

City of Cedar Hill Comprehensive Plan 2008



Chapter 5: LIVABILITY

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INTRODUCTION

Whereas the *Future Land Use Plan* in Chapter 4 addresses City-wide uses in a broad context, the *Livability* chapter is intended to provide guidance on the finer grain of development layout and design.

In the simplest terms, creating “livability” means creating environments which are “people-centric” rather than “auto-centric”. It means creating places where people want to be, that contribute to interaction and discourse with others, and that are personally fulfilling. This has implications for how we design neighborhoods, retail areas and civic spaces, and how we design the routes we take between them.

The urban design of a community plays an important role in its livability. Especially important are the views one encounters circulating through the area. How do the streets feel (including adjacent development), are they “welcoming” and exude the intended character and image of the community at large? Are pedestrian areas such as sidewalks, trails, plazas and yes, parking areas, shaded, comfortable and interesting?

GOALS, OBJECTIVES & POLICIES

The following goals, objectives, and corresponding policies were developed through the visioning portion of this comprehensive planning process. All additional discussion throughout the chapter is intended to support and supplement these goals and objectives. It should be noted that some goals and objectives are applicable to more than one chapter, and therefore may be discussed in each pertinent section.

Goal 5.1:

Review the City's development standards and examine ways in which such standards can be improved to achieve increased livability and sustainability.

- Continually track the City's existing housing inventory, in terms of housing type, lot size, ownership, and location, in order to accurately determine the variety of housing available.
 - Make necessary modifications to the *Future Land Use Map* and/or ordinances, to mitigate the deficiencies of the current housing stock.

Objective 5.1 a: Develop standards for transitional elements to enhance the relationships between residential and complementary non-residential development.

- Integrate retail areas into the surrounding neighborhoods area.
 - Allow a mixture of uses to strengthen and sustain retail uses over time.

Objective 5.1 b: Establish non-residential design standards that will allow the City to proactively plan for the adaptive reuse of buildings that may become vacant as the City ages.

Objective 5.1 c: Review zoning and subdivision ordinances and engineering standards to ensure that the principles of this Plan are incorporated.

Objective 5.1 d: Include guidelines for the establishment of public improvement districts and/or home owners' associations, or both, as appropriate, in all new subdivisions to help enhance the sustainability of neighborhoods.

Objective 5.1 e: Review existing subdivisions and, where appropriate, encourage the establishment of public improvement districts to revitalize and enhance the sustainability of neighborhoods.

**Goal 5.2:
Employ smart growth principles to help ensure the City's future sustainability.**

Objective 5.2 a: Pursue progressive environmental regulations, such as the Green Building Program.

- Consider the implementation of LEED ND (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Neighborhood Development) standards, where appropriate.

**Goal 5.3:
Continue to pursue and encourage the establishment of new businesses in Cedar Hill, thereby creating increased and diversified employment opportunities.**

Objective 5.3 a: Work collaboratively with the Cedar Hill Economic Development Corporation (CHEDC) and the Cedar Hill Community Development Corporation (CHCDC) in achieving mutual goals and objectives.

Objective 5.3 b: Investigate ways the City, the CHEDC, and the CHCDC can combine resources to benefit the residents and local businesses of Cedar Hill.

Objective 5.3 c: Promote tourism of Cedar Hill and related business opportunities.

Objective 5.3 d: In coordination with the CHEDC, develop target industries or employers that would be well suited to Cedar Hill and would diversity its employment opportunities.

- Develop a variety of incentive packages to offer to targeted industries and/or employers.

**Goal 5.4:
Reinforce the vision of Cedar Hill as a premier City for families and businesses; making Cedar Hill known as a destination City with unique points of interest to offer visitors – unique recreation, cultural, and higher education opportunities.**

**Goal 5.5:
Encourage the continued development and establishment of unique recreational opportunities throughout the community.**

Objective 5.5 a: Allow the clustering of homes as a method to preserve land for parks and natural areas.

Objective 5.5 b: Promote the implementation of concepts identified in the *Parks, Recreation & Open Space Master Plan*.

Objective 5.5 c: Pursue a new community park site in the southeastern portion of the City.

- Investigate linking the City trail system, as outlined in the *Parks, Recreation & Open Space Master Plan*, to

nearby trail systems, thus creating a regional trail system throughout the region.

Goal 5.6:

Continue to promote and protect the natural environment of Cedar Hill, including the Escarpment, wildlife, scenery, and vegetation.

