
ULI NORTH TEXAS

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PANEL REPORT



ALICE BRANCH CREEK HEALTH & WELLNESS GREENBELT

DALLAS, TEXAS

MARCH 18-19, 2019

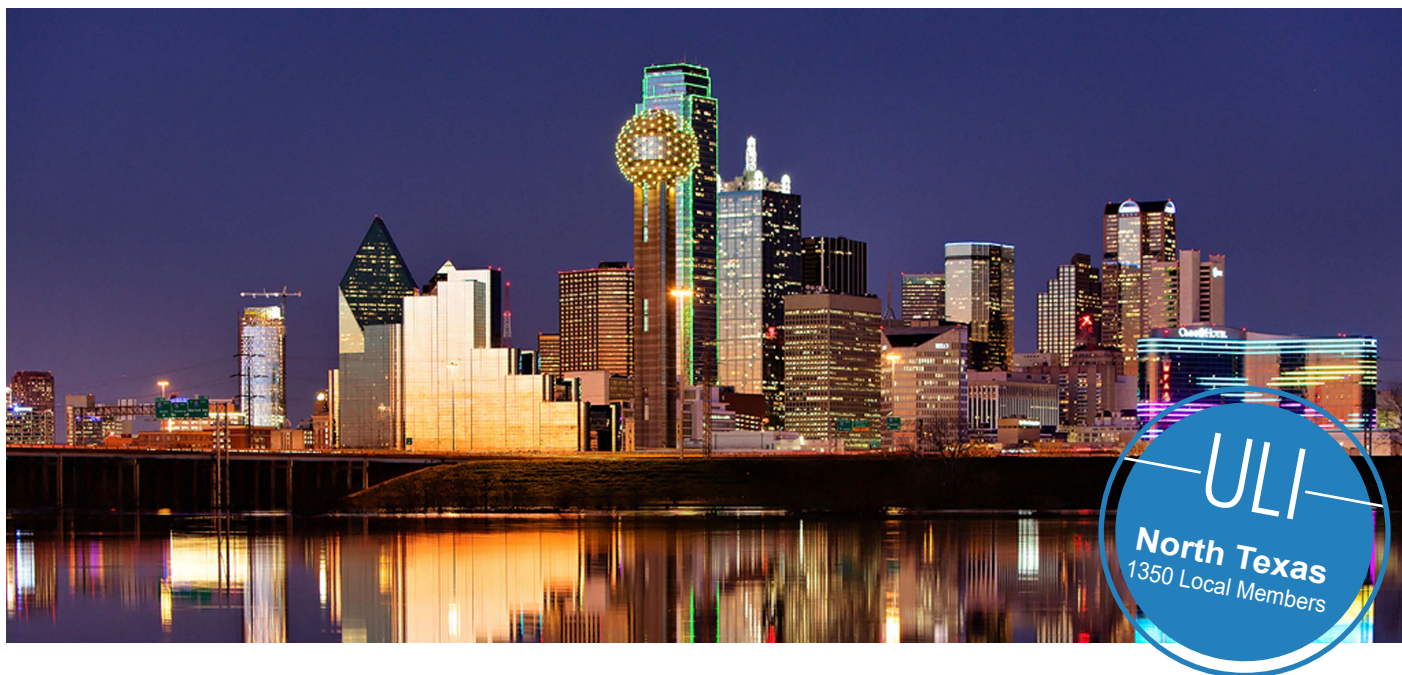
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1 ULI AND THE TAP PROCESS



URBAN LAND INSTITUTE (ULI)

The Urban Land Institute is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit research and education organization supported by its members. Founded in 1936, the Institute now has approximately 40,000 real estate and urban development professionals dedicated to advancing the institute's mission of providing leadership in the responsible use of land and creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide. ULI's interdisciplinary membership represents all aspects of the industry, including developers, property owners, investors, architects, urban planners, public officials, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, and academics. Established in 1936, ULI has a presence in the Americas, Europe, and Asia Pacific regions, with members in 76 countries.

