

New Camp Bowie standards to spur redevelopment

By Aleshia Howe, Managing Editor

Fort Worth City Councilmembers are expected to approve new zoning plans for Camp Bowie Boulevard to create a form-based code for the area. The following story ran on Feb. 15, 2010, in the Fort Worth Business Press:

Camp Bowie West may have experienced its heyday a handful of decades ago, but a few local planners and business owners are hard at work on a resurrection of the well-known thoroughfare.

Though Camp Bowie Boulevard, which runs east and west in Fort Worth's central city and is known for its distinctive brick paving, has gone through a major transformation in the past decade along the stretch from University Drive to Interstate 30, the street's western half has seen better days.

In an effort to reclaim western Camp Bowie's former glory, Camp Bowie District Inc., which manages Camp Bowie's Public Improvement District, hired Gateway Planning to create form-based codes for Camp Bowie Boulevard from Interstate 30 to Loop 820. The design team currently is holding meetings with Camp Bowie's business owners.

Form-based codes are an alternative to conventional zoning in that regular use codes dictate only the use of a property "commercial, industrial, etc." while form-based codes identify the look and feel of a project.

Fort Worth has seen form-based codes enacted in Fort Worth South and will see the codes in the planned Trinity River Vision project.

Scott Polikov, president of Gateway Planning, said form-based code is a tool in a redevelopment initiative. And the stretch of Camp Bowie Boulevard from University Drive to Interstate 30 already has a near-form-based environment.

Historic Camp Bowie was designed and laid out as part of a master plan, so it was developed and still has the attributes of a form-based environment, Polikov said. That's why it's retaining its value so well. But from Interstate 30 to Alta Mere and from Alta Mere to 820, we think this is an opportunity to attract some appropriate reinvestment, with help from TxDOT to potentially help us with the street design to support the redevelopment vision. We want to try to carry the historic theme throughout the roadway, maybe not like from University to 30, but with elements of the brick and the streetscaping. This is not an aesthetic exercise, although aesthetics are a part of it.

Polikov said the main redesign goal is urban design continuity.

When you get through the Ridglea area, it's losing its vitality. We want to try to extend that sense of arrival on Camp Bowie past Ridglea, Polikov said. The section of Camp Bowie further down is seen as a destination, not a buffer. There's a sense of arrival to a destination and that's what we want to extend past Ridglea.

Brandy O'Quinn, principal at Urban Strategies of Texas LLC and former president of the Camp Bowie District, was hired to work with Gateway on the new design standards.

It's similar to why Downtown felt the need to create design standards. New investors came in and in order to protect development, they felt they needed to create design standards, O'Quinn said. To that same mission, Camp Bowie is the same way. Even though portions of it already look like it's created, we never would have thought Stripling and Cox would be torn down and so many developers own property on Camp Bowie that it's important to protect the area.

O'Quinn said there are beautiful architectural aspects to many areas of Camp Bowie including the Ridglea area and although form-based codes do not dictate architectural standards, they would at minimum allow for any new development to match the existing architecture.

The stretch of Camp Bowie from Interstate 30 to Loop 820, though, will not be exactly the same as the stretch from University Drive to Interstate 30, O'Quinn said.

Camp Bowie West is not a pedestrian area, she said. But we want to look to that area to create some good, clean jobs that can then stimulate that area and help the area's retail and residential. Right now, it's way too retail intensive and it's not doing as well as it should €! We could beautify all day but if we don't get the infrastructure in place, a redevelopment will not succeed “ that's why we need to get the jobs in there.

Polikov agreed, saying the goal for the area's redevelopment is to build up the tax base, beginning with jobs and enacting the form-based code because redevelopment creates value, which creates a better tax base, which means more money for aesthetic improvements.

One such improvement will involve Camp Bowie Boulevard itself. O'Quinn said according to a recent traffic count study, the stretch of Camp Bowie between Alta Mere and Loop 820 sees 24,000 cars daily on its six-lane road. Compared with the 17,000 cars seen on Camp Bowie in the Ridglea area, O'Quinn said the traffic count from Alta Mere to Loop 820 is not hardly enough to justify so many lanes.

There are several things we could do. We could have on-street parking in certain areas; we could bring the buildings up and get the sidewalks to stretch from building to building to create pedestrian nodes along Camp Bowie from Alta Mere to Loop 820, O'Quinn said.

The next public meeting for Camp Bowie business owners will be at 6 p.m. March 9 at Ridglea Country Club. Once the code is drafted, it must be approved by the Camp Bowie District Board of Directors and then by the city's zoning commission followed by the City Council.

I think from a business standpoint, this is the DNA of the new public-private partnerships, Polikov said. There's not enough private or public money, separately, to create redevelopment momentum. This makes it possible for the public sector to grow its tax base sustainably and for the private sector to invest with less risk. It's going to be required in our new economy. Its timing is really very good.