

Cedar Hill, Texas

High-Level Diagnostic Report

January 2026



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**The mission of the City of Cedar Hill is to deliver
the highest quality municipal services to our
citizens and customers consistent with our
community values.**

– Cedar Hill’s Mission Statement

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Diagnostic Report Contents

Section 1) Diagnostic Introduction	1
1.01. Project Overview	1
1.02. Background.....	1
1.03. City of Cedar Hill’s Core Values and the Premier Statements.....	2
1.04. Alignment with the Comprehensive Plan	3
Section 2) Priority Findings	7
2.01. Key Issues Identified in the Diagnostic Assessment.....	7
2.02. Stakeholder Findings.....	10
2.03. Technical Findings.....	12
2.04. Conclusion	16

Section 1) Diagnostic Introduction

1.01. Project Overview

The City of Cedar Hill, Texas, has initiated a comprehensive effort to review, update, and modernize its zoning, subdivision, tree and development regulations. This report serves as a consensus-building tool to inform the public, elected officials, and appointed staff of the anticipated revisions and recommendations. It should be noted that this report does not encompass every potential issue or consideration; as the process unfolds, further analysis and adjustments are expected. This report should be viewed as a starting point rather than a definitive and exhaustive catalog of all potential revisions. Beyond substantive changes, the overall update will also address issues such as correcting typos, resolving conflicts, and updating legislative references and allowances.

1.02. Background

The city's regulations are scattered across multiple chapters of the city's adopted code of ordinances. The regulations have been adopted in a piecemeal fashion and amended over time. Most regulations, including the zoning and subdivision regulations, have not had a comprehensive update. In recent years, there have been significant changes to the zoning and subdivision enabling provisions of the Texas Local Government Code, particularly Chapters 211 and 212. These changes have prompted the need for local governments to review and update their development regulations to maintain consistency with state law and ensure that local procedures reflect current legislative standards and best practices.

The city adopted *Cedar Hill Next*, a Comprehensive Plan, in 2022 and updated its long-range planning policies in July 2024 to define the community's vision and guide Cedar Hill's preferred development patterns. A central priority of the Plan is to review and modernize the city's development and land use regulations. The extent to which the Plan's land use vision is implemented remains both the most important and most complex component of the city's UDC process. The UDC will also incorporate guidance from *Downtown Complete Street Master Plan*, the *City Council Strategic Plan*, *The Green Imprint: Cedar Hill Parks and Open Space Master Plan* and the *West Midtown Master Plan* to ensure alignment across all planning efforts.

This Diagnostic Report follows the initial phase of the city's code rewrite process and incorporates interview data from city staff, policymakers, residents, and customers. This high-level diagnostic report outlines the overall approach to updating the UDC and identifies the priority findings, stakeholder input, and technical observations guiding the rewrite.

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1.03. City of Cedar Hill's Core Values and the Premier Statements

In addition to the feedback received from the stakeholder groups, this report was drafted under the influence of Cedar Hill's core values of People and Relationships, Stewardship, Highest Ethical Standards, Behavior and Integrity and Servant Leadership and the City's Premier Statements. Where applicable, the findings and recommendations of this report are tied to one or more of the following values:



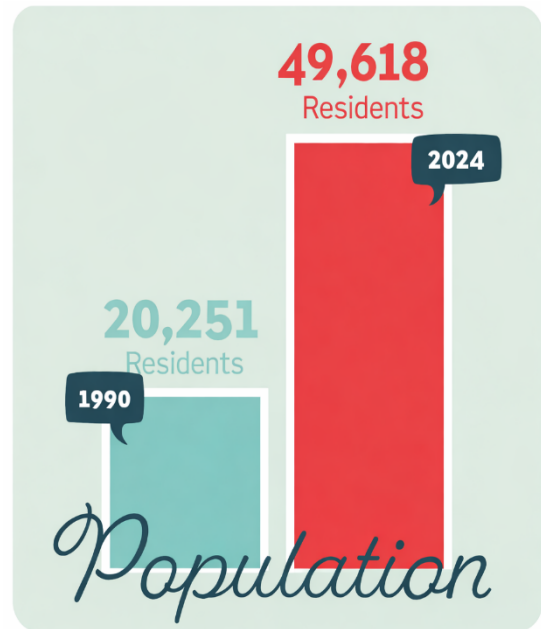
1.04. Alignment with the Comprehensive Plan

