

January 9, 2020

Don Williams, Chairman  
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Dear Don,

I have reviewed the power point presentation of the Fair Park Master Plan Update prepared by Perkins & Will that you forwarded to me. My understanding is that this product was presented and discussed at a public meeting held on November 20, 2019 at the end of Phase 3 of a six-month planning process envisioned by the client/consultant team to address the recommendations included in the Report of the Mayor's Fair Park Task Force dated September 3, 2004, and to produce a redevelopment plan for the study area that reflects the "Four Pillars" (Activation, Community, Culture, and History) of the Fair Park First organization entrusted by the City of Dallas with guiding the process.

I recognize that the power point presentation is an in-progress document that the consultant prepared for discussion purposes and that the final product of the planning effort will be augmented with many additional documents and illustrations. Therefore, I want to reserve the right to revise the following comments when I review the final product.

Let me begin by stating some known facts.

1. Fair Park is Dallas's most iconic, large, and underutilized asset with great and untapped potential for redevelopment.
2. Since its inception, the site of the 1936 World's Fair has been a financial "sink hole" and a burden for the city.
3. More than 40 plans in the past decades have failed or were not implemented for lack of funding or management/operational reasons.
4. Fair Park has been the cause of detrimental impacts on the process of community renewal and redevelopment in South Dallas.

Given these facts and the complex multidisciplinary issues to be addressed and resolved in the new master plan, it was with much anticipation that I began to review the consultant team proposals. Yet I wound up feeling that the accelerated study pace imposed on the project resulted in an inferior overall plan, one with missed opportunities. I am disappointed with what has been proposed so far and believe that what is emerging is a plan that is mostly a confirmation of the "status quo", a plan that is not aspirational and does not address the primary issues that have inhibited previous Fair Park plans. Even though some of the specific site proposals are thoughtful and should be part of the final plan (e.g. the pedestrian loop, extensive tree planting, hard and ecological infrastructure improvements, renovation and repurposing of decayed structures, etc.), I believe the current overall plan is uninspiring and does not produce a compelling and transformative vision to capture the imagination of citizens and potential philanthropic donors. It does not foster a creative and mutually beneficial coexistence with State Fair's activities and the park's other tenants and stakeholders.

The new master plan for Fair Park can not/should not be an update of past failed/unrealized plans, nor should it be constrained by the guiding principle: "The concept and design of the 1936 Texas Centennial Exposition shall continue to guide the development of Fair Park." Of course, the iconic structures and much of the historic site plan needs to be maintained and cared for. But new creative programs should be explored for the utilization or repurposing of

most of the current assets and the new structures and places that will be envisioned in the park now and in the next decades. This should not be an historic renovation project. It should be a plan that defines a new vision for 21 century South Dallas.

Finally, and most important, a new plan for the repurposing of Fair Park cannot and should not be drafted without, at the same time, proposing redevelopment plans for the communities and urban context abutting the park. When it was initially conceived, Fair Park was an island in the middle of agricultural fields outside the urbanized area of the city. Now it lies in the middle of a strategic area with complex infrastructural, economic, and sociological problems in addition to substantial physical obsolescence that have unfortunately tainted its image. In many ways, this area will be the next urban frontier for Dallas and when and if properly redeveloped, it will contribute to a renewed city image.

It is for these reasons that I urge the decision makers, community leaders, and members of the planning/management team to slow down the project schedule, recalibrate the planning process, and expand the scope of work to include at a minimum:

1. The study of at least two additional comprehensive alternative redevelopment plans/scenarios based on different programmatic assumptions to compare with the plan now under consideration.
2. The study of 3 alternative plans for the redevelopment of the vacant or underutilized land in the areas/neighborhoods surrounding Fair Park, including all parcels owned by the State Fair Association outside of the perimeter of Fair Park.
3. Relatedly, the study should consider alternative parking strategies for Fair Park and potential new development to be envisioned in the areas immediately adjacent to the park. These strategies should look at comparable solutions adopted in other nationally recognized examples of signature parks (e.g. Chicago, Boston, etc.).
4. An exploration of the urban design and economic impacts that the I345/I30 infrastructure project will have on Fair Park in terms of land use changes, parking needs and accessibility.
5. An evaluation of the financial sustainability and self-sufficiency of the existing and future uses/elements programmed in the park and surrounding areas.

I believe that a recalibration of the master plan update is necessary and essential to ensure that Fair Park redevelopment will play a pivotal role in the growth of South Dallas. The greater divide that has historically existed between Fair Park and the community must be transformed into opportunities for renewal, reconciliation, inclusiveness, and economic/human development.

It has been said that Dallas is now at a crossroads and that interest in the economic opportunities that exist in South Dallas are becoming real and must be encouraged. New investment infrastructure projects and community stabilization efforts are well underway and must be continuously nurtured.

Public and philanthropic investments that will be required at Fair Park will most likely reach \$500 million. It is important to make sure that these resources will be well spent and that the city will get the appropriate return on investment. To achieve this, I believe the master plan should explore many possibilities and not leave stones unturned. The master plan should be truly holistic, transformative, and futuristic. It should also celebrate the evolution of Fair Park over time. As an emergent world-class city, Dallas should not settle for anything less than that!

I am familiar with the reputation and quality of work that Perkins & Will has produced in other cities in America and abroad. There is no doubt in my mind that their talented and multidisciplinary team can increase the breadth of their current master plan.

My hope is that the client and community leaders will agree to expand the scope of the current master plan update.

I hope you find these comments helpful. Please feel free to contact me for clarification or additional information.

Sincerely,  
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