

**Historic Downtown Retail Study Executive Summary**  
Plano, Texas June 30, 2008  
Gibbs Planning Group, Inc.



*Plano's Historic 15th Street (looking northeast) features many restored historic buildings and an attractive streetscape.*

### **General Overview**

Plano's historic downtown is a vibrant commercial area that offers a variety of unique businesses and restaurants. Numerous new popular restaurants and pubs have recently opened downtown that complement the existing retail shops. The downtown is easily accessible from most of the Plano region and has plenty of parking for its existing size. Plano's downtown's commerce is reportedly experiencing a steady rate of growth that appears likely to be in its early stages of expansion.

The City has been active in working with the private sector to encourage new residential and commercial construction resulting in more than 1,000 new dwellings. The downtown also has a busy DART commuter station located at the west end of its primary commercial street (15<sup>th</sup> Street).

### **Retail Market Demand**

This study finds that the Historic Downtown Plano area can support an additional 142,000 square feet of retail and restaurant space by 2010, and generate nearly \$69 million in sales by 2012. This supportable retail includes 51,100 square feet of grocery store, 28,400 square feet for a building supplies and materials store, 11,700 square feet of full service restaurants, 6,700 square feet of general merchandise retailers, 6,000 square feet for furniture, and 5,500 square feet for

lawn & garden equipment stores. In addition, 4,800 square feet of woman's apparel, 4,000 square feet of book and music stores, 3,500 square feet of limited service (carry out & to-go) eating facilities, 2,800 square feet of specialty food stores, a 2,600 square foot beer/wine/liquor store, 2,500 square feet of office supplies & gift stores, 2,500 square feet of home furnishings stores, 2,400 square feet of men's apparel, 1,800 square feet of unisex clothing store, 1,750 square feet for a florist/flowers store, and 1,400 square feet of shoe stores are also be supportable in the downtown.

Historic Downtown Plano Texas offers an opportunity to create a unique shopping experience in the Greater Dallas-Fort Worth market, to appeal to the growing commercial needs of its new downtown and surrounding residents, by offering authentic niche products and services. The trade area population base surrounding the downtown is home to almost 300,000 persons, which is projected to grow through 2012 to over 370,000. Incomes in the area are higher than average, with average household incomes reported as \$118,200 and per-capita incomes as \$41,400.



*Plano's historic downtown looking north. Most of the retailers are located along 15<sup>th</sup> Street (shown running east-west in the center of the picture).*

### **Retail Mix**

The historic downtown has a balance of small independent specialty retailers and restaurants. Home furnishings and antiques are the downtown's existing primary single retail category, and serve as an anchor that pulls visitors to the downtown on a regular basis. The downtown also contains numerous service businesses and an art museum. The City hall, DART station and a performing arts center anchor the downtown's businesses.

Restaurants and pubs are an emerging trend in the historic district, with numerous popular dining options recently opening. Some of these new restaurants offer fine dining that has proven to be popular. Although supportable in the historic area, grocery stores have resisted locating in the downtown area, despite its central location and recent housing development.

It is likely that restaurants and pubs will become Plano's primary downtown business category during the next decade. The expanded dining businesses reflect the changing eating habits of American families that are eating out on a more frequent basis. Additional children's stores, coffee shops, a green grocery, bakery, deli, fashion, home furnishings, ice cream, jewelry, neighborhood services, shoes and sporting goods would complement the downtown restaurants.

**Recommendations:** GPG recommends that a balance of restaurants and retail be maintained in the downtown area. Too many restaurants and pubs will eventually over burden the downtown's parking system, reducing the convenience for shoppers. Too many restaurants and pubs can also negatively affect the quality of life for downtown residents. This study also recommends that select national retailers, a grocery and a leading regional or national coffee shop be recruited for the downtown.



*The downtown's parking areas are well maintained and have a variety of directional signage designs. This study recommends that a new way-finding graphic system be implemented to promote more use of the surface parking lots.*

## **Parking**

The downtown area statistically has enough parking for existing and near term demand. The parking is well maintained and easily accessible. Like many urban locations, shoppers and employees compete for the most convenient parking spots. Plano's 15<sup>th</sup> Street and south lot are generally filled, while the surrounding surface lots and decks remain mostly empty. The downtown is also served by several surface lots and two parking decks that offer both public and residential parking. Many of the public lots are difficult to locate due to their remote location and limited signage.

Some business owners complained that the new restaurants have increased parking demand to such a point that most on-street parking is filled and

unavailable for convenient shopper visits. The second easiest lot is located south of 15<sup>th</sup> Street and most of these stalls are used by City Parks and Recreation employees, who work in the adjacent (east) office building.



*Downtown Plano has numerous surface parking lots and on street parking that statistically meets the existing commercial and residential demands. However, many of the most convenient spaces are filled with employees and long-term users.*

**Recommendations:** GPG recommends that the city consider installing parking meters along the prime sections of 15<sup>th</sup> Street to allow for more convenient shopper parking. These meters, if properly managed, should discourage employee and long term parking in the downtown’s prime locations. Should parking meters not be implemented along 15<sup>th</sup> Street, the City should reduce the parking period from four to 2 hours to discourage long-term employee parking.

GPG also recommends that valet parking be permitted near intense businesses such as restaurants, to allow for convenient shopper visits. The valet parking should be carefully managed with the minimum removal of on-street parking stalls.

The south surface parking (west to the Parks and Recreation office building) should have its parking time reduced to 2-3 hours, and direct City employees to park in surrounding surface lots. This study also recommends that the city implement a new way-finding system to direct shoppers and employees to various parking lots.



*The historic downtown has an attractive streetscape and landscaping. However, some areas need additional maintenance.*

## Streetscape

Plano's downtown area has an attractive and well maintained streetscape that complements its historic character. The streetscape includes trees, flower beds and brick pavers. A vintage cast iron clock serves as a focal point for the downtown. GPG found that in almost all cases, the street furnishings, walkways, trash containers and light fixtures were well maintained and contributing to the retail environment.

The small pocket park located at the west end of 15th Street between the Fillmore Pub and rail tracks is an exception to the balance of the streetscape. This park has a small waterfall that is surrounded by moldy debris. The park's recession into the ground and minimal shade trees are likely responsible for its limited usage. The park's adjacent restaurant has expressed interest in locating an outside dining patio overlooking the park; however, the park will need to be redesigned to accommodate the dining.

**Recommendations:** GPG recommends that the City continue its high levels of streetscape design and maintenance. GPG also recommends that the City improve maintenance in the west end park to bring it up to the quality of the balance of the public realm. When possible, the park's raised planters should be modified to accommodate outside dining from the adjacent restaurant. This outside dining will help to enliven the park.



*While most of Plano's downtown alleys are well maintained, some of the private properties fronting the alleys are in need of maintenance and graffiti removal.*

## Alleys

Plano's downtown area is served by a network of alleys that offer convenient service access to most of the commercial buildings. The alleys are also well maintained, clean and pedestrian friendly. In some cases, private property owners have neglected their alley fronting areas, resulting in unsightly materials storage and poorly maintained buildings. There are limited examples of graffiti and low light levels that present a potential unpleasant experience for downtown visitors and employees.

**Recommendations:** GPG recommends that the City remove the existing graffiti as quickly as possible. In addition, the City should consider implementing a program that identifies and removes graffiti on a 24/7 basis. Light levels in alleys should be improved to shopping center industry standards.

## Refuse Disposal

The downtown has numerous locations and methods for refuse storage. In most cases the refuse is located on private property along alleys in well-maintained containers. However, as the downtown's businesses grow, especially the number of restaurants, refuse is beginning to become a challenge. In some cases, refuse containers are unsightly and in need of screening



**Recommendations:** GPG recommends that the City consider implementing a common refuse storage system that offers centralized locations for screened containers. In some cases, these refuse containers should be cooled to minimize odors.

## Store Planning

Downtown Plano's historic storefronts are almost completely restored to a high quality. These storefronts reinforce the specialty retailer's uniqueness and level of service. However, some of the recent mixed use construction lacks the first level historic commercial storefront elements that assist in commerce.

**Recommendations:** GPG recommends that Plano continue its quality historic storefront renovations and encourage the same standards to be applied to new construction. When possible, new mixed use buildings should be retrofitted or designed to include a horizontal sign band between the first and upper levels, large amounts of clear glass on the first level storefront, awnings and a variety of materials and colors between the first and upper levels of the building.



*Most of Plano's historic buildings have been carefully restored. The downtown's newer buildings should be retrofitted to have a more commercial appearing first level that reflects the downtown's historic character.*

### **Brownfield Trust Property Site**

Located one-third mile southwest of downtown Plano, the Brownfield Trust Property site has recently become available for potential redevelopment. This site is presently occupied by a large older warehouse and surrounded by industrial and residential land uses. This property has some limited local access along its Avenue K frontage. However, this access is limited by the existing rail tracks that divide the property in half.

