

*“The tendency of mankind to congregate in cities is a marked characteristic of modern times. The movement is worldwide. Men are becoming convinced that the formless growth of the city is neither economical nor satisfactory; and that overcrowding and congestion of traffic paralyze the vital functions of the city. The complicated problems of a city are not beyond the control of aroused public sentiment, and practical men of affairs are turning their attention to working out the means whereby the city may be made an efficient instrument for providing all its people with the best possible conditions of living.”*

*(Chicago) in common with other great cities, realizes that the time has come to bring order out of chaos incident to rapid growth. Among the various instruments designed to accomplish this result, a Plan for a well- ordered and convenient city is seen to be indispensable.”*

.....*Daniel Burnham, 1906, “The Plan of Chicago”*

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

### **“The Trinity in Broad View”**

The history of American urbanism has produced some of the most significant and endearing places in human civilization, including Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, Lake Shore Drive in Chicago, the “Emerald Necklace” of Boston and New York’s Central Park. Great organizers of urban form, they are themselves the consequence of organization and planning. Although each is unique, all are tangible expressions of a city’s “public realm.” Consciously designed, these spaces gave their cities distinct identity, usability, economic value and delight for every citizen.

The idea of a spatially defined “public realm” is a fundamental tenet of livable cities and quality of life.” In older more established cities it takes the form of a seamless and interconnected webbing of parks, plazas, avenues, boulevards, civic buildings and institutions. As the real estate owned and accessible to all citizens, these public spaces have in turn generated highly valuable private real estate in their surrounding neighborhoods and edges. The relationship between well-planned public spaces, which generate exceptional economic value, is fact when the adjacencies are correctly designed as they were at White Rock Lake. How the elements of the Trinity relate will either promote or discourage comparable economic, civic and social value. Having stood the test of time, documenting, analyzing and transforming the techniques contained in the great urban parks of America will guarantee the outcome of a contemporary urban plan.

In the highest sense, The Advisory Panel acknowledges the potential of the currently unused Trinity River Floodway and related “Great Trinity Forest” to become the form-giver of an underdeveloped public realm of Dallas. Guided by national examples of equivalent urban parks, Dallas stands to potentially achieve its ambitions to be counted amongst the great cities of the world. These underpinnings establish our professional viewpoint of the current proposal known as the “Trinity River Corridor Master Implementation Plan”, reviewed by an advisory committee on August 3, 4, and 5<sup>th</sup> in presentations at Reunion Tower.

When originally planned, high-speed multi-lane highways were intended to by pass city centers becoming an “interstate” system of mobility, defense, and connectivity. However, lobbying governors and city mayors, believing that the high volume of “drive-by” customers would increase economic value, plunged them directly into existing city centers. With fifty years to weigh the outcome, the blurring of the high-speed multi-lane highway with strip mall reasoning has produced adverse effects on urban centers.

Rather than becoming the fastest route *between* cities they became the fastest route *within* cities. Instead of delivering economic value, their intrusiveness physically separated worker from workplace, residents from parks, child from playground and neighbors from each other. Even Dallas’ own Woodall Rogers Freeway, intentionally lowered to become more negotiable to pedestrians, still remains as a physical and psychological barrier between the prosperity of Uptown and the Arts District.

Today, a significant number of cities are expending great effort and financial resources to move, bury and eliminate urban highways, in lieu of achieving even greater social, recreational and economic benefits. Most notably Boston’s “Big Dig” buried its highway, and New York’s west side stopped highway construction through public opposition in order to build a park. Even Fort Worth expended great effort to recapture the connectively of its southern end by re-routing Interstate-30. Contemporary urban thinking now views the construction of additional high-speed highways as an obsolete model for creating economic value.

## **II. OBSERVATIONS**

### **A. “Trinity River Corridor Plan” Presentation and Discussion**

The TRC Plan identified five issues as its basis. They were Transportation, Flooding, Recreation, Environment, and Economic Impact.

The Study Area was defined to the Advisory Panel as a “flood conveyance area” (as opposed to an impoundment reservoir) for purposes of moving regional storm drainage safely through the urban center of Dallas.

The plan contained a 135-acre lake. (Roughly 1/9<sup>th</sup> the size of White Rock Lake)

The existing Trinity channel would be split into two 200’ wide channels and conveying its waters around the lake along the east and west edges.

Disconnected from the natural flow of the Trinity, supply water to the lake would be provided by the Waste Water Treatment Plant.

The plan recommended a 55 mph limited access Tollway located within the levees and routed under the existing vehicular bridges, which cross the Floodway.

The interior edges of the Tollway would include vertical retaining walls and other devices to prevent the Tollway from flooding.

