

# **Northeast Denton Small Area Plan Proposal**

## **Offered by the North Denton Neighborhood Association and Denton Community**

### **Our Proposal in Brief**

In this document we propose the City of Denton create a Small Area Plan for northeast Denton, which we believe represents a wonderful, compelling vision for this area and offers an extraordinary legacy for the Denton community.

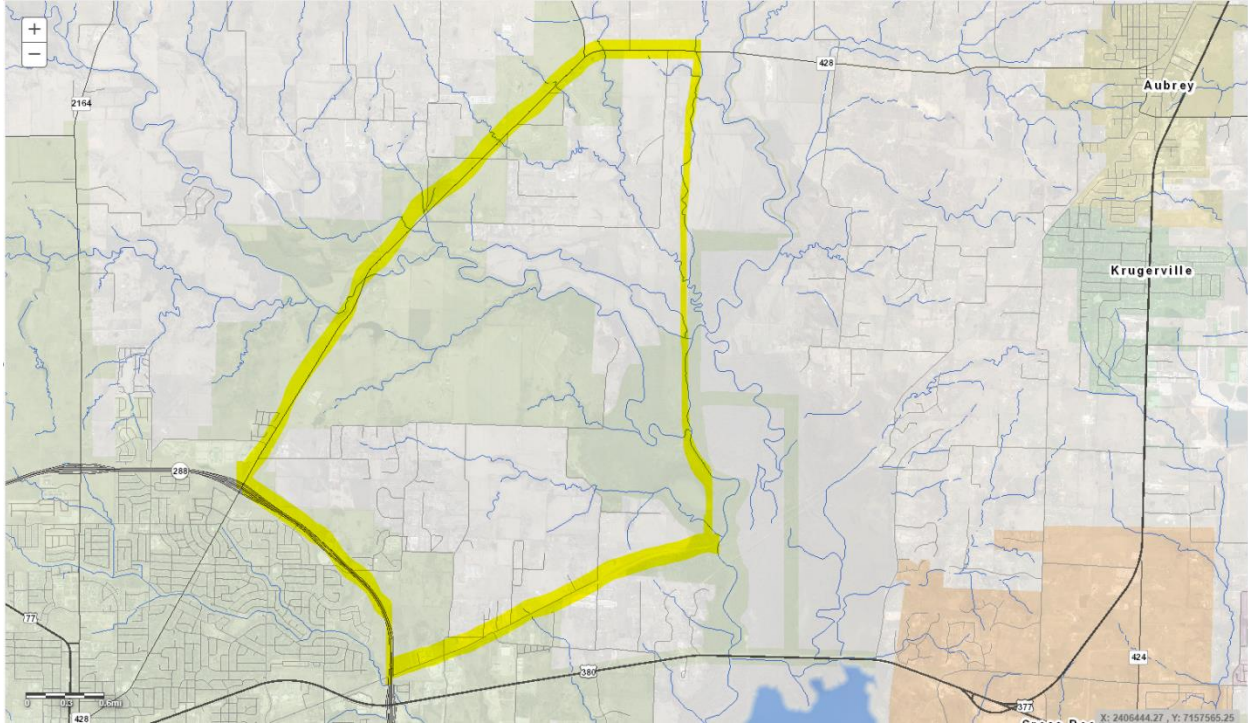
Our plan promotes certain special aspects of northeast Denton as an outstanding resource for the people of Denton and addresses the challenges for the area. Our vision is to set the base for housing density of the area, create a network of parks and trails, a nature preserve, botanical garden, arboretum, music and arts venues and historical interpretive centers.

These together can be viewed as a cluster of parks, venues and open spaces, much like Zilker Park in Austin. Not only will these provide a beautiful recreation hub and park system, they will highlight various aspects of what makes Denton such a special place. As called for in the Denton Plan 2030, land use zoning is to be graduated with distance from the City center, culminating in parks and wildlife corridors along the riparian ways. This will encourage growth and greater density in the city center which will be more tax-efficient and create greater vitality for the downtown. By prioritizing the preservation and careful utilization of this area, we believe it will add immeasurably to the quality of life of the people (and wildlife) in this area and serve as an attractive selling point for the City as it continues to recruit new businesses and growth to Denton for generations to come.

### **WHERE: Area of Proposed Small Area Plan**

We recommend that the City of Denton create and implement a Small Area Plan for this carefully defined area:

- Southern boundary along the railroad tracks alongside Mingo Road
- Eastern boundary defined by the Elm Fork of the Trinity River and Greenbelt
- Northern boundary defined by the area to the south and east of FM 428
- Western boundary defined by FM 428 and Loop 288



**Figure 1.** Area proposed for Small Area Plan highlighted

This area is defined to incorporate natural geographic boundaries and commonalities. The natural geographic boundaries are the Elm Fork of the Trinity River and its floodplain to the east and the railroad tracks (with only two crossings) to the south. Additionally, this area has special proximity to rivers and creeks providing wildlife habitat and diversity, and providing critical watershed feeding into Lake Lewisville. The commonalities are the predominant current agricultural and rural zoning, with small areas of low-density residential development to the south and west.

**WHY:**

We in North Texas, like many other cities across the U.S. South, face the challenges of managing great change – population migration and growth, climate change, technological change, and need for education, commerce and industry to provide skills, jobs, purpose, goods and services to residents to advance our well-being. The open space in the region, which so many enjoy for recreational and psychological well-being and which provides our drinking water, clean air and habitat for wildlife, is rapidly shrinking.

With the rapid growth in the region, we see a dwindling opportunity for the City of Denton to tap the brakes and carefully think through what the City and people of the area want not just today, but tomorrow. How a city evolves and engages these force of change makes an enormous difference in the quality of life of its citizens. We recognize that the role of city

planning is to anticipate these changes, balance multiple needs, and model the city to address these challenges while preserving and enhancing what is most special about the community and the area. It is the very special nature of Denton that brings people here and keeps them here. Finding creative ways to keep Denton distinct from its neighbors is an important part of that planning and growth.

The northeast quadrant of Denton is unique and special in the community for its wildlife, environmental, natural history, scenic, recreational and agricultural attributes and its geographic isolation which limits its suitability for mass housing development. According to the North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) Regional Ecosystem Framework (REF), this is the most environmentally-sensitive area in all of Denton County, earning a high REF Composite score of 35 (See Figure 4, below). Much of this area has been given the highest REF Rarity score of 5, which score looks at Vegetation Rarity, Natural Heritage Rank, Taxonomic Richness, and Rare Species Richness,. The area also earned scores of 5 in the categories of Wetlands and Wildlife Habitat, and scores of 4 in Natural and, importantly, Diversity.<sup>1</sup>

Being relatively isolated from a mobility standpoint by rivers, creeks, floodplains, limited-access divided highways (current & proposed), and railroad right-of-way, and having these important natural resources, this area creates challenges for subdivision development in terms of limited road access and safety while alternatively presenting great potential in the long term as a wonderful resource for the community as proposed herein.

With the extraordinary growth in the North Texas region, there have been massive, rapid changes in land use. Recently, the pressures have shifted to northeast Denton. Given the special environmental realities of the area, now is the time to be proactive in thoughtfully creating a vision and plan for this area before it is too late. Once it is gone there is no going back, wishing we had done something differently.

We see this time as an opportunity to think big about how this area could best serve the people of North Texas for generations to come. Our proposed plan seeks to preserve through designated land use certain critically important environmental and ecological attributes of the area that contribute to the health and well-being of all residents of Denton and the surrounding areas. It considers and incorporates recommended growth patterns, mobility, education, music & arts, and history, all of which are important defining themes for the Denton community.

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<sup>1</sup> Follow this link for the interactive Regional Ecosystem Framework Map.  
<https://nctcoggis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=629ea7bf1f5e4d93a38f857ebb1f2f1f>  
You can follow this link for the data dictionary to better understand the terms and the ratings:  
<https://www.nctcog.org/envir/natural-resources/regional-ecosystem-framework>

With this plan the City of Denton will become the most attractive city in all of North Texas for quality of life and depth of community resources, creating a distinctive and everlasting brand for the city.

## DREAMING BIG: OUR VISION

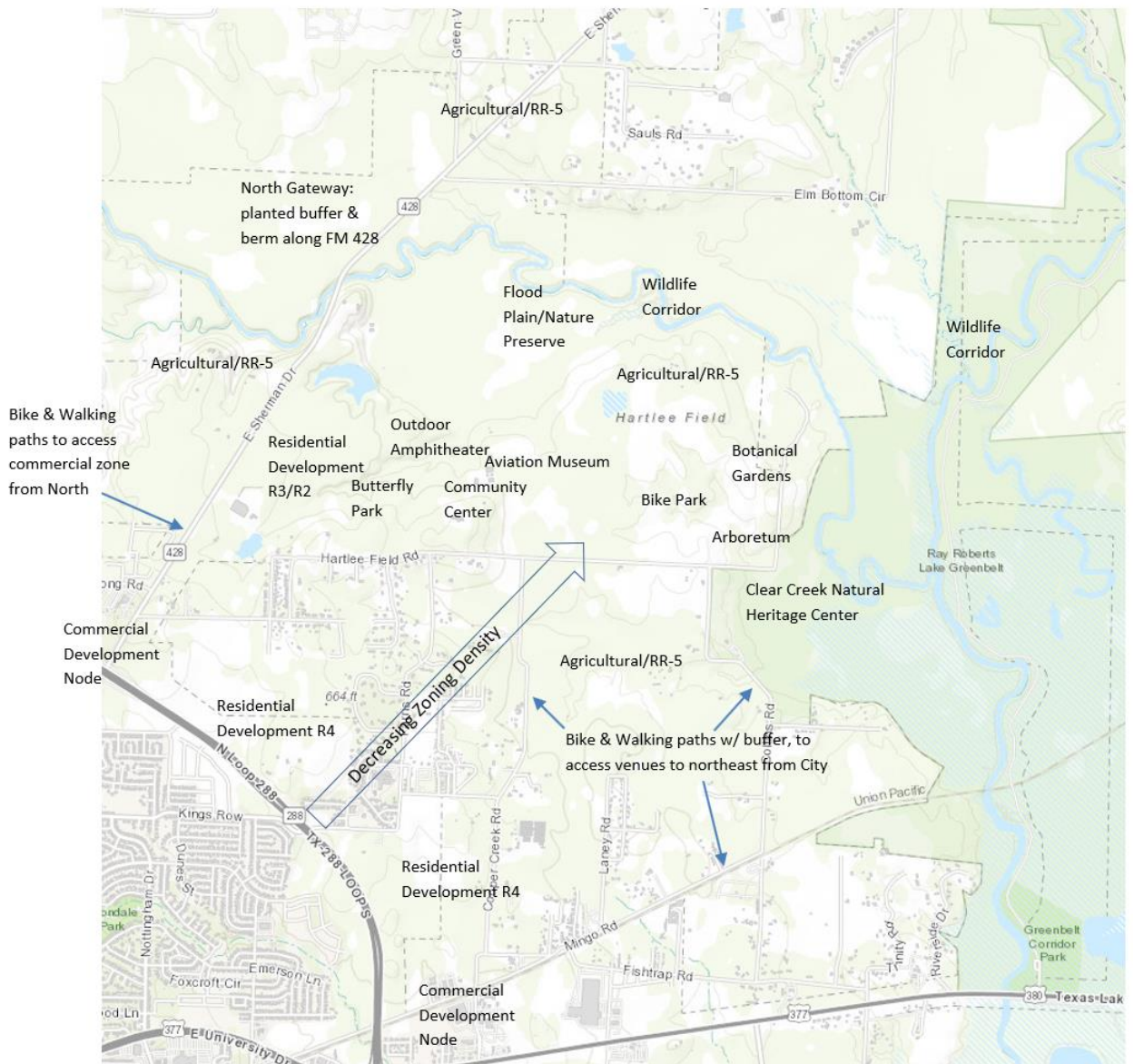


Figure 2. Preliminary plan

## Quality of Life

- Heritage of farm and ranch land
- Recreation, promoting healthy lifestyle
- Music & arts
- Education

