University Park
Centennial Master Plan

Adopted 2022

CENTENNIAL MASTER PLAN
UP
EST. 1924

Affirming Sense of Place

Theme 1

Affirming Sense of Place

University Park is a beautiful city, with tree-lined streets, wonderful parks, great architecture and a strong sense of community. By actively affirming, and supporting this sense of place, the City can help ensure these qualities are preserved and continue to grow, making University Park a great place to live and work for both current and future generations. This Master Plan Theme of "Affirming Sense of Place" outlines goals and action items to make this achievable.

A Sense of Place is what gives a city a unique quality and helps it differentiate itself from other cities in a large urban area like the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex. As the City of University Park is surrounded on all sides by either Highland Park or Dallas, a definitive sense of place makes people aware of when they are entering University Park. While the City of University Park already does this well, there is always room for improvement, and it will take a concentrated effort to maintain and build upon the City's present standards.

Some aspects of this character can be thought of as subcategories underneath the umbrella Theme of "Affirming Sense of Place." These subcategories include topic areas such as Quality of Life, Character & Aesthetics, Parks, Zoning, Utilities, Education, Big Bets, and Public Safety. These subcategories also overlap with other Master Plan Themes, but the Goals and Action Items in this Theme are specifically tied to the characteristics of "Affirming Sense of Place" within the City.

Preserving and creating a sense of place is something every city has to address in some manner. As populations increase and neighborhoods change over the course of time, it takes forward, creative thinking to ensure that the reason residents of University Park move to the City and call it home is retained and preserved.

Affirming Sense of Place: Plan Goals and Action Items

1. Preserve and Celebrate University Park's Built Environment

The way a community looks and feels are important parts of its sense of place. For example, the aesthetic choices made in the architecture and landscape of a block of homes affect the overall character of the larger neighborhood. Neighborhoods, in turn, help define cities. University Park prides itself on its safe residential feel and the beautiful tree canopy that greens its neighborhoods, as well as the style and grace of many of its homes and streets. This sense of place brings value to residents. These goals are aimed at character and aesthetics.

Action Item 1.1 Preserve the public streetscape and front yards in neighborhoods.

Description: The City's task in this area, is not so much to make this realm better but rather to prevent its diminishment. One hallmark of University Park streets is the mature trees creating a wonderful aesthetic for the City's streetscapes. These trees need to be protected.

- Expanded tree ordinances can be a route to achieving this.

- An incentive program encouraging residents to plant trees on their private property will help maintain the tree canopy, especially as the current trees become older and begin to die off.

Background: In residential neighborhoods, the space from one home façade to the next – with front yards, parkways, and streetscape in the middle — serves as a figurative "front door" to individual neighborhoods and the larger community of University Park. It is the place where children play, people walk their dogs, or walk and jog.
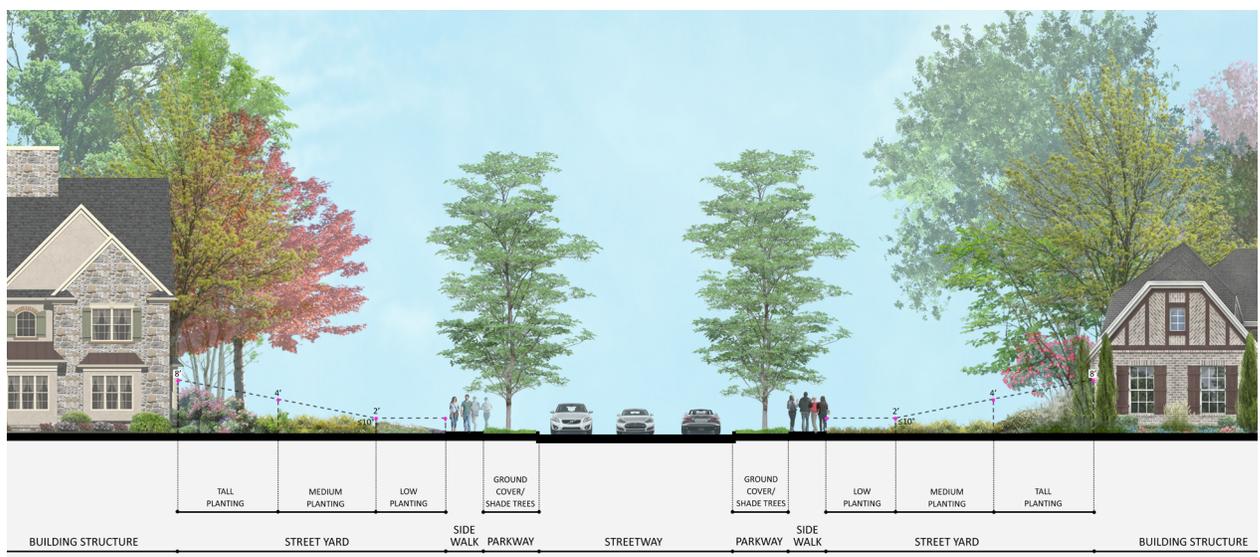
Examples: There are multiple examples of cities with strong tree ordinances that could be applicable for University Park, such as San Marcos and New Braunfels.