Objective 5.6 a: Preserve natural areas for public use, such as areas with extensive tree coverage, wildlife habitat, and views from the Escarpment.

Objective 5.6 b: Promote the preservation of natural green edges along street fronts to serve as buffers to development.

Objective 5.6 c: Ensure the environment and the natural areas surrounding the lake and creek/drainage corridors are protected and preserved as much as possible.

Objective 5.6 d: Enforce the new tree preservation ordinance.

Objective 5.6 e: Work towards becoming Tree City USA.

Goal 5.7:

Pursue the enhancement and awareness of various tourism opportunities in Cedar Hill, such as Dogwood Canyon and Cedar Hill State Park.

Objective 5.7 a: Promote Cedar Hill State Park, the Dallas Nature Center, Joe Pool Lake, and Dogwood Canyon as regional tourist destinations.

Objective 5.7 b: Ensure land uses adjacent to Cedar Hill State Park, Dogwood Canyon, and other areas of natural habitat are appropriate and complimentary.



ELEMENTS OF LIVABILITY

What does the term *livability* mean with regard to city planning? There are many intangibles that make a city livable, such as a sense of community, a strong sense of place, city pride, and the friendliness of neighbors. However, there are also tangible aspects which can nurture livability and specific actions which help to create a truly livable community. The American Institute of Architects has developed the following ten principles essential for creating livable communities. This chapter will build upon these and other principles and identify specific concepts and policies for the City of Cedar Hill.

1 Design on a Human Scale



This street front in Celebration, Florida creates an inviting atmosphere for pedestrians. Store front windows, benches, shade trees, on-street parking, a wide sidewalk, and a grass buffer allow residents and visitors to easily and comfortably walk to shops, cafes, services, and jobs.

2 Provide Choices



Monotony is rarely touted as a selling point. Variety and choice are what people look for in a desirable community. Only through a diverse set of options is a community able to appeal to and provide for a diverse citizenry. Variety in shopping, employment, and particularly housing allow neighborhoods and communities to benefit from the inclusion of people of all ages, educational backgrounds, and income ranges.

3 Encourage Mixed-Use Development

Mixed use developments allow for greater human interaction, and thus more lively and vibrant communities. Ground floor retail and cafes, such as this one providing outdoor seating in Flower Mound, Texas, encourages pedestrian activity and adds to the desirability of surrounding uses.

4 Preserve Urban Centers

The town square in McKinney, Texas, has been revitalized with boutique retail shops, cafes, offices, and a performing arts venue. These uses utilized the existing buildings, and capitalized on the walkability of the square, which continues to bring life and interest to the historic downtown area.

5 Vary Transportation Options

The automobile is no longer the sole consideration of transportation planning. For cities today, it is equally important to incorporate alternative mobility options, such as light rail, trails, and bicycle lanes, such as this one in Houston, Texas. Walking, biking, and public transit all need to be viable options for a community to be healthy, sustainable, and livable.

6 Build Vibrant Public Spaces



A strategically located focal point, such as this large fountain that sits in the middle of residential, retail, office, transit, and civic uses in Englewood, Colorado, indicates to citizens an area specifically dedicated to public gatherings and events.

7 Create Neighborhood Identity



An easily recognizable feature, such as this landscaped clock marking the entry of Las Colinas in Irving, Texas, helps to create a unique identity and character for the neighborhood / community.

8 Protect Environmental Resources



Conscious efforts to protect natural areas can add to the aesthetic quality of an areas, as well as facilitate infrastructure functionality. This drainage area in Highlands Ranch, Colorado, is designed to fit into and enhance the natural landscape. By balancing the demands of development with respect for the environment, communities can preserve the features of nature and even increase property values.

9

Conserve Landscapes



While most livability concepts focus on the built environment, a certain amount of agricultural or natural open space is equally significant. This open area in Denton County, Texas is being used for the grazing of livestock. Such areas serve important environmental, cultural, and economic purposes.

10

Design Matters



Quality design is an essential element in the creation of livable communities. Even in open and public gathering spaces, such as San Francisco's Ghirardelli Square, excellent design is key for a successful and sustainable project.