As the preeminent, multidisciplinary real estate forum, ULI facilitates the open exchange of ideas, information and experience among local, national and international industry leaders and policy makers dedicated to creating better places.

URBAN LAND INSTITUTE – NORTH TEXAS DISTRICT COUNCIL

ULI North Texas was founded more than 15 years ago and is one of more than 50 District Councils operating in the U.S. as part of the national Urban Land Institute. Today, ULI North Texas is an association of more than 1350 local members representing a broad spectrum of land use and development disciplines including all of the varied professions reflected in the national ULI membership.

Our mission is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities. ULI North Texas carries forth that mission by serving the greater Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex, in both public and private sectors, with pragmatic land use expertise and education.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PANELS (TAPS)

Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs) are part of the ULI Advisory Services program. They are organized by local chapters. Panelists for these two-day work sessions are experts in their fields selected from the local chapter's membership to address challenges that require local knowledge to resolve. Panelists offer objective, responsible advice to local decision-

makers on a variety of land use and real estate issues related to site-specific and public policy questions. The scope is defined by the client, which in this case was the Trust for Public Land.

The program is flexible to provide a customized approach. The panel begins with a briefing followed by a two-day intensive working session in the client's community. During the session, ULI's expert panelists tour the study area, interview stakeholders, and address a set of questions posed by the client about a specific development issue or policy barrier. The outcome is a community presentation and final report that presents the panel's responses to the client's questions and offers a diverse set of suggestions. To request a TAP, to serve as a panelist or to learn more, contact Pamela Stein, Pamela.Stein@uli.org.



"Everybody would like to live in a place where they can walk out their front door into the city and out their back door into the woods." — Don Gatze, former dean, University of Texas at Arlington School of Architecture

2 OVERVIEW

BACKGROUND

Nationally, ULI and the Trust for Public Land (TPL) are partners in an initiative known as the “10 Minute Walk” that advocates locating parks and trails within a 10-minute walk from where residents live. In North Texas, the collaboration with TPL’s Dallas office and ULI’s North Texas District Council emerged from that national initiative.

The idea for the Alice Branch Health & Wellness Greenbelt grew out of an initiative led by the South Oak Cliff High School (SOC) Alumni Association and SOC Principal Dr. Willie F. Johnson who reached out to TPL in June 2018 about concerns and potential remedies related to an undeveloped creek and wooded land near the high school that attracts students and contributes to issues of delinquency and safety.

The high school is located in an economically disadvantaged neighborhood where 60 percent of households live below the poverty level. The area has undergone many challenges over the years that residents tie to systemic political disenfranchisement and decades-long racial discrimination.

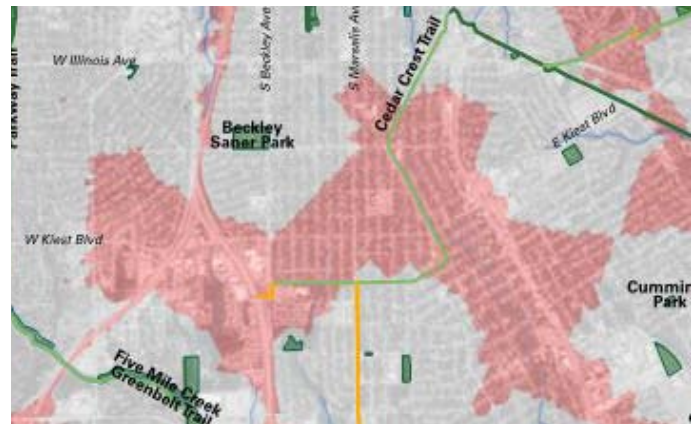
In December 2015, a group of students walked out of class to protest conditions at the school, which they said included a gas leak, a leaking roof, inadequate heating and cooling, and crumbling conditions at the school, which opened in 1952.