## Environmental Preservation

- Wildlife habitat & protection; green right-of-way/wildlife corridor
- Watershed protection
- Tree preservation (Cross Timbers and bottomlands)
- Preserve natural flood zones and ecosystem

## Historic Preservation

- Hartlee Field - preserve and educate
- Cooper Creek historic settlement
- Preserve cemeteries (viz. slave cemetery found near Deerwood)
- Preserve a vestige of our historic past of agricultural & ranch land

## Economic Sustainability

- Encourage infill pattern of development for City
- Discourage suburban sprawl and their adverse impact on city budgets long-term (viz. Strong Towns)

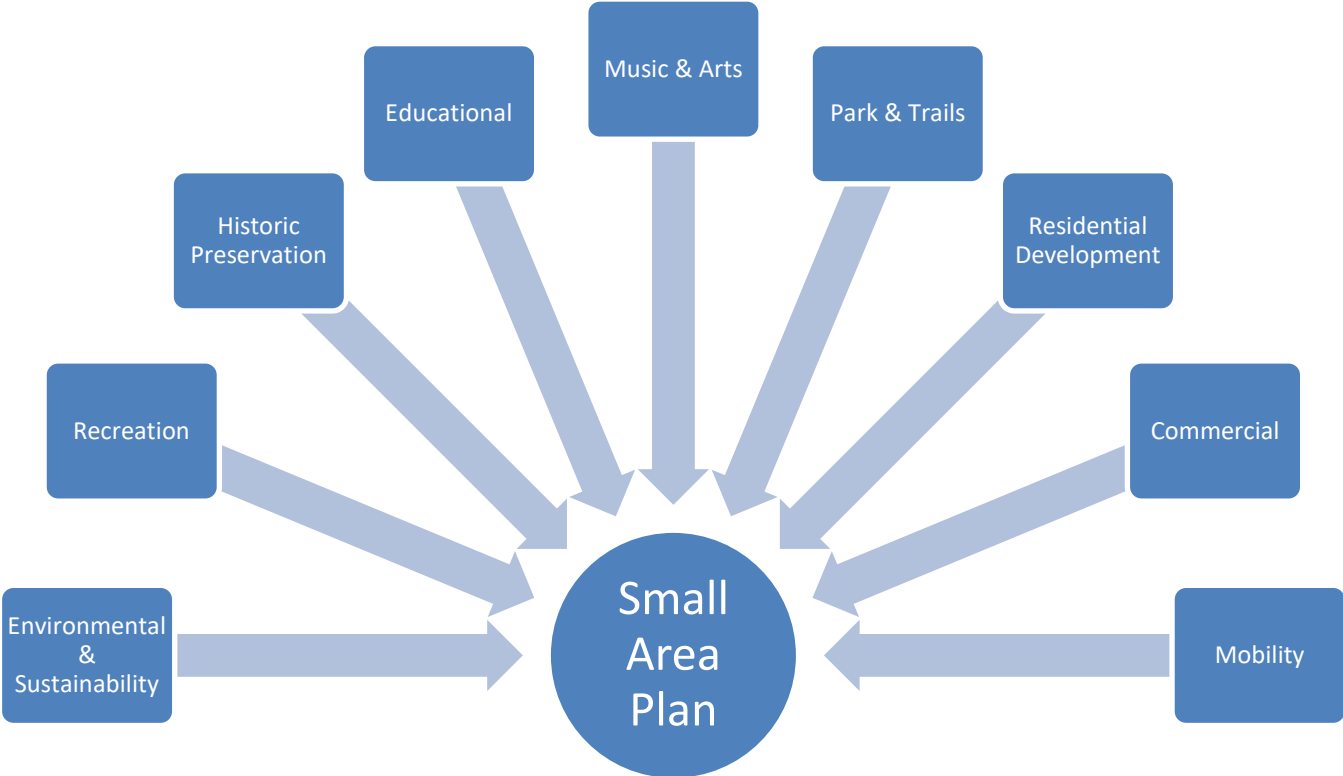
## Create a Legacy

- Scenic country roads and trails for biking, walking, hiking, horseback riding, etc.
- Parks & museums
- Music & arts venues
- Historic preservation
- Nature & historic interpretive centers

This part of Denton is to become a destination for everyone to enjoy. As the nearby areas become developed, this will be an oasis; a "Central Park" for North Texas. With its museums, arts venues, arboretum and gardens, bike park, and hiking trails through the green corridors, we see this as a lasting legacy. It will enhance the quality of life and culture of Denton and become an attraction for the entire region, contributing greatly to the vitality of Denton.

### SMALL AREA PLAN VISION: ASPECTS OF THE PLAN

We see the following elements as part of our vision:



Considering each aspect individually, we recommend the following elements be developed.

## Environmental & Sustainability

- Open lands to the extent practical
  - Rural residential
  - Agricultural
  - Park land
- Low-impact residential & other development
  - Low density; conservation development per Comprehensive Plan
  - Reduced runoff, fertilizer, pesticides
- Maintain watershed quality
- Maintain indigenous Cross Timbers forests & prairie
- Wildlife habitat (“oasis” within Denton)
- Environmental education to the community (see Education)



## Recreation

- Trails for biking, walking, hiking and horseback riding
  - Offer a variety of trail surfaces. Mostly gravel/decomposed granite; some paved (for wheelchair access)
  - Take advantage of creeks and riverways to create continuous paths
- Maintain rural, low-traffic roads for biking [no one wants to bike along busy roads] and for distance running (viz. Ryan HS track team on Hartlee Field Rd every Saturday morning)
- Bike ways radiating out of central part of City (along Mingo Rd. and Sherman Dr.) for easy access and to create loops
  - Mingo Rd. developed with a wide buffer alongside with trees and bike/walking path (native plants, trees & shrubs that do not require watering and have low maintenance)
- Outdoor fitness “courses”
- A Community Center and Artist's Retreat (for which the Carter mansion would serve beautifully), which may be used for (a) Horticultural and environmental awareness classes, (b) Cooking for healthy eating and nutritional classes, (c) yoga classes, (d) art and ceramics classes, (e) art exhibits by local artists, (f) small concerts by local musicians, and (g) Art films followed by group discussions (we believe there is a small movie theater in the mansion)
- Community vegetable gardens (plots reserved by City residents)
- Butterfly garden
- Mountain bike park (add bike shop manned by a local bike shop on weekends with beverages, snacks and picnic tables)
- Childrens’ playground with playground equipment and picnic tables
- Create trails (bike/walking/hiking/equestrian) that extend from Cross Timbers heights (Coyote Point/Oak Bend) down through prairie to riparian bottomland forests with interpretive points along the way



Photo from potential partner TWU's Butterfly Garden [www.twu.edu/butterfly-garden](http://www.twu.edu/butterfly-garden)

## Historic Preservation

- Landmark status for Hartlee Field
  - Aviation museum
- Natural history interpretative center and trail
  - Underfoot fossils of sabre-toothed tigers, elephants & giant sloths
  - Local geological history and how it gave rise to local river and agricultural resources
  - Cross Timbers habitat
  - Current wildlife found in area
- Cooper Creek settlement - becomes central to highlight history of early settlers in Denton
- Agricultural and ranching heritage



**Historic Hartlee Field**

## Educational Venues

- Clear Creek Park natural heritage interpretive center
  - Mini-museum illustrating wildlife of area, history (Native American, Mexican and pioneer settlement, etc.)
  - Butterfly park and gardens (associated with TWU butterfly research group)
  - Guided natural history tours on weekends (with volunteer docents)
  - Lectures on natural history or environmental topics
  - Picnic area and food shop for weekend visitors; make a lunch destination (if successful, could become more permanent restaurant, with facility owned by City but leased to restaurateur)
  - Models: Heard Museum, McKinney ([Heard Museum – Natural Science Museum & Wildlife Sanctuary](#))
- Hartlee Field aviation and/or history museum
  - Provide aviation history museum
  - And possibly celebrate north Texans' role in various wars, especially highlighting Hartlee Air Field and missile base nearby.
  - (May find very willing partners in American Airlines, Southwest Airlines, Raytheon, M1 Support Services and others)
- Arboretum (there are huge existing Pecan and Oak trees along Hartlee Field Rd. at the Clear Creek Natural Heritage Center, which would only require some clearing and pathways to make it attractive and accessible, with modest signage identifying specimen trees)
- Associated Botanical Center featuring native species, prairie and woodland areas (can be funded by annual plant sales by volunteers)
- See as model: Zilker Park, Austin [Zilker Park: Most-Loved Park in Austin, Texas \(austinparks.org\)](#)
- Create trails (bike/walking/hiking/equestrian) that extend from Cross Timbers heights (Coyote Point/Oak Bend) down through prairie (with Pleistocene fossils (e.g., camels and sloths) underfoot) to riparian bottomland forests with interpretive points along the way

## Music & Arts

- Establish an outdoor music and theater venue (amphitheater as a mini-Red Rocks or Tanglewood)
  - Amphitheater could take advantage of the existing natural basin on the Carter property (50 ft. drop in terrain)
  - Leverage UNT and TWU arts organizations
  - Further solidify Denton's place as a music destination
- Sculpture & flower garden
- Music & film “shed” for smaller music performances, film and arts displays
- For larger-scale events, guests could park at the Collins Stadium and be bussed to the venue (large-scale parking does not need to be built).
- Consider as models the Zilker Park in Austin ( [Zilker Park: Most-Loved Park in Austin, Texas \(austinparks.org\)](http://austinparks.org) and Myers Park in McKinney (<https://www.collincountytx.gov/myers/Pages/default.aspx>).



**Open Air Theater or Music Venue Possibilities**

## Park Land

- As land develops, evaluate all opportunities for Park Land Exactions using the Park Land Dedication Ordinance. Consider working with the Developer to enhance any dedication requirements to expand the park open spaces and drainage structures for recreational uses.
- Consider land acquisition now for additional park space and wildlife corridor. Take opportunity to partner with organizations such as "Trust for Public Lands" and "Denton Parks Foundation" to work with landowners, partner groups, and public agencies to acquire, create access to, and secure public ownership and stewardship of the lands and waters that enhance the quality of life and make our community a great place to live, work, and play. Consider agreements to use land values as "In kind" matches for Grants.
- Expand the Clear Creek Natural Heritage Center as land becomes available adjacent to the property.
- Consider land acquisition now for additional park space and wildlife corridor. Land adjacent to Clear Creek Natural Heritage Center is currently for sale.
- Consider purchase or donation of development rights from current landowners; would be funded by tax on all property transfers dedicated to such acquisitions.
- Part of the park land would be left natural with hiking trails meandering through (as now).
- Part of the park land would be developed for uses as a botanical garden, natural history interpretive centers, and music and arts venues.
- Establish a Recreation Community Center, which would host public and private events. Events could include arts classes, dances, scientific studies, and cultural events. The Carter family home would be perfect for this should it become available.



