

*2020 was a year of significant progress for east Fort Worth, despite a pandemic.*

*Here is a brief recap of some of the positive things that took place.*

## Education

East Fort Worth's three public high schools are in the midst of renovations and additions that will better position the schools for the next several decades to come. These projects are expected to be completed late next year. Some portions of the renovations are now open.

**Dunbar High School** is receiving \$31 million in renovations to create collaborative spaces and provide for more career and technical education, along with a new front entrance. The school opened in 1967.

**Eastern Hills High School** is receiving \$48 million in renovations to provide for more career and technical education, a new science wing, library space, and a new front entrance. The school opened in 1959.

**Polytechnic High School** is receiving \$52 million in renovations to provide for more career and technical education and a new science wing. The school opened in 1938.

This \$131 million total investment in these three schools will improve the education of east side students, and represents a substantial commitment by the Fort Worth Independent School District.

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**Nolan Catholic High School** completed a \$42 million upgrade and expansion of their campus, including a new chapel and facilities to support or expand broadcasting, art, engineering, and physical fitness programs. The most obvious exterior changes are the addition of the IDEA building (for engineering and art) and a new natatorium. Nolan Catholic High School has been an important educational partner in east Fort Worth since 1961.

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Construction started on a new \$15 million **Uplift Crescendo Charter School** on Cooks Lane at I-30. The 60,000 square foot school will open in fall 2021, serving grades PK-5. Uplift Education is a free charter

school with 21 campuses currently operating in the area. For more information, see <https://www.uplifteducation.org/site/Default.aspx?PageID=14899>.

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**Trinity Basin Preparatory School** demolished the 1945-vintage Sagamore Hill Baptist Church campus, which had served as temporary quarters for their charter school. The demolition was necessary as the school embarked on construction of a new 45,000 square foot classroom building, with a construction value of \$13 million.

Trinity Basin launched its east Fort Worth campus in 2014 and opened a new 26,000 square foot classroom building in 2018. Current enrollment is 740 students, and will expand to 920 once construction is complete. Trinity Basin is a free charter school providing education for PK3 to 8<sup>th</sup> grade. See <https://www.trinitybasin.com/> for additional information.

## Growth and Development

The East Lancaster Avenue Public Improvement District went fully operational in February. Daily private security patrols are reducing issues with vagrancy, adding a measure of safety to businesses, and giving those conducting commerce a sense of security. The PID also seeks to market the street for redevelopment, all through funding from property taxes paid by East Lancaster Avenue property owners. See <https://www.pid20.org/>.

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Trinity Metro announced plans for Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) on East Lancaster Avenue in March. This pioneering new public transportation service is essentially light rail on wheels, with dedicated lanes and stations in the median. The project is in early concept development and will be years in the making. In June, the federal government awarded a \$600,000 grant to aid in this effort. Goals include improving pedestrian safety, increasing ridership, and boosting the economic vitality of the street.

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Work began in September to create a master plan for East Lancaster Avenue. The

stakeholders include Vision East Lancaster, the East Lancaster Avenue PID Board, and Trinity Metro. The end result is intended to serve as a template for redevelopment and a guide for public transportation efforts.

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The Vineyard on Lancaster opened in early 2020. The two five-story mixed-use buildings near downtown Fort Worth provide 104 affordable apartments and a free onsite health clinic. The Vineyard is owned and operated by Union Gospel Mission.

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Sunset at Fash Place began leasing in December. The 66-unit affordable housing community on Oakland Boulevard was built with ongoing support and input from the Meadowbrook neighborhood, and provides much-needed quality housing for ages 55 and over. The apartment community's name honors the Fash family, who once had a large home on the site, and the architectural style pays homage to the Fash house as well.

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Construction of the Reby Cary Youth Library got underway in May. The 8,000

square foot library will be the first children's library in Fort Worth, and is one of the few in the state. It will feature public art inside and out and a sensory garden outside. The art inside will consist of a glass, stainless steel and LED ceiling-mounted mobile through the length of the building.

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In April, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development awarded the city of Fort Worth and Fort Worth Housing Solutions a \$35 million grant, to help fund the Stop Six Choice Neighborhood Transformation Plan. This plan aims to redevelop a nearly two square mile area into a vibrant, sustainable community over the next decade. The \$35.3 million Cowan Place is the first of six planned phases of affordable housing for this southeast Fort Worth community and the first new housing development of any magnitude in Stop Six in decades. Its contemporary design is notable for its lighted "lantern" that signals a bright, modern future for one of Fort Worth's historic communities. For more information on this multi-phase redevelopment effort, see <https://stopsixcni.org/>.

## Community

New families continue to discover the charm of our historic neighborhoods. Refreshed exteriors are a common sight as homes are being remodeled and new investment is occurring. New homes continue to be built in our far eastern areas, and infill housing is being constructed in Meadowbrook, Polytechnic, and other parts of our mature neighborhoods.

