

# Community Action Grant Report Expanding Vision North Texas November 8, 2007



ULI's support, through the ULI Community Action Grant for "Expanding Vision North Texas" and other means, continues to be an important part of Vision North Texas' success. During the past fiscal year (July 1, 2006 through June 30, 2007), the Community Action Grant's resources have contributed to the successful design of a subregional workshop template and the completion of two such workshops. These activities are described below.

## Workshop Template

The concept of a subregional workshop adapts the 'Reality Check' exercise to a more focused geographic area and a more detailed discussion with stakeholders. Since Vision North Texas addresses a region that is over 9,000 square miles in size, the ability to engage people at a subregional level is very important. The workshop template was developed first through two workshops we held with partner organizations during 2006. We modified this approach and applied it to two subareas of our region in 2007. This report and the associated package of digital materials provide a template that can be used in other parts of North Texas and by ULI District Councils in other regions.

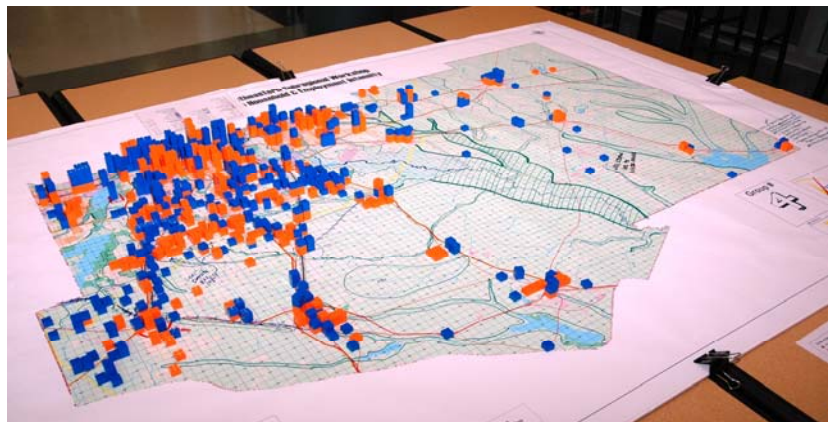


## Southeastern Subregional Workshop

The Southeastern Subregional Workshop was held on January 27, 2007 at Lancaster High School in Lancaster TX. It addressed an area of approximately 1,900 square miles, including the southern part of Dallas County, most of Ellis County and all of Kaufman County.

The workshop brought together diverse stakeholders from this subregion – development, public, community, environmental, business and other interests were represented. Ten discussion groups used large maps, markers and Legos to depict preferred growth patterns for four different subregional growth scenarios. The entire group also participated in a keypad polling exercise that secured individual participants' feedback on issues facing North Texas.

This workshop began the Vision North Texas Greenprinting Initiative. Greenprinting combines a detailed computer mapping component with the engagement of stakeholders in setting area priorities



for land conservation. Workshop groups established land conservation goals and identified priority areas on the subregional maps; keypad polling questions provided additional insights into community preferences.

## Southwestern Subregional Workshop

The second subregional workshop was held on June 30, 2007 at Aledo High School in Aledo TX. It followed the same general template used for the Southeastern Subregional Workshop, but with some refinements and modifications. This workshop was conducted in partnership with AIA Fort Worth, as part of their “Blueprint Initiative” celebrating AIA’s 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

This subregion covers approximately 2,100 square miles and includes the southwestern part of Tarrant County, most of southern Parker County, all of Hood and Johnson counties, and the part of Palo Pinto County surrounding the City of Mineral Wells.