Sustainability

An important aspect of livability is the concept of **sustainability**, which involves creating an environment that people and businesses want to both invest and re-invest in. It includes such things as the:

- Achievement of a high level of livability, as previously outlined;
- Ability of a person to live in the community from birth to old age to death — i.e. throughout his or her entire life-cycle by offering a broad range of quality housing types that can accommodate singles, families, retirees and elderly needs;
- Ability to adapt to inevitable changes in population characteristics and economic conditions, such as employment opportunities, as the community continues to mature and to age gracefully;
- Creation of a building, cultural, and open space infrastructure that contributes to the desirability of a community over time, and that improves with age. Examples include parks and open space, cultural facilities, and non-residential buildings that do not have to be torn down and rebuilt when tenants move to another location; or which “wear out” in 20 years.
- Provision of a variety of transportation and circulation options; and
- Design of infrastructure that is environmentally sensitive and that minimizes long-term maintenance costs.

In order to create neighborhoods and cities which are sustainable, they must provide a unique combination of assets (i.e., a variety of homes, distinctive design features, quality retail, inviting public spaces, etc.) that are not necessarily found in every other neighborhood or city in the area. Such amenities as proximity to parks, open space and recreation, relationships to schools and neighborhood retail, and views of the landscape can aid in attracting residents with a true and long-term commitment to the community. Residents who will reinvest in their homes and that can continue to live in the same neighborhood when circumstances change, provide an intergenerational mix, security, and a socially supportive community. In the end, it is important that people will, over time, reinvest in their properties rather than just move on to other subdivisions or communities. This is the basis for a stable and healthy community.

“... most of the individual behaviors and governmental policies that support sustainability are best nurtured at the local level”

Skinnarland, Kirvil. “What is a sustainable society?” www.sustainableseattle.org

“The ultimate goal of sustainable design is to create communities that work as efficiently and elegantly as biological systems in order to achieve and maintain, with minimal capital, a high quality of life well into the future. The results of this effort will not only be safer drinking water, cleaner air, and healthier habitats, but also a stronger economic base and – most important – a more empowered and engaged citizenry.”

Williams, Daniel, FAIA. “A Sustainable Approach to Neighborhood and Regional Development.” *Livability 101*, AIA, 2005.

Figure 5-1: Diagram – The Importance of Creating Livability and Sustainability



APPLICATION OF LIVABILITY CONCEPTS

Land Use

Future Land Use (Chapter 4) is the primary location within this *Comprehensive Plan* wherein land uses are discussed and related recommendations are made. However, the way in which land is developed within a community has a direct and lasting impact on “quality of life”, and therefore, some aspects of land use are necessary to discuss within this *Livability* chapter as well. Ideally, the result of a community’s land use pattern is that citizens’ housing and services needs are met locally over the long-term. There are two key components related to land use that are essential to address as Cedar Hill’s level of livability is enhanced and maintained in the future – these are housing variety, and retail development.

Housing Variety

The availability of a variety of housing choices is important to the livability and particularly the sustainability of a city. This is true for a number of reasons. Most recognizably, a mixture of housing options is necessary to meet the individual needs of the population. A homogenous housing stock is not conducive to a diverse population. People with different income levels, cultures, family sizes, etc. need different qualities in their housing. While a young, single professional may be best suited for an upscale loft, a large extended family might require a more traditional, single-family detached home with a backyard in which the kids can play.

“...great neighborhoods offer many choices, they accommodate change gracefully, and they are socially and economically inclusive.”

Hinshaw, Mark. “Great Neighborhoods.”
Planning, Jan 2008, p 6.

Examples of Different Housing Types



Large lot, single family detached



Townhomes



Mixed Use

Similarly, only if a City provides a variety of housing options can the City be a true “full life-cycle” community. The term “full life-cycle” is intended to describe all stages of life – young singles, professional couples, families with children, empty-nesters, retirees and seniors, including those requiring living assistance. To adequately provide for all of these life cycles, and thus allow people to remain in the City even as they progress from cycle to cycle, the City’s housing stock should include high income homes of various types (large lot, small lot, townhome, loft and condominium) and more affordable housing types (small lot / small home, townhome, loft, condominium, mother-in-law suite, mixed use / live-work units, and others).

Recommendations

The inclusion of an assortment of quality, well-constructed and appropriately situated residential units, as previously described, should be a consideration of all new developments. The City should encourage developers to include multiple housing options within new developments. In this way, the City can provide affordable accommodation alternatives for the housing needs of various age groups, employment types, and income ranges.

