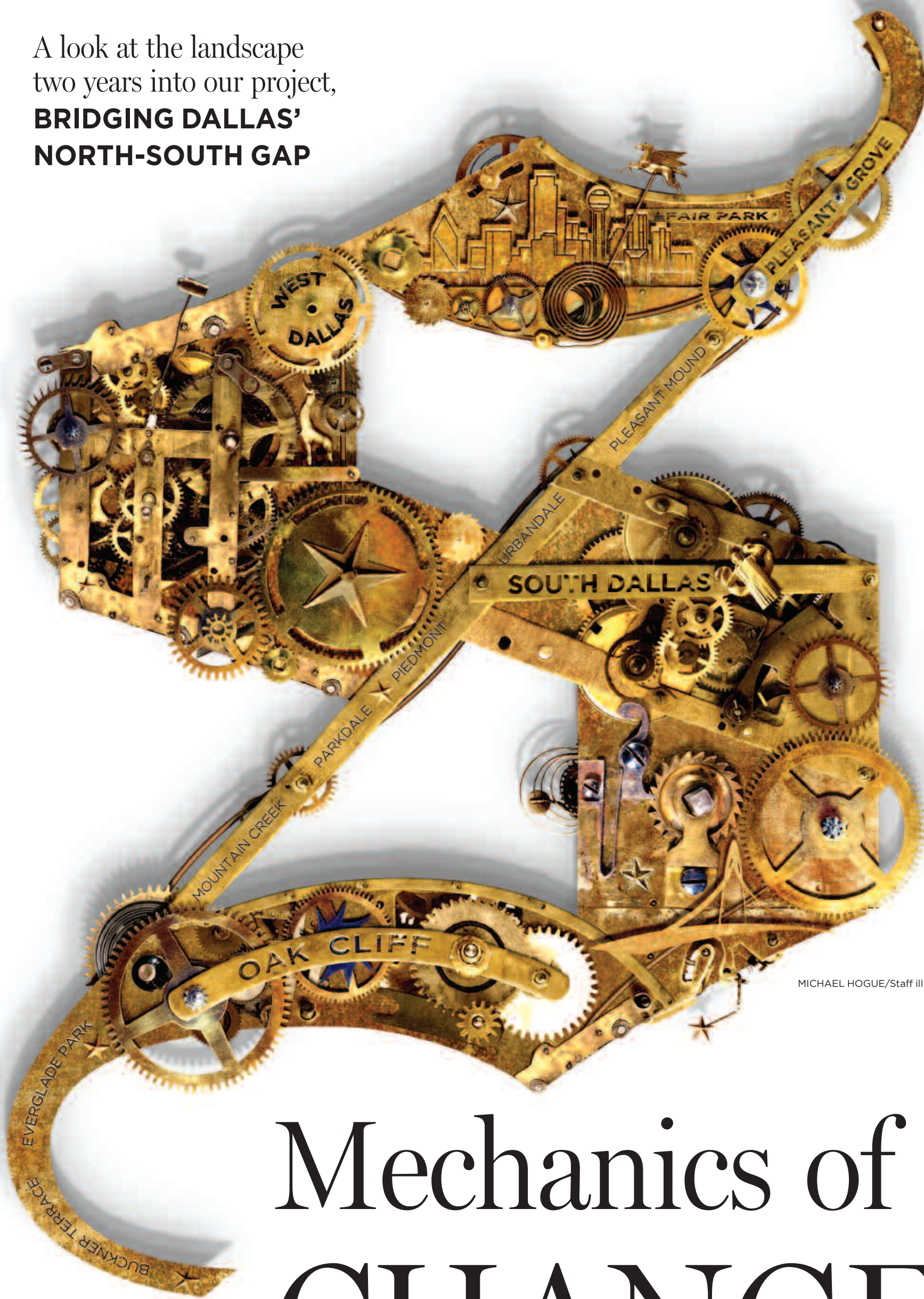


Sunday, September 20, 2009

A look at the landscape  
two years into our project,  
**BRIDGING DALLAS'  
NORTH-SOUTH GAP**



MICHAEL HOGUE/Staff illustration

# Mechanics of CHANGE

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### EDUCATION

A look at education levels in our five bases — and a report card on southern Dallas high schools. **7P**

### MAPS

The vast amount of property that is derelict or underdeveloped presents special challenges. **8P**



**CREATE** customized maps of our five focus neighborhoods with data you most care about.

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Tackling decades of imbalances in southern Dallas may be harder during a recession — but it's not impossible, says **Tod Robberson**

Conditions have changed considerably since *The Dallas Morning News* introduced its campaign in late 2007 to bridge the gap between northern and southern Dallas. The economy took a nose dive. The Trinity River project stalled over engineering questions. Mayor Tom Leppert worked to win approval for a convention center hotel.

Despite the focus often being elsewhere, signs of progress are evident that could be leveraged into much larger victories in southern Dallas. But that will require a renewed sense of mission by the city's political and business leadership and vastly improved partnerships among those with influence in southern Dallas communities.

Late last year, *The News* commissioned a detailed study of southern Dallas by the Institute for Urban Policy Research at the University of Texas at Dallas. We hope this information, to which today's Points section is devoted, will help City Council members, DISD trustees, business and religious leaders, interested citizens — and our own newspaper — find concrete strategies to bridge the north-south gap.

For the 51 percent of Dallas residents who live north of Interstate 30 and the Trinity River, the substandard conditions that most of the southern half has endured for decades may not be top of mind. But it's in everyone's interest to see southern Dallas move closer to the north's level of prosperity.

Companies that come looking for a new home in Dallas don't just look at the economically healthy and vibrant north. The disparities are a business turn-off. When southern residents' incomes

Progress along Lancaster Road reveals a hint of what's possible in southern Dallas, says **Colleen McCain Nelson**

Dallas Mayor Tom Leppert was pushing a grocery cart. Mayor Pro Tem Dwaine Caraway was searching for oatmeal.

Somewhere along the way, the city leaders picked up a pig-tailed 4-year-old — as well as a cart full of food. And as the shopping race wrapped up, everyone was all smiles.

Discount grocery stores don't usually attract bold-faced names or prompt such rollicking affairs. But the arrival of a new Save-A-Lot on Lancaster Road in east Oak Cliff was rightly celebrated this summer.

The opening of a bright, shiny, new store in a long-neglected neighborhood signified what's going right in southern Dallas. And it's the most visible victory in a multifaceted effort to battle blight and spur economic development along the Lancaster Corridor.

Replacing an abandoned, asbestos-filled theater with a much-needed grocery store was an indisputable upgrade. But the bricks and mortar — not to mention the milk and eggs — didn't tell the whole story.

Before Save-A-Lot's doors swung open, city leaders made a commitment to bolster the neighborhood by tackling impediments to development. Attempting to lure developers to Lancaster Road would be a losing effort as long as crime persisted, code violations lingered and undesirable businesses dominated the landscape.

During the last two years, this newspaper has advocated for changes to the policies and practices that for decades



# The Dallas Morning News

Established October 1, 1885

## Publishers

George Bannerman Dealey 1885-1940

E.M. (Ted) Dealey 1940-1960

Joe M. Dealey 1960-1980

James M. Moroney Jr. 1980-1985

John A. Rector Jr. 1985-1986

Burl Osborne 1986-2001

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Sunday, September 20, 2009

## EDITORIALS

### BRIDGING DALLAS' NORTH-SOUTH GAP

# Task Force Deferred

## City Hall needs to get moving on group's proposals

When Dallas leaders committed to revitalizing the southern half of the city, they went big.

More than 200 movers, shakers, activists and residents were assembled to serve on the Mayor's Southern Dallas Task Force. Tom Leppert tapped City Council member Tennell Atkins to steer this super-sized group, and both men touted the importance of inclusiveness and community buy-in.

Mission accomplished: The business and neighborhood leaders who signed on have donated thousands of unpaid hours and have lent their expertise and ideas. But a year later, some are wondering what they have to show for it.

In June, the task force's 13 teams detailed priority projects that could be accomplished in the short term and could make a difference in southern Dallas. The multimedia presentations at City Hall were accompanied by some fanfare, drawing a who's who of Dallas leadership to the big reveal.

More than three months later, task force members are still waiting for a response, an acknowledgement, any sort of sign that the Dallas City Council has interest in implementing or even exploring their recommendations.

Sadly, the full-color binders filled with ideas about improving the quality of life south of the Trinity River have not been put to good use.

To be fair, summers pass by in a blur at City Hall. The council takes a monthlong vacation in July. And for the last six weeks, elected officials have been knee-deep in a budget crisis.

But as council members have debated next year's finances, cutting deals and seeking compromises to ensure that essential programs are funded, the southern Dallas proposals have gone missing. Despite the deficit, council members should consider how they could pay for the recommended small-scale projects.

Adding even a single line item would signal that long-neglected neighborhoods won't be forced to wait until city coffers are flush to see overdue investment. Or, if council members

can't find a way to include funds in this budget, they must move quickly to begin studying the task force's proposals and to lay out plans for implementation. Otherwise, Dallas leaders' talk of making redevelopment in the south a priority starts to sound like empty rhetoric.

Last week, Bob Stimson, president of the Oak Cliff Chamber of Commerce and vice chair of one of the southern Dallas teams, wrote to council members, telling them how disappointed he and other task force members were to see their hard work and ideas ignored during this budget cycle.

"The lack of responsiveness from this council to those issues sends an incredibly sad message to those that volunteered their time and to the area that they represent," he said.

Atkins continues to counsel patience, reiterating his commitment to finding the needed funds. But he must bring a sense of urgency, lest this ambitious effort start to unravel.

At the top of everyone's to-do list should be the creation of an economic development corporation. An agency charged with recruiting businesses, disbursing funds and advocating for southern Dallas could jump-start this process. And,

as this newspaper argued when it outlined its proposal for creating such an agency, an economic development corporation would serve as a fulcrum for other projects.

As the research in this special editorial section confirms, closing the gap between the city's northern and southern halves will be arduous and expensive. A long-term commitment, innovative ideas and leadership, plenty of money and a comprehensive approach that does more than nibble around the edges will be required.

Leppert and Atkins have assembled an army of committed volunteers who appear up to the challenge. Ultimately, though, the onus rests on the council, which must execute — and find a way to pay for this.

In those binders with brightly colored tabs, elected officials will find a good place to start.

### Key UTD findings

Today's Points section and online component offer details on southern Dallas showing:

■ Explosive growth in the Hispanic population, as African-American and Anglo numbers fall.

■ Huge amounts of vacant and underutilized land in most of our focus neighborhoods.

■ Links between the high percentage of noncontiguous vacant land and depressed property values.

■ Poverty overlapping with poor-quality housing and low educational attainment.

■ A wide income gap with northern Dallas, even in minority-to-minority comparisons.

# The Year's Victories

## We're happy to have played a role in these successes

Since this newspaper launched its "Bridging Dallas' North-South Gap" project, the editorial board has been determined to stay focused on concrete examples of change for the better in southern Dallas. We particularly want to see results in our five geographic bases, anticipating that progress there will eventually ripple throughout the southern half of the city.

The update regarding our "10 Drops in a Bucket," published on Page 3P, tallies some of the successes. But that's only part of the story.

While our advocacy wasn't entirely responsible for the victories listed below, we're pleased to have played a part:

■ We focused intently on six reforms during this year's legislative session to improve life south of the Trinity River. We helped three of them get passed: Austin empowered cities to better regulate group homes for disabled Texans (a particular problem in southern Dallas), simplified the moving of properties from the city's land bank into development and helped finance affordable housing units.

■ Our editorial exposing lax management of the new Frazier affordable housing complex led to a state inspection and changes in the management company's accounting procedures. Section 8 residents can now see why they're being billed for previously unspecified expenses.

■ We highlighted why City Hall should help resuscitate Southwest Center Mall. The City Council hired the Urban Land Institute to recommend options for a makeover of this dying shopping center.

■ Our editorials citing the dangers at "Dead Man's Curve" in South Dallas prompted the Texas Department of Transportation to install new signs and other warning features to make drivers slow down on this treacherous, accident-prone stretch of highway.

■ We helped spark discussion about creating a development corporation, and the economic development team within the Mayor's Southern Dallas Task Force has made this a top priority.

■ We urged the city to crack down on drug dealing at South Dallas car washes. Police made seven arrests last week.

■ We proposed a marketing campaign for Jefferson Boulevard. As part of that effort, new City Council member Delia Jasso has created a task force to re-imagine the boulevard's retail potential.

■ After learning about a group's efforts to place a homeless halfway house in South Dallas, we raised concerns that this community already has its share of homeless people. The group canceled its plans.

■ We urged West Dallas organizations to generate stronger community support for initiatives benefiting the neglected area. The West Dallas Chamber of Commerce since has grown more active, nonprofits are getting more residents involved in shaping West Dallas' future, and several city departments are working more closely with residents.

Next year, we hope to report even more progress. For now, we're glad to celebrate these victories. Cities are renewed one step at a time.



MIKE SMITH/Las Vegas Sun

## LETTERS

### GOP is open to discussion

Re: "Disappointed with Congress," by Otis Carroll, last Sunday Letters.

As a result of the Democratic leadership's partisan and outrageous abuse of the legislative rules and process that has excluded consideration of Republican health care ideas, Ralph Hall, other members and I used our only opportunity to show the president solutions that he falsely stated we did not have. We violated no rules.

