

Comprehensive Plan 2008

Little Elm, Texas



Chapter 3: Livability Strategy

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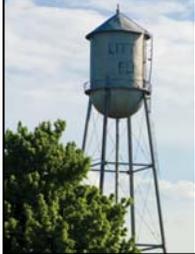
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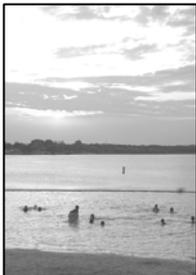
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INTRODUCTION

What does the term *livability* mean with regard to city/town planning? There are many intangibles that make a city or town livable, such as a sense of community, a strong sense of place in particular areas, civic pride, and the friendliness of neighbors. But there are also tangible aspects that can nurture livability. Therefore, the aspects of livability that this chapter will concentrate on involve:

- Creation of walkable communities;
- Creation of neighborhood identity, and areas with a strong “sense of place”;
- Concentration on the design of the Public Realm³⁻¹;
- Aesthetic quality of the neighborhoods and community;
- Proximity to open space and recreational opportunities;
- Proximity and availability of other community services such as high quality schools;
- Ease of access to and quality of retail and restaurants;
- Traffic flow and availability of alternative means of travel;
- Availability of the desired type, style, and cost of housing;
- Proximity to employment opportunities;
- Sustainability in buildings and development pattern; and
- Accessibility to natural areas.

Figure 3-1: The Importance of Creating Livability & Long-Term Value (Sustainability)



¹ This term includes all spaces that are not privately owned and that are encountered by citizens and visitors on a regular basis such that these spaces influence the perception that citizens and visitors have of Health. Such spaces include streets, parks, sidewalks, trails, and public buildings.





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

- Achievement of a high level of livability, as outlined above;
- 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 condition, 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.

LIVABILITY POLICIES

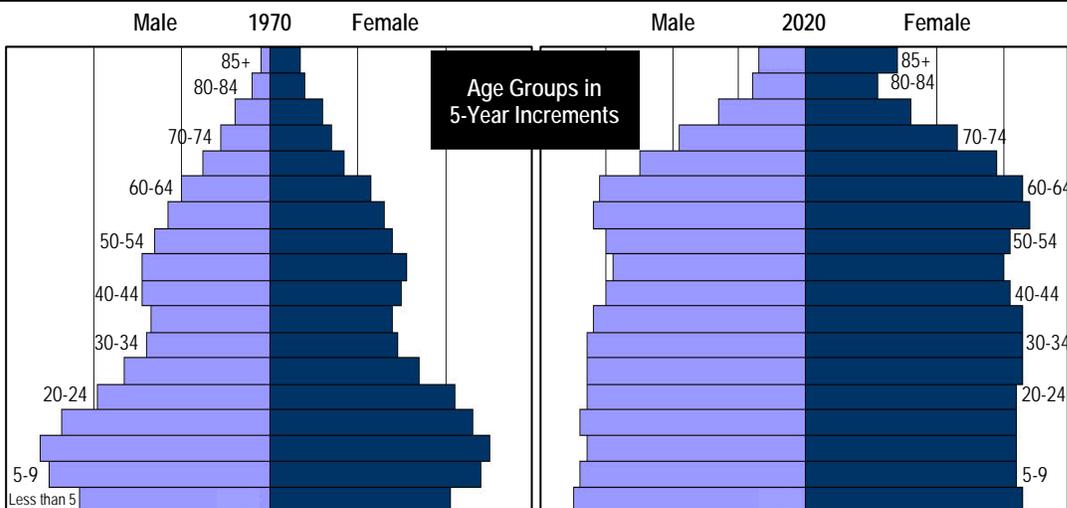
A Full-Life Cycle Community

All sustainable communities must provide housing for the full cycle of life – young singles, married couples, families, empty nesters, retirees, and seniors (including independent, assisted-living, and nursing homes). People progressing through each of these life phases have different requirements in terms of size, location, type and cost of housing units. Truly successful communities that provide these options maintain value and continue to attract investment. An important attribute, however, is not to segregate the non-single-family unit types, but rather to integrate them into diverse neighborhoods throughout the community.