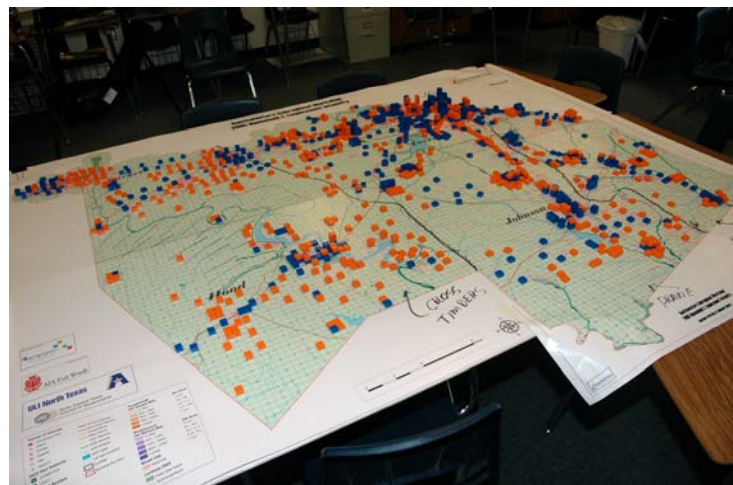


At this workshop, eight groups of diverse stakeholders considered regional and subregional issues and created preferred development patterns for four different growth scenarios. This workshop placed less emphasis on land conservation because this area will not be covered by the initial VNT Greenprint. Instead, additional discussion focused on issues of community form and urban design.

## Workshop Template

The digital materials provided with this report include examples and illustrations of the key elements of the subregional workshop approach. These include:

- The participants’ workbook, which contains the agenda for the session, background information on the region and subregion, biographies of speakers and instructions for the small group exercise. Workbooks for the Southeastern and Southwestern Subregional Workshops are provided.
- The presentation used for one of the volunteer training sessions is included.
- Reports of the highlights of each workshop are provided. These reports include images of the group’s work results and of the keypad polling used to assess opinions among the entire group of participants.





- The report on all activities during Phase 2 of Vision North Texas is also provided. This report includes the recommendations of all discussion groups at all the workshops conducted during the past two years.

Key lessons learned from these workshops are:

- Trained and enthusiastic volunteers are essential to the project. Recruit them early and hold at least two training sessions so each volunteer can attend a session. We assigned individuals to volunteer roles based on their background, familiarity with Vision North Texas and expressions of interest. Volunteers served in these roles:
  - Facilitator
  - Recorder
  - Resource person
  - Registration assistant
  - A/V assistant
  - Photographer
  - Data entry assistant
  - General volunteer
- Start securing sponsorships as soon as the decision is made to hold a workshop. In our case, the general project funding did not cover all costs for workshops. Additional specific funding was needed to carry them out. We added two lower level sponsorship opportunities related to the subregional workshops so businesses that are most active in their subregion could contribute at affordable levels. In general, we estimated that each workshop cost approximately \$35,000 (for a workshop sized for about 150 people), including direct expenses and an estimate of value of staff and consultant time spent.
- Participants should be recruited in numbers that will allow for a balance of viewpoints in each small group. We used letters, invitations, email outreach and personal phone calls to recruit participants. Several rounds of contact are necessary.
- The subregional workshops must be designed in a way that builds on the earlier region-wide workshop. We included the regional analysis as part of the background information for each subregion. Also, we used the scenarios developed at the regional workshop to establish the range of population and employment growth that might be possible in the particular subregion. These high and low estimates determined the number of Legos each group allocated within the subregion.
- It's important to carry out the discussion of overall goals and themes (or 'headlines', as we termed them) before groups begin placing Legos on the map. In this way, there is a rationale for the Lego placement and a way for individuals within the group to discuss whether or not a particular distribution is appropriate.
- Legos and markers work very well as tools for engaging the diverse set of participants.
- Some issues are better addressed through discussion than through the geographic distribution of growth. We found it worthwhile to focus each workshop on a particular set of issues, so the discussion could be more detailed. In the Southeast, the topic was land conservation; in the Southwest, it was urban design.
- Keypad polling was very well-received and enabled us to gain input immediately and anonymously from the workshop participants.

As Vision North Texas moves into its next phase, the results of these subregional workshops will serve as the basis for research and dialogue. Workshop participants will be involved in our effort to define and implement sustainable choices for accommodating future growth. The Community Action Grant was very important to our ability to carry out these workshops and expand the impact of Vision North Texas beyond the initial 'Reality Check' event. Thank you!