

Executive Summary

The creation of this Northwest Highway and Preston Road Area Plan has been a collaborative effort of homeowners, condominium and apartment residents, commercial property owners, and representatives from the City of Dallas and Regional Transportation organizations. Consultants were retained to gather data and research on a variety of issues that impact the Study Area. The final conclusions and recommendations in the Area Plan were developed and unanimously approved by the Advisory Task Force, which was comprised of 14 volunteers who represented the various constituencies who make up the Study Area.

Issues

There is a broad consensus of opinion among residents and commercial property owners that Preston Center and the surrounding neighborhoods suffer from serious traffic congestion, parking and infrastructure issues.

Research on traffic volumes and patterns support this conclusion and show that almost half of the congestion on Northwest Highway is caused by regional traffic passing through the Study Area. The resulting congestion has caused area residents to object to most major development proposals in and around Preston Center, out of concern that even worse traffic will seriously impact the quality of life in their neighborhoods.

The availability of parking in and around Preston Center is also a major issue to both commercial property owners and to neighborhood residents. Consultants conducted a parking study (See Appendix IV) that found sufficient parking spaces to support the normal needs of existing businesses in Preston Center. However, during the period being studied, approximately 10% of the adjacent retail space was vacant and the study included some tenant-parking only spaces as being publicly available. The ATF believes that if Preston Center is developed to its full potential, there will be a serious shortage of convenient parking for customers and employees. In addition, the vast majority of the public parking is located in an obsolete 60-year-old parking structure that visually dominates the area.

COMMUNITY ISSUES & CONCERNS

- Traffic Congestion
- Availability of Convenient Parking
- Quality and Condition of Infrastructure

Single Family Residential Neighborhoods

The residential neighborhoods that surround Preston Center are well established and are among the highest value in the entire City of Dallas. These neighborhoods are well maintained, and over the past 20 years the residential tax base has increased significantly as older homes have been replaced with new custom homes. The Advisory Task Force concluded that the Area Plan must make it a priority to protect and preserve the vitality and quality of life in these neighborhoods. Residents are very concerned that residential proximity slope projections be maintained to minimize commercial and multi-family encroachment on their neighborhoods and want to see greater efforts to mitigate traffic. They have also expressed interest in efforts to make their neighborhoods more pedestrian friendly, with better access to Preston Center.



Multi-Family Residential Neighborhoods

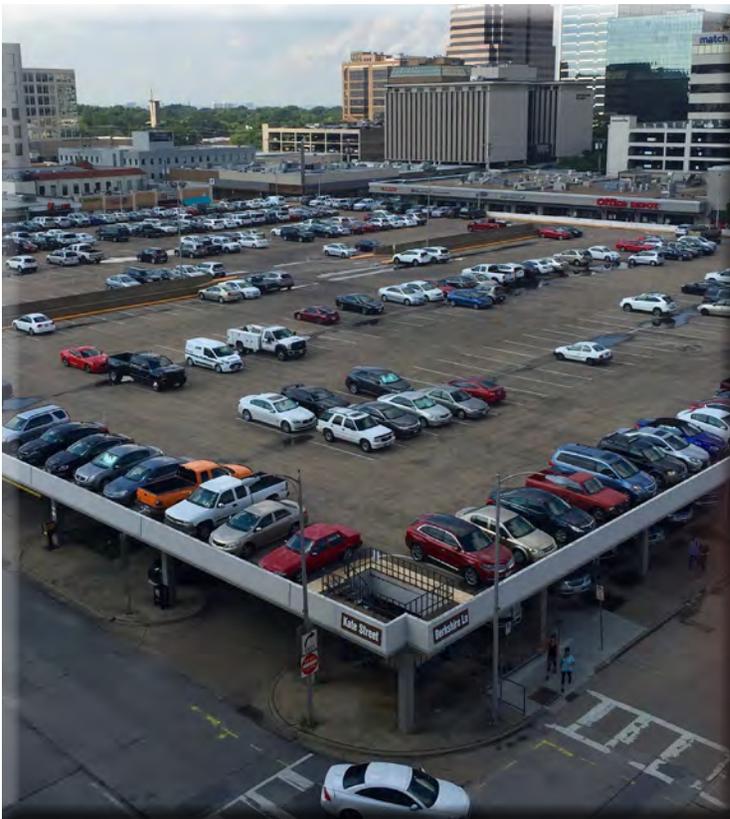
Most of the multi-family residential units in the Preston Center area are located along the north side of Northwest Highway, between Preston and Hillcrest Roads. Originally developed in the 1960's, this neighborhood contains both high-rise and low-rise condominiums, rental apartments, senior living facilities, and limited commercial developments near the intersection of Northwest Highway and Hillcrest Road. Over the past ten years, a significant portion of this neighborhood has been redeveloped. Most of the residents in this multi-family neighborhood and in the adjoining single family neighborhoods to the north want to limit additional redevelopment projects to a maximum of four stories, with smaller building footprints and more green space.

