

A Great Park for a Great City

The Case to Restore Fair Park, Reform the State Fair Corporation, and Transform Dallas into a Whole City

July 31, 2017

*"I took the road less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference."*

Dallas at the Crossroads

Two roads diverge in our near future. We cannot travel them both.

Dallas has been approaching a critical juncture for a long time—about what kind of city we will be, about who will benefit and who will be left out.

At the heart of those concerns is what to do about Fair Park.

One road is mostly known to us. We know its landscape, its turns and bridges, its potholes and detours. We know it because it's basically the road we have been on.

We don't have to do much, or think much, to take this familiar road. It's the easier way—especially for those who benefit from the way things are.

To choose the less-traveled road would be disruptive and painful. It would require hard decisions, uncommon cooperation, and unusual wisdom and courage.

We will have to look more purposefully, more selflessly, than perhaps we've ever looked at where our current path is leading us. Because as

comfortable as this road seems to be, it is leading to a diminished city—in truth, only half a city. The road signs are clear.

Dallas has come to a major junction. Two roads diverge, and now we must choose.

The "Safe" Road about Fair Park: Do Nothing

The heated debate about the future of Fair Park, not just in recent months but over the last several decades, has often obscured the larger question about what kind of city we want to be, about which road we will take for the long haul.

The arguments and decisions about Fair Park became stuck years ago in a web of local politics, special interests, and powerful lobbying, caught in the entanglement of race and class, of ignorance and prejudice. The public debate has long reflected the deep frustration of a city attempting to address what seems to be an unsolvable problem. It's hard not to just throw our hands up.

Fair Park has become a quagmire, a boggy political mess. No matter what decision is made, no matter what is done or not done, someone is going to be upset, some group will complain. And so it has not been worth it, at least for some city leaders, to try to fix what is broken—not worth the political investment

The Main Problem

The City of Dallas seems healthy, but beneath the surface there are warning signs.

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Once a World Icon

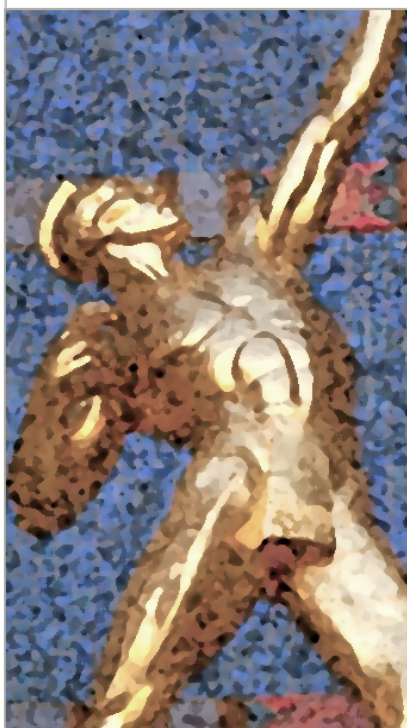
All the growth southward abruptly halts at Fair Park and the blighted neighborhoods it perpetuates.

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The State Fair

Will the State Fair corporation be accountable to the citizens of Dallas? Thirteen questions.

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Fair Park

“Fair Park, I’m reminded every time I visit New York or San Francisco, could be our Central or Golden Gate Park. It could be one key to the revitalization of our inner city. Like so many institutions and men and ideas, it instead has become a neglected monument, no longer satisfying to a city in a very big hurry. Yet the possibilities are there; they should not be overlooked.”

D Magazine,
quoting noted Dallas architect
James Pratt, 1975

to wade into the issues and get caught in the muck. It has been easier to avoid making any choice at all, to stay on the seemingly safe road we already know.

But making no choice is itself a choice. Preserving the status quo will have profound consequences. Choosing to stay on the road we are on forces us to turn our backs on another road, a way forward that leads to a different future for Dallas. It’s a road we have not chosen because doing so would be messy, at least in the short term. But good leadership sees beyond the next curve. For those who have eyes to see, the destination of this less-traveled road is the liberation of Dallas to implement its best and highest instincts, to be the city it says it is—or at least wants to be.

An Alternative Road: Fair Park as Catalyst for City Transformation

As we approach this fork in the road, we must know why we are choosing this road or that. Which is to say, we have to know the problem we are facing. Otherwise, we end up choosing what we think is the easiest or quickest route. Sadly, we seem to be making a choice for the status quo because we have mistaken what the problem is.

Means and End. Fair Park, although deeply and tragically broken, is not the problem. And fixing it, however crucial, is not the ultimate goal. The heart of our concern is not simply erecting a great park, though doing so would be a goal worthy of a great city. Rather, our desire is the transformation of the City itself by revitalizing our iconic park.

In other words, fixing Fair Park is not the end but the means, the catalyst for the larger goal. Fair Park is uniquely and strategically the gateway to achieving that goal—providing an economic engine for the city’s highest-risk neighborhoods; expanding and solidifying Dallas’s urban core; attracting people and businesses to all of Dallas, not just half; equalizing the city tax base; and ultimately realizing our highest values. That’s the argument we wish to make here.

Problem. But before we can see the way ahead, we have to be clear-eyed about what the problem actually is, what’s happening to Dallas. We will name ten indicators of the City’s declining health that collectively reflect where our current road has led us. These are problems the City rarely talks about but must face head-on if we want Dallas to be more than it is now. Only when we know the problem can we act wisely and decisively in choosing the road ahead. Only

then can we see how and why the revitalization of Fair Park is so important to a reimagined future for Dallas.

Obstacle to Change. Finally, before all is said and done we will have to take a cold, hard look at how a few individuals, behind the scenes of the State Fair, have used this iconic Dallas institution to protect the status quo, to advantage themselves, and to prevent the meaningful change the City needs and desires. In so doing, they have misused the special benefits the City has given the State Fair; they have stymied every effort to make Fair Park a vibrant, signature park for Dallas; they have worked to keep Fair Park mostly empty throughout the year, to no one's advantage but their own; they have flagrantly distorted economic impact data to make it appear

that Dallas is profiting significantly from the Fair; they have perpetuated an archaic model of operating a fair, preventing both the State Fair itself and the City of Dallas from reaping the benefits of a contemporary, “best practices” approach; and ultimately they are depleting and destroying the nearby neighborhoods, blocking the growth of Dallas to the south, keeping Dallas from becoming a whole city.

These realities are painful—about where Dallas is, about the decline of Fair Park and its effect on the surrounding neighborhoods, about the devastating impact of State Fair operations on the City of Dallas. But we have to face these truths squarely. That's what the times call for. That's what courage calls for.

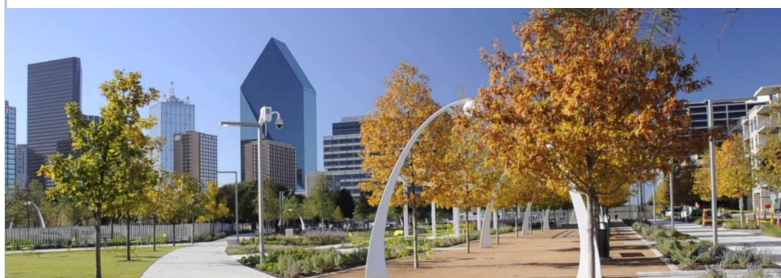
I. The Main Problem: Dallas's Declining Health

Dallas is a city to be proud of. There's a vibrancy among its residents, an entrepreneurial spirit, a willingness to take risks, a keen sense of our place and our history. Many things are going well. Witness the rise of Uptown, the renewal of Deep Ellum, and the rebirth of Downtown, not to mention Bishop Arts, West Dallas, and The Cedars. Note the flourishing downtown arts community—symphony, opera, theatre, and museums—and the accomplishments of our great academic institutions, among many other success stories.

Since Dallas seems to be thriving in these ways, it may be shocking to discover that many things are not going well at all. Because we're proud of our city, and rightly so, we often discount this part of our story, if we know it at all. But if we don't confront what's happening, if we only focus on the things we like, we will miss the full picture—to our great detriment. We're like a medical patient who appears to be healthy but who ignores the dull ache in his belly, until it's too late.

Dallas seems healthy. But beneath the surface are critical warning signs—a dull ache becoming alarmingly acute. The question is, are we alert enough to notice and brave enough to do something about it while we still can?

Here's the stark picture. On a list of demographics crucial to city health, the City of Dallas ranks at the bottom of American cities, just above Detroit. In a nutshell, here is what we face:



“A positive impact of 20% on property values abutting or fronting a park is a reasonable starting point guideline for estimating a park's impact.”