A. Demographic Information

Located in southwest Dallas County and extending into northern Ellis County, Cedar Hill is a diverse suburban community of just under 50,000 residents. The city has seen substantial growth over the past several decades, with the population increasing from 6,850 residents in 1980 to 20,251 in 1990 and, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, reaching approximately 49,618 residents in 2024.

Even with this steady growth, Cedar Hill has maintained its small-town character and park-like feel that supports a high quality of life while positioning the community as a regional hub for retail, recreation, and education.

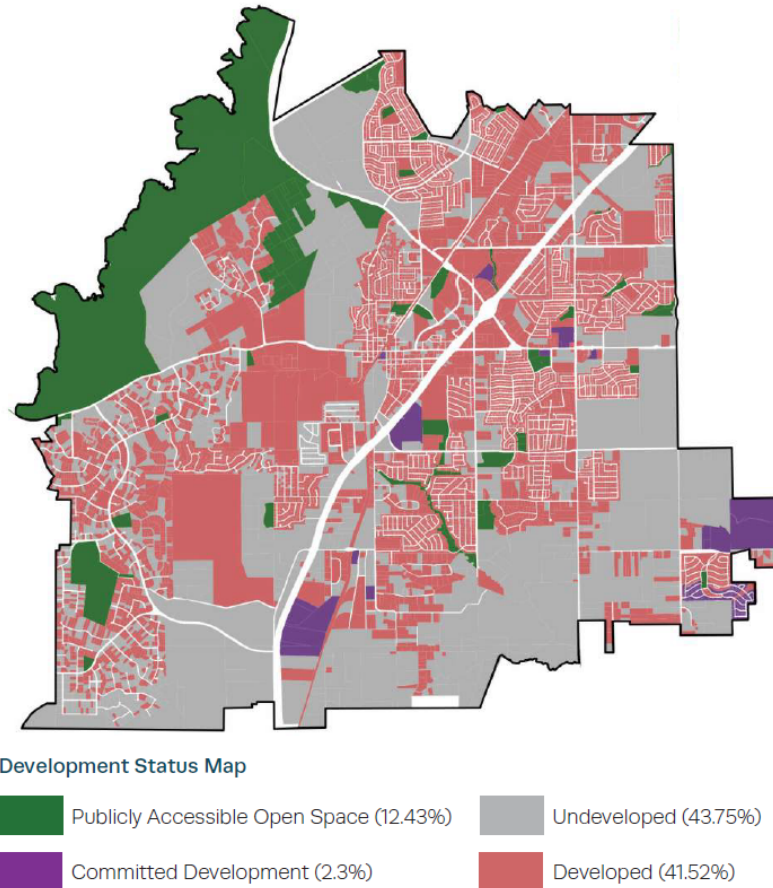
The city covers approximately 36 square miles and benefits from a prime location that includes natural amenities such as Joe Pool Lake along its borders and Cedar Hill State Park within the city's boundaries.



B. Developed vs Undeveloped Land

Cedar Hill's land area is roughly divided between developed and undeveloped properties. The Comprehensive Plan notes that about 41.5% of the city's land is developed, with another 2.3% classified as committed development, where plans are already approved, while approximately 56.2% remains undeveloped.