Our action was to inform him that we have plans and are ready to take him up on his claim that "his door is always open." The president came into the House chamber as an invited guest and made the accusation that those of us who have been critical have not engaged in "honest debate" and are using "scare tactics." He said that many of his hosts made "bogus claims," engaged in "demagoguery," "distortion," "acrimony" and are "cynical and irresponsible." He even used the L-word before anyone else in the House did. That's no way to act when you're invited into someone else's House.

Ralph and I have just been trying to let the president know that when he's ready to discuss instead of fuss, we are ready with alternative health care reform proposals so we can work together on a plan that Americans need, want and deserve to provide Americans both coverage and control.

U.S. Rep. Louie Gohmert, Tyler

### The health care racket

Health insurance companies do not provide health care to you; they just pay the bills. And they do a poor job at that because they rake off every penny they can to pay exorbitant CEO salaries and profits to the shareholders.

Insurance companies are supposed to administer a pool to spread risk. Everyone pays in enough to cover the likely costs of the group, and their medical costs are paid from the fund. For-profit health care insurance companies could more accurately be called "illness profiteers."

We pay taxes to support fire departments because we can't afford to each buy our own fire-fighting equipment and recognize the public benefit protecting everyone's property. Imagine if we privatized the fire departments and received assistance only if we had paid our fees.

I support an efficient, government administered single-payer system. If Medicare were extended to all citizens, we would enjoy lower overall costs, the providers would spend less time fighting claims processors, and our manufacturers would be more competitive with foreign companies.

Jim Swift, Arlington

### War effort doesn't exist

Re: "No more pulled punches," by Thomas Webb, Tuesday Letters.

Comparing the bombing of Dresden and Tokyo during World War II to inflicting civilian casualties in the Afghan war is off base.

The residents of both cities at that time contributed to the war effort of those nations. They worked in the factories or on the farms to keep Imperial Japan and Nazi Germany fighting.

A better comparison would be the thousands of French citizens who were wounded and died during and after the Normandy invasion of June 1944.

The British government had forbidden air attacks on occupied countries if there was a risk of high civilian casualties.

Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower had to lobby and plead for weeks before the Normandy invasion to get permission to bomb the French countryside behind the beaches and further inland.

I do not think we have that type of commitment from the Afghan people or their corrupt, inept government.

Leo Maxwell, Lancaster

## LETTERS & VIEWPOINTS POLICY

We value reader submissions. We receive far more than we can print and publish a representative sample. Limit letters to 200 words, with not more than one published every 30 days. Viewpoints columns should not exceed 600 words and also are edited for length and clarity. Include your name, address with ZIP code and daytime phone number. Submissions become property of *The News*.

### Keep your size 10s to yourself...

U.S. Rep. Joe Wilson's insult to President Barack Obama during his address to Congress was the moral equivalent to hurling a shoe at him.

Scott Mashburn, Dallas

### ... not that Congress would care

Congress voted on a resolution of disapproval of U.S. Rep. Joe Wilson, who hollered out to Obama, "You lie!"

Certainly Wilson made an intemperate remark at the wrong time and in the wrong place, but the remark itself was not incorrect.

But now I ask where was Congress' outrage when Muntadher al-Zaidi launched his shoes at our nation's president when he traveled to Iraq last year? Will Congress vote a resolution condemning him for incivility? Hardly.

Lyle Paul, Dallas

### 'Crackpot' is a compliment

Re: "Patriots or Pinheads? Tea party movement must contain its extremes," Thursday Editorials.

While I recognize Glenn Beck as an entertainer who uses people's fears, I think he does so because he recognizes the dangers to our country and our form of government. But to call him a "crackpot" makes the editorial seem left wing and speaks badly for your paper.

Beck is 2-for-2 at the moment. Van Jones is gone, or at least out of sight, and ACORN has been exposed for what it is, despite Attorney General Eric Holder's refusal to investigate.

My favorite moment was news anchor Charlie Gibson admitting that he had heard nothing about ACORN.

Perhaps we need a few "crackpots" like Beck around.

What do you think?

Pat Winnubst, McKinney

### An arts center by any name?

Re: "New arts center to bear AT&T name — Donation amount not disclosed; Wi-Fi promised for complex," Tuesday news story.

More than 100 families have given in excess of \$1 million each to see this epic effort move to completion. This is an insult to the generosity of the many people who have made this happen.

I cannot believe that the Winspears or Wyllys are happy about this. Nor would I be if I had committed millions to this project. This is rightly the Dallas Center for the Performing Arts, underwritten by citizens of Dallas that care.

I can see the new Cowboys Stadium being the AT&T Stadium, but I cannot see Lincoln Center in New York being The Bank of America Performing Arts Center.

Robert Henderson, Dallas

### Put an end to job exporting

President Barack Obama said in his recent address to Congress that thousands more Americans will lose their health insurance over the next several years. I wholeheartedly believe him.

While we are having the health care debate, why don't we also have the discussion of bringing our jobs back to the U.S.?

Corporations are not quite so evil when they are employing people, helping to insure folks and put food on their tables and pay tax revenues.

What incentives will there be for corporations to bring back U.S. jobs? How will our administration navigate this with corporations working in countries that not only compete for our jobs but now hold a good portion of our debt?

Julie Forrer, Plano

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Staff photos

This new grocery store is a shining example of how a city commitment can pave the way for progress. It wouldn't have been possible without increased code enforcement and policing.

## Nelson

Continued from Page 1P

short-changed the southern half of Dallas. Central to our argument has been the belief that a comprehensive approach is needed. Tackling problems in isolation — simply issuing more code citations or opening one new business — will not yield long-term results.

Rather, the city must pick its spots. Do more of everything in a targeted neighborhood — implement a surge of sorts. And success should emanate outward.

The Lancaster Corridor is a work in progress. For residents of northern Dallas who consider downtown to be the southern limit of their comfort zone, improvements might not jump out at them on this road with a DART train running down the middle.

But after implementing a broad-based strategy, city officials are starting to glimpse Lancaster's potential. Crime is down. Demolitions are up. Private money is beginning to build on public investment.

To make over this area, or any other in southern Dallas, the city must notch wins both big and small and write public policy that advances established objectives. Along the Lancaster Corridor, all of that is happening.

And if city leaders continue to build on recent progress, this effort could serve as a road map for revitalizing other areas that have been left to languish.

### Small fixes first

Reviving an area like the Lancaster Corridor isn't as simple as throwing incentives at developers and waiting for them to build. Too often, city leaders and neighborhood groups skip to the end-game, focusing on the retail and residential development they'd like to see spring from the earth.

*Wouldn't it be nice if we had grocery stores and banks instead of pawn shops and payday loan operations?* they say. *Why can't we attract a Target instead of another dollar store?*

But a wish list isn't a development strategy. And along Lancaster, any plan needed to start with the basics.

For too long, the city failed to rein in crime and code violations in this part of town. One need only look at the Wendy's restaurant with no chairs — a not-so-subtle message that patrons can't be trusted to sit down — to understand the dim view many developers took of this area.

That's why Leppert wisely

made public safety the first priority. The mayor's strategy for the neighborhood could be boiled down to three points: Make it safer. Make it cleaner. Make it more attractive for investment.

A relatively small but hugely important victory was the demolition of two no-tell motels on Lancaster that had been havens for crime. As Caraway, the mayor pro tem, noted, once the infamous Southern Comfort Motel came crashing down, other opportunities for improvement emerged.

During this fiscal year, six properties in the neighborhood have been demolished. Seventy-seven others are being considered for the same fate.

Stepped-up code enforcement and policing efforts, as well as the installation of a community prosecutor, have netted a 26 percent reduction in crime over one year in the Lancaster-Kiest area.

Robert Abtahi, a corporate-lawyer-turned-community-prosecutor, was sent to the Lancaster Corridor with a single directive: Make this area better.

He has. His work building relationships with property owners has created a shared sense of responsibility for maintaining and upgrading the neighborhood.

Abtahi and other city officials have played both offense and defense on Lancaster, aggressively tackling nuisance properties and guarding against changes that run counter to the city's goals. For example, when a barbecue joint sought a night club permit and clearance to stay open until 4 a.m., Caraway personally protested the application. The city eventually won a crucial court victory and closed the door on a club cropping up near homes and schools.

### Building on progress

These hard-fought wins aren't obvious as you drive down Lancaster, where razor wire still tops the fence of a used-car lot, payday loans remain plentiful and retail options include the Motown Mini-Mall. But even modest improvements gave the city needed leverage as it negotiated with Save-A-Lot to build a new store.

The "extreme value" grocer already had a smaller, aging outpost nearby, but after company officials worked with Caraway, who represents this area, plans were finalized to build a bigger, brand-new store.

Rick Meyer, the company's vice president for market development, says Caraway's commitment to the project was key. Also important was the city's effort to jump-start an extreme makeover for the shopping center attached to the new grocery store. The past-its-prime strip mall now has a modern façade and is ready to

lease.

The new Save-A-Lot and the rehabbed shopping center have been celebrated by Caraway and other leaders. And they should be.

A few detractors have turned up their noses at the no-frills store, which offers a limited selection of groceries and some brands you've never heard of. Shoppers can find Cheerios and Coca-Cola, as well as Kraft Easy Mac. But they'll have to settle for Panner peanut butter instead of Skippy and Crème Between instead of Oreos.

Caraway acknowledges that Save-A-Lot isn't the spot to pick up porters and prawns. But in an area long underserved by grocery stores, having easy access to basic staples in a clean, well-kept store is a win. And for residents who had hoped for a higher-end option, Caraway certainly wouldn't turn another grocer down.

"There's plenty of room for Tom Thumb here. I've got suggested locations if they want to come to District 4," the mayor pro tem says. "But I'm not going to close the door on Save-A-Lot."

### Policy, as well as projects

With a clean-up of the Lancaster Corridor in progress and a few new businesses putting down roots, the city has spurred both incremental improvements and sizable steps forward. But to sustain that momentum, city leaders must support policies that will revitalize the neighborhood in the long-term.

The City Council got creative this year when it approved a plan to funnel tax revenues from development north of downtown south to the Lancaster-Kiest area. The awkwardly named transit-oriented development/tax-incremental finance district could be the multimillion-dollar boost the neighborhood needs, as the revenue can be used to improve infrastructure and subsidize development.

The action was commendable, both for providing much-needed funds and for recognizing that Dallas' economic future depends on the strength of the city's southern half. In the past, the idea of spending northern tax dollars on southern redevelopment would have been a nonstarter.

This council has shown the collective will to over-invest in areas such as the Lancaster Corridor in an effort to resuscitate neighborhoods that had been relegated to second-tier status.

The questions now will be how to continue progress along Lancaster and how to replicate success in other neighborhoods. After decades of turning our back on this part of town, revitalization will be slow and expensive work.

With a do-it-all approach in the Lancaster Corridor, city leaders have sketched an outline for creating a vibrant neighborhood. Commitment will be key to sustaining and expanding this effort.

Closing the gap between northern and southern Dallas remains a distant goal. But a close look at the new-and-somewhat-improved Lancaster Road reveals a hint of what's possible.



Dallas Morning News editorial writer Colleen McCain Nelson wrote this on behalf of the editorial board. Her e-mail address is [cmccain@dallasnews.com](mailto:cmccain@dallasnews.com).

# Crossing items off our southern Dallas to-do list

These relatively small upgrades add up, drop by drop, says

**Colleen McCain Nelson**

The Dallas Inn was a disaster. Even from the parking lot at this mess of a motel, I could see evidence of drugs and rats. Both alarmed me. Broken windows had been "repaired" by taping newspapers over them, and the security system consisted of two-by-fours wedged across glass patio doors.

This bombed-out building sat at the edge of the Dallas Zoo, no doubt making a memorable first impression as tourists approached. The pile of police reports detailing burglaries, prostitution, assorted criminal mischief and even killings suggested that there was seldom a quiet moment at the Dallas Inn.

Nearly two years ago, we began spotlighting some of the most egregious eyesores in the neglected neighborhoods of southern Dallas. From the start, the Dallas Inn was at the top of our to-fix list.

As I worked on the monthly updates to the "10 Drops in the Bucket" series, I made regular visits to 508 S. Marsalis Ave. My presence usually spurred suspicious stares from residents, and the front desk sat empty when I approached. I'd spend time surveying the scene, looking for any sign of improvements.

City officials had the Dallas Inn in their sights as well. They ordered the owner to make repairs and comply with city codes. Eventually, a new, brightly colored sign went up. The rats and the rest of problems stayed.

Later, the city sued. And after a deal was struck with the Texas Department of Transportation to acquire the property, the Dallas Inn finally was marked for demolition.

But months passed with no sign of bulldozers.

I drove by whenever I was in the neighborhood — on the off chance that today would be the end for the no-tell motel. Death watch for the Dallas Inn continued.

At last, on a steamy July day, this notorious motel came crashing down. The lot was scraped clean, leaving only a concrete slab behind.

In most neighborhoods, a vacant lot doesn't seem like a victory. A patch of barren earth isn't exactly an ideal neighbor.

But in some of southern Dallas' struggling areas, bulldozers bring hope. Demolishing crumbling houses and buildings that double as crime havens and tearing down abandoned, fire-ravaged structures give neighborhoods a chance for a fresh start.

The demise of the Dallas Inn was celebrated by zoo officials and nearby neighborhood groups.