**John L. Crompton, Ph.D., Texas A&M
Renowned Economic Impact Expert**

Ten Sobering Facts about Dallas

1. Job Market Hasn't Fully Recovered. From 2001 to 2014, Dallas County lost 144,093 jobs. While the job market has been improving in recent years, employment is well short of peak levels.² Dallas's neighboring cities are attracting more major employers (e.g., JP Morgan Chase and Toyota North America have moved to Plano, Stand Rock Hospitalities added 1,000 jobs in Grapevine.)³

2. Incomes are shrinking. In 2015, our city's median household income fell to \$43,781⁴—and only \$20,892⁵ for the Fair Park / South Dallas area—compared to \$83,793⁶ for Plano, and \$61,644⁷ for the Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington area.

3. Infant mortality rates are on the rise. From 2014-2016, infant deaths in Dallas rose to 7.43 percent,⁸ higher than the national average of 5.82 percent and double the rates of developed nations, which range between 3.2 and 2.1 percent.⁹

4. Fewer new residents are moving to Dallas. The metro area is growing, but not Dallas. DFW Metro's population doubled in the past 30 years,¹⁰ while Dallas grew only 10 percent during the same period.¹¹ The results are especially dire when comparing the growth in college-educated population, with Dallas ranked 70 out of 150 top cities attracting college-educated young residents.¹²

5. Young professionals are looking elsewhere. Of the 30 largest U.S. cities, Dallas is second-to-last in its percentage of growth in 18- to 34-year-olds. Young professionals are bypassing Dallas for cities with high quality-of-life indexes, such as Austin, San Jose, Ann Arbor and Boston, which have thriving parks and other outdoor venues.¹³

6. Poverty is increasing. Dallas has the worst childhood poverty rate of the country's 10 largest cities with a rate at 38 percent in 2016. Dallas's poverty rate (family of four making less than \$24,000) stood at 24 percent compared to 7.5 percent for Plano.¹⁴

7. Income inequality is growing. Of the 561 largest cities in the U.S., only 24 have income inequality worse than Dallas.¹⁵ The gap between the rich and poor in Dallas continues to expand, to the detriment of the whole city.

8. Crime rate is rising. A Dallas resident is three times more likely to be robbed than the national average (3.22 in Dallas versus 1.02 national robbery rate),¹⁶ a result of a shrinking police force and declining police morale.

9. Tax base is imbalanced. North Dallas has 55 percent of the City's population but provides 85 percent of its tax base, while South Dallas has 45 percent of the population but provides only 15 percent of the tax base.

10. Park land is scarce. Among major U.S. cities, Dallas ranks 50th in meeting the need for public parks,¹⁷ putting us at a disadvantage in attracting the largest segments of the nation's population—retirees and young professionals.

Dallas at the Tipping Point

The indicators of Dallas's decline are sobering. But the trends are not new. More than a decade ago, the Dallas Morning News published clear warnings in their study, "Dallas at the Tipping Point."¹⁸ They bluntly asserted that if an aggregate quality-of-life index were credited and weighted by what Dallas residents value most, Dallas would rank near the bottom among its peers.

"If Dallas were a corporate client," the report said, "it would significantly lag behind its competitors, losing ground with its corporate customers of tax-paying residents and businesses as well as sustaining institutions."

The Dallas Morning News report concluded: "I.M. Pei probably didn't mean for Dallas City Hall to look like a ship run aground, but these days the image is hard to ignore."

Despite construction cranes and a booming Uptown, the trend persists with multiple credit downgrades and embarrassing pension fund crises. These are at least some of the underlying causes and painful realities Dallas is experiencing. The City needs to look at them in depth, discern their causes, understand their effects and make the necessary changes.

The changes we need will neither be simple nor quick. But a critical piece of the solution increasingly is clear—a solution unique to Dallas, strategically located, and eminently doable. If Fair Park is transformed—if it can be a thriving gathering place for the City and an economic engine for the surrounding neighborhoods—then it will be the catalyst for the growth of South Dallas and the critical piece in the transformation of Dallas itself.

Ironically, such a vision of a vibrant park for the benefit of the whole city is what was intended in the beginning.

II. Once a World Icon, Now a Once-a-Year Fairground

From the first day the citizens of Dallas owned Fair Park, it was to be the people's great park—a place of recreation and beauty, a community-gathering place, the center of Dallas life and culture. It was designated "a park for the whole people, the whole time."

From Failure to Flourishing

The Park was first created in 1886 as fairgrounds for the State Fair of Texas, but this initial venture was short-lived. In 1904, the City of Dallas bailed out the State Fair from near bankruptcy and purchased Fair Park. When the City acquired ownership of Fair Park, the vision changed. And over the following decades, the results were nothing short of remarkable.

Beginning in 1904, the City envisioned Fair Park not as occasional fairgrounds but as Dallas's great park, a park for the whole City.

Designed by George Kessler, the first Fair Park mirrored City leaders' aspirations for well-planned public spaces, tree-lined boulevards, public art and beautiful fountains:

"We believe that after much careful consideration of the matter that both the Fair and the Park are of equal importance: that neither should be subordinate to the other; that while the holding of the annual Fair is of much import, . . . it is but for a few days of each year, whereas **the park should be for the whole people, for the whole time, a place of recreation and the study of nature and the beautiful.**"

Alderman J. E. Flanders
"Development of Fair Park"
Dallas Morning News, January 18, 1905

Over subsequent decades, Fair Park grew and flourished, and the State Fair thrived. Most of the striking buildings we now know and admire were designed and erected for Texas's 1936 Centennial Exposition, a six-month world's fair credited with buffering Dallas from the Great Depression.

When the Expo ended, Dallas had an Art Deco showcase that would draw National Historic Landmark status.

By the second half of the 20th century, Fair Park was the enviable address of The Dallas Symphony Orchestra, the Dallas Museum of Art, the Dallas Opera, the Science Museum, the Women's Museum and other great cultural destinations.

But in more recent years, with the Park's decline, most of these venues closed or relocated elsewhere.

Fair Park Today: Return to Failure

Fair Park now languishes in one of the city's two lowest-income communities. Official unemployment in the adjacent neighborhoods approaches 19.5 percent (more than six times that of the Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington Metropolitan Region of 3.6 percent),¹⁹ and real unemployment is close to 50 percent.

Dallas's great public park, once a world icon, has become what

the City determined it would never be: a once-a-year fairground and occasional event space.

For most of the year, Fair Park is a tragedy of vast underused or deteriorating spaces. It certainly does not reflect the original vision as "a park for the whole people, for the whole time."

How did this happen? How did a 277-acre park near downtown, in South and East Dallas, once the high ground of city culture, become a decaying relic?

What happened to its people and events? Why is no great park radiating vibrant new life into nearby neighborhoods, with fit and affordable mixed-income housing, good jobs, reopened schools, safety and recreation?

These are not empty questions. Nor are they merely questions about some park in someone else's neighborhood. What's happening—or not happening—at Fair Park affects the entire city.

Obstacle to Growth

Over the past decade, the urban core has drawn more than 50,000 new residents within a 2.5 mile radius of Downtown Dallas,²⁰ spawning a substantial building boom and a rapidly increasing tax base. Meanwhile, new real estate projects, restaurants, services, and jobs have cleared the elevated highways of I-35 on the west (with the Design District and Trinity Groves), I-30 on the south (with The Cedars and

Fair Park Early History 1886 – 1936

January 1886 – The State Fair acquires 80 acres in what was a pasture in East Dallas, in 1887 acquires an additional 40 acres.

December 1903 – A series of mishaps including fires, lawsuits, and construction cost overruns lead State Fair to financial crisis.

April 1904 – Dallas voters approve \$125 thousand to purchase the fairgrounds for use as a year-round park, thus establishing the City ownership.

1906 – The new Parks Department commissions George Kessler to create a master plan. It is implemented with the purchase of 10 additional acres of land, acquired for \$12,497, increasing the park to 130 acres. Dallas Zoo, a racetrack, baseball field, and various other enhancements are built to make Fair Park into a park.

1923 – Ku Klux Klan Day is held during State Fair of Texas with over 30 thousand in attendance.

1935 to 1936 – Architect George Dahl and consulting architect Paul Phillipe Cret are hired to transform Fair Park into an Art Deco treasure in celebration of the Texas Centennial Exposition. More than 50 buildings are constructed. Many of the buildings were torn down after the Exposition, including the Building of Negro Achievement.

Oak Cliff's Bishop Arts), and I-345 on the east (with Baylor Hospital, the Latino Cultural Center, and Deep Ellum). And a lively debate is underway about expanding DART downtown, bringing I-345 to grade and creating a new Trinity River Park.

In other words, the urban core of Dallas is booming with new life in every direction. Except one.

All growth eastward and southward abruptly halts at the derelict, underutilized, misused Fair Park—and the blighted neighborhoods it perpetuates.

