criminal activity. There are three primary commercial areas, the North Buckner corridor, the Lakeland/ Ferguson intersection and a strip shopping center on Oates, south of Ferguson. The Regional Retail district created in the 1980s on North Buckner now allows many uses that are not compatible with adjacent residential uses. Rezoning to more compatible zoning districts is an option that should be studied in conjunction with economic realities and possibilities to attract new and improved businesses. Replacing under-performing uses with ones desired by the community could be better supported in changes to zoning districts that allow mixed residential and commercial uses in a more urban environment or neighborhood focused businesses and repurposing of older apartments to townhomes. These changes are suggested in the conceptual Strategic Opportunity Areas in the Land Use section of this area plan.

This is not to say that there are not a number of very viable businesses and industries in the area that work well with the residents’ concepts of what could make this a more attractive place to work, eat and shop, particularly along the North Buckner/Loop12 corridor. But North Buckner is a very wide state road that is difficult to drive and unfriendly to pedestrians. Sidewalks and landscaping intermittent at best. This is where urban design and transportation issues can coincide with land use to improve appearance and safety that can, in turn, foster better business opportunities. At Oates Plaza, an absentee owner has neglected the appearance and allowed non neighborhood business to locate in the center. On the other hand, the shopping center on Ferguson at Lakeland has seen some improvements. A post office, dry cleaners, small restaurant and chain pharmacy are currently in place. Still some of the businesses, a “dollar” store, tobacco retailer and alternative financial institution are not what the adjacent neighborhood said they preferred in the SWOT analysis conducted at the beginning of the study.

The apartments in the area are relatively low rent and under maintained. Recent crime reports indicate that crimes of robbery, burglary, drugs and assault are localized within the apartment complexes and that there are now relatively few crimes committed in the adjacent single-family neighborhood. The lower crime rates in the whole area are directly attributable to the activities supported by the Department of Justice Weed and Seed grant and the diligence of the area crime watches. Redevelopment and repurposing of some of the apartment units are addressed in the Land Use section of this plan.

Economic Development Partners

Over the past 15 years, the grassroots organization of neighborhood associations, crime watches, churches, business leaders, and the Ferguson Road Initiative (FRI) have worked to promote economic development in this part of Dallas. In 2011, FRI recognized that there was a need for a business organization like a “chamber of commerce” to support area businesses and encourage new businesses to locate in far east Dallas. Because FRI wanted to retain its residential membership rather than change to a chamber, the **Community Connection** was created. This new FRI outreach enables businesses and service providers to join together to support existing businesses and to attract businesses. Until recently, there has been little interaction with the East Dallas Chamber of Commerce; however the Community Connection is working with them on cooperative projects and membership to foster economic development. Area neighborhood associations and crime watches also want to be involved in supporting local businesses and fostering new development.

Ferguson Road Initiative has an established relationship with the City’s **Office of Economic Development**. When work was begun on this area plan, it was recommended that the FRI economic development plan be used. However the FRI plan is not entirely adaptable to the White Rock East area when looking at the changes that need to occur. A different approach is needed.

Economic Development Tools

The City’s Office of Economic Development and its partners offer a variety of programs designed to assist small businesses in Dallas. These programs include assistance with business operations, training programs, administrative assistance and other services. These services are delivered through eight Business Assistance Centers throughout Dallas. Availability of these services to small business in the study area could perhaps be coordinated through the Ferguson Road Initiative/Community Connection.

Eventually the economy will improve and the prime location of affordable residences and business location opportunities in the study area will be discovered. For renewal and repurposing, there will need to be public and private investment efforts. There are certain tools available for incentives for business development that may be appropriately used in White Rock East. In Dallas, special districts are used to assist with revitalization and development that achieves an adopted community vision. The use of these tools will rely heavily on private investment and assemblage of tracts to be feasible. Presented below are simplified descriptions of possible tools that could be considered in the future.