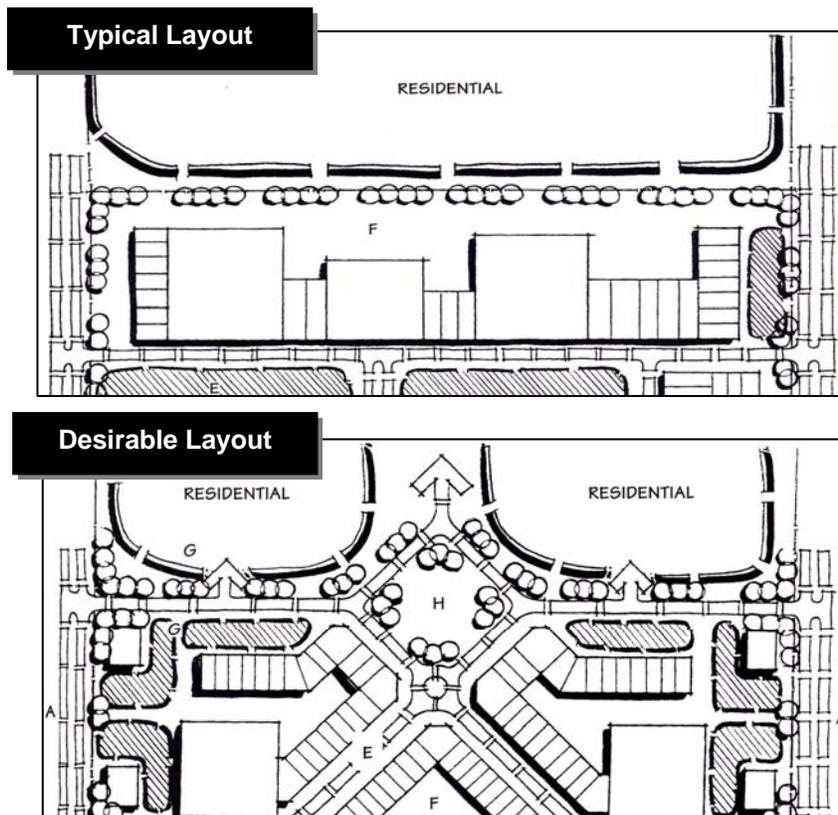
Retail

The design of retail areas has evolved over time. They are now typically single-use (as opposed to mixed use), retail developments that compete for high-visibility intersections and roadway corridors. They are also typically only accessible by automobile. This type of retail development, shown below as the “Typical Layout”, has proved to be unsustainable.

Recommendations

Future retail developments in Cedar Hill should be developed with the following components, which are exemplified in the “Desirable Layout”:

- A mix of uses including residential and/or office
- Pedestrian and roadway connections to adjacent neighborhood areas
- Internalized parking with buildings out front (as opposed to large parking areas located adjacent to the street)
- Separation of parking (to minimize large expanses of concrete)
- Minimized spacing between buildings
- Reduced setbacks (to increase the visibility of buildings)



Source: Hall, Kenneth B. and Gerald A. Porterfield. *Community By Design: New Urbanism for Suburbs and Small Cities*. MacGraw-Hill, 2001, page 190.

Connectivity

Connectivity and the ability to easily get from one land use to another, both with and without the use of the automobile, is an essential element of livability. The old concepts of land use isolation and the resulting sprawl, have been replaced with the more modern concepts of interconnectivity, a mixture of uses, and their residual benefits. The benefits of designing developments and cities with a focus on connectivity include increased physical activity and the associated health benefits, convenience, additional social interaction, and improved environmental responsiveness.

“The purpose of the connectivity requirements...is to ensure provision of efficient access to as many lots as possible, and enhance direct movement by pedestrians, bicycles, and motor vehicles between destinations.”

“Portland, Oregon.” Planning for Street Connectivity. APA Planning Advisory Service Report, No. 515, 2003, p 26.

Development tends to occur autonomously, primarily due to the fact that areas develop at different times. The challenge is to connect these different developments to not only allow for access in between, but to actually encourage people to walk or bike in between (instead of driving). Such connections would not only further a positive neighborhood and community feel, but would also help to address current major concerns about the nation’s lack of fitness, rising energy costs, and environmental impacts.



Example of connectivity between uses in Southlake Town Center

Recommendations

As development occurs, interconnectedness should be encouraged both within and around the development through increased pedestrian, bicycle, and automobile access. More specifically, pedestrian and bicycle connectivity to schools, retail areas, parks, and places of employment should be encouraged. If surrounding areas are not yet developed, provisions for pedestrian, bicycle, and automobile access should be established with consideration for future connections and accessibility. Therefore, the City should integrate into the decision-making process the concept of connectivity for all new development and redevelopment proposals.