Even on the surface, we can see why. Fair Park is, frankly, not a park. Certainly not the great park Dallas envisioned more than a century ago. Consider these unsettling facts:

The Appalling Condition of Fair Park

Asphalt desert. Fair Park is an economy-stifling, environment-destroying asphalt desert. Shockingly, for every 10 acres of actual park land, there are 200 acres of paving and parking. Of Fair Park's 277 acres, almost 75 percent are asphalt.

- The Park has more than 9,251 paved parking spaces, mostly used three weeks a year. Separately the State Fair corporation owns 70 additional acres outside the park, including 6,000 parking spaces used primarily one day a year (during the Texas-OU football game).²¹
- Besides suffocating any chance for economic growth in the area, the excessive pavement causes consistent flooding of the historic buildings, hastening their deterioration.
- Moreover, the water-resistant and heat-absorbing asphalt collects storm water on its surface and blocks it from the soil. The EPA's February 2008 report lists a host of the harmful effects: high levels of contaminants in parking lot water runoff, increased flooding, and increased polluted air emissions—an unhealthy “heat island.”²²

Empty buildings. Fair Park currently has 1.786 million square feet of built area. Of that, around 759,000 square feet are unleased space, with rare or sporadic use for special events. In other words, more than 40 percent of the buildings in Fair Park are essentially empty most of the year.

- The effect of the empty buildings on economic development in the area is disastrous, not to mention the high opportunity-cost in year-around cultural, educational, and other uses that could help make Fair Park self-sufficient and the nearby neighborhoods more economically viable.
- The American Planning Association cited a University of Illinois study that says desolate spaces are less safe than green ones. Notably, the greener the surroundings, the fewer crimes against people and property.²³

Fair Park Recent History 1955–present

1955 – NAACP protesters, led by Juanita Craft, picketed the State Fair, which had banned blacks from amusement rides and food stands.

1966 – A State Fair report concludes that the land around Fair Park should be “bought up and turned into a paved, lighted, fenced parking lot” to “eliminate the problem” of white fairgoers having to see “the Negroes in their shacks.”

1982 – Voters approve an \$18 million bond package to renovate and repair Fair Park's historic buildings.

1983 – Dallas Museum of Fine Arts relocates to the downtown Arts District, signaling Fair Park's decline as a year-round attraction.

1988 – Fair Park declared a National Historic Landmark.

1990 to 2000 – The State Fair corporation begins to purchase commercial and residential lots in adjacent Fair Park neighborhoods to expand parking. Now the State Fair owns 70 acres of surface parking sitting empty more than 90 percent of the year. Neighborhood population declined from 70,000 in 1970 to less than 30,000 today.

Present — The State Fair steadily expands its takeover of Fair Park, controlling most of the buildings and parking all year to support a 3-week fair, while the Park and its neighborhoods languish.

Deteriorating historic buildings. For decades, neither the City nor the State Fair corporation (though required by contract) made the basic expenditures necessary to maintain the historic buildings, an appalling dereliction of civic and fiduciary responsibility.

- The State Fair corporation, as we shall see, spent money on the Cotton Bowl and midway rides that mostly benefited the Fair, while the Park itself and most of the buildings fell into decline.
- To restore the buildings to the condition they would have been had they been routinely maintained over the years would now cost almost \$500 million,²⁴ perhaps half of that in the highest priority items. To be clear, the money needed for these repairs does not include what is needed to make Fair Park a park again.

The abdication of responsibility on the part of the City and the State Fair corporation, which created the current dreadful condition of Fair Park, is shocking. By itself, such mismanagement calls for a certain measure of courage and commitment on the part of City and Fair leaders to fix what they have broken. But the ones bearing the greatest cost for the decline of Fair Park are the Fair Park neighbors and Dallas taxpayers. Their plight makes fixing Fair Park not merely urgent but sound economics. And an act of justice.

What Fair Park Sows, the Neighborhood Reaps

Not 50 years ago, the South Dallas / Fair Park community had more than 70,000 residents of mixed income and race and vital retail and other services.²⁵ As Fair Park fell into decline, nearby neighborhoods bore the greatest pain:

Fewer people, greater poverty. Over the past 5 decades, the population of the neighborhoods fell by over 70 percent. The most recent census now reports fewer than 20,000 residents, the majority low-income.

- Of the residents near Fair Park, only 28 percent are homeowners.²⁶ The remaining residents rent—the inverse of a healthy ratio.

- Besides a few well-maintained homes, the area is pocked by vacant lots from razed homes, vacant and boarded-up homes, and slumlords' rental homes—most in substandard condition.
- As the State Fair leaders demanded and built expansive parking lots for the three-week-a-year fair, demolishing homes and destroying blocks of residential housing, the dwindling population saw the closure of six public schools nearby.

Dwindling housing, disappearing value. While Dallas housing is growing, Fair Park area housing is falling.

- From 1970 to 2013, the number of housing units in Dallas grew 72 percent. There were 57,000 new housing starts in 2015.²⁷ In that period, Fair Park area housing decreased by more than 50 percent.
- Recently, proposals for tax credits for new housing, the only available mechanism for financing, were rejected by the City and the Council's Housing Committee—one for the Hatcher Station Residential mixed income/use transit-oriented development project next to the Hatcher Station Parkland Hospital Clinic.²⁸ The City has failed to develop effective, affordable workforce housing policies and programs to repopulate the community.
- From 1999 to 2014, City of Dallas property values have grown more than four times that of the property values near Fair Park.²⁹
- Many houses demolished over the years have not been rebuilt, leaving empty lots and draining tax revenue. Just east of Fair Park, in the Mill City neighborhood, a Habitat for Humanity survey shows more than 47 percent substandard housing.³⁰

Impediment to growth. In spite of the obstacles, growth is trying to happen in islands of strength and health in the area, like Spring Street, Frazier, Jubilee, South Fair, Dolphin Heights, Park Row and South Boulevard. But actions by State Fair's operations undercut progress.

- As the State Fair corporation buys and demolishes neighborhood houses (while refusing to state its purpose in buying land in residential neighborhoods and filing false statements to obtain property tax exemptions), it drains housing density and population, which, in turn, spurs crime,³¹ depletes schools, and removes residents' incentive to return.

These actions require further explanation:

A Story of “Shacks” and Seizures: A Window into the Problem

It’s easy from a distance to caricature what has happened to the neighborhoods around Fair Park. Part of the problem is that few people outside the neighborhood actually know the neighbors. It would be worth the time to visit and ask questions, respectfully and sincerely. And to mostly listen.

You will hear why most of the neighbors rarely step foot in Fair Park even though it’s just around the corner. You will hear why many don’t think of Fair Park as their park, how they feel marginalized by the formidable fence, which serves as a visible sign of non-welcome. You might hear stories, still powerful and crushing, about “Negro Achievement Day” at the State Fair, the one day for decades that African Americans were allowed to attend the Fair. Or about “Ku Klux Klan Day” at the Fair, though Klan members, being white, could attend any other day of the Fair they wanted.

But the defining story you will hear is of the seizure of homes, the methodical and devastating removal of entire city blocks for the benefit of the Fair. All the residents know the story. Many will know it particularly well. It was their homes seized and destroyed. The reason why is heartbreaking.

Beginning in the early 1970s, Fair Park began to significantly expand in size. The critical factor in this dramatic expansion was a 1966 report commissioned by the State Fair corporation entitled, “Redevelopment Program for the State Fair of Texas.”³² The purpose of the study, led by Economics Research Associates of Los Angeles, was to provide planning principles and strategies for the Fair’s future, certainly a worthy goal.

In the final appendix of the report, the researchers shared the results of a survey and interviews of (white) fairgoers. The report cites “intense emotional discomfort in middle-class white residents of Dallas” concerning the area surrounding Fair Park. Many felt “embarrassment . . . that visitors to Dallas [had to] see the ‘other side’ of the city.” There was special concern about “so many colored and white people” having to be in such close proximity to one another during the Fair.

One statement in the report is particularly chilling:

“The solution for all of these conflicts, at least in terms of Fair Park’s location, is simple. All that is required is to eliminate the problem from sight. If the poor Negroes in their shacks cannot be seen, all the guilt feeling revealed above will disappear, or at least be removed from primary consideration.”

The report concludes, “This question was posed: ‘If all the land around Fair Park were bought up and turned into paved, lighted, fenced parking lot, would that solve the problem?’ The citizens of Dallas answered with a resounding, ‘Yes!’”

And that's what happened. Over the next few years, homes of African-American families were seized through eminent domain. Homes of a few white families were seized as well, but the City offered them 10 times more per square foot than the City offered black families in the same neighborhood.

The City bulldozed block after block of the nearby community. Homes and businesses were ripped down, paved over with massive parking lots to be used only a few days a year. A tall fence was built for the Fair to keep neighbors out and white fairgoers feeling safe.

