

YOUTH MASTER PLAN

Submitted to the DeSoto City Council

City of DeSoto, Texas

by

Dr. Alejandro Rodriguez
University of Texas at Arlington

and

Dr. Joseph S. Portugal
University of Texas at Arlington

March 1, 2021

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 3

INTRODUCTION 5

 Purpose of the Youth Master Plan 5

 Benefit of a Youth Master Plan 6

BACKGROUND 6

 Demographics 7

 Mission Statement 8

 Vision Statement 8

 City of DeSoto Youth Master Plan Core Values 8

GOALS AND STRATEGIES 9

 Goal 1: To collaboratively and continuously identify the needs of youth in the community 9

 Strategies 9

 Goal 2: To develop a shared vision that effectively uses resources to serve the youth in the community. 10

 Strategies 10

 Goal 3: To coordinate the effective provision of services for youth in the community. 11

 Strategies 12

 Goal 4: To coordinate the resources to ensure the sustainability of the YMP 13

 Strategies 13

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Youth Master Plan (YMP) is designed to sustain youth's ability to grow and prosper into adulthood. Currently, the City of DeSoto provides extensive programming through the Parks & Recreation Department and the Public Library, addressing a myriad of interests and life skills necessary to support adolescents as they age. The YMP is an extension of that effort and represents a firm commitment to DeSoto's youth and an investment in their future.

The City of DeSoto retained the services of a consulting team from the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA) to help staff develop the Youth Master Plan. Mavis Lloyd, an independent consultant, was hired to coordinate City staff's work regarding the activities geared to developing the plan. The UTA consultants led the team in accomplishing the following tasks for the plan:

1. Identified community stakeholders, agencies, and organizations willing to participate in the design and implementation of the YMP
2. Identified youth service categories such as education, health, life skills, and recreation
3. Completed a demographic review of various groups affected by the plan
4. Drafted the YMP goals and objectives
5. Developed survey protocol used for the stakeholders focus group
6. Drafted a report of the stakeholders' focus group
7. Assisted with the questions and administration of a youth focus group
8. Developed a youth survey questionnaire based on the goals, objectives, and data from both focus groups.
9. Administered the youth survey
10. Drafted an analysis and report of the youth survey
11. Developed a draft of the YMP and shared it with the City staff for their review. The YMP's recommendations were based on youth survey data, YMP goals, objectives, and data from the youth focus group and the stakeholders' focus group.
12. The UTA consultants drafted the final version of the YMP based on City staff review.

The following is a summary of the most important strategies contained in the YMP.

- Ultimately, the success and sustainability of the YMP will depend upon the ability of the City of DeSoto, the DeSoto Independent School District, primary community stakeholders, and the youth to manage, coordinate and monitor the plan elements. Consequently, the City should seek to strengthen the participation and collaboration of the DeSoto Independent School System and other important community stakeholders in the continuous revision and administration of the youth needs' assessment survey. Survey the youth in the community every two years and revise the YMP as needed based on the survey data analysis.
- Establish a six-person Leadership and Coordinating Committee under the purview of the City Manager. The committee will be charged with finding entrepreneurial and innovative ways to effectively implement youth initiatives and programs. The committee will also be charged with ensuring a better alignment of resources and needs and coordinating key tasks for the sustainability of the YMP. An Assistant City Manager should serve as the

THE CITY OF DESOTO; WHERE THE YOUTH ARE PART OF THE SOLUTION

committee leader, and LCC's representatives should include the Parks and Recreation Department, Library, and the DeSoto Police Department. The Leadership and Coordinating Committee should provide summary reports to the City Manager and the YMP Committee.

- The Leadership Coordinating Committee should create subcommittees to examine specific performance benchmarks related to the following service categories:
 - Education
 - Youth Health and Mental Wellness
 - Life Skills and Career Readiness
 - Sports and Recreation

Such subcommittees should conduct an annual review of 1) the plan goals and objectives and 2) programs under their service categories. Subcommittees will use task metrics approved by the Leadership Coordinating Committee to evaluate programs on how well they contribute to achieving the adopted goals and objectives.