Every month, I give readers — and city leaders — the latest information about 10 problem properties. Big ideas are needed to bolster the southern half of the city, but these small fixes also help improve the area, block by block. Ideally, the structures on our list would be repaired, rehabbed or reinvented as usable homes or businesses. But often, they're burned or decayed beyond repair.

Most of the drops are added at the behest of neighbors who have given up trying to get City Hall's attention. Many have tried — and failed — to track down absentee owners.

So far, we've checked 13 drops off our list. Decrepit structures have been demolished, vacant buildings have been sold, and a school playground has been upgraded.

But the most notable sign of progress has been the ongoing commitment from city officials to keep checking drops off our list. Joey Zapata, interim director of code compliance, provides detailed status reports each month for the properties we're targeting. Seldom is a trouble spot allowed to languish with no sign of

### Checkmarks we've made

- Near the intersection of Imperial and Montie streets, a homeowner who had created a shantytown of sorts in his back yard tore down the shacks.
- The crime-ridden Southern Comfort Motel on Lancaster Road was demolished.
- Code officials cleaned up South Lamar Street, which had become a hangout for illegal vendors, card players and folks who spent their days drinking beer.
- A lot near Interstate 35E and Ledbetter Drive was overrun with rubbish and pit bulls before the city forced the owner to clean it up.
- A graffiti-covered, vacant vacuum repair shop on South Hampton Road was demolished.
- Two burned-out houses on Park Row Avenue were demolished.
- The scorched remains of a house on Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard were cleared away.
- An abandoned and crumbling auto repair shop on Pennsylvania Avenue was torn down.
- Mountains of rubble left behind after an apartment complex on Grand Avenue burned down were cleared away.
- A useless patch of cracked asphalt on the Rosemont Elementary School campus was hauled off and replaced by grassy play space.
- A fire-ravaged apartment complex on Navajo Drive was demolished.
- The rodent-infested, code-challenged Dallas Inn was razed.
- On Comal Street, a decaying house that had been stripped to the studs was demolished.

action — whether that's issuing citations, sending out mow/clean crews or going to court.

This month, Mayor Tom Leppert took it upon himself to provide updates on several of the long-suffering spots. He told me: We're going to knock these 10 drops off the list so that you can move on to 10 more.

I will gladly take Leppert up on that offer.

He had good news to report about a long-vacant gas station on Clark Road in far southwest Dallas. A reader had alerted me to the boarded-up property. Leppert happily announced that it has been sold and soon will be back in business.

Leppert had a pledge for the pastor who plans to move his congregation into a church on Navaro Street in West Dallas. The concerned resident had had no luck getting the burned-out house next door cleaned up. The rotting structure was attracting drug users and repelling church leaders.

"We're going to get that demolished," Leppert said. "We're aggressively going after it."

To its credit, the city is taking a proactive approach to code enforcement. No longer content to simply issue citations without seeing results, code officials and city attorneys have gotten creative — and aggressive.

That's good news because for every drop on our list, several more are lined up, waiting to be highlighted. This month, we checked off a ramshackle house on Comal Street after it was demolished. But I had to look only a few yards away to find its replacement — an equally dilapidated home that's coming apart at the seams.

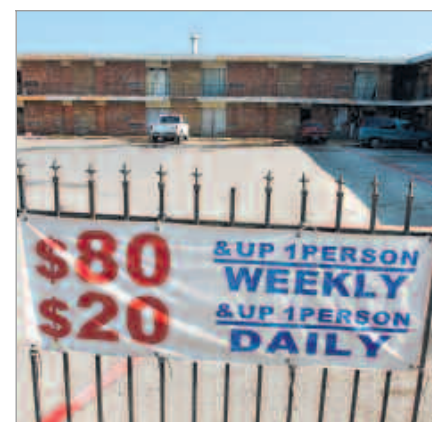
In this neighborhood just south of downtown and the Trinity River, horses sometimes roam the streets, and nearly half the houses are boarded up. We'll tackle them one at a time.

The "10 Drops" campaign isn't going away — I have buckets of work left to do.

Colleen McCain Nelson is a Dallas Morning News editorial writer. Her e-mail address is [cmccain@dallasnews.com](mailto:cmccain@dallasnews.com).



The Lancaster Corridor is still a work in progress — but that work is happening. If the city can do more of everything in one targeted neighborhood, success should emanate outward.



FILE 2007/Staff photo

The Dallas Inn, above, was home to burglaries, prostitution, criminal mischief, even killings. Its demolition in July brought hope to the neighborhood — and some visual relief to Dallas Zoo visitors.



Staff photo



# Five focus neighborhoods

## GRAND SOUTH DALLAS

Close to downtown and DART, this prime real estate is underutilized

Grand South Dallas has a distinctly unsettling feel to it. Too much land is either vacant or marred by dilapidated, boarded-up buildings. For visitors, such as the hundreds of thousands who descend on the State Fair of Texas around this time each year, the image of urban blight has a frightening effect and discourages the kinds of commercial and residential investment this newspaper seeks.

Anyone who drives around this area — bounded by Fair Park, Barry Avenue, Fitzhugh Avenue, U.S. Highway 175 and Interstates 45 and 30 — can't help but feel that there's an opportunity going to waste — especially considering the downtown skyline looming nearby and the two DART rail stations that have just opened.

North of downtown, property like this sells at a premium and attracts major investors. South of downtown, it sells for a pittance.

One of the measures of progress we set last year for the Grand South Dallas neighborhood base was to see a demonstrable reduction in the amount of land left vacant or devoted to parking. We also wanted to see better use of the fairgrounds for the 11 months when the State Fair isn't in progress. On the latter front, we're pleased to report progress with the planned development of the midway as a year-round attraction beginning in 2012. But the underutilization of land remains an unaddressed problem.

Last fall, this newspaper teamed up with the Institute for Urban Policy Research to find ways to measure how land is being used — or underused — around southern Dallas. The results — a computerized database and "windshield survey" — provide a shocking picture of Grand South Dallas.

Of the residential land being used, roughly 28 percent of homes require major structural repairs or, worse, total reconstruction. More than a third of all parcels in Grand South Dallas consist of vacant land or empty lots officially designated as "parking."

That's only half the story. The windshield data allow anyone to drill down and obtain details about properties. With the click of a mouse, users can isolate any parcel and obtain its property ID number. Pasting it into the Dallas Central Appraisal District's online database allows you to identify the property owner and tax record. (The windshield software is available free online. Visit [dallasnews.com/opinion/northsouth](http://dallasnews.com/opinion/northsouth) for instructions.)

That's where the story gets really interesting.

Using the windshield survey and Google Street View maps, an eye-opening virtual tour of Grand South Dallas is a few clicks away. By incorporating the DCAD data, it's easy to see why blighted properties are so costly to all Dallas taxpayers.

For example, we checked a few problematic plots adjacent to the new Martin Luther King Jr. DART rail station. We randomly selected a roughly 3,400-square-foot commercial building and land. It is appraised at \$82,500 and receives an annual tax bill of \$2,069. But a piece of property half that size in Oak Lawn, an equal distance from downtown on the northern side of the city, has an appraised value of \$409,500 and contributes \$10,269 a year in taxes.

Large patches of underdeveloped southern Dallas property contribute even less to the tax base, forcing residents and businesses in the north to pay a higher share of taxes to make up the difference. That's why it's in everyone's interest to fix this problem.

But don't take our word for it. A virtual tour, using the windshield survey, tells a far more thorough story.

*Dallas Morning News editorial writer Tod Robberson wrote this on behalf of the editorial board. His e-mail address is [trobberon@dallasnews.com](mailto:trobberon@dallasnews.com).*

## PLEASANT GROVE CROSSROADS

With Green Line stops a year away, the time for preparation is now

Deep Ellum and Fair Park may be getting all the DART love right now, but the growing Green Line soon will run through the heart of the Pleasant Grove Crossroads.

For an area whose residents often describe themselves as invisible and isolated, the December 2010 opening of the Lake June and Buckner rail stations will deliver citywide access and convenience. And more important, with the jobs-to-employees balance so out of whack, residents will be able to leverage the DART line into the kind of green that counts most, the cash kind.

The new line will help residents easily get to parts of town with big-time employers: Baylor University Medical Center, downtown Dallas, Market Center, Parkland hospital, UT Southwestern and points beyond.

We're not talking just any jobs, but better-paying ones, for residents of an area the Institute for Urban Policy Research describes as largely moderate- and low-income Hispanic households that put a premium on hard work and stable families.

Overall, the research paints this picture of the Pleasant Grove Crossroads, which is bounded by Lake June Road, St. Augustine Road, Elam Road and U.S. Highway 175 and is among the most densely populated parts of Dallas:

- The Hispanic population tripled in the past 18 years, while the white population declined 76 percent. The estimated 2008 breakdown: 76 percent Hispanic, 12 percent white and 11 percent black.

- The percentage of households with children living in poverty is roughly equal to that of the city as a whole (22 percent vs. the city's 21 percent).

- Housing has appreciated 46 percent compared with the city's 44 percent from 1990 to 2008. Residences here are in generally good condition, with only small clusters in need of serious repair. Sixty-six percent were reported average or fair; just over 30 percent were graded good, very good or excellent.

- Seventy-one percent of homes are owner-occupied, compared with the city's 42 percent. Ninety-five percent of the owner-occupied units are valued at less than \$100,000, with the average appraisal \$62,270. The average housing age is 51 years; the average size is 1,084 square feet.

The research also points to a comparatively poorly paid community that undoubtedly would benefit from jobs that offer better wages:

- Residents make far less than the citywide figures, earning 42 percent of what the population citywide makes. While the city as a whole increased its per capita income over the past 18 years by 8 percent, the Pleasant Grove base grew only 1 percent.

- Almost 24 percent of employed residents commute 45 minutes or more to work each way, compared with 15 percent citywide. DART will help residents make different economic choices — faster travel options to more places with reliability not offered by the "beaters" in many driveways.

With DART's arrival a little over a year away, advocacy groups, business owners and other stakeholders are working on ways to enhance the community. A similar challenge for residents is how to position themselves individually to improve quality of life. Perhaps that starts with a job-training conversation at Eastfield College's new Pleasant Grove Campus — just blocks from the soon-to-be Buckner rail station and already a catalyst for more varied businesses to open on this landmark southeastern Dallas boulevard.

Our research indicates that residents and leaders alike have many good reasons to seize this moment; the question is, will they dare to? Those decisions will determine whether Pleasant Grove indeed becomes a great place or, as the joke in The Grove goes, remains a great place to be from.

*Dallas Morning News deputy editorial page editor Sharon Grigsby wrote this on behalf of the editorial board. Her e-mail address is [sgrigsby@dallasnews.com](mailto:sgrigsby@dallasnews.com).*

## RED BIRD RENEWED

Plans for mall and airport, what's lacking is the

Red Bird is a neighborhood interrupted. With a mall, an airport, a hospital should be one of southern Dallas' area that once was on the way up now has

Housing developments were platted by surrounding Dallas Executive Airport site grassy fields that were supposed to become west Center Mall, once southern Dallas' years-long death.

For too long, this city has talked about Studies detail what the mall could become economic engine. But execution — and po

Without a concerted effort to bolster R area will deteriorate significantly.

Right now, this is still a spot where fam live. A study by the Institute for Urban P bounded by Ledbetter Drive, Westmorela Hampton Road attracts working couples

In this predominantly African-American residents have at least a high school diploma the city as a whole but is still higher than t we are focusing on in southern Dallas.

Residents here are no doubt attracted t 86 percent of single-family homes are in g tion. But homeowners in these tidy brick l tive prosperity, surrounded by undeveloped complexes. Available lots — residential a

In this neighborhood just west of U.S. Interstate 20, apartments outnumber single the sprawling complexes are starting to de downhill fast. Without a jump-start to R ridden apartments could dominate the la

The neighborhood's best hope for rega airport and the mall.

For years, city officials have mulled pla 1,000-acre property that is home to Dalla res is evident. The airport has three times Addison has 44 commercial structures on on the Dallas property.

While the airport has been stuck in nee been in free fall. Retailers have high-tailed an outdated shopping center behind. Resi property is repurposed.

This year, the City Council hired the U ideas for resuscitating the mall. Experts d mixed-use village. They called for a public creating a tax-increment-financing distric ping center and the airport. And they told

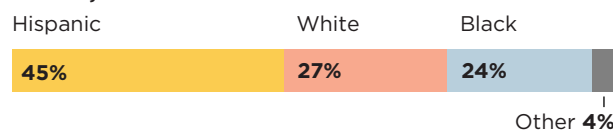
So far, council members have shown lit asm for investing public dollars in this pro that would reinvest in this neighborhood

And, perhaps, the area could indeed be

*Dallas Morning News editorial writer Collee of the editorial board. Her e-mail address is*

### Citywide

#### RACE, ETHNICITY



Population increased **23 percent** from 1990 to 2008.