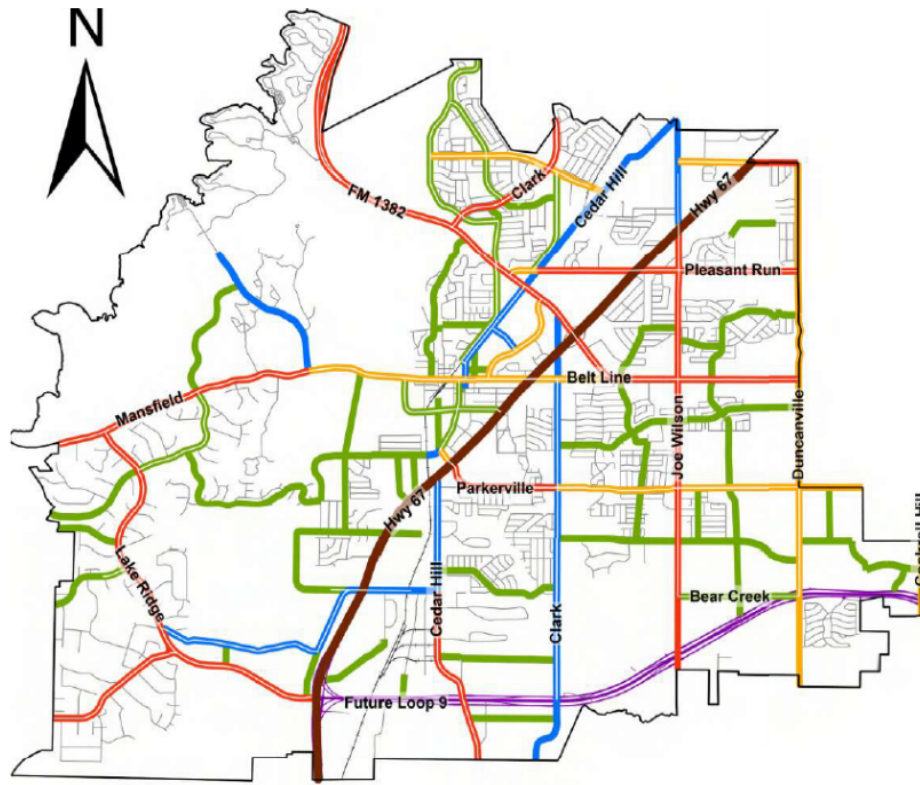
In practical terms, nearly half of Cedar Hill is still undeveloped, which provides a significant opportunity for future growth. This status highlights the need for proactive planning so the city can guide how and where new development occurs in the coming decades. By identifying strategic areas for expansion, including major corridors like the planned Loop 9 and protecting environmentally sensitive lands, Cedar Hill aims to balance growth with conservation as it moves toward full build-out.



C. Loop 9

Loop 9 is a major regional highway project that will shape Cedar Hill's southern growth areas. Proposed by the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), the project calls for a six-lane access freeway with frontage roads that will connect US Highway 67 in Cedar Hill to Interstate 35E to the east. The planned right-of-way will include the initial frontage road lanes and reserve a wide median for a future expressway that will create a new loop route along the southern edge of Dallas County and northern Ellis County.

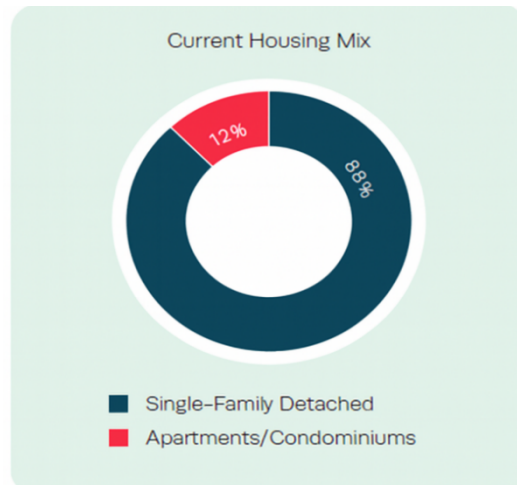
Construction is expected to move forward in phases over the next several years. Phase I will add a new interchange at Lake Ridge Parkway and US 67 in Cedar Hill, and later phases will extend two lane frontage roads toward I 35E. TxDOT studied several possible routes for the corridor and as of fall 2023 selected Alignment 3 as the final alignment through Cedar Hill's jurisdiction. City leaders view the Loop 9 corridor as a significant opportunity and are planning ahead to make sure the highway's design and related development support Cedar Hill's environmental goals and broader community priorities.