Timeframe (short, medium, long): Medium

Action Item 1.2 Enhance City ordinance to protect the scale of the built environment.

Description: A city's zoning ordinances are tools that affect its character and aesthetics. The City needs to consider these changes and adjustments to its ordinances:

- Regulate the scale of new structures and address "height looming," structures that

BUILDING STRUCTURE | STREET YARD | SIDE WALK | PARKWAY | STREETWAY | PARKWAY | SIDE WALK | STREET YARD | BUILDING STRUCTURE

TALL PLANTING | MEDIUM PLANTING | LOW PLANTING | GROUND COVER/ SHADE TREES | | GROUND COVER/ SHADE TREES | LOW PLANTING | MEDIUM PLANTING | TALL PLANTING

may dominate a lot and interfere with neighbors' enjoyment of their own property by excessive height or scale at the property line without adequate setbacks or building articulation.

- Adopt rules to limit impermeable coverage on lots (and account for swimming pools and front driveways in coverage calculations).
- Encourage architectural articulation of facades.
- Encourage the preservation of historically significant structures.

Background: University Park went through a Zoning Ordinance revision in 2018. If additional changes are needed, certain sections of the Zoning Ordinance will need to be revised.

Examples: One way to do this is the supplementation or replacement of traditional zoning with more flexible codes either across the City or in certain areas, such as gateways and commercial districts. Form-based codes put more emphasis on the "form" of the built environment and less on segregating land uses by zone. Pure form-based coding across the City may be premature, would require careful study, and should be accompanied by a thorough public education campaign and careful grandfathering provisions. Fair Oaks Ranch, a suburb of San Antonio is an example of a community using a modified form-based code to address these issues. There are also several Hill Country communities that are implementing broad-based, form-oriented zoning to maintain their community character, as are a growing number of leading-edge cities across the country.

Timeframe (short, medium, long): Medium

Action Item 1.3 Support efforts to preserve and enhance the sense of University Park's identity.

Description: Enhancing University Park's sense of identity, both locally and regionally, can be accomplished through a variety of branding efforts — such as branded signing and wayfinding — done by either City staff or an outside consultant. Centennial Master Plan Steering Committee members also discussed possible gateway branding in conjunction with SMU. University Park already has its own unique street signs, but a more robust

distinction could be made to separate University Park from Highland Park and Dallas.

Background: University Park is often confused by outsiders with its neighbor to the south, Highland Park, despite the fact that University Park is three times larger and many of the things people associate as being emblematic of the Park Cities' are, in actuality, within University Park.

Timeframe (short, medium, long): Long

Action Item 1.4 Establish a tree ordinance to protect mature, healthy trees.

Description: A strategy for preserving/replacing trees is critical to maintaining the City's identity as a community. Adopting a heritage tree ordinance would protect these mature trees. Additionally, a strategy could be implemented as part of the ordinance to replace any existing tree above a certain caliper that will be taken down/removed.