Over the past 20 years or so, major changes have begun in the composition of the general population. On average, people are living longer, having fewer children, living more single lifestyles, and becoming more ethnically diverse. Consider the following trends identified by William Frey, Senior Fellow with the Brookings Institution, related to the general population:

- **Traditional Families** – Married couples with children made up only 27 percent of all suburban households in 2000; by 2010, they will constitute as little as 20 percent. Today, the other 73 percent of American households are made up of singles, families with no children, and single parents with children.

Figure 3-1: Population Age Distribution – 1970 & 2020



Source: Riche, Martha Farnsworth. Farnsworth Riche and Associates. *The Implications of Changing U.S. Demographics for Housing Choice and Location in Cities.* A Discussion Paper Prepared for The Brookings Institution Center on Urban & Metropolitan Policy. March 2001. (Adapted from Figure 1.)





- **People Living Alone** – People living alone constituted 23.5 percent of households in 2000; by 2010, they will grow to over 33 percent of all households.
- **Population 35 Years & Over** – Population aged 35 and over reached 46.3 percent in 1990; in 2000, they rose to 50.5 percent.
- **Minorities** – In the 2000 census, 27 percent of the suburban population in large metropolitan areas nationwide was made up of minorities, up from 19 percent in 1990; minorities were responsible for the bulk of the population growth in many suburban regions.

The demographic changes noted above have important implications for real estate markets. For example, compared to families with children, singles, couples with no children, and retirees are more likely to be attracted to smaller, lower-maintenance housing that is clustered within walking distance of retail, employment and transit facilities. Another interesting fact is that in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metropolitan Area in 2005, 26 percent of all households were comprised of single persons; and 47 percent of mortgages were written for singles.

Most new homes being constructed in Little Elm are single-family detached. This is a reflection of the initial demand for housing in developing areas. Families looking for larger homes (for the money) on single-family lots in a good school district are often the first to move into a new subdivision. However, as in all maturing communities, early residents either “age” in the community or move to another. In fact, the median American moves once every five years, so within eight to ten years, a majority of the original purchasers typically move out of the community and a new population moves in. This is a phenomenon that all communities have experienced, and has contributed to a rapid decline of many monotonous subdivisions. Master-planned communities however, are careful to include a variety of housing types over time.

The additional issue that many fast-growing suburban areas face is the fact that a majority of their building stock and utility infrastructure was built within a relatively short time frame, and will consequently age together and require increasing amounts of maintenance. The best way to avoid the negative effects of this on the quality of the community and the municipal and school tax rate is to ensure re-investment by creating a diversity of housing and retail type and amenities. The greater the diversity of product type, the stronger the market is for each type. The worst possible scenario would be to build all of one type and size of home and one type of retail center, as so many communities have done over the last 30 to 50 years.

Policy LP.1: Emphasize the need for housing variety, to characterize Little Elm as a full-life cycle community. (Reference: Goals L.1 & L.2)

Sub-Policy LP.1.1: Housing variety should incorporate a housing stock of diverse sizes, types, and prices.

Sub-Policy LP.1.2: The following elements should be recorded by the Town to create an inventory of the existing housing stock to monitor the level of housing diversity:

- a) Housing type,
- b) Lot-size, and
- c) Square footage of the residential unit.

Sub-Policy LP.1.3: Promote the use of the “housing tree” in residential developments, with this concept larger homes are located adjacent to the main street with smaller homes behind.

Figure 3-2: Example of the Housing Tree Concept
 Source: Arcadia Realty and TBG partners





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Focal Points

The most livable towns and cities generally have at least one location that citizens can identify as a gathering place. Examples include Covent Gardens in London, Dupont Circle in Washington, D.C., Rockefeller Center in New York City, Southlake Town Center, and Snider Plaza in University Park. Another type of gathering space that is not as obvious, but is often just as effective as intentionally created spaces are known as “third places.” These are places that are not the “home” or the “office”, but a place where people gather and discuss issues and ideas, and where rank and title are left behind. Examples include coffee shops, bookstores, cafes, and restaurants.

