

Fort Worth **Business Press**

Hurst in first stage of major redevelopment

BY ELIZABETH BASSETT

February 25, 2008

A brand-new fire station in Hurst will be one of the first signs of a redevelopment movement that will transform the city from a bedroom community into an urban landscape.

The fire station, which had a groundbreaking in early February and is expected to be completed by the end of this year or early 2009, will be part of a mixed-use urban center with businesses, offices and residential space as well as a senior activity center.

It will also be an example of the public-private relationship that Hurst officials are hoping will personify the three projects that will start in the community.

Mike Morgan, development manager for the city of Hurst, said that the city poses a set of challenges seen nationwide as developers look for better ways to use space that may already be in use. Hurst is about 96 percent built out already, leaving little space for large-scale new developments, he said.

“Our country is going to continue to grow, and we can’t just keep gobbling up new land and resources,” Morgan said.

Three new mixed-use areas in the city are being planned along the same lines as centers in Fort Worth, like the Museum District or the Southside of Fort Worth, which have already been built out and require reshuffling structures on already developed land, Morgan said. Cities on the outer edges of the Metroplex, like Southlake, have open land for new structures and pose different challenges than Hurst, he said.

Allan Weegar, Hurst city manager, described the three separate Hurst projects: Heritage Village, the Hurst Town Center and the Bellaire Arts District. Planning has already started with these projects, but he is trying to keep the growth methodical so that the plans can be carried out.

“What we didn’t want to do was build up excitement to a point and then there’s a big let-down if it doesn’t meet expectations,” Weegar said.

Jeff Jones, assistant city manager, said that while the city is approaching the projects carefully, community support is overwhelmingly positive. In research conducted with phone interviews, about three-quarters of those questioned supported redevelopment and named it a No. 1 priority for the city, he said.

“It’s above crime, public safety,” Jones said.

The new fire station will be located in the Heritage Village, which will be a mixed-use urban center with businesses, offices and residential space as well as a senior activity center. Construction on the activity center, housed in an old Cavender’s building, will start this summer, and once completed in summer 2009 will have classrooms, a billiards room, computer lab, quilting room, ceramics room, a library, a catering kitchen and dining room, a fitness room and an approximately 5,700-square-foot multi-purpose room. North East Mall will be within walking distance, there will be plenty of open space and the Hurst Community Park will sit adjacent to the senior activity center.

“We took an old shopping center and decided to look at what we could do with it,” Weegar said.

The Heritage Village is also probably the first project in Hurst that will be completed, Weegar said.

The second project, which is projected to be built in several phases, will be the Hurst Town Center, which Jones said started in part with a desire to build a large meeting space.

“I can’t tell you how many people say there’s no place to have a large nice wedding reception that’s local,” Jones said.

New hotels, including a Hyatt Place, a Hampton Inn & Suites and a Holiday Inn Select that is under construction will mean the city will be able to host events like family reunions or smaller conferences and functions, Jones said. Additionally, local businesses, like the North Hills Hospital and Bell Helicopter have been pushing for nearby meeting space, he said.

“There’s a large unmet demand for that kind of thing in the Northeast area,” he said.

Another possible hotel could join the area on Thousand Oaks Drive, and the road would be lined with mixed-use areas from the Hurst City Hall to the conference area.

The third Hurst redevelopment project is the Bellaire Arts District, which would be in conjunction with the city of Bedford, Weegar said. The current Bellaire Shopping Center, which Weegar said was one of the first in Hurst, would be redone to incorporate new retail and office space and residential areas while keeping the Artisan Center Theater central to the area.

The redevelopment starting in Hurst has been talked about and planned since 1999, said Weegar. That year, the City Council held a Strategic Planning Session with looking at defining the community as it moved into the future, and using local talents like Hurst resident Ed Casebier, president of Renaissance Development Company Inc. in Fort Worth, is essential to keeping residents invested in the transformation of the city.

“We’re not just sitting back and letting it happen,” Weegar said. “We’re really driving this. If

we sat back and let this come to us, it wouldn't.”

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