

# University Park Centennial Master Plan

Adopted 2022



## Innovative Governance

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# Theme 3

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## Innovative Governance

The City of University Park has a long history of adapting its governance to meet the challenges of the times. Staying in front of social and economic changes that affect University Park is critical in preserving the lifestyle that its residents have enjoyed for years. In fact, University Park has a history of making major governance changes in its comprehensive plan. In the 1989 Master Plan, University Park decided to change from a general-law to a home-rule charter city allowing the City to set its own rules and regulations. This change was integral in ensuring that University Park stayed a top-rate city, which was the number one recommendation in the 1989 plan. To continue the tradition of adapting to the times as a core principle, one of the major themes of the Centennial Master Plan is Innovative Governance and University Park's commitment to governing ahead of the times. Various ideas are included in this report to cause the City to become less dependent on the Property Tax to finance City operations.

Innovative Governance revolves around governance itself, how to confirm and maintain the City's position as an efficient and forward-looking organization. It deals with vision, and with the process and the programs that will help University Park be responsive to residents and resilient in the face of change. In today's times, we have identified several challenges in which University Park will

need to meet to implement innovative governing ideas. This theme identifies goals and action items that are critical to bringing innovation to University Park's governance. The goals and action items cover ways to diversify City revenues, opportunities for residents to be involved in municipal decisions and financing, expanding communication with nearby government entities, researching and implementing departmental plans, and continuing critical City operations. The purpose of this direction is to ensure that University Park stays flexible to the ever-changing legislative and economic landscape but also stays adherent to the ideologies that built the City.

Looking around the region at trends affecting the governance of municipalities, cities such as Dallas, Arlington, Irving, Plano, Frisco, and Garland are researching innovative revenue models through an organization called North Texas Innovation Alliance (NTXIA). This organization is focused on revenue-generating solutions and financial models that aid in economic recovery and propel transformative projects forward; and also evaluating options to monetize their data and assets such as land, buildings, lighting, and roads to generate new revenue. For University Park, this level of analysis may not be relevant today but preparing for how to maintain/increase revenues in the future is becoming a hot topic regionally.

# Innovative Governance: Plan Goals and Action Items

## 1. Diversification of Revenues

Fluctuations in economic conditions and changes in the legislative and political landscape at the state level results in a need for heightened degrees of innovation. The most important issue that will affect governance in the future is state legislation that caps how much a municipality can raise its property tax rate. This cap means that municipalities will have less control over how much money they generate for the foreseeable future. City governments have to be more adaptive and creative about their operations and how they fund them. Various ideas are included in this report to cause the City to become less dependent on the property tax to finance its operations.

**Action Item 1.1** Create a “City Fund for Excellence” to allow for funding on targeted projects or departments in the City.

**Description:** This master plan recommends the City create one foundation to address all of its needs. One civic foundation or a “City Fund for Excellence” would be responsible for collecting all donations for a variety of municipal projects.

**Background:** The civic foundation would allow for the community to privately fund projects that would otherwise have to wait until municipal funding became available. The foundation would be a separate independent 501c3 organization with a board made up of University Park residents, the business community, and the municipal organization. The board would be appointed by the Mayor and City Council.

**Examples:** Kalamazoo, Michigan has a fund called the Foundation for Excellence (FFE) that funds ambitious projects with the aim to inspire their community. The fund has an independent board with city representatives on it. It has been very successful at funding projects and programs in Kalamazoo. The Foundation has \$500 million as of spring 2022.

**Timeframe (short, medium, long):** Short

**Action Item 1.2** Form a Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development Corporation.

**Description:** Utilize common city organizations to help bolster businesses and entrepreneurs that currently operate or will operate within University Park and create a healthy business environment. This action item will help businesses in University Park cultivate an organized response, assist in recruiting businesses to the area, help retain businesses already in the City, promote entrepreneurship, build for the digital age of business, and organize resources/funding opportunities. Working on Snider Plaza and Miracle Mile projects could be a starting point for either a Chamber of Commerce or Economic Development Corporation.

**Background:** University Park is in need of institutions that are solely committed to the economic health and growth of the University Park Business Community. A Chamber of Commerce would be a benefit to business owners within the City, having a centralized place to advocate for business-friendly policies, programs, etc. An Economic Development Corporation would help the City create policies and practices that are pro-business and also plan for the economic health of the City long-term.

**Examples:** Frisco, Plano, Grand Prairie and Carrollton have very active Economic Development Departments that University Park could learn from and they are also involved in Chambers of Commerce that are successful. These communities have specialized in commercial economic growth and while University Park is different there are lessons to learn from these communities successes. The North Dallas Chamber would be a good model to study. There are likely many business memberships and it is the size of the chamber that would be more appropriate for University Park. It is not uncommon for a business to belong to more than one Chamber of Commerce.