The school witnessed a revolving door of five principals in five years before Dr. Willie Johnson was named principal in 2017. Dr. Johnson is a familiar face to the neighborhood as he served as a special education teacher and coach at SOC from 1991-2001. Since returning, he has sought out the school’s sizable alumni base to create an advocacy voice for improved conditions at the school and its surrounding neighborhoods.

In spite of myriad challenges, the neighborhood surrounding the high school has immense pride in its rich African-American history, and community leaders have expressed energy, enthusiasm and vitality amid these challenges.

South Oak Cliff High School and the surrounding neighborhood, the area shaded pink on the map, is part of what the TPL calls a “park desert.”



map courtesy of TBG Partners

Residents across a broad area of South Oak Cliff don’t have access to a park within a 10-minute walk. This area also demonstrates health disparities, showing a higher rate of people with diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, asthma or other lung diseases.

After Dr. Johnson reached out to TPL, the nonprofit began attending community meetings to learn more about the neighborhood’s desires, including a meeting at For Oak Cliff, a community-based nonprofit that advocates in the areas of education, community building, and advocacy for South Oak Cliff.

Residents attending the community meetings expressed the desire for a health & wellness trail that would run along Alice Branch Creek through South Oak Cliff and provide intergenerational gathering spaces for students, parents, and grandparents. It would also provide a place for exercise and outdoor recreation while improving the walkability of the neighborhood.



Today, the creek is overgrown with invasive tree species and the creek bed is littered with plastic and other debris. There are concerns about homeless encampments, criminal elements and student delinquency in the wooded areas lining the greenbelt.



Current site conditions do not support community objectives.

The neighborhoods within walking distance of the greenbelt include SOC students and parents. Also included in this area is a significant aging population whose needs must be part of any discussion. This

group of people tends to view SOC High School as a positive for the neighborhood, realizes that students and their families have few activities in the neighborhood, and that a trail system, with programming, would provide positive options as well as a safer way to get from point A to point B.



artist rendering courtesy of TBG Partners

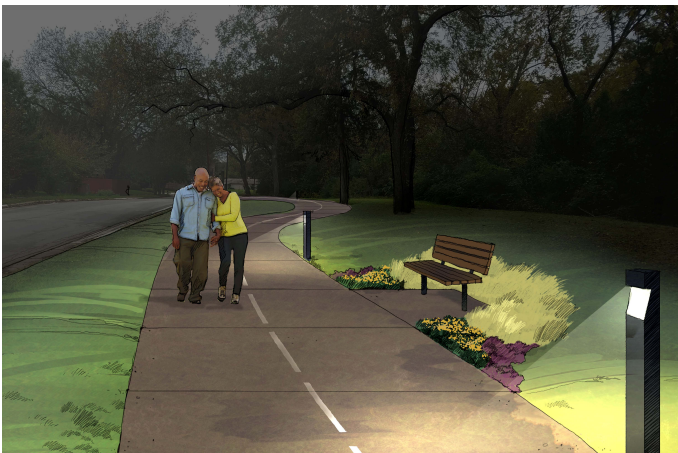
Future vision of greenbelt trail and park system will support the health, safety and welfare of the community.

A SHARED VISION:

Residents have expressed the desire for a maintained greenbelt and trail network extending from the newly completed Cedar Crest Trail on the north, through the neighborhood, via Alice Branch Creek, and eventually connecting to Glendale Park on the south. An estimated 7,000 people live within a 10-minute walk of this proposed greenbelt.

