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City introduces Strategy for Vital Neighborhoods

This past July, the City Council and citizens of Garland were introduced to the Strategy for Vital Neighborhoods, an initiative to stabilize and improve neighborhoods throughout the city. The Strategy recognizes Garland is a community with a variety of neighborhoods and though each neighborhood is unique, they share some things in common. Moreover, as Garland matures and approaches the point when it is fully developed or “built-out”, it is critical to ensure neighborhoods get the proper attention and resources. The Strategy for Vital Neighborhoods was developed in response to the request of City Council to focus attention on Garland’s neighborhoods. This exciting initiative is both unique and challenging. In the coming months the Strategy will be kicked off across the city.

The main theme of the Strategy for Vital Neighborhoods is partnerships. By creating and sustaining partnerships with City of Garland departments, neighborhood organizations, businesses, non-profit organizations, the faith community, educational institutions, and others, the effort to stabilize and improve neighborhoods will be shared among many and the success increased. Everything in the Strategy for Vital Neighborhoods goes back to Garland’s Neighborhood Philosophy -- “Recognizing a strength of Garland is the character of its neighborhoods, we will work in partnership with neighborhood stakeholders and community resources to build a stronger community and keep Garland an excellent place to live and invest.”

The philosophy identifies neighborhoods as one of the defining elements of Garland and emphasizes the relationship between neighborhood quality and the overall quality of the city. Second, the philosophy embraces building partnerships to build stronger neighborhoods. Finally, it speaks to the choices individuals, families and businesses have when selecting where to reside, work, and locate. Having confidence Garland will remain a community with rising property values increases the likelihood of continued and growing investment.

The Strategy for Vital Neighborhoods also has three envisioned outcomes: stabilized and improved neighborhoods; sense of community; and increased neighborhood management capacity. Again, Garland’s neighborhoods are all different. They may be seen as improving, declining, or stable neighborhoods. The Strategy will offer tools to restore and revitalize older neighborhoods and to keep newer neighborhoods in good condition. Neighborhoods are not only houses, but also businesses, schools, places of worship, parks, and all of the other parts of a community. Neighborhoods also have a relationship to other neighborhoods, the city, and the region, placing them within a wider context. Residents and property owners should have a sense of pride and responsibility

for their neighborhood. Working together, all those having a stake in an area will see how their individual interests combine to create a quality neighborhood.

Local government by itself cannot build vital neighborhoods. The Strategy for Vital Neighborhoods will increase the skills and abilities of neighborhood stakeholders to work through issues in their neighborhood and identify potential partners in the community to assist them. The City of Garland is committed to providing the services and programs best-suited for municipal government; however, a more active, engaged, and empowered citizenry will be more effective in bringing about vital neighborhoods in partnership with the City and other organizations. Building the capacity for neighborhood associations and individuals to take care of day-to-day issues in neighborhoods will primarily be accomplished through the Garland Neighborhood University or GNU. Look for more information about Garland Neighborhood University in the coming months.

The first major event to kick off the Strategy for Vital Neighborhoods is the Neighborhood Summit—an invitation only event to be held Saturday, October 28th, at the Atrium at the Granville Arts Center in downtown Garland. Attendees will hear from two nationally-renowned neighborhood experts, participate in an interactive exercise to build knowledge of and enthusiasm for neighborhood revitalization, and learn about how the Strategy for Vital Neighborhoods will provide the tools for neighborhoods to partner with the City of Garland to create neighborhoods of choice.

The Strategy for Vital Neighborhoods is intended for all of Garland's neighborhoods; however, four areas have been selected as pilot areas to focus on during the first months of the initiative. The pilot neighborhoods are Carriagehouse, Forest Ridge-Walnut, Oakridge, and Terrace-Bellaire. These areas were selected because they each offer unique challenges and opportunities, as well represent the different types of neighborhoods in Garland. The general boundaries of these areas are as follows:

Carriagehouse: North—Naaman School Road
 South—Buckingham Road
 East—Pleasant Valley Road
 West—Lavon Drive

Forest Ridge-Walnut: North—Buckingham Road
 South—Walnut Street
 East—Jupiter Road
 West—City Limits

Oakridge: North—Belt Line Road
 South—Buckingham Road
 East—Shiloh Road
 West—Jupiter Road

Terrace-Bellaire: North—Avenue B/Avenue D
 South—Miller Road
 East—Dairy Road
 West—South First Street

Kick off meetings are planned for early November in each of these areas. To get involved and placed on the contact list, please contact Alex Koenig, Neighborhood Planner, by phone at (972) 205-2726 or e-mail akoenig@ci.garland.tx.us, or Felisa Conner, Neighborhood Vitality Manager, by phone at (972) 205-3864 or e-mail at fconner@ci.garland.tx.us.

Additional neighborhoods will be selected in early 2007.

The Strategy for Vital Neighborhoods will yield physical changes, but will also include new and improved neighborhood organizations, experience in planning and plan implementation, greater collaboration among individuals and organizations, and stronger networks supporting neighborhoods in Garland. Working with residents, business owners, the faith community, non-profit organizations and a wide variety of other partners will create relationships to sustain on-going neighborhood development and a build a stronger community.