

STAFF REPORT

Case Number:	N/A
Request:	Conduct a public hearing and consider a request to adopt the IH-35E Corridor Vision Study, amending the City of Farmers Branch comprehensive plans; approximately 463 acres generally located along both sides of IH-35E Freeway, extending from the north city limit line to the south city line, and generally bounded by the DART/BNSF Railroad on the west, and on the east by Denton Drive, Rawhide Creek, Valley View Lane, the rear property line of properties on Nestle Street, Havenhurst Street, Bee Street, Wicker Avenue, the rear property lines of properties fronting on Hermitage Street, the Cooks Creek Channel, and the west property lines of the residential lots fronting Bee Street; and take appropriate action.
Address:	IH-35E Corridor
Lot Size:	± 463 net acres
Petitioner:	City of Farmers Branch

Background:

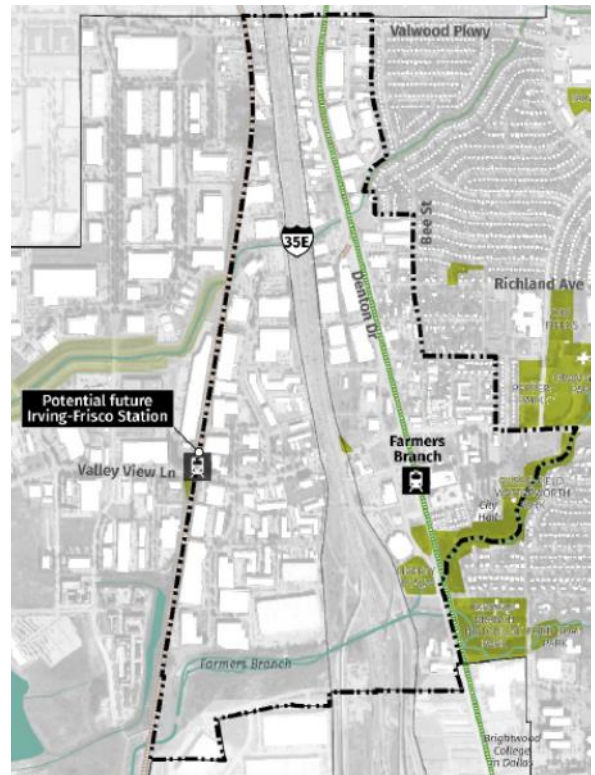
This is a city-initiated project. The City's 2020 Strategic Plan identified the IH-35E Corridor Vision Study as a project to help fulfill C2 of the Strategic Plan: provide attractive, unique and connected spaces for community interaction. The vision study also aligns with City Council's FY2019-2020 Critical Business Outcome CBO1 which is implementing a vision for the central corridor. The vision study will guide development within the IH-35E corridor for approximately the next 20 years and include recommended strategies to leverage existing assets in order to increase property values and allow for higher quality land uses within the corridor. This is an optimal time to adopt and begin implementation of the study as the IH-35E highway infrastructure will be widened during the next five years, further impacting properties particularly along the west side of the highway. While the highway construction is occurring, implementing vision study recommendations and strategies can begin thereby establishing a foundation for future development in the corridor.

Preparation of the study has been conducted in just over one year, beginning on November 12, 2019, when City Council approved a Professional Services Agreement with Interface Studio LLC for completion of the study. During that time the consultant team, led by Interface Studio LLC (and assisted by Ninigret Partners and WGI), have conducted a robust public engagement process that included interviews, focus groups, four steering committee meetings, and two online surveys. The public engagement process was conducted in tandem with extensive analysis including: evaluation of existing conditions; constraints and opportunities analysis; and the development of strategies to implement the vision for the corridor over the next 20 years. The result of extensive public consultation and professional analysis is the proposed IH-35E Corridor Vision Study.

The purpose of this agenda item is for the Planning and Zoning Commission to conduct a public hearing and make a recommendation to City Council regarding the adoption of the IH-35E Corridor Vision Study as it relates to guiding land use and development, and public infrastructure investments within the IH-35E corridor, for approximately the next 20 years.

