

## FM Center: From Here to There

Planners Consider First Steps for Development

By Cécile Satin

Staff Writer

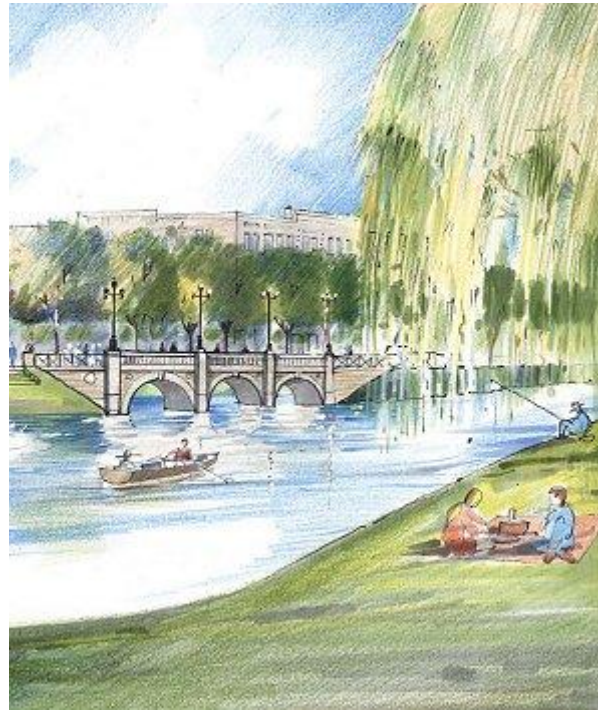
*Editor's Note: Second of two parts.*

Urban forest, density and Master Plan amendments are among the major hurdles that await developers of the 158 acres of land between Cross Timbers, Long Prairie and Morris Roads.

Parker Square developer Cole McDowell recently unveiled plans for a "down town" Flower Mound anchored in the center by a 3,200 feet-long river walk, a hospital, 40 acres of parks and an Italian influenced plaza.

Council and planning and zoning commissioners all agreed-- it looks great, but it will take some work before the plan materializes.

The project will be developed in phases and may take up to 10 years to complete development of all 158 acres, McDowell said. While he did not go into too many details, he told council members that the first phase would be the southern portion of the development near FM 2499 and the current post office, one block north of Cross Timbers. It would entail the southern end of the river walk and one-to-two story retail buildings, which could include a high-scale grocery store. McDowell estimated building cost at \$20 million for the first phase.



The last attempt by another developer to build a Market Street grocery store on that southern portion failed last year after council denied a master plan amendment request to remove part of the urban forest designation on the property. Council thought at the time that not enough had been done to protect the forest.

"You can't compare the last excursion with what is being proposed," Commissioner Dennis McKaige said. "The scale of this is four times what the other one was."

The scale of development also left many wondering about the preservation of tree canopy and the urban forest.

Project engineer Bobby Dollack said he has estimated the tree coverage at 72 acres, but once development is completed, the tree canopy would be at 49.6 acres.

"It is a step-canopy replacement to replace any trees eliminated with each phase of the building process," Dollack said.

McDowell mentioned that the urban forest represents roughly 125 feet and they intend to keep about 50 feet of it.

"The problem is that nobody can get in there," McDowell said. "When we are done with it, we will have parks with trees and streets with trees. I think that we can get to 100 percent of tree canopy when it is built and settled down."

The plan also includes a 130 foot buffer of existing trees along the north, east, and south edge of the Forums neighborhood homes. The pond adjacent to that neighborhood will be increased by 30 percent, McDowell said.

But, encroaching on the urban forest will take a master plan amendment and a super majority vote. The town listed three urban forests, but has no definition of the designation and no protection guidelines other than its tree ordinance. The current ordinance has been deemed ineffective to protect these ecologically sensitive areas by the town's Environmental Conservation Commission.

Since this spring, there has already been one unsuccessful proposal to change the tree ordinance. Commissioners and council members have been unable to come to terms on a new tree ordinance and have remained at a stand still since then.

Also during this time period, council also agreed to amend the master plan and eliminate the urban forest designation on two properties fronting Long Prairie Road between Timber Creek and Euclid. The removal was requested by the homeowners who saw the designation as a limitation of their property rights.

McDowell also mentioned that the main component of the development will be a residential mix including condominiums, two-to-three story town houses or duplexes, unassisted senior living and some multi-family units along Morris Road. The condominiums would be located at the center of the development in a 10-story building.

A few high density projects have been brought to the forefront by developers over the past few months in Lakeside and at the corner of Chaparral Road and FM 2499.

But council members and residents have shown reservation when it comes to multi-family and high density residential. However, council members have agreed that if controlled, high density developments could become an asset. With the increased interest to build condominium and town houses comes the need for new regulations, Smith said.

"We are developing the ability to have town houses and create the standards and regulations needed to get the quality product we expect," Mayor Jody Smith said.

Planning and Zoning Commissioners had agreed this summer to work on creating requirements in the zoning code regarding the design and development standards of town homes and multi-family units.

Council members also mentioned their desire to see a town hall included within the development. Under the town's charter, however, town hall is to remain at the location it is now. Moving it would include changing the town's ordinance, Smith said.

But the next step for McDowell is creating a "central business district overlay" outlining the project's components and start the application process with the town.

"This [phase] includes a plaza, river walk, and buildings with architectural features that will endure," McKaige said. "It is a vision that we need to move to...but we need a mechanism to have the project stay on course."