

# The Green We Need

## Give us more ‘mini Klyde Warren’ parks, please

Perhaps you’ve never been to the strip mall near the corner of Hillcrest and Arapaho roads in Far North Dallas. Still, the old Hillcrest Village would be familiar.

The dull 1980s retail strip — with its beige, rectangular cookie-cutter buildings and an ocean of mostly empty parking spots — is a staple of the American suburban landscape. You might care to go to one only when you’re craving a drink from Starbucks.

But the new Hillcrest Village makes an impression.

A moribund mall just a few years ago, now the development has been nicknamed “a mini Klyde Warren Park,” our colleague Sarah Blaskovich reported in December. That’s because the city of Dallas partnered with retail developer Shop Cos. to revive the mall with snazzy restaurants and to strip out the central parking lot and a two-story building to create a 1.5-acre park with a playground.

This dense corner of Dallas bordering Richardson is short on open space, and it has been difficult for the city to buy parkland there because land is scarce and valuable, Dallas Park Board President Calvert Collins-Bratton said.

Shop Cos. bought the mall in 2018, razed one of the buildings and flipped that land and the central parking lot to the city for \$1.4 million.

The city-owned park, called Hillcrest Village Green, cost another \$4.2 million to build and debuted Saturday to a lot of buzz. This open space should be a template for others in the commercial real estate game, and we hope more developers will take note.

We recognize that getting this park built took a confluence of favorable factors. Shop Cos. co-founder David Sacher has an emotional connection to the mall because he grew up in the area. He and Shop’s lead developer, Daniel Fuller, approached the city with their idea for the mall. The city paid for the green space with money from a \$262 million bond package for parks that voters passed in 2017. Dallas also kicked in \$1.5 million in economic development funds to give the shopping center a facelift. Wide patios, trees and benches have replaced pavement and old, narrow walkways.

“It’s like a unicorn,” Collins-Bratton told us. “It took a private developer who saw the value of park space working with the city to make that happen.”

Sacher said he and his colleagues drew inspiration from Malibu Country Mart in California, a Mediterranean-style outdoor mall with trendy stores and restaurants lining manicured lawns, inviting picnic areas and a colorful playground. He told us that the reason we don’t see more projects like the Hillcrest Village renovation is that

developers aren't typically willing to tear down revenue-generating buildings to replace them with open space. He said eliminating parking lots can also put developers at odds with municipal parking requirements.

The pandemic has been catastrophic for retailers and restaurants, but spaces like Hillcrest Village Green should be good for business, spurring families and friends to dine and spend time outdoors. Already Shop Cos. has signed nearly 30 leases.

We urge cities to reexamine their parking requirements, and we encourage developers to be better neighbors. Even a small playground or a pocket park can make a world of difference to families.