## Residential Development

- Diversity of housing; purposeful preservation of rural and agricultural land
  - Northeast Denton remains the lower-density area for the city, requiring conservation development for most of the area to the extent land is proposed for development (see Denton Plan 2030)
- Scale zoning density from R4-R3 closer to City to RR-5 out on rural fringe
- Special overlays:
  - Trails: Secure Public Access Easements on existing Utility Easements for future uses as funding becomes available to construct trails and Pedestrian ways per the Denton Parks Trails Master Plan
- Parks & community garden plots interspersed in neighborhood
  - Tree preservation and planting; encourage native species planting
  - Lighting restrictions (no extraneous lighting, which lights should be directed downward, not upward)
  - Walkability – sidewalks & trails to meet diverse needs (concrete sidewalks and gravel or crushed stone for trails)
  - Permit certain types of commercial development in specific nodes (see Commercial Development)
  - Buffers to existing neighborhoods to the extent there is a big difference in character or density (with trees, shrubs, pedestrian/bike paths and berms)
    - Natural, planted buffers, including berms, instead of walls
    - Garden plot areas for residents may be found along this buffer as well.
    - Encourage the garden “amenities” of the development to be laid out along this buffer, not just within the new community, to the extent practical
  - Traffic from such new developments be handled within the property directly to major arteries, not impacting existing neighborhoods
  - Consider some areas for denser housing development (R4, R3 and R2 along Loop 288 & southern-most 1/2 mi. of FM 428), but have corridors of open, natural space (with trails, etc.).
  - Recommend “conservation development” pattern of development, similar to above for current RR-zoned areas (see Denton Plan 2030, page 48 for specifics)
  - Identify key areas to be dedicated to low density, higher density, no building, even commercial nodes (shopping & services nearby to minimize need for cars, higher-capacity roads & traffic)
  - No PDs permitted that would circumvent intended/existing zoning

## Commercial Development

- Light, commercial activity permitted in designated locations (nodes) to promote walkability from residences (reduce need for driving). Accordingly:
  - Specific types of commercial businesses permitted: food markets, restaurants, bakeries, coffee shops, professional offices in specific areas or nodes. See Future Land Use Map (FLUM).
  - Encourage local shopkeepers; discourage national chains (especially “fast food”).
    - Limit chain convenience stores, gas stations, large gyms. Yes to small exercise studios (yoga, pilates), boutique food markets and cafes.
    - Fitting with the branding of Denton and this Northeast Denton SAP, the buildings of these businesses should be distinct in their character/appearance to fit with the rural nature of the area
  - Nodes located at intersection of Loop 288 and Sherman Dr. and possibly further north along Sherman Dr./FM 428 (should there be further residential development along there, e.g., at Wagon Wheel Way). Should not create traffic within heart of SAP area.
  - Farmers market
  - The Tree Folk Farm – community market. Locally-owned businesses are economic engines; develop farmers market venue. Encourage local growers, egg sellers, cheesemakers, etc. to sell their wares.



## Mobility

- Preserve to the extent possible the rural nature of roads in this area
  - Preserve recreational value of country roads for bicyclists, running groups, and walkers
- Should subdivisions come in (see Residential Development), require traffic generated by such development be directed internally in the property directly to a main artery, and not putting loads on existing country roads. Further development of arteries should be limited (specifically, permit expansion of Cooper Creek Rd. as an extension of Mayhill Rd. to the north, but not expand Hartlee Field Rd., Farris Rd. or Collins Rd. Protect those roads from drivers seeking "short-cuts" through these rural areas.S
- Naturalistic buffers (planted berms) to existing neighbors should be required, along with walking paths, unless the new development is of similar density and character to the immediately adjacent neighborhood (i.e., not of higher density than existing neighborhoods).
- Mingo Road should be developed to provide an attractive, landscaped access to the parks, recreational facilities, and music/arts venues out along the east side of the SAP area (Collins Rd. and Hartlee Field Rd.). Recommendations include:
  - a park-like buffer alongside the roadbed which would include a mixed-use bike and pedestrian path.
  - planted (and retained existing) trees and low scale planting (for visibility and safety)
  - native plants requiring little supplemental watering and maintenance.
  - lit for safety, but with down-facing lights (to reduce light pollution)
  - bus service to venues (electrified if possible).
- Sherman Dr./FM 428, north of Loop 288 – the northern “gateway” to Denton. Should TxDOT determine to expand FM 428 to a limited-access highway, such limited access should not begin within one mile of Loop 288. This one-mile strip along FM 428 should be improved to add a 30 foot buffer along each side of the highway, which buffer should have separate walking and biking paths. (Note that this is a favorite route for distance biking, which bikers travel at high speeds, incompatible with pedestrians and children.) This would enhance walkability to the commercial node at the intersection of Loop 288 and Sherman Dr./FM 428.
- Work with TxDOT to construct a limited access connection on Loop 288 Kings Row. Fix King Row/Loop 288 traffic problem; infrastructure improvements before development is permitted.

## **THE BACKGROUND**

### **CONSIDERATIONS FOR PROPOSING A SMALL AREA PLAN**

Denton has a rich history and many special attributes that provide for a very high quality of life. These attributes include:

- Natural history and geology of the area with prairie lands, Cross Timbers and bottomland forests through which beautiful rivers and creeks flow.
- The natural resources with which the area is endowed have led historically to agricultural use, to cattle grazing on the prairie lands, and to a distinctive horse country heritage akin to Lexington, Kentucky, an exceptional legacy for Denton to retain and promote.
- A lively music and arts scene in part arising from the world-renowned UNT Music Department and the Denton Arts & Jazz Festival and from local events including the Texas Storytelling Festival and the North Texas Fair & Rodeo.
- An interesting history, including Hartlee Field where hundreds of pilots trained during WWII, astronaut Alan Shepard took flight training, and Hollywood came to make films such as "Pancho Barnes" with Valerie Bertanelli. Work is currently being done to gain the field landmark status. The historic Cooper Creek Settlement and Cemetery (recognized as a Historic Texas Cemetery) are in this area as well. Farris Road is named for one of the early pre-civil war settlers.
- Extraordinary education resources that enhance citizenship, understanding of our environment, and contribute to music, arts, literature, economy and humanity.
- Proximity to the Dallas Fort Worth metroplex, providing ample additional cultural and employment resources
- A unique downtown characterized by the central courthouse square surrounded by universities and infused with local businesses, the life blood of the community.

The more we consider and enhance these special attributes and resources in conjunction with development, the better the quality of life for Denton residents and the more sustainable it will be.

## Challenges

There are significant challenges in that the northeast Denton area is “Land Locked” with limited access to major thoroughfares. It is bordered by important river floodplain areas to the north and east, and railroad tracks (with limited crossings) to the south. Further, this area is bordered to the west by TxDOT limited-access highways, both currently as to Loop 288 and proposed as to FM 428, which will limit access and crossings to two or three choke-points for the entire area. Yet its proximity and direct access to central Denton along Mingo Rd presents a unique opportunity to enhance this locale for recreation and other uses, creating a park with multiple venues, similar to Zilker Park in Austin.

## Comprehensive Plans - 2030 and 2040

It is important to note that our group, the North Denton Neighborhood Association (NDNA) supports growth in Denton, but in a guided way. Economic growth contributes to well-being by supplying well-paying jobs to the community, which in turn supports the community, a virtuous cycle. This growth, however, should be managed through planning and zoning to encourage an optimal growth pattern, which preserves and enhances resources that are important for quality of life and directs commercial and residential growth to specified areas (as per the Future Land Use Map [FLUM]).

The City leadership and staff, in partnership with the community, has done an excellent job drafting a vision and planning for this future, particularly as articulated by the city’s current Comprehensive Plan, the Denton Plan 2030.

NDNA believes the Denton Plan 2030 vision statement and preferred growth concept to be even more important and relevant **now** than in 2015 when it was adopted, given the pressure for growth in North Texas.

Denton Plan 2030 represents a well-thought-out guide for growth in the City and surrounding Extraterritorial Jurisdiction (ETJ) areas, representing the best rendition of the will of the residents; the result of many hours of community input. We have concern for the current revision to the Denton Plan 2030. Unfortunately, for the Denton Plan 2040 Plan rewrite, there has been virtually no such visioning and thoughtful sessions beyond a couple of online polling sessions (with multiple choice questions and chat boxes, which are suggestive at best) and which do not provide the opportunity for careful, nuanced discussion that gives rise to consensus.

The Denton Plan 2030 continues to be the best and most comprehensive expression of the will of the Denton community to date. This Small Area Plan is intended to guide the Denton Plan 2040 being drafted.



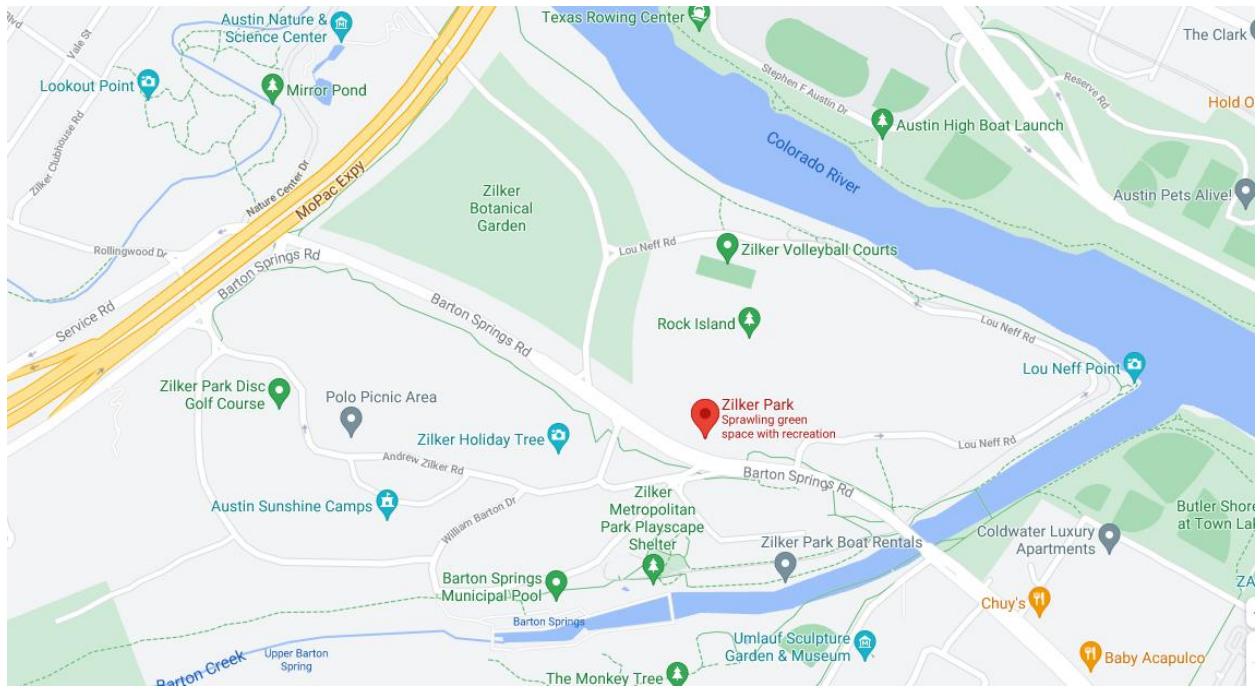
Forum attendees were distributed into tables at the beginning of the visioning exercise. A mix of age and representation was encouraged at each table to reflect a variety of viewpoints. (November series shown)

The Denton Plan 2030 has become even more relevant today as growth is occurring piecemeal around the city, being addressed by individual tracts/proposals as they arise, often in disregard of the Comprehensive Plan (particularly as to zoning). We see significant mobility, traffic, safety and quality of life issues developing as a result of this piecemeal development. Furthermore, and just as important, it precludes the opportunity to create larger value for the community.