**31 percent** of residents age 5 and older speak Spanish at home.

#### POVERTY, INCOME

**21%** **\$72,572** **\$23,912**

Households with children living in poverty in 2008 | Average adjusted gross income in 2005 | Per capita income in 2008

#### EMPLOYMENT 2008

**6%** **7%** **15%**

Males age 16 and older who were unemployed | Females age 16 and older who were unemployed | Workers who spent 45 minutes or more commuting to work each way

#### WHERE EARNINGS ARE GOING

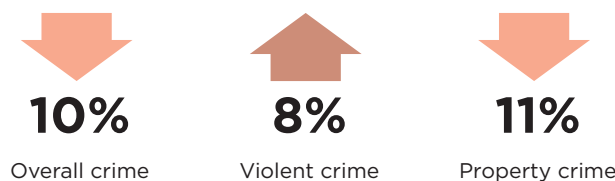
In 2008, Dallas residents spent an average of \$17,166 on goods and services, or 72 percent of per capita income. (The survey method we used based goods and services on items that fall under the headings within the Yellow Pages.)

Dallas has 394 banks.

#### PROPERTY

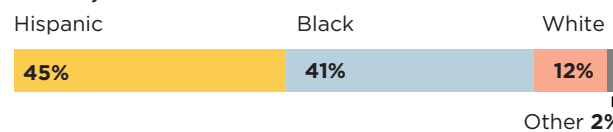
**\$111,600** Average home property value

#### CRIME 2007-08



### Grand South Dallas

#### RACE, ETHNICITY



Population declined **10 percent** from 1990 to 2008.

**36 percent** of residents age 5 and older speak Spanish at home.

#### POVERTY, INCOME

**42%** **\$28,549** **\$12,529**

Households with children living in poverty in 2008 | Average adjusted gross income in 2005 | Per capita income in 2008

#### EMPLOYMENT 2008

**16%** **22%** **19%**

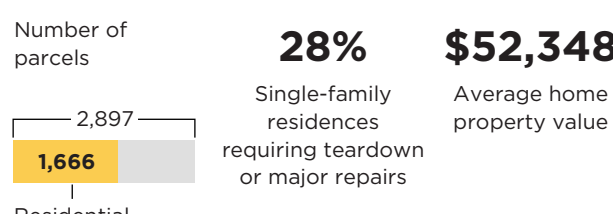
Males age 16 and older who were unemployed | Females age 16 and older who were unemployed | Workers who spent 45 minutes or more commuting to work each way

#### WHERE EARNINGS ARE GOING

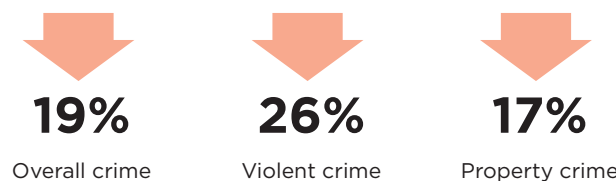
Residents spent roughly \$11,158 each on goods and services, or 89 percent of per capita income.

This base has eight banks.

#### PROPERTY



#### CRIME 2007-08



### Pleasant Grove Crossroads

#### RACE, ETHNICITY



Population increased **16 percent** from 1990 to 2008.

**55 percent** of residents age 5 and older speak Spanish at home.

#### POVERTY, INCOME

**22%** **\$24,709** **\$9,929**

Households with children living in poverty in 2008 | Average adjusted gross income in 2005 | Per capita income in 2008

#### EMPLOYMENT 2008

**8%** **11%** **24%**

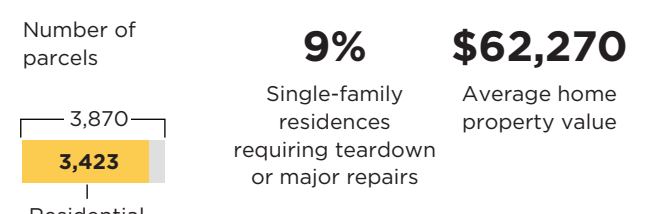
Males age 16 and older who were unemployed | Females age 16 and older who were unemployed | Workers who spent 45 minutes or more commuting to work each way

#### WHERE EARNINGS ARE GOING

Residents spent roughly \$10,990 each on goods and services, or 111 percent of per capita income. This suggests that, on average, they spent more money than they made.

There are no banks in this base.

#### PROPERTY



#### CRIME 2007-08





# hoods, one year later

airport exist —  
the political will

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tal and relatively new homes, this  
destination neighborhoods. But an  
stalled out.

ut never built. Hundreds of acres  
undeveloped. “For sale” signs dot  
the commercial centers. And South-  
retail gem, is dying an agonizing,

Red Bird’s untapped potential.  
e and how the airport could be an  
political will — have been lacking.  
ed Bird’s underutilized assets, the

ilies with decent incomes want to  
Policy Research found that the area  
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with kids.

an neighborhood, 83 percent of  
ma. Per capita income lags behind  
that of the four other neighborhoods

to the new and affordable houses;  
ood, very good or excellent condi-  
houses live on small islands of rela-  
ed property and aging apartment  
d commercial — are abundant.  
Highway 67 and straddling In-  
-family homes 5 to 1. Too many of  
ecline and are in danger of going  
d Bird’s economy, crumbling, crime-  
andscape.

ining momentum rests with the

ms to spur development on the  
s Executive Airport. But little prog-  
the acreage of Addison Airport, but  
its campus, compared with just 12

tral, Southwest Center Mall has  
it to the suburbs, leaving a shell of  
idents are likely to follow unless the

urban Land Institute to offer its best  
rew the outlines of a plan for a  
-private partnership and suggested  
ct that would include both the shop-  
the city to hurry.

ttle urgency and even less enthusi-  
ject. But at the least, creating a TIF  
would give it a fighting chance.  
come Red Bird Renewed.

McCain Nelson wrote this on behalf  
cmccain@dallasnews.com.

## THE HEART OF OAK CLIFF

Progress on education encouraging,  
but retail options are still inadequate

When you hear people talk about the future of Texas, you don’t have to conjure up images of what our state will look like and the challenges it will face. You can see it today in The Heart of Oak Cliff, a stretch of the city from Jefferson Boulevard south to Illinois Avenue and from Marsalis Avenue west to Edgefield Avenue.

In those blocks, you get a snapshot of a state that is becoming more Latino and less Anglo, is filled with young, working families who can’t yet make the middle class, and is trying to turn students from immigrant families into passionate learners with a vision for their lives.

We explained last year that we selected this slice of the city because of its mirror-image qualities. A year later, we have more data to support that choice. Consider these statistics on the neighborhood from the Institute for Urban Policy Research:

- The Hispanic population has grown 79 percent since 1990.
  - The median age is lower than the city’s as a whole, and residents have about \$45,000 less in adjusted gross income.
  - Fifty-one percent of the residents over 25 lack a high school diploma.
- These realities almost precisely reflect the projections of Texas demographer Steve Murdock. In looking at the next 40 years, his studies show Texas’ Latino population growing fast, Texas household incomes going down and the number of Texans without a high school diploma going up.

Now, some will turn away from these realities, as if they describe a foreign land. They don’t. They describe our city, our state and our future. If we don’t invest in these neighborhoods, we fail to invest in ourselves.

The good news is that there are gains over the last year to build upon. The schools in The Heart of Oak Cliff especially have shown impressive strides.

- This year, both Adamson and Sunset high schools earned the Texas Education Agency’s second-highest ranking for their performance on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills. For both schools, the recognition represented several years of serious education reforms.
- Greiner Middle School again earned a recognized ranking. Only seven of Dallas’ 33 other middle schools earned that distinction or higher.
- Four elementary schools that draw students from these neighborhoods earned the coveted recognized ranking: Winnetka, Rosemont, Botello and Henderson.

Even in this economy, there are business developments to cheer.

We’re particularly excited that City Council member Delia Jasso has convened a Jefferson Boulevard task force of merchants, neighbors and community leaders to figure out the best ways to grow the boulevard, which has become the “Latino downtown of Dallas.” Among the ideas for Jefferson are a monthly *mercado* to showcase the boulevard and its vendors.

But there remains a mighty gap between this neighborhood and the north. For all the encouraging school data, students still are far from routinely ready for college.

Likewise, there was virtually no diversifying of the retail options along Jefferson and in the nearby Wynnewood Village shopping center. Dollar stores, bridal shops and check-cashing shops prevail, limiting residents’ choices and the area’s economic growth.

Over the next year, we will keep pushing for a greater economic diversity there. We will promote ways to get more students ready for college. And we will press City Hall to invest in the economic and social capital of the area.

The way we look at it, neither Dallas nor Texas can afford anything less.

Dallas Morning News editorial columnist William McKenzie wrote this on behalf of the editorial board. His e-mail address is [wmckenzie@dallasnews.com](mailto:wmckenzie@dallasnews.com).

## WEST DALLAS GATEWAY

Residents starting to chip away at  
crime, education, housing gridlock

Crime is down in the West Dallas Gateway, in part because of increased police patrols and heroic efforts by a nonprofit organization to buy out a recalcitrant landlord whose more than 40 substandard residential properties had blighted the community for decades.

How bad were these trouble spots? Acquiring and bulldozing just one, a notorious haven for illicit activity, meant dozens fewer police calls. Now dozens of new homes are poised to rise from the leveled ground. We’d like to see that happen sooner rather than later because vacant land represents 28 percent of this neighborhood’s real estate.

City code enforcers also have gotten results, not by being tougher but by working smarter. Instead of peppering properties with tickets, they’re walking the streets and knocking on doors to track down owners. Neighbors used to look the other way. Now many have become the inspectors’ eyes and ears. We set this type of action last year as a measure of progress for West Dallas, and it’s definitely a step forward.

Longtime residents like Arrvel Wilson are glad to see these breakthroughs begin to transform the way others think about their community. Except for a stint in the military, the pastor of West Dallas Community Church has lived in West Dallas since 1949 and has seen many other promising starts fade quickly. But for the first time in a long time, Wilson and many others in the neighborhood see more than glimmers of hope in new efforts to fight crime, build homes and educate children.

“West Dallas has seen a lot of empty promises,” said Wilson, 63. “But there is a new day.”

However, Wilson is also a realist who concedes that the task is far from complete. Education remains this area’s most vexing problem. According to the Institute for Urban Policy Research, about 63 percent of residents over age 25 lack a high school diploma in the West Dallas Gateway, bounded by Hampton Road, Canada Drive and Singleton Boulevard. Thirty-four percent don’t have a ninth-grade education, more than twice the citywide rate.

The area’s elementary and middle schools are a mix of academic successes and setbacks.

And at the high school level, Pinkston is rated academically unacceptable and faces an uncertain future, even as Principal Norma Villegas works to change the school’s culture. Such uncertainty detracts from the neighborhood’s appeal and helps create an atmosphere of instability.

The good news is that residents are confronting the neighborhood’s educational challenges. For example, while parents here certainly care about their children, many don’t know how to help them with homework or what teachers expect of students. So the Dallas Concilio, a nonprofit Hispanic service organization, now conducts classes to help parents fill in these blanks. Likewise, El Centro Community College recently opened a campus across from Pinkston with the goal of becoming a resource for students. Southern Methodist University also has committed its vast educational resources to help area nonprofits promote success here.

Better education leads to better jobs, stable neighborhoods and less crime; it provides successful youngsters with a reason to return to and invest in the communities they were raised in.

West Dallas Gateway’s long-term success depends on sustaining the emerging partnerships and energy. It is breaking the gridlock of neglect and abuse but still needs more victories on crime, education and housing to continue to move forward.

Dallas Morning News editorial writer Jim Mitchell wrote this on behalf of the editorial board. His e-mail address is [jmitchell@dallasnews.com](mailto:jmitchell@dallasnews.com).

## Red Bird Renewed

### RACE, ETHNICITY



Population increased **52 percent** from 1990 to 2008.

**8 percent** of residents age 5 and older speak Spanish at home.

### POVERTY, INCOME

**24%**    **\$23,477**    **\$14,335**

Households with children living in poverty in 2008

Average adjusted gross income in 2005

Per capita income in 2008

### EMPLOYMENT 2008

**12%**    **11%**    **23%**

Males age 16 and older who were unemployed

Females age 16 and older who were unemployed

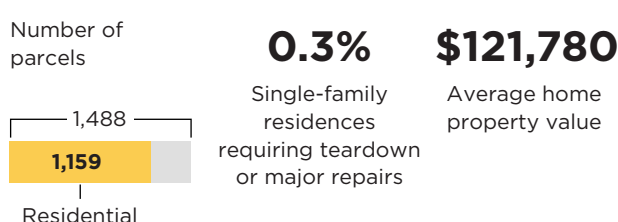
Workers who spent 45 minutes or more commuting to work each way

### WHERE EARNINGS ARE GOING

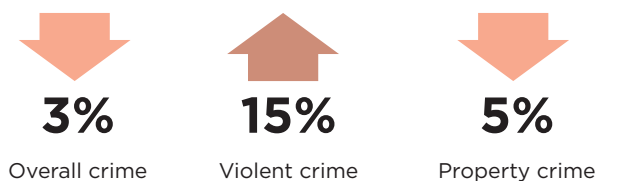
Residents spent roughly \$13,323 each on goods and services, or 93 percent of per capita income.

This base has six banks.

### PROPERTY



### CRIME 2007-08



## The Heart of Oak Cliff

### RACE, ETHNICITY



Population increased **14 percent** from 1990 to 2008.