Background: One thing that makes University Park stand out is its trees, which line the streets and provide cover to so much of the City with their canopies. In addition to their beauty, the trees provide shade, save energy costs, clean the air and soil, and add value to homes.

Examples: There are several examples of cities throughout Texas that have strong tree ordinances for mature trees. One example is Austin. While its ordinance can appear complicated, it has produced strong results. Another example is the Woodlands Township, which is known for its trees (particularly Pine Trees), where they prohibit the removal of trees larger than six-inch caliper.

Timeframe (short, medium, long): Medium

Action Item 1.5 Encourage the formation of cooperative associations with regional and benchmark cities.

Description: It would be mutually beneficial to form an association of those cities with similar characteristics to University Park to compare best practices and learn from one another.

Background: University Park is among a very select group of premier residential communities in the United States with its own government and school district. Due to its age, it is no longer considered a suburb, but is not an inner city either, despite being surrounded by Dallas.

Examples: There are a few national and state organizations that can help provide that data. (National League of Cities, International City/County Management Association).

Timeframe (short, medium, long): Medium

2. Continue Enhancing the City's Park System

There is room to improve the current parks system so that it offers a variety of recreation opportunities for users. There is also the opportunity to expand the park system but due to the availability of land in University Park, this will require creative thinking. The parks system of University Park is a valuable asset. Parks are very much a part of the identity of University Park. It is, after all, in the name of the City. The City scores very high on The Trust for Public Land's "Park Score" which shows that 92% of residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park. University Park currently has 13 parks which is good considering the size of the City.

Action Item 2.1 Create more green space throughout University Park, adding to the City's charm and giving the City a more environmentally friendly look and feel.

Description: Identifying the areas beyond the current parks system where green space (trees, grass, flower beds and even hanging flower baskets) could be added. Those improvements would be ranked by value-added versus the cost to install.

Example: One solution could be a study that would consider a green boulevard divider for Hillcrest between Mockingbird and University, which would help to soften and beautify the buffer between SMU and University Park.

Timeframe (short, medium, long): Short

Action Item 2.2 Establish a leash-free dog park.

Description: University Park does not currently have a leash-free dog park. To create a dog park the City should explore a few options:

- A dog park in a section of one of the City's larger parks
- Acquisition of property on vacant land inside University Park that could be dedicated to a dog park
- Partnership with a local business to use private property as a public leash-free dog park

Background: City staff has noted that this process would need to generate public support that would be ample and lasting. The placement of the dog park will be critical to its success and the support it receives from the community due to several factors such as size required, foot traffic, and noise. However, dog parks can be great meeting places and help to build a real sense of community among residents of the City.

Examples: There are good examples throughout the surrounding area that can be modeled. For a public example, Dallas's Bluff View Park has recently undergone renovations to separate the children's playground from the dog park, allowing dogs to run around in a fenced area without a leash. On the private side, the Credit Union of Texas on Ross Avenue in Dallas, created a privately owned leash-free dog park open to the public; University Park can use either model as a way to add leash-free parks to the community.

Timeframe (short, medium, long): Long

Action Item 2.3 Adding indoor sports recreation through community partnerships.

Description: University Park should explore creating interlocal agreements between private athletic facilities and the City on a beneficial basis, that will increase the amount of recreational spaces available for residents.

Background: University Park has numerous private indoor athletic facilities located across the City. Indoor recreation is one area that is lacking in the University Park parks facilities.

Examples: Similar existing agreements exist between HPISD and SMU, and these agreements could be used as a model for structuring future agreements with private entities.

Timeframe (short, medium, long): Short

Action Item 2.4 Facilitate indoor/outdoor community engagement programming through coordination with parks, the library, and other departments.

Description: University Park should explore creating programs that bolster the emotional health of the community. Ideally, this would include programs for community members of all ages and abilities.