There are serious deficiencies in the storm water drainage systems serving this neighborhood, causing recurring flooding and property damage, and continuing redevelopment will exacerbate these issues. The City of Dallas needs to address these problems in order to accommodate the increased density that is permitted under current zoning.

Preston Center

Preston Center was established about 65 years ago as a thriving suburban retail center, but it has since evolved into one of the most successful office sub-markets in the region. Today, Preston Center has approximately 3 million square feet of office space, 500,000 square feet of retail space, a hotel, and 129 multi-family residential units. As NorthPark was developed and expanded as the premier regional shopping center, the nature of the Preston Center retail space has shifted toward restaurants and retailers that primarily serve the immediate neighborhood.

From a planning perspective, redevelopment of the old retail areas of Preston Center (generally bounded by Northwest Highway, Preston Road, Sherry Lane and Douglas Avenue) has the greatest potential to enhance the overall neighborhood and significantly increase the area tax base for the City of Dallas. From a practical perspective, however, there are several factors that complicate the ability to execute any plan:



- Property ownership in the planning area is broken into small parcels and no single owner currently controls sufficient land to dramatically change the nature of development in the area.
- Current zoning permits a wide variety of land uses on most parcels, but because most sites are too small to accommodate underground parking, the typical land use is one-story retail.
- Traditionally, the most profitable development opportunities in Preston Center have been single parcel office buildings. From a neighborhood perspective, office buildings are the least desirable stand-alone land use because they generate significant traffic, concentrated during rush hour.
- The area is visually dominated by an obsolete 60-year-old parking garage that is owned by the City, but is operated and maintained by a private corporation. The replacement and/or redevelopment of the garage is complicated by numerous deed restrictions and easements, some of which require unanimous approval of adjoining property owners.
- Preston Center has very little green space, and the streetscape and lighting is not consistent. In contrast, the portion of Preston Center located in University Park (east of Preston Road) is under common ownership and has achieved a much more upscale and inviting environment.

Community Vision

This report presents an Area Plan for the Northwest Highway and Preston Road neighborhoods that is based on a community vision for the future. The Advisory Task Force was comprised of representatives of all major constituencies who reside in and/or own commercial property in the Study Area. Based on extensive discussions of issues and opportunities, community input during public meetings and private conversations with constituents, and research findings provided by government officials and project consultants, the following Community Vision evolved:

COMMUNITY VISION STATEMENT

The Northwest Highway and Preston Road area will maintain and enhance its position as one of the most desirable and livable residential areas in the City of Dallas, offering stable, protected neighborhoods with a range of great housing alternatives, from rental apartments to estate properties. A renewed, walkable Preston Center will serve as an urban core for the surrounding neighborhoods, with a balanced mixture of office, retail, residential, hospitality and entertainment facilities, making it possible to live, work and play without getting into your automobile.

