

*2023 was another year of significant progress for east Fort Worth.  
Here is a brief recap of some of the positive things that took place.*

## Education and Commerce

Texas Wesleyan University said goodbye to Fred Slabach after twelve years as its president. Slabach leaves a legacy of university enhancements and increased enrollment, including more than \$50 million in capital improvements to the campus and surrounding Polytechnic neighborhood, which was a catalyst for additional economic revitalization. The university welcomed Emily Messer as its 21st and first female president. Texas Wesleyan has been an important anchor in east Fort Worth for over 130 years. The Polytechnic community takes its name from the institution's original name.

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The Texas Wesleyan Rams football team restarted in 2016, 74 years after team play was suspended in the early days of World War II. Naturally, a football team needs a place to practice and play games on the campus. Texas Wesleyan University put the finishing touches on phase 1 of their football

stadium master plan with the opening of its new athletic field. Phase 2 calls for a 5,500 to 6,000 seat stadium and press box. The university's new stadium, billed as a \$16.5 million project, will increase Texas Wesleyan's sports tourism. The stadium will also host other athletic programs like soccer, track and field, and intramural sports. Here is a look at the finished plan <https://www.wraarchitects.com/texas-wesleyan-university-stadium>.

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The Fort Worth Independent School District is in the early design phase on three east Fort Worth middle schools and two new elementary schools. Jean McClung Middle School, William James Middle School, and Meadowbrook Middle School are all scheduled to see interior renovations and improved entrance security in the next several years. Meanwhile, Eastern Hills Elementary School and Maudrie Walton Elementary School will be all-new buildings

replacing existing 1950s-era facilities. In 2024, the designs should be substantially complete.

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Rocketship Texas completed renovations to a former technical school facility, opening its second Fort Worth campus, known as Rocketship Explore Elementary School. The charter school, located at 300 E Loop 820, serves grades PK thru four. It joins its sister east Fort Worth campus, Rocketship Dennis Dunkins Elementary School, which opened in 2021. Rocketship has schools in four states and Washington, DC.

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OneWorld Alliance began 2023 in its new headquarters in east Fort Worth, joining founding partner American Airlines at their Skyview campus, strengthening the DFW region as a center of aviation excellence. OneWorld consists of thirteen member airlines from around the globe offering premium services to their customers.

## Parks and People

Meadowbrook Golf Course, which opened as a private country club in 1924, closed just shy of its 100<sup>th</sup> birthday to begin a \$15.5M course renovation and construction of a new maintenance facility. A “Par-Tee” was hosted by the Central Meadowbrook Neighborhood Association to celebrate the beginning of these important improvements to this jewel in our community. The course will reopen in spring/summer 2025. Meadowbrook Golf Course is one of just three municipal golf courses in the city.

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Gateway Park moved closer to adoption of a new master plan as part of \$8 million in bond funds. Access to the park will hopefully be expanded further west to near Riverside Drive, taking in much of the oxbow as part of the Panther Island Central City Project. While the \$8M is a good start, to realize the full master plan will require a much larger investment in the coming years—currently estimated at \$140 million. Gateway Park is the only metropolitan park in the city and is one of the largest city parks in the nation.

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Upon picking up a Fort Worth visitor’s guide at a travel center near the Texas-

Oklahoma border, an east Fort Worth neighbor found the map to be lacking—no east Fort Worth points of interest were shown. She enlisted a couple more neighborhood leaders and began a series of meetings with the Visit Fort Worth executive team that led to an updated map and website showcasing Texas Wesleyan University, Gateway Park, the Historic Handley Wedding District, and other sites in east Fort Worth. They literally put east Fort Worth on the map!

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Open space was purchased by the city of Fort Worth in the far eastern portion of the Handley neighborhood. The nearly three-acre site near Rose Hill Cemetery was evaluated by city staff and the Audubon Society as a significant habitat for migratory birds. Audubon is considering constructing a bird blind on the site and for their volunteers to lead nature walks for public environmental education purposes. The city also acquired 153 acres along the shore of Lake Arlington for future open space or park land. Since 2020, the city has worked aggressively to preserve land in our city, and east Fort Worth has been a substantial recipient of these efforts, which provides

equitable access to open space and improves community health in addition to simply giving the city a little breathing room.

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Funkytown Mindful Market marked its first full year of operation as the only fully licensed farmer’s and artisan’s market in east Fort Worth. The market is an outlet for the public to have access to the produce grown on several nearby urban farms. While other markets may tout “locally grown” produce, it could be from up to 150 miles away, while Funkytown’s is truly local. Find out more about this market here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dMcMCiOyz1g>.

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For the first time in its history, the Fort Worth city council expanded from nine to eleven members. Much of east Fort Worth, as well as a portion of south Fort Worth, became part of an all-new District 11. In June, the voters elected Jeanette Martinez to the seat. She is the first Latina to serve on city council. There are now two Hispanic representatives on the dais, which is a step toward better representation of this growing segment of our city.