**63 percent** of residents age 5 and older speak Spanish at home.

### POVERTY, INCOME

**18%**    **\$28,540**    **\$13,010**

Households with children living in poverty in 2008

Average adjusted gross income in 2005

Per capita income in 2008

### EMPLOYMENT 2008

**6%**    **10%**    **18%**

Males age 16 and older who were unemployed

Females age 16 and older who were unemployed

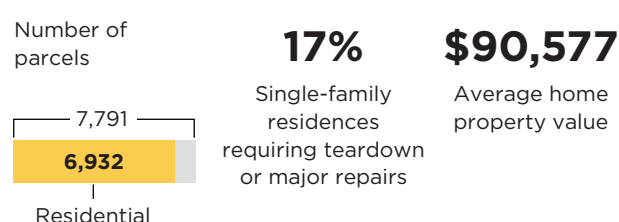
Workers who spent 45 minutes or more commuting to work each way

### WHERE EARNINGS ARE GOING

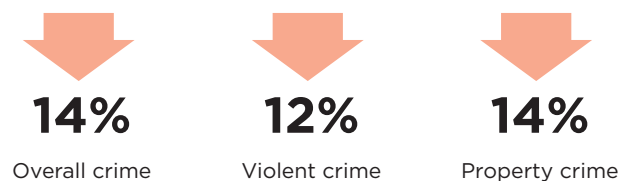
Residents spent roughly \$12,208 each on goods and services, or 94 percent of per capita income.

This base has eight banks.

### PROPERTY



### CRIME 2007-08



## West Dallas Gateway

### RACE, ETHNICITY



Population declined **10 percent** from 1990 to 2008.

**54 percent** of residents age 5 and older speak Spanish at home.

### POVERTY, INCOME

**27%**    **\$22,979**    **\$10,357**

Households with children living in poverty in 2008

Average adjusted gross income in 2005

Per capita income in 2008

### EMPLOYMENT 2008

**7%**    **20%**    **18%**

Males age 16 and older who were unemployed

Females age 16 and older who were unemployed

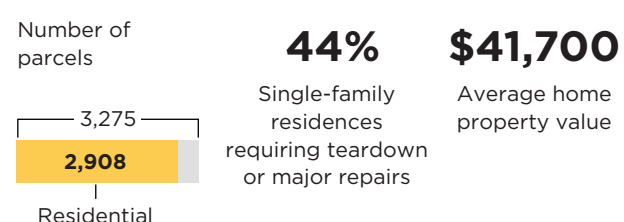
Workers who spent 45 minutes or more commuting to work each way

### WHERE EARNINGS ARE GOING

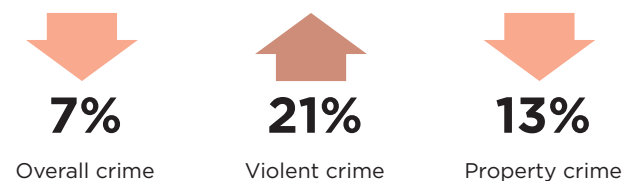
Residents spent roughly \$10,700 each on goods and services, or 103 percent of per capita income. This suggests that, on average, they spent more money than they made.

There are no banks in this base.

### PROPERTY



### CRIME 2007-08





# Robberson

Continued from Page 1P

and property values remain depressed, a higher tax burden shifts to those in the north.

Some might argue that bad economic conditions and budget shortfalls make it impossible to address these problems right now. Yes, officials have an obligation to balance the budget. That doesn't, however, let them off the hook for finding fiscally responsible ways to remedy generations-old developmental imbalances.

Finding solutions will be harder when there's less money, but that's not an excuse to keep putting off southern Dallas' problems until better times roll around. It just means being more innovative and persistent in inching toward the goal of making our city whole.

The Institute for Urban Policy Research culled scores of federal, state and local databases for statistics quantifying the extent of the north-south disparity. Additionally, it sent researchers into five specific neighborhoods to assess such criteria as housing conditions, street maintenance, the presence of street lamps and obvious code violations. The teams even noted where paint was peeling and stray dogs were present.

The five neighborhoods — in parts of West Dallas, Oak Cliff, Red Bird, Pleasant Grove and South Dallas-Fair Park — were chosen based on their potential for progress that could radiate outward. The database and some of the interactive "windshield maps" are available online at [dallasnews.com/opinion/northsouth](http://dallasnews.com/opinion/northsouth).

It is important to note that the statistics related to our five bases do not necessarily represent all of southern Dallas. They are, at best, a snapshot of the conditions likely to be faced by residents of areas with similar demographic and income characteristics. Many of the problems reflected on the windshield maps may have been fixed by now; others may have arisen.

## Help residents help themselves

Dallas-area politicians have widely

varying approaches about the best way to fix the problems in southern Dallas. Some favor a comprehensive approach that would address multiple fronts simultaneously: roads, schools, jobs, investment, code enforcement and crime, to name a few. Their energy and drive is commendable, but they cannot succeed without broader support. These problems developed over decades, and fixing them will require years of unwavering effort.

Other politicians have remained largely silent, as if these problems somehow are best left to fix themselves. Rest assured, they will not. Nor will elected officials find solutions by leading solely from the City Council chamber or school board auditorium. Just as it requires extensive behind-the-scenes efforts by top leaders to bulldoze a hot-sheet motel or open a new supermarket, leadership also means inspiring people to start helping themselves.

For example, our statistics show that large percentages of parents and children still don't understand how their behavior affects progress toward a solution. Far too many southern Dallas generations have grown up receiving the wrong message.

In the West Dallas Gateway base, for example, 11 percent of births in 2008 were to teen mothers, and 68 percent were to unmarried mothers. Fifty-five percent of births were to mothers who dropped out of high school. This is where the cycle begins. Children in many such homes are being raised by mothers who are kids themselves, with minimal parenting skills and limited income-generating potential. Statistics indicate that children who grow up in that atmosphere are more likely than other kids to repeat the example of their parents.

What other wrong messages are our children getting? In the Pleasant Grove Crossroads base, more than half of residents 25 and older have no high school diploma. Nearly a third didn't get past ninth grade. The neighborhood's per capita income in 2008 was \$9,929 — less than half the citywide average. And yet 90 percent of Pleasant Grove households have at least one car. More than half own two to five cars.

Could parents in this Pleasant Grove neighborhood be sending their kids the message that "success" means

## Behind the research

The Institute for Urban Policy Research at the University of Texas at Dallas provided the research and legwork for this "Bridging Dallas' North-South Gap" project. In addition to culling and crunching many data sources regarding the property and residents of our five base neighborhoods — and the city as a whole — the institute also conducted a detailed, visual "windshield survey" of the neighborhoods.

Surveyors from the institute's Community Research Team went street by street in each neighborhood from December 2008 to January 2009. The team, whose members live and work in southern Dallas, had specific tools and instructions to collect information on land use (parks, commercial uses, parking, vacant lot, etc.) and physical condition of every street.

They also graded housing conditions according to a specific list of criteria and made numerous quality-of-life observations about, for instance, street lights, sidewalks and gutters.

This information was fed into a mapping program that allows users to compare characteristics by neighborhood.

The team also created a second database making use of existing demographic surveys and public statistical records, using the most up-to-date numbers available from the various institutions. The database provides a snapshot and speaks only to the specific neighborhoods we selected. And in some cases, the data can only approximate conditions in our bases because government surveying boundaries, such as ZIP codes, don't always match up with the boundaries we've selected.

earning enough to buy cars, rather than finishing high school and maybe going on to college? For those adults, perhaps, success isn't defined by climbing the professional ladder. It might be simply getting a job — any job — and earning enough to buy the material necessities they lacked growing up.

Maybe it's just coincidence, but until May, the two worst-performing Dallas high schools were both in the Pleasant Grove area — H. Grady Spruce and W.W. Samuell. Dropout rates at those schools remain high,

despite the school district's best efforts to retain students. If the message students are getting from their parents doesn't match the message they're getting from teachers — that education should be the first priority — then little is likely to change.

If this theory is correct, it should apply to other areas with similar demographics.

The Pleasant Grove and West Dallas bases have similar rates of low-earning Hispanics. In West Dallas, where per capita income was \$10,357 in 2008, 43 percent of households own two to five vehicles. Materially, West Dallas residents seem to be coping well, but they face severe educational deficits. The area's high school — Pinkston — joins Samuell and Spruce among DISD's lowest achievers.

If high schools aren't performing in these areas, it means a new generation of low-skilled young adults is preparing to enter the job market, helping perpetuate the cycle that holds most of southern Dallas down.

In all three of those struggling schools, DISD pumped massive amounts of time and energy this year into programs to raise students' scores on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills and to get parents more involved in helping their children improve academically. Did it bust the budget? Not at all, because the effort relied heavily on volunteerism and self-help.

Can DISD do better? It must, because eight of the city's 12 most-troubled high schools are in southern Dallas, and our statistics show that they have been consistently short-changed in terms of average class sizes and teacher-experience levels. Although Pinkston and Spruce improved significantly on their TAKS scores, they remained on the academically unacceptable list, partly because of dropout rates. The solution will call for dozens of strategies — from curriculum improvements to teacher training. But DISD can't do it alone. Parents play an integral role in keeping their children in school.

## The killer commute

Is it realistic, though, to demand greater parental involvement, considering the other pressures southern Dallas parents face? These workers,

on average, must commute greater distances than those in northern Dallas to jobs that pay far less. Citywide, about one out of seven workers spends 45 minutes or more commuting to work. But about one out of four Red Bird Renewed and Pleasant Grove Crossroads workers faces a daily, one-way commute of 45 to 90 minutes.

Think about it: Ninety minutes one-way means a round-trip commute of three hours a day. Anyone spending that much time going to and from work is bound to have far less time to devote to proper parenting or cooking healthy food. As a result, federal statistics show, health problems such as obesity are much higher among populations with low incomes. Obesity, in particular, drops when leisure time increases and healthy food choices are more available. A healthier southern Dallas is definitely in the financial interests of northern Dallas taxpayers.

Not only do southern Dallas residents have to travel longer distances to work, they also earn less than average. Much less. The average adjusted gross income of a Red Bird base wage-earner, for example, is only one-third of the citywide average.

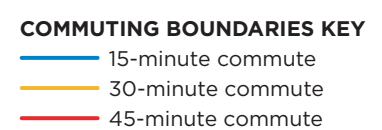
Meanwhile, Dallas-area employers are spending more to locate their businesses in the north, despite the availability of cheap, expanses of land in the south. If, at the same time, southern Dallas workers are spending more money and commuting time to reach low-paying jobs in the expensive north, wouldn't everyone benefit if more of those employers were in southern Dallas?

Of course, many businesses refuse to consider southern Dallas because of its image as a high-crime area full of shacks and garbage. Interestingly, the crime rate is falling across southern Dallas and is lower, per capita, than in northern Dallas. According to official police statistics, two of the highest-crime areas of Dallas are in ZIP codes 75231 and 75243, which are within a mile of the city's most high-profile mall, NorthPark Center. Yet business investment thrives there.

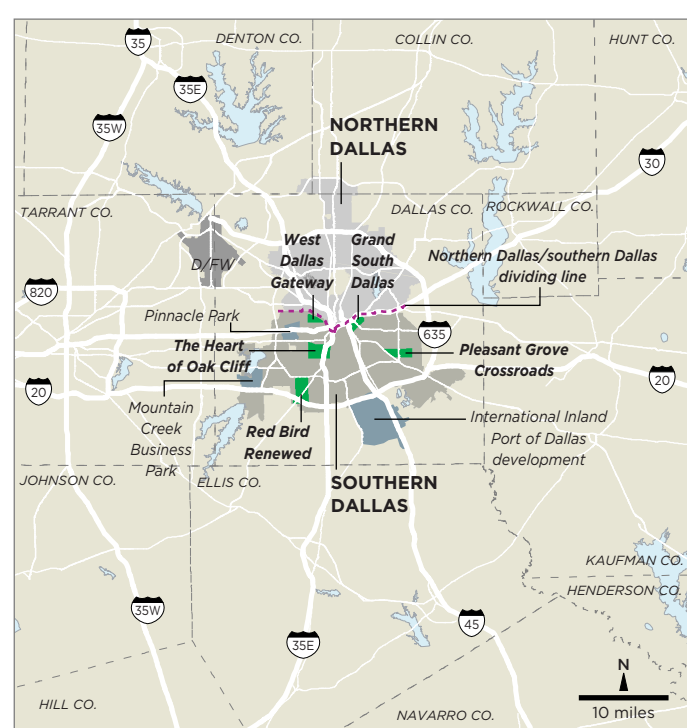
When it comes to investing in southern Dallas, "the biggest drawback, to be real truthful, is the perception," says Leppert, the mayor. "There's a lot of things that have happened, and that certainly doesn't

## A look at commuting patterns

On average, southern Dallas workers have to commute farther than Dallas residents citywide to get to where the jobs are. Here's a look at estimated commuting boundaries for each of the focus neighborhoods:

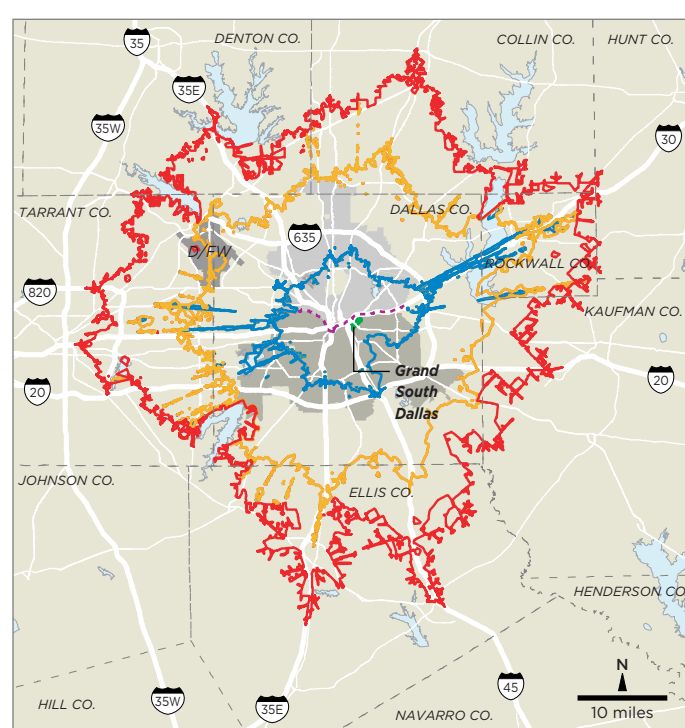


### Area overview



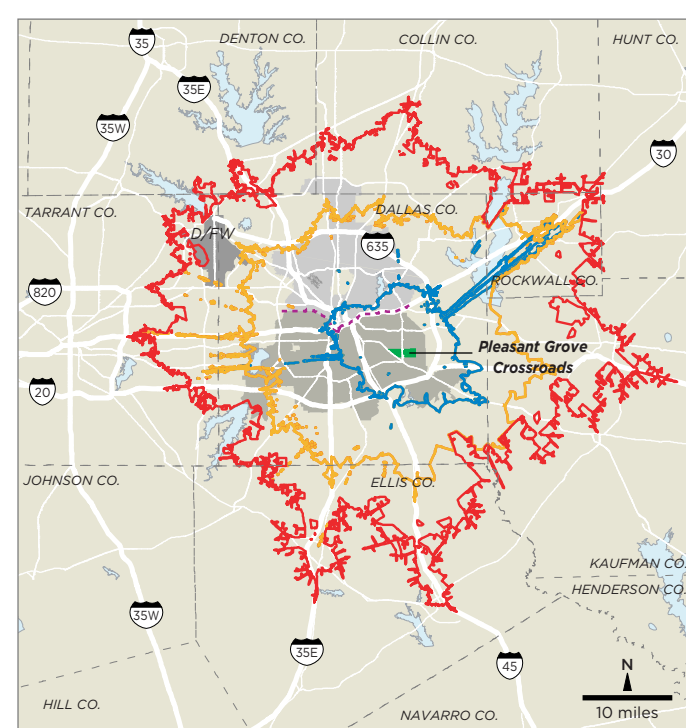
Average citywide salary paid in 2006: **\$50,342**  
 2008 unemployment: **6% males; 7% females** (age 16 and older)  
 2008 per capita income: **\$23,912**  
 Those who commute 45 minutes or more to work each way: **15%**

### Grand South Dallas



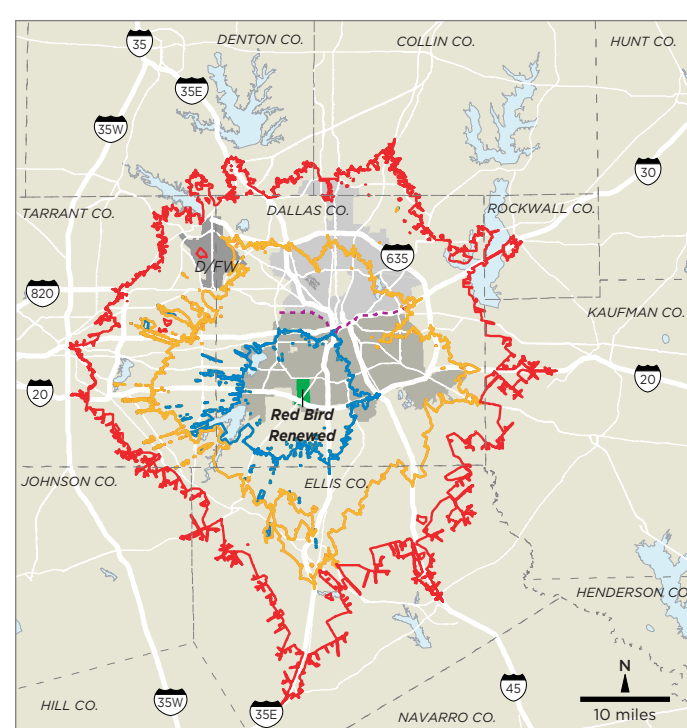
Average salary paid by employers in 2006: **\$41,534**  
 2008 unemployment: **16% males; 22% females**  
 2008 per capita income: **\$12,529**  
 Those who commute 45 minutes or more to work each way: **19%**

### Pleasant Grove Crossroads



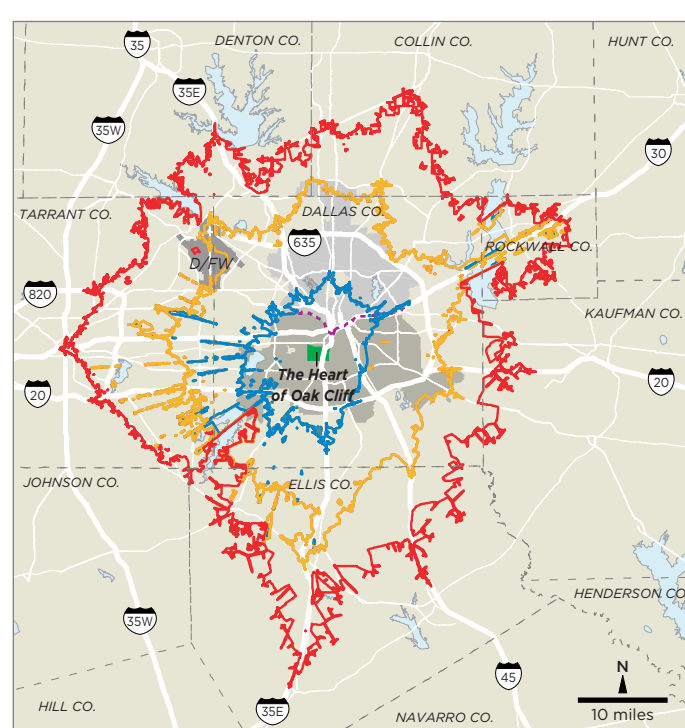
Average salary paid by employers in 2006: **\$40,885**  
 2008 unemployment: **8% males; 11% females**  
 2008 per capita income: **\$9,929**  
 Those who commute 45 minutes or more to work each way: **24%**

### Red Bird Renewed



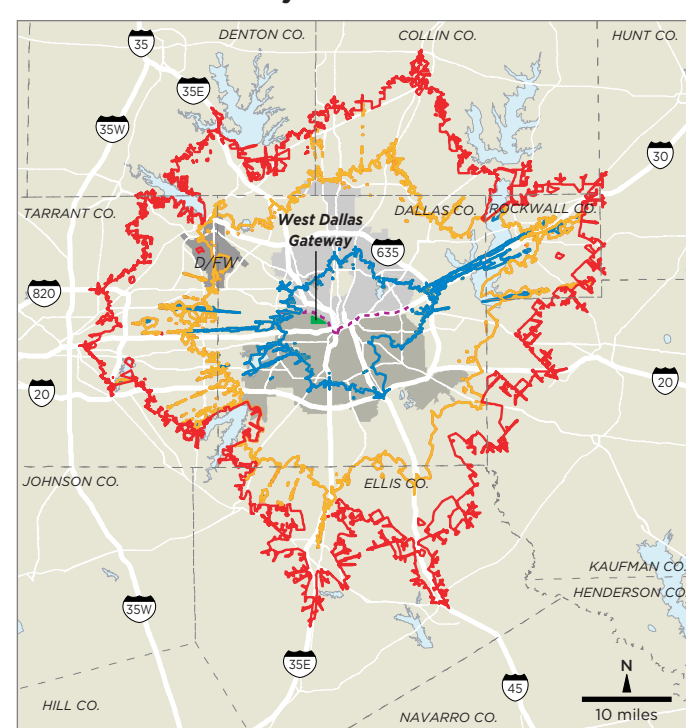
Average salary paid by employers in 2006: **\$30,095**  
 2008 unemployment: **12% males; 11% females**  
 2008 per capita income: **\$14,335**  
 Those who commute 45 minutes or more to work each way: **23%**

### The Heart of Oak Cliff



Average salary paid by employers in 2006: **\$35,356**  
 2008 unemployment: **6% males; 10% females**  
 2008 per capita income: **\$13,010**  
 Those who commute 45 minutes or more to work each way: **18%**

### West Dallas Gateway



Average salary paid by employers in 2006: **\$38,423**  
 2008 unemployment: **7% males; 20% females**  
 2008 per capita income: **\$10,357**  
 Those who commute 45 minutes or more to work each way: **18%**

SOURCES: Institute for Urban Policy Research; Claritas

TOM SETZER/Staff Artist



**Dallas citywide rates**

- 29 percent of population age 25 and over has no high school diploma.
- 15 percent has less than a ninth-grade education.
- 6 percent of births were to teen mothers.
- 51 percent of births were to unmarried mothers.
- 46 percent of births were to mothers who didn't finish high school.

**Grand South Dallas**

- 59 percent of population age 25 and older has no high school diploma.
- 29 percent has less than a ninth-grade education.
- 12 percent of births were to teen mothers.
- 83 percent of births were to unmarried mothers.
- 38 percent of births were to mothers who didn't finish high school.

**Pleasant Grove Crossroads**

- 57 percent of population age 25 and older has no high school diploma.
- 30 percent has less than a ninth-grade education.
- 7 percent of births were to teen mothers.
- 51 percent of births were to unmarried mothers.
- 64 percent of births were to mothers who didn't finish high school.

**Red Bird Renewed**

- 17 percent of population age 25 and older has no high school diploma.
- 2 percent has less than a ninth-grade education.
- 6 percent of births were to teen mothers.
- 72 percent of births were to unmarried mothers.
- 27 percent of births were to mothers who didn't finish high school.

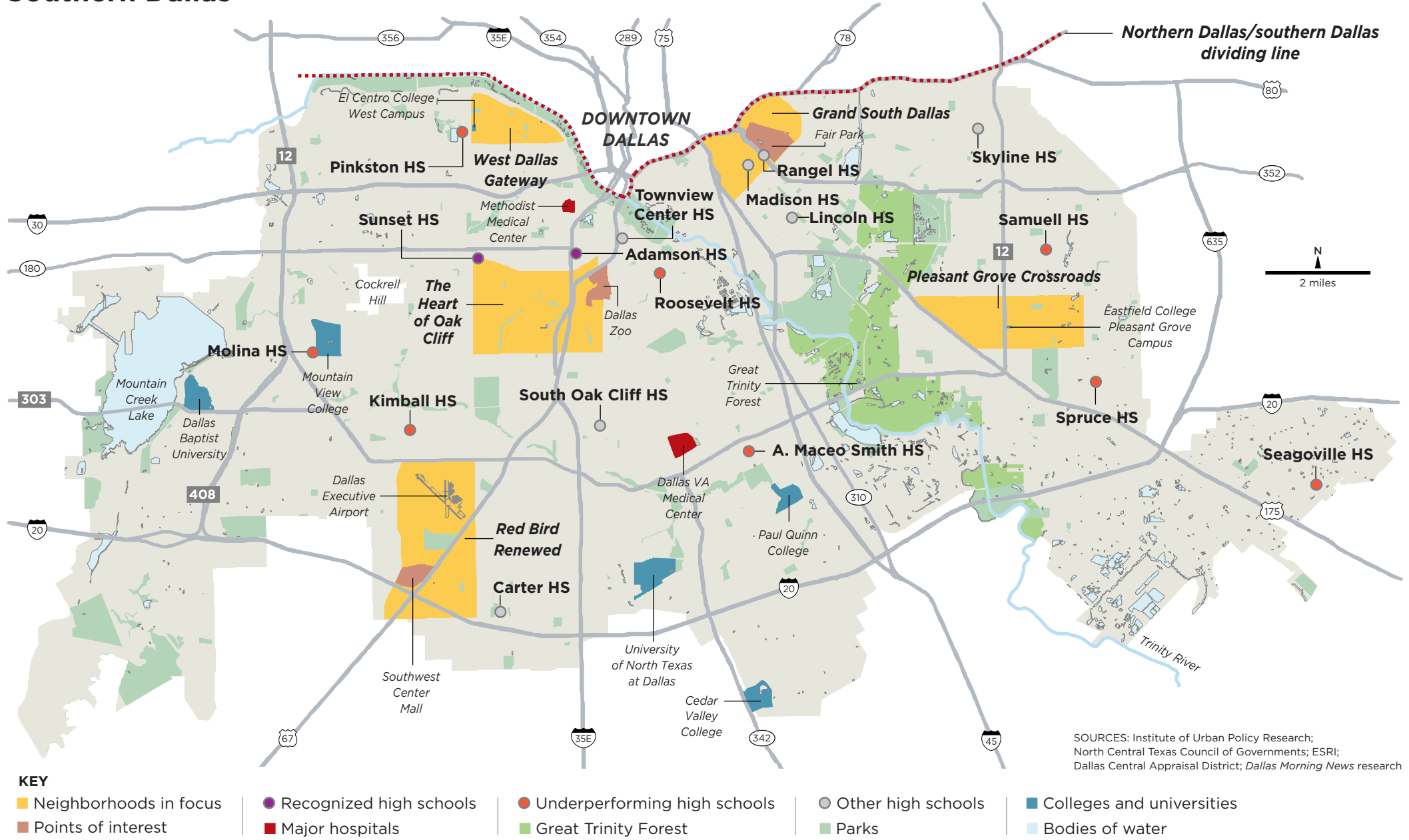
**The Heart of Oak Cliff**

- 51 percent of population age 25 and older has no high school diploma.
- 30 percent has less than a ninth-grade education.
- 9 percent of births were to teen mothers.
- 52 percent of births were to unmarried mothers.
- 55 percent of births were to mothers who didn't finish high school.