The proposal contains these three key elements:

1. Gateway Park: to be developed on a 2 acre tract of vacant land located on the west bank of Alice Branch Creek between the Cedar Crest Trail and East Overton Road (Land is under contract for purchase by TPL).
2. Sun Valley Park: to be prospectively developed on a 3-4 acre parcel within a larger, heavily wooded tract of land, located south of East Overton Road and directly behind an existing multifamily housing project (TAP focus).
3. Health and Wellness trail extending from Gateway Park to Glendale Park (TAP focus).



artist rendering courtesy of TBG Partners

“We believe that once Gateway Park is open, it will improve health, educational and public safety outcomes.” — Robert Kent, North Texas area director, Trust for Public Land

The community has expressed a desire for fitness equipment, community gathering spaces, a playground, and cultural elements to be incorporated

into the greenbelt. Residents said they’d like to put South Oak Cliff’s rich cultural history on display and one idea is to have a “Walk of Fame” along the trail that could celebrate prominent graduates from the high school.



3 STAKEHOLDER INPUT PROCESS

The Trust for Public Land firmly believes community engagement and continued involvement must be at the heart of any TPL project.



In addition to one-on-one and community meetings, TPL co-hosted a “pop-up park” event, in June, with the Better Block Foundation, a nonprofit that educates, equips, and empowers communities and their leaders to reshape and reactivate built environments to promote the growth of healthy and vibrant neighborhoods.

The pop-up park event was held on the previously referenced future Gateway Park tract of land at the northern end of the proposed greenbelt. TPL and Better Block brought out temporary park amenities to help people imagine what the space could look like as a park. The event was an opportunity for the entire community to come out and celebrate the start of the process to re-imagine the greenbelt area.

During the TAP process, panelists interviewed a number of area residents and community representatives one-on-one. (See page 18 for a list of community participants.) The interviews were designed to provide insight and answer questions about potential future greenbelt development. Invitees included community, church and business leaders as well as City of Dallas staffers. Neighborhood leaders were generally supportive of the ideas presented to develop the Alice Creek Greenbelt into an amenity that would include parks, trails and a method of

connecting neighborhoods.

They also expressed excitement about the renaissance underway in South Oak Cliff. However, there were also concerns expressed that included fears that a park could attract crime and criminal elements such as drug dealers and prostitutes as well as encourage juvenile delinquency and/or undesirable behavior that neighbors don’t like such as cruising with loud music, or barbecuing and drinking in the parks. Jodi Robinson, who manages community engagement for the City of Dallas Police Department, told the panel there’s a negative perception issue regarding safety in free, open places. Neighbors who live near the park or greenbelt, she said, may raise concerns about who will be attracted to the greenbelt and to the parks.

Community residents have inquired about the possibility of lighting, security cameras and gates that close the parks or trail areas after a certain time.



“(Parks) are a nice community amenity, but we also know they will come with added responsibility.” — Jodi Robinson, City of Dallas Police Department

