



# NATURAL BEAUTY AT WORK

By **Karin Anderson**, Communications  
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Tucked between two Dallas-area suburbs that are virtually bursting at the seams, Fairview is an anomaly. A flourishing commercial district greets visitors along the Town's western edge, but less than a mile from hectic North Central Expressway, Fairview's master-planned developments yield to sprawling homesites and intentionally preserved thickets. Roosters call out from multi-acre lots and horses peek over fences. The motto "Keeping it Country" has started to fade from official use, but the spirit of rural life carries on here. Conservation is built into the Town's mission statement; a dark sky ordinance deters light pollution, and the mayor's catchphrase is "plant more trees."

"Fairview has been blessed with rolling terrain and tree-lined creeks and roads," Mayor Henry Lessner said. "Over the years, we tried to preserve this atmosphere, even as the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex exploded around us. We planned our neighborhood roads to push traffic around our Town rather than through it, and we set aside parcels of land for trails and parks."

In 2009, the Town drew up plans to transform 18 valuable acres of undeveloped land not far from its commercial district into a park that would be the envy of many suburbs: walkways, arbors, and bridges would lead visitors to fountains, formal gardens, and an amphitheater.



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The proposal for Coyote Park (named after some of its native inhabitants) also protected wetlands, woodlands, and natural grasses. Still, residents didn't approve. They had hoped for something more organic, and they were concerned about the volume of traffic the improvements might attract. It simply didn't suit them.

But volunteerism did – and still does.

"Volunteers from our park board, our local Rotary Club, local churches, and other residents work to beautify the Town," Lessner said. "Preserving the natural beauty of our Town is one of our highest priorities."

Fairview's first official volunteer beautification event took place in 2013. Increasing traffic on main thoroughfares had brought with it trash and debris, which was collecting along roadsides.

Congregants from a local church approached Town officials with an offer to organize a cleanup day. Town staff recruited more volunteers and got permission from the Texas Department of Transportation for the unpaid crews to pick up trash in the right-of-way.

Two other churches joined the effort, and on a late October morning, dozens of helpers packed the parking lot of Town hall, ready to work. Most of the assembled volunteers were divided into teams and given reflective vests, tools, and maps. Together, they cleaned up six-and-a-half miles of roadway.

Families with young children were assigned to a park, where they spread mulch around playground equipment and added crushed granite to trails.

"Even the little guys got involved with hand spades," remembered Town Engineer James Chancellor.

The cleanup day has been reprised several times in the past decade, often by Fairview's Rotary Club and most recently by the Town's Parks and Recreation Advisory Board. Again, scores of volunteers have driven the work, with help from Town staff picking up bags stuffed with trash. The 2023 workday was strategically planned to coincide with an annual hazardous waste collection and document shredding event hosted by Fairview's public works department.

Meanwhile, the 18-acres once slated for an amenity-filled park sat mostly unused. Walkers and cyclists frequented a paved trail that skirts the property's southern edge, but few others ever ventured past the dense trees and bushes that screen the meadow from a small park with a playground. A church and several homes with vast lots encircle most of the land. The Town shaved off a portion of the reserved acreage when it sold an adjacent parcel, and a few homes now sit where better access to the park might have been.

"It's essentially landlocked," Parks and Recreation Advisory Board Chairwoman Katherine Ponder said on a recent tour of the now 17.6 acres. The 14-year-old plan for the park was created before Ponder's time on the park board, but she has seen various versions of the proposal. She and other board members were determined to find a new way to enhance the land without compromising its rustic appeal.

Park Board Member Renee Powell sought out the Collin County Master Gardeners Association for advice, and club members surveyed the area, taking an inventory of existing plant life before making recommendations.

"One of the master gardeners came back another time," Powell said. "She had identified over 90 different plants."

The new plan deleted virtually everything artificial, calling instead for swaths of wildflowers and informal, unimproved trails to lead visitors through the blