



# Future Dimensions

ENVISIONING  
PLANO'S  
FUTURE

Presented by

Transition and Revitalization Commission

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# Acknowledgements

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# Executive Summary

Communities are constantly changing and need to periodically innovate in response to shifting demographics, changes in the population base and economic conditions, as well as regional and national issues. Over the past year, the Transition and Revitalization Commission (TRC) has worked to identify and study the ways in which Plano is changing. This document represents the concerted effort of TRC to explore and understand these issues. It also presents a vision for Plano's future which accounts for many of the challenges the city is currently facing.

This study identified four major areas of focus for the city in the years ahead:

- [Flattening revenues and ongoing economic viability](#)
- [Changing demographics](#)
- [Challenges associated with being a first-tier suburb](#)
- [Regional growth](#)

To successfully adapt to these changes, Plano must consider ways to creatively leverage its assets and

reinvent itself. In doing so, TRC believes the city can effectively find ways to meet the needs of today's and tomorrow's citizens.

How a city grows physically affects how it grows economically, socially and environmentally. For this reason, the TRC vision for the future kept returning to the physical structure of the city, it is the keystone which anchors the other recommendations.

TRC envisions a more urban, diverse and sophisticated city. One that offers a smart array of activities for its citizenry. By adding density nodes, Plano can support more transportation options, the addition of unique, neighborhood-based community spaces, encourage redevelopment, take advantage of existing infrastructure and enhance the city's tax base. These and other goals are detailed in the report that follows.

# Introduction

## Purpose

- *Understand the biggest challenges facing the city of Plano.*
- *Create a vision for and stimulate discussion about Plano's future.*
- *Recommend possible courses of action.*

Communities are constantly changing and need to periodically innovate in response to shifting demographics, changes in population bases and economic conditions, as well as regional and national issues. These changes are not uncommon; in fact almost every city sees economic, demographic, and other transitions that fundamentally reshape the city. These changes create challenges and opportunities for cities and bring with them different demands and focus in areas from public safety and transportation systems to financial resources, housing, and workforce education. For Plano, these changes characterize a new phase of the city's development, as it evolves to a mature, more sophisticated and sustainable city.

The original "Plano at Maturity" report was completed five years ago; regional and local trends have changed during that time, so it was time for a fresh look at some of the challenges the city of Plano is facing. In the fall of 2007, TRC embarked on this project and for the past year the group has identified, studied, and discussed a wide variety of topics impacting the city, including but certainly not limited to: changing demographics - the population in Plano is generally getting older and more diverse; aging infrastructure and housing stock; flattening revenue stream (which has been further stressed with current national economic conditions); as well as energy and the environment. The main goal was to create a vision for Plano's future and then to draft a set of recommendations focused on achieving that vision.

# Major Challenges

Plano is experiencing a particularly critical time in its history as it transitions from a rapidly growing suburb to a more stable, mature, sophisticated, complex, and self-sustaining city. Evidence of this change can be found throughout the city, from the diversity in population, to the growth of the more urban areas especially Legacy Town Center and Downtown Plano, the provision of light rail and advancing technologies.

Plano today contrasts quite markedly with the Plano of 40 years ago. Starting in the 1960s Plano experienced tremendous growth rates - as fast or faster than any city in the country. Plano largely embraced the changes that came with the growth in population and rose to the challenge not just by managing the growth, but by creating a well organized and attractive city with many quality neighborhoods and business districts, and a balance of land uses offering a wide array of services to its citizenry.

Because of strong leadership during these years, Plano today has many assets on which to build a

bright future. Plano stands out based on a host of traditional economic indicators (e.g., income level, educational attainment, homeownership, and employment). The city generally has a good balance of land uses and can rely on a largely complete and well-maintained infrastructure.

However, there are some significant challenges that lie ahead. In moving forward, it is critical to understand some of the major changes that are shaping the future of the city.



## Flattening Revenues and Economic Viability

Plano is experiencing a slowdown in the growth of its primary revenue sources (sales tax and property tax) with less new development coming on line as land resources diminish, current economic conditions, the mortgage crisis, higher energy prices, competition from surrounding cities (especially for sales tax), and various other factors. With limited revenues, in addition to core city services, the city may also be challenged to fund and implement future state mandates. Economic viability is going to be an ongoing concern. It will be essential that the city maintain a robust economy and offer a vital and attractive living environment for all its citizens. Accomplishing this will help to moderate future stresses on the city's budget.



## Changing Demographics

During the “boom” years, Plano’s population was much more homogenous than it is today. Most of the population consisted of families with school age children. In many ways, this simplified the provision of services as this meant that much of the citizenry was looking for similar types and levels of service. Today, with a population that is both aging and growing more diverse, Plano is challenged to meet a greater variety of needs.

## First-tier Suburb

The “first wave” of growth north of Dallas is moving beyond Plano to new locales further out which still have large tracts of developable land. This is a major indication that Plano has begun its transformation from an “outer” suburb to an “inner” suburb a transition that brings with it many critical advantages such as close-in neighborhoods, DART light rail service, major employment centers, and educational providers but also many of the problems associated with this inner, more mature status traffic congestion, aging infrastructure, limited greenfield sites, and high land and housing prices. Plano also faces significant competition from its newer, neighboring cities, especially when it comes to economic development.

## Regional Growth

In the U.S., mega-regions will account for 50% of the nation’s population growth and 66% of its economic growth over the next 45 years. As part of the “Texas Triangle” the Metroplex can expect that a major part of that wave of physical and economic growth will impact its cities. The way that growth is managed will influence tremendously the outcome for the region. Regional collaboration will be exceedingly important on issues including transportation, energy, and the environment.

As one of the largest cities in the Metroplex and a major employment center, Plano can play a significant role in the future of the region. Despite the fact that Plano’s residentially zoned land is largely developed, opportunities exist in both the commercial and residential sectors. The city can capitalize on the coming growth by adding density nodes at key locations throughout the city (more details below). In this manner, Plano could take advantage of existing infrastructure; build the tax base; support redevelopment; and provide more transportation options. It would also allow the city to enhance the variety of amenities available in its neighborhoods. Ideas about how the city might work towards these and other goals are detailed in this report.



# Vision

Plano's elected officials and staff have always been resourceful in dealing with the challenges facing the city. While today's challenges are unique, it is clear that the tenacity with which the city faced the tremendous growth of past decades is just what will lead the city in the future. That being said, ***Plano must consider ways to creatively leverage its assets to reinvent itself.*** In doing so, TRC believes the city can effectively find ways to meet the needs of today's and tomorrow's citizens.

Further, TRC in making its recommendations has chosen to work towards integrating these goals for the city under the umbrella of sustainability - fiscal, social and environmental. While the term "sustainability" is most often used to describe environmental goals, sustainability is broader than that. In fact it relates directly to the quality of life in a community, whether the economic, social, and environmental systems that make up the community are providing a healthy, productive, meaningful life for all community residents, present and future. This simple concept of a sustainable city became the overriding theme for the recommendations contained in this report.

How a city grows physically affects how it grows economically, socially and environmentally. For this reason, TRC's vision for the future kept returning to the physical structure of the city - it is the keystone which anchors the other recommendations.

TRC's vision for the future centers on additional density at certain strategic locations throughout the city. These "density nodes" will provide the physical structure or fabric on which to build the future of the city and will support goals ranging from more transportation options to community centers that help create identity for various parts of town; destinations that attract visitors from surrounding cities; sustainable economic conditions; and "smart" regional growth.

While Plano has typically identified itself as a suburban community, one way that Plano has already started to evolve is by adding pockets of more urban (higher density, mixed-use) development. When done well, these projects have the potential to support a variety of other goals for the city including the redevelopment of underutilized retail corners, growth of the tax base, provision of additional transportation

and housing options, and more amenities (public and private) all within walking distance of existing neighborhoods.

Mixed-use, higher density development will be essential to Plano's future development. It is also one of the main tools Plano has to promote continued economic growth. By encouraging growth in existing places the city can add population, support transit and provide a greater variety of housing in the city. Concentrating growth in existing areas can also help to mitigate the impacts of projected regional growth and buoy the tax base.

This could be accomplished by adding higher density, mixed-use nodes at the intersections of key major thoroughfares. Mutually supporting synergistic uses generate higher total revenue than the sum of their parts. With carefully selected components, people on different schedules visit common uses at different times for different reasons, creating a dynamic environment around the clock. More compact development patterns can also increase economic productivity. Studies show that "accessible" cities with efficient transportation systems (please see subsequent section) had higher productivity than more dispersed places and that

average labor productivity increases with more employment density. Also, today's economy is driven by knowledge workers, and companies are increasingly concerned about worker preferences for residential location. Strong sense of place and vitality helps attract and retain talented workers.

Now is the time to invest in a livable community that is attractive to current and future residents and businesses. This means refurbishing older neighborhoods, bringing downtown and neighborhood centers to life, and working closely with businesses and institutions of higher education to make the best use of remaining lands.



# Recommendations



## Density Nodes

The city should identify a series of “density nodes” in major corridors and at intersections throughout the city. The existing street grid provides an excellent structure on which to add density nodes. These areas would be mixed-use and higher density activity centers. They could potentially provide additional office space, housing, and would support the creation of additional transit

stops. They could provide neighborhood businesses and services (both private and public) within walking distance of people’s homes. These community spots could be further enhanced with some late night entertainment venues which can provide wonderful gathering places for residents of and visitors to Plano, as the restaurants have in Downtown Plano.

Civic spaces in these areas could further enhance the density node as a community activity center. This would also provide an opportunity to establish community/neighborhood identity points helping neighborhoods to differentiate themselves and to establish varied character for different parts of the city, lending complexity and interest.

### ***Have a Plan***

Identify neighborhood commercial (NC) corners and other areas that are appropriate to designate as density nodes.

### ***Engage Citizens***

Proactively work with area residents to design and implement these projects. While these projects may provide enhancements to existing neighborhoods it will be critical to engage residents to receive their input on any proposed projects. Neighborhood meetings or design charettes can provide an opportunity to share ideas and learn about any concerns the residents may have. This would also be an opportunity to refine and enhance the plan.

### ***Consider Density Bonuses***

Evaluate whether density bonuses would be a practical solution necessary to offset costs of redevelopment and help make projects more viable.

### ***Support Infill***

Work to anticipate and reduce regulatory barriers to infill development to help ensure a predictable approval process.

### ***Community Spaces***

The public realm should be considered an essential component of these density nodes. Well-scaled public spaces must accompany any development, providing the connective tissue among uses, enhancing sense of community, and adding vitality. Sidewalks and streets that engage passersby, public places that encourage social interaction and provide a showcase for events, and architectural and landscaping features that celebrate community all help to create a welcoming environment. Consider the development of more venues for special community events and conference centers, particularly those that could



accommodate culturally-related special events and activities. These nodes should also reflect the local character of Plano and even of the individual neighborhoods. “For too long, suburbs have looked very similar, lacking any distinguishing characteristics from one another. Tomorrow’s suburbs will be infused with the local character that makes the world’s best places stand out in people’s minds.”

## **Accept higher densities and mixed-use in selected locations**

Higher residential densities and mixed-use developments are an essential part of the transition to a mature suburb. Plano will simply not succeed in the 21st Century without creating its share of this kind of development. In a city where 65% of the residences are single-family homes, this kind of development is not appropriate for every neighborhood; however, allowing higher densities and mixed-use development in certain strategic areas will ensure that the city has lively and interesting districts, while protecting the single-family neighborhoods.

## **Transportation Options**

It is impossible to effectively/efficiently (both service wise and cost wise) provide mass transit options without having a development infrastructure that supports it. The city must work to enhance mobility for the community as a whole by supporting more transportation options. This would benefit aging residents and others with limited access to standard automobile transportation (such as children). It would also enhance livability in the city and support regional clean air initiatives.



For many years now, cities have largely been designed around the automobile. However, TRC sees a future where the automobile no longer reigns supreme. Transportation options will foster connections both inside and outside of the community enhancing Plano's position as an economic and employment center. The city should provide for alternate transportation and good transitions between modes - for example bike racks and the ability to take bikes on buses. The city can begin by focusing on creating a solid east-west connection and western north-south routes connecting major destination points (including employment

centers) and fill in with density nodes at key locations. There is also a need to establish transit routes that connect density nodes. To develop an effective community transit system:



### **Collaborate**

Partner with DART to offer enhanced service along routes that support density nodes.

### **Consider the Possibilities**

Initiate a feasibility study to explore possible routes that would create a "network" of existing and future nodes. An example of one place to start is Legacy Business Park and Town Center where a lunch time shuttle between businesses and restaurants could be offered.

## Easy to Use

Ensure that existing transit options are as attractive and easy to use as possible. For example, explore ways to relieve the parking shortage at Parker Road Station and make bus stops more comfortable by providing benches.

## Redevelopment

Strategic reuse of previously developed land will be essential to Plano's future. Plano can create more capacity for growth by intensifying development on passed-over land and underutilized parcels (See *Density Nodes*). Plano can benefit from planned strategic investment which can generate growth and revitalization in future years and can help protect essential property and sales tax revenues. Some strategies the city can utilize are as follows:

## Look Ahead

Be proactive in seeking redevelopment opportunities that will help to shape a desired future for Plano. The city must continue to work to entice commercial entities and to provide economic development programs that encourage redevelopment in all areas of the city.

## Incentives

Continue to explore financial and zoning incentives that would encourage owners of under-performing commercial properties to convert to residential and mixed-use development that would revitalize and strengthen the community as a whole.

## Existing Regulations

Initiate a comprehensive look at existing regulations as they relate to development and redevelopment. Do our existing regulations describe what we want to happen?



## **Flexibility**

Recognize the need for flexibility in development and redevelopment. For example - an existing shopping center may want to complete some improvements but completing significant changes under today's regulations would require bringing the site up to today's standards. This can be too cost prohibitive and put a halt to any improvements. Rather than an all or nothing approach, the city should consider developing an approach that would allow for graduated improvements.

## **Market Specific Land Resources**

The city must continue to be proactive in identifying those parcels and buildings that are key to its economic future including both the large chunks of raw land and underutilized parcels. In the future, promoting the reuse of these assets will mean doing more than simply inventorying these resources and more than just showing large vacant parcels to big corporations. As Plano transitions towards more infill and redevelopment projects, it will also mean the city playing an active role in matching older buildings and

smaller parcels with the emerging entrepreneurs who will serve as the keys to the new economy.

## **Education**

One of Plano's major assets is that the city has an educated and diverse citizenry (both corporate and residential). The city should continue to strengthen its relationship with both, especially when it comes to the dissemination of information and sharing of ideas.



The city should develop a comprehensive program for educating the public on the critical issues that affect the long-term quality of life and success of Plano. Examples could include: public meetings, newspapers, journals, and other written publications, Citizens' Academy, City Council Roundtables, community-wide summits to engage residents in a dialogue about how Plano is changing, the challenges facing the city and potential solutions. Plano is facing some significant budgetary challenges in coming years and this dialogue will be essential to informing the citizenry and gathering feedback about city services as well as potential changes to the physical structure of the city.

The concentration and agglomeration of firms and workers facilitate the flow of information and knowledge exchange. Take advantage of this in areas such as Legacy and the Research/Technology Center zoning district by fostering relationships with local schools and businesses to build local technology resources. In addition, consider the creation of technology/conference centers where businesses and individuals can congregate and share ideas for expanding and enhancing local business opportunities.



### ***Facilitate and Support Collaborative Efforts***

The city, where possible, should act as a change agent to enhance cooperation between area institutions and businesses. For example, the city should support an ongoing dialogue and sharing of information resources between entities such as the Chamber of Commerce, local colleges and area businesses.

## Help Identify and Monitor Critical Issues Facing the Community

The city is in a unique position as a service provider and as such should work with local schools, businesses and non-profits to help identify and monitor critical issues facing the city. For example, with an aging population and four major hospitals located in the city, the nursing shortage is an area that will have ramifications for the city in terms of residential needs as well as economic development. This and similar situations should be monitored and discussed by area schools, governments and hospitals. While the city, by the nature of its service focus, may not be able to directly impact such issues, where possible it should facilitate collaboration on these challenges.

## Financial Resources Sustainability

Broadly speaking, the best long-term strategy the city can employ to maintain financial resources is to continue to be a livable city. Places that are vibrant, energetic, and varied will attract a diverse and engaged community, including residents and employers.

A critical component of this will be for the city to provide more housing choices, promote better land use, and support mass transit in order to sustain its competitive economy (See *Transportation*).

The regional changes described above also suggest opportunities for sharing of services and facilities between entities within the city of Plano and extending to surrounding municipalities and beyond. Joint service agreements are important tools. Plano can and should continue to explore many avenues when considering ways to invest its resources. The city should regularly examine



the feasibility of collaborative agreements that include sharing capital expenses, the procurement of equipment, and creatively sharing personnel with the goal of reducing expenditures, improving services, and working collaboratively toward regional goals.

### ***Consider the Needs of Today's and Tomorrow's Citizens***

The city's financial position in terms of holding a AAA bond rating and the ability to pay cash for many expenditures is very strong. Maintaining the city's bond rating and reserves should be a priority.

### ***Plan for a Rainy Day***

The city should focus on building up contingency funding as much as possible.

### ***You Get What You Pay For***

The City of Plano has a well deserved reputation for providing a great quality of life for its citizenry. This is in large part due to high quality city services.

For this reason, raising taxes, within reason, would be preferable to cutting city services.

### ***Communication is Key***

The city should enhance its communication about the value of services it offers. For example, Plano has one of the lowest tax rates in the Metroplex. The average annual residential tax bill in Plano works out to be less than the average annual cost of cable television. The city should promote this so that residents have a better understanding about what they are getting.