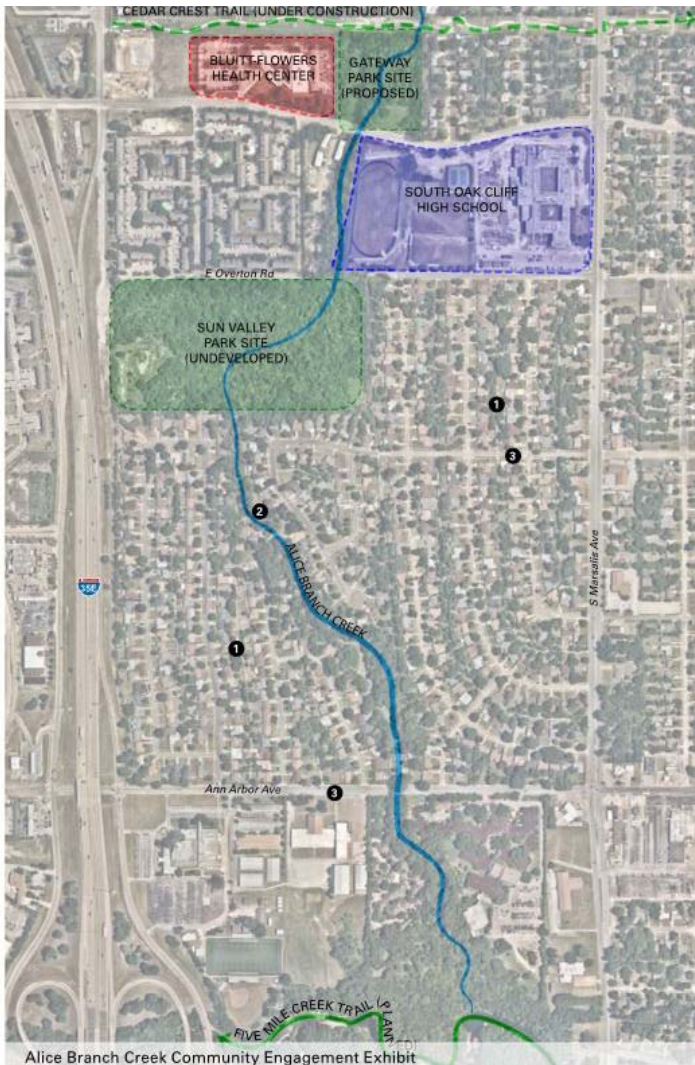
4 TIMELINE

TPL TIMELINE FOR GATEWAY PARK

- September 2018: Steering committee formed
- March-May 2019: Community engagement
- May: Close on 2-acre tract land purchase (First phase)
- June 1: Experiential park event
- August: Masterplan complete
- October: Texas Trees Foundation to plant trees at SOC High School
- December: Construction documents complete
- First Quarter 2020: Gateway Park Groundbreaking
- First Quarter 2021: Ribbon cutting



“A successfully executed Phase 1 is crucial to creating credibility with the community and gaining neighborhood support for the development of future park and trail initiatives,” — Karl Zavitkovsky, TAP panelist and former Director of the Office of Economic Development for the City of Dallas



map courtesy of The Trust for Public Land

5 SCOPE OF SERVICES

TAP SCOPE OF SERVICES

The TAP addressed three key issues:

1. Ownership of Sun Valley Park, the ability to acquire all or a portion of the property and development challenges, opportunities and recommended next steps
2. Trail alignment through the entire greenbelt, options and recommendations
3. Funding strategies and recommendations



6 TAP RECOMMENDATIONS

ISSUE ONE: OWNERSHIP & RELATED QUESTIONS

Questions and challenges about the ownership: The Sun Valley property appears to be the remnant of a Planned Development (PD) established in the 1980s that was never completed. Here are some of the questions the TAP sought to answer: What is the legal status of the property? Who is the current owner, who controls development, what is the applicable zoning, and can this property be transitioned into a City-owned park with viable public access?

ANSWERS:

- Sun Valley Park property was identified as a 20.9-acre tract owned by M&R Lewis Land Holdings, Inc., a Texas corporation, 836 N. FM 1174, Bertram, Texas, 78605.
- No portion is owned by the City, nor is it dedicated park land, despite being called “Sun Valley Park” on city maps.
- The 20-acre tract is part of an original 50-acre tract that includes a 360-unit apartment complex, built in the 1980s. An April 1986 article in The Dallas Morning News says apartment developer Billy Joe Dupree promised to build a park if he obtained zoning approval for the apartments. Although the developer received approval to build Phase 1 of the apartments, he never built a park.
- Development restrictions/options are set out by the PD, which requires 3 acres for a park and allows for up to 700 units of two-story multifamily development. The PD appears to have been amended in the past. This park requirement continues on the remaining undeveloped land and must be addressed by the owner as a part of any future development, should development occur.

TAP RECOMMENDATIONS ON OWNERSHIP QUESTIONS

TAP recommends contacting the record title owner to initiate negotiations for land acquisition of the whole

20-acre tract, or as much of it as the owner is willing to donate or sell, to the City (via TPL).

