

KAREN S. WALZ

Vision North Texas Looks to the Future

ULI North Texas leads a visioning effort to help the region deal with its rapid growth.

NORTH TEXAS, THE NATION'S fourth-most-populous metropolitan area at 6 million people, is expected to see that number double by 2050. How can a region add that many people and still maintain or enhance its quality of life and sustainability? The work of an innovative partnership of the private, public, and academic sectors—

council's reputation as an innovator, and not duplicate the efforts of other area organizations. Fernando Costa, planning director for Fort Worth, took up the challenge, proposing that the district council lead a visioning effort that would help the region deal with its rapid growth. The district council leadership agreed that a visioning project

as a way to promote high-quality growth in the region, and in 2002, the council's executive board approved its Ten Principles of Development Excellence, providing guidance to local communities regarding development patterns. When ULI leaders proposed a partnership to Mike Eastland, NCTCOG executive director, and John Promise, director of environment and development, they were ready to join forces.

In addition to the private and public sectors, the third critical segment for the project was the academic community. The University of Texas at Arlington (UTA), located in the geographic center of the region and the largest state university in north Texas, had two newly arrived leaders, president James Spaniolo and dean of architecture Don Gatzke. They immediately grasped the potential of the initiative and agreed to have UTA act as the lead academic institution.

In mid-2004, representatives of these private, public, and academic interests formed the Vision North Texas regional planning committee, which decided to conduct a one-day regional visioning workshop in April 2005. Strategic Community Solutions, a Dallas-based urban planning consultant, was hired to design and manage the project.

The first Vision North Texas workshop, which was similar to other Reality Check exercises conducted by ULI district councils, began with a challenge from past ULI chairman Ron Terwilliger to "use visioning to create communities with a sense of belonging and a high quality of life." Other speakers provided information and research on the

At the initial Vision North Texas workshop, Fort Worth Mayor Mike Moncrief worked with stakeholders from Dallas and other communities to develop a concept for the region's growth. Moncrief has been an active participant and proponent of Vision North Texas.



Vision North Texas—is designed to address just that question.

For many years, Dallas, Fort Worth, and other north Texas cities have had active ULI members and leaders, but the region did not form a ULI district council until 2004. At the earliest meetings of the new district council, ULI North Texas, chairman John Walsh challenged members to propose projects that would have an impact on the region, help build the district

would help the young organization achieve its goals.

Recognizing that such a project would require a partnership, ULI approached the North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG), a voluntary association of local governments that manages such programs as demographic analysis, transportation planning, and environmental quality initiatives.

In 2001, NCTCOG had formed the Center of Development Excellence



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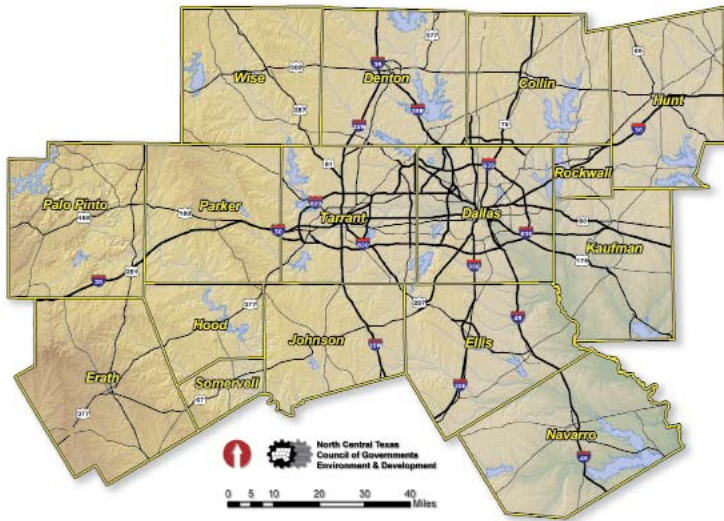
region and on national trends. A diverse collection of leaders—from the arenas of business, government, academics, community, environment, finance, church, and special needs, among others—representing the ten central counties of the region then worked in small groups to identify key issues and create a preferred concept for the region's future. These results were presented during an afternoon session, accompanied by photographs of each group's work.

Two techniques proved particularly valuable. Vision North Texas followed ULI Washington's lead in using Legos to represent anticipated residential and employment growth. Participants placed the 1,200 Legos on a six-by-seven-foot (1.8-by-2.1-m) map of the region to portray desired development patterns—a simple approach that allowed participants to focus on the growth facing the region rather than be distracted by technology that would be involved in a more complex visioning system.

A second technique had not been employed at other Reality Check events. Using an electronic keypad polling system, participants provided feedback about regional issues and proposed actions to address them. Survey questions were presented on a large screen, and anonymous responses were collected. The results—presented to the participants immediately after each vote—identified the top issues for scenario evaluation, demonstrated clear support for continuing the Vision North Texas project, and showed surprisingly strong interest in the idea of establishing a preferred regional development scenario.