D. Housing Variety

Housing in Cedar Hill is primarily made up of single-family homes, with relatively few multi-family options available. About 84% of the city's housing units are detached single-family houses, and roughly 74% of all homes are owner-occupied. When townhouses and other attached single-family units are included, about 88% of the total housing stock falls into the single-family category which leaves only around 12% in multi-family apartments or condominiums.

This mix shows that Cedar Hill offers a fairly limited range of housing types, which aligns with its traditional suburban character. The Comprehensive Plan points to the value of adding more diverse housing choices in key areas to better serve residents of different ages and income levels while still preserving the community's overall identity.



E. Plan Goals and the Unified Development Codes

The Comprehensive Plan recommends updating and unifying the city's development ordinances so they better support Cedar Hill's long-term vision for growth and conservation. As part of this effort, the plan recommends a coordinated review of the zoning ordinance, subdivision ordinance, and tree ordinance. The goal is to create a modernized set of development codes that clearly reflect community priorities. This includes introducing new zoning strategies for key opportunity areas, improving subdivision standards to ensure adequate parkland and open space, and allowing the types of development and preservation the plan envisions.

Several goals in the plan depend directly on these updates. The Housing Goals focus on protecting existing neighborhoods and expanding multigenerational housing options, which will require adjustments to zoning standards so they support a wider variety of housing types, including accessory dwelling units. Accessory dwelling units will be subject to a defined set of standards intended to ensure compatibility with surrounding neighborhoods. They also call for thoughtful transitions between established and new development. In rural areas the plan introduces the idea of conservation neighborhoods, which allow clustered development and private well or septic systems where appropriate. Together these updates will help guide future growth in a way that stays true to Cedar Hill's long-term vision and values.

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Section 2) Priority Findings

2.01. Key Issues Identified in the Diagnostic Assessment

A. Creating the Unified Development Code (UDC)

Cedar Hill's decision to pursue this initiative reflects a proactive commitment to improving efficiency, enhancing clarity, and supporting the city's long-term vision. This UDC will integrate the city's zoning code, subdivision regulations, tree ordinance and development regulations into a singular set of regulations. A zoning code only applies to what land uses are permitted on a specific piece of property. A UDC, however, integrates all land use regulations into one document. Consolidating all land use code streamlines the process for applicants and removes any conflicts that might exist between separate ordinances. Similar to the zoning code, the Tree Ordinance has issues that need to be addressed to comply with new state laws. The adoption process will prioritize transparency and collaboration through public engagement, stakeholder participation, and coordination with city leadership. The resulting UDC will offer a flexible and cohesive regulatory framework that supports responsible and well-coordinated growth.

B. Preserving Open Space and Natural Systems

Cedar Hill is committed to preserving its natural character through a citywide open space retention goal of 25 percent as established by the Comprehensive Plan, Cedar Hill Next. New development and redevelopment under the UDC will contribute toward achieving this overall goal. The UDC will focus on design standards that encourage sustainable growth while protecting the environment. It will incorporate flexible zoning practices and subdivision guidelines that manage stormwater, define right-of-way requirements, and establish landscaped setbacks. This direction supports the city's ongoing emphasis on natural drainage systems, erosion control, and the inclusion of greenway buffers.

Cedar Hill's scenic landscapes are one of its defining qualities, and the UDC will reinforce this through stronger landscape and environmental standards. Development practices will focus on protecting trees, native vegetation, and the escarpment's sensitive ecosystems. The UDC will also integrate green infrastructure elements that contribute to stormwater control and visual quality. These updates will not only preserve the city's natural character but also enhance the environmental performance of development projects. Together, these improvements create a framework for growth that is resilient, attractive, and environmentally responsible. Through these coordinated efforts, Cedar Hill can maintain its ecological integrity and continue to grow as a community where development and nature complement one another.

