



Richardson, Plano parlaying DART stations into urban-style development

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Published: 10 February 2013 10:35 PM

For years, cars and highways have driven the growth of suburban Richardson and Plano. Public transit has been a small aside, with less than 3 percent of the cities' residents taking trains or buses to work.

But as the cities grow older and open space for development disappears, city leaders are looking to their DART trains to promote denser growth over the next decade.

The days of sprawling subdivisions sprouting in the cities appear to be ending. Many new or planned projects include mixed-use buildings and walkable streets.

"There is a densification of the region that I think everyone is beginning to recognize may be the more economical way to use land than urban sprawl," Richardson City Manager Dan Johnson said.

The most significant new project is planned at the Bush Turnpike station on DART's Red Line. Right now, the stop is surrounded by fields. But the real estate firm KDC plans soon to build a mixed-use complex with a hotel, retail, almost 4,000 apartments and more than 2.5 million square feet of office space.

KDC president Tobin Grove said the development is the kind that DART's supporters expected when rail lines were first built. It may not have come as quickly as promised, but it will benefit the city and increase rail ridership, he said.

State Farm has confirmed that it will occupy almost 1.5 million square feet of office space. Defense contractor Raytheon also reportedly is looking at the area.

Detailed renderings of the 186-acre development haven't been released, but developers said the site will have three large office towers with retail space at the bottom, plus a parking garage and separate multifamily housing units. Many of the buildings will have ground-floor retail, and they will open up to a common plaza, which will have sidewalk connections to outlying areas and the rail station.

"We are starting to see a lot of our corporate clients that are really interested in the true work-live-play environments where they can live with residential and retail environments," Grove said. "Adding a DART station and rail access is just one step further in that."

Plano leaders, meanwhile, hope the project will attract similar development along their southern border, which is just yards from the KDC site. City planners foresee a dense strip of multiuse developments stretching from the turnpike to the end of the Red Line at Parker Road.

That goal was detailed in the city's Downtown Vision Plan, which the City Council approved at a recent meeting. The document, an update of the original 1999 plan, calls for 2,000 housing units to be built along Plano's DART corridor over the next 10 years.

And, based on the success of its downtown station, the city is confident that it can achieve that goal. Fifteen years ago, the area around 15th Street and K Avenue was a sleepy collection of craft shops. Then word came that DART planned to build a train stop in the area. The city updated infrastructure, expanded a park and partnered with a developer to build apartments with retail on the ground floor.

The station was completed in 2002, and the area has boomed. It is bustling with restaurants, art galleries and more than 1,000 apartments.

"I think downtown is a good case study of how to leverage transit as an economic development tool," said Plano Planning Director Phyllis Jarrell. "It is a good case study of how a maturing suburban community can revitalize."

Richardson hopes to emulate that success at its southernmost stations. Redevelopment has already begun around the Spring Valley Road stop, where the city updated the roads and sewer lines and built a park. Brick Row, an apartment complex with ground-floor retail, has opened. Patio homes are under construction nearby.

Johnson, the Richardson city manager, said similar development will begin at the Arapaho Road station "very soon."

Both cities' leaders say they harbor no plans of turning all areas into dense neighborhoods. Most of Richardson and Plano will remain suburban, they say. But they also recognize that only 8 percent of Plano and 10 percent of Richardson remains undeveloped, and most of that is being saved for major economic development opportunities.

The new developments offer ways to continue to grow. And the character of the sites can attract residents who might not be interested in other areas of their towns.

"It's an area for people who want that [urban] lifestyle but don't want to or can't afford to live in downtown or uptown [Dallas]," said Jarrell. "We are trying to

accommodate a wide range of housing types."

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