# Frisco City Council selects new items for 2018 priorities

**By Lindsey Juarez and Nicole Luna** | 7:55 am March 9, 2018

Frisco City Council has narrowed down a list of priorities it would like to focus on in 2018. Every year during the month of January, City Council comes together for a winter work session to receive annual updates from city staff and identify a list of priorities for the year.

“One of the great things we did is that we went back to the concept of vision,” Deputy Mayor Pro Tem John Keating said. Mayor Jeff Cheney said council considers these priorities new initiatives for the city, and the hope would be to have these priorities wrapped up by the end of 2018.

“In the past a lot of the top 10 lists were very nebulous concepts, and you couldn’t really measure [them], like diversify tax base or lower tax rates,” Cheney said. “We really wanted to get more into more specific goals that we could target and go after.”

The 2018 list differs from previous years’ lists, both with new priorities and some priorities removed. For years, the cleanup at the former Exide plant, attracting a Fortune 100 or 500 company and moving forward on Grand Park had been singled out as items on each year’s list. However, for the first time in several years those items are not on the list.

Keating said some items, such as Grand Park or the Exide cleanup, are dependent on other factors that are out of the city’s control. These factors include waiting on a permit to be approved by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to build a lake feature within Grand Park.

“Just because something comes off of our top 10 priorities list does not mean we are not still focusing on it, like public safety or Grand Park,” Council Member Shona Huffman said. “It just means we are either in motion on those things or are still working on those things. This new top 10 list is something that we are all unified on, that these need to have a top focus for us over the next year.”

The 2018 list includes priorities that the city has control over and can make progress on in the upcoming year, Keating said.

“Each one of these items on this [2018] list has its own set of challenges, but we think we can move the ball forward in a measurable manner in 2018,” Keating said.

# **Implement traffic innovation**

Cheney said because of fast growth, traffic has become more congested in Frisco. What this priority aims to do is use new technologies to help relieve that congestion. Examples of innovation include using an adaptive signal control system, in which traffic lights will communicate with certain new vehicles to adjust signal timing.

Cheney also said the plan is for there to be autonomous, or self-driving, buses in Frisco by this year, used in the private sector.

# **Rebuilding capital reserves**

Capital reserves are funds reserved for capital investments or other large expenses that a city might incur in the future.

“The capital reserve fund is important because it allows us to prepare for unseen things that might come up … such as if there is some type of emergency that occurs with some type of financial burden that hits the city that was unexpected,” Huffman said.

The city of Frisco began building a capital reserve fund about six years ago, Cheney said. Having the fund allowed the city to fund burying power lines on Main Street, he said.

Since the city has used some of those funds, Cheney said it is time to replenish the fund for future projects or improvements. Huffman said Frisco can rebuild capital reserves by keeping the city’s budget tight so that extra money can be pushed into the fund.

# **Developing a performing arts center strategy**

Cheney said something he often hears from businesses, developers and residents is that there needs to be more of an arts presence in Frisco. Council would like to see a performing arts center as a public-private partnership, similar to the partnerships that brought Dr Pepper Ballpark, Toyota Stadium and the Ford Center at The Star, Cheney said.

Council’s Performing Arts Committee is in the middle of a feasibility study to determine the size and needs of a potential performing arts center, Huffman said.

# **Legislative plan to protect Frisco**

Cheney said it is important for council to further examine local control and continue to make sure the decisions being made for Frisco and its residents are made at a local level and not at a state or federal level. Council plans to continue to work with state legislators and help shape state policies.

“Anything that would restrict how the city of Frisco is able to provide services to the residents at the level the residents have come to expect and demand is something we are looking out for,” Huffman said.

# **Finish the downtown master plan**

In September, City Council approved a contract with a consulting firm to update the 20-year-old downtown master plan. The update to the plan is expected to be complete in August. In the meantime, construction will begin soon on two new developments in downtown Frisco, the Patios at The Rail and the Tower at The Rail.

Huffman, who works at the Frisco Chamber of Commerce office in downtown, said council will be looking at methods that would allow downtown businesses to thrive, preserve old downtown and maintain Frisco’s “uniqueness.”

“My office window looks out on Main Street all day long, so it’s extremely important to me what this part of town looks like,” she said. “I am highly supportive of the businesses that have already continued to push to thrive and grow down here.”

Cheney said the council and city officials plan to continue to work with the private market to explore old downtown Frisco options.

# **Expanding higher education**

Council would like to have a strategic focus to grow and expand higher education opportunities to have an educated workforce in Frisco, Cheney said. This includes the possibility of bringing a four-year university to the city.

# **Changes to the Frisco Economic Development Corp.**

Cheney said the city has done a great job bringing businesses, housing and entertainment to Frisco. However, the goal for this year is for the city to “aggressively” go after Fortune 500 companies and bring jobs to Frisco, he said.

Changes to the Frisco Economic Development Corp.’s organization and strategy will help make that goal happen, Cheney said. Interim FEDC President Ron Patterson—who is expected to be named the new FEDC president within the month—has made changes to the corporation’s organizational chart.

New leadership will soon be coming to the FEDC. Patterson’s appointment as president is pending council and FEDC board of directors approval, and Vice President Dave Quinn officially left his position in early March.

# **Creating an identity in Frisco’s north corridor**

Frisco needs to be more competitive in finding development in north Frisco near US 380, Cheney said. The plan for 2018 is to attract more businesses and residential developments to that area, he said.

Keating said residents on the north side of Frisco often have to drive south for shopping and services. Having more development on the Frisco side of US 380 could bring those destinations closer to the city’s northern residents.

“We’re seeing a lot of development on the other side of [US] 380 in Prosper and Celina, and we want to capture our side while that growth and development is going,” Keating said. “US 380 is booming, and [council and city staff are]working very closely with Collin County and Denton County trying to find similar goals, find the right path.”

# **Planning facility expansion**

As Frisco continues to grow, many of the city facilities have been outgrown, Cheney said.

The plan for this year is to take a long-term view of all the city facilities and plan accordingly, Cheney said.

City Hall is planned to be expanded so the municipal court could move from downtown Frisco to Frisco Square. Keating said this will allow the court to grow as needed and use new technology that its current building could not handle as well.

The City Hall expansion was also planned to include an expansion of the Frisco Public Library, but Cheney said in a video about the priorities that the city is no longer looking to do that. The library is opening a new branch focused on children’s programming at Stonebriar Centre. The branch is part of a project to build a 295-room Hyatt Regency hotel and conference center attached to Stonebriar Centre. The hotel is expected to open in 2019.

# **Master planning parks**

Early this year, City Council, the Frisco Community Development Corp. and the FEDC approved the purchase of 390 acres on Brinkmann Ranch for a future park. This park is planned to include athletic fields.

Cheney said council and the city will look into master planning the rest of Frisco’s park system, including Grand Park, for the city’s build-out. Though Grand Park is not its own priority on this year’s top 10 list, he said it is part of the overall priority to master-plan parks.

“This item is to kind of take a step back and look at all of our parks as far as how we’re going to master-plan them and what’s the vision for completion, and that certainly includes Grand Park,” Cheney said.