IH-35E Corridor Vision Study Area:

The study area includes approximately 463 net acres of land on the east and west sides of the IH-35E right-of-way, and is bounded on the south by the Farmers Branch city limit line (which approximately runs from the DART/BNSF Railroad right-of-way easterly to Mustang Road south of its intersection with Morgan Parkway, then easterly and roughly parallel to the south right of way of Morgan Parkway, then continuing easterly under IH-35E to Denton Drive); on the north by the Farmers Branch city limit line (which runs along the rear property lines of properties fronting on Valwood Parkway between Bee Street and the DART/BNSF Railroad); the DART/BNSF Railroad (also known as the Madill Railroad) on the west from Valwood Parkway south to the southern city limits line; and on the east by Denton Drive, Rawhide Creek, Valley View Lane, the rear property line of properties on Nestle Street, Havenhurst Street, Bee Street, Wicker Avenue, the rear property lines of properties fronting on Hermitage Street, the Cooks Creek Channel, and the west property lines of the residential lots fronting Bee Street.



Five planned development districts currently provide land use regulation for the study area. Planned Development Nos. 24, 25, 32, 70, and 97, are largely based on light industrial districts. Planned Development No. 86, also known as the Station Area Code, is a form-based code that envisions a walkable town center, based on transit and pedestrian-oriented principles, for the City of Farmers Branch.

Vision Study Development Process:

The IH-35E Corridor Vision Study process involved extensive public and stakeholder engagement, analysis of current conditions, identification of constraints and opportunities for the corridor, and formulation of strategies moving forward. An outline of the plan process is below:



During January 2020, the consultant team held a number of interviews with area residents, developers, large and small business owners, as well as Councilmembers. This process, together with extensive site visits, provided a baseline of knowledge of existing conditions within the corridor.

Through the plan development process, the steering committee (comprised of the Planning & Zoning Commission) has acted as a sounding board for the consultant team and staff, providing input to the study and feedback on work completed. Four meetings of the steering committee, including a joint meeting with City Council (held on October 12, 2020) were held in support of the IH-35E Corridor Vision Study.

The first round of in-person public consultation, originally planned for March 19, 2020, was canceled due to the Covid-19 health crisis. In lieu of the public open house, staff and the consultant team conducted an online survey that ran from June 22, 2020 to July 5, 2020, in order to gather feedback from residents, business owners, and employees. The online survey, which had over 400 responses, allowed respondents to review initial corridor analysis and provide an opportunity to answer a series of questions, including identifying priorities for the corridor, and assessing the impact of the Covid-19 health crisis. The responses received informed the draft vision, selection of target areas, and ideas for future development within the corridor.

A second survey was held between September 14, 2020 and September 27, 2020, and a live virtual question and answer session was hosted on September 17, 2020. The online survey had over 120 responses and allowed respondents to provide feedback on ideas presented for the public realm and three of the target areas. Unfortunately, the live virtual event had minimal attendance.

To gain interest and participation in both surveys, they were advertised and promoted using a number of methods, including: advertisement in the Branch Bulletin and via Farmers Branch social media sites; promotional emails; promotional postcards mailed to corridor landowners and tenants; information included in the water bill; and promotion by the Steering Committee and City Council.

Four focus groups were held in August, 2020. These focus groups were groups of 2 – 8 attendees and represented: mid to large size business groups; small businesses; residents; and representatives of transportation agencies. The focus groups provided feedback related to preliminary

recommendations and allowed for more in-depth discussion on the ideas presented as they related to the specific interest group.

The last two steps in the public consultation process are the public hearings to be held at the Planning & Zoning Commission meeting (January 11, 2021) and City Council meeting (anticipated for February 2, 2021) where both entities will be considering the IH-35 Corridor Vision Study. At both meetings, the public will have the opportunity to speak for or against the IH-35E Corridor Vision Study, in addition to seeking information and/or clarification related to the study.

Each phase of the public engagement process has contributed to the development of the proposed IH-35E Corridor Vision Study through providing baseline information, helping to identify priorities, and providing feedback on ideas presented by the consultant team. Information and direction provided through public consultation informed the analysis conducted by the consultant team. The vision study presented today is a result of both the public consultation and consultant analysis that informed the vision, goals, and strategies presented in the IH-35E Corridor Vision Study.