Alternative Mobility Options

To a large extent, land development is centered around the automobile. This is due to the fact that the primary mode of transportation is the automobile, and development is designed to accommodate automobiles, often to the exclusion of any other travel mode. However, alternative forms of transportation are becoming increasingly important, with society becoming more aware of healthy lifestyles that involve walking, running and biking, and the rising cost of gasoline is helping to fuel this trend.

Interesting Transportation Facts

Half of the population is too old or too young to drive.

Approximately 80 percent of automobile trips are non-work-related.

Townscape, Inc.

In addition, an alternative form of transportation would benefit a large portion of the population who cannot drive because of age or disability. In Cedar Hill, trails offer one of the most viable options for another mode of transportation. The City has adopted the *Parks, Recreation & Open Space Master Plan* that provides extensive details and recommendations for a City-wide trail system, which would serve both local and regional purposes. As stated in the *Master Plan*, “trails are an important component of the future park system, as they serve recreational, transportation, and linkage purposes.” This portion of the *Livability* chapter, therefore, is intended to reinforce the City’s commitment to establishing an extension to the trail system.



Example of a trail running through Murphy, Texas

Recommendations

In order to enhance Cedar Hill’s livability, the local trail system should connect homes, parks, schools, and any retail uses that are developed. The City should strive to make Cedar Hill into a fully interconnected City; this would allow residents multiple mobility options for travel throughout the City.

Employment

Employment opportunities are obviously an important dimension of any city. While the location of Cedar Hill allows its citizenry the option of finding suitable employment throughout the Dallas-Fort Worth area, local employment options remain an important consideration. Attracting industries or businesses / employers that are deemed appropriate for the City would not only provide additional jobs, but would also limit the amount of people commuting daily, and add to the City's tax base.

"Smart people and strong infrastructure draw businesses. Strong, vibrant communities are what keep them."

Eliot Spitzer, Governor of New York
State of the State Address
January 9, 2008

Recommendations

The City should continue to work with the Cedar Hill Economic Development Corporation (CHEDC) and the Cedar Hill Community Development Corporation (CHCDC) regarding employment options.

IN CONCLUSION

Through the incorporation of these basic concepts, a city can improve its livability, sustainability, and quality of life. Cedar Hill has already been employing many of the practices related to livability, discussed herein. For example, the location of the new City Administration Facility mixes a variety of uses in close proximity, helps to create a defined public space, provides connections via multi-modal options (i.e., the trail system and the commuter rail, when applicable), and features visually interesting design details. Preservation of the Escarpment and its environmental significance is another instance in which Cedar Hill has progressively acted to protect and enhance a unique characteristic which helps to define the essence of the City.

It is only through such active measures aimed at continually improving quality of life that a city / community can become a truly great place. While “a great place” may initially sound elusive, it is simply a place in which the residents have a strong connection to their living environment. When residents form an emotional bond to their surroundings they are more involved, informed, and willing to invest in their community. As the diagram in *Figure 5-1* illustrates, citizens’ investment and subsequent reinvestment in the community is the crucial element to the longevity and sustainability of any place.

The table below summarizes the recommendations from this *Livability* chapter. In addition, a reference to the corresponding goals and objectives are included with each recommendation.

| Summary of Recommendations | |
|---|-----------------------------|
| Housing Variety | Goal /Objective |
| Where appropriate, the City should encourage developers to include a variety of quality housing types in all new developments. | 5.1 |
| Retail | |
| The City should require that new retail developments include a mixture of uses, provide ample pedestrian connections, are configured so that buildings front the street (rather than parking) with reduced set backs, and incorporate other such features which help to create a unique, sustainable pedestrian experience. | 5.1; 5.1a |
| Connectivity | |
| Pedestrian, bicycle, and automobile access should be required between all new developments and adjacent developed areas. | 5.1; 5.1a |
| The City should require pedestrian and bicycle connections to/from residential, retail, parks, school, and employment centers. | 5.1; 5.1a |
| The concept of connectivity should be integrated into the City's decision making process regarding all new development and redevelopment proposals. | 5.1 |
| Alternative Mobility Options | |
| The City should work toward making the community fully interconnected, particularly by means of the bike and trail system. | 5.5b; 5.5c |
| Employment | |
| The City should continue to work with the Cedar Hill Economic Development Corporation (CHEDC) and the Cedar Hill Community Development Corporation (CHCDC) regarding employment options. | 5.3; 5.3a; 5.3b; 5.3c; 5.3d |