

West End Square

Dallas, TX

OVERVIEW:

Field Operations worked with Parks for Downtown Dallas and the City of Dallas Park and Recreation Department to design West End Square, located at the center of the West End Historic District. The site presented an extraordinary opportunity to create a cutting-edge, vibrant, and world-class public space—a next generation park that is both a great civic space and a model for innovation.

The design for West End Square balances history and innovation, creating a much-needed neighborhood park catered to the district's growing population and a testing ground for incorporating technology in a public space both as a means to support maintenance and operations but also as a public amenity in itself.

The Square's design creates two unique environments: the Frame, a U-shaped canopy structure that serves as a flexible armature for a plug-and-play approach to technologies, allowing these to be incorporated over time as the Square's uses and needs evolve; and the Prairie Gardens that compose the interior of the Square with organically shaped planting beds, sculpted and planted with a palette inspired by the Texas Blackland Prairies.

PROJECT FACTS:

YEAR:	2018–21 March 2018 – October 2019 (Design) January 2020 – February 2021 (Construction) March 2021 (Opening)
SIZE:	0.78 acres
SERVICES:	Landscape Architecture; Public Realm; Project Management; Community Engagement; Concept Design; Schematic Design; Design Development; Construction Documents & Construction Administration Services
ROLE:	Prime; landscape architecture, urban design
BUDGET:	\$6.25 million (construction budget)
CLIENT:	Parks for Downtown Dallas

PROJECT TEAM:

Project Lead, Landscape Architecture, Urban Design: James Corner Field Operations

James Corner, RLA, Design Director
Isabel Castilla, Principal-in-Charge, ASLA
Stephanie Ulrich, Project Manager / Lead Designer
Kate Rodgers, Project Designer

Civil & Traffic Engineering: Pacheco Koch

Structural Engineering: Datum Rios

Lighting Design: HLB Lighting Design

MEP Engineering: Purdy-McGuire, Inc.

Communications: Datacom Design Group

Water Feature Consultant: Greenscape Pump Services

Soils & Irrigation: Jeffrey L. Bruce & Co., LLC

Signage & Wayfinding: Order

Horticulture: Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Garden

ADDITIONAL PROJECT INFORMATION:

Site Context

Today, the West End Historic District is one of the leading tourist attractions in the City of Dallas. Located in the northwestern area of downtown Dallas, the West End Historic District is at the junction between a wide range of downtown Dallas attractions. This prime location situates the future West End Square at the heart of multiple routes through downtown Dallas and Victory Park with proximity to the DART West End Station to the east.

In recent years, the West End has experienced growth in residential development, as well as an influx of both new and adaptive reuse in commercial developments geared towards creative and innovative companies. Recently rebranded as the Dallas Innovation District, this spirit of innovation echoes the Historic District's original positioning as a manufacturing district—a district of making.

The surrounding attractions bring in a wide range of visitors, from tourists to local residents, activating downtown Dallas during weekdays and weekends. Within a 10–15-minute walk from the site, pedestrians can access the American Airlines Center for large-scale events, the Katy Trail to the north, the Arts District and Klyde Warren Park to the northeast, the Convention Center to the south, and Main Street to the east. West End Square will become a central point for an existing network of neighborhood destinations.

The site is bounded by four distinct edges: Market Street to the east, North Record Street to the west, Corbin Street to the south and the old Spaghetti Warehouse building to the north.

Market Street is a vibrant edge—one characterized by extended outdoor dining and the main pedestrian thoroughfare in the West End, connecting to Victory Park to the north. North Record Street provides a quieter entry point to the site with residential building frontage, as well as connections to Dealey Plaza and the Dallas Holocaust and Human Rights Museum. Corbin Street, a low-trafficked one-way street, opens up to the restaurants along the southern edge, with historic loading docks and spillover outdoor dining. To the north, the building that previously housed the Spaghetti Warehouse provides a strong edge and presents an opportunity for activation in the future.

Design Elements

The Frame – The Frame activates the street edge by creating a diversely programmed threshold between the Historic District’s sidewalks and the Square’s lush garden interior. The trellis-like structure acts as an armature for all of the Square’s technologies that operate the park. As a flexible armature, the Frame’s structure takes on a plug-and-play approach, allowing new features to be incorporated over time as the Square’s uses and needs evolve.

Outdoor Workroom – Located beneath the shade canopy created by the Frame’s northern edge, this space houses a 50-foot-long table fitted with charging stations and Wi-Fi, providing a unique opportunity to comfortably work outside. The Workroom includes overflow space in the gardens, envisioned as a more intimate workspace for individuals and smaller groups.

The Porch – Featuring porch swings hung from the Frame’s edge along North Record Street that are an interactive and social feature, the Porch provides a playful environment for all ages.

Game Room – The Game Room provides a variety of games for the public, including ping pong and foosball. It creates a playful space that encourages social connection between local workers and residents who were involved throughout the public engagement process.