A park landscape plan indicating some recreational fields and trapezoidal ponds was shown in the northern portion of the study area between the highways.

Multiple bridges designed by Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava would extend across the lake and connect to West Dallas and other key pieces of infrastructure.

Levee extensions are proposed to protect the Cadillac Heights neighborhood from flooding, supplemented by a proposed “swale” and wetlands to be cut through the Great Trinity Forest to relieve conveyance obstacles.

## **B. “Comprehensive Land Use Plan” Presentation and Discussion**

The Comprehensive Land Use Plan had selected 22 autonomous sites along the study area.

One land use plan was presented for all of the five Tollway alignments, implying all transportation configurations yielded the same land use results.

The consultant team working for the City of Dallas informed the Advisory Panel that their study was autonomous to any decision regarding a highway alignment in the Trinity River Corridor Study.

The Advisory Panel was given the impression during the previous day’s presentations that the CLUP had been commissioned to provide information to guide the selection of a highway alignment.

### **III. RESPONSES**

#### **A. Specific Comments & Reactions to the “Trinity River Corridor Plan”**

As demonstrated by planning examples, which produced America’s great urban parks, a successful and thorough urban plan includes more than five issues. Most significantly, they also include the design of any surface streets within the park; specific locations of new civic buildings, specific design proposals to the adjacent neighborhoods to correctly mesh the city with the public space. Additionally, all issues are equally weighted to prevent any one issue from dominating and compromising the success of the others. The AP finds the issues addressed in the current scheme are incomplete and too narrow to realize the full potential of the floodway.

The design did not demonstrate any connection or consideration of precedents culled from established and successful park designs which gave credibility and assurance to the design.

A 135-acre lake is inadequate to accommodate the recreational uses (e.g. sailboating etc.) as portrayed to the public in the Bond Election. The AP is highly concerned the outcome of the project as a usable and accessible recreational amenity is significantly beneath public expectations.

Although justified for “hydrologic reasons,” splitting the river channel to bypass the lake is artificial, un-natural and inconsistent with contemporary thinking, which emphasizes the creation of low maintenance self-sustaining environments. Additionally these flanking channels will literally and psychologically operate as a moat preventing easy and convenient access.

The logical route to position the split channels ultimately constricts the size of the lake to 135 acres. Its elongated form restricts the movements of boats to only one direction and is inadequate to accommodate the uses represented to the public in the Bond Election.

High-speed multi-lane highways extinguish conventional recreational uses from occurring in any meaningful way.

The garden like design of the parkland will be costly to maintain and is in opposition to the Trinity’s natural inclination to be a wetland.

The Advisory Panel supports the initiative to architecturally consider all proposed bridges as represented by the Calatrava designs.

### ***Narrative Summary about the Trinity River Corridor Plan***

The project's main programmatic elements - the lake, the Tollway, and recreational uses are compromising each other through their co-location into this site. The river cannot flow into the lake for alleged hydrological reasons. As a result, two bypassing channels isolate it from convenient recreational access. Conversely, logical routes for the channels constrict the size of the lake into acreage insufficient to meet the recreational expectations (sail boating et. al) that was portrayed during the Bond Election.

Furthermore, the Tollway becomes an inner liner isolating the park. Flood protection walls must be added to its interior edges since the preferred option is to place it within the levees. These conditions further restrict access and views of the park. Since the existing levees are already barriers to access, these addition elements make the park effectively inaccessible if they are implemented.

Although the Advisory Panel noted that intermittent pedestrian bridges had been shown to cross the successive barriers, no historic precedent was presented nor known to any committee member of a park with this degree of restricted and bounded access. This perception was supported by the design consultant's own characterization of the project as "access challenged." As a consequence, it is highly unlikely this design will generate the kind of social and economic benefits realized by other great urban American Parks.

### **B. Specific Comments and Reactions to the Comprehensive Land Use Plan (CLUP)**

There is no connection between the economic assessment study and the Trinity River Corridor Project. Since their autonomy does not permit the exchange of any factual information, the studies do not gain any credibility or direction as a consequence of the other.

No rationale was given as to why 22 specific sites were selected given the form of the floodway has continuous urban frontage on both sides. As a result, The AP is concerned that the study is erroneously fragmented in its view dismissing the opportunity to envision the project's economic and urban design component as a contiguous whole.

The fact that the land use maps do not indicate any effect of one highway alignment over another is fundamentally unsound. Although explanations were offered this was due to insufficient professional fees, without this level of study – which in the view of the AP is fundamental - the CLUP is meaningless in evaluating the benefits of one alignment over another. Additionally, the CLUP did not evaluate the economic impact of a no-highway, park-only alternative.

