Public Involvement

Early and ongoing public involvement was solicited so that the public had ample opportunity to help direct the DTIP’s concepts and implementation strategies. The residents of Denton were empowered from the beginning of the project to provide their detailed thoughts and opinions about downtown. The community dialogue exhibited during the public meetings was passionate and heartfelt.

A few themes emerged during the public involvement process, and these themes formed the basis for the DTIP recommendations. These themes are discussed in this chapter, along with the steps involved in the public involvement process.
The DTIP project began with a large public involvement outreach effort, as is appropriate for this type of comprehensive study. Stakeholder interviews, on-line surveys, and public workshops were among the tools used to gather broad-based input from the Denton community. The project’s public involvement activities were designed to gather public input on downtown and to identify and discuss the issues, challenges, concerns, and community goals of Denton’s residents. A community-based process was used, involving a sequential series of planning activities for residents to offer their input. The process, started with broad planning perspectives, extended into the refinement of planning objectives, and culminated in discussing specific recommendations.

The plans and strategies developed in this document are the direct result of the coordinated planning process that the city staff and its consultant conducted. The following sections detail the opportunities afforded to the community to provide input into the creation of the DTIP.

A. Downtown Task Force

The Downtown Task Force, which is a subcommittee of the Economic Development Partnership Board, is composed of citizens whose primary task is to see that the Downtown Master Plan is implemented. The Downtown Task Force served as a Steering Committee for the DTIP process and added members up to a total of about two dozen for its Steering Committee role. This Steering Committee met monthly and provided a public opportunity to review the status of the project, furnish feedback, and become familiar with the next steps in the process. This group gave ongoing advice on the DTIP and the planning process.

In addition, city staff met with various stakeholders in the community. The large DTIP project area was divided into five sections, and a city staff member was assigned to each. This city staff then met one-on-one with the various stakeholders to review the DTIP and invited their participation.
B. Stakeholder Interviews

The consultant conducted over 60 stakeholder interviews with business owners, residents, city officials, and property owners over a three day period (October 13 through 15, 2009). A series of 19 questions, which were varied to clarify each interviewee’s perspective, were used to define the issues and aspirations of the Denton community. Responses included comments on downtown’s strengths, economic development, quality-of-life issues, parking, and solid waste. (The interview questionnaire form is included in the Appendix.)

Although numerous opinions were given on a variety of topics, a consensus was apparent on a number of important issues. A synopsis of consensus issues follows:

- The Denton County Courthouse and Courthouse Square form a special place for residents and out-of-town visitors, directly tied to the identity of downtown.
- Downtown provides an economically attractive environment for starting or locating a business; however, even more ways or opportunities are possible for the city to advance downtown’s attractiveness to business owners.
- The new transit station is seen as a very positive opportunity for the city and downtown.
- Inadequate downtown parking is an issue.
- New development in downtown should include a mix of uses with residential/office uses over retail stores.
- The University of North Texas and Texas Woman’s University are viewed as major downtown assets and should be considered when planning for the future.
- Well-designed streets and appealing streetscapes are the most important factors for the quality of life in downtown.
- Downtown’s solid waste containers need to be screened from view.
- The city should not limit architectural styles, building materials, or colors. However, minor controls should be implemented to maintain downtown’s historic aesthetic.
- Building codes for downtown and downtown’s infrastructure are felt to be outdated and to hinder development and redevelopment.
- More shopping, entertainment, and housing options are needed downtown.
• The consensus vision for downtown is that of a vibrant, unique, walkable, mixed-use downtown.
• A high-quality pedestrian-friendly downtown area is envisioned with adequate parking, including structured parking facilities, surface city lots, and on-street spaces.

C. On-line Survey

The city conducted an on-line survey on its website from November 13 through December 3, 2009 to capture additional resident input. A total of 109 residents completed the on-line survey. The survey consisted of the same 19 questions used during the stakeholder interviews.

Additionally, the general public was able to participate in preparing the DTIP by logging onto the city’s website. Any interested individual could obtain information about the DTIP, access meeting minutes and survey results, and provide input by accessing the city’s website. Staff regularly updated the DTIP information on the city website.

D. Public Meetings

Public Meeting 1

The City of Denton hosted the first DTIP public meeting on December 14, 2009 at the Central Fire Station. Approximately 60 people attended the meeting, which was structured as an open house, followed by a formal presentation. This meeting provided the first opportunity for residents, stakeholders, city officials, and the consultant to listen and learn from each other.