### **Models to Follow**

Consider what New York City would have been like without Central Park, which visionaries set aside as a permanent resource to the city. It is no accident that the highest value properties are found around Central Park, creating great tax density/efficiencies for the city. We propose this plan in the hopes that the leaders of today's Denton will be the visionaries tomorrow's Denton celebrate.

Zilker Park in Austin presents another great model for development of a special area for the future benefit of a city with its botanical garden, nature preserve and science center, playscapes, boat rentals, sculpture garden and the nearby Palmer Events Center and the Long Center for the Performing Arts.



**Figure 3.** Zilker Park in Austin, TX

McKinney has taken a step in this direction as well with its Ervin Park and the Crape Myrtle Trails, but they are separated from McKinney’s other recreation facilities, and do not have the rich university resources nor vision that Denton has to take this to a much higher level and the envy of all of North Texas.

The City also should consider what pattern of growth (a) promotes the most efficient use of resources and (b) does not impose an excessive future tax burden on the citizenry. The unrestrained development of residential subdivisions over time will create significant further economic and tax burdens well beyond the benefit of the increased tax base. This unfavorable long-term impact has been well documented in *Strong Towns* and other literature. Instead, the City should promote economic development primarily in the central city (building up and not out) to provide vitality to the City in a fiscally-responsible manner.

We therefore respectfully urge the City leadership and staff to take a step back, take a higher view, as to what vision, what elements the City should have to create the most attractive, livable city in North Texas. Anyone can build more subdivisions. True leaders do more. In our view, the city should promote the following elements:

- Vibrant downtown

- Appropriate public transportation to mitigate traffic
- Parks and green spaces
- Recreational facilities
- Music and arts venues to showcase and support this community, one of the special hallmarks of Denton
- Areas designated for business & residential development
- Sustainability, both environmental/ecological and economic
- Preservation of what is special to our history, to maintain a special culture and local feel to our town, reflecting its heritage.

The northeast Denton area has the best potential to develop certain of these resources. This is best done through the implementation of a Small Area Plan (SAP), as presented.

## **AUTHORITY SUPPORTING A SMALL AREA PLAN FOR THIS AREA**

### **The Denton Plan 2030: The “Comprehensive Plan”**

The foundation of our Small Area Plan is the Denton Plan 2030. The Denton Plan 2030 laid out vision and principles for future growth of Denton. We refresh the reader and cite for reference below some of the principles from the plan that guide our vision for this Small Area Plan for northeast Denton.

The first paragraph of the Community Vision Statement says “Our exceptional livability, the diversity of choices available to our people in employment, lifestyle, and neighborhood settings; and our North Texas values and culture define what Denton is and what we have to offer. We have realized our vision by respecting and building on our heritage, leveraging our assets, and making wise choices in guiding sound growth and investment, while balancing priorities for our four Strategic Directions:

- The Character of Denton
- Our People, Institutions, and Government
- The Strength of Our Economy
- Sound Growth: Our Form and Function”

### **The Character of Denton**

The Vision Statement states succinctly:

“Denton is authentic. Our small-town charm and North Texas heritage are proudly embraced along with positive change, smart and balanced growth, and high-quality development.”

“Denton is consciously green. We are a leader in our commitment to sustainability and we have a significant tree canopy, a network of parks and greenways, stream corridors, and urban forests.”

Denton is fertile territory for creativity and innovation in our vibrant music and arts scene, technology, business, and education.

Regarding the point “Denton is consciously green”, the Plan states “As the population grows and development expands over the Plan horizon, providing parks and open space and the conservation of natural resources is essential for maintaining the quality of life and character of Denton.” And “...the following primary considerations... are integrated into goals throughout Denton Plan 2030:” [excerpts follow]

”An integrated green infrastructure network created by the linking of parks and natural resources together through parks, trails, contiguous open space, and natural systems.”

” Prioritization of conservation strategies that achieve integrated conservation objectives, including: protecting air quality, ecosystems and habitat, water body and watershed conservation and quality, and protection of rural, agricultural character.”

### **Sound Growth: Our Form and Function**

The Denton Plan 2030 establishes an optimal pattern of growth identified as a “Preferred Growth Concept”, based on fiscal, economic, environmental and quality of life factors, and promoting compact, purposeful growth in centers, along certain identified corridors and areas specifically identified for Master Planned Communities.

The Preferred Growth Concept calls for a development emphasis on infilling existing land within the city, creating compact centers for growth, and for preserving the open spaces to maintain the historic character and beauty of Denton.<sup>2</sup>

To quote the Denton Plan 2030 regarding rural fringe areas which includes the SAP area:

“In our rural fringe areas of the city and the Extraterritorial Jurisdiction (ETJ) we see...

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<sup>2</sup> See Denton Plan 2030, Compact Growth Scenario and Preferred Growth Concept plan pages 21-25 and *Attachment C*.

- Contiguous, staged growth which is fiscally and environmentally sound, reduces fragmentation and sprawl, discourages premature development, and conserves the City’s future growing room.
- Conservation development which retains rural character, protects open space and greenways, enhances development value, and provides greater choices to land owners.” (Community Vision Statement, p. 14)

In this spirit, the Future Land Use Map (FLUM) directs preserving the rural aspect of Northeast Denton and recommends “conservation development” as the preferred development pattern for this rural area.

NDNA strongly backs this vision. These are the values that we believe can be best supported and expressed for the benefit of the entire City and region in a Small Area Plan for northeast Denton.

**Denton Development Code (DDC)**

The Purpose of the DDC is spelled out in section 1.2, which purposes include:

- Promote the health, safety, and general welfare of the City’s inhabitants.
- Implement the City’s Comprehensive Plan.
- Preserve and protect the natural environment.
- Encourage the appropriate use of land, buildings and structures.

Clearly, the Comprehensive Plan is central to the DDC and is to be followed.

As noted above, the Future Land Use Map (“FLUM”) specifically identifies areas for zoning. The northeast Denton area is largely zoned RR (rural – see FLUM, Figure 4).

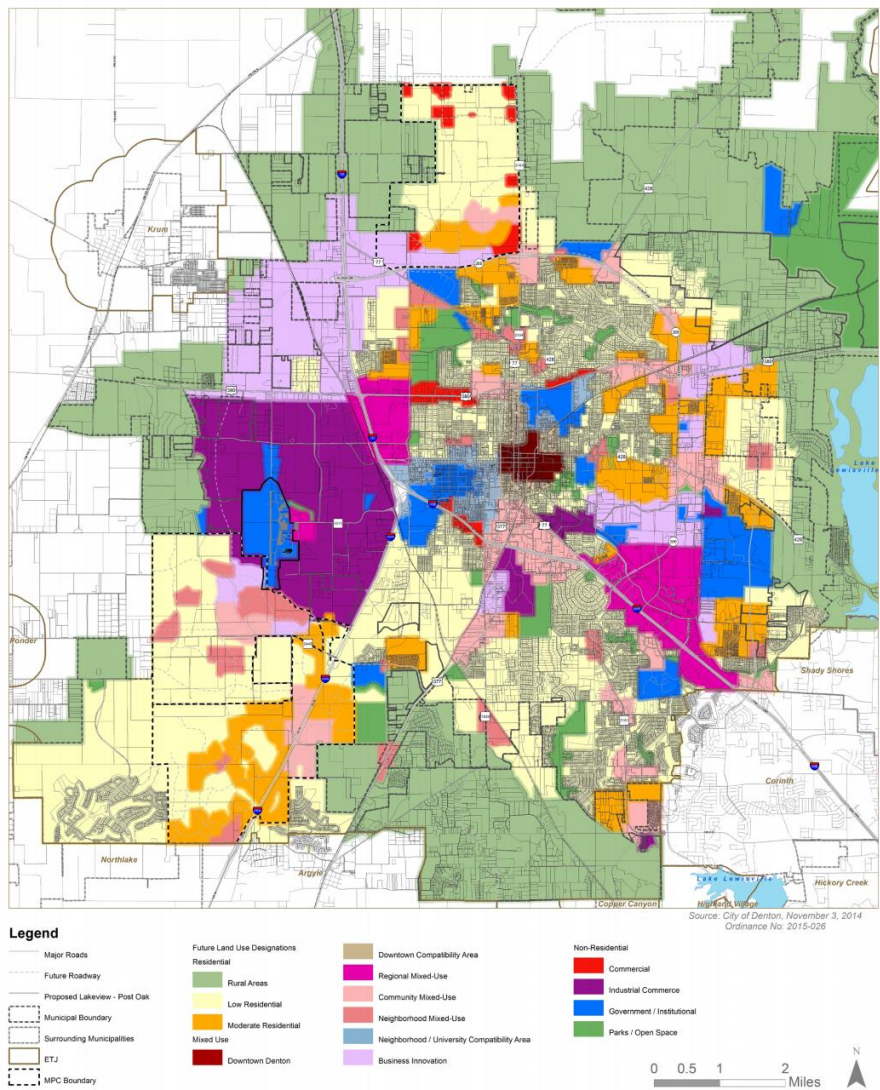
PD development has been permitted by City DDC and so by the City Development Services staff, but has been abused by developers using it to achieve higher density than the zoning map permits without material benefit to the community. Approval criteria (DDC Sec. 2.7.4.D, page 77) states that in reviewing a proposed rezoning to a PD district, the Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council shall consider whether and to what extent the proposed PD district:

- (a) complies with the goals of the Comprehensive Plan and
- (b) in the case of residential development, that the development will be compatible with the character of the surrounding area.

City Council needs to revisit the Planned Development type zoning criteria to make clearer what is considered significant or an enhancement and must meet or exceed base zoning of an area.

The surrounding area is largely rural and agricultural land and where there is housing development, is generally an acre or more per home in the ETJ. In the Deerwood Forest neighborhood near Kings Row, the density is generally R3 or lower density, and the area north of Hartlee Field Road is generally very large ranch tracts, each hundreds of acres. Proposed developments for land within the northeast Denton SAP area brought before the City Council to date have been inconsistent with current land use. This warrants special consideration, in light of the special qualities of this area, and which lead us in part to propose a Small Area Plan to make clearer what the desired “appropriate use of land” is for this area. We believe a Small Area Plan herein best reflects the Comprehensive Plan (and FLUM) and will best serve the above purposes of the DDC.