- Develop usable and user-friendly web presence. This will not need a redesign of the City's website but the addition of a visible and accessible website dedicated to youth services. The design team should seek the active contribution of a youth representative to help capture how the youth would like to see information displayed.
- Conduct a comprehensive annual review of the YMP aimed at ensuring the sustainability of the plan.
- Evaluate resources so that allocations are better aligned to the most critical needs of the youth of the community.
- Celebrate plan achievements as they happen or as early as practicable. The long-term success of the YMP depends on the level of support it gets from stakeholders across the entire community. Launching new programs, changing program service levels, and their marketing hinges on their support. Engaging the community on key initiatives and program evaluations can help build a sense of ownership and commitment by any key stakeholder concerned with helping youth become well-rounded future community leaders.
- Engage the DISD Superintendent and other ISD representatives as appropriate to help with the long-term success of the YMP. The continued success of a youth master plan is more likely to be achieved when cities, schools, the youth, parents, and other key community stakeholders work together in nurturing youth to become the leaders the community needs.

These strategies are further developed below under the YMP's goals and objectives.

INTRODUCTION

Cities are well-versed in comprehensive planning to support capital improvements, economic development, infrastructure, and orderly growth. They are equally adept at preparing strategic plans for effective council-manager relations, financial management, human resources, and public safety. However, designing a plan for youth in the community requires the joint efforts of stakeholders, sponsors, and a broad spectrum of local organizations, public, private and non-profit.

The National League of Cities (NLC) developed "*Creating a Youth Master Plan*" to guide municipal and community leaders in this endeavor. As a visionary guide for the future, youth master plans represent an attempt to coordinate a wide range of programs and services that ensure life skills development in a safe environment. A benefit of the process is that "cities, schools, young people, and other key stakeholders work together to lay the foundation for children and youth, [and] for the community as a whole (NLC, 2016:4)."

As a stakeholder, schools are central to this community-based effort. Understandably, the partnership between cities and schools is a necessary catalyst to preparing the plan. Schools have a vested interest in youth through the educational process, established relationships with parents, and the provision of facilities to support a quality learning environment. Ultimately, the success of the planning process is predicated on the coordination of diverse agents to craft a core document that addresses the specific youth issues in the community.

The City of DeSoto is committed to providing programs to support the transition of youth to adulthood. One way to achieve that goal is through the development and implementation of a youth master plan. The plan's scope includes a series of goals and objectives that engage the city, school district, community stakeholders, and youth in a combined effort to promote adolescents' health, safety, and welfare.

Purpose of the Youth Master Plan

The purpose of the youth master plan is to provide a template or guide for youth programming designed to address core needs in the community. These may involve yet are not limited to education, health, life skills, and recreation. Identifying and creating supplemental programs, training, or mentoring opportunities enhances youth's ability to become effective community leaders. Alternatively, this may perpetuate a cycle whereby they opt to reside in the city and contribute to its long-term viability. According to the NLC,

"The development of a youth master plan can also transform how the community perceives - and how cities and schools work with and for - young people. By involving youth in the local decision-making processes that affect their lives, they come to be seen more clearly as valuable assets and partners working to improve the quality of life in their schools and neighborhoods. Their involvement helps city and school officials learn more about the real concerns, hopes, and struggles that are part of young people's daily lives. Youth engagement leads to more effective policies and programs while building and strengthening the community's next generation of leaders (4)."

The City of DeSoto's commitment to developing a YMP acknowledges its belief that youth are assets to the community. Further, fostering opportunities for youth engagement are a defined action step to ensuring long-term sustainability.

Benefit of a Youth Master Plan

The DeSoto Parks and Recreation Department (PARC) and the DeSoto Public Library have developed and implemented numerous programs that appeal to various youth interests. Generally, these are associated with education, health, life skills, and recreation. Offering flexible opportunities for personal enrichment and growth has been a successful venture for the city.

In association with PARC, the Youth Advisory Council supports participation, inclusiveness, and initiatives to engage youth and foster better relations with elected and appointed leaders in the city. The Library's Teen Services offers a host of programs to appeal to youth in the community and support their matriculation to becoming responsible adults.