Proposed IH-35E Corridor Vision Study:

The proposed IH-35E Corridor Vision Study outlines the approximate 20-year vision for the corridor and identifies the tools and strategies to meet the study's vision and goals during this timeframe. The document is divided into five chapters and an appendix (see attachments 2 and 3). A list of the study's chapters and a description of each is provided below:

- I. Background
- II. Vision and Goals
- III. Land Use and Target Areas
- IV. Strategies
- V. Implementation

I. Background:

This chapter of the vision study outlines the project purpose, to guide development within the IH-35E corridor over the next 20 years and include strategies to leverage existing assets and facilitate redevelopment in order to increase property values and allow for higher quality land uses within the corridor. This chapter also outlines the physical boundaries of the study (as seen in the figure above), and existing conditions (e.g. land use, and densities within the region). The project process, including public consultation (outlined above), the role of the steering committee, and the approvals process is also explained in this chapter.

II. Vision and Goals

This chapter of the vision study states the overarching vision for the corridor during the timeframe of the plan. The goals are a set of achievable outcomes, which support the study's overarching vision. All subsequent chapters work towards the achievement of the vision and goals.

The proposed overarching vision for the IH-35E Corridor is:

*The IH-35E corridor is the **front door** to Farmers Branch and a **world-class place to live and do business** in the Dallas-Fort Worth region. It offers space and access for a wide range of businesses looking to grow and expand, and a range of housing and amenities for residents. Visually the corridor is an attractive gateway that reflects the City's reputation for excellence.*

The proposed goals for the corridor, which support the aforementioned vision, are:

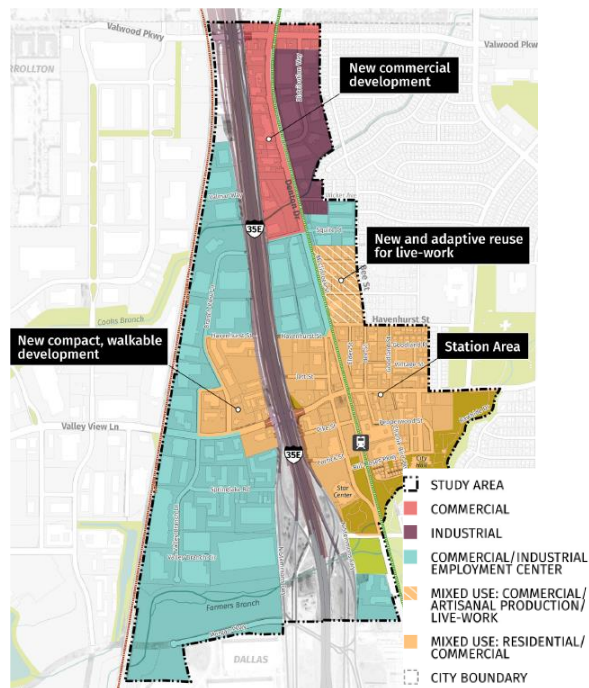
- Create a modern urban industrial district with opportunities for mixed use development and highway-oriented commercial amenities, in order to leverage existing assets and increase property values along the corridor;
- Extend the Station Area mixed use development to the west side of IH-35E in order to form a cohesive new “front door” appearance along Valley View Lane, consisting of dense, compact, walkable development;
- Improve the appearance of the corridor to create a visually enticing experience along IH-35E through property upgrades and attracting new businesses;
- Green the corridor through increased landscaping and establishing corridor-wide initiatives so it better matches the City's reputation as a “City in the Park”; and
- Connect the Farmers Branch community on both sides of IH-35E through improved aesthetics and infrastructure that is accessible to all modes of transportation.

III. Land Use and Target Areas:

This chapter of the study identifies four target areas and addresses the remainder of the corridor. For each target area, preferred land uses and tools (which link to strategies later in the study) are identified. In addition, target areas have a vision, which supports the corridor's overall vision, as well as a constraints and opportunities analysis. The remaining areas of the corridor are addressed separately, and include preferred land uses and supporting strategies.