During the public input process, one of the greatest concerns was that Little Elm did not have an identity. While people commented that the Town had a “small-town feel,” the general consensus was it was difficult to identify Little Elm from the surrounding communities and that the Town did not have a true center. The concepts of developing a town center and other focal points of the community were mentioned as methods to help develop a Town identity.

Furthermore, creating attractive pedestrian connections from the town center or other focal points (i.e., neighborhood retail areas) to the surrounding neighborhoods will increase the desirability, sense of place, and value of those neighborhoods while at the same time supporting business activity in the Town Center or focal points. Sidewalks in and around the Town Center and other focal points are a vital part of the infrastructure. In heavy traffic areas, sidewalks should be wide enough to accommodate two-way pedestrian traffic (approximately six to eight feet wide, but up to ten feet in retail/restaurant areas), and they should provide interesting views, shade and a feeling of safety.

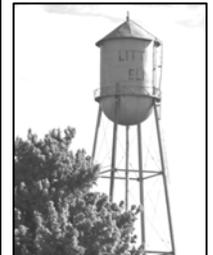
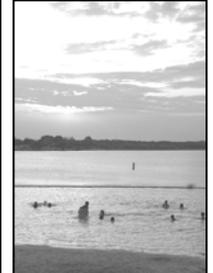


Examples of Pedestrian Connections

What is “Sense of Place?”

Places that are desirable appeal to all the senses—sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. They are a rich mix of local activities, aesthetic design, quality, and price. Successful place making is about meeting demand from the local community. Besides allowing people to perform essential functions such as holding jobs and shopping, places should be enjoyable, entertaining, and educational. Success in place making lies in configuring spaces and structures and the interconnections between and among them in a way that facilitates and encourages human activity and interaction—an environment that people want to be a part of because it has been designed, built, and maintained with the goal of satisfying the full spectrum of human needs and aspirations from the mundane to the inspirational. A successful place appeals to the senses, engaging visitors and inhabitants alike in a voyage of discovery of enticing sights, sounds, and scents.

Booth, Geoffrey, et al. Ten Principles for Reinventing Suburban Business Districts. Washington, D.C.: ULI—the





Policy LP.2: Integrate retail / office centers and mixed-use developments as focal points of surrounding neighborhoods. (Reference: Goals L.2 & L.4)

Sub-Policy LP.2.1: Create a Town Center to be a focal point for the community, foster civic pride, and enhance the Town's identity.



Source: Jim Richards, Townscape
Conceptual Drawing of the Little Elm Town Center

Sub-Policy LP.2.2: Investigate the concept of a shuttle or trolley connecting the Town Center with surrounding areas, including parks and retail destinations.

Sub-Policy LP.2.3: Investigate the concept of a community and recreation center within the Town Center.

