**Update to 20-year-old plan includes a Main Street redesign, new developments**

**By Nicole Luna** | 9:00 am Oct. 6, 2018 CDT

After almost a year of work, the Frisco Downtown Master Plan will receive its first update since 1998.

The draft plan proposes several projects, including a Fourth Street Plaza in the heart of downtown; a design district that would attract new businesses; and a new design for Main Street. All of these elements together are aimed at making downtown pedestrian-friendly and more connected, Frisco Development Services Director John Lettelleir said.

The plan has received approval from the downtown master plan committee and Frisco Planning and Zoning Commission. The City Council will consider final approval of the plan Oct. 16.

If the plan is approved, Lettelleir said it could take several years before the proposed projects in the plan can start construction as city officials look for funding and private partners.

“We have people who are investing in downtown already, and the ingredients are coming together,” Lettelleir said. “We need a plan to solidify those ingredients and to see what more needs to be added to finish baking the cake in downtown.”

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# **Main Street design**

One of the most discussed topics in compiling the draft master plan was Main Street’s design, Lettelleir said.

The plan recommends that the existing median be replaced with a center turn lane, which would allow for the outside lanes to be narrowed and provide for wider sidewalks. On-street parallel parking would remain, but there would be an option to remove it if the council decides in the future it is no longer needed.

Lettelleir said there was discussion about widening Main Street to four lanes to help with the heavy traffic congestion the road currently experiences. However, he said more drivers would want to use a widened roadway, meaning traffic flow would be improved for only a short period of time.

The recommendations made for Main Street are similar to improvements that were made to Greenville, South Carolina’s Main Street, Lettelleir said. The revitalization of downtown Greenville started in the late 1970s. Greenville’s Main Street was a sprawling four-lane roadway; in 1979 the street was reduced to two lanes.

“We made [Main Street] more pedestrian-friendly by slowing the traffic down [with a two-lane roadway], added new [street]trees and wider sidewalks,” said Mary Douglas Hirsch, real estate development manager for Greenville’s Economic Development Corporation. “This set the stage for a more picturesque, pedestrian-friendly street.”

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# **Providing a mix of uses**

Frisco’s downtown redevelopment plan proposes five character areas— West, Central, North, South and East— that would provide a variety of uses in downtown for office, retail, restaurants, residential and entertainment.

The areas are intended to help contextualize the recommended development projects in the plan.

For example, the Fourth Street Plaza is a concept that has been discussed for several years, Lettelleir said.

The proposed plaza would be in the heart of downtown—the Central area—and would run along Fourth Street from Oak to Elm streets. A portion of Fourth Street could be closed to traffic so the plaza can be pedestrian- focused. The plaza is intended to bring in new restaurants and urban living.

The plan proposes the city use small alley easements behind buildings south of Main Street to create the plaza. The plaza would provide a community gathering space with food trucks, small retail shops and kiosks, as well as a stage for performances and concerts. There would also be a proposed five-story parking garage with an additional 468 parking spaces.

The plan also proposes a mixed-use design district between the Frisco Heritage Center and the Silos. This district would link downtown and Frisco Square through shops, restaurants, studios and showrooms anchored by a pedestrian-focused promenade.

According to the plan, the meshing of historic downtown and Frisco Square would create a regional destination in Frisco.

“This is a great idea that is coming from this plan because when you create an area that is special with a mix of uses in downtown, it complements the area and it also helps bridge Frisco Square with downtown,” Lettelleir said. “It’s always been important to city leadership [to connect]the two areas.”

According to the plan, these projects would transform the public realm in downtown and shift the mobility patterns in and around the area. Lettelleir said the key is to provide a connected walkable public environment that people want to visit.

David Morely, a senior planning associate with the American Planning Association, said downtowns are important for functional and symbolic reasons.

“From a functional perspective, downtown areas typically combine a mix of offices, restaurants, shopping and [residential], so it’s a centralized location … that is a more efficient way to bring a group of uses together in closer proximity to make it more convenient for folks,” Morely said. “Beyond that, downtowns are powerful symbols for most places and for many visitors and residents. A vibrant downtown equals a healthy city.”

Morely said in a large metropolitan area like the Dallas-Fort Worth area, a unique downtown can distinguish a community from its neighbors.

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# **Master Plan: A top priority**

One of Frisco City Council’s top priorities for 2018 was to update the 20-year-old master plan to bring in new development while preserving its history.

In September 2017, City Council awarded a contract to consulting firm Gateway Planning in the amount of $332,700 to update the plan. The city also put together a downtown master plan committee made up of downtown stakeholders that met throughout the year.

Council Member Bill Woodard, who also sat on the committee, said an update to the plan was overdue.

“The downtown master plan hasn’t been updated since ’98, and we started to see some activity in the downtown area,” Woodard said. “We all feel passionately about downtown, and we thought it was a good time to go through that process and update the plan to provide a road map going forward.”

Some of the activity Woodard referred to are planned developments from Nack Development, which currently has one project under construction—Tower at The Rail, a residential and retail development—and three more projects in the pipeline.

Nack Development President Donny Churchman said he believes his projects probably influenced the city’s decision to update the plan.

Churchman said he had some concerns the update to the plan might stymie his company’s projects, but he has worked with the city to make certain that would not be the case. Construction on the second project, Patios at The Rail, will begin this fall with the other projects—The Calaboose and Nack Theater—beginning construction next year.

“I think our projects are the catalyst for what downtown should be,” said Churchman, a Frisco resident. “I want a downtown that respects its history but a downtown where people want to be and is reflective of the size of our city.”