**2 DENTON PLAN 2030**  
**FIGURE 2.4: Future Land Use Map**



**Figure 4. Denton Plan 2030 Future Land Use Map**

## **Denton Small Area Plans**

The City of Denton website states:

“The Denton Plan 2030 was adopted in February 2015 and is the framework by which the city manages growth, promotes reinvestment, and improves the quality of life for citizens for the next two decades. The Land Use chapter [of the Comprehensive Plan] specifically highlights the need for compact and balanced growth that has a purpose within the goals of the city. Small Area Planning is a logical extension of a city's Comprehensive Plan in order to achieve a balanced growth pattern.”

“The process for Small Area Planning allows for community members and stakeholders to provide input, create a shared vision, and influence future development policies for a specific area.”

“Small Area Planning gives the city the ability to address a localized challenge across city departments and creates public support for implementing a plan of action. A Small Area Plan is a document that provides guidelines for specific policy actions in concert with the vision of the Denton Plan 2030 and with the community vision drafted in the Small Area Plan. The Small Area Plan can identify needs for new Overlay Districts within the plan, identify areas for city-initiated zonings, identify other code amendments, and call for Capital Improvement Projects to be focused in the area.”

Hence, given the special attributes and challenges for this area, we recommend a Small Area Plan be developed along the lines herein.

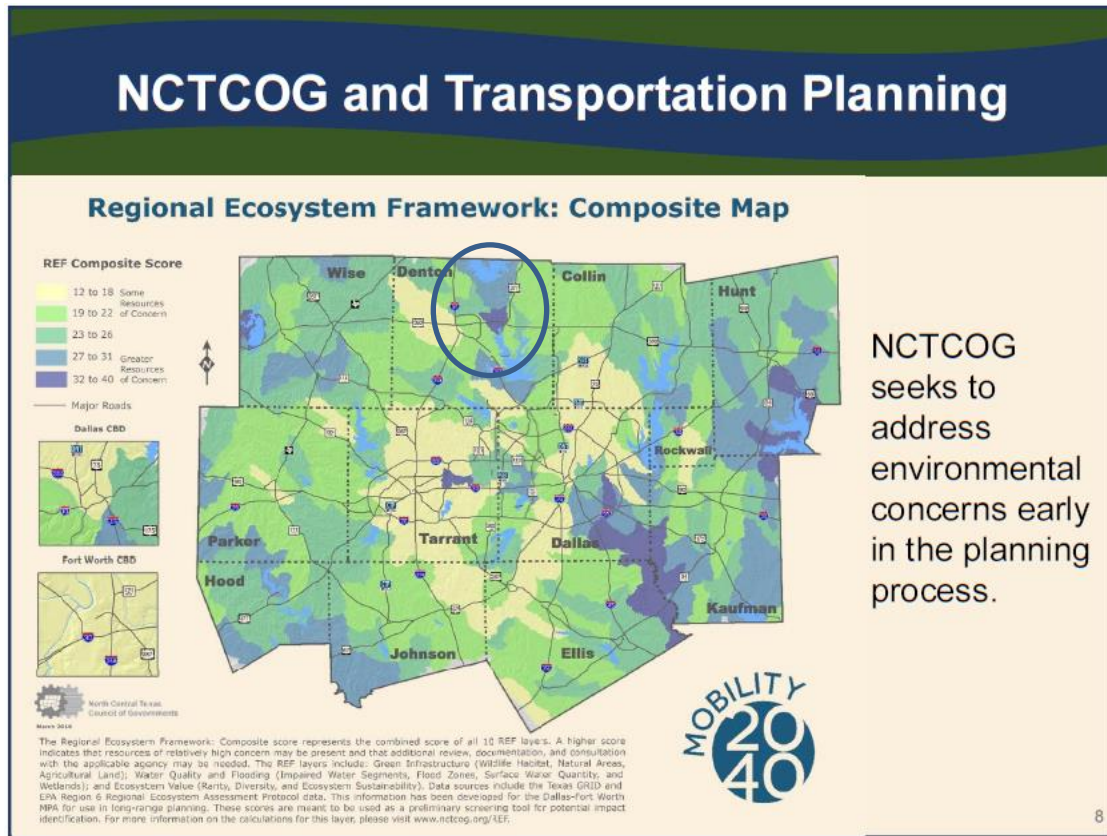
## **WHAT IS SPECIAL ABOUT THIS AREA?**

### **Ecology and Wildlife**

The area proposed for this Small Area Plan is an attractive rural and suburban setting characterized by rolling hills, prairie, Cross Timbers post oak trees, and river bottomland mature forests. Roadrunners, coyotes, and Carolina wrens share the area with the people of Denton.

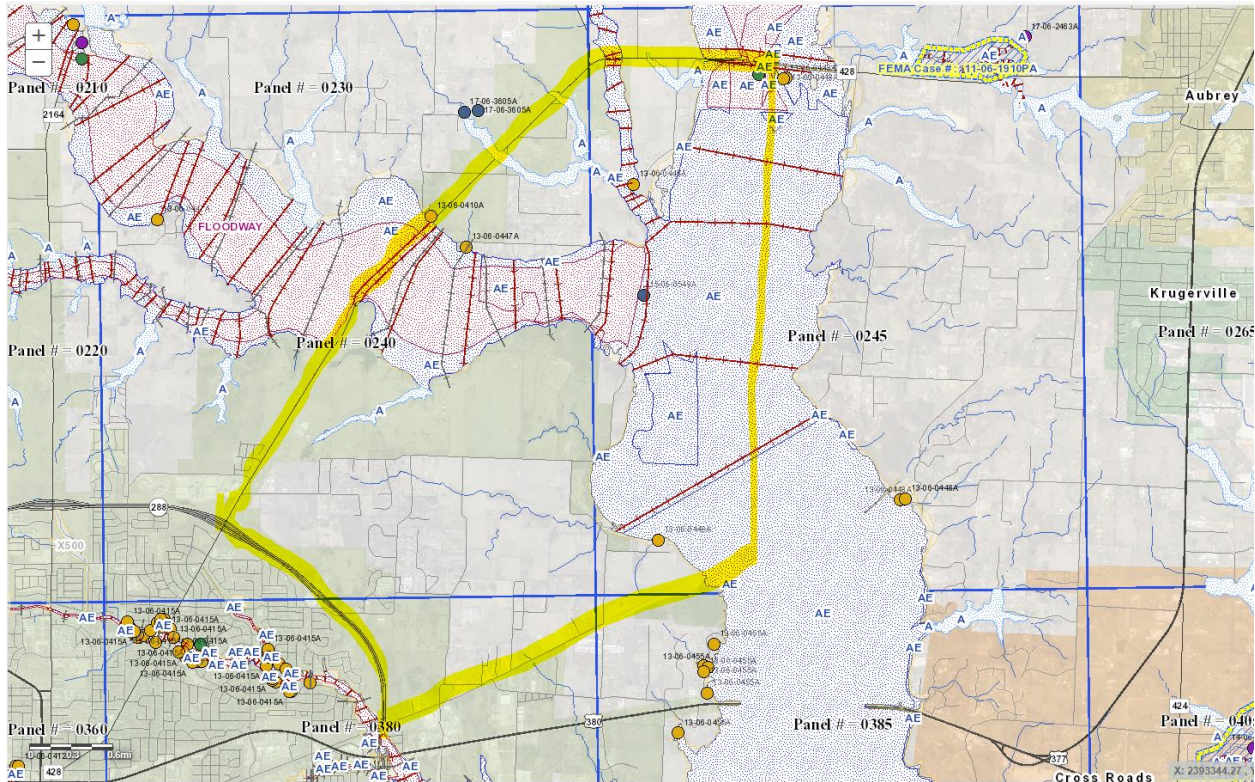
This is an environmentally important and sensitive area. The NCTCOG Regional Ecosystem Framework (“REF”) identified and rated this area as the most environmentally important in all of Denton County, rating the environmental importance on 10 factors. The NCTCOG REF Composite Map is copied below, in which you will note the darkest shading denotes the areas of the highest ecological concern. Further, you see this northeast area of Denton County

highlighted for our plan is of the greatest environmental importance in the entire region, warranting special consideration.



**Figure 5.** NCTCOG Regional Ecosystem Framework map ([North Central Texas Council of Governments - Regional Ecosystem Framework \(nctcog.org\)](http://North Central Texas Council of Governments - Regional Ecosystem Framework (nctcog.org)))

This area has critical importance as a watershed and, more specifically, for drinking water quality for Denton and Dallas Counties. It is also considered a vital wildlife corridor.



**Figure 6.** Area map showing floodplain zones covering much of northeast Denton; Proposed Small Area Plan area highlighted. Much of the area is in floodplain and important to wildlife habitat, and is also crucial as a wildlife corridor.

The Greenbelt along the Trinity River provides an important wildlife corridor and habitat, which should be preserved and further enhanced.

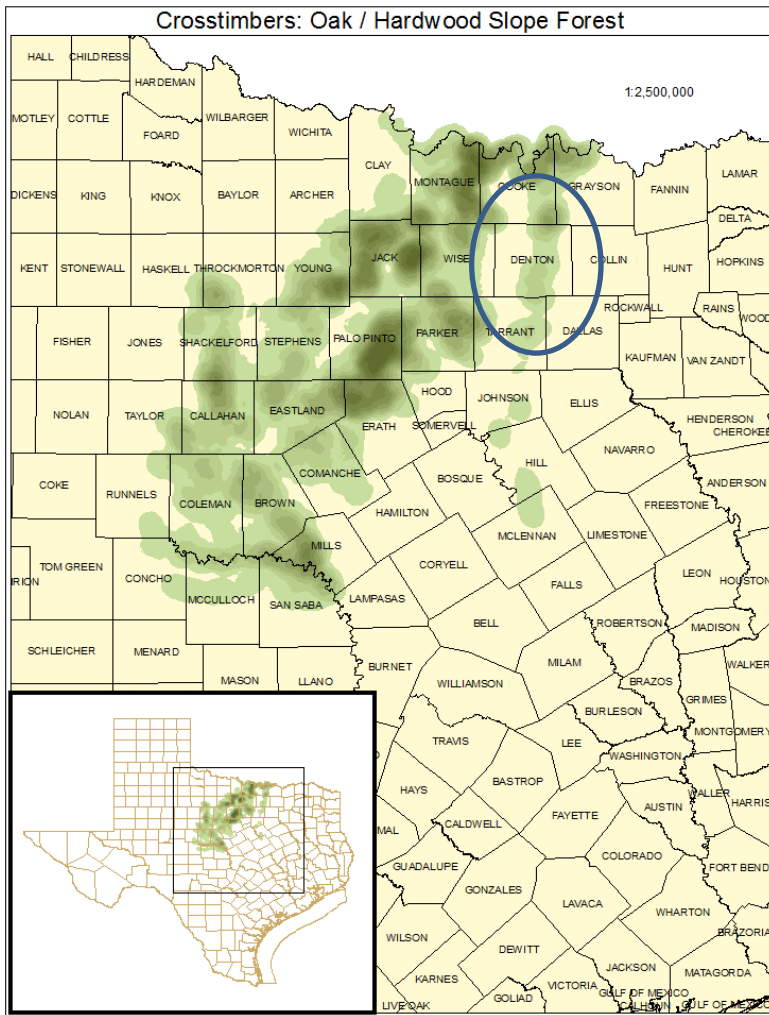
The northeast Denton area also contains important tree resources, particularly in the Cross Timbers oak forests and bottomland stands of mature pecan and other hardwood trees. These are shrinking resources per Texas A&M Forest Service and merit preservation wherever possible:

**Vegetation Description**

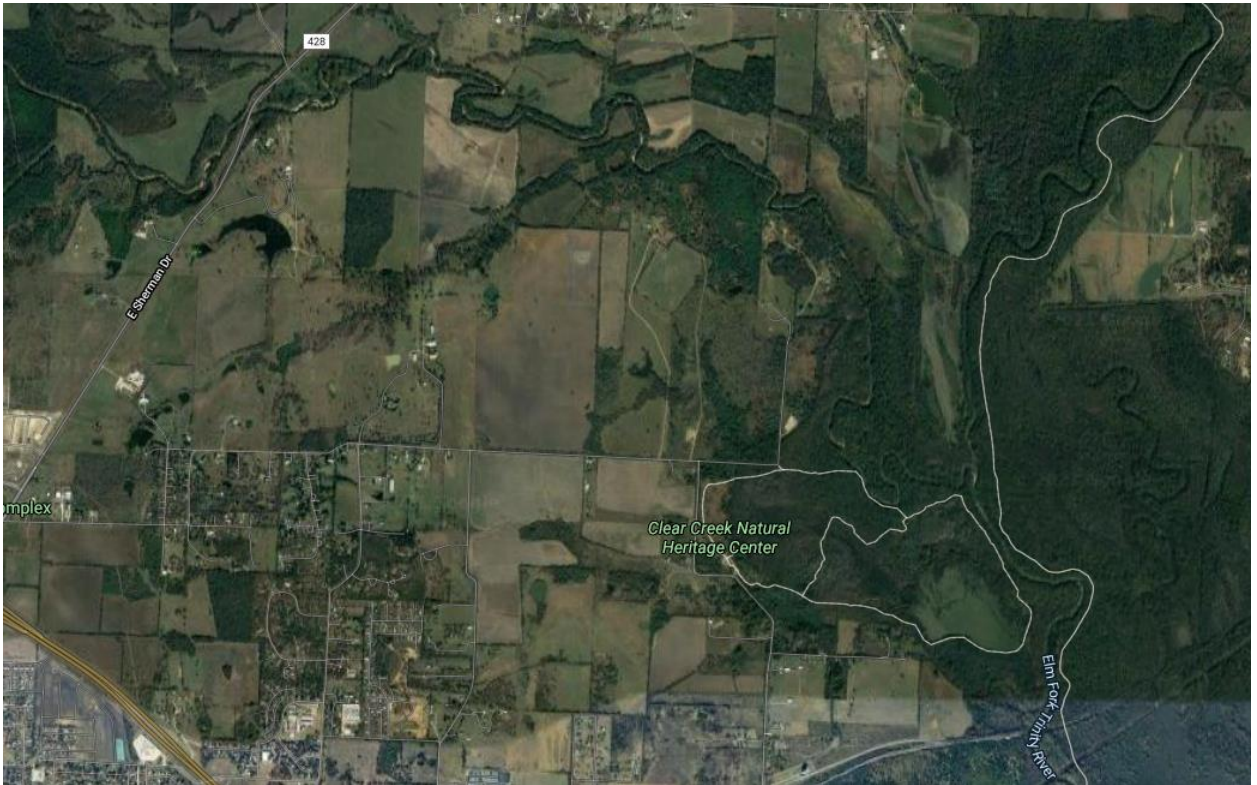
In north central Texas, the Eastern Cross Timbers vegetative sub-region is a narrow strip of timbered country extending from eastern Cooke County on the Red River south to western Hill County and includes portions of Denton, Tarrant, Johnson, and Hill Counties. Today, few large tracts of undisturbed woodlands remain in the Eastern Cross Timbers which is perhaps the most fragmented vegetative region in Texas.

**Figure 7.** From Texas A&M Forest Service – Texas Ecoregions – Eastern Cross Timbers [Texas A&M Forest Service - Trees of Texas - Eco-Regions - Texas Ecoregions \(tamu.edu\)](http://tamu.edu)

Tree have been identified as an important resource to the City of Denton with the Denton Development Code (DDC) and other initiatives supporting tree preservation. The DDC defines ESAs to include, among other things, “Upland Habitat Areas, a minimum of ten acres in size, that contain remnants of the eastern Cross Timbers Habitat.” A simple review of the satellite photographs suggests the lands governed by this SAP contain possibly the largest stands of remaining eastern Cross Timbers habitat in the City and County.



**Figure 8.** Cross Timbers Forests in North Texas



**Figure 9.** Satellite view showing Cross Timbers stands, floodplain and wetlands habitat within in the SAP area.

There are also substantial floodplain and riparian zones eligible for ESA status that should be preserved.

### **Heritage of the area**

This region proposed for a SAP also is rich with the agricultural heritage of Denton, with its crops and grazing lands. Small farms and community gardens are an important part of that heritage and about how Denton defines itself. It is essential to preserve some of this for the enjoyment of the community and as an attractive bicycling and hiking route for the City.

## Recreation

This area is a very popularly used for recreation, including hiking and biking. It is common to see 10-20 bicyclists and walkers throughout the area every day, and double or triple that on weekend days. Various bike groups hold races through the SAP community and more bicycle races, runs, and walks could be held in the area if it were preserved as a part of this plan.



The Ryan High School men's and women's track teams run along Hartlee Field Rd every Saturday morning. Why? Because of the area's low traffic (i.e., safety), low 30 mph speed limits, varied terrain and natural beauty for a multi-mile running loop that permits the teams being followed by a support vehicle.



**Figures 10.** Bicyclists and High School track team in the SAP.

Horseback riding is a popular recreation here, and part of Denton’s rich heritage. Northeast Denton contains both large horse and cattle ranches as well as smaller ranchettes with horses and other livestock. The sandy soils of this region make for excellent riding.



**Figure 11.** Horseback riding along Hartlee Field Rd. – an important pastime and tradition and opportunity to define Denton

As the City continues to expand, there will be an increased need and community demand to not only support, but encourage, healthy pursuits and recreation. Our vision is to utilize this area as a special resource.

### **History**

FM 428 is one of the oldest trails and roads in Texas, constituting one of the earliest 25 roads in the state. Denton has a long history.

This SAP area includes the early settlement of Cooper Creek. It also includes Hartlee Field, where pilots trained during WWII and aviation enthusiasts regularly gathered for decades after. It is interesting history that the astronaut Alan Shepard, the first American to travel to space and who walked on the moon, trained here.

These comprise a great heritage to be commemorated and celebrated in our community. These historical sites should be preserved, including Hartlee Field. We are fortunate that Hartlee Field, with its historic hangars, has been preserved by the Carter family, and until recently there was an annual reunion of the pilots who trained there. Filmmakers have loved the open spaces and old hangars and surely could be coaxed back into the area for this special space.



**Figure 12.** The astronaut Alan Shepard, among others, was trained in flight here during WWII.<sup>3</sup>

The Cooper Creek Settlement is located near Cooper Creek Road/Mingo and Fish Trap Roads and is a part of this Small Area Plan. The land for the cemetery, school and church had been set aside in deeds that date back to the 1870s. The Cooper Creek community was established around 1872 although families had been living in the area before the Civil War. The current Farris Road is named for one of those original families. The area was settled due to the abundance of water, timber and sandy soil. The crops in the area were cotton, corn and other similar crops. Like many rural areas, as the number of farms grew, the community established a school and church along with a cemetery. The area consisted of the cemetery, school and two churches, First Baptist Church (known commonly as Cooper Creek Baptist Church) and First

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.dentoncounty.gov/DocumentCenter/View/3245/2020-Special-Edition-WWII-Retrospect-PDF>

Methodist Church (known commonly as Cooper Creek Methodist Church). Cooper Creek is similar to the other agriculturally based communities in Denton County including Green Valley, Bolivar, Drop and Chinn's Chapel. Cooper Creek was an active community with participation centered at the school, churches and cemetery. The cemetery was part of the social structure and focal point of this farming community.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to significant history of the people of the area, there is a very interesting natural history to the area which presents educational opportunities for learning.

The northeast Denton neighborhood is bound inside the arms of Clear Creek. The stream channel, and the lush flood plain forests beyond its banks are enjoyed by some for solitude, others for a jog in the quiet of nature. The flood plain rises steeply to a mile-wide flat surface- a river terrace of Clear Creek that formed more than 30,000 years ago. Fossils of mammoths, horses, sabre-tooth cats and other extinct animals are buried below the terrace surface. The clay soils on the terrace supported native prairies, as can still be seen at the Clear Creek Nature Center. Above the terrace to the west, the Woodbine Sandstone has weathered into sandy soils that are favored by the Post Oaks and Blackjack Oaks that make up the Cross Timbers, the famous forest belt that divides the black prairies to the east and west of Denton. This neighborhood has a unique, habitat-rich environment that illustrates our natural history as well as how Dentonites have used and lived on this land.

These could be brought to life for students and adults both with a natural history trail, dioramas and signage presenting the fascinating geologic and natural history of the region.

As development in this area is now active, the time is short to develop a comprehensive and coordinated plan that will enable future residents, visitors and school groups to appreciate our rich environment, and to enjoy that environment in many ways. Physical connections are important to the visitors who will walk, run, and bike from forest to prairie to flood plain. Every effort should be made to create trails and spaces dedicated so that the story of this landscape can be seen and enjoyed.

### **Culture: Music and Arts**

Music and the Arts is a very large part of the culture here in Denton. This is a huge part of the Denton "brand." The lively music and arts scene is seeded by the world-renowned Music Department of UNT, by TWU and by local events such as the Denton Arts and Jazz Festival , which attract a large national audience.<sup>5</sup> Arts are a cherished part of the quality of life in this town. This SAP provides a vision for venues to showcase music and arts and to attract a larger

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<sup>4</sup> Source: Emily Fowler and Alma Lain Chambers, ed. Towns and Communities of Denton County.

<sup>5</sup> Over 200,000 people from over 100 Texas cities and some 32 states attend. <https://dentonjazzfest.com/>

audience to Denton, which in turn support our local restaurants, businesses and lend vitality to the town. An outdoor theater or other attractive rural venue would only further highlight the specialness of Denton.

## **Education**

Because this area has a special history and character, it lends itself to interesting educational opportunities. The opportunity to expand the terrific work of the Denton Office of History and Culture into the area, whether with Denton ISD or local historians, is obvious.

The ecology of the area with its agricultural use, varied terrain from prairie to Cross Timbers forest to bottomland forests, and wildlife habitat provides an excellent opportunity to present education opportunities to the community as well. This suggests an arboretum presenting the different forest types. We recommend a perfect location that in a small footprint has prairie, Cross Timbers and bottomland forests to highlight. There is an opportunity to have a nearby botanical garden to highlight the same in terms of both flora and fauna – exhibiting indigenous species for each habitat type.

We also have the opportunity to return much of the area to native plants, thus encouraging butterflies, bumblebees, and other important creatures of nature. Denton is particularly suited to this because of our wonderful local Universities, including TWU which is a national leader in this area.

Art education would benefit from retaining the natural habitat of the area as well, providing spaces for artists of all sorts to teach and create within nature.

## **Wildlife Corridor**

North Texas is teeming with a variety of wildlife species. From the iconic road runner to the beloved hummingbird, this area is a birdwatcher's paradise. Armadillos, lizards, turtles, snakes, frogs, and toads provide delightful educational and discovery adventures for children and adults alike. Coyotes and bobcats help keep ecological balance in the area.