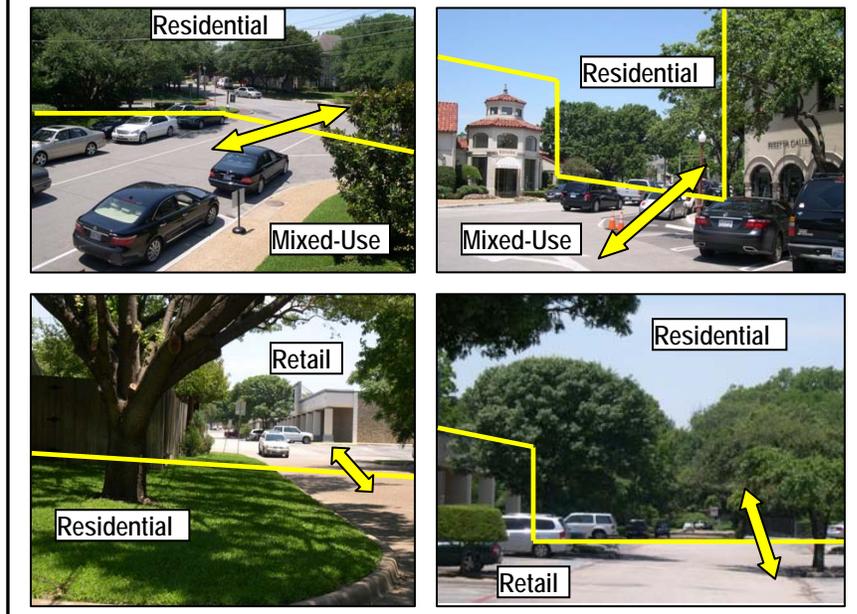
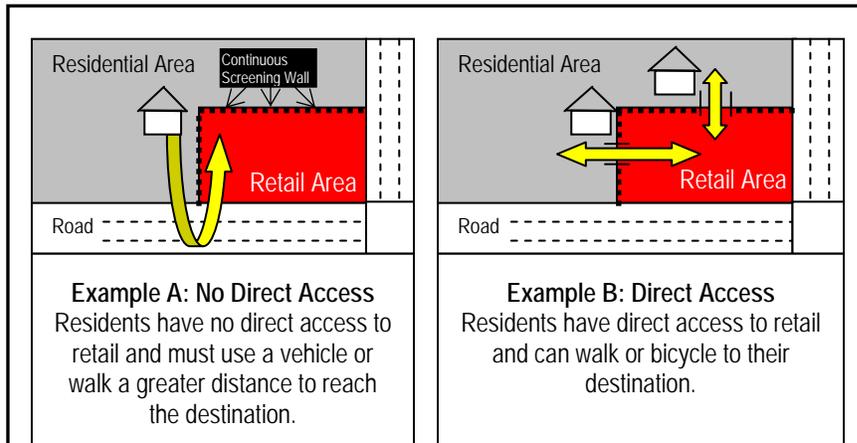
Sub-Policy LP.2.4: Create walking & biking trails between neighborhoods and retail centers to provide a convenient connection, without the need for automobiles.



Examples of Connections

Sub-Policy LP.2.5: Provide access to neighborhoods from compatible adjacent development, such as retail and mixed-use developments.

- a) Retail and mixed-use development should be designed to be part of the surrounding neighborhood, instead of autonomous, separated developments.
- b) Limit the use of traditional screening walls that block access to adjacent neighborhoods from retail and mixed-use developments.



Arrow Depicts Access between Residential & Non-Residential Areas



Examples of Access





Sub-Policy LP.2.6: Encourage pedestrian friendly environments.



Examples of Pedestrian Friendly Environments

Sub-Policy LP.2.7: Encourage retail developments to:

- a) Promote slower traffic,
- b) Reduce the need for large signs,
- c) Decrease the amount vehicle trips, and
- d) Lower the amount of required parking.

Sub-Policy LP.2.8: Ensure "ownership of the street" in pedestrian-oriented commercial and mixed-use areas by providing windows and direct access to the sidewalk from adjacent uses.

Sub-Policy LP.2.9: Concentrate retail and office developments in areas with ample pedestrian access.

Sub-Policy LP.2.10: Ensure that the Town is not over-zoned with traditional retail zoning districts.

Office Developments

One of the most repeated comments received during both the public workshops and CPAC meetings related to the Town's need for additional employment opportunities. This comment, combined with the community's desire for livable and sustainable development, supports the idea that Little Elm's future office development should be unique and diverse in nature. For instance, traditional or neo-traditional office developments should be allowed in designated area of the Town. These types of office developments (e.g., live-work units) would allow a person to live above their office. However, these types of units are not suitable for the entire Town, since they do not accommodate larger scale office developments.

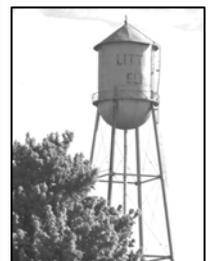
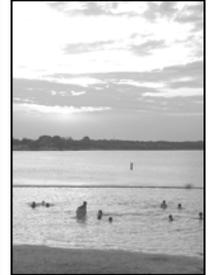
Policy LP.3: Promote the development of diverse office spaces throughout the Town. (Reference: Goals L.1, L.2, L.3, & L.4)

Sub-Policy LP.3.1: Encourage live-work units, where appropriate.

- a) Definition: Live-Work Units. Live-work units refer to units that contain both living quarters and studio/workshop/office/personal or professional service space, such as artist lofts and travel agencies. In some instances, the business activity occupying the live/work unit may utilize employees in addition to the residents. However, at least one of the full-time workers of the live/work unit must reside in the unit, and the residential area cannot be rented separately from the working area. Live-work units are frequently created through the adaptive reuse of non-residential structures, but may also be developed as a new building designed for such use.