The chief benefit of a YMP is the formalization of community practices designed to safeguard youth's health, safety, and welfare. The city and the school district and stakeholders, agencies, and organizations unite to form an alliance that identifies issues affecting youth and plans for their amelioration. In that regard, involving youth in the plan's core aspects instills leadership and provides a voice for continued oversight and responsiveness.

BACKGROUND

The City of DeSoto is a diverse home-rule community that was incorporated in 1949. Residents enjoy a wide array of activities, including the arts, beautification, civic academy, and programs for all ages. DeSoto was awarded the National League of Cities All America City Award in 2006 and the 2016 Commission for Accreditation of Parks and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) Accreditation, National Parks and Recreation Association (NPRRA).

DeSoto spans approximately 21 square miles and has a population of approximately 52,988 people (2019 Estimates, U.S. Census Bureau). It is bordered by Interstate 35E, Interstate 20, and US Highway 67 in southern Dallas County. In September 2015, the city adopted a comprehensive plan with core elements, including future land use, transportation, streetscape, housing, and urban design. These criteria support a thriving local economy and a Standard & Poor's bond rating of AA- and Fitch bond rating of AA.

The Best Southwest Partnership, a consortium of cities in southwest Dallas and north Ellis counties experiencing economic growth and population expansion, includes DeSoto. Member communities are dedicated to promoting economic, education, and legislative welfare. DeSoto stands to benefit from this association.

The DeSoto Parks and Recreation Department, in conjunction with the DeSoto Public Library, have implemented multi-faceted recreational and educational programs. These quality-of-life amenities are a necessary and vital component of developing and implementing a youth master plan.

Demographics

Demographic information for youth ages 10-19 was taken from the 2013-2017 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates. Table 1 shows the number of youths in age groups 10-17 and 15-19. The data reflect a total population of 4,239 youth in age group 10-17, of which 2,306 are males, and 1,933 are females. For ages 15-19, there are 3,747 youth, of which 2,305 are male, and 1,442 are female.

Table 1. Youth population by age group (ages 10-19)

Age	Population	Male	Female
10-17	4239	2306	1933
15-19	3747	2305	1442

Source: 2013-2017 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates

Information for race includes a breakout of age ranges from 10-14, 15-17, and 18-19. The counts for ethnicity include white, Black, Asian, Hispanic, Pacific Islander, and a breakout for males and females (Table 2). A review of the data reveals that the numbers don't match the demographic count for youth age 11-19. Part of this anomaly is due to the census count for Hispanic youth, which allows for ethnic deviations depending on country of origin and other criteria.

Table 2. Youth race by age group and sex (ages 10-19)

Male					
Age Group	White	Black	Asian	Hispanic	Pacific Islander
10-14	594	1602	24	569	18
15-17	282	1122	0	287	47
18-19	20	747	0	60	0
Female					
10-14	610	1199	0	621	0
15-17	202	805	0	211	0
18-19	138	244	0	129	0

Source: 2013-2017 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates

Based on the census available for DeSoto, the data are consistent with the interpretation that the community is mostly minority (an estimated 70%) and diverse. For the most part, Black and Hispanic youth are well represented in the report of the minority youth. There are 3,471 Black males and 916 Hispanic males among the age groups 10-17 and 15-19. By comparison, there are 2,248 Black females and 961 Hispanic females in age groups 10-17 and 15-19.

Mission Statement

The City of DeSoto strives to continually engage the youth in our community to identify the best strategies and programming needed to develop an environment where our youth will thrive. Our overarching goal is to work with the youth, the DeSoto Independent School District, and other stakeholders to provide educational, healthy, safe, fun, and nurturing experiences to help all youth succeed into adulthood.

Vision Statement

The City of DeSoto; where the youth are part of the solution.

City of DeSoto Youth Master Plan Core Values

The City of DeSoto Youth Master Plan is guided by the following shared set of beliefs and fundamental core values.

- Our youth are our most precious assets. We value, appreciate, and seek to help them develop into well-rounded, productive adults engaged in our community's continuous improvement.
- Our youth are respected and heard. We respect and seek the active engagement of ALL youth in our community.
- Our youth comes from different backgrounds. We celebrate the diversity of our youth and believe that this diversity adds value and strengthens our community.