Let's be clear: The City did not have to destroy these neighborhoods. The State Fair leaders did not have to accept the report's recommendations. But they made a choice. They came to a fork in the road and chose their route. And, five decades later, while most of "white" Dallas has no idea what happened, the neighbors of Fair Park still remember. The consequences run deep and long.

The unfriendly acquisition of land near Fair Park continues to this day. Though its form is not identical, its impact is the same. By purchasing 70 nearby acres in recent years,³³ with funds that belonged to the City for Fair Park, with the City of Dallas's complicity and neglect, the State Fair corporation today practices private eminent domain over South Dallas / Fair Park neighborhoods. Perpetuating vacancy, disinvestment, and blight, the State Fair corporation gains parking revenue a few days a year as well as unsightly above-ground storage, while suppressing the property value of surrounding lots, which it then acquires. One neighboring business owner publicly calls it a "hostage crisis"—as the State Fair expands, the neighbors are held hostage to its acquisitions and operations.

The State Fair. The decline of Fair Park led to the decline of the nearby neighborhoods. And the actions of State Fair operators led to the deterioration of both Fair Park and neighborhood. But we have only seen the tip of the iceberg regarding the operations of the State Fair and its impact on the community. Before we navigate the fork in the road just ahead, we need to shine our headlights on the economics and management of the corporation running the State Fair.

III. The State Fair: Economics and Management

The State Fair has a place deep in the hearts of most Dallas residents. Many folks carry great memories of the Fair—of corny dogs and nachos, of big rides and Big Tex, of family time and Texas pride. It's part of the City's image and should remain a vital part of the City's future.

The question is not whether the State Fair continue. It should; and it should thrive. In fact, if it adopted best-practice operations common to other modern fairs and entertainment venues, it could operate with even greater success to the advantage of everyone.

Rather, the question is: Will the State Fair operators be good stewards and accountable to the citizens of Dallas and local government, responsible to oversee and properly manage Fair Park? Will the State Fair corporation come clean with their finances, their actions, and their plans so that the City stops losing millions of dollars unnecessarily while the Park and the nearby communities continue to deteriorate? Will the State Fair corporation allow the highest and best use of Fair Park, for all of Dallas?

The citizens of Dallas deserve answers from the State Fair corporation to a number of crucial questions, especially since transparency and good caretaking have not been the Fair's fundamental management style, and doing what's best for Dallas, the Park, and the neighborhoods has not been their primary interest.

Independent Forensic Audit. Because of the lack of accountability in which State Fair operators have functioned for decades, what is vitally needed is an independent forensic audit of State Fair finances, operations, and governance to determine how much is owed the City of Dallas in back maintenance

payments, currently estimated at more than \$100 million between 2003 and 2015.³⁴

We begin with thirteen critical questions, which demand clear and immediate answers.

13 Questions for the State Fair and Fair Park

1. Who pays rent, and who benefits from it?

Of Fair Park's 15 occupied buildings (African-American Museum, Discovery Gardens, Children's Aquarium, Dallas Historical Society, etc.) only two pay rent: the Dallas Summer Musicals and LiveNation. Under its lease, the State Fair corporation by contract is supposed to pay \$1.5 million per year in rent.³⁵ A multi-year rent abatement (from 2006 to 2018) was granted to offset its funding a portion of the Cotton Bowl renovations.³⁶ Since the State Fair corporation was already contractually obligated to fund Fair Park improvements, including the Cotton Bowl, the City was shortchanged by \$14 million.

The City, not the State Fair, shoulders the cost of Fair Park, while the State Fair—with free land, free rent, free parking, and free rein—receives the benefit. Why?

2. What is the actual cost of Fair Park to the City?

Fair Park costs the City and its taxpayers some \$20 million in current direct expenditures, not including payments on bonds and certificates of obligation.³⁷ But these figures do not include amortization of capital expenses or general City services such as roads, central overhead, fire, police, legal services and administration. Estimated bond obligations for capital expenses, primarily for the benefit of State



"They try to build on people's land and houses, and they move them to build parking lots. It makes you feel like they're robbing you from where you've been all your life, you and your family. Someone you know is gone and there's just concrete. They're taking it away and there's nothing you can do—to make more parking lots for their Texas-OU games."

Ashley Walker, third-generation resident near Fair Park

Fair of Texas, exceed \$100 million. For example, the State Fair corporation pays police \$550,000 during the fair, but actual City policing expense exceeds \$2.3 million—another public subsidy.³⁸

State Fair's Annual Cost to Dallas³⁹

	Revenue & (Expenses)
Concessions/Lease/Event Revenue	2.6 M
Direct Operations and Maintenance	(13.9 M)
Overhead	(6.5 M)
Cotton Bowl Field Maintenance	(2.0 M)
Total Annual Loss to Dallas	(19.8 M)

These figures do not include amortization of capital expenses, or general City services such as roads, central overhead, fire, and police. Estimated bond payments or capital expenses purely for the benefit of State Fair of Texas are estimated at \$100 million. The State Fair of Texas pays police \$550,000 during the fair, but actual expense exceeds \$2.3 million.

3. What happened to the \$172 million in bond funds borrowed by Dallas taxpayers?

Since 2002, almost \$100 million has gone to renovations for 3 football games for Fair Park.⁴⁰ (The Cotton Bowl game has already moved to AT&T Stadium.) The City incurred this debt in reliance on the misleading statements by the State Fair corporation, exaggerating the Fair's annual economic impact for Dallas, a claim now definitively proven false.⁴¹ These bond funds should have advanced the goals of the City-approved plan (the Hargreaves Plan), not the State Fair's plans.

4. Do State Fair operations benefit the City?

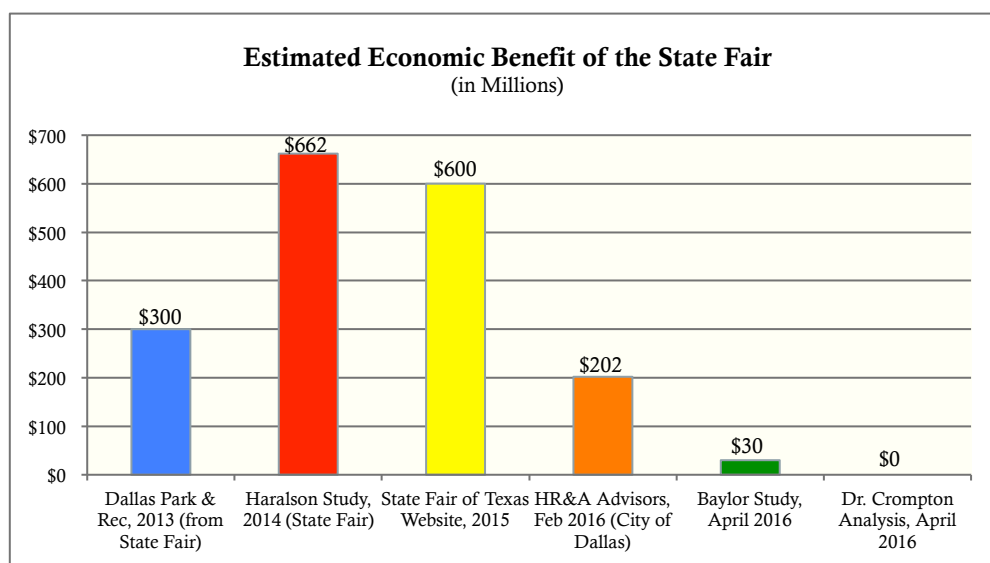
The State Fair corporation claims an annual economic impact of \$608 million—double their \$300 million claim in 2013, and six times their \$50 million claim in 2003.

These numbers reflect an absurd 1,000 percent increase in claimed economic impact over thirteen years while showing modest increases in attendance and revenues and no credible substantiation.

Baylor University's April 2016 economic impact study indicates direct spending of no more than \$30 million.⁴² Dr. John Crompton, Texas A&M University Distinguished Professor, suggests the real net impact may actually be zero.⁴³

Realistic attendance projections, utilizing hotel occupancy and DART transit data, show perhaps 1.5 to 1.7 million State Fair visitors compared to the State Fair's reported 3 million. State Fair executives have admitted they have had no reliable method of determining attendance numbers.

Besides implausible economic impact numbers and unreliable attendance figures, the State Fair's impact on the nearby neighborhoods is not just negligible but negative. The Baylor study noted that the usual "park premium" impact on the community is not at play for properties near Fair Park. Their study demonstrated that properties near Fair Park are lower in value than similar properties just a few blocks away and that for-sale properties stay on the market longer.



5. What do Dallas taxpayers lose in terms of new opportunity?

The answer is billions of dollars in loss of redevelopment, in property and sales taxes, in jobs to spur economic value, and in education, housing and services. The 2003 Hargreaves Plan, for an estimated \$150 million, would have hit reset on a great park and revived use of the now-vacant historic museums and Art Deco buildings, spreading value into the neighborhoods.