Examples of Live-Work Units



Examples of Live Work Units

Sub-Policy LP.3.2:

Work collaboratively with the Little Elm Economic Development Corporation (LEEDC) to:

- a) Understand which industries and employers would be well suited for the Town and ensure that zoning and other regulations are supportive of that type of development.
- b) Help achieve the EDC's goals and objectives.



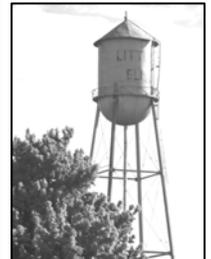
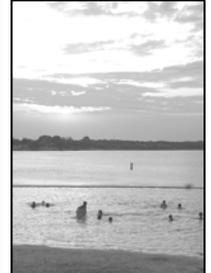
Quality Design and Building Materials

Quality design and building materials are intended to improve the quality of life, or livability, of Little Elm. The following policies focus on elements of the man-made environment that can be enhanced, such as building materials, site design, landscaping, and similar elements. Such elements are often difficult to quantify because their aesthetic quality is inherently subjective. They often deal with the sensory response of people to the physical environment in terms of its visual appearance, spatial character and relationships. Although individual responses to aesthetic considerations vary, the careful application of image-related design principles in planning practice should enhance the quality of the built environment and the corresponding quality of life enjoyed by Little Elm's citizens and visitors.

The images that people experience along major roadways often create a lasting impression of the local quality of life. Communities across the country have recognized that roadways offer a tremendous opportunity to enhance their image. Little Elm has made efforts at improving its image by implementing landscaping, screening, and sign standards. Additionally, several roadway medians have been landscaped and gateway entry treatments have been constructed.

Elements such as landscaping, building materials, and signage – which are typically reviewed by the Town during the development approval process – will serve as the basis for many of the recommendations herein. New projects offer the opportunity for development standards to be implemented as part of the zoning process. By implementing the image and design elements recommended here, site development and building design standards for future development can be applied throughout the Town without the need for planned unit development zoning. Applying these standards in a uniform manner would have a significant impact on the quality of life and the community image of Little Elm.

Fundamental to the image of Little Elm is maintaining its “small-town feel”. Basic to this image is the need to encourage interpersonal interaction and chance meetings with friends and neighbors. However, the majority of the Town (e.g., retail areas) is designed to be automobile-oriented, and this design works against the creation of social gathering places and social interactions that provide a “sense of community”. Such “strip” and “pad” development types tend to ebb and flow in response to evolving and changing markets. Nearby cities such as Plano, Richardson, and Carrollton are suffering because of this condition. Significant portions of their retail market have moved northward leaving vacant and underutilized single-purpose developments. These centers were designed and built





exclusively for automobile-oriented retail, and they were “walled off” (i.e., physically separated) from adjacent neighborhoods. After a 20- to 40-year economic life, there are few options besides demolition and reconstruction for new uses.

Policy LP.4: Promote quality design and building materials for residential and non-residential developments, to ensure lasting value of the property and community. (Reference: Goals L.2, L.4, & L.7)

Sub-Policy LP.4.1: Encourage quality design and building materials.



Examples of Quality Designs and Building Materials

Sub-Policy LP.4.2: Promote the inclusion of gathering places within both residential and non-residential developments.



Examples of Gathering Spaces

Sub-Policy LP.4.3: Encourage design in both residential and non-residential development that respects natural topography and drainage.



Examples of Preservation

Sub-Policy LP.4.4: Promote the use of green building standards to help reduce the cost and consumption of utilities.

Sub-Policy LP.4.5: Create public buildings that have distinction and quality design in highly visible locations.



Examples of Public Buildings

Sub-Policy LP.4.6: Focus on sustaining and improving existing residential neighborhoods with the following:

- a) Proactive code enforcement,
- b) Repairing roads and other infrastructure needs,
- c) Retrofitting neighborhoods with bicycle lanes, and
- d) Improved public landscaping.