Background: The COVID pandemic has exacerbated underlying emotional health issues in children, adolescents and adults. Univeristy Park could utilize public parks to offer group activities and exercises that would benefit the emotional health of our community. While it is something that University Park already does through library initiatives, there is an opportunity for broader cultural programming and using these events as community-building and place-making tools. The demographics of University Park have shifted in the last few decades, moving from over 90% white to 80% white with a rising Hispanic and Asian population giving the City an opportunity to integrate more diverse programming to embrace the entire community.

Examples: Many cities in the area have a position designated for managing public events. It can be accomplished through the Parks Department, or coordinated through a Special Events Department that is created for this specific purpose. A number of cities in the area such as Frisco, Plano, Richardson, and Addison have facilities and staff dedicated to producing large and small community events on a monthly basis. The scale of events dictates how much staffing is needed and whether they need to be just dedicated to that function. The Texas Festival and Events Association would be a good resource for University Park to access before determining how the City would like to organize this effort.

Timeframe (short, medium, long): Short

Action Item 2.5 Create a parks, open space, and trails master plan, and make a commitment to update the plan at least every 10 years.

Description: This plan should address the current needs of the University Park park system and its future growth, also the desired amount of open space set aside throughout residential and commercial uses, and create/maintain trails throughout University Park that are easily used by the community. University Park should also make a commitment to update this plan at least every ten years to ensure the long term sustainability of its parks system.

Background: This would address the needs of park space and open space throughout the community, and the University Park Trail System at a more detailed level. Because of University Park's size, all of these action items can be achieved in one document. To keep up with industry standards, this plan should be revisited at least once a decade.

Timeframe (short, medium, long): Medium

3. Refining Design Standards for Residential and Commercial Areas

Action Item 3.1 Research and implement strategies to enhance commercial areas to better fit the community.

Description: Public spaces around retail spaces should be invested in to improve walkability and create green space. Utilizing design, city policy, and community programming can help retail areas feel connected to their surrounding neighborhoods. Creating guidelines for commercial and multifamily compatibility can help developers understand what University Park wants for their community while creating their plans for development.

Background: There are multiple retail areas throughout University Park and there are different potential strategies to enhance their contribution to the City. The retail strips along Hillcrest Avenue

need a connection to SMU, which could be done through streetscape improvements to that section of Hillcrest Avenue. Both the concept plans for Miracle Mile and Snider Plaza (Appendix XIV) showcase innovative design standards to make both retail areas more visually appealing and incorporated into the neighborhood. Similar design standards can be created for other retail in University Park.
Timeframe (short, medium, long): Medium

Action Item 3.2 Consider front yard landscaping height guidelines to preserve the community feeling of residential streets.

Description: Amend the zoning ordinance to place height restrictions on plantings in the front yard. Closer to the house, larger shrubs would be allowed while progressively closer to the sidewalk, the height of allowable plant material decreases to prevent the creation of green walls that circumvent the fence ordinances. There could be allowable exceptions such as when a home sits along a major thoroughfare.

Background: One of the things that create the sense of place for a majority of single-family homes is the front yard landscapes. Recently it has become a trend to wall off the front yards of homes using tall shrubbery to create a green wall, thereby cutting it off from the rest of the neighborhood, creating visual barriers, and endangering the sense of place and community within neighborhoods.

Timeframe (short, medium, long): Medium

Examples of non-articlulated (top) and articulated (bottom) facades.

Action Item 3.3 Encourage architectural façade articulation of all four sides of residential and commercial buildings.

Description: Encouraging façade articulation on all sides of the building would enhance the sense of place and protect adjoining neighbors. It is possible that the façade articulation may be allowed to exist inside setback areas within defined distance limits, so as to prevent the loss of buildable site area.

Background: Currently University Park only has facade articulation options for the front of single-family homes. This means all four sides of the building could be a flat plane with no facade articulations. This blank and repetitive patterning creates less interesting architecture, thus detracting from the overall sense of place.

Examples: There is precedent for this in other cities throughout the area that could be looked to for examples. See Appendix IV for more examples.

Timeframe (short, medium, long): Long

4. Improve the Visibility of University Park's History

University Park residents typically enjoy a quality standard of health, comfort, and happiness that result in a higher quality of life overall. The perception of a good quality of life is one of the factors that make University Park an attractive place to live. It is also a significant part of creating the University Park sense of place.