What a great project destination, say for scout troops, who might construct bluebird nesting boxes and plant native milkweed to sustain Monarch butterflies.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> [www.inaturalist.org](http://www.inaturalist.org) lists the many species of wildlife in this area.

## **WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES TO THE AREA THAT GIVE RISE TO THE NEED FOR A SAP?**

An unbridled piecemeal development has been proposed for this area as a wave of homebuilding in North Texas overtakes Denton County and the City. This has led to suburban sprawl spreading over the region, creating seas of rooftops, dramatically changing the character of the landscape.

Now is the time for the City to consider its long-term future and set aside lands for parks and recreation and to reserve through zoning parts of the City areas for rural and agricultural uses before the opportunity is lost to piecemeal development.

Traffic issues have reached critical Level of Service (“LOS”) F [the worst] for the roads that pass along or through the area. This is because the area is essentially a land locked cul-de-sac with limited egress, bounded to the north and east by rivers/creeks and their floodplains and the railroad tracks to the south along Mingo Rd which have but two crossings (at Geesling Rd. and Cooper Creek Rd.). Traffic from the area wants to get to Loop 288 due to its access to shopping, services and to the interstate. This has created a trapped neighborhood that puts great traffic strain on the two points of access to the main roads, Loop 288 and FM 428.

Sherman Drive (FM 428) north of Loop 288 has a LOS F, even BEFORE the new developments of Stark Farms and Agave Ranch. Furthermore, it is no longer permitted to turn left towards the City center out of Hartlee Field Rd. serving this area, which means traffic from the Hartlee Field Rd. and ETJ areas essentially needs to exit at King’s Row intersection. Left turns onto FM428 southbound are a challenge in any event, given the traffic converging on and emerging from the intersection at Loop 288.

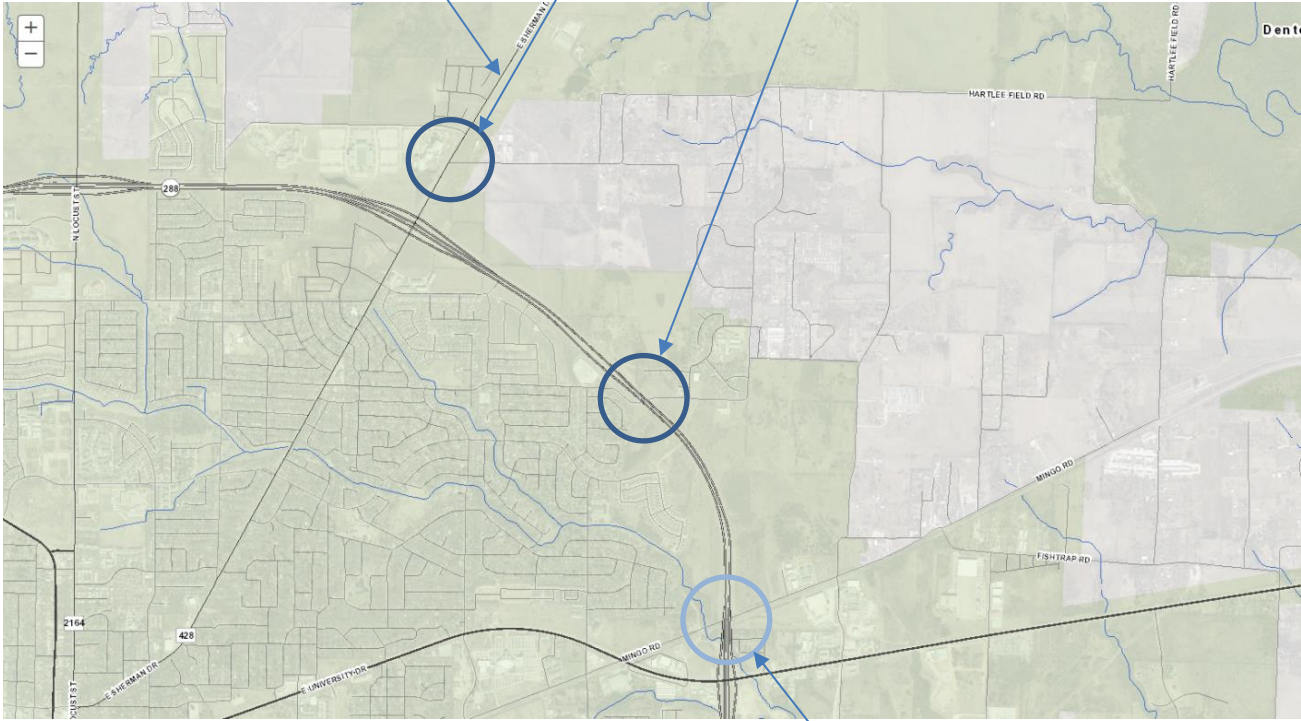
Kings Row is a LOS F near the intersection of Loop 288; this is BEFORE the proposed development of the Brown Tract (Kings Way Development), the Windsor development along Silver Dome/Farris, the expansion of the trailer park on the north side of Silver Dome, and the potential development of the Carter Property. During the Hodge Elementary School pickup & drop-off times, traffic is backed up along Loop 288 with traffic going 60-65 mph by them – frightening!

Traffic safety and LOS will be severely impacted by further development of the area. These traffic issues must be addressed before any further development should be approved. Otherwise, significant safety issues will expand exponentially and children’s lives may be lost.

FM 428 to become limited-access highway in TxDOT Plans, such that access will be limited to head into town, creating bottlenecks

No left turn permitted onto Sherman Dr. from Hartlee Field Rd.

Bottleneck LOS 5 at Kings Row and 288 Loop



**Figure 13.** Two challenging traffic intersections, each LOS F

Mingo Rd does not access Loop 288

The proposed Mobility Plan for the city proposes putting Primary and Secondary arterials on the country roads, which would degrade the quality of life for residents along those roads and take their lands, for which substantial opposition has arisen in the community.

There is inadequate infrastructure for development, with no city sewer lines or water lines northeast of Loop 288 (except for a small area of the Deerwood neighborhood). Further development would add a significant financial burden to the city in time. Most homes in the SAP area have their own or, in some cases, joint water wells; the City water system serves only the Deerwood neighborhood. The lack of infrastructure was going to cause Taylor Morrison for their development of the Carter land to run a sewer line along Farris Rd, which the County does not permit along County road rights-of-way and which would violate minimum distance/offset requirements between water wells and sewer infrastructure for residents along the road.

Denser development of the SAP area would also create ecological problems as suburban runoff from lawn fertilization and increased flow from roofs and pavement would adversely affect water quality and flood/erosion potential. Furthermore, wildlife and their habitat is shrinking, being increasingly confined to more restricted areas.

As well, City Planners and developers are not paying sufficient attention to the Denton Plan 2030, particularly as to zoning, getting around the plan by being offered PDs and PIDs which allows them to break and get around the stated zoning to achieve higher density than the zoning allows. This should not be permitted! The Denton Plan 2030, including its FLUM, represents the best and most comprehensive expression of the will of the community, and has only grown subsequently in its importance.

Lastly, this SAP area has relatively close proximity to the central part of Denton (via Mingo Road and Sherman Drive), which access can be enhanced. This proximity is why we see so many bikes and use of the Clear Creek Natural Heritage Center.

The Denton Plan 2030 and the Future Land Use Map promote a diversity of housing choices as laid out in the FLUM. Because of the problems with current access, this SAP area should be left largely at rural and agricultural zoning. Low density zoning may also attract higher-income executives to come to Denton and establish businesses here, consistent with the Comprehensive Plan's desire for a diversity of housing. Currently there is a dearth of high-income homes available for executives in the City, which will limit the appeal of Denton for higher income service and other businesses, such as financial service, investment and consulting firms, limiting its ability to attract a targeted segment for business development. This is one reason why Charles Schwab, Fidelity and Deloitte for example, chose Westlake, and not the City of Denton, for its new headquarters. This is not in any way to diminish the need for affordable housing; there have been no community objections raised to the expansion of Woodhaven Mobile Home Community here, which is more than doubling its size, offering additional affordable housing in the area. The Woodhaven Mobile Home Community on Silver Dome Road currently has some two hundred homes. It will soon double to four hundred. The homes, with community fees, tend to cost families about \$1,200 per month. This is "affordable housing" much more so than the \$300,000 plus homes pushed by some developers as "affordable." We support the growth of this community and believe they are an important part of this area and will greatly benefit from this proposed Small Area Plan.

In summary, this northeast area of Denton provides enormous opportunities to enhance the quality of life in our town.

## THE OBJECTIVES FOR THE SMALL AREA PLAN

In overview our objectives in developing a SAP are (1) to enhance the quality of life in Denton, (2) promote environmental preservation and sustainability, (3) encourage historic preservation, (4) foster economic sustainability, and (5) create a meaningful and exciting legacy for the City. We look to do this by creating a green oasis convenient to central Denton that includes:

- walking,
- running, hiking, biking and horseback trails through a scenic area close to town,
- the bike park,
- an arboretum & botanical garden each highlighting indigenous species and providing educational opportunities for all,
- music and arts venues,
- a natural history trail with signage informing of the geological and natural history of the area,
- agricultural and ranch land preservation (preserving our heritage),
- museums on aviation and early Texas history of the region, and other ideas.

We encourage the many existing tracts of remaining Cross Timbers forest be protected by ESAs. Residential development should be in the areas closest to Loop 288 with a density no less than that consistent with the existing land use, and with land use increasingly rural as we proceed toward the northeast direction - with the northeasterly-most areas remaining either park land or agricultural. Commercial development would be at certain nodes such as the intersection of Sherman Dr./FM 428 and Loop 288; this would encourage walking or biking to food and services, reducing auto travel. We encourage Denton to create a program to purchase land for parks or to purchase development rights from landowners who might seek to sell, encouraging the land to remain rural and agricultural – a green space for the city.