A reasonable estimate of cumulative lost opportunity costs to Dallas taxpayers exceeds \$5 billion and grows yearly by hundreds of millions of dollars and loss of tax dollars. Fair Park area property values have not kept up in neighborhoods dotted with blighted housing, vacant businesses, and unkempt lots. In sharp contrast, Dallas Appraisal District valuations show property values rising in the urban core, including a “park premium” around Klyde Warren Park.

What Dallas is losing in lost opportunity costs can be seen in the economic impact of new parks in other cities, such as Chicago’s Millennium Park, once an open-air parking lot, or the booming High Line Park in New York, a previously abandoned rail line, among numerous others. Each revival created economic booms. Each is a lesson for Dallas.

6. Why does the State Fair need four months to run the Fair?

State-of-the-art exhibitions, entertainment, and other venues are assembled and disassembled in a matter of days. Yet in 2003, an amended lease doubled the Fair’s setup time from 30 to 60 days’ setup, and from 15 to 30 days’ takedown, giving the State Fair corporation four months control of the Park. This, say former Park tenants, is what helped drive them out:

“The City’s requirement that tenants vacate the majority of the buildings in Fair Park during the State Fair is the principal reason for Fair Park’s ongoing decline.” —Stephen Page, Founder of Texas Museum of Automotive History previously located at Grand Place building in Fair Park.⁴⁴

7. Does the State Fair comply with its lease with the City?

The lease is in default.⁴⁵ In its contract with the City the State Fair corporation, a nonprofit 501(c)(3), leases some 40 acres of the Midway, three buildings outside the Midway, and the former Opera House storage facilities, its headquarters, and the agricultural barns. During the Fair, for varied purposes, and for no rent, the State Fair uses most of Fair Park’s other buildings—again, another public subsidy. Through many changes over the years, the City’s lease with the State Fair corporation officially favors the Fair in multiple ways:

- The City pays for Fair Park operations for all 12 months and is responsible to develop and improve Fair Park, despite the State Fair four-month occupation. The State Fair corporation pays for utilities it uses, and during the Fair they pay for the utilities on the buildings it occupies.
- The midway is closed most of the year in violation of State Fair corporation’s lease, which requires it to operate the midway year-round.
- The City foots the bill for numerous buildings exclusively or primarily used by the Fair.
- The State Fair operators control concessions, parking, leases and vendors during the annual event limiting the use for other tenants for four months, and concession revenues—conditions that restrict current and prospective year-around restaurants, services or other tenants interested in the park.
- The State Fair’s auto show and tawdry flea markets (selling mattresses, hot tubs, toe rings, etc.) do not comport with its mission yet consume over 50 percent of its operating footprint.



“For a community to get nothing while an engine next door is bringing in millions of dollars—it’s beyond corrupt.”

Dennis Bryant, Resident near Fair Park

8. What about State Fair's rent obligations?

"Excess revenues" for nonprofits is defined in its lease as revenues that exceed expenses and may be used to fulfill its mission. The lease with the city requires the State Fair corporation to pay its excess revenues—revenues minus expenses and \$4.5 million of reserves—to maintain, develop and enhance Fair Park.⁴⁶ Their promotional materials claim they've "reinvested" \$45 million in Fair Park. This amount has primarily benefited the State Fair corporation.⁴⁷

"The State Fair has spent \$112.5 million on improvements since 1998, according to its own records, but a good 90 percent of those improvements are of little to no benefit to anyone but the State Fair, according to a Watchdog analysis of the recently disclosed numbers."
—Jon Cassidy Watchdog.org⁴⁸

State Fair's revenues are low, compared to best practices. In 2013 the State Fair corporation reported \$37 million in concessions and admissions, with 3 million attendees, or about \$11 per attendee.⁴⁹ Those numbers do not add up. Admission tickets are \$18, a reported 20,000 parking spaces at \$15 each, which with concessions, rides and games typically add up to about \$100 per attendee, should result in substantially higher revenue.

Moreover, State Fair "excess revenues" are suppressed due to self-serving land purchases, excessive executive compensation, no-bid contracting, failed management and operating processes, and insider deals—money that should have gone to Fair Park.

9. What did the City audit of the State Fair discover?

The results of the 2015 audit indicate that the Park and Recreation Department has not provided required oversight to ensure compliance with the terms and conditions of the lease.⁵⁰ This resulted in an ill-advised Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) proposed between the City of Dallas and the State Fair corporation to increase reserves to over \$10 million annually.⁵¹ The MOU also gives control of funds intended for Fair Park to the State Fair—now due the City under the lease agreement. This MOU, if approved, would unwisely strengthen the State Fair corporation's grip on funds that belong to the City.

With these details in mind, why do the State Fair operators dodge City contracting requirements? The City forbids conflicts of interest, no-bid contracts and self-dealing, and requires Minority- or Women-owned Business Enterprise (M/WBE) provisions. The City

should require compliance of Fair Park tenants with these provisions.

The continued failure in leadership at the Dallas Park and Recreation Department is highlighted in the recent proposal for 2017 Bond Program allocations to Fair Park.⁵² The director of the Dallas Park and Recreation Department, Willis Winters, has proposed a \$68 million allocation for Fair Park—no dollars for a park but to preserve vacant or underused buildings, benefiting mainly the State Fair corporation, which then uses them rent-free. These priorities were derived from a flawed "needs inventory" process which Winters allowed Walt Humann to direct.⁵³

10. What is the State Fair hiding?

The State Fair corporation, a non-profit, occupies a public asset and receives public subsidies. It ignores transparency and accountability—e.g., no detail is provided on attendance numbers, ticket sales and paid parking, contracts, and operating expenses.

Despite huge cash payments, the Fair appears to have no internal audit function, or audit committee. Agreements with vendors, concessions and exhibitions show no details. These practices are contrary to nonprofit disclosure and operating best-practices, governance and laws.

State Fair staff deny the Fair is subject to the Texas Public Information Act, requiring response to Open Records Requests while receiving "public subsidies." A State Fair executive publicly said, "We only make public what is required by law and no more." An attorney was sued for making an Open Records Request to State Fair, and the case is ongoing, costing the State Fair (and hence Fair Park) hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal fees.⁵⁴

Audited financial statements reveal the existence of conflicts of interest. For example, Robert B. Smith, previously board secretary, counsel and vice chairman of the Executive Compensation Committee, was paid \$412,580 per the 2015 IRS 990 filing for "routine legal business." However, "0" dollars in compensation was reported.

More troublesome are the interlocking relationships among State Fair and City officials (current and former) that have influenced the administration of the contract with the State Fair corporation and public bond funds in ways that have only benefited them at the expense of Dallas taxpayers. Reports of kickbacks and corruption abound.

11. Why does State Fair pay such lavish salaries?

In 2013, the State Fair president was paid \$890,000 (when the State Fair corporation reported a loss of more than \$2 million) and \$1.4 million in 2014. The salaries of the top 7 executives are close to 300 percent higher than the median salary of CEOs and senior staff of nonprofits nationally.

The Houston Rodeo by comparison, has three times more revenue, is six times more profitable, awards more than 20 times more student scholarships, and its president made \$578,533 in 2015. Despite promising change from prior practices, the new State Fair CEO was paid \$707,399 in 2015.⁵⁵ 2016 compensation figures are not disclosed, though doubtlessly are much higher due to increasing profits. Nearly half of this compensation was under an incentive plan based on profits, the wrong incentive for a nonprofit.

Decades of excessive compensation is already a root cause of the State Fair corporation's exploitive footprint and operating policies. Why should an executive of a non-profit operating on public property be paid with subsidies based mainly on profits? The public purse is purloined for private gain. Why does its board fail to provide good governance and oversight on such vital issues?