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C. Strengthening Design Standards through Overlays

To guide cohesive and purposeful growth, the revised code will strengthen overlay standards for key areas, including Downtown, Midtown, Uptown, the U.S. Highway 67 Corridor, the future Loop 9 Corridor, and the Great Greenway Corridor along F.M. 1382 and Mansfield Road. These overlays will align future design and development with the vision set forth in the Comprehensive Plan, promoting context-sensitive design that fits the character and function of each district. The standards will foster a unified yet adaptable development pattern that enhances walkability and builds a strong sense of place. This approach ensures that as Cedar Hill grows, its built environment continues to reflect shared community values and long-term planning goals.

D. Encouraging a Mix of Housing Types

The future of Cedar Hill's neighborhoods lies in offering diverse housing options. The UDC will facilitate options for mixed housing types across Downtown, Midtown, Uptown, and key corridors such as U.S. Highway 67, and the Great Greenway. These provisions will support redevelopment opportunities and integrate new homes within existing neighborhoods in a compatible way. Cedar Hill can broaden housing options and improve attainability by allowing flexibility in density, building form, and site design that responds to the character and context of each area of the city, rather than applying a single standard citywide.

E. Modernizing Subdivision Processes

The updated code will simplify and modernize the subdivision process to reflect current development trends and state law requirements. This modernization will improve efficiency and predictability for applicants while maintaining high standards for design and infrastructure. Clearer procedures and review criteria will reduce confusion, shorten review times, and promote consistent decision-making. The intent is to ensure that subdivision standards support the city's broader planning goals for connectivity and design quality. By modernizing these processes, Cedar Hill can create a regulatory environment that is both transparent and responsive to changing development patterns.

F. Aligning Zoning and Subdivision Regulations for Greenway Connectivity

Zoning and subdivision regulations will be aligned to implement the Master Thoroughfare Plan and reinforce "greenway concepts" that connect development with nature. This alignment will promote high-quality private development that complements public goals for open space, mobility, and sustainability. By coordinating these regulatory tools, Cedar Hill can encourage cohesive growth patterns that enhance walkability, preserve key natural corridors, and support multimodal transportation. The revised framework will ensure that new projects contribute to the larger vision for a connected community.

G. Incorporating Developer Participation in Infrastructure

The UDC will define clear requirements for how developers contribute to infrastructure improvements. These regulations will specify responsibilities for funding, building, and maintaining key public systems such as streets, utilities, and the general infrastructure. The intent is to ensure that development contributes its fair share while maintaining high standards and efficient use of public resources. Clear participation standards will strengthen coordination between developers and the city, allowing projects to advance more effectively. This approach will also promote accountability and help ensure that infrastructure expands in step with the community's growth.

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2.02. Stakeholder Findings

A. Development Community and Market Stakeholder Interview Findings

This section summarizes feedback gathered over two months of stakeholder interviews conducted as part of the City of Cedar Hill's UDC update. Input was collected from developers, downtown merchants, and real estate brokers. Discussions focused on how current regulations, review procedures, and city processes influence development feasibility and project outcomes. Participants consistently praised Cedar Hill's collaborative staff and forward-looking vision yet identified inefficiencies, unclear requirements, and procedural hurdles within the existing code and permitting process. Overall, stakeholders emphasized the need for more flexible, transparent, and streamlined regulations to support high-quality development. The issues identified include the following:

- **Lengthy Review Timelines:** Civil and building permit reviews take too long, often exceeding standard industry expectations.
- **Unclear Sequencing:** Confusion exists around the order and dependencies between platting, permitting, and infrastructure approvals.
- **Rigid Zoning Structure:** The Planned Development (PD) process, while flexible, is time-consuming and overused due to outdated base zoning categories.
- **Tree Preservation Requirements:** Current standards are complex and costly, with unrealistic survey requirements.
- **Parking Ratios:** Regulations are inflexible and conflict with landscaping and tree mitigation goals.
- **Open Space Standards:** Hard to meet for infill projects; developers suggested incentives or fee waivers for providing public open space.
- **Infrastructure Costs:** Unclear proportionality for shared improvements and limited cost-sharing mechanisms.
- **Permit and Inspection Delays:** Lack of transparency and predictable timelines for reviews.
- **Public Opposition:** Extended neighborhood resistance slows approvals; clearer city-led communication is needed.
- **Inconsistent Guidance:** Need for visual process maps, checklists, and online tools to clarify review steps.

B. Staff and Appointed Officials Interview Findings

This section summarizes feedback from city staff, the Planning and Zoning Commission chair, park officials, and community stakeholders, on challenges and opportunities in modernizing the city's zoning, subdivision, and development regulations. Across all the interviews, there is strong alignment on Cedar Hill's identity as a "City within a Park," emphasizing balanced growth, environmental stewardship, and community character. The need for a unified, and state law compliant UDC is clear, one that simplifies processes, integrates walkability and housing diversity. The stakeholders expressed strong alignment on priorities such as enhancing Downtown activation, refining development standards, and creating a transparent, education-focused regulatory system that is easy for both residents and developers to navigate.

The following issues were identified:

- **Outdated and Fragmented Code:** Existing zoning and subdivision ordinances are decades old, internally inconsistent, and difficult to interpret without staff intervention.
- **Overreliance on Planned Developments (PDs):** The lack of modern base zoning districts results in complex projects moving through the PD process, contributing to inefficiencies and unpredictability.
- **Process Inefficiencies:** Long review timelines, excessive approval processes, and unclear sequencing between plats, permits, and infrastructure slow development.
- **Streamline Approval Processes:** There may be opportunities to streamline the review of routine, fully conforming items such as plats and site plans while maintaining council oversight.
- **Inconsistent Land Use Table and Definitions:** Outdated terminology and missing modern uses create confusion and limit flexibility.
- **Downtown and Overlay Challenges:** Overlapping boundaries, rigid Conditional Use Permit (CUP) requirements, and inflexible design standards hinder small business activation.
- **Public Education Opportunities:** Enhanced outreach and education may help residents better navigate permit requirements and dimensional standards.
- **Environmental Stewardship Needs:** Greater emphasis is needed on protecting the escarpment, codifying Dark Sky practices, and incorporating green infrastructure.
- **Parking Reform:** Stakeholders favor reduced parking ratios, shared parking strategies, and the use of alternative materials.
- **Future Vision for the UDC:** Staff envisions a modern, flexible, and visually intuitive code that supports redevelopment, promotes mixed-use developments, and strengthens Cedar Hill's "City within a Park" identity.

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2.03. Technical Findings

A. Create a User-Friendly Code

The city's development regulations should be well-organized, well-written, and easy to use. Staff, developers, applicants, consultants, and other users of the UDC should be able to navigate the new code easily. All development regulations should align with adequate and accurate cross-references between sections and relevant topics. Strategies to address this theme include:

- **Merge Code Chapters into a UDC:** Combine all zoning, subdivision, and related regulatory chapters into one comprehensive UDC to simplify cross-referencing, improve usability, and create a cohesive regulatory framework.
- **Refine Language for Consistency and Clarity:** Review overall language choice for the appropriate use of permissive (e.g., "may," "should") and prescriptive (e.g., "shall," "must") language.
- **Modernize, Simplify Technical and Legal Language:** Streamline complex or legalistic terminology to make the code more accessible to developers, staff, and the public while maintaining precision and intent.
- **Establish a Logical and Sequential Structure:** Create a logical order to the UDC that follows the typical development process and provides a uniform structure and appearance.
- **Incorporate Visual Aids:** Implement graphics, including charts, tables, and flowcharts, to explain review procedures and dimensional requirements throughout the UDC.
- **Centralize Definitions:** Relocate all definitions from individual chapters into one dedicated section at the end of the UDC to improve consistency and ease of reference.
- **Consolidate Repetitive Provisions:** Structure the UDC following the recommended outline of this report and consolidate repeated provisions (purpose statements, enforcement, penalties, etc.) into one dedicated section.
- **Centralize Processes and Procedures:** Integrate direct cross-references between zoning, subdivision, and building regulations and their corresponding plat, site plan, and permit sections.
- **Add Cross-References Between Related Sections:** Add cross-references between relevant code sections, such as between the zoning, subdivision, and building regulations and the plat, site plan, or building permit stage sections.
- **Allow Administrative Flexibility for Supporting Documents:** Authorize staff to adopt and revise fee schedules and submittal checklists outside the UDC, allowing efficient updates without formal amendments.

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B. Incorporate Changes in State Law

Alignment with the current Texas Local Government Code is essential to ensure that Cedar Hill's zoning and subdivision ordinances are legally defensible and enforceable. The State of Texas has introduced and amended numerous statutes that directly affect how cities regulate land use, zoning, and development. These changes impact everything from how zoning maps are adopted to how terms like "nonconforming use," "variance," and "specific use permit" are defined and administered. Without updates, Cedar Hill risks operating with policies that may not hold up under legal scrutiny or could unintentionally limit the city's authority to enforce its own regulations.

C. Streamlining Processes

Streamlining processes within the UDC is essential to creating a more efficient and predictable development environment. Clearer procedures, consolidated review steps, and well-defined administrative authorities help reduce unnecessary delays and minimize uncertainty for applicants. By modernizing the code to remove redundancies and clarify responsibilities, the city can improve turnaround times and support more effective coordination among departments. A streamlined UDC ultimately strengthens customer service, enhances transparency, and promotes a more responsive development review process.

For example, under current regulations, all plats in Cedar Hill are routed to the Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council. With the passage of House Bill 3699, the State expanded provisions for administrative approval of plats, providing local governments with a tool to offer a more efficient approval process. If utilized, this framework could allow staff to administratively approve plats that fully conform to all applicable requirements, helping to shorten approval timelines for straightforward submittals. Plats that require variances or deviations would continue to be presented to the Planning and Zoning Commission.

The existing language in the subdivision regulations creates confusion regarding the platting process. A cleanup of this language is needed to provide clarity and consistency in the plat approval process.

This change will streamline internal processes and significantly improve turnaround times, ensuring a more efficient and predictable experience for applicants while aligning local procedures with current state law.

D. Drive Through Uses within Gateway Corridors

Requests for drive-through facilities along major corridors are relatively common, and the approval body has expressed a desire for greater discretion when evaluating these proposals within gateway corridors that serve as primary entrances to Cedar Hill. Requiring a Conditional Use Permit in designated overlays and gateway corridors would allow the city to review site design, stacking capacity, architectural treatment, and compatibility with surrounding development on a case-by-case basis. The city could also consider incorporating spacing requirements, such as prohibiting a new drive-through use within a certain distance of an existing one.

E. Advancing an Urban Corridor Character

The City has also expressed a desire for new multifamily projects within key corridors to meet a minimum height of four stories. This standard aligns with broader goals of establishing a more urban corridor, supporting greater intensity, improved walkability and a built environment that frames the street and activates the public realm. Together, these policies work in concert to shape corridors that function not only as transportation routes but also as distinct urban places.

This approach supports the city's goal of promoting a balanced mix of uses along key corridors rather than allowing an over-concentration of auto-oriented development.

F. Alcohol Related Uses and the Need for Use-Based Standards

Selling alcohol as a component of a business in Cedar Hill, including restaurants, currently involves a cumbersome approval process. Any new business that plans to offer alcohol must obtain a Conditional Use Permit, even when alcohol sales are incidental to the primary use. This requirement can significantly slow the timeline for opening and create unnecessary hurdles for businesses that otherwise meet all applicable standards.