## East Lancaster Avenue and East Rosedale Street

Funding for the eventual rebuilding of East Lancaster Avenue from I-35W to the Arlington city limit mostly wrapped up. One funding source was a \$20M federal grant. The city of Fort Worth is working with a consultant to recommend a final roadway design and transit option, which will then be vetted and designed by TXDOT. This project will bring this important commercial corridor to a 21<sup>st</sup> century design standard, improving safety for pedestrians and motorists, improving transit options, and promoting economic redevelopment. Several rounds of public meetings were held throughout the year. Construction is anticipated to start by 2027.

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Union Gospel Mission cut the ribbon on a new 27,000 square foot Community Outreach Center, which will provide formerly homeless people with vocational training in the trades of apartment complex maintenance and warehouse fulfillment (forklift training and other warehouse-centric equipment). These skills will help clients be more employable and better able to sustain themselves with a living wage,

and represents out-of-the-box thinking by those organizations devoted to helping those experiencing homelessness. For more information, see <https://www.ugm-tc.org/news/723-the-community-outreach-center/>.

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Palladium USA announced a new mixed-income residential project for East Lancaster Avenue, to be called Palladium City Skyline. This 243-unit complex will be the first new construction east of Riverside Drive along East Lancaster Avenue in twenty years. It should break ground in the first half of 2024. The Central Meadowbrook Neighborhood Association worked closely with Palladium in producing a vision they and their membership could support. The first units should go online in late 2025.

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The East Lancaster Avenue Public Improvement District continues to have a positive impact on the corridor. Private security patrols operate seven days a week to add a visual deterrent, aid businesses in keeping their property safe, and reduce

issues with vagrancy. Additionally, cameras tied to the FWPD Real-Time Crime Center have been instrumental in locating stolen cars and vehicles associated with felony warrants. Several commercial real estate firms were given tours of the street to showcase potential areas for redevelopment.

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Progress continued in Stop Six with Cowan Place's grand opening in November, construction for Hughes House (now in progress), and the announcement of Babers Manor (set to break ground in 2024). Cowan Place is named for Alonzo and Sarah Cowan, early African-American landowners in the community. The 174-unit four-story mixed-income community is for ages 62 and older. Hughes House is named for legendary basketball coach Robert Hughes, Senior and will bring 210 mixed-income units and townhomes, along with 12,000 square feet of commercial space. Babers Manor will be an 80-unit mixed income community. These are the first three of six phases of new housing and amenities for the Stop Six community as part of the Stop Six Choice Neighborhood initiative.

## Neighborhoods

*East Fort Worth is blessed to have some active neighborhood associations. Here is a sampling of the activities that occurred in 2023.*

In February, the West Meadowbrook Neighborhood Association and Central Meadowbrook Neighborhood Association shared the city of Fort Worth's Neighborhood Collaboration Award with neighborhoods in the Riverside area for their work opposing a warehouse zoning case outside the entrance to Gateway Park.

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The West Meadowbrook, Central Meadowbrook, Eastern Hills, and Poly South neighborhood associations partnered to host a District 11 city council candidate forum ahead of the May city elections. The forum was broadcast live on Facebook and more than 100 people from throughout the new district attended in person.

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In June, the Handley Neighborhood Association conducted its annual "Feed the Firemen" activity. Over three nights, Handley neighbors provided meals for the entire crew at Station 24 as a sincere way to say thanks. Similar efforts to show appreciation to police officers are a little more difficult to pull off, but Handley

neighbors packed about 300 goody bags for the East Division officers as a small way to express their support.

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A tree-planting program was spearheaded by "super-neighbor" Mike Phipps in cooperation with the City of Fort Worth Forestry Department's tree giveaway effort. Phipps planted 41 native trees from the Community Tree Program along Normandy Road, securing cooperation from neighbors to help care for the new saplings.

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West and Central Meadowbrook volunteers and residents living near East Lancaster Avenue spearheaded a cleanup conceived by FWPD Deputy Chief Monica Martin along McLean Avenue in October. The "Clean McLean" initiative was the product of a task force created a year ago. Participants removed litter within one block of a problem property on East Lancaster Avenue. FWPD, Code Compliance, and other city staff removed trash alongside neighbors on a Saturday morning.

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National Night Out is held city-wide each fall to promote neighborhood engagement and community involvement. West and Central Meadowbrook teamed up at Reby Cary Youth Library and drew about 300 visitors with exhibitors, free hotdogs and ice cream, and giveaways. The Handley-Meadowbrook Community Center hosted a National Night Out event with help from Handley Neighborhood Association, with about 350 community members turning out. There was a similar turnout in Woodhaven where International Leadership Academy hosted a National Night Out event. Great community spirit was evident!

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The Woodhaven Neighborhood Association partnered with the International Leadership Academy to sponsor their annual Halloween Trunk or Treat event. Over 550 kids in the community took part.

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The Handley Neighborhood Association hosted their annual Photos With Santa event at the caboose museum over several weekends during the Christmas season.