Action Item 4.1 Create opportunities to promote the city's history and traditions.

Description: One way to promote the City's history and traditions would be to record oral history from those who experienced it or have knowledge of it from past generations. Encouraging residents to tell those stories could be done through a concept called "Story Worth," where an individual is sent a question each week and then the answers are all compiled to help form the historical narrative. This could be done through the City's website and social media platforms. An oral history project, interviewing people, and recording those stories would also put a face and a voice to the story, making it more impactful.

Background: Incorporated in 1924, University Park has more than 100 years of history that needs to be better promoted and acknowledged. After the collection of the historical information is complete, it could be used to create publications, historical trail maps, and may even prompt the creation of historical markers to acknowledge the location of a particular historic event in the City's history. Exhibits at the University Park library could be created to help future generations learn about the history of the City.

Examples: The City already has a collection of "brown books" on display at the Library and accessible online, which has original building permit data including footprint, cost, and photo of the completed building.

Timeframe short, medium, long): Short

5. Utilize Best Practices for Utilities

The infrastructure of utilities throughout University Park initially does not seem like a contributor to the sense of place. However, their framework helps support and create that overall place and they do have a visual impact on the way a place is perceived.

Action Item 5.1 Explore opportunities to bury utility lines (where feasible).

Description: Overhead utilities are unsightly, susceptible to breakage due to weather, and create a safety hazard if and when they break. Burying them would not be possible everywhere in University Park, due to lack of Right-Of-Way width, which particularly applies to residential areas, where utilities go through the existing alleys. There are a lot of utilities that would be competing for space in a limited area and many of those utilities have specific setback requirements.

Background: It would be very costly to do this as a standalone project, other communities have estimated that it can cost anywhere from $1 million to $3 million per mile depending on the geography and population density. A more cost-effective approach could be to bury lines as a part of larger construction projects that require new utility services instead of taking existing utilities underground. This action item will require analysis and planning to determine where this would be possible considering both physical and financial limitations.

Examples: As roadways are reconstructed, the City can explore the opportunity to underground existing utilities as part of the larger construction project.

Timeframe (short, medium, long): Long

6. Create Connections with Nearby Educational Institutions

The education of a city's residentry plays an important role in its sense of place. It brings to the forefront the ability to engage residents and increase awareness of current practices and trends that will benefit the residents and property owners alike, thereby opening dialogue to ongoing change and feedback. The city's residents are just as important as stewards of the environment as are the city's departments.

Action Item 6.1 Develop programs that encourage shared facilities and resources between SMU, HPISD, City of University Park, and residents.

Description: Identify facilities that could be shared and/or joint programs to share resources. A framework would need to be put in place to develop and implement the programs as they are identified. This can be done through a committee or entity responsible for such programs, examples being: the Arts Council, Research Consortium, Office of Community Affairs, and various types of foundations.

Background: University Park has an abundance of facilities though schools and the university that could be better utilized to serve various public needs.

Examples: Below are several ideas of how the City can encourage shared facilities and resouces:

- Establish program similar to The Lab School in Austin, allowing SMU education students to come into HPISD classrooms for observation.
- Establish more formalized city/university center or institute to facilitate research/ joint study of local issues and generally provide a platform for additional partnership opportunities between entities.
- Create a framework, like a master neighborhood calendar, for cross communitication to highlight important event.
- Explore programs to highlight the arts at SMU and HPISD and bring them to the community, such as concerts in the parks.

Timeframe (short, medium, long): Short

Action Item 6.2 Make SMU "Our University" campaign.

Description: An "Our University" campaign would connect the residents of University Park with SMU students and faculty through local programs and events. A process of realizing this goal could be done through communication and/or partnership with SMU to develop these events and establish leadership programs.

Examples: Rice University has a connection with its surrounding Houston Community that could be a benchmark for University Park. Named "Rice in the Community," the program allows for students to conduct research projects and build community engagement programs around the neighborhood, while residents are allowed to access continuing education courses at the University. Univeristy Park can build this into leadership programs, surrogate family program for SMU freshman who are away from home, community lecture series for students and residents, and other ideas to build connections between SMU and University Park.