Sub-Policy LP.4.7:

Through the use of zoning, ensure the location, size of development, screening, buffering, access, connectivity, and parks and recreational opportunities (e.g., hike and bike trails connected to the development) are compatible and complementary to the surrounding land uses.

Sub-Policy LP.4.8:

Focus on sustaining and improving existing non-residential areas with the following:

- a) Proper screening of business operations,
- b) Quality sign standards,
- c) Proactive code enforcement, and
- d) Quality landscaping standards.

Sub-Policy LP.4.9:

Update the current tree preservation ordinance.

Sub-Policy LP.4.10:

Landscaping requirements should promote water conservation.

Street Design

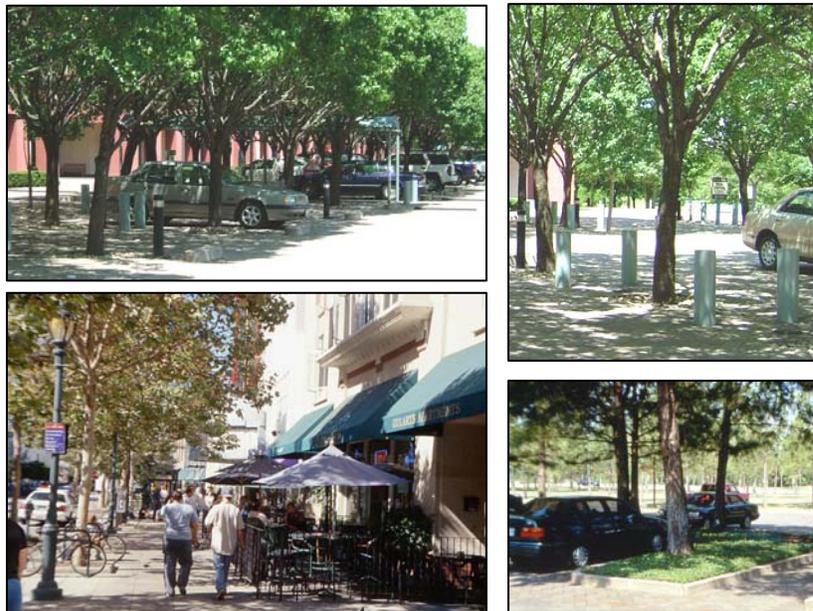
Streets are one of the most common and frequently used public features in any urban environment. Every day people use streets to enter and leave their neighborhoods. Either the influence streets have on people can be positive, negative, or a mixture of both. Streets have a direct influence of the quality of life and sustainability of a neighborhood. Because of their importance in defining and creating public space, street design should not be based solely on the desire to move automobile traffic. Pedestrians and their relationship to the street also need to be considered.

"The streets and sidewalks are the social glue that binds the place together."

Hinshaw, Mark. "Great Neighborhoods." *Planning*, Jan 2008, p.7

Policy LP.5: Encourage livable commercial and residential street design that provides for a positive pedestrian experience. (Reference: Goals L.2, L.4, & L.7)

Sub-Policy LP.5.1: Encourage the use of shade trees to provide relief from the sun and lessen the effects of the heat during summer months.

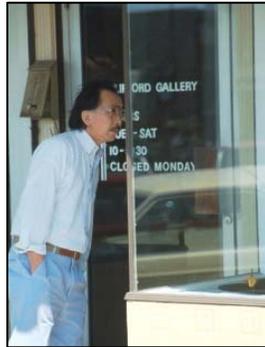


Examples of Shade Trees





Sub-Policy LP.5.2: Promote the use of clear windows for retail activity and the display of merchandise at grade for visual interest to pedestrians.



Examples of the use of Clear Windows

Sub-Policy LP.5.3: Support the use of sidewalks as a continuation of retail and restaurant / entertainment activity.



Examples of Retail Use of the Sidewalk

Sub-Policy LP.5.4: Design streets with generous sidewalks.

Sub-Policy LP.5.5: Consider developing street types/designs to match the character and function of the area (e.g., desired speed).

Sub-Policy LP.5.6: Allow the use of roundabouts at intersections to slow traffic and provide attractive landmark views.



