

ARTS ENTERTAINMENT > ARCHITECTURE

Downtown Dallas' parks revolution is a remarkable public-private achievement

In less than a decade, downtown is forever changed.



People explore Carpenter Park on its opening day, Tuesday, May 3, 2022, in Dallas. The new park sits near I-345 in downtown Dallas. (Rebecca Slezak / Staff Photographer)

By Dallas Morning News Editorial

2:00 AM on May 4, 2022 CDT

If you don't remember what downtown Dallas was like before its parks revolution, it's hard to imagine now. And it's worth keeping in mind that this change has happened with extraordinary speed in the glacial world of public infrastructure.

On Tuesday morning, the tangled braid of roads leading into the east side of downtown was gone. In its place is Carpenter Park, our newest and largest downtown park, a beautiful space, both serene and active, that is an invitation into the central city, a place worthy of the skyline that rises around it and of the iconic sculpture, Portal Park Slice, repositioned as its anchor.

The Dallas Morning News

Dirt has been turning for a little more than a decade to build our downtown parks, and what has been accomplished in so little time is remarkable. It seemed to take “a nanosecond,” as Mary Margaret Jones, the landscape architect responsible for envisioning the downtown parks, said Tuesday.

In truth, some two decades of vision, planning and work have gone into the realization of the downtown parks master plan. Robert Decherd, founder and chairman of Parks for Downtown Dallas and chairman, president and chief executive of DallasNews Corporation, has led this transformational change in concert with many partners, public and private.

On Tuesday, Decherd joined Mayor Eric Johnson and the family of John Carpenter, who gave generously to construct this gift to the city. It was the latest, but not the last, opening ceremony for Parks for Downtown Dallas, which has given the city Civic Garden, West End Square and Pacific Plaza. Harwood Park, its final work under the downtown parks master plan, is under construction and is scheduled to open in spring 2023.

At nearly six acres, Carpenter Park redefines the eastern edge of downtown and its connection to Deep Ellum. It also alters for the better the connection between the city and the people who live in it.

The old park was a statement of the primacy of the roads that got people into and out of downtown. The new park is an embrace of the people who are downtown, who enjoy the city in both its movement and its stillness.

Parks are, as Mayor Johnson said Tuesday, critical infrastructure. They are as integral to the fullness of our lives as the roads that carry us here and there. They are fulfilling and completing.

Downtown Dallas is home now to major parks thanks to a private and public commitment to the master plan that conceived of a radically different city core where beautiful public spaces, rather than towering private buildings, are the center of gravity.

That change will ensure that downtown Dallas endures for generations as a place not only of commerce but also of life.

Dallas Morning News Editorial. Dallas Morning News editorials are written by the paper's Editorial Board and serve as the voice and view of the paper. The board considers a broad range of topics and is overseen by the Editorial Page Editor.

[@dmnopinion](mailto:editorialboard@dallasnews.com)