- The overall vision for the Study Area is for Preston Center to become a revitalized and expanded urban core, surrounded by vibrant, high-quality residential neighborhoods that are protected from commercial and multi-family encroachment within their current boundaries.
- Both residential and commercial property owners visualize improved mobility in the Study Area. If aggressive and continuing steps are taken by City of Dallas and Regional Transportation officials to mitigate traffic congestion, the majority of constituents support efforts to rejuvenate and increase the density of development in and around Preston Center.
- The single-family residential neighborhoods surrounding Preston Center are vibrant and have been continually maintained as some of the most desirable places to live in Dallas. In a natural cycle of renewal, many of the older houses have been replaced with larger custom homes. The vision for these neighborhoods is to maintain their exclusively residential nature, and to maintain and improve pedestrian and bicycle accessibility.
- Multi-family residential developments would be encouraged in Preston Center (Zone 1) in addition to the current concentration of condominiums and apartments along Northwest Highway, between Preston and Hillcrest Roads (Zone 4). While a significant portion of the current multi-family in Zone 4 has already been redeveloped, this renewal and replacement of housing stock is visualized to continue, with increased density but with building heights not exceeding four stories in Zone 4. In and around Preston Center (Zone 1), new mid-rise and high-rise residential and mixed-use construction would be allowed and encouraged.
- Preston Center is visualized as a mixed-use urban core for the Study Area. The vision is to create a new community center that would be easily accessible from the surrounding neighborhoods, but where people can live, work, shop and be entertained without needing to use an automobile. The goal would be to redevelop much of the current retail space in buildings that feature ground floor retail businesses, with residential units on the upper floors.

Critical Elements

Any comprehensive plan for the Northwest Highway and Preston Road Area must address two critical elements: traffic congestion and the obsolete parking structure that visually dominates Preston Center.

The accompanying report addresses numerous opportunities to mitigate traffic on Northwest Highway and on Preston Road. Several mitigation projects have already been initiated by TxDOT and were under way at the time of the study. In addition, regional transportation authorities are currently studying a variety of projects that would enhance mobility and lessen traffic issues in the area. The active pursuit of these alternatives will be critical to support the visualized increase in density in Preston Center and to sustain community support for this Area Plan.

The biggest impediment to the successful redevelopment of Preston Center is the existing City-owned parking structure that dominates the area. Over the past 30 years, much of the retail space surrounding the garage has been renovated or replaced with newer versions of the one-story spaces that have been there for the past 60 years. The current garage exacerbates traffic issues in Preston Center and materially limits the desirability of the neighborhood for serious redevelopment efforts. If the goal is to create a new urban center, the existing parking structure must be replaced or totally redeveloped so that sufficiency and accessibility of parking is improved and new community spaces created. This will be a complicated project, and it will be expensive.

The Advisory Task Force concluded that the optimal solution was to propose a new underground parking garage with a park at ground level. This would literally change the landscape in Preston Center, creating a highly desirable centerpiece for the entire neighborhood. The market potential for mixed-use development around the park is significantly greater than would be expected from a major renovation/expansion of the existing garage. While the existing garage is a deterrent to high quality development, a new underground parking facility and park would make the neighborhood surrounding it one of the most desirable new development locations in the City of Dallas.

Based on preliminary conversations with both private and public entities, there appears to be great potential for the creation of public-private partnerships to build and maintain the park and the garage. In addition, an underground parking facility would provide great opportunities to mitigate traffic congestion through direct garage access from Northwest Highway and Preston Road. However, if public/private financing for the ideal solution cannot be identified within 24 months of the date of this report, an alternative plan to expand and upgrade the current garage should be pursued.



Multi-Family Neighborhoods (Zone 4)

This zone is located immediately north of Northwest Highway, between Hillcrest and Preston Roads. Originally developed in the 1960's, this neighborhood contains both high-rise and low-rise condominiums, rental apartments, senior living facilities and limited commercial developments. (See Appendix I, Existing Zoning). Over the past ten years, there have been a number of redevelopment projects in this neighborhood and this trend is likely to continue, as it did in the single-family neighborhoods to the north. Presently, there are approximately 2,250 units of multifamily housing in Zone 4.

To date, most of the Zone 4 redevelopment activity has occurred east of Edgemere Road and very few sites remain available for redevelopment. The only commercial developments in the zone are located at the southeast corner, near the intersection of Hillcrest Road and Northwest Highway. The majority of the new multi-family developments in eastern half of the zone are luxury rental apartments.



West of Edgemere Road, Zone 4 is primarily comprised of multi-family condominiums that were developed prior to 1975. While some of the condominiums are available for rental, the majority of the housing in the western part of Zone 4 is owner occupied. Two high-rise buildings (Preston Tower and the Athena) were constructed in 1966 but current zoning prohibits the development of more high-rise buildings in the Zone. The typical condominium developments in Zone 4 are two-story garden apartments. The Laurel Apartments, now under construction at Preston Road and Northwest Highway, is the first major redevelopment project in the western part of Zone 4.