The strong stakeholder support found at the initial workshop prompted Vision North Texas leaders to continue and expand the program. During 2006 and 2007, the work of Vision North Texas focused on four primary initiatives:

- ▷ Education and outreach: educate regional residents, business leaders, and elected and appointed officials to raise awareness about the growth anticipated in the



Vision North Texas focuses on a 16-county region defined by the North Central Texas Council of Governments, a voluntary association of local governments in and around Dallas and Fort Worth.

2007 in Lancaster, addressed a 1,900-square-mile (4,900-sq-km) region that will add 700,000 residents and 445,000 jobs by 2030. The southwestern subregional workshop, held in June 2007 in Aledo, considered a 2,086-square-mile (5,403-sq-km) area that will add 710,000 residents and 255,000 jobs over the same period. Both workshops led to creation of new concepts for sustainable development and location of infrastructure.

a wide range of natural resources and assets with stakeholder involvement to define goals and priorities for land conservation in the region. Once completed, this tool will help local decision makers identify the most important parcels to preserve throughout the region.

In April 2007, the Vision North Texas advisory committee began discussing the concept of a preferred development scenario. Stakeholder support for this concept, reflected in the keypad polling at each event, increased from 83 percent of participants at the initial regional workshop to 94 percent at the leadership summit and 96 percent at each of the subregional workshops. Over the course of several committee meetings, the project consultant presented information on efforts in other regions, and the committee discussed the components of an approach that would be appropriate in north Texas. At its September 2007 meeting, the committee approved an ambitious work plan to create North Texas 2050, a regional vision and action plan.

The original workshop model has now been used to bring together diverse stakeholders to discuss regional issues, but with a focus on a particular north Texas subregion. The southeastern subregional workshop, held in January

The North Texas 2050 initiative builds on past efforts, but takes a significant step forward. Its scope is broader than that of any one of the region's existing issue- and

region and the choices for accommodating it in a way that is successful and sustainable.

▷ Involvement: involve more people in the discussion of the choices available to the region and the application of the Ten Principles of Development Excellence.

▷ Research into development-excellence best practices: research the implications of these choices and the tools that can be used to achieve a desired direction; make examples of the best practices available and celebrate the best practices for development excellence in the region.

▷ Policy decision: decide whether to create a preferred regional scenario, and, if one is created, decide what level of detail it should have and what role it should play.

The organizations that began Vision North Texas—ULI, NCTCOG, and UTA—continued as its charter sponsors. Funding was provided by ULI North Texas, and by ULI through a Smart Growth Partnership and a Community Action Grant; by NCTCOG member cities and counties through voluntary financial contributions; and by a variety of other sponsors who provided additional cash and in-kind support.

In Phase II of its program, Vision North Texas extended its educational outreach by making presentations to organizations ranging from city

councils to chambers of commerce and Kiwanis clubs. It also created an advisory council and recruited more than 70 regional leaders to serve. Finally, it expanded its boundaries to include all 16 counties in the region served by NCTCOG, meaning Vision North Texas now serves a region the size of Vermont.

Three projects illustrate the Vision North Texas research agenda:

▷ An examination of the comprehensive plans of north Texas cities to determine how well they reflect the Ten Principles of Development Excellence and to understand the regional pattern that would result from their implementation.

▷ Creation of a set of community form types that describe a city's current characteristics and role in the region.

▷ Creation of a "greenprint" for the region—a project being executed through a contract with the Trust for Public Land, a San Francisco-based national nonprofit land conservation organization. The greenprint will combine computerized data on

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city-specific plans, which provide a starting point for the project. It will address the full 16-county region and consider growth and change through 2050.

The process to create North Texas 2050 includes research, additional workshops, evaluation of alternative scenarios, interactive communica-

tion with individuals and organizations, and policy discussion led by Vision North Texas's advisers and consultants. A management committee—a subset of the advisory committee—meets and provides more specific direction to the consultants and others who will do the actual drafting of North Texas 2050.

Among the issues it is expected to address are land use, transportation, water quality and supply, natural resources, housing, economic competitiveness, climate

Each discussion group at the southeastern subregional workshop selected a stakeholder representative to present its findings and concept for regional growth. Here, one presenter recommends “growth and transportation while conserving our natural resources and open spaces” as the reporters for other groups listen.



change, education, health care, and energy. With the region's population projected to grow from 6 million in 2005 to 12 million in 2050, coordinated attention to these issues will be essential for a successful and sustainable future.

North Texas 2050 will provide important new resources for the region. Its regional vision statement will describe the desired future through one or more preferred scenarios, an integrated infrastructure framework, and principles for the pattern and character of the region's future growth. Its action package will provide tools—such as model ordinances and restructured incentives—that will help private and public sector decision makers make choices likely to lead to the desired future.

Upon completion of the North Texas 2050 strategy—targeted for the end of 2009—the Vision North Texas charter sponsors will be

asked to adopt or endorse it. Cities, counties, businesses, environmental groups, civic organizations, and other project participants will also be asked to adopt or endorse North Texas 2050 because their decisions will implement the vision and shape the region's future.

In the past 50 years, north Texas has grown from a group of small and medium-sized communities to become a region that is a major global employment and urban population center. The next 50 years will see change that is at least as significant. Vision North Texas and ULI have created the forum for discussion, debate, and action to ensure that the coming dramatic change will result in a sustainable and successful region. **UL**