Examples of Roundabouts

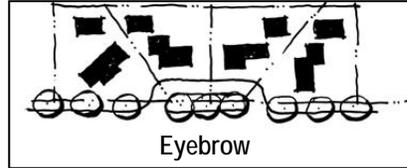
Sub-Policy LP.5.7: In areas not adjacent to a major transportation corridor (i.e., Eldorado Parkway and Highway 380), consider limiting the use of street walls and promoting the use of large lots, slip streets, eyebrow streets, and courts to create a more enjoyable walking environment.



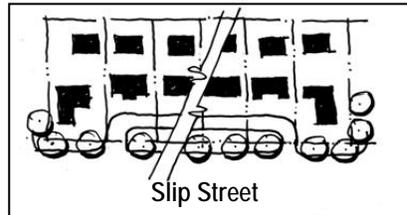
Above: Design Discouraged



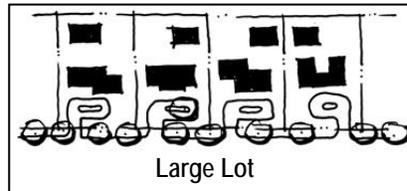
Above: Design Encouraged
(Slip Street)



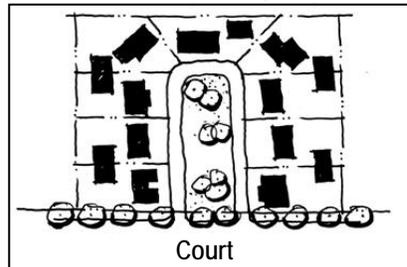
Eyebrow



Slip Street



Large Lot



Court

Examples of Creating Enjoyable Walking Environments





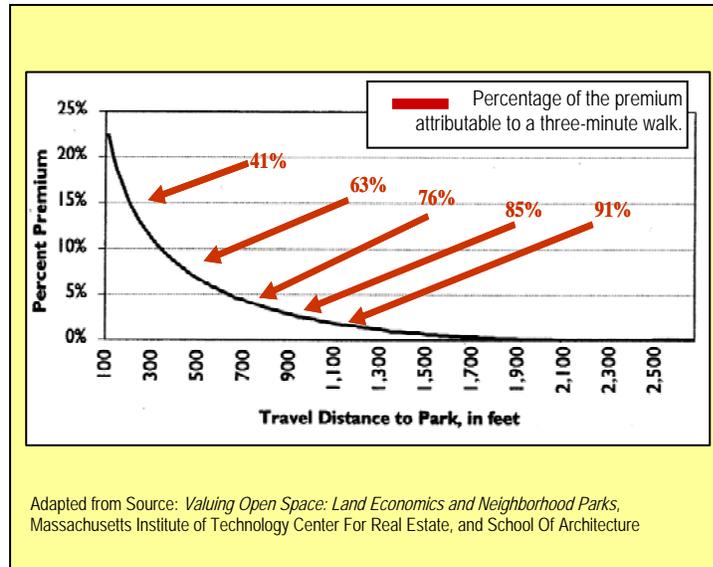
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Incorporate Parks and Open Space

The amount and quality of parks and open space within a community are often cited as important elements of the local quality of life. Little Elm has recognized this fact through an adopted 2005 Park Master Plan and other various park planning efforts. This portion of the *Livability Strategy*, therefore, focuses on fine-tuning the way in which parks and open spaces are designed and integrated with development throughout the Town order to further enhance the town's livability.

There are researched and proven methods to add value to sites and homes that are adjacent to parks and open spaces. These methods generally relate to the level of visibility and accessibility to such areas. As shown in the image below, the following are key facts related to adding value to properties adjacent to parks and open spaces:

- Properties within 100 feet of public open space have a 23-percent premium property value.
- There is measurable value added to properties for up to a quarter-mile.
- Properties that have access to a park or open space within a three-minute walk account for 85 percent of the total value-added premium.



Value Added to Homes via Parks and Open Space

Given these facts, the way in which a neighborhood is laid out can greatly affect property values. The following actions are therefore recommended to add value, increased livability, and greater sustainability to local home sites.





Policy LP.6: Incorporate parks and open space into all new residential development projects and existing neighborhoods, where feasible. (Reference: Goals L.5 & F.8)

Sub-Policy LP.6.1: Promote trails and parks within neighborhoods and non-residential areas.