Preston Tower and the Athena



Typical Residential Development West of Edgemere Road

If the entirety of Zone 4 was redeveloped under current zoning, theoretical density could be doubled. However, the combination of deed restrictions, relatively new developments that do not max out density, and demand for larger, more spacious residential units probably limit likely growth to less than the density currently allowed.

Homeowners and residents in Zone 4 report serious deficiencies in the storm water drainage systems serving the neighborhood as it now exists, causing recurring flooding and property damage in several areas. During heavy rains on July 4, 2016, the 29-story Preston Tower condominium building experienced significant flooding in its parking garage, due to an inability of the City's storm water drainage system to accommodate the record rainfall in the area. Continuing redevelopment will exacerbate this problem, and the City of Dallas needs to address these issues in order to accommodate the increased density that is permitted under current zoning. Additionally, inadequate sidewalks and an over-reliance on parking on City streets adversely impact auto and pedestrian mobility within the neighborhood.

Current residents are receptive to continued redevelopment and increased density, but they also want to preserve the quality of life in the neighborhood. For planning purposes, there is a general willingness to accept four-story structures in return for smaller building footprints that would preserve open spaces. Residents strongly desire that all new developments meet city codes for on-site parking, and they would greatly prefer underground parking whenever feasible. There is a broad consensus that the zone should remain residential in nature, and that retail and office development should be limited to the existing commercial area at the southeastern corner of the zone.

Multi-Family Neighborhoods (Zone 4)

Zone 4 is envisioned as a renewable, multi-family enclave giving preference to owner-occupied condominium units and senior living facilities. Retail and commercial development is limited to the existing area at the southeast corner of the zone.

The Preferred Vision would maintain an orientation toward large, owner-occupied condominiums appealing to people ready to downsize from single-family homes, but who would enjoy living in the Preston Hollow area. The vision would allow for the gradual augmentation of various housing types in the neighborhood, with higher density than now exists, but with the understanding that particular attention be given to the need for improved infrastructure, most especially the enhancement of existing storm water drainage systems. In addition, new developments should include on-site parking for residents and guests (preferably underground), greater landscaping and open space, and pedestrian-friendly amenities (see Appendix II). Building heights within the zone should be restricted by the existing City of Dallas proximity slope limitations designed to protect the single-family neighborhoods located north of Bandera Avenue; and throughout the zone, new multi-family residential structures would not exceed four stories in height. The plan envisions the highest density development to be concentrated along the Northwest Highway frontages. The two existing high-rise residential structures would continue to be the only such buildings in the zone.

Over the past ten years, a significant portion of Zone 4 has been or is currently being redeveloped, and the existing redevelopment projects are generally representative of the quality and scale that is envisioned. The Preferred Vision consists mainly of replacing the remaining older, multi-family housing stock. Although some areas of Zone 4 are subject to deed restrictions that limit density, current zoning generally allows for three-story, multi-family construction that would dramatically increase lot coverage and reduce the open spaces and landscaping that now exist. The Preferred Vision assumes that much of the current zoning will be changed as this area is redeveloped, permitting increased height as a trade-off for reduced lot coverage and other features that would improve the quality of life in the neighborhood and meet the needs of the community.



Key Policies, Strategies and Actions

The Northwest Highway and Preston Road Area Plan has been developed through the collaborative efforts of a broad cross section of property owners in the Study Area. Community preferences have been balanced with commercial and residential property rights. The Task Force members have solicited and received input from their various constituencies and have represented those interests in a good faith effort to create a consensus plan for the Study Area.

An overriding concern of virtually all participants has been related to traffic congestion, parking problems and infrastructure deficiencies in the Study Area. These issues have been the basis for numerous zoning controversies in recent years. Projects that seek to mitigate these issues should be encouraged. The Task Force has received support from the City of Dallas and from regional and state transportation officials to pursue an aggressive program to mitigate these issues. These efforts represent a fundamental foundation for the consensus plan, which was developed and presented to the City in October 2016 for adoption by the City Plan Commission and City Council.