Commercial/Industrial Employment Center:

This area makes up the portion of the vision study that is outside of the Station Area and four target areas. It is envisioned that the existing, largely light industrial, land uses will remain over the life of the vision study. These areas will be enhanced through a number of strategies including: investment in tree planting on public and private land; development of pocket parks, which will act as an area amenity; enhanced commercial facades, to improve area aesthetics; and last mile connection to the DART station, to improve access to transit for area employees.



Station Area:

Redevelopment in the station area has already begun, and as the area redevelops it will act as a catalyst for development within the rest of the corridor. Development in this area is expected to follow direction provided within the Station Area Code (Planned Development No. 86), which is a form-based code and envisions the development of a town center with a mix of uses and interconnected walkable streets. The IH-35E Corridor Vision Study recommends that the City continue with strategies that are currently being implemented in the Station Area such as land banking, public/private partnerships, and development incentives. The vision study recommends that additional strategies including investment in public art and signage, increased tree planting and planned road improvements outlined in the Station Area Code along Valley View Lane, Denton Drive, and Bee Street, along with improved pedestrian connections between key locations, be implemented to further the development of a town center.

Target Areas:

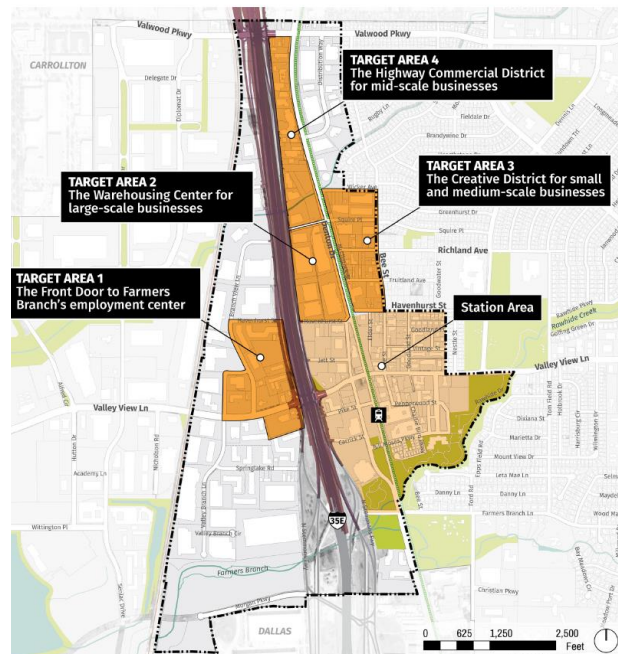
Through public consultation and analysis, four target areas were identified where specific strategies could be implemented to have the greatest impact on the corridor. Each target area has a vision statement that supports the overall vision for the corridor. In addition, a constraints and opportunities analysis was performed for each target area; this analysis informed the preferred land uses, tools, and strategies identified. Below is a description of each target area:

Target Area 1:

Target area 1 is identified as an opportunity to extend the Station Area to the west side of IH-35E and act as the front door to Farmers Branch's commercial/industrial employment center creating a work-centered counterpart to the mixed use Station Area on the east side of IH-35E.

Constraints to redevelopment include the number of property owners and parcel sizes. In addition, the current sidewalk infrastructure and roadway design, including the IH-35E underpass, make walkability in the area difficult and unsafe.

Opportunities in this area include land assemblage, the development of an interim amenity (such as a food park) to activate the area for employees and residents. In addition, infrastructure improvements such as the narrowing of Valley View Lane by one lane in each direction will help to improve the pedestrian experience and improve the connection between the east and west sides of IH-35E.



With the uncertainty caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, allowing flexibility in future land uses for the target area will increase opportunities for redevelopment as the economic recovery occurs. The preferred uses identified for the area include office, retail, restaurant, and multi-family residential. The study recommends that a form-based code be implemented in Target Area 1 to ensure desired design standards are achieved in the area while providing land use flexibility.

Target Area 2:

Target area 2 is positioned to house large-scale businesses that need larger spaces and highway access. It is not expected that existing buildings in this area will redevelop, rather that aesthetic enhancements to facades and landscaping in the public and private realm will improve the look and feel of the area.