Because the site has limited value to a developer, the panel suggests that conversations with the owner begin by asking for a donation of the entire tract to the City for the purpose of park and greenway development. Panelists believe a cooperative solution allowing for the park and some commercial development might be achievable, but limitations to commercial development include the following:

- PD development limitations
- PD park requirement
- Floodplain, creek location, topography
- Tree ordinance mitigation expenses
- Property access challenges
- Neighborhood expectation of a park and wariness regarding new development due to unfulfilled promises of the past
- Rezoning requirements and neighborhood opposition to multifamily development

Should the owner prove unwilling to sell any part of the site, the City should be consulted about its willingness to pursue eminent domain acquisition.

The above factors will impact a reasonable fair amount market sales price should a donation not occur.

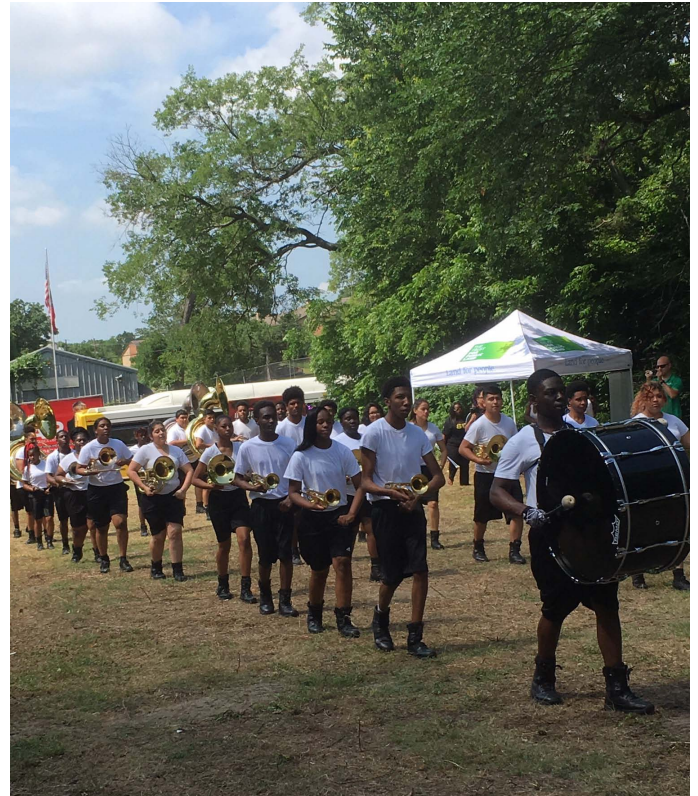


ISSUE TWO: COMMUNITY NEEDS AND ISSUES

TPL sought TAP's help in determining whether the entire Sun Valley property should be developed into a park, and if not, how much of it should be. Like TPL, the panel was of the opinion that communities are transformed when they have access to nature. They view the Alice Branch Greenbelt as a catalyst for further revitalization of the area and its current residents without the negative connotations of developer-led gentrification that some current residents may fear could raise property prices and force them out.

To have a positive impact on the existing community, processes will need to be in place to provide ongoing support of the greenbelt. That could be done through a "Friends Of" nonprofit entity that would receive some seed funding and be set up to raise funds and support the needs of the gateway park, the green belt trails and Sun Valley Park. Through it all, it was determined that the community must be actively involved in the project, taking "ownership" of it, supporting it and helping to guide it so that it meets the community needs and desires.

In the case of the Alice Branch greenbelt, TPL and the community share an interest in programming attached to the parks and trails, especially with health professionals anchoring one portion and students/educational programming another.



TAP RECOMMENDATIONS ADDRESSING ISSUES AND NEEDS

The community will need to determine whether it wants to offer parking at any portions of the greenbelt. Parking could activate the park and bring in more people that would discourage homeless encampments, illegal dumping, or criminal activity. Security lighting, cameras or other security could also be added to prevent and discourage crime.