Although the site is located close to the North Central Expressway and the President George Bush Turnpike, its regional access is limited due to difficult access to these freeways. In addition, the site has little direct visibility from the freeways or surrounding major roads.

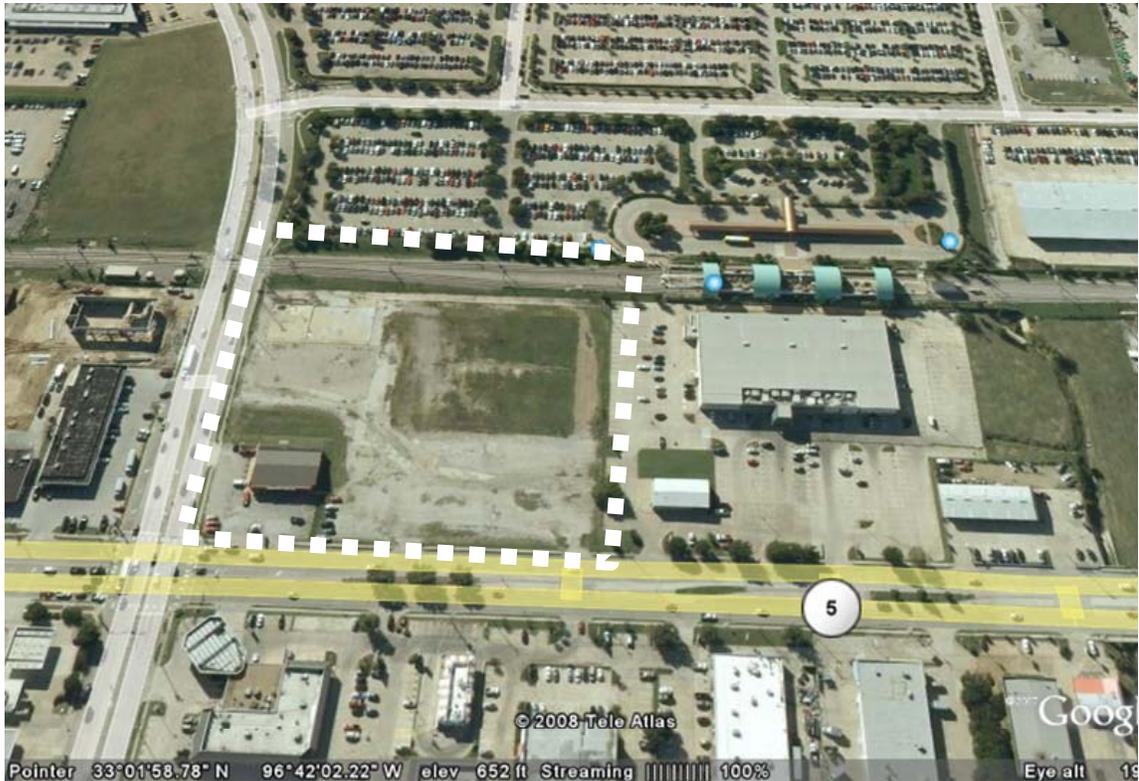


*The Brownfield Trust Property (Brownfield's Stewardship Fund / 10<sup>th</sup> Street Industries Properties) 33 acre site is show above, inside of the white dashed lines.*

**Recommendations:** This study recommends that the Brownfield Trust Property be maintained as industrial, storage, or a flex type of land use. The site may also be suitable for some combination of residential development, because of its adjacent residential neighborhood to the north and its walking distance to the downtown. However, should a viable mixed use development be proposed, the city should consider it carefully.

### **Parker Road – Station Property**

Located three quarters of a mile north of downtown Plano, the Parker Station site is a vacant infill property that is located just east of the Parker DART station. This property is located on the corner of Avenue K and East Park Boulevard and has excellent access to most of the Plano region. The property is surrounded by older commercial shopping centers to its north, east and south. Dense residential neighborhoods are located within an easy drive to the east of the site.



*View of the Parker Station Site looking west. East Park Blvd. is located to the left (south and Avenue F to the bottom of the site). The Parker Station is shown to the upper right of the photo.*

**Recommendations:** Given the properties adjacency to the DART station, its long term use should be office and medium to high density residential, with supporting commercial. However, it is plausible that the economic slowdown may delay this development for a decade or longer. An interim use could be neighborhood retail and service businesses such as banks, groceries, pharmacies, restaurants, hardware, florists, etc. The site could also be land banked, with surface parking for the DART station and a smaller convenience center of 10,000 – 20,000 square feet, until the market supports a dense mixed use project.