The following assumptions underlie the Preferred Visions for Zones 1 through 7 and will be critical for the successful implementation of the Plan:

- NCTCOG should expedite further study of design, cost and transportation system connections for the proposed underground parking facility in Zone 1.
- The City of Dallas should inventory critical infrastructure needs in the study area, with particular attention to the storm sewer problems in Zone 4 and the condition of streets, alleys, sidewalks and lighting in Zone 1.
- The City of Dallas should actively support both design and operational initiatives to encourage the development of a vibrant, pedestrian friendly environment at the core of Preston Center (see Appendix III, Pedestrians and Bicycles). Streetscape designs should anticipate extensive sidewalk dining and entertainment, and citywide policies and regulations should be evaluated to insure that they do not unnecessarily restrict desirable activities that would add life and vitality to the neighborhood. As the area redevelops, sidewalks in the City of Dallas right-of-way should be a minimum of 8 feet in width in Preston Center.
- As soon as a decision is made regarding the replacement versus renovation/expansion of the Preston Center Parking Garage, the City of Dallas should concurrently develop recommendations on how to best improve circulation, reduce traffic congestion, and improve wayfinding and public realm improvements within Preston Center. In addition, the City should support the creation of a Public Improvement District (PID) and/or Tax Increment Financing District (TIF), or other funding mechanisms, in order to create a revenue stream for public improvements and ongoing maintenance of city-owned infrastructure and facilities.
- NCTCOG should study the feasibility and cost of constructing a tolled, underground tunnel of yet-to-be-determined length beneath or near Northwest Highway (or other traffic infrastructure) to divert non-local, through commuter traffic from the study area. The Advisory Task Force requested on 1/28/16 that NCTCOG study such a tunnel, including the pros and cons of varying lengths (from a few blocks to eight miles) and the viability of an underground connection between the tunnel and the proposed new Preston Center garage.

- NTCCOG should work with the North Texas Tollway Authority (NTTA) and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), which owns and maintains Northwest Highway, to develop a plan to improve the Northwest Highway/Dallas North Tollway interchange.
 - If engineering issues can be solved, a Texas U-turn should be built on the south side of Northwest Highway where it crosses the Dallas North Tollway. This would enable cars to leave Preston Center and enter the southbound Dallas North Tollway without accessing Northwest Highway.
 - The northbound Tollway exit ramp at Northwest Highway should be redesigned, if feasible, so exiting cars can make an immediate right turn on Sherry Lane and Luther Lane, allowing people to access numerous high-rise buildings without going around the block.
- New exit ramps should be built (where none exist now) along southbound Dallas North Tollway at Walnut Hill and at Lovers Lane in order to reduce traffic exiting at Northwest Highway.
- The signal light installed in 2015 in front of the City of Dallas Fire Station No. 27 at Northwest Highway just west of Douglas Avenue, should be deactivated at all times, except when emergency vehicles are in active service and need to exit the firehouse.
- TxDOT, NCTCOG, the City of Dallas and University Park should study the feasibility of adding one or more pedestrian bridges or tunnels across Northwest Highway in order to connect residential neighborhoods to Preston Center East and West.

Next Steps

Although the Northwest Highway and Preston Road Area Plan does not bind the City of Dallas to implement any of its recommendations, it is the hope of both the 14-member Advisory Task Force and the many area stakeholders they represented over the course of 18 months, that current and future City officials will use this document as an important guideline for any development decisions made in the study area (see Figure 4 “Long-Term Framework Plan”).

Bicycle and Pedestrian Access

A key desire expressed on numerous occasions by the community was better and safer pedestrian and bicycle connectivity to Zone 1 from the surrounding neighborhoods. The Preferred Vision for Zone 1 also includes a pedestrian tunnel or bridge under or over Northwest Highway to allow area residents to bike, walk, jog or roller blade to Preston Center safely and easily. Per community feedback, the pedestrian tunnel and/or pedestrian bridge would appropriately be located between Douglas Avenue and Pickwick Lane and the exact location is subject to a detailed study by the City and TxDOT. (See Appendix III, Pedestrian and Bicycles)