For permanent uses the CUP requirement applies broadly whenever alcohol is introduced, which adds time and uncertainty without distinguishing between routine restaurant service and higher intensity alcohol focused uses. Establishing clearer use-based standards for permanent alcohol related activities would allow the city to regulate impacts more effectively while avoiding delays for typical business operations.

The downtown area seeks to host special events and other temporary activities that may involve alcohol, but the current CUP framework is not suited for short-term uses and often creates delays. Introducing new land use categories and use-based standards tailored to temporary alcohol related activities would provide a more predictable and flexible permitting process while maintaining appropriate safeguards. This approach would reduce procedural barriers, support economic activity, encourage community gatherings, and help activate storefront spaces more efficiently.

G. Land Use and Parking Challenges in Downtown

Downtown Cedar Hill also experiences difficulty attracting certain commercial amusement uses due to outdated definitions and parking requirements within the existing code. The current definition of commercial amusement is narrow and does not reflect the range of modern entertainment concepts, making some businesses ineligible or subject to excessive procedural review. Updating this definition, along with reviewing and modernizing all land use definitions, is recommended to give the city greater flexibility in evaluating proposals and to help attract new businesses.

In addition, the existing parking standards are excessive for walkable downtown environments. Requirements that may be appropriate for suburban shopping centers are not practical for small parcels and historic buildings. This rigidity has turned away prospective businesses that cannot meet outdated parking minimums. These standards should be carefully reviewed and updated to align

with modern practices so they can better support the needs of a vibrant downtown.

H. Role of Planned Developments and Overlay Districts

In Cedar Hill, Planned Developments (PDs) are the primary tool used to regulate the character and design of new development. Rather than relying solely on base zoning districts, PDs allow the city to tailor development standards, such as setbacks, building materials, land uses, and design elements, to fit the specific context and vision of a site. This approach offers discretion for the elected officials while ensuring that development reflects the city's long-term goals.

PDs are particularly useful in areas where conventional zoning may not adequately protect or promote the desired character, allowing the city to negotiate custom development standards that align with community expectations. However, this has also led to a potential overreliance on PDs, which can complicate the development review process and create inefficiencies. Introducing more refined, use-based standards in the base zoning code could reduce the need for PDs, streamline the development process, and provide more predictability for applicants and staff.

Similarly, the Uptown Overlay District serves a parallel function by guiding the form and aesthetics of development within a defined area. This overlay introduces supplemental requirements, which reinforce the unique identity of the Uptown area. Like PDs, the overlay ensures that new projects contribute to a cohesive, walkable, and visually appealing environment. During the UDC process, the lessons learned from both PDs and Overlay Districts can inform a more standardized, use-based approach that supports quality development without relying heavily on customized zoning agreements.

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2.04. Conclusion

A. Summary

This high-level diagnostic report provides an overview of Cedar Hill's initiative to modernize and unify its zoning, subdivision, and development regulations into a single, user-friendly UDC. Grounded in the City's values of people and relationships, stewardship, high ethical standards, behavior and integrity, and servant leadership, the report is guided by the City Council's Premier Statements, which emphasize maintaining Cedar Hill's distinctive character, ensuring public safety, supporting Texas Schools of Choice, and preserving a clean community. It also highlights the City's commitment to vibrant parks, trails, and natural beauty, a strong and diverse economy, excellent, safe, and efficient infrastructure, and an engaged community, reinforcing a balanced approach to responsible growth and long-term community well-being.

B. Next Steps

This report serves as one of the first steps in the code rewrite process, setting the foundation for the city's new development framework. The next phase will include a comprehensive diagnostic report with a proposed outline for the UDC, which will expand on these findings and provide detailed recommendations.

The UDC will be drafted in phases, starting with reorganization and technical edits, followed by language updates and the creation of new sections. The final code will advance through the formal adoption process, which includes public hearings before both the Planning and Zoning Commission and the City Council.