GOALS AND STRATEGIES

The YMP follows four major goals. The consultants developed these goals in close collaboration with staff from the City Manager's office, the Parks Department, and the Library (YMP team). The agreed-upon goals were the basis for the questions used during the stakeholders' focus group. After the focus group and based on the focus group data analysis, the YMP team revised the goals. The set of revised goals guided the design of the needs' assessment survey administered to the youth throughout the city.

The main purpose of the survey was to determine the youth population's needs. More specifically, the survey was used to ascertain which program(s) the youth feel is most needed and to what extent they believe the City and other organizations are providing needed services. This recount of the interaction between the goals, the focus group questions, and the needs' assessment survey questions are here specified to denote the importance of the goals to the Youth Master Plan process. That is, the goals, the objectives, and the recommendations were not developed in a vacuum. Quite the contrary, they are inherently connected to the entire planning process. Most importantly, the recommendations are entirely based on the analysis of the youth needs' assessment survey. Thus, the YMP is organized along four goals and corresponding specific objectives. Strategies to achieve the plan's goals and objectives are specified below.

Goal 1: To collaboratively and continuously identify the needs of youth in the community.

This goal reflects the need to continuously engage in measuring the youth population's needs. The premise followed here is the recognition that the Youth Master Plan, perhaps more than other plans because it serves a rapidly changing population, is a living document. As such, the plan needs cyclical updates based on the continuous survey of the youth population.

- Objective 1: Engage at least 80 percent of community stakeholders to identify youth needs by June 2022.
- Objective 2: Survey users and stakeholders biannually to determine youth needs.

Strategies

1.a. Survey the youth in the community every two years and revise the YMP as needed based on the survey data analysis.

1.b. Reexamine the survey questions for validity and applicability. Revision of the survey questions should be carefully considered so that they are still supplying data that would help achieve the goals and objectives of the YMP.

1.c. Maintain a repository of data analysis from past youth needs' assessments. Such a repository will help to analyze if there are any service-related or needs trends that can only be discerned when data for multiple years is analyzed.

1.d. Seek to strengthen the participation and collaboration of the DeSoto Independent School System and other important community stakeholders in the continuous revision and administration of the youth needs' assessment survey.

Goal 2: To develop a shared vision that effectively uses resources to serve the youth in the community.

This goal is about the critical need to use scarce resources most effectively and efficiently possible. However, the vision and decisions on how to best use youth-related resources are developed in collaboration with other community stakeholders, including youth. In this shared decision-making approach, coordination and effective communication with the youth are critical. Therefore, communication is a multiprong activity where adults make every effort to speak the youth's language, use technologies and platforms they prefer to communicate with others, and advertise the programs and activities widely and in different venues, forums, and media.

- Objective 1: By the second quarter of 2021, establish a coordinating body charged with making effective use of scarce resources to serve the community's youth.
- Objective 2: By the first quarter of 2021, develop a marketing plan to promote youth programs and services effectively

Strategies

2.a. Establish a six-person Leadership and Coordinating Committee under the purview of the City Manager. The committee will be charged with finding entrepreneurial and innovative ways to effectively implement youth initiatives and programs. The committee will also be charged with ensuring a better alignment of resources and needs and coordinating key tasks for the sustainability of the YMP. An Assistant City Manager should serve as the committee leader, and LCC's representatives should include the Parks and Recreation Department, Library, and the DeSoto Police Department. The Leadership and Coordinating Committee should provide summary reports to the City Manager and the YMP Committee.

2.b. Develop a social marketing plan to promote and disseminate youth programs and services offered by all organizations within the City of DeSoto. The Leadership and Coordinating Committee should lead the effort to develop the marketing plan. However,

this task should involve key community stakeholders and especially the DeSoto ISD and a youth representative.

2.c. Develop a full inventory and mapping of all programs and stakeholders providing youth services in the community. This information is critical to developing the marketing plan and fulfilling the Leadership and Coordinating Committee's coordinating responsibilities. It is key to identify the community's strengths and unmet needs.