Innovation Arcade – The Frame along the park’s Market Street edge is designed to host temporary installations, performances, and artwork, further expanding community programming opportunities at West End Square. Seating steps front the eastern side of the Square along Market Street.

Prairie Gardens – The interior of West End Square is a Prairie Garden, creating a moment of respite within the Historic District’s brick-paved sidewalks. The organically shaped planting beds are sculpted and planted with a palette inspired by the Texas Blackland Prairies. Seating nooks are carved into the planting beds and provide a variety of social seating arrangements. The gardens are supported by a smart irrigation system that can self-regulate and respond to its weather sensor, allowing for a more sustainable approach overall.

Water Table – The Water Table, located within the Prairie Gardens, incorporates three different modes: a reflecting pool for still days, bubblers on windy days, and a cloud mist with potable water for cooling during particularly dry and hot days.

Lawn – As part of the garden interior, the Lawn fronts the trellis, creating a spillover area for sitting in the sun during cooler days.

Paving

West End Square's paving combines the Historic District's most distinctive material, brick, with a more contemporary interior paved with exposed aggregate cast-in-place concrete.

Planting

West End Square balances the integration of new technologies and flexible spaces with a lush green respite within the Historic District. New Cedar Elms and low, raised planters border the edges of the Square, creating a green buffer between the street and sidewalk. Within the interior of the Square, organically shaped planting beds with a subtle undulating topography feature gardens inspired by the Texas Blackland Prairies that carefully combine grasses and perennial textures, providing seasonal interest year-round. The gardens include shade trees such as Mexican Sycamore, Burr Oaks and Chinquapin Oaks, including a Burr Oak that marks the center of the garden, surrounded by seating. Flowering trees such as Texas Redbud, Desert Willow, White Crepe Myrtle and Mexican Plum punctuate the entrances to the garden.

Planting selections are native or adaptive with low water use. Many of the plants are butterfly pollinators and insect attractors, protecting plant diversity and food sources in turn.

In a downtown that estimates a higher population of dogs than residents, West End Square encourages those who will visit with dogs while protecting the longevity of the Square with strategic design moves. The edges of the Square are designed to handle dog urine with raised planters for male dogs and intermittent decomposed granite for female dogs. A smart irrigation system and dedicated subsurface drainage are in place to minimize the impact of urination.

Furnishing

The Square features a variety of custom fixed furniture, including curbed benches of different sizes, circular platforms for flexible seating, porch swings, a seating step feature and a 50-foot-long worktable alongside colorful and movable tables and chairs. The fixed furniture presents integrates smart features, such as wireless charging stations and Wi-Fi connectivity to enhance visitors' experience of the public space.

Lighting

Eco-smart LED lighting technology that is low maintenance and energy efficient provides a safe and rich user experience. The lighting includes smart sensors that can be programmed to adjust lighting levels based on times of high use, length of operational occupancy, and nearby motion. This technology allows for the lighting to be dimmed after hours to reduce energy costs and respect the Square's residential surroundings with lighting that's dark sky compliant. This smart lighting system also has the capacity to include sensors that collect real-time data on energy consumption and fixture malfunction, minimizing maintenance costs over time.

Community Engagement

Two meetings were held in the West End Historic District and were attended by residents, businesses, and local workers.

The design team implemented iPads and QR codes to show 3D views made in-house by Field Operations, allowing for an immersive experience and an opportunity for the community to provide more specific feedback.

Plant List

Trees

Texas Redbud
Desert Willow
White Crepe Myrtle
Mexican Sycamore
Mexican Plum
Burr Oak
Chinquapin Oak
Cedar Elm

Understory

Century Plant
Agave
Red Yucca
Yellow Yucca
Texas Yucca
Cast Iron Plant
Blue Grama
Blue Sedge
Everoro Japanese Sedge
Plains Coreopsis
Bermuda Grass
Firewheel
Siskiyou Pink Guara
Super Blue Liriope
Horsemint
Muhly
Lindheimer's Muhly
Texas Needle Grass
Catmint
Hameln Dwarf Fountain Grass
Mealy White Sage
Henry Duelberg Sage
Sweetscented Marigold
Purpletop Vervain

Sustainability

West End Square's smart irrigation system, with a weather sensor and self-regulation, allows for more efficient use of resources and adjusts to the park's needs. The Water Table incorporates three different modes: a reflecting pool for still days, bubblers on windy days, and a water mist with potable water for cooling on days that are particularly dry and hot. The modes are triggered by a wind sensor incorporated on the trellis structure columns.

The trellis minimizes heat gain in a place where the urban heat effect is significant and provides a shade canopy that allows for a comfortable outdoor workroom.

Many of the materials in the park are sourced locally, including the louvers, wireless chargers, and sensors for the smart system, which were all fabricated in Texas.

Smart Systems

The Frame is a technology armature that supports the smart systems employed in West End Square, a network that comes together to support the park's maintenance and operations. This structure is flexible and allows for adaptation in the park over time as needs change.