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Scouting the Trinity: Get Me To The Water

One hundred and fifty years ago, a group of developers stood somewhere near the site of RadioShack's new campus and, while overlooking the Trinity River, proclaimed they had found a great location to build a city.

Those early developers might have been army scouts, but they knew a good place to build when they saw one.

After all these years and generations of development, a new frontier is still visible from the bluffs overlooking the Trinity River. An imaginative eye no longer sees the river as a natural impediment to Indian attacks, but an



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opportunity for neighborhoods, parks and commercial and retail development. Civic, community and business leaders with an eye for aesthetics, growth and/or a buck are formulating a massive public, private partnership known as the Trinity River Project.

The goal of the Trinity River Project is to make the Trinity River the centerpiece of Fort Worth. Along the Trinity River, just north of downtown, lies over 800 acres of mostly vacant decaying buildings, used-car lots, old industrial sites, a former power plant and undeveloped land. Visionaries see a town lake and a number of canals creating three to four times more waterfront than we presently have. The town lake would provide recreation. The canals would offer a setting for a mixture of duplexes, condos, retail and commercial development. As developers have learned, people want to be near water and will pay for the privilege.

The Trinity River Project is in its early stages, but some pieces already are in place and others are on the drawing board. The Cash America building, located on the shore of the Trinity, was re-built and enlarged after the tornado of

2000. A little further east along the river, Pier 1 Imports and RadioShack soon will house thousands of workers at new campuses. Continuing east past the courthouse, there are plans to re-develop the old historical neighborhood around Samuels Avenue. The project, called Trinity Bluffs, would provide 1,500 residences ranging from apartments to condos to townhouses. And of course, there will be new shops and restaurants to serve these residents.

New developments of dense housing and neighborhood stores and restaurants that you can walk to are examples of what is being called new urbanism. As defined by the Urban Land Institute, new urbanism is the creation of a total and connected community. It is walkable from end to end, has a variety of housing types, a civic core and a mix of uses and amenities. It has an interconnected street network with recognizable boundaries and provides for chance meetings and privacy.

It sounds like the old days in small towns.

This new urbanism first came to parts of the country where there was no longer land to build new suburbs or where traffic was so bad that people wanted back into the city. In recent years, the concept has been embraced in downtown Fort Worth with projects such as the re-development of the former Bank One Building. It seems that developers can't build condos and other private residences fast enough to meet demand.

Key components of many new urbanism projects are water and parks. People want to live, work and play as close to the water's edge as possible. Throughout the country, new developments are emerging along the water's edge. Chattanooga, Cincinnati, Louisville, Oakland, Pittsburgh, Portland and New Orleans are just some of the many cities that are undergoing or have recently undergone major downtown development along rivers. Some of these projects are possible because waterborne commerce diminished and cities are looking to re-develop unsightly water-side property; others have underutilized rivers such as the Trinity that can't handle commercial traffic.

New urbanism is also springing up along lakes. In Chicago, a 28-acre tract of land, the largest undeveloped parcel of downtown land in a major U.S. city, is being transformed into a new lakefront neighborhood that will include 5,000 residences, 1,500 hotel rooms, a park, school and 2.2 million gross square feet of commercial space.

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come the last 150 years. From frontier cabins in the 1850s, to Cowtown at the turn of the century, tall buildings in the '50s, skyscrapers in the '80s, and a return to downtown entertainment and living in the '90s. Major changes are happening faster and faster. Someday when we look back, the big development in the early years of this century will be the Trinity River area.

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