

Arlington proposition aims to increase downtown's density

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Development is not only crucial to downtown Arlington's economic growth, it's a significant catalyst to the overall improvement of air quality, researchers say.

The city will hold a public hearing Tuesday about the \$93,745 motion into the city's comprehensive Division Street Corridor Strategy. A \$75,000 grant from the North Central Texas Council of Governments helped fund the plan. The other \$18,750 came from city-generated funds, which were put up as the required match for the grant.

The proposition identifies new development possibilities ranging from a senior housing project to residential lofts, said Lyndsay Mitchell, Arlington Design Center planning project manager. The 11-point plan covering Division Street between Cooper and Collins streets also includes proposed improvements for green space, restaurants and parking. However, Mitchell said housing is a primary concern.

"It's something that we lack in the area," she said.

Arlington doesn't have the option to expand its borders, said Taner Ozdil, assistant professor for the landscape architecture program. Ozdil, who studies regional population and helped lay the groundwork for Vision North Texas, said the largest parcels of available land have been developed, and it is time for the city to build vertically.

The long-term benefit: improved air quality.

Arlington has developed at a substantially lower density than other urban areas, Ozdil said, meaning the city is spread out over three dominant areas: south, north and downtown Arlington.

"Such low-density neighborhoods mean almost all trips must be by car, a practice that adds to traffic congestion and air pollution," he said.

More than 50 percent of the pollution in Arlington is credited to the cars on the road, said Melanie Sattler, civil engineering associate professor. Sattler teaches the fundamentals of air pollution and also assisted in development of the Metroplex air quality State Implementation Plan, a motion required by the Federal Clean Air Act for states failing to meet the National Ambient Air Quality Standards. The plan describes how the state will reduce and maintain air pollution emissions to comply with federal standards.

Arlington is currently in a state of non-attainment with those standards.

Using development to create a more efficient and dense downtown are both steps in the right direction, said Sattler.

“What Arlington is doing is very good for long-term air quality,” she said.

In addition to current strategies, Sattler also said, public transportation is a huge part of the puzzle.

Kathryn Wilemon, District 4 councilwoman and mayor pro tempore, said the city is looking at rail system in Arlington.

“Rail is the thing I believe will come forward eventually to help get the cars off the road,” Wilemon said. “We can’t keep building big highways. If we continue with the transit we’re in now, our air quality is just going to deteriorate even more.”

The 16-county North Texas region will see a 75 percent population increase by 2050, according to Vision North Texas research. Vision North Texas is a private-public partnership that includes UTA and attempts to better understand the region’s quality of life, economic desirability and long-term sustainability.

For Tarrant County, that equals more than 3.2 million residents; at least 653,000 of those will live in Arlington.

“We have to understand what the larger good of the city is,” Ozdil said. “Most importantly, residents have to live here. It has to be populated.”

Currently, 13 percent of downtown Arlington is used for housing. Downtown Arlington is considered to be the area encompassing the Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone Number One, which is 355 acres, Mitchell said in an email. The area stretches east from Collins Street and west to Davis Street, north from Sanford Street and south to Second Street.

Strategies such as the Division Street makeover are designed to increase residential development interest as well as help alleviate the stress of car emissions. However, because the land is private property, Wilemon said the city needs its community’s support.

That has been difficult to garner, she said.

“We can only plan,” she said. “We can do the infrastructure. We can help in that manner, but we won’t be building anything.”

Wilemon said some residents fear the downtown growth will push out single-family homes.

“We still want to protect the integrity of our single-family neighborhoods,” she said. “We will still try to enhance and grow those areas. But in the areas where the need is there, we will work with development for that.”

Another public reading is scheduled for Nov. 6.

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