Dear residents,

As many of you know, after years of planning and community outreach, the city is moving forward with a second phase of improvements in Snider Plaza. Having completed necessary underground improvements centered on water and sanitary sewer lines, the next tasks focus on stormwater upgrades, new pavement, sidewalk improvements, and associated landscaping. This upkeep and maintenance are what people expect from the places they live, shop and dine. And, these improvements will also address aging infrastructure.

A lot of study, listening and contemplation has brought us to this point. In 2018, the City engaged Paris Rutherford of the Catalyst Group to facilitate a series of public meetings to identify improvements and make recommendations to the City. In 2020, the City Council approved a concept plan, authorizing staff to pursue detailed design plans. In December 2022, city staff constructed a streetscape mock-up to showcase components of the plan, including pavers, landscaping, lighting, and benches. This mock-up is still on display, located on city property along Rankin, just west of Snider Plaza.

As originally conceived, in addition to addressing parking, infrastructure and potential landscaping, the plan contemplated a family-oriented green area, sidewalk amenities, special pavers and other enhancements. Community input for the design was overwhelmingly positive. Most concerns focused on construction timing, shopper and merchant construction-related inconvenience, parking and project costs.

Last spring, staff began the zoning approval process. After numerous public hearings, the plan was approved with modifications, including removal of greenspaces so that some parking could be restored. As drawn now, the plan preserves as much curbside parking as feasible.

Contrary to recent statements you may have heard, no parking spaces will be removed for street-side landscaping. When curbs and sidewalks are improved, by federal law, cities must bring them up to current standards. Although 22 parking spaces will be lost from what is currently available, that reduction is necessitated by government regulations to address ADA requirements and pedestrian safety.

When you hear that Snider Plaza already has a parking deficit and can’t tolerate the loss of additional parking slots, that counters what the city has done in recent years to add parking. For decades, Council members were urged not to pass up buying land adjacent to Snider Plaza to increase surface parking for customers and employees. That’s why the City purchased property on Rankin, just west of Snider Plaza to add a new surface parking lot with 53 spaces.

Parking has also increased in recent years on the side south of Snider Plaza. Through an agreement between the City and Hilltop Plaza, your first hour of parking in the Hilltop Plaza parking garage is free, and the rate is only $4 an hour after that. In addition, at considerable taxpayer expense, dozens of Snider Plaza employees are also being provided with passes to park while construction is ongoing throughout
Snider Plaza. This mix of customer and employee parking is aimed at boosting the availability of the Plaza's quick-in, quick-out: curbside slots. Given these combined efforts, parking availability in and near the Plaza has been greatly enhanced.

The City actively patrols and writes citations for parking violations throughout the Plaza in accordance with posted time limits. So, what can we do to address future parking issues? A key component here is coordination with building ownership and what is communicated by them to those they lease to. One potential answer is the creation of a Public Improvement District (PID), which was first recommended in 2009 by a Snider Plaza taskforce of merchants, property owners, and nearby residents. Districts of this sort, established only through the approval of a majority of property owners in Snider Plaza, are successfully in place in similar retail and restaurant areas near Snider Plaza. If such a district is established here, monies would then be collected in an ongoing manner to fund all issues related to parking management.

In summer 2022, the City Council adopted a Centennial Master Plan. Designed to provide a roadmap for the City’s continued success during the next few decades, the document’s themes and goals represent input from more than 4,000 residents. The document emphasizes the necessity to support efforts to preserve and enhance the sense of University Park’s identity and to enhance and maintain our commercial areas.

While this project is not endorsed by everyone, the City Council believes this upcoming work, like other improvement projects that are planned or underway in other portions of the city, meets with the expectations of most who call University Park home.

I encourage you to read more about the project at uptexas.org/sniderplaza.

Sincerely,

Mayor Tommy Stewart