Excessive compensation is a red flag for corruption. The 2013 Massachusetts Attorney General's Public Charities CEO Compensation Review warns that "high executive compensation at public charities can lead to concerns because large compensation packages take money away from charitable missions."⁵⁶

The IRS strictly forbids a tax-exempt organization's decision makers—board members, trustees, officers, or key employees—from receiving unreasonable

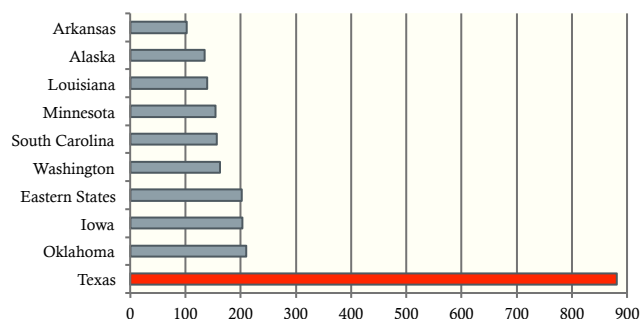
benefits from the nonprofit's income or assets. Excessive compensation is the most common violation of this prohibition, and can cause the IRS to levy hefty fines against the board of directors, staff, and all persons involved.⁵⁷

12. How has the State Fair invested in Fair Park?

The State Fair corporation's advocacy for investments of public money has overwhelmingly benefited them—not Fair Park or Dallas taxpayers. For example:

- At the urging of the State Fair corporation, \$82 million in taxpayer money was spent on improving the Cotton Bowl for new preferred-patron skyboxes, seating, and an LED scoreboard—for three games a year.⁵⁸
- \$30 million was spent, with taxpayer subsidies, for Summer Adventures.⁵⁹ State Fair operators committed to three seasons of Summer Adventures, but when admissions fell below expectations, it was closed before the first season ended.
- \$13.5 million was spent in 2015-16, funded by \$4.5 million of public bond funds and \$4 million of State Fair excess revenue, which could have gone for Fair Park maintenance, to construct a livestock center (the Briscoe Carpenter Livestock Center a 55,000 square-foot facility). The Texas Agriculture Department allocated \$1 million for this project. The center will feature exhibit space, a stepped-floor auction arena and animal holding areas, banquet facility, dining and lounge areas—and year-around offices for State Fair staff.⁶⁰
- \$4 million in student scholarships were awarded by State Fair between 2002 and 2015 compared to \$111 million by the Houston Rodeo.⁶¹ The Houston Rodeo has awarded scholarships of nearly 9 percent of their revenue compared with State Fair's 1.4 percent. State Fair financial statements show scholarship funds come from donated money, likely livestock high bidders (the State Fair grabs 40 percent of the students' prize money for the winning steer, unlike the Ft. Worth Stock Show and other fairs) and other contributions, not from operations.
- Unlike other fairs and major nonprofits, the Fair has no supporting fundraising organization to raise charitable funding, relying instead on public funds. Though an advocate for the State Fair, "Friends of Fair Park" has been singularly unsuccessful in fundraising for Fair Park.

2013 CEO Compensation for State Fairs
(in thousands)



13. Why has the State Fair board condoned these practices and outcomes?

As a matter of public stewardship, it is bewildering that the State Fair board, composed of many leading citizens, has through lax governance and poor oversight, enabled the Fair's perverse operating conditions and inequities.⁶²

The State Fair board has 55 members. None live in District 7 where Fair Park is located. 12 are from Highland Park/University Park and 14 are from District 13 in wealthy North Dallas. None come from Districts 4, 5, and 8 (all located in Southern Dallas). One member is from Vernon, Texas. The board meets once a year to receive and ratify management's report. Perhaps the board and management do not even know the people in the neighborhoods (other than the few they have financially supported to ensure their cooperation).

From its admirable origins of organizing a fair, carnival and agricultural programs, the State Fair has evolved into a money-making machine whose internal dynamics brook no change or criticism (like a church or fraternity disregarding sexual abuse or a minerals company covering up unlawful strip-mining and ecological damage). The result is to exploit a public asset and public funding for private gain and wreak havoc on a defenseless neighborhood and Dallas taxpayers.

Inside this system, its participants see themselves as virtuous, and their operations are disguised as meritorious, despite public harm. Stuck in defending the status quo, management and its chummy executive committee play on nostalgia for a bygone era, while disdaining facts, best practices and the larger public good.

Unwilling to critique or change what is benefitting them—whether through ego or greed—inconvenient facts and better alternatives are rejected out of hand. Instead of responsible stewardship for the common good, the Fair resorts to power and entitlement. It asserts it has the power of a lease and hence the right to do what it wants whether or not it is good stewardship or comports with its stated “nonprofit” mission: to “celebrate Texas by promoting agriculture, education and community involvement.”

The spiral of violence against Fair Park and its surrounding neighborhoods, perpetrated by the operators of the State Fair, must be reversed.

Reforming and modernizing the State Fair is long overdue, as is the rejuvenation of Fair Park and its neighborhoods, so that Dallas will be lifted from its economic decline. With input from all current and future constituents of Fair Park and its neighbors, the State Fair should cooperate and collaborate to reorganize their footprint and uses of Fair Park, for the benefit of all.

The State Fair must not be permitted to exercise blocking power over necessary revitalization of Fair Park and its neighborhoods. If the State Fair remains intransigent, the City has no choice but to declare the lease in default and order a forensic audit.

IV. The Future of Fair Park

Over the years, the overwhelming complexity of the issues related to Fair Park and the State Fair has created something close to systemic paralysis, expressed in such comments as:

We want things fixed but don't know where to start.
If we fix this problem, an even harder problem pops up.
If we please this group, another group will be upset . . .
Or another neighborhood . . . Or another friend.
Past leaders made decisions that current leaders must fix—and pay for.
We can't spend our way out of the mess, so where should we focus funding?
Or should we provide funding at all?
We like the Fair itself but wish it were better managed.
But the problems may be so intractable they can't be fixed.
Or perhaps the State Fair should be relocated to liberate Fair Park.

And on and on. So decisions are postponed. Decision makers are polarized. Other priorities are pursued. And with each year, the problems worsen. Yet, just ahead two roads diverge. Something has to be done about Fair Park—sooner not later. And doing nothing is itself a choice with consequences.

If only there were a common starting point, a set of agreed-upon values, some past action or decision we could all return to for perspective and balance.

As it turns out, that's exactly what we have.

A Shared Starting Place: The Hargreaves Plan

In 2003, the City Council approved a comprehensive plan to rescue Fair Park.⁶³ It was funded by the City and the State Fair corporation, among others. Plan developers included members of the City Council, the Park and Recreation board and staff, neighborhood and City stakeholders, various Fair Park museum and program directors, and the City of Dallas Landmark Commission. The lead consultant was the renowned planning firm, Hargreaves Associates.

The Hargreaves Plan (“Fair Park Comprehensive Development Plan”) set five commendable and achievable objectives:

1. To create a signature public park.
2. To uphold the Park's historic legacy.
3. To support the museums and the State Fair while activating the Park with new programs.
4. To encourage economic vitality.
5. To enhance connectivity with the community and the greater Dallas Metroplex.

Not including the cost of any new buildings, the consultants set total cost for implementation of the plan at \$150 million.

If only we had taken this road. The plan, though approved, essentially was disregarded. The bond campaign and other public monies, as well as State Fair operations funds, were diverted to less-productive uses.

The signature park went unfunded. Other key pieces of the plan were ignored. The plan had little or no effect on Fair Park operations. The consequences of the inaction have been devastating.

Still, the Hargreaves Plan, though outdated because of changes in the Park, represents both consensus and possibility. Here are the four big ideas, approved by the City Council, that never left the plan's pages:

Four Big Ideas for Our Signature Park

Museum Green. The plan would convert the massive asphalt desert to extensive green space—an 85-acre Museum Green, which would no longer be a parking lot but a public park. But none of the Museum Green has materialized. And most of the museums are now gone.

The Women's Museum and Automobile Museum have closed. The Science Museum and most of the other museums and cultural organizations moved out. The remaining structures are mostly vacant. Though public bond campaigns restored the murals and sculptures, their host buildings are dying.

Historic Core. The grand corridor of historic art, murals, and architecture would become a revitalized public gathering place and artistic showcase. The Centennial and Automobile Buildings, facing the Esplanade, would add small cafes, food vendors, and outdoor dining. Other historic buildings would house modern institutions serving diverse human activities. But today, none of these uses exist.

Midway. The plan proposed that the State Fair-operated midway would operate year-round, transforming the Park's lively heart from a high-fenced space used three weeks a year to a vibrant, people-centered Park core. The plan anticipated the midway would draw 500,000 visitors annually—and the money that comes with them.

Though the State Fair corporation contractually agreed to this plan, it placed its focus instead on diverting City bond money to renovate the Cotton Bowl—for football games held during the Fair.

An Observation Tower was built and the Summer Adventures promoted—all to benefit principally the State Fair. But this poorly considered venture failed before the first season ended.

Ultimately, the State Fair has added no new full-year activities for Fair Park, as they claimed they would when applying for public funding. The midway remains largely as it was before the plan was approved.



Fair Park Boulevard. The plan would create “a new front door” to Fair Park (currently a confusing sea of asphalt). The Boulevard would bring together museums, playing fields, a community center, a pedestrian and bicycle path, rows of trees, the Age of Steam Railroad Museum, and a 25,000-square-foot main visitors center.

But no boulevard was built. No paths, no trees, no playing fields, no visitors' center. And no Railroad Museum, which departed for Frisco. Most of these initiatives were blocked and funds coopted by the State Fair corporation.

Though unfunded and unimplemented, the Hargreaves Plan remains reasonable, affordable, and untouched. It has already been endorsed by the City Council and the State Fair corporation. An updated version of its broad vision is still the best way forward.

