

**My, how the world has changed since our last edition of 'The Real Dirt'!** Everyday life is now impacted as families, organizations, and governmental bodies strive to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. We applaud our business community as they adjust to new and ever-changing market conditions, implement safety protocols, and continue to provide needed goods and services to our citizens. In times like these, it is more important than ever that we work together to support our local business family.

**The Real Dirt** is intended to share timely and accurate information regarding commercial and other development in Benbrook. The Benbrook Economic Development Corporation (BEDC) is here to answer your questions, as much as we are able to publicly share information without jeopardizing possible developer deals. Also, the **Real Dirt** can act as rumor patrol....offering the **real dirt** on development activities, our approach, and practical answers to real citizen questions.

## **Be Nimble, Be Quick**

**The last several months have certainly brought challenges**, and the beginning of the pandemic highlighted the need to quickly pivot BEDC's business retention focus, in response to conditions of the moment.

BEDC went to work right away to ease the strain on our business community. In March/April, BEDC offered a reimbursement program to pay for temporary signage to businesses announcing curbside, drive-through, and/or alternate operations. Working in tandem with the Benbrook Area Chamber of Commerce (BACC), the BEDC maintained a listing of open eateries, and continues to partner to share valuable announcements. Through the City's website and social media outlets, BEDC provides real-time information on available resources. As the Tarrant County Small Business Assistance program considers a second wave of grants this fall, BEDC will remain available to assist Benbrook businesses that need access to copiers/fax/scan services for application materials.

In early May 2020, **in response to the new challenges our businesses faced**, the BEDC board of directors sought and received city council approval to offer a **Disaster Relief Grant** to local small businesses. To date, BEDC has awarded 94 grants for rent/mortgage assistance, and has directed non-qualifying businesses to other available resources. The grant will run through September 2020.

Recently, the BEDC launched a new website, [ZoomBusiness](#). This site allows businesses to list services for free, and provides a great resource for consumers to quickly find local retail/commercial/non-profit organizations. Additionally, [ZoomProspector](#) is our new property search website; it allows businesses to easily review available sites for lease or sale in Benbrook. The BEDC remains nimble in our approach to supporting our business community; our goal is to remain responsive, helpful, and available - now and into the future.

## **Commercial Dirt**

While the development/construction industry has been impacted by the pandemic, we continue to proactively engage with that community, and we see continued interest from developers and site selectors reviewing the Benbrook market, available properties, and possible incentives.

**On the retail development front**, several EDC-incentivized projects are now complete: Hoffbrau Steak & Grill House opened in July 2019, and Braum's Ice Cream & Dairy Store opened for business in March 2020. BEDC continues to be in conversation with other potential restauranteurs and developers, with a focus on encouraging full-service or fast-casual local and regional options that offer quality, family-friendly concepts, and alcohol service.

Just recently, as part of a developer agreement with BEDC, **Benbrook Plaza shopping center** completed significant improvements to the aging center. With a new storefront and parking lot, improved landscaping, and several new tenants, the center is a more active and vibrant retail hub.

Similarly, **Timber Creek shopping center**, in partnership with the BEDC, is undergoing a refreshed façade, new storefront signage, and parking lot improvements. Investing in improvements to aging centers is one way BEDC can help create attractive options for new tenants, resulting in new retail options for our community.

In March, Footworks Performing Arts Center completed a new 9,000 square foot state-of-the-art dance studio at 9191 Vista Way. While under construction, BEDC leased Footwork's old location to them after acquiring the building. Encouraging new development sometimes means assessing the current needs of individual businesses, and being open to creative ways to move projects forward.

We fully appreciate that our citizens want options – eateries, grocery options, more retail choice. We must also balance that knowledge with a changing development model – more online options, less brick-and-mortar investment. **Two exciting opportunities for commercial growth lie in BEDC-owned properties.** BEDC is investing in two pieces of land that offer possibilities; the Westpark corner (location of old Marc's automotive building), and NW Winscott (vacant land just west of Cracker Barrel). To responsibly develop these properties, the BEDC must be tenacious, selective, and patient. Both properties offer significant challenges to development; environmental issues, topography, utilities, etc. However, one role of an economic development corporation is to remove barriers to development. For some time, BEDC has invested in removing "warts" and making improvements to both pieces of land. When these properties are clear for construction and proposals are properly vetted, the resulting developments are likely to serve Benbrook for decades to come. Our goal is to develop responsibly - now and into the future.

*Speaking of investing.....* BEDC continues to budget for aesthetic improvements along **Benbrook Boulevard/U.S. 377**. This year, landscaping is nearly complete, new benches dot the corridor, and colorful banners stretch along the roadway from new light poles. Soon, new masonry monument signs to the north and south of the corridor will serve as gateway anchors, informing motorists that they are indeed in Benbrook, our *Small Town, Big Backyard*.

## ***Rooftops***

At the beginning of the year, Aura Apartments began leasing the 301-unit high-quality, market-rate, multi-family complex. Recently, dirt work commenced on 58 new residential lots at Whitestone Heights Phase 2, and will soon begin on 81 new residential lots at the 19-acre Whitestone Crest Phase 2, located west of Rolling Hills Park and south of Trail Ridge Drive. The completion of these residential projects equates to increased daytime population - which increases interest in our market from retailers and other commercial users looking for "rooftops."

## ***When are we getting a grocery store? My neighbor said we're getting an HEB!***

To date, there has been no serious discussion with HEB to bring the concept to Benbrook; but not for lack of effort. Certainly, BEDC has reached out on multiple occasions and in multiple ways to gain the attention of the grocery powerhouse, as well as nearly every other grocer in the market; both large and small. Recruiting grocery is highly competitive, and relies heavily on industry-specific analysis of a community.

Even so, we continue to proactively seek a quality grocer to consider the Benbrook community. BEDC conducted a grocery analysis to include industry information of interest; market share, community profile, etc. We stand ready to assist a quality company in any way we can to welcome them in meeting our community's desire for a stand-alone grocer. The work continues.

## **How can I stay informed, ask questions, or share my thoughts about what's happening in my city?**

1. Attend City Council and/or Board and Commission meetings.
2. Watch live stream or archived videos on the [City of Benbrook website](#) or Charter Channel 190.
3. Read the Benbrook Community Newsletter and Annual Report that come in your mail.
4. Follow our social media pages; Facebook, Twitter, Next Door.
5. Call, email, snail mail, or Facebook message us. We promise to get back to you. We're here to serve.

***Thank You for Building a Better Benbrook!***