

Trinity Uptown – Fort Worth

Fort Worth is a western metropolis located in the north central region of Texas. Its history roots back to the mid 1800's when it was just a military outpost. Today it is a burgeoning city of well over a 600,000 people and anchors a metropolitan area of over 2.3 million people¹. Fort Worth is also the fastest growing city in the nation with a population over 500,000. For the most part the city has grown in the typical fashion of most Sunbelt cities. The build environment is characterized by low density, autocentric development made up of strip malls, single family houses with front and back yards, and freeways.

The sprawling model for the city's development has brought about many negative issues such as air pollution, water shortages, urban flash flooding, loss of animal habitat, and many other problems. People in the Fort Worth metropolitan area have enjoyed relatively short commutes however as the city has grown traffic has worsened and commutes have become longer in time and distance. These issues have begun to detract from the quality of life in the region.

In 1949, the city was devastated by its worst flood in its recent history. Over a span of three days heavy rains fell over the city causing wide spread flooding and in some places the water rose well over 20 feet high. It is a well known story around Fort Worth about the Flood of 1949 that the water went to the second story of the Montgomery Ward building on west 7th Street. After this devastating flood the city spent millions to build a levee system that could protect residents from the 100 year flood.

In the 1980s, city leaders and residents saw that the city was growing considerably and the flood protection system built in the 1950 may not be adequate and developed a master plan for the Trinity River corridor throughout the Fort Worth Metro which includes much of the western watershed for the river.

¹ <http://www.nctcog.org/ris/demographics/population/2007popestimates.pdf>

The idea of a master plan for the Trinity River was created by members of the community in the 1980s and developed by urban designers and specialty consultants in the 1990s, and adopted by City Council in 2003. The Trinity River Vision Master Plan encompasses 88 miles of the Trinity River and its greenbelts and tributaries throughout the Fort Worth area. The "vision" has always been to advocate for this natural resource, keeping the river beautiful, accessible, enjoyable, and productive and to make sure it remains a valuable asset for the entire region.

The master plan addressed such issues as the environment, ecosystems, flood protection, recreational opportunities, access to the waterfront, preserving green space, and urban revitalization based around the river.

The plan focuses on eight segments of the Trinity River and its tributaries: Clear Fork North, Clear Fork South, Marine Creek, Mary's Creek, Sycamore Creek, West Fork East, West Fork West, and most importantly the Central City



area now called Trinity “Uptown”. It considers environmental quality, conservation, recreation facilities, trail developments, reforestation, beautification, and linkage to neighborhoods, downtown, and other special districts. The plan also addresses adjoining land uses, transportation and how other facilities best complement and benefit from the greenways. However, the most complex section of the project is the downtown portion.

The Central City Project is one segment of the Trinity River Vision master plan. It includes about four miles of the river from near West 7th Street and Trinity Park on the south to Samuels Avenue and 23rd Street on the north. This is a portion of the river where the floodway levee system has created a visual and physical barrier to the river and inhibited development in Fort Worth's core. This project will provide needed flood protection for the area and allow the public access to 12 miles of waterfront. The area will provide the link from downtown north to the Stockyards and west to the Museum District.

The project includes creating a new bypass channel through portions of the near northside area of the city as well as deepening and widening the current river channel into a “town” lake. This project will create 4 islands across the lake from downtown. Currently this area is home to an old industrial area with many abandoned warehouses. This section of town has very little residential uses therefore this phase will have very little to no direct impact on homes. This area will be known as Uptown.

The Uptown plan aims to revitalize an 800-acre area north of downtown Fort Worth with a combination of public improvements and private development. Its goal is to provide an environment in which families can live, work, shop, play, and learn. Public-Private partnerships are key to ensure that this section of the vision can be fulfilled. Private development of the area will be possible once flood protection is in place and levees are removed to open up the land. The area will enable up to 10,000 new homes to be constructed in the area, providing a solution to the demand for high-density urban housing; Downtown Fort Worth is expected grow from 3,000 people in 2000 to more than 18,000 by 2015². The city's population is expected to increase by more than 50% in the next 20 years,

² Fort Worth Star-Telegram

and Uptown will provide a cost-efficient and sustainable alternative to annexation and urban sprawl.

Uptown will allow the city to integrate mixed-income housing into Fort Worth's central city. Residential development in the Uptown area will complement and reinforce the already successful adjoining neighborhoods without resulting in widespread gentrification. This could mean that the city plans to enact an Inclusionary zoning ordinance that will require developers to set aside a certain amount of units for people in particular income brackets.

The project will be designed around five basic elements³:

- Waterways
 - Since the levee system will be dismantled the canals and the town lake will be used to add additional capacity to the flood control system.
 - These canals will have trails along them as well as scenic promenades and be navigable by water taxis and kayaks.
 - Certain areas along the canals and lake will be zoned mixed use to create an urban water front.
- Street Network
 - The existing gridiron street system will be maintained for integration into the central city street network and ensure a pedestrian priority.
 - All streets will be tree lined and have elements of public art integrated in the streetscape.
 - Streets will be used as public space and link the many public parks and plazas.
- Public Open Space
 - 35% of the area in the Uptown area will be designated as open space. There will be a mix of parks, plazas, and nodes to create a sense of openness in the dense urban setting.
- Neighborhood Design

³ http://trinityuptown.com/TRVWeb/App_Pages/Projects/ProjectSummary.aspx

- The area is divided into 4 new neighborhoods. Each neighborhood will have its own community institutions such as parks, plazas, schools and churches.
 - Setbacks are minimal to create a well defined urban edge
- Land Use, Building Density and Heights
 - The tallest building will be 10 -20 story mixed use structures.
 - Lower 6 story courtyard style buildings will dominate the rest of the urban landscape in Uptown

Overall the price tag of this project is expected to be around 435 billion dollars, which seems rather low. The project will be built in phases over the next 50 years. There has already been some substantial investment in the area since the project was announced and more development is expected to come on line as the city continues to grow and the project moves forward. However, in addition to Inclusionary zoning the city should also look into other green design techniques to ensure the sustainability of this project. Green roofs, incentives for LEED certified building design and other green design elements should be encouraged or mandatory. Also with the increased population density, viable a mass transit system is a must.

The Trinity River Vision and Uptown project is an innovative and thoughtful way to integrate a new urban neighborhood in with a flood control project. This gives the city a rare opportunity to transform its core into a vibrant urban space that is also in tune with its environment. Fort Worth is in a unique position to have so much available land near the core that can be built on with displacing residents. This world class project will change the face of Fort Worth not only environmentally, but economically and socially as well.