The TAP suggests that a community engagement official from the Dallas Police Department be added to the Alice Branch steering committee meeting once a month to be able to address any concerns about safety.

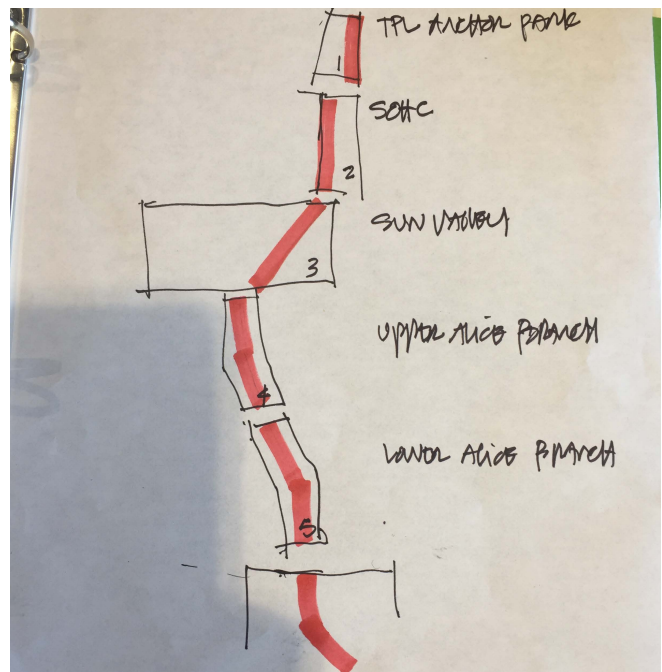
ISSUE THREE: TRAIL ALIGNMENT

The TAP was asked to provide recommendations for creating a continuous health and wellness trail along the banks of Alice Branch Creek from Sun Valley Park to Glendale Park.

The panel recommends breaking up the park and greenbelt development into the following six segments:

1. Gateway Park Segment
2. SOC Campus Segment
3. Sun Valley Park: Next steps: Determine ownership and acquisition options; feasibility and schematic design of linear park;
4. Upper Marsalis Park Segment Option
A alignment: Located through the stream Through Sun Valley Park to Charlemagne Easement. Option B alignment: Garza to Vanette via a "green alley," which revitalizes an unused alley way into a usable space for walking and biking. Next steps on this segment will involve determining interest from residents in a green alley or going through the stream bed and the costs of those alternatives.
5. Lower Marsalis Segment: Connection through easement from Ann Arbor to Charlemagne
6. Ann Arbor to Five Mile Creek along streamline through T Boone Pickens Retirement Facility

- improvements to connect the trails and neighborhood assets as a viable option
- Provide a schematic design for each element using a community engagement and participatory design process
- Where possible and feasible, include alternative routes that make loops, whether through alleys, on-street, and easement connections. Loops should be of multiple lengths for a variety of users, ages, and abilities.



CONSIDERATIONS FOR ALL SEGMENTS:

- Complete the Gateway Park segment first to demonstrate tangible progress and gain additional community support/buy-in
- Determine ADA requirements and provide alternatives if necessary
- Reconnect with Alice Branch Creek at its closest points where possible if the segment appears to be a public easement
- Consider ownership, feasibility and cost for each segment
- Where it proves to be impossible to use the drainage way, consider using streetscape



artist rendering courtesy of TBG Partners

FUNDING STRATEGIES

The panel was asked to investigate potential sources of funding for land acquisition, park design and public improvements. TPL also wanted the panel to consider how to fund operations and maintenance and identify the key steps to secure funding and move forward with implementation.

The panel identified three potential public sources for funding and determined that there is a reasonable expectation that the Alice Branch Creek Greenway project could access funding from one or more of the below sources:

1. General obligation bonds from the City of Dallas
2. Tax Increment Finance (TIF) district incentives
3. North Texas Council of Government (NCTCOG) sustainability grants, which generally require a 20-25 percent local government match

These potential sources can be used in combination with one another and require approval from the responsible municipal entities. Significant private sector philanthropic funding, pro-active community engagement, and the strong endorsement and support of the South Oak Cliff High School staff and its alumni association will be important factors in securing public sector assistance.