Constraints in the area include the high voltage power lines, one-way access from N. Stemmons Freeway, and current land values in the target area which make redevelopment unlikely.

Opportunities include updating the existing zoning to focus on uses such as e-commerce, indoor recreation and entertainment uses, and large-scale creative industries that will support the Station Area and surrounding target areas. Improvement of existing facades through a façade grant program, tree plantings along street frontages, and the completion of the planned bicycle connection between the Station Area and Carrollton, will contribute to the success of Target Area 2.

Target Area 3:

Target area 3 is a creative district that will offer medium and small-scale companies a home. The existing block structure is an asset that will allow the area to be walkable and grow organically from the Station Area.

Small parcel sizes and multiple owners are the main constraints in the area, making infill and small-scale redevelopment the most probable development scenario for the target area. There is an opportunity for this area to provide for small-scale production business in the creative industries (i.e. visual and performing arts, design, media, crafts, food and beverage), and live-work units as an accessory use. In addition, sidewalk improvements to Squire Place and Bee Street, will improve walkability and access to the area. Once developed, this area will provide a suitable transition between the more intensive, larger scale uses closer to IH-35E and the residential neighborhood east of Bee Street.

Target Area 4:

This target area is located along the east side of N. Stemmons Freeway and is highly visible from the highway. The area is seen as an opportunity for mid-scale commercial activity, such as restaurants and entertainment-related uses which will benefit from high visibility.

Shallow lot sizes, dual street frontages, and limited access from N. Stemmons Freeway are the main constraints in this target area. Opportunities include commercial development that can benefit from visibility from IH-35E, improved facades through a targeted façade

improvement program, and the establishment of a cut through road between N. Stemmons and Denton Drive. Preferred land uses in the area include retail, restaurant and entertainment uses.

IV. Strategies

The strategies outlined in this chapter of the vision study are specific actions that the City and its partners (TxDOT, private developers, landowners and business owners) can take to help meet the vision and goals of the plan over the approximate 20-year timeframe. The strategies are organized into five themes: 1. Address zoning in key target areas; 2. Extend the Station Area west of IH-35E; 3. Create a visually enticing corridor; 4. Green the corridor; and 5. Connect both sides of the corridor.

The strategies implement the visions for each target area, and the overarching vision for the corridor. For each of the target areas, a number of strategies are identified and when implemented, these strategies will ensure that the vision for the target areas and the corridor as a whole are achieved.