The workshop was publicized using a variety of methods to maximize public awareness and participation. Announcement methods included:

• City of Denton website announcement
• Press releases
• Flyers and table tents (3-dimensional display) were distributed at multiple locations downtown

At the meeting participants discussed existing conditions and the draft project goals and objectives initially defined for the project. The participants were then given eight Downtown Master Plan goal statements that define the vision for downtown.
Denton along with 28 statements of objectives that the consultant developed to implement the master plan goals to rank. The participants were asked to rank each of the 28 objectives in order of priority to give the city and its consultant an understanding of what additional opportunities may exist for leveraging downtown economic development. (The detailed results of the public meeting are located in the Appendix.) The following are a few of the highlights of the results, each of which builds on the statement that downtown Denton needs to:

- Establish unique and special opportunities for dining, retail, and entertainment.
- Create a downtown with vibrant districts, each of which offers a unique character while still working well together.
- Develop a pleasant, safe, and inviting street environment that has a special style that is themed together using streetscape elements, such as: pedestrian benches, trash receptacles, street and pedestrian lighting, street trees and landscaping, wayfinding signage, etc.
- Establish a network of exterior public spaces that can facilitate events, gatherings, and festivals appealing to a wide range of Denton citizens and visitors.
- Enhance Hickory Street, which will link the proposed DCTA transit station with the Courthouse, as a “Great Street” in downtown for shopping, art galleries, and dining.
- Create a program for waste management that will improve aesthetics, odor control, and overall street images.
- Leverage implementation through partnerships, commonly referred to as public/private partnerships, in which the costs and revenues of growth are shared.

Public Meeting 2

A second public meeting was held on March 10, 2010 at the Denton Civic Center from 6:00 - 8:30 pm. Approximately 75 people attended the meeting in which the consultant presented the initial results of the existing conditions and analysis along with draft recommendation strategies. The existing conditions and analysis results presented to the community were as follows:
1. Downtown Denton has tremendous existing resources
2. Bold new improvements are currently under construction
3. Additional redevelopment and revitalization projects are underway downtown
4. The next wave of downtown projects is not too far away

The draft recommendation strategies discussion focused on the proposed plans and strategies for:

- Parking
- Complete streets
- Parks and outdoor venues
- Solid waste removal
- Review of the Form Based Code

The participants were then asked to answer a series of questions located at various stations (tables) dispersed throughout the room. They were instructed to place dots on the answer that best represented their opinion on the particular implementation strategy. Each participant placed either a green (yes) or a red (no) dot in the space provided. The purpose was to gauge the community’s preferences among the initial implementation strategies and plans for downtown.

The following are nine examples of the results that were collected from the strategy question exercise that had a total of 27 questions. (The detailed results of the exercise are located in Appendix.)

1. Do you agree that some development, such as in the immediate vicinity of the DCTA transit station, could be up to seven stories tall?
   Results:
   Yes: 17
   No: 30

2. Do you support a concept that would encourage the city to enter into a public/private partnership to provide additional parking lots and parking garages?
   Results:
   Yes: 24
   No: 12

3. Do you support the solution that all solid waste and recyclables containers/dumpsters be screened from view by a masonry wall?
Results:
Yes: 40
No: 2

4. Do you support the “complete streets” concept (streets developed for equal and safe use by automobiles, pedestrians, and bicyclists) for streets in downtown?
   Results:
   Yes: 37
   No: 8

5. Do you support the concept of Hickory Street being designed in a true “Great Street” - a pedestrian street which will connect the proposed DCTA transit station with the courthouse square providing new shopping, restaurants and residential?
   Results:
   Yes: 45
   No: 2

6. Do you support a significant wayfinding signage program which identifies the location of parks, major public buildings, public parking, etc?
   Results:
   Yes: 40
   No: 0

7. Would you support, as development and density occurs in downtown, high quality parking garages with retail uses on the ground floor?
   Results:
   Yes: 34
   No: 6

8. Do you support a form-based code, that will ensure a more predictable outcome that is in character with Denton’s mixed-use, walkable and bike-friendly goals?
   Results:
   Yes: 35
   No: 4

9. Do you feel the city should implement a shared parking program for downtown? (Spaces are shared by more than one user, retail and office during the morning and residential in the evening, which allows lots to be used more efficiently.)
   Results:
   Yes: 35
   No: 4
The consultant team then used the responses to the questions to assist in making preliminary recommendations.

**E. Additional Outreach**

The city and the consultant used the following additional mechanisms to provide project awareness and secure community input.

**Logo**

A specific logo, using the outline of the Denton Courthouse as its main theme, was developed for the DTIP project to relay a consistent, unifying element for all of the materials presented to the public, including maps, exhibits, and project documents. The DTIP logo assisted the community in identifying project-related correspondence, and it also illustrated the intended branding message. The project logo is used in this DTIP document.

**Press Release**

Denton’s Public Information Officer disseminated all DTIP project information to city residents. His office wrote and distributed all press releases and articles, as well as conducted all media interviews.

**Downtown Newsletter**

The Denton Economic Development Department produces a quarterly newsletter to inform citizens about downtown activities. The newsletter profiled the DTIP project in several articles. (Copies of these articles are located in the appendix.)

**DTIP Website**

For example of full service website view in appendix.