

*2016 ICMA Award nomination
Community Partnership Awards
City of Cedar Hill Government Center*

Problem assessment, the challenge or need that prompted the local government to develop the program

The City Hall building in the heart of the downtown square was built when the city's population was barely 5,000. Over the years, the City's population exploded to over 45,000 residents. As a result of the increase in population, conditions became increasingly overcrowded as the City struggled to provide services to its expanding number of residents. As a result, many departments and divisions began to move to other locations which required the City to lease multiple buildings over time. Citizens and others doing business with the City were often directed to one of the seven (7) buildings spread across the 36 mile city which meant crossing the street or driving several miles to the appropriate satellite office.

In the old downtown City Hall on the square, offices were small and cramped and sometimes shared between multiple employees. The City Hall's single conference room could hold only about 15 people; and the City Council Chamber was dark with a low ceiling and view-challenging pillars in the front row. The confined space faced challenges when citizens had to leave when the Council convened in a closed session. As a result, the City Hall was not citizen friendly and extremely inefficient for staff.

At the same time, the Cedar Hill Independent School District (CHISD) Administration Building was becoming almost uninhabitable with roof leaks and ventilation problems. The Board of Trustees met in a cozy room that seated only about 25 visitors.

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As a result of the fast growing nature of the community, both the City and CHISD facilities were unable to accommodate the needs of the staff and the residents it served, both now and in the future. This caused both the City and ISD administration to consider ideas on how to better serve the community.

Program implementation and costs

Separate bond elections, approved overwhelmingly by voters, had set aside funds to build new administrative offices for each entity that would support the community's growth. In 2005, as preliminary plans were started separately, a former City Council member asked why the City and school district didn't consider building one facility to serve both groups, because both served the same population. The boundaries of CHISD closely follow the city limits. A quick check revealed that no other local government and ISD in Texas had tried this solution, but the idea seemed to make sense. After several kinks were worked out, the idea to join forces and create one campus was adopted by both entities.

During initial discussions of the joint facility concept, it was evident there was a need to improve services and provide citizens with access to city and school administrators. A joint committee from both entities' administrations was created to assist in defining the needs of both groups. Several efficiencies became apparent immediately. For example, single campus meant lower land acquisition costs and offered savings in shared parking and landscaping. The potential for efficiencies and partnerships grew from there. One of the most predominant shared concepts that both the City Council and CHISD Board of Trustees agreed to was the concept of a large Council/Board meeting room and the design included sharing a spacious lobby, mini-conference rooms off the lobby, the elevator, IT facilities and the HVAC system.

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In the beginning, it was a challenge making a decision on the potential location of the new civic center concept based on many reasons. First and foremost, the City wanted to be very sensitive to the fact that moving the City Hall from downtown could create a hardship on the downtown square businesses. The City Council made it a priority to ensure that the community and downtown businesses would not be negatively affected by the City Hall move. At the same time, the City was experiencing an increase in retail development activity within a mile from the downtown area, which had been titled the “Uptown” area. A location was selected to give the Government Center greater visibility and accessibility in both the historic downtown area and the developing Uptown area.

As the project specifications began to take shape, it seemed natural to include the Police Department instead of building a new police station to replace the one the Department had outgrown. This idea was further encouraged by the fact that the new potential location was deemed the City Center and would benefit all sectors within the community for both City and ISD purposes. Due to the fact that the City of Cedar Hill was at just more than halfway to build out, it was of high priority to develop a facility with the capability to serve citizens’ needs well into the future.

Tangible results or measurable outcomes of the program

The City’s partnership with Cedar Hill Independent School District on the 117,000 square foot, \$27.5 million Cedar Hill Government Center in the heart of the City Center became a reality in 2008. The Government Center is a one of-a-kind facility that is the only facility in the State of Texas that houses both City and school district administration offices as well as the police headquarters. This partnership saved tax payers over \$4 million in construction costs and saves

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over \$300,000 annually through combined operational and maintenance cost savings. The facility continues to save operational costs with the implementation of environmentally conscious practices, such as the 152 kW rooftop solar photovoltaic system that generates over 210,000 kilowatt hours of electricity, reduces 280,000 pounds of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, and saves the Government Center over \$21,000 per year in energy costs. More importantly, the citizens have been able to enjoy maximized efficiency at a “one-stop shop”, where they can take care of both their city-related needs and their child’s school needs.

The logical layout of the new facility offers unsurpassed convenience to citizens. The building is easy to find and once inside, the most frequently used City services including Utility Billing, Municipal Court and Human Resources are conveniently found on the first floor near the entrance.

There are many evident benefits to the community at what we now call the Government Center. Residents can meet with City staff members in one of several conference rooms on the first floor. The Municipal Court judge uses a large multi-purpose room that can be easily reconfigured for other uses such a training facility, board meetings, retirement celebrations and much more. The Police Department has its own attached lobby that welcomes visitors 24/7.

The second floor has a convenient one-stop shop area that developers and others alike who desire to do business with the city can go to do business, get questions answered and receive services. The one-stop shop center includes the City departments of Planning & Zoning, Building Inspections, Code Enforcement, Public Works and Engineering, Neighborhood Services, and Parks & Recreation.

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Everything a citizen or developer may need in regards to City development is located in one centralized location, which represents a huge enhancement to how Cedar Hill did business.

To residents, the Cedar Hill Government Center presents a unified presence for local government services and education. The function is decidedly citizen-centric and the inspiring design is a source of community pride.

Lessons learned during planning, implementation, and analysis of the program

Cooperation between the two largest taxing entities in the community is a natural extension of the community's values, but it represents an extremely rare trait in local government. The process was not without bumps along the way. The vision came from the elected officials who represented the citizens. The professional managers of the City administration, working with their ISD colleagues, kept the project focused on citizen service and responsible fiscal management. Unique vision, unparalleled cooperation and service-focused management have delivered an impressive, service-oriented government center that will serve the community for generations to come.