Pedestrian Accessibility

The Northwest Highway and Preston Road Area Plan study team inventoried facilities that support an active pedestrian and bicycle environment. Local parks, trails and sidewalks are presented in Figure III-1. Zone 4 east of Edgemere to Hillcrest has connected sidewalks, while Zone 4 west of Edgemere to Preston lack sidewalk connectivity. Zone 1 has a relatively complete sidewalk system on newly developed sites but lacking sidewalk connectivity in established development. The majority of the Study Area in the central and westerly portion has “rural” style roads with very few sidewalks. These narrow streets have open bar ditches and tend to encourage drivers to slow down and discourage cut through traffic. The street grid in these areas is generally friendly to bicyclists because the vehicular traffic is slower. Illustrated in Figure III-1 is the one-quarter mile radius (approximate 5-minute walking distance) and the one-half mile radius from the center of the Preston Center parking garage. Preston Center is close to the majority of residential in the Study Area.

Pedestrian Recommendations for Zone 1 at Northwest Highway and Preston Road:

Both Northwest Highway and Preston Road are currently auto-oriented and are extremely difficult to cross or walk along safely. Improvements to make these roadways more inviting and walkable are key to providing options for accessing the Preston Center amenities from adjacent neighborhoods. (NOTE: Specific pedestrian-related recommendations could be modified in the short term, depending on the outcome of the design of the new, city-owned parking garage being proposed for Preston Center; likewise, if a traffic tunnel is constructed under Northwest Highway, as desired, these pedestrian-related recommendations could also change.)

The following pedestrian improvements are recommended on and near this primary intersection:

- Provide enhanced crosswalks/pavement markings at Northwest Highway and Hillcrest, Thackery, Preston, Pickwick, Douglas, and the Dallas North Tollway. Also provide same along Douglas from Northwest Highway to Sherry Lane at every intersection.
- Maximize widths of sidewalks overall as property redevelops with a goal of providing a minimum of eight-foot sidewalks.
- Complete missing sidewalks on Northwest Highway and Preston Road. (Initiate a sidewalk improvement program funded through private/public funds.)
- Improve walkways along building frontages (on the south side of Northwest Highway) through signage and markings so that there is a clear walkway along the building. This provides pedestrians with a clear path to walk along the building frontage along Northwest Highway, without having to walk along the road, through the parking lots, which is now the practice.
- Provide crosswalks at cross streets within Preston Center at Northwest Highway, and assess potential for six-foot pedestrian refuge islands at the intersection of Preston and Northwest Highway (explore potential to narrow each traffic lane by one foot to obtain sufficient median width).
- Provide sidewalk and trees along the north side of Northwest Highway as the property develops, and delineate a sidewalk through the wide driveway area on the outside of the office building at the northwest corner of Northwest Highway and Preston Road.
- Explore underground or above-ground crossings from neighborhoods on the north side of Northwest Highway to Preston Center, and reconfigure streets connecting with Zone 1 to enhance entrances, control access and improve landscaping.
- Coordinate with Northwest Bible Church to replace their existing wall along Northwest Highway, just west of the Dallas North Tollway, to allow a sidewalk along Northwest Highway.

Pedestrian Recommendations for Zone 4:

Improvements to the streetscape and public realm that serve and enhance the existing land uses allow residents to connect to an increasingly walkable neighborhood. These improvements will also serve to ready the area for strategic longer term redevelopment at the desire and timing of existing property owners.

The following pedestrian improvements are recommended for Zone 4:

- Upgrade street trees and provide new street trees in areas with gaps in tree cover.
- Provide perimeter sidewalk connections along Preston, Walnut Hill, Hillcrest and Northwest Highway.
- Support resident requests to install sidewalks on a block-by-block basis, with owner initiation per city policy.
- Complete sidewalks on Edgemere and Hillcrest.
- Improve crosswalks from Zone 4 across Northwest Highway at Edgemere.
- Redesign Bandera to 12' lanes and 5' sidewalks on the south side.
- Follow city bike plan to place a shared-use trail along the east side of Preston Road from Northwest Highway to Walnut Hill Lane.
- Identify opportunities for strategic open space enhancements such as outdoor seating areas, landscape zones, street trees, shade structures and lighting.
- City should consider using the public right-of-way to create a connected urban form