2.d. Develop usable and user-friendly web presence. This will not need a redesign of the City's website but the addition of a visible and accessible website dedicated to youth services. The design team should seek the active contribution of a youth representative to help capture how the youth would like to see information displayed. The youth website should be used to market the community's programs and as a tool to engage with the youth. This type of social marketing should include links to social platforms that the youth use to communicate and socialize, such as Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, WhatsApp, and others.

2.e. Strengthen the existing Youth Advisory Council already in place by providing it with more opportunities to actively contribute to decisions that affect the community's youth. Invite a representative of the YAC to participate in the activities of the Leadership Coordinating Committee. Allow the YAC the opportunity to comment on decisions of the Leadership Coordinating Committee.

Goal 3: To coordinate the effective provision of services for youth in the community.

This goal is about measuring how effectively youth services are being provided. Service or program evaluation should be integral and integrated into the plan of services. Critical components of any plan include service coordination, targeted communication of services, measuring how well services are being provided. A good evaluation plan is designed to answer critical questions.

- Objective 1: By June 2021, develop performance benchmarks to evaluate the effectiveness of service delivery.
- Objective 2: By September 2021, realign programmatic offerings to better meet the needs identified by the youth survey.
- Objective 3: Ongoing, implement the YMP's continued assessment recommendations and revise as necessary.

Strategies

3.a. Authorize the Leadership Coordinating Committee to create subcommittees charged with evaluating specific performance benchmarks related to the following service categories:

- Education
- Youth Health and Mental Wellness
- Life Skills and Career Readiness
- Sports and Recreation

Each subcommittee should conduct an annual review of

- the plan goals and objectives and
- programs under their service categories.

Subcommittees will use task metrics approved by the Leadership Coordinating Committee to evaluate how well programs contribute to achieving the adopted goals and objectives.

The subcommittees should submit recommendations to the Leadership Coordinating Committee to revise programs, reorganization, or change in funding levels or continuation based on the program evaluations. They should also recommend the adoption of new programs.

The evaluation should consider costs, instructional staff, location, scheduling, or other facets of the plan. The subcommittee should prepare a summary report for the City Manager to be shared with the Mayor and Council. The results of the evaluation should be shared with the Superintendent of DeSoto ISD.

3.b. Align program offerings to the needs identified by the youth survey.

3.c. Study the feasibility of providing some level of public transportation for youth (bike lanes, shuttles, etc.) to access programs offered in the community.

3.d. Evaluate the website dedicated to the YMP along the following components:

- Ongoing maintenance program – websites lacking maintenance tend to become obsolete and unresponsive rather quickly.
- Evaluate website content and compliance – this is another critical component of responsive website design.

- Evaluate web analytics and make strategic recommendations based on how much traffic the website is generating. If pages receive light traffic, recommend redesign or removal for more appealing and usable content.
- Test for website usability and functionality. If users need too many clicks to find the information or encounter too many broken links, recommend redesigning or removing obsolete content.

Goal 4: To coordinate the resources to ensure the sustainability of the YMP

This goal reflects the City's concern with strengthening the sustainability of YMP. Among the many actions the Leadership Coordinating Committee could take to strengthen the plan's sustainability, one could include sustaining coalitions, nurturing relationships with key community stakeholders, continuously engaging them in the plan, and keeping critical partnerships on track to achieving the plan's goals and objectives.

- Objective 1: Perform a comprehensive annual review of YMP.
- Objective 2: Prepare annual assessment of resource levels and coordinate revision as necessary.

Strategies

4.a. Conduct a comprehensive annual review of the YMP aimed at ensuring the sustainability of the plan.

4.b. Evaluate resources so that allocations are better aligned to the most critical needs of the youth of the community.

4.c. Celebrate plan achievements as they happen or as early as practicable. The long-term success of the YMP depends on the level of support it gets from stakeholders across the entire community. Launching new programs, changing program service levels, and their marketing hinges on their support. Engaging the community on key initiatives and program evaluations can help build a sense of ownership and commitment by any key stakeholder concerned with helping youth become well-rounded future community leaders.

4.d. Engage the Superintendent for the DeSoto ISD and other ISD representatives as appropriate to help with the long-term success of the YMP. The continued success of a youth master plan is more likely to be achieved when cities, schools, the youth, parents, and other key community stakeholders work together in nurturing youth to become the leaders the community needs.