NEXT STEPS FOR POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCE

1. GO bond funding: This type of funding must be negotiated with the City of Dallas Park & Recreation Department and requires approval by the Park Board and City Council. There might be a further opportunity to seek future funding support from the 2022 bond program. Next step: Educate Park department staff on the merits of the project and build community support.
2. TIF funding: The project isn't located in a current TIF district, but could be incorporated

into the TOD TIF district, which stretches along the DART line from Lovers Lane to Lancaster Road/Loop 12, and has four sub-districts. Most likely scenario is to request an expansion of the boundaries of the Lancaster Corridor sub-district, to include the Alice Branch Creek Greenway-related land as well as other proximate properties whose future commercial development potential might be stimulated by this initiative. TIF grants are administered by the City of Dallas' Office of Economic Development and are made to viable projects that have been approved by the TIF Board and the City Council. Once an approved project has met all City requirements, payments are made over a multiyear period, depending on availability of tax increment collections. The TOD TIF's major source of income is tax increment collected in the Mockingbird/Lover's Lane sub-district, 40% of which is directly allocated to the Lancaster Corridor sub-district. Expanding Lancaster Corridor to include the geographic area pertaining to Alice Branch Creek and Glendale Park would enable this project to benefit from available TIF funding. As TIF funding does not become available until a project is completed, there may be an option to fund a portion of project costs with GO bonds and use future TIF proceeds to recycle the bond money into other park projects. Next steps: Meet with Dallas Office of Economic Development staff to explore options.

3. NCTCOG Sustainability Grants: These grant applications are made in conjunction with the City's Office of Economic Development and generally require a 25% match from the participating municipality. TIF funds are often used to provide this match. Next steps: Explore grant application deadline and requirements with City's Office of Economic Development Staff.

7 COMMUNITY AND TAP PARTICIPANTS

PANEL MEMBERS

Alice Branch Creek Health & Wellness Greenbelt

TAP Chair

Neal Sleeper, Cityplace Development

- Peter Bratt, City of Dallas Parks and Recreation Department
- Donald Gatzke, retired, *Dean of Architecture at The University of Texas Arlington*
- Art Hudman, retired, City of Dallas Attorney
- Suzan Kedron, Attorney, Jackson Walker
- Robert Kent, TPL
- Lee McKinney, retired, (JP Morgan Chase) and former Assistant Director, City of Dallas Office of Economic Development
- Bud Melton, Hallf Associates
- Molly Plummer, TPL
- Karl Zavitkovsky, retired (Citicorp and Bank of America) and former Director, City of Dallas Office of Economic Development

STAKEHOLDERS/COMMUNITY PARTICIPANTS

- Ola M. Allen, community leader
- Susan Alvarez, City of Dallas, storm water expert
- Rev. Horace Bradshaw, minister
- Derrick Battie, community leader
- Al Herron, commercial developer
- Dr. Willie F. Johnson, Jr., Principal, South Oak Cliff High School
- Winston Norton II, MEGA
- Sherman Roberts, Citywide Community Development Corp.
- Jodi Robinson, Dallas Police Department

Staff

- Kerry Curry, *report writer*
- Ann Podeszwa, TBG Partners, *report design*
- Pam Stein, Executive Director, ULI North Texas

8 CONCLUSIONS

CONCLUSION

After two days of deliberations, TAP panelists were able to answer a number of questions about the future viability and potential scope of the Alice Branch Creek Health & Wellness Greenbelt with a list of next step suggestions that will assist the community and the Trust for Public Land to move the process forward and continue to collaborate in developing parks and greenbelt amenities for South Oak Cliff.



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