The CLUP did not collect, study or evaluate the property value increases and effects that have been generated by other existing parks built in major American cities. (See introduction) The AP sees this as missing groundwork to build a credible business case that characterizes the economic benefits of the project.

## **IV. RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **1. Towards a Sustainable Region**

The environmental sustainability of our built and natural environment is a fact of contemporary discourse. Presentations made to the advisory committee made clear that growth and traffic counts used to validate the Tollway, were based on assumptions that planning models of suburban sprawl and singular use of the automobile would continue unchanged in our regional culture for the next 25 years. The AP finds these assumptions narrow and inconsiderate of the cultural changes already taking place nationally as well as in Dallas.

The success of light rail, pockets of newly developed high density neighborhoods such as Uptown, Addison Circle, and Legacy Town Center to name a few, clearly indicate a shift in patterns that will put worker and workplace closer together. This view was additionally supported by the NTCOG's presentation that the construction of new high-speed multi-lane highways is always a "last resort" to overcome transportation problems. The Advisory Panel lauds the NTCOG's view and dedicates its support to solve problems of regional mobility by considering the broader influences of sustainable strategies. To think in these terms is consistent with increasing national and worldwide emphasis on issues like the environment, air quality, stability of inner-city neighborhoods and the highest quality of life for the perpetuity of all generations.

### **2. The Need for an Encompassing Urban Vision**

An Encompassing Urban Vision comparable in content and thoroughness to those, which produced the great urban parks of America, is urgently needed for this project. (e.g., Burnham's plan of Chicago, Olmstead's plan for the Back Bay of Boston and the Emerald Necklace to name a few.) A nationally acknowledged urban planner that has worked on high quality waterfront projects, a landscape architect with built experience in river corridors, and an urban economist that understands the relationship between private values around public spaces are the essential participants formulating the plan. This effort may or may not compliment engineering studies already prepared and could be accomplished within the Environmental Impact Study timeline of one year.

This effort would insure that Trinity Park would achieve its highest potential in generating economic value and simultaneously lower risk of investment. The Advisory Panel pledges its assistance in mobilizing this undertaking, if supported by the resources of the Dallas Chapter of the AIA.

### **3. Specific Recommendations for the Five Issues Enumerated in the Master Implementation Plan**

**Transportation** – A high-speed limited access Tollway will extinguish usable recreation and assembly within the levees in any meaningful way.

**Flood Control** – Wetland landscapes are more consistent with the floodway's natural and functional tendencies. A greater consideration should be given to utilizing these within the conveyance area. Environmental presentations reinforced wetlands are less maintenance given they are self sustaining.

**Recreation** – A chain of islands connected by a contiguous webbing of wetlands is more consistent with the environmental habitat of the Trinity and would add national distinctiveness (identity/image) to the recreational uses it would contain.

**Environment** – Splitting the Trinity to by pass the lake is unnatural, artificial, and was unvalidated by any urban precedent that functions successfully. The over-engineering of this design diminishes the lake in size and use, and is antithetical to contemporary notions of self-sustaining environments.

**Economic** – The Comprehensive Land Use Plan must be rational and grounded in fact so that logical and informed decisions can be made about the Tollway. Realizing the highest economic potential of the Trinity opportunity will only be accomplished through empirical study working in conjunction with an encompassing urban vision.

### **4. Heighten Planning Emphases of Two Key Areas**

The urban region directly between the Trinity and existing aggregation of downtown buildings contains a collection underutilized low-density land uses. In the interest of developing a more tangible connection to the Park, this area should receive heightened attention. The designation of the Woodall Rogers Bridge as a landmark connection across the Trinity also demands meaningful and comprehensive planning of West Dallas including the entire length of Singleton Boulevard from the Trinity to Loop 12.

### **5. Increase Resources to Relevant City of Dallas Departments**

This project is too large for the private sector or any one developer to steward and coordinate. Towards that end, the AC suggests the City of Dallas distribute more resources to all relevant Departments (Planning, Parks and Recreation et. al.) to endow this project with the civic leadership and participation it requires.

## **V. SUMMARY**

### **“A Usable and Pleasant Park as the Public Domain to Connect all Citizens and Neighborhoods of Dallas”**

The public realm of a city is the real estate where all are welcome – that all in a sense “own.” If designed to be usable and pleasant, the Trinity River will become the place equally shared and enjoyed by citizens of south and north Dallas. It is paramount to the success of this project, and to the long-term economic value it will generate through correctly planned adjacencies, that this project is conceived and implemented with an urban vision with parity to all issues. Towards this, our professional society is dedicated to enable and advance.