Mayor's Fair Park Task Force

A decade after the City approved but failed to implement the Hargreaves Plan, Mayor Mike Rawlings established a special Fair Park Task Force as part of his "GrowSouth" initiative. The Mayor charged the task force to "capitalize on the many strengths of Fair Park and enable it to reach its full potential."

Eleven months later, in September 2014, the task force reaffirmed the essential vision of the Hargreaves Plan. It called on the City, famously, to "put the 'park' back in Fair Park" with three strategic initiatives⁶⁴ echoing the plan approved a decade earlier:

1. Enhance access/connectivity with the community and city. Extend the Santa Fe Trail into the Park, lower I-30, and enhance the main gates and entry points at Grand Avenue, Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., and Exposition Blvd.

2. Establish a community park on the south side of Fair Park. Convert parking lots between the Music Hall and the African American Museum, and former Perot Museum and former Science Place, into green areas, and develop an open, year-round signature park with structured parking.

3. Empower new organization as the operations and marketing authority for Fair Park. Establish a public-private partnership to properly manage and oversee the State Fair lease agreement, along with all other tenants at Fair Park; have the City fund the organization with a \$15 million annual operating budget and \$478 million for capital improvements.⁶⁵

In the spirit set by Dallas leaders and the Hargreaves Plan, the Task Force envisioned Fair Park in the heart of Dallas next to a revitalized Deep Ellum, linked to White Rock Lake and Tenison/Samuell Grand Park, connected to the Cedars and Downtown. In a city with too few parks, Fair Park again would be the crown jewel of Dallas's park system: open, green, and connected by the Santa Fe Trail, with pedestrian and bicycle friendly entry gates, free for all, providing a place of beauty, respite and recreation.

The Task Force urged Fair Park to:

Set specific programming areas. Building on the Hargreaves Plan, the task force called for the creation of historic, cultural and children's areas, a historic core, music green, the midway, festival lawns, and more.

FAIR PARK

A PARK FOR ALL PEOPLE

Report of the Mayor's Fair Park Task Force | 3 September 2014

Turn surface parking space to green space. At the heart of the recommendations was a signature park along Robert B. Cullum Boulevard on the southeast side of the park open year-round and freely available to all Dallas residents. (Parks lead to activities and people, in turn drawing tenants who will be able to pay for the renovation and upkeep of the historic buildings.)

Move the Park fence. Remove the fence along Robert B. Cullum Blvd, making the street pedestrian-friendly and available to local communities, restoring Fair Park to its original open and accessible state.

Create one operational and marketing authority. The task force called for cohesive governance to implement the vision and fulfill its mission as Dallas's great park—a private and independent entity with full power and responsibility for leases, scheduling, maintenance, operations and marketing. The board would ensure community engagement, public transparency, and clear accountability to Dallas citizens.

Preserve and serve the State Fair, ensuring an equitable relationship with Park tenants and community. “The long-term prosperity of the Texas State Fair is in the best interest of Fair Park and the City,” the Task force said. The Park’s number-one tenant could stay, its contract enforced and renegotiated, under the authority of the new governing body—but with an adjusted footprint and with operations accommodating the State Fair to long-term tenants and full-year Park use.

Support the governance organization and the Park with City funds. The City should contribute more than \$15 million annually for Fair Park operations and maintenance. It also should fund the (then) estimated \$478 million needed to repair and revitalize the Park and historic structures. The task force proposed two \$175 million bond program installments, certificates of obligation, and other bond propositions through match funding.

With minimal changes, the Mayor’s Task Force report was approved by the Park and Recreation Board.

From the Ashes of Hargreaves: New Studies Emerge

So two City-initiated, consensus-driven proposals have been completed and approved: the bold 2003 Hargreaves Plan followed by the 2014 Mayor’s Fair Park Task Force, which endorsed and expanded Hargreaves. Neither is funded. Both are stalled, though the Mayor’s Task Force report remains actionable. Still, Fair Park continues to languish and the State Fair corporation remains stubbornly opaque.

In the vacuum, other proposals have emerged, all building on the foundation laid by Hargreaves.

The Di Mambro Study: “A New Future for Fair Park.” Before work ended on the Mayor’s Fair Park Task Force, the Foundation for Community Empowerment, working to revitalize low-income neighborhoods in Southern Dallas, asked Antonio Di Mambro to interview citizens, study best practices, and recommend specifics for a rebirth of Fair Park. DiMambro is the internationally renowned, Boston-based architect/planner and long-time expert on Dallas. From meetings with more than 100 Dallas neighborhood residents, as well as business, civic and philanthropic leaders, Di Mambro presented his study in November 2014.⁶⁶

Building on the 2003 Hargreaves Plan and the Mayor’s Task Force Report, Di Mambro’s study envisions four distinct but connected sections, knit together with green spaces and plazas:

- **The State Fair** would gain ample permanent space to consolidate and build dedicated state-of-the-art facilities. During the Fair it would have access to parking and most of the Park. During the year, it would share the Park with the other tenants and, especially, with parkgoers. Without the State Fair’s restrictive four-month access/parking control, the rest of the Park could flourish in compatible coexistence.
- **The Historic Core** and museums would be preserved, repaired, repurposed. Their historical and landmark status would encourage educational, retail and other uses that would populate the buildings year-round. As the State Fair executives acquire permanent quarters and

21st century operations, the Park's historic Art Deco buildings would be freed for permanent tenants, aiding long-term preservation.

- **The Multiplex** would be a 50-acre sports, entertainment and dining corridor; a boulevard from the Cotton Bowl to Fitzhugh (still available to the State Fair for the games); and a venue for concerts, movies, exhibitions, festivals, restaurants, bars and coffee shops filled with people in a full calendar of activities. The Multiplex would boost convention and visitor business, supporting Dallas's hospitality industry and sales tax revenue.
- **Dallas Commons** would be a 110-acre, world-class park along Cullum Blvd., drawing neighbors, Dallas-area residents and city visitors to a destination that, coupled with the Multiplex, would attract millions to America's greatest inland park.

An independent economic impact study said the Di Mambro plan would generate some \$3.5 billion in total construction inside the Park and on its edges; 8,000 construction jobs; and 5,000 ongoing jobs to stimulate nearby neighborhoods—multiplying business and housing and annual Dallas tax revenues of \$100 million-plus.

The UTA Study: "The Reinvigoration of a National Treasure." This 2016 study by UTA's College of Architecture, Planning & Public Affairs envisions Fair Park as a vibrant amenity serving surrounding neighborhoods and the entire city year round.

It recommends removing the existing fence around Fair Park, connecting the historic cultural district with the Dallas Area Rapid Transit D-Link service and an extension of the M-Line Trolley, converting surface parking lots to programmed park land, replacing other lots with parking structures, and offsetting improvement costs with increased visitor dollars. A "loop circulation pattern" would encourage visitors, especially during the Fair, to linger in cluster-themed and higher-profit areas.⁶⁷

The Ash + Lime Study: "State Fair Reimagined: A 21st-Century Vision for the State Fair of Texas." Prepared by the Dallas urban planning and design firm Ash + Lime Strategies, this 2016 study assesses

Learning from Others: Park Renewal "Best Practices"

Fair Park has a unique history, but Dallas is not alone in wanting to revitalize a dying park. Other cities have found creative ways to transform dead space into highly productive repurposing of public land and historic buildings—boosting year-around activities, uniting communities, lifting property values, providing jobs, increasing city revenue, and enhancing quality of life.

Central Park (New York) set the standard for public-private partnerships in 1979 when a new conservancy created one of the great urban park renewals in the country. Central Park had been at the point of insolvency following decades of neglect. Innovative financial, operational, and management structures were put in place, ultimately making it the most visited park in the country—41 million annual visitors. In 2014, the "park premium" effect resulted in \$204 million in direct spending by park visitors, which added over \$1 billion in direct tax contributions. The Park's 843-acres include open meadows, ball fields, ponds, a children's zoo, ice skating rink, walking and biking trails, outdoor performance areas, educational facilities, and classical architecture.

Millennium Park (Chicago) was a desolate parking lot in a space previously occupied by Illinois Central rail yards, bordering Lake Michigan and Chicago's central business district. This new cultural/arts/recreation/entertainment/park land created, as of 2017, the top-visited tourist attraction in the Midwest, with \$2.5 billion in direct sales by visitors and over \$4 billion in new construction. The "park premium" is credited with increasing residential real estate values, as of 2006, by \$100 per square foot.

Discovery Green (Houston) is an urban park in downtown Houston. It opened in 2008 with a lake, venues for public performances, a children's area and multiple recreational areas. The park has lifted the Houston economy with more than 2 million annual visitors, and added some \$1 billion in residential and commercial projects. Since opening the park has revived convention activity and created \$625 million in downtown development.

operations of various theme parks, casinos, county fairs, expositions, cruise ships, and resorts to argue that the State Fair suffers from sprawl and poor layout.