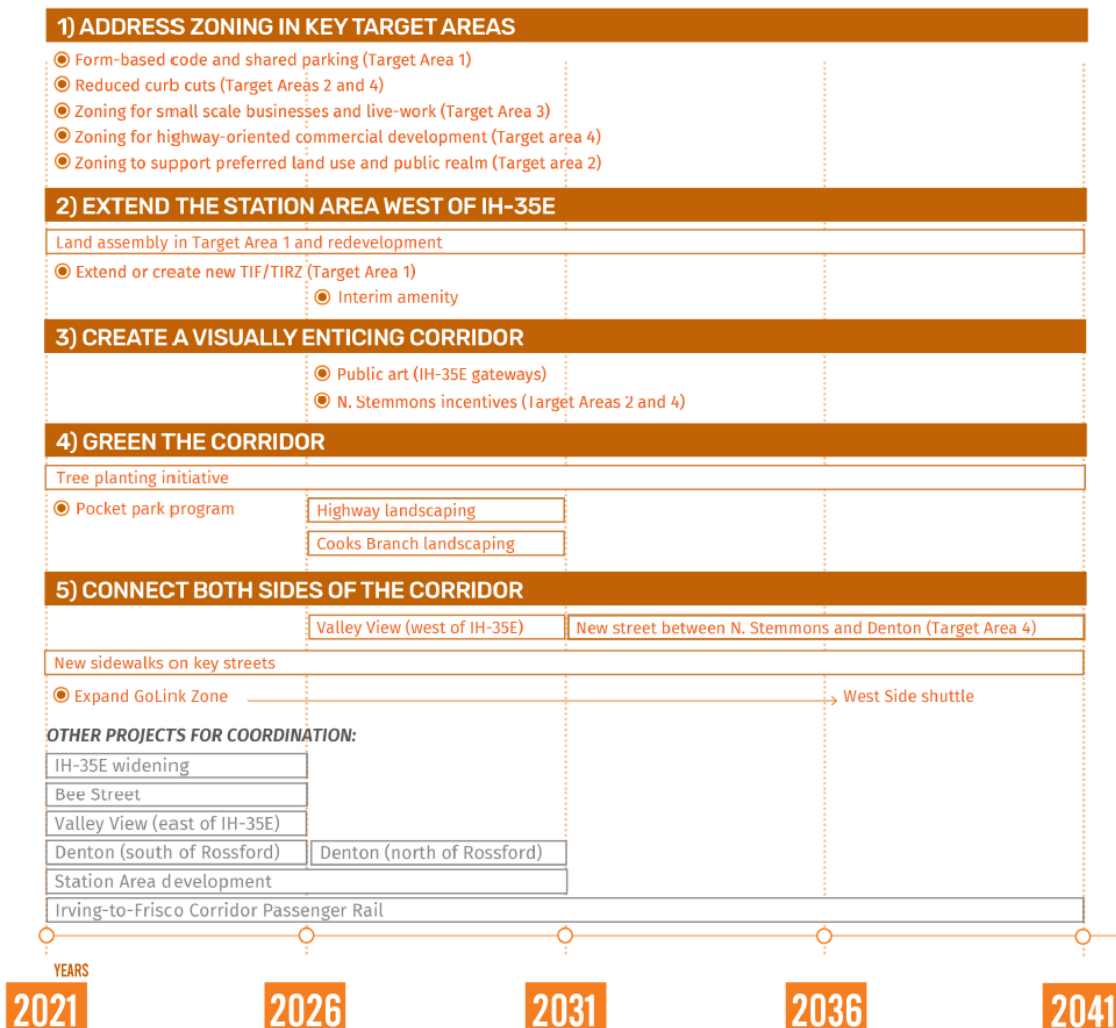
V. Implementation

The implementation chapter of the vision study lays out a road map for when the City should implement each of the strategies over the 20-year timeframe of the plan, and which stakeholders should be involved. This approach to implementation provides clear direction to the City for how and when to include strategies in the City's work plan, and make the budget allocations required to support the strategies and vision study implementation.

Strategies for early implementation (1-5 years) include: evaluation and establishment of zoning consistent with the recommendations of the vision study; reconstruction of Valley View Lane east of IH-35E and the narrowing of Denton Drive south of Rossford Street (which are currently in the City's work plan); land assembly in Target Area 1; and developing a corridor-wide tree planting initiative. Completion of these items will set the stage for future development consistent with vision study recommendations, and create a framework and momentum for redevelopment within the corridor.

This chapter also includes an implementation matrix and a number of indicators that can be used to measure vision study progress. It is recommended that the vision study be evaluated every five years; this review will evaluate the success of the plan recommendations and the progress of implementation. If the plan is not progressing as desired, the City may choose to amend the plan where necessary or to focus more closely on its implementation so that the vision can be achieved.

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Public Response:

A notice was published in the Dallas Morning news on December 29, 2020. In addition, a postcard was mailed to area landowners and businesses advertising the public hearing, an email was sent out to the subscribers list from the public engagement process, and information (including the draft plan) was posted on the project website. Staff has received no letters in favor or opposition to the proposed study.

Staff Recommendation:

The IH-35E Corridor Vision Study provides a vision – or a road map – for the IH-35E corridor for the next approximately 20 years, with the aim of becoming a world class place to live and do business in the Dallas-Fort Worth region, accommodating a variety of land uses, and improving the aesthetics of the corridor. The study advocates for the creation of a modern urban industrial district with opportunities for mixed use development and highway-oriented commercial amenities, in order to leverage existing assets and increase property values along the corridor.

Additionally, the vision study sets out a detailed set of strategies and an accompanying implementation plan to provide the City with the framework needed to implement the plan and monitor its progress over time, contributing to the success of the corridor. As such, staff recommends approval of the IH-35E Corridor Vision Study.