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The Eastside Community Garden was launched on land owned by Meadowbrook Methodist Church. Founded by gardener Tom Blanton, it quickly became a community gathering spot for dozens of East Fort Worth residents, many of whom didn't know each other but all share a common interest in vegetable gardening.

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COVID-19 brought many challenges this year. Some neighborhood events were canceled and others modified, such as White Lake Hills' drive-by high school graduation celebration. West Meadowbrook sponsored several food truck events. One neighbor put together a curbside "Yellow Heart Pantry" to help needy residents. Gardens on the Go became a reliable way to buy wholesale-

priced fresh vegetables without visiting a store. Customers put five dollars in their trunk, which volunteers at the site exchanged for a large bag of produce.

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The community did its part to support local restaurants struggling during the pandemic and by giving back to the community. A number of neighbors worked to gather about \$3,500 in donations over the summer, which were used to buy gift cards from these local restaurants. About 150 gift cards were distributed to first responders and code compliance officers serving east Fort Worth. In another gesture of support, the community provided each of these same folks with 1.25 pound gifts of nuts from Vending Nut Company at Christmas time.

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Cowtown has begun to develop quite a reputation as a coffee town, and Black Coffee and Coffee Folk were two small businesses the community supported. The search for the perfect cup of coffee continues to lure people to east Fort Worth, where they are often surprised at the beauty and diversity of our neighborhoods.

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Signs marking Dairy Lane between Bridge Street and Bridgewood Drive were installed in July. A neighbor discovered the two-block long street with three stop lights had no name, and thus began a year-long odyssey with the city of Fort Worth and TXDOT. After a number of suggestions (some quite humorous), Dairy Lane was chosen to honor White Lake Dairy which operated in the area from 1918 to 1960.

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Neighborhood advocates continued to be vigilant to inappropriate changes in our community and worked with local officials and state representatives on solutions:

- Neighborhood leaders worked with county officials to focus on game rooms, a negative contributor to neighborhood stability and safety, as a county ordinance came online.
- A number of unsuitable zoning changes and variances were denied by our city leadership this year.
- Neighborhood leaders brought awareness to the dangers associated with fireworks, and encouraged an educational effort by the city.
- A long-problematic small apartment complex was demolished in July, thanks to the perseverance of neighborhood advocates working with the city of Fort Worth.

## Parks and Infrastructure

The city of Fort Worth purchased Broadcast Hill in May, adding 52 acres to the Stratford Park/Tandy Hills Natural Area. This was the first acquisition in a new effort to preserve natural open spaces in our city. The Stratford Park/Tandy Hills Natural Area now tops 200 acres, and was the culmination of years of efforts by residents to convince the city to acquire the land. The Friends of Tandy Hills raised nearly \$65,000 towards the purchase, with the rest coming from the city's oil and gas fund.

Broadcast Hill is a portion of the historic site of the first television station in the southwest, which went on the air in 1948. Together, these 200+ acres represent some of the only remaining remnants of undisturbed prairie and its unique ecosystem in Fort Worth.

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A second open space acquisition occurred in December with the purchase of 24 heavily wooded acres to add to Cobblestone Trail Park—effectively doubling the size of the park, preserving a portion of old growth forest, and creating new possibilities.

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Oakland Lake Park was the recipient of a new paved perimeter walking trail. The nearly mile-long serpentine sidewalk system not only enhances the park experience for those in the neighborhood, but also serves as an important connector for children walking to school and for handicapped persons to safely get around. Previously, a portion of that journey involved walking in the street. A long-time advocate for this sidewalk intends to use it as a memorial to those we lost who loved the park or met with tragedy over the park's nearly one hundred years.

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East Fort Worth residents gave back to their community by participating in park cleanups. Cleanups involving about twenty volunteers reclaimed an overgrown picnic area of Stratford Park, and in the process discovered a hidden trail that no one knew existed. Quanah Parker Park, Oakland Lake Park, Sandy Lane Park, a portion of the Trinity Trails, and others also had volunteer cleanup events, some on a monthly basis.

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As the new Reby Cary Library construction moves along, a new pocket park will be

added in the northwest corner of the property. The park will feature a small playground with benches and picnic tables. The West Meadowbrook Neighborhood Association donated over \$5,000 for the purchase of these amenities.

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Eastside Blossoms continued its volunteer project of planting flowering trees along major thoroughfares in east Fort Worth. With a goal of 2,000 trees, to date about 1,500 trees have been planted, with 200 new trees planted in 2020. Future plans include plantings at local libraries (called Libraries Blossom) and several school facilities. See <https://www.eastsideblossoms.org/>

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Access to east Fort Worth is one of our best assets, and that includes East Loop 820. Progress is in full swing to widen the freeway between Randol Mill Road and Hurst, including a new, safer interchange with State Highway 121. Meanwhile, public comments were sought for the new Southeast Connector project, which will rebuild the last remaining four-lane section of the loop around the city, beginning at Meadowbrook Drive, south to Interstate 20.