**West Dallas Gateway**

- 63 percent of population age 25 and over has no high school diploma.
- 34 percent has less than a ninth-grade education.
- 11 percent of births were to teen mothers.
- 68 percent of births were to unmarried mothers.
- 55 percent of births were to mothers who didn't finish high school.

**Southern Dallas**



**KEY**  
 ■ Neighborhoods in focus | ● Recognized high schools | ● Underperforming high schools | ● Other high schools | ■ Colleges and universities  
 ■ Points of interest | ■ Major hospitals | ■ Great Trinity Forest | ■ Parks | ■ Bodies of water

SOURCES: Institute of Urban Policy Research; North Central Texas Council of Governments; ESRI; Dallas Central Appraisal District; Dallas Morning News research

TOM SETZER/Staff Artist

**Underperforming high schools\***

	Average teaching experience	Teacher turnover rate	Student-teacher ratio	Student attendance rate	Students meeting college-ready standards			
					Math	Reading	Science	Social Studies
<b>Districtwide</b>	11.5 years	11.4%	13.8 to 1	81%	30%	33%	18%	45%
<b>Kimball</b>	14.7 years	15%	12 to 1	78%	6%	20%	4%	30%
<b>Roosevelt</b>	10.3 years	27%	10 to 1	68%	6%	14%	6%	36%
<b>Seagoville</b>	15.4 years	16%	12 to 1	83%	12%	26%	9%	46%
<b>Pinkston</b>	9.2 years	31%	18 to 1	69%	6%	12%	4%	19%
<b>A. Maceo Smith</b>	9.8 years	24%	25 to 1	66%	4%	19%	4%	30%
<b>Molina**</b>	10.8 years	14%	14 to 1	91%	14%	26%	9%	38%
<b>Samuell</b>	10.3 years	26%	25 to 1	75%	7%	16%	3%	29%
<b>Spruce</b>	10.7 years	16%	12 to 1	76%	4%	14%	2%	27%

\* Schools that were listed "academically unacceptable" for at least two of the last five years \*\* This fall, Molina achieved recognized status  
 SOURCES: Dallas Independent School District; Texas Education Agency

TROY OXFORD/Staff Artist

mean there's not more to do. ... But we still deal, unfortunately, with the perception that southern Dallas is a bad place for business investment.

Let's be careful not to raise expectations beyond reason; southern Dallas workers wouldn't necessarily make more money if more businesses relocated there. But workers certainly would spend less on car and mass-transit expenses getting to their jobs, and they might at least have the option of spending more time at home because of the shorter commute. That represents a net increase in disposable income and quality of life. It also means more time to spend parenting.

**Where to start**

The research by the Institute for Urban Policy Research confirms that the two priorities for bridging the north-south gap must be jobs and education. Both are tricky problems to attack during a recession, but it can be done within existing budgetary constraints. Here are places to start:

**1. The mayor's office**

Leppert has raised the city's profile and attacked problems with admirable dedication. Let's take it to the next level: a concerted, national or international campaign to bring big employers to southern Dallas, building on what the mayor has already done during trips to Mexico and China. As Leppert has pointed out, there already are three excellent southern Dallas sites for transport, big-box and warehousing

companies to set up shop, at the International Inland Port of Dallas, Pinnacle Park and Mountain Creek Business Park.

Over the next 15 months, DART rail's Green Line will establish a new potential business corridor between Pleasant Grove and South Dallas-Fair Park. It's imperative that developers see the possibility of locating affordable big-box stores like Kmart or Target on available land along U.S. Highway 175, close to rail stops in Pleasant Grove. Our statistics show that the heavily car-dependent residents of Pleasant Grove may need some persuasion to use DART rail but that South Dallas residents will depend on it. So the rail lines can help create an inter-neighborhood commercial and employment synergy that will benefit both communities and better suit their transit-oriented developmental needs.

"I would love for the national economy to be better," Leppert responded when questioned on this issue.

Fair point. But this is exactly the time when major corporations are searching for bargains. And as the mayor himself says, there's no better deal than southern Dallas for the availability of cheap land and vast human resources aided by city-funded training centers.

Now is the time to market it vigorously. Corporate America is taking a fresh look at production models and seeing new merit in domestic markets vs. outsourced production in developing countries. Consider these comments in June by General Electric's chief executive officer, Jeffrey Immelt:

"Inside the company we're doing real decision-making about: have we outsourced too much capability in [foreign] areas? And if so, what should we bring back, and where should we put it?"

General Electric is looking at labor costs and locations to see where it can get the best deal for its money. "In the places where you have relatively high labor costs, they've got to be more productive" if they have any hope of competing on a global basis, he says.

Clearly, southern Dallas has the marketable mix of low labor costs and competitively priced land close to major shipping routes. It's time to start presenting these as selling points for our city. Our mayor has the corporate credibility to present this case authoritatively, and he can do it without busting the budget.

**2. Council and school representatives**

City Council members and school board trustees can take their roles to the next level, too — particularly in regard to organizing and team-building efforts in their districts. Not to mention making certain that constituents receive accurate and constructive information about their neighborhoods and schools.

Remember that parents and grandparents who were raised without proper education and with minimal parenting skills are role models for new generations. This risks the perpetuation of a minority-dominated underclass in southern Dallas that is unable to qualify for good jobs and too poor to move elsewhere. While

there are active parents at Sunset High and numerous elementary schools, many areas are full of residents too busy struggling to survive to be involved with neighborhood associations and PTAs.

Waiting for people to get organized is no way to lead. It's not enough to attend the opening of a library and portray yourself as a "hands-on" council member or trustee. Leadership is organizing and attending community meetings, rallying neighborhoods and helping people take responsibility for their lives and their children's futures.

People just need help knowing how to get started. Once they're introduced to the basics of community leadership — and properly inspired by good examples — southern Dallas will have the tools for the high quality of neighborhood organization that has helped so many northern Dallas communities thrive.

"People need to understand that progress is being made," the mayor says. "Just don't give up."

**3. The business community**

In this economy, every dollar has to count. The mix of costs for labor, land and transportation should be the dominant factors guiding business decisions on where to locate offices, stores, warehouses and factories. We don't expect corporate decision-makers to base their decisions on altruistic notions of what's best for southern Dallas or righting historic wrongs, but rather what's best for business. And when they do the calculations, they will discover what em-

ployers such as FedEx, Union-Pacific Railroad, the Allen Group and Advanced H2O already have: Southern Dallas is where the numbers work best.

The University of North Texas Center for Economic Development and Research came to the same conclusion in a report three years ago: "Southern Dallas is ripe for new and expanded business investment."

Importantly, companies locating or expanding in the southern sector have access to a large and readily available pool of talented individuals with a broad range of skills. What's more, because many workers drive through southern Dallas on their way to and from work in other areas, many of them will respond to job opportunities closer to home."

**4. Religious and nonprofit groups**

Our research suggests that these groups are wise to follow the adage, "Give a man a fish, feed him for a day; teach a man to fish, feed him for a lifetime." Volunteers working each day to help the needy in southern Dallas might consider a new approach, relying less on giving and more on building a sense of self-reliance. For example, more can be done to raise awareness of the cross-generational damage caused by teen pregnancy and to teach proper parenting skills.

These groups also can help by organizing community meetings and pressuring trustees and City Council members to attend. The idea is to deliver the inspirational messages of hope and respon-

sibility that southern Dallas residents need to hear — again and again.

In addition, these groups could assist more with the team-building needed to raise the level of neighborhood activism, whether that be in reporting code violations or creating crime watch groups.

The message should be consistent with the goal: If you want better retail or better jobs closer to home, you must take steps to improve the attractiveness of your neighborhoods. If parents want a better life for their children, they will have to become better parents first.

These are four difficult — and perhaps lofty — goals. Some elected officials, business leaders and volunteer groups might be tempted to dismiss them as impossible.

Our challenge to them is, first, study the statistics in this section and on our Web site. Are existing efforts making the kinds of progress they should be? Are they enough? Finally, what better ideas are out there? We want to hear them.

One thing is clear: Accepting the status quo, as reflected in these statistics, is accepting perpetual imbalance and underperformance. Plans that provide little more than cosmetic or piecemeal fixes are not the answer. This is the call to action — not more excuses.



Dallas Morning News editorial writer Todd Robberson wrote this on behalf of the editorial board. His e-mail address is trobberson@dallasnews.com.



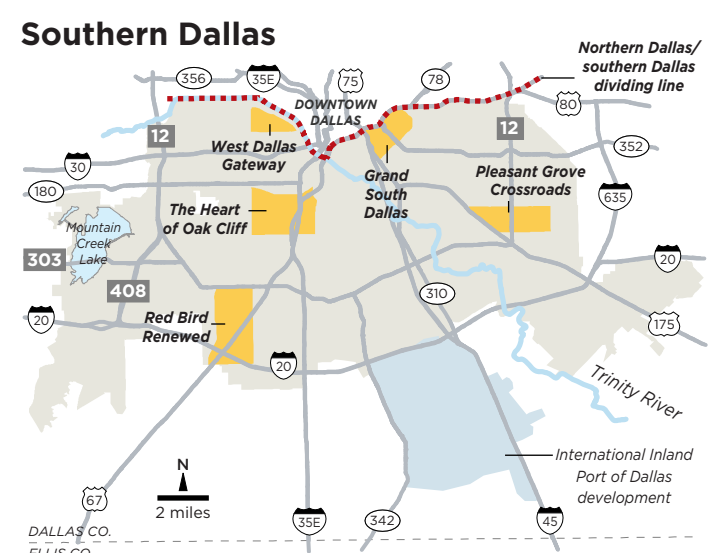
# State of decay

These maps, created by the University of Texas at Dallas' Institute for Urban Policy Research, provide a detailed picture of housing and street conditions in each of our southern Dallas focus neighborhoods.

While only a snapshot, they are evidence of a vicious cycle in the making.

Consider the miniscule amount of land used for commercial and retail purposes, noted in beige on each of the maps. When a neighborhood lacks commercial activity, it lacks business investment. Low retail and commercial activity means residents have to travel farther to get the goods and services they need. Without commerce, there's less money around to drive the local economy and create jobs.

That's the imbalance that the "Bridging Dallas' North-South Gap" crusade is advocating to change.



SOURCE: Institute for Urban Policy Research TOM SETZER/Staff Artist

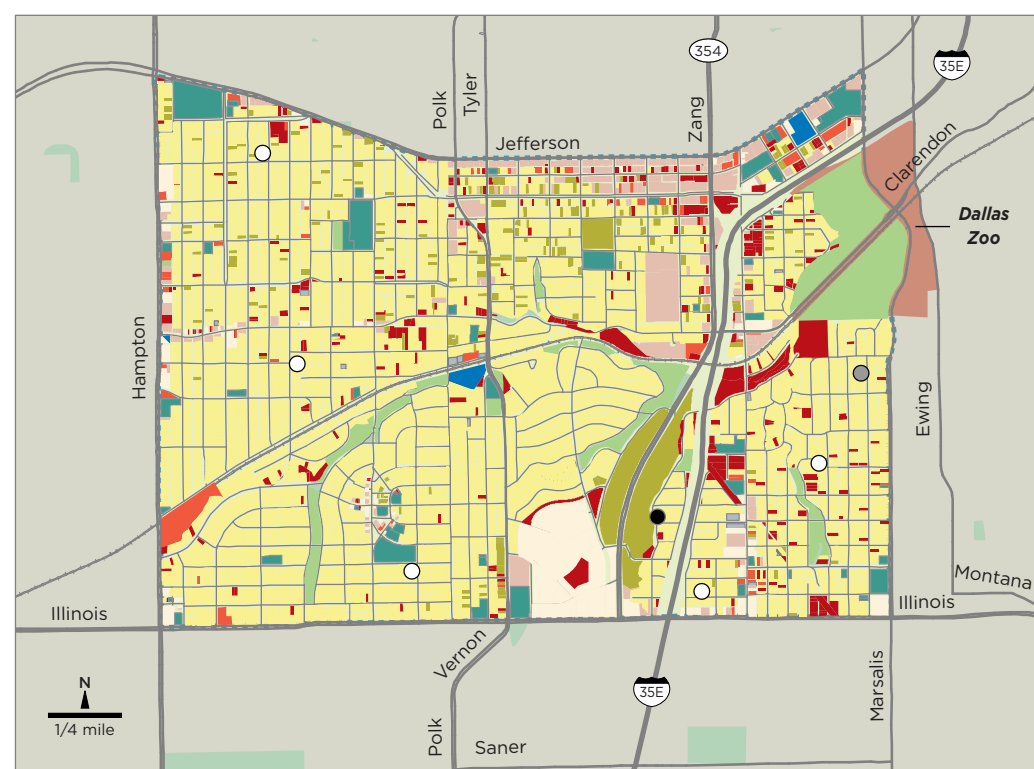
## Land parcel use

- Residential — Single-family
- Residential — Multifamily
- Commercial/retail
- Institutional
- Parks
- Vacant/undeveloped land
- Manufacturing/warehouse
- Service
- Parking
- Unknown