The Denton community prizes open space, greenbelts and recreation opportunities. Here are some comments from Facebook illustrating the meaning to the community of such green spaces; the people specifically were commenting on proposed development and expansion of local country roads in northeast Denton:

*“Clear Creek is our favorite place in Denton, and we try to get there every week. In fact, I am not exaggerating when I say that it’s been important to our peace of mind and coping during the pandemic. It’s a true treasure, and needs to be protected. Any changes to the road need to be made with absolute care that one of the best parts of Denton is not adversely affected.”*

*“We drove on Hartlee Field this wknd, just a local drive to get out and explore (pandemic entertainment) and saw the signs. The residents clearly feel an expansion would be a bad decision. That needs to be respected. It’s a lovely area that deserves protection.”*

*“Denton needs to wake up and realize that preserving natural places, and open green spaces within and near town are very much long term investments that will pay huge dividends in the future to a wide group of people.*

*This all smacks of once again wanting to make Denton attractive to developers in the short term, decisions meant to lure more people here, rather than serve the ones who are here already.”*

The following comments are from the “Final Denton County Greenbelt Plan For the Future”:

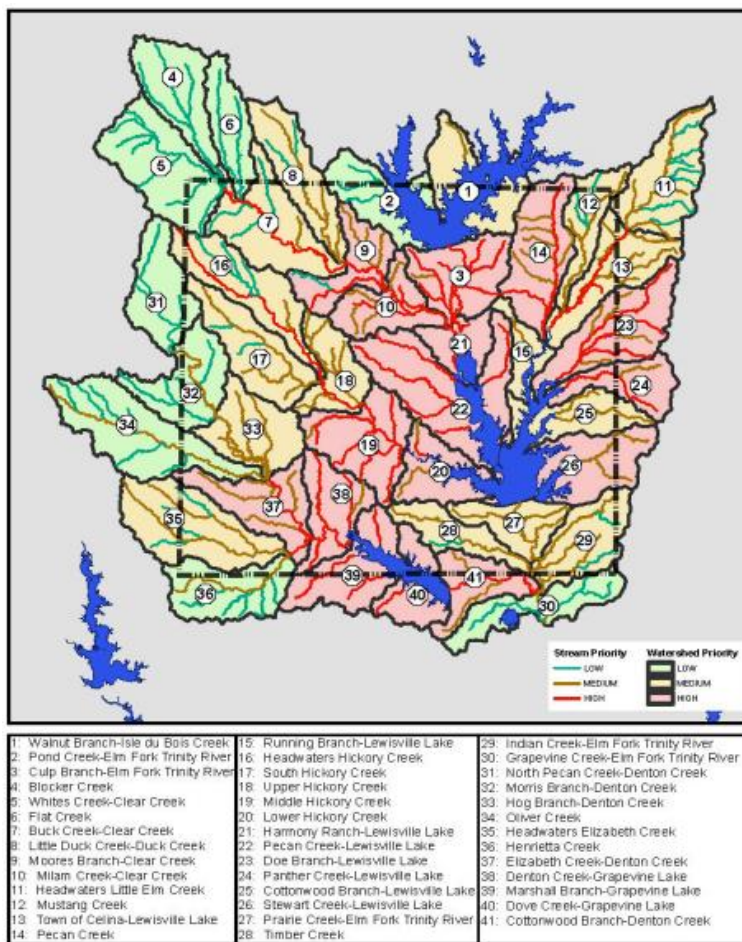
*“The cost of urban stormwater pollution control increases as urbanization increases. It is more cost effective to initiate control early on. In other words, protection of area watersheds prior to development pressures or impacts is imperative for cost effective stormwater management.”*

*“A compelling fact: It is much more cost effective to protect greenbelts and stream corridors with greenbelt opportunities now, rather than later try to restore them after they have been lost to nearby development.”*

*“Greenbelt and riparian areas are naturally occurring water treatment facilities. In these areas the watershed is shallower and closer to the surface. When downstream of urban runoff, they can help offset some of the pollutants that runoff from developed areas. They also help to retain and release water [throughout] the year as the soil and plants help absorb winter runoff and precipitation.”*

*“For me and my family, we chose our home in Denton County when relocating to Texas from California several years ago due to the Greenbelts. These areas help to offset urban sprawl giving us a feel of space which we did not have in the over populated cities in California. In addition, the trails that run through many of the Greenbelts give us a way to get out, get active, and enjoy nature without having to take a long drive.”*

The Following figure from the “Final Denton County Greenbelt Plan For the Future” identifies the critical watershed areas for Denton County that are to be protected. This is a major objective and driver for our plan – preserving watershed and water quality. We also seek to preserve wildlife habitat, which is rapidly shrinking in the City of Denton.



**Figure ES-5 Watershed Priority Status**

A conceptual plan and map for the area might look like this:

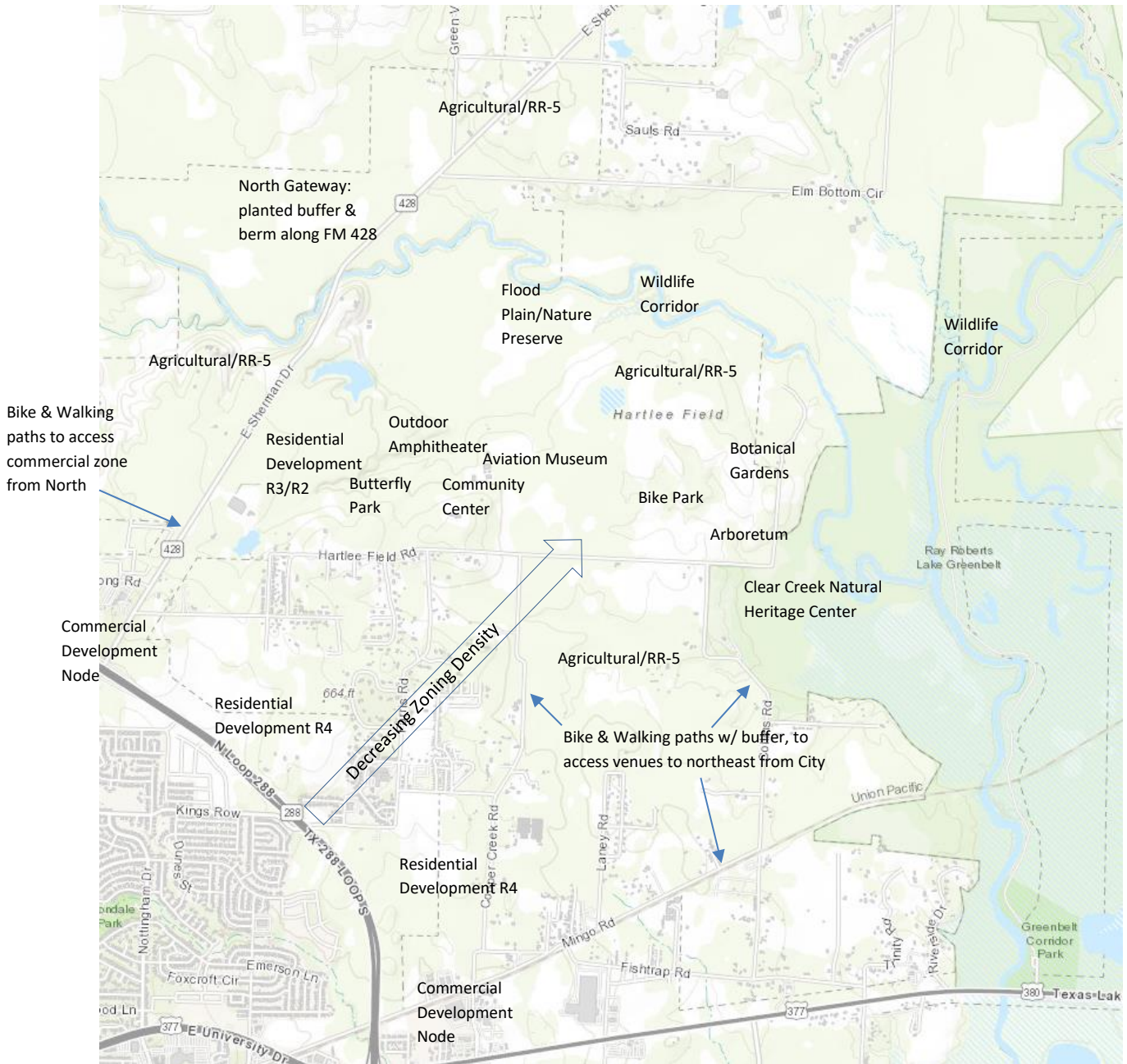


Figure 14. Geographical conception

## Conclusion

In conclusion, we have an extraordinary opportunity to create a great legacy for the Denton community. The Northeast Denton area is endowed with extraordinary beauty, rivers, wildlife, agricultural heritage, and varied terrain that are appreciated today by many for recreation, relaxation, and enjoyment of the natural surroundings.

Yet these assets are threatened by unbridled development that would replicate the suburban sprawl we see in Frisco and in other surrounding communities. We see from the Denton Plan 2030 that most existing residents in our community value Denton greatly for its quiet and attractive downtown, variety of housing attracting diversity to the community, its centers of learning, its arts and music, and its easy access to recreational opportunities offered by the surrounding rural area, and do not wish to duplicate the suburban cookie-cutter development model we see across much of the DFW area. We recognize that residential growth will consume much of the surrounding area, and is indeed, to a reasonable extent, healthy for the vitality of Denton, but believe strongly that some of this rural land should be preserved in a rural aspect for future enjoyment, much like we have seen in Austin and other cities who designated certain lands for naturalistic settings, wildlife corridors, recreational ways & facilities, and artistic, educational and community venues.<sup>7</sup>

Further, this area in Northeast Denton has challenges due to its physical isolation (a land-locked cul-de-sac surrounded by rivers, floodplains and greenways to the north and east, and limited-access roadways to the south and west), which has already created unsafe road bottlenecks and congestion, which would be significantly exacerbated by any meaningful further growth. So instead, we propose the City turn this challenge into an opportunity by exploiting the area's special attributes and creating an extraordinary asset out of this area in the form we have described in this Plan to create an exciting legacy unlike that seen in any other North Texas community.

We know this is a bold plan. We recognize there is cost to this which we believe can be mitigated by partnership with and investment from both for-profit and non-profit organizations. There are models for us to follow – and Denton will become a model for others to come.<sup>8</sup> The Denton Economic Development Partnership touts parks and open spaces as essential to Denton's quality of life. Corporations today want to support their communities,

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<sup>7</sup> Even the state of Florida recognizes – and acts upon – the need to preserve some land: <https://www.newyorker.com/news/us-journal/floridas-remarkable-new-wildlife-corridor-from-the-panhandle-to-the-keys>

<sup>8</sup> The City of Denton Animal Shelter went from being a razor-wired high-kill shelter to a no-kill shelter in a green facility that serves as a model for shelters around the nation (indeed, the world) because caring people dared to dream big.

especially projects which align to their interests and values, such as “green” communities – something Denton strives to be – as well as museums, music and arts. This plan demonstrates, in a very real way, Denton’s commitment, thus making it even more attractive to businesses not just for their employee’s quality of life, but for their own pro-bono and, potentially, promotional purposes. If we want to expand economic growth in Denton we need to add more than just new neighborhoods. We need to give corporations and local businesses that something extra to bring them here to stay.

We see opportunities for local and corporate sponsorship as well as state and federal grants to help pay for it all. The Texan by Nature program, begun by Laura Bush, seems to be a particularly good opportunity.<sup>9</sup> Groups who have historically donated to projects such as this one include the Healthy Hive Foundation (and others of that sort) along with corporations such as American Airlines, UPS, Wells Fargo, and Target.

Other partners could help with each part of this proposal. We see area non-profits such as the Greater Denton Arts Council and Denton Film working alongside local businesses such as the Painted Flower Farm, Meador’s Nursery, local distilleries and breweries such as the Bearded Monk or Armadillo Ale Works, and others. We envision working with local business partners such as Day’s Hardware alongside national companies such as Home Depot. We envision partnering with the area universities and school districts throughout the county helping promote their STEAM education initiatives. We envision support and energy for this project from area bicycle, hiking, running, gardening, music, theater, and art groups. This is the opportunity to think big, have fun across the communities and groups of Denton, and to create an exciting legacy for all.

Seeing the excitement generated among the Northeast Denton community who conceived this vision, we hope the City Councilors, City staff, and the rest of the community will immediately see the long-term benefit of this Plan and join us in this endeavor.

We look forward to your guidance in how to make this wonderful vision a reality.



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<sup>9</sup> <https://texanbynature.org/programs/conservation-wrangler/>



A final reminder of what a little planning ahead can accomplish. Central Park, New York City

Let's Dream Big Together!