Comparing circulation patterns and best practices, the study recommends specific State Fair changes to generate more revenue and thus more funds to enhance Fair Park (at lower taxpayer burden). Jettisoning archaic county and state fair strategies and adopting current best practices of modern state fairs and the theme-park industry, the State Fair corporation could create positive change within Fair Park, surrounding neighborhoods, and the City of Dallas.⁶⁸



Forest Park, St Louis Art Deco Greenhouse



Millennium Park, Chicago

Balboa Park (San Diego), originally a World's Fair, is now a 1,200-acre urban green space with open plazas, gardens, walking paths, museums, theaters, restaurants, shops, and the famous San Diego Zoo. In 2008, San Diego formed a public-private partnership to manage and operate the park. Today Balboa Park is one of three most-visited parks in the U.S., with more than 6 million annual visitors. The park generates more than \$280 million in direct sales and \$885 million in positive economic impact for the City of San Diego.

Forest Park (St Louis) is a 1,371-acre public park originally home to the 1904 World's Fair. It has long been the home of the St. Louis Zoo, the St. Louis Art Museum, the Missouri History Museum, and the St. Louis Science Center. In 2000, a public-private partnership was formed, which completed a \$100 million restoration of facilities. The park includes meadows, trees, man-made lakes and freshwater streams. Forest Park has more than 12 million visitors per year.

Seattle Center (Seattle) was the site of the 1962 World's Fair. It's now a 74-acre urban campus, with great open space. It's home to more than 30 cultural, educational and entertainment entities and a stage for around 16,000 annual events and activities. The campus also provides rental space for commercial and community functions and is the city's largest live touring concert venue. In 2016, Seattle Center brought in 2.2 million-plus visitors. It adds almost \$2 billion to Seattle's economy and creates 18,000-plus jobs and \$90 million in tax revenue.

Crissy Field (San Francisco) is 100 acres of stunning natural habitat. In 2001, the area was transformed from a former military airfield and contaminated brownfield into an environmental showcase. Today Crissy Field is a spectacular public space where people walk or bike on a path with iconic views of the Bay and Golden Gate Bridge. The area includes a gorgeous 100-acre swath of national park land—including a restored grassy field, revitalized marsh, new shoreline promenade, and an environmental education facility to ensure that stewardship of the land endures. The revitalization included repurposing historic buildings (including hangars) by park-compatible tenants who adapted the buildings and paid for the renovations and ongoing maintenance.

V. A Time for Action, a Time for Courage

Recent Developments

The recommendations of the 2014 Mayor's Fair Park Task Force are still in play. Though essentially nothing has been done in the Park since the Task Force made its recommendations, and though the State Fair corporation has not yet been required to function with transparency and accountability, possibilities for the future are still alive.

In 2015, Mayor Rawlings, without a transparent and competitive selection process, named Walt Humann, retired executive of Hunt Oil, to develop an implementation strategy for the Task Force's recommendation of a public-private partnership to manage, operate, and market Fair Park. Humann chaired a "transition team" of City officials for 18 months to develop the takeover plan. Humann then formed the Fair Park Texas Foundation to negotiate a sole-source, no-bid contract with the City of Dallas to manage and operate Fair Park, worth over \$800 million over 30 years.

But on October 13, 2016, the City Attorney ruled that approving the Fair Park Texas Foundation management agreement would violate City ordinances and state law. Subsequently, the City of Dallas issued a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for Fair Park management and operation. The three teams that submitted qualifications were deemed qualified and invited to submit a bid in response to a Request for Proposal (RFP):

The Fair Park Texas Foundation, created by Walt Humann. Dallas Mayor Mike Rawlings tapped Humann to spearhead a nonprofit to manage Fair Park operations before any public bid was announced. The foundation appointed nine board members; three have now resigned; Humann is chair and CEO.

Oak Cliff Foundation, a nonprofit led by developer Monte Anderson. This team includes urban planner Patrick Kennedy and former Dallas Summer Musicals president Michael Jenkins, who also runs a theme park company.

In the City for Good, a South Dallas nonprofit led by Terry Kittleson. The team includes Trammell Crow Company, Dan Biederman Company (a world-renowned park developer whose experience includes Bryant Park in New York City and Klyde Warren Park), and Spectra (a major entertainment venue manager owned by Comcast that operates entertainment venues throughout the United States and world).

The Request for Competitive Sealed Proposals were issued on July 14, 2017:⁶⁹

"The successful Proposer will be responsible for the full and complete management and operation of Fair Park as a public park subject to contract terms and conditions; maintaining and managing the grounds and facilities of Fair Park as a vibrant, year-round location for events, daily activities, and cultural enrichment; cultivating connections with and supporting revitalization of the surrounding neighborhood; administering third party contracts in the City's stead, including vendor concessions, licenses, and leases; securing and presenting future third party contract opportunities for Fair Park, including naming and sponsorships; and seeking and securing financial support opportunities for Fair Park through non-City sources."

Responses are due October 2, 2017. "It is the desired goal of the City to have an executed management contract with the successful proposer no later than January 31, 2018."

The goals and objectives are:

1. Execute the recommendations of the Mayor's Fair Park Task Force Report, as amended by the Park and Recreation Board Resolution, including the development of a new year-round community park.
2. Identify additional ways to maximize the year-round utilization of the Park.
3. Establish effective community relations, including cultivating connections with and supporting revitalization of the surrounding neighborhood, marketing, promotions, fundraising, sponsorships, and advertising.
4. Enhance and maintain Fair Park as a City of Dallas landmark district, State Antiquities Landmark, and a National Historic Landmark.
5. Utilizing the Office of Cultural Affairs application and review process for major cultural institutions, develop a plan to maintain, enhance, and foster the success of and/or augment the various cultural institutions located in Fair Park.
6. Promote, protect, preserve, and conserve the collection of public art in the Park.
7. Support, maintain, and enhance sporting and recreation venues located in Fair Park.
8. Administer third-party contracts, including vendor contracts, concessions, licenses and leases, and contracts securing and presenting future events, programming, and visitor attraction opportunities for Fair Park.
9. Prepare a strategic plan and business plan for the implementation of a centralized, comprehensive, and integrated management organization to potentially become a self-supporting enterprise, responsible for the planning and capital development for needed enhancements, as well as improved operations and maintenance of existing and new improvements at Fair Park. The strategic and business plan must address park programming, as well as capital improvements.
10. Upon selection, update the 2003 Fair Park Comprehensive Development Plan. Proposers should set the parameters for this update in their response to this RFCSP, to serve as the performance benchmark in a contract with the City.

These three teams, no doubt, will present very different proposals and bring distinct capabilities. The outcome of this process will determine the future of Fair Park and, in no small measure, the future of Dallas. For the sake of Dallas and its iconic park, the City should:

Deliver on the promise to build a great park. Build a crown jewel for Dallas. Attract visitors from around the world. Reinvigorate Dallas's economy and Fair Park neighborhoods.

Hold the State Fair corporation accountable. Request a forensic audit of the State Fair corporation and renegotiate the footprint and operations so as to accommodate the highest and best use of Fair Park and contributions to its neighborhoods and Dallas taxpayers. And the State Fair should consent in advance to approve whichever team the City selects.

Enter into a responsible public-private partnership. Secure a best-in-class team able to transform Fair Park from a decaying grand dame into a vibrant center of culture, art, and commerce—one that over time will become financially self-sufficient—while preserving and repurposing the vacant historical buildings.

Open the doors for growth in the urban core. The “park premium” of a signature park can transform blighted neighborhoods into prosperous, tax-generating, inclusive communities enabling the urban core to grow south and east.

Reunite our neighborhoods. Connect Fair Park not only to its immediate neighborhoods but also to the growing and prosperous neighborhoods of Downtown, Deep Ellum, the Cedars, Uptown, the Trinity, and White Rock Lake. Repair the wounded urban core around I-30 and I-45.

Invest in Dallas’s future. Provide the funds to rejuvenate Fair Park and attract park-compatible tenants. Attract a young and highly skilled workforce. Build a great park that serves as the economic engine for jobs, education, small businesses, innovators, the arts, entertainment and recreation.

The Road Ahead

Dallas is facing major decisions about Fair Park. The possible paths forward lead to very different futures.

With so much at stake, the temptation is to let personal politics trump good policy. But that’s the familiar road. That’s the Fair Park politics that have brought us to where we are now.

In ten years it will be too late. The deterioration of Fair Park and the community by then will be virtually irreversible. It may be too late in two years. Now is the time for bold action. Now is the time for moral courage. The future of Dallas depends on it.

“Courage, my friends; ‘tis not too late to build a better world.”⁷⁰

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