**Timeframe (short, medium, long):** Medium

Action Item 1.3 Create a new community program to coincide with public improvements that seek to revitalize existing retail centers.

**Description:** A new community program will promote existing businesses while attracting new businesses that help the overall performance of retail centers, providing opportunities within the community that offer value to donors and add to the unique character of the community. A successful program will result in increased sales tax and mixed beverage revenue while creating a strong sense of place for the community. This could be an activity carried out by the creation of a Chamber of Commerce/Economic Development Board, as suggested in Action Item 1.2 of Innovative Governance.

**Examples:** The City of Garland conducts an annual business expo to showcase existing businesses in their community, introduce new businesses to the area, and attract potential businesses from other areas. This expo can take place indoors or outdoors in one of the retail areas to drive demand for businesses and involve residents/patrons while making the event a fun family evening.

**Timeframe (short, medium, long):** Medium

## 2. Increase Resident Involvement in Governmental Decisions

Another major strength that University Park possesses to defend against legislative changes is its active and engaged residents. There are many programs and opportunities that cannot be handled reasonably by the City government. In those spaces delegating responsibility to groups of engaged and informed residents can increase the number of programs run by University Park. A healthy number of resident committees/organizations will be naturally more responsive to social and economic constraints as they change over the years.

Action Item 2.1 Create a volunteer corps.

**Description:** Similar to volunteer fire departments, police reserves, Red Cross, Baptist Men, etc. The concept is to recruit, train and retain a group of resident volunteers to assist University Park public safety personnel in case of severe weather events and/or other natural or manmade disasters.



**Background:** Volunteer programs in cities are usually managed by someone in the HR department and they serve every department. Volunteers assist by answering phones, working in the library, keeping municipal court records and court days, participating in park and roadway cleanups, assisting with town meetings, assisting the elderly, young, and infirm during times of crisis, such as the freezing weather events of 2021, and resident-on-patrol programs. The central control of a volunteer program allows the City to track people's volunteer participation and institute programs to acknowledge and celebrate their involvement.

**Timeframe (short, medium, long):** Short

Action Item 2.2 Create a resident committee that would advocate for private and public art and its placement throughout the City of University Park.

**Description:** Creating a program that encourages the placement of art and sculpture that can be enjoyed by people on both private and public



properties will add to the built environment of University Park.

**Background:** A city of University Park's maturity and culture should aspire to great things that take it to the next level. The arts are one of those markers.

**Examples:** Carmel, Indiana, funds statues throughout town and funds an art district with the help of a robust art grant program.

The Addison Arbor Foundation was started as an independent 501c3 organization to promote the planting and protection of trees in Addison. Their mission has changed over the years to include the management of the community garden where residents can rent a plot to plant their own vegetables and a community public art program. In 2021, they placed their 19th piece of public art in the town and they manage and maintain the collection that is valued at over \$2 million dollars. This kind of effort could be organized under the University Park City Fund for Excellence (see Innovative Governance, Action Item 1.1) and could have a

specific group of people overseeing the public art function.

**Timeframe (short, medium, long):** Short

Action Item 2.3 Create a standing resident Sustainability Advisory Board.

**Description:** The City Council should create a new resident advisory board dealing with sustainability.

**Background:** A Sustainability Advisory Board would be tasked with advising the Governing Body of University Park, acting as the voice of the residents of University Park. This board should advise City Council, City staff, and other City organizations on environmental issues that affect the City. The board should have a City staff member liaison assigned to them.

**Examples:** The City of Irving has a similar concept called the Green Advisory Board that has been responsible for suggesting programs and policies keeping Irving sustainable for years to come.

**Timeframe (short, medium, long):** Short

Action Item 2.4 Create an awareness campaign to educate residents on how to incorporate techniques and materials that will maintain a healthy stormwater system.

**Description:** The purpose of this action item is to explain how permeable driveways and reduction of grass clippings in the street by yard services can improve the health of the City's stormwater system.

**Background:** Permeable pavements help reestablish a more natural hydrologic balance and reduce runoff volume by trapping and slowly releasing precipitation into the ground instead of allowing it to flow into storm drains and out to receiving waters as effluent. Trash and yard clippings contribute to clogged drains, reducing the amount of water that can safely enter the stormwater system.

**Timeframe (short, medium, long):** Medium

### 3. Increase Collaboration with Other Governmental Entities

An important way to build resilience into University Park's governance is to foster strong relationships with other governmental institutions, sharing utilities, meeting space, fields, school facilities, auditoriums. These are important relationships that will allow University Park residents to benefit from resources beyond what the City can offer.

Action Item 3.1 Develop a framework for communication between SMU, HPISD, and the City.

**Description:** This framework would allow for cross communication on media outlets for all entities. This would serve to inform the residents of this community on local events.