Timeframe (short, medium, long): Medium

7. Increase Investment in Programs to Protect University Park Residents

Whether a community is viewed as safe has a tremendous impact on its sense of place. It impacts who wants to live in the area and to some degree also impacts the economic value of the community. University Park is viewed by most as a safe place, but updates will be needed to ensure that is maintained as such over time.

Action Item 7.1 Maintain a competitive advantage on staff compensation amongst comparable cities.

Description: Complete an annual to bi-annual review of compensation packages against the competition to ensure that University Park is retaining the talented staff that it has, and further attract the best talent for open positions.

Timeframe (short, medium, long): Medium

Action Item 7.2 Update security protocols for all public facilities to ensure safety while maintaining a welcoming atmosphere.

Description: Update security protocols for all public facilities to ensure University Park stays ready for potential threats without damaging the City's welcoming appeal.

Background: Security concerns are likely to increase in the future, requiring that public facilities must be secured for long-term future use without hindering the interaction with the public. Maintaining this sense of safety and community in University Park facilities is consistent with the overall goals of the Master Plan.

Timeframe (short, medium, long): Medium

Action Item 7.3 Increase the participation of the City's Direct Alarm program.

Description: This action item is focused on increasing the percentage of households that participate in the Direct Alarm program from approximately 67% to 80% in the next year. For new construction, the goal would be to get 100% participation. This will need to be implemented gradually to ensure the technology needed is in place to support growth.

Background: One important thing to note is that as subscribers increase so does the liability of the City with its Direct Alarm services.

Timeframe (short, medium, long): Short

Action Item 7.4 Increase City personnel to focus on mitigating the devastating effects of substance abuse in University Park.

Description: Provide education/interaction/ monitoring within the schools, which could potentially be done in conjunction with the existing DARE program. City personnel should conduct investigations into infractions to find the root cause, and coordinate with their peers within local law enforcement agencies as necessity prevails, keeping in mind state and city laws are adhered to.

Examples: There is also the potential to explore collaboration with Dallas County and other jurisdictions to develop partner programs or take advantage of existing programs.

Timeframe (short, medium, long): Short

Action Item 7.5 Offer CPR training for residents by police and fire personnel.

Description: Offer CPR training for University Park residents as a valuable community-building activity while also providing training that will save lives. This should be arranged through HPISD schools continuing education programs so that Police and Fire instructors are only needed to show up to the classes and teach,

not coordinate the entire program. There could be a sponsored opportunity with the YMCA and local churches to help with the publicity of the program.

Timeframe (short, medium, long): Short

Action Item 7.6 Create publicity presentations and other policies for Police and Fire recruitment.

Description: This program will help ensure that University Park is acquiring the best talent for its Police and Fire Departments. There are a variety of tools that can be used to accomplish this: targeted recruitment activities, social media campaigns, printed publications, presentations at conferences, and marketing videos accompanying an open position announcement. This will require a creative marketing approach and identifying the advantages of University Park to prospective Police and Fire employees.

Background: Services like police and fire have always been in high regard in University Park. Maintaining quality employees is critical to the communities trust in its public safety officials. Attracting and retaining quality employees needs to be an active step in this plan, to ensure that there is no decline in service.

Timeframe (short, medium, long): Short

Action Item 7.7 Increase opportunities for police and fire personnel to engage with residents.

Description: The City can implement a community crime watch program, hold block parties with Police and Fire departments attending as guests, amongst other things to help Police and Fire personnel engage with the community at large. Other options beyond the block parties could be a fingerprint program for kids at the local grade school, and having Police and Fire members attend and participate in the annual fishing tournament at Caruth Park.

Background: This can be a community-building activity, allowing residents the opportunity to get to know the neighborhood as well as those members of Police and Fire that serve the community. This can also create a relationship of trust between community members and their local Police and Fire members.

Timeframe (short, medium, long): Short