## Code violation signs

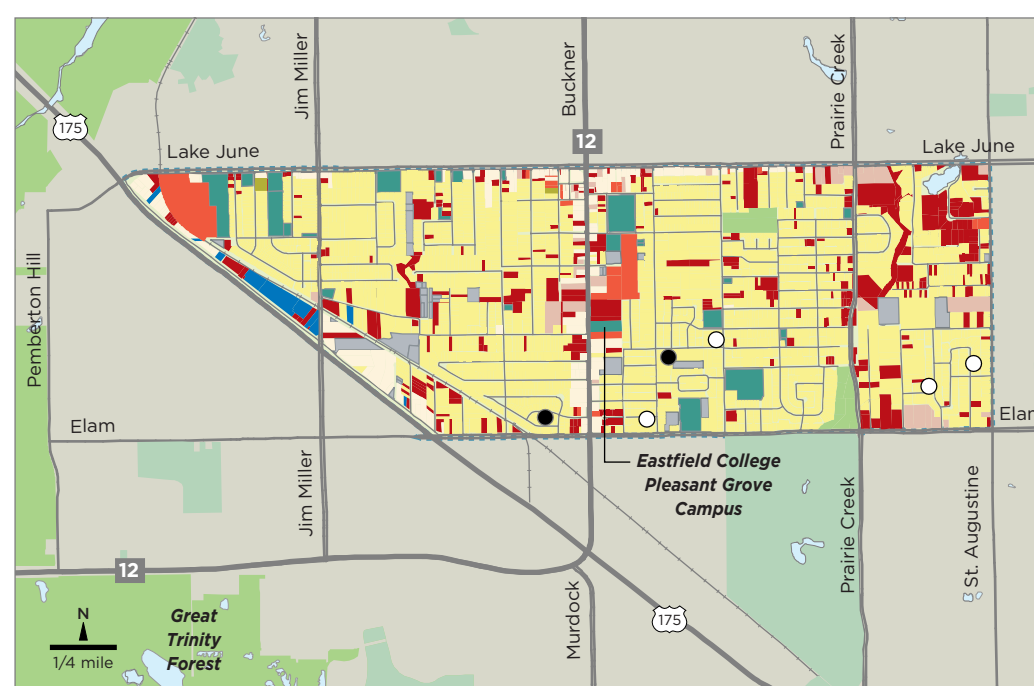
- Single-family residence locations with code violation signs posted
- Window only
- Yard only
- Yard and window

### Heart of Oak Cliff



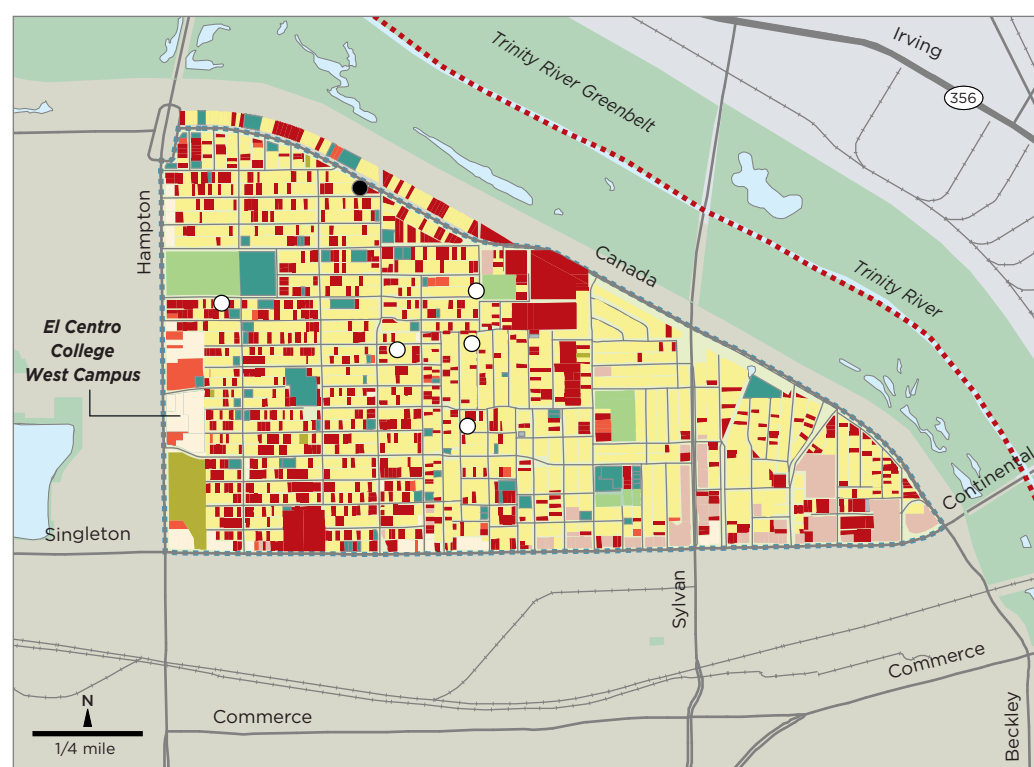
The vast expanse of single-family residences tells the story of a stable consumer market with low unemployment. The Wynnewood Village shopping center is shown in beige at the bottom center of the map. As the only major retail center for the area, it seems ripe for redevelopment.

### Pleasant Grove Crossroads



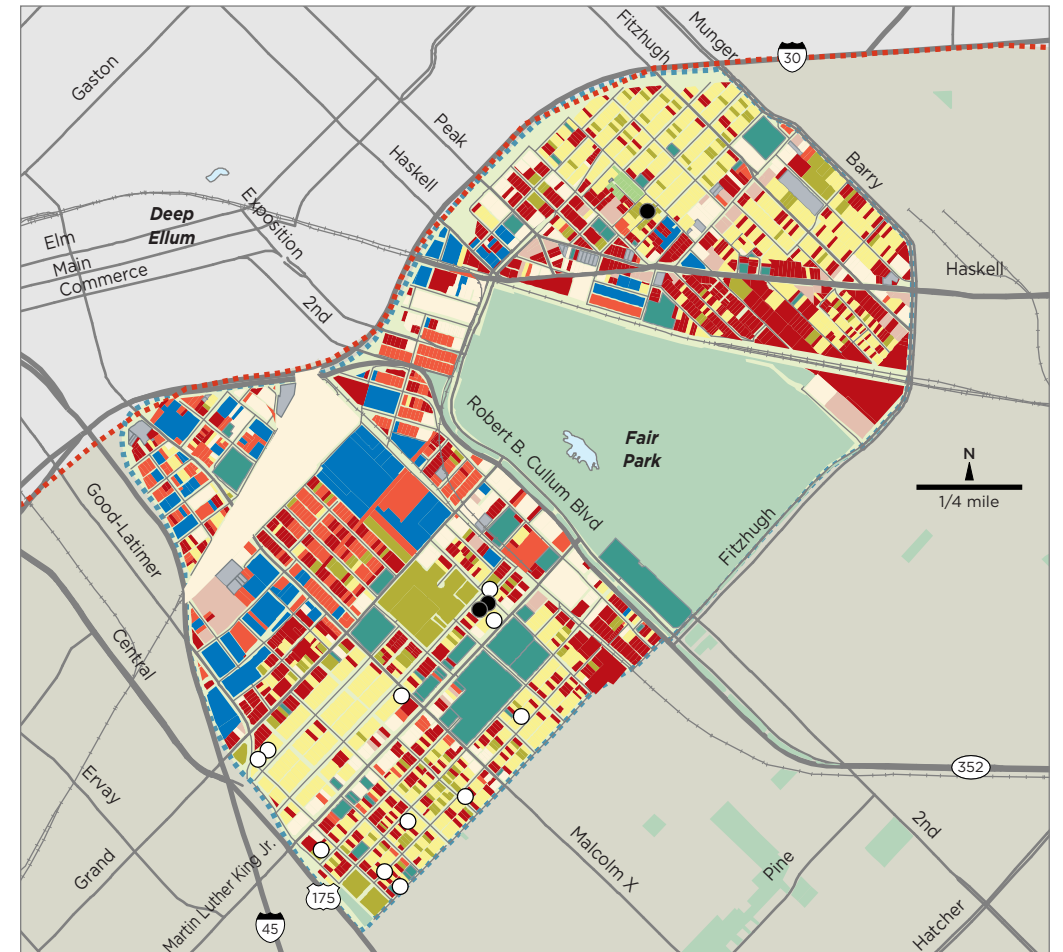
The overwhelming yellow on this map underscores the residential core of the Pleasant Grove Crossroads. This represents an opportunity for big-box retail investment. The absence of commercial/retail shows that a potentially strong consumer market remains untapped.

### West Dallas Gateway



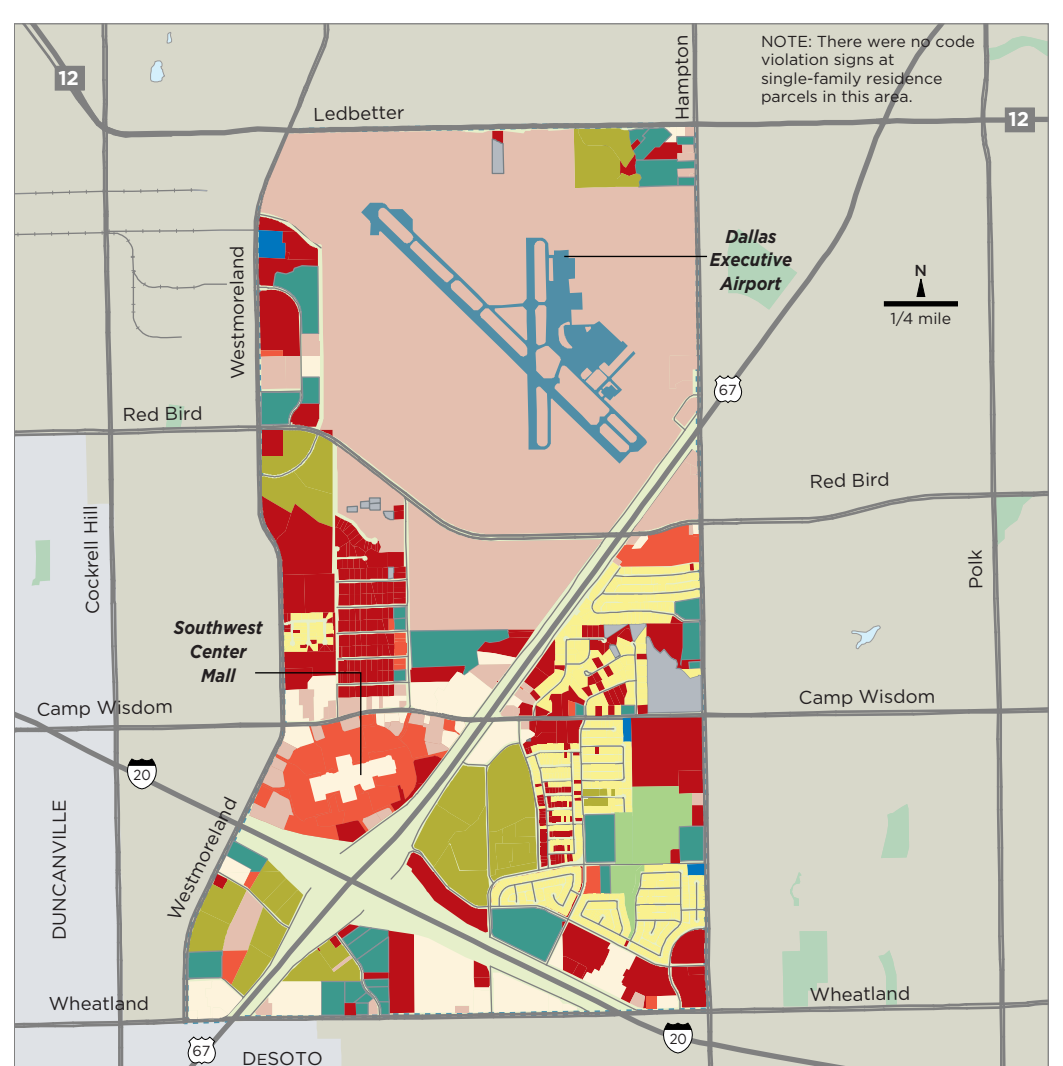
The mosaic of vacant land peppered among single-family homes depicts one of this neighborhood's biggest problems. Because the vacant land is interspersed, it's hard to redevelop the area. That deters investment and adds to the neighborhood's blighted appearance.

### Grand South Dallas



The two shades of red dominating this map represent vacant land. Occasionally, it serves as parking for the State Fair, but for most of the year, it represents blight. Considering this neighborhood's proximity to downtown, all this empty land signifies a development opportunity wasted.

### Red Bird Renewed



Note the solid patches of single-family residences and big, contiguous areas of vacant land. Developers are attracted to those patches because they're easier to work with. The absence of vacant land in residential areas contributes to the high home values in Red Bird Renewed.