The most common district used to support capital investment is the **Tax Increment Finance (TIF) District**. A TIF can be a valuable tool in an area where existing property values are low and planned development will result in a significant increase in property value. In a TIF, a base’ property value is established. The TIF plan is created with specific assumptions about development, future value, and capital investment. As development occurs and the property value increases, taxes are levied on the new property value. The taxes related to the ‘base’ value are provided to the appropriate taxing entities. The taxes related to the ‘increment’ of new property value are provided to the TIF fund. In this way, new private investment covers the cost of the infrastructure needed to support the area’s development. In Dallas, the TIF policy would require a developer to propose a viable development worth at least \$100 million in initial investments. This may be difficult to achieve in the study area given the numerous individual property owners, customer base and property values, but it should at least be an option. The steps to create a TIF would include the preparation of a Project Plan and a Reinvestment Zone Plan for



the area, formation of a TIF Board, and approval of the TIF by the Dallas City Council. When there is a major developer in the area that could be in a position to redevelop areas in cooperation with other landowners, this approach could be considered.

Other special districts are **Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and Public Improvement Districts (PIDs)**. Primary characteristics of these districts are that these activities are overseen by a Board of Directors (and often, a paid staff member) and they are paid for by special assessments of the property within the district. Creation of a BID or PID requires the support of property owners in the area as well as the City Council. Activities of these types of districts could include enhanced clean-up operations, programs of signage and banners to identify the area, enhanced landscape maintenance to name a few. The limits to which property owners are willing to assess themselves to provide funding for these operations would be the deciding factor in the creation of a PID or BID. Should there be an interest in such a district, it would need to be coordinated with the Ferguson Road Initiative as a part of their overall economic development plan for discussion with property owners to determine whether, and at what level, there might be support for special district creation. As special districts the PID and BID are similar in that a BID might be more appropriate in a non-residential area whereas a PID could work in an area with a mix of residential and non-residential uses.

Coordination between City departments is needed in areas ripe for revitalization that are relatively built out and have infrastructure in place. The Department of Sustainable Development and Construction reviews zoning, platting, stormwater management, building codes, building permits economic development, as well as coordinating with TxDOT. Guidelines and requirements for this express review service are found on the City's website.

Assessment of Opportunities

This section is included to provide additional insight into issues identified in the other sections of the area plan, particularly Land Use, Transportation, Urban Design and Code Compliance. Issues in those chapters will require a cross pollination of ideas to begin to achieve the desired revitalization of the area.

In order to address a move to more appropriate zoning, there needs to be a focused approach to understanding what would be necessary to attract the desired businesses. A study of the local market area by qualified economists or real estate analysts and development of a strategy would be the basis for finding and incentivizing new development. The steps to develop a sustainable and comprehensive market strategy are as follows:

1. The WRE area must first stabilize by maintaining any positive market forces and prospective market enhancements in terms of new, meaningful development;
2. A WRE coalition of residents and businesses must work with City departments to promote WRE as a viable economic area for existing and new businesses; and
3. Transformation of WRE into an economic center will require an understanding of the current market forces, economic development incentives, zoning modifications, market re-branding, aesthetic enhancements and community (residential and nonresidential) participation.

Implementation Measures

Given the accessible location of White Rock East in the DFW Metroplex, the recommended Implementation Measures will serve to rejuvenate and enhance residential and commercial features that can be implemented in this gateway to Dallas. These proposed measures can and will lead to a more sustainable future for the study area and far east Dallas.

As identified in the SWOT analysis and subsequent work on the plan, the following goal and implementation measures were developed.

Goal	Implementation Measure
<p>Goal ED.1: Vibrant economic locations with sound businesses that provide local needs and services</p>	<p>ED.1.1: Work with businesses and property owners to improve the study area’s overall ability to attract businesses consistent with the needs and desires of citizens.</p>
	<p>ED.1.2: Conduct Market Study to assess the potential for desired and needed businesses and coordinate with appropriate zoning districts.</p>
	<p>ED.1.3: Investigate the feasibility of creating special districts that would allow taxes to be used for improvements.</p>
	<p>ED.1.4: Support the Community Connection of FRI which functions like a chamber of commerce in supporting existing business, attracting new businesses and monitoring economic development.</p>
	<p>ED.1.5: Encourage a quicker zoning and permitting review process that fosters quality, desired development and protects community interests.</p>

These are measures that will understandably take time and effort, but improvements to the area will be improvements for the whole city.