Examples of Parks and Open Space

Sub-Policy LP.6.2: Encourage neighborhood socialization and promote higher land values via the creation of parks, recreational areas, and open space throughout all neighborhoods.



Examples of Parks and Open Space

Sub-Policy LP.6.3: Disperse open space throughout neighborhoods.



Example of Dispersing Open Space throughout a Neighborhood

Sub-Policy LP.6.4: Encourage homes to face towards open spaces.



Example of Homes Facing Towards Open Space





Sub-Policy LP.6.5: Promote the use of clustering to create open spaces within neighborhoods.

Sub-Policy LP.6.6: Investigate the need and possible location for a new library.

Sub-Policy LP.6.7: Coordinate with Little Elm Independent School District (L.E.I.S.D) to build parks, recreational opportunities, and open spaces throughout the community.

Hike & Bike Trails

To a large extent, land development is centered on 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 option. 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 Facts About Transportation

Half of the population is too old or too young to drive. Approximately 80 percent of automobile trips are non-work-related.

Connectivity and the ability to travel from one area to another without the use of a vehicle is an important community feature. Examples of connectivity would be a person being able to walk to a store, park, trail, school, or through an adjoining neighborhood. Neighborhood design should encourage people to be physically active in their community. With approximately 67 percent of Americans being overweight and 33 percent being obese² (increasing a person's risk of diabetes, heart disease, and other health issues), the neighborhood should be a place where people can get physical exercise in a comfortable and enjoyable environment. The physical health of individuals is an important part of neighborhood livability and sustainability.

In addition, an alternative form of transportation would benefit a large portion of the population who cannot drive because of age or disability. In Little Elm, trails offer the most viable option for another transportation mode. The Town has adopted the 2005 Parks Master Plan that establishes trails throughout the community. This portion of the *Livability Strategy*, therefore, is intended to reinforce the Town's commitment to establishing an extension to the trail system. From the perspective of enhancing livability, the local trail system should connect homes, parks, schools, and any retail uses that are developed.

² BBC News, Obesity 'Epidemic' Turns Global, OCT 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/health/7057951.stm>





Policy LP.7: Link parks, open spaces, neighborhoods, non-residential developments, and other community attractions throughout the Town with a series of interconnected hike & bike trails. (Reference: Goals L.4, L.5, & F.8)

Sub-Policy LP.7.1: Promote an interconnected hike & bike system that would allow people, such as school-aged children and the elderly, to move freely about the community, without the need for automobiles.



Examples of Parks and Open Space Linkages

Sub-Policy LP.7.2: Link Little Elm's hike & bike trail system to surrounding trail systems, such as Frisco's and Prosper's systems.

Sub-Policy LP.7.3: Work with the Army Corp of Engineers and developers to provide additional areas around the lake to be used for public use, such as:

- a) Hike and Bike Trails, and
- b) Additional Marina Facilities.

Sub-Policy LP.7.4: Investigate the addition of bicycle lanes to existing roadways.



Examples of Bicycle Lanes

Preserving the Floodplain

In recent decades, awareness of the importance of preserving the environment has grown. The impact of development on the environment can be positive or negative – development can enhance environmental features for the better, or it can essentially “pave over paradise.” The preservation of one of Little Elm’s most important environmental assets and the promotion of the lake as an amenity are important community goals. The lake’s value to residents was repeatedly mentioned in the public workshops and is prominent in the vision and mission statements.

Lewisville Lake offers many opportunities for people to enjoy a natural setting. The natural settings surrounding the lake can be used as a community asset if people are allowed access to the natural open space areas. The relationship between the Town and the Army Corp of Engineers, the organization responsible for the lake, is important to ensuring that future development respects natural features and that floodplains are preserved.

Policy LP.8: Preserve and utilize the floodplain surrounding Lewisville Lake as natural open space areas. (Reference: Goals L.2, L.3, L.4, L.5, L.6, & F.9)

Sub-Policy LP.8.1: Work with the Army Corp of Engineers to obtain public access to Corp properties surrounding the lake.



Examples of Preserving Flood Plain