**Background:** The tools to communicate between SMU, HPISD, and the City are already in place. A framework would provide the community with information on current events in the neighborhood.

**Examples:** Master neighborhood calendar, social media, cross communications through the Arbor, HPISD E-blast, SMU events newsletter or link, Daily Campus student newspaper, and other SMU platforms. In addition, explore a PTA position at each HPISD campus for HPISD/SMU/Community Liaison.

**Timeframe (short, medium, long):** Medium

Action Item 3.2 Maintain water supply by upgrading interconnection metering so the City of Dallas System can supply water to University Park in an emergency.

**Description:** In order to maintain a backup water supply with the City of Dallas, University Park can upgrade its interconnection metering to be sure that interconnection processes and technical issues match that of Dallas for efficient delivery of water.

**Background:** Emergency interconnection with the City of Dallas was put in place in 2011. During the February 2021 freeze, the interconnection metering was found to be inadequate to serve the City in its entirety.

**Timeframe (short, medium, long):** Long

Action Item 3.3 Affirm long-term legal water rights with Highland Park and the Park Cities Municipal Utilities District (PCMUD).

**Description:** Ensure adequate water supply for the City based on water rights from Lake Grapevine.

**Background:** The current contract for water rights is based on a 2004 agreement. The City can review the document to be sure it still protects University Park for the long term.

**Timeframe (short, medium, long):** Long

### 4. Continue/Enhance Existing City Department Operations

The Centennial Master Plan process identified several ongoing municipal projects that were considered vital to maintain. These ongoing projects/operations are a necessary part of the plan as each project is either not yet at its completion date, but still a priority for University Park or needs small changes in how they are currently being implemented to best suit University Park's needs. The Centennial Master Plan Steering Committee deemed it necessary to reiterate a few of the projects/operations that should be acknowledged as continually important.

Action Item 4.1 Sanitation Department should begin researching alternative waste disposal options.

**Description:** Green waste disposal is currently picked up by the City and delivered to a vendor for composting for a fee. There should be alternatives for waste disposal that allows for residents to

participate in green waste disposal individually.

**Background:** The City has a current contract with the City of Garland for landfill use. This contract expires in 2027 and determining waste disposal options will be critical in the next few years. The recycling program was originally self-funding, current market conditions are such that the City pays to dispose of recycled material (a fee on water bill that does not cover costs that are higher than landfill disposal).

**Examples:** The City could reacquire disposed material and use as needed for use in City landscaping projects. Residents could also pay additional fees for bulk pick-up as a way to cover costs.

**Timeframe (short, medium, long):** Long

Action Item 4.2 Continue City's Efforts to Promote Water Conservation through the City's landscape ordinances.

**Description:** The City of University Park implemented a water conservation program around 2011 during a prolonged drought. This program entailed a scheduled landscape water program that has been in continuous use since its implementation. This program should be continued at the current level, while utilizing innovative technologies where appropriate. A related item can be seen in Preparing for the Future, Action Item 1.2.

**Timeframe (short, medium, long):** Short

Action Item 4.3 Continue with design and implementation of Stormwater Management Plan.

**Description:** This is a program that University Park residents want to continue to help alleviate flooding from rain events. City staff and consultants should continue evaluating issues and designing measures to lessen the extent of flooding events.

**Background:** Through conversation with focus groups and the Centennial Master Plan Steering Committee, a lot of the feedback on University Park's Stormwater Management Plan discussed continuing programs that are effective at reducing flooding in the City. The current Stormwater Management Program's first phase is currently under construction and has phase two in its design phase.

**Timeframe (short, medium, long):** Short

Action Item 4.4 Explore ways to prevent contamination of waterways.

**Description:** The City routinely dredges its multiple ponds, to reduce the litter that accumulates over time. This can be a costly endeavor. In order to increase the time between each dredging project, the City should focus efforts on prevention. The City currently has a street sweeping program (enhanced in 2017). The City can also explore adding booms to Turtle Creek that control and contain debris.

**Background:** Keeping clean streets and parks/ open spaces can prevent creeks and ponds from collecting garbage when storms occur. Utilizing street sweeping and litter control projects can prevent the City from having to pay for dredging projects. This will also increase the cleanliness and appearance of the City.

**Timeframe (short, medium, long):** Medium



Action Item 4.5 Develop a schedule for debris removal.

**Description:** Creating a formal schedule for debris pickup can help ensure that City waterways stay clean and also prevent potential flooding issues due to debris restricting water flow. The City can be proactive with protecting its waterways by making debris removal a consistent piece of the City's services.

**Background:** The main impact this action item will have is improving the Turtle Creek system appearance. The creation of a schedule will make the maintenance of University Park waterways an ongoing City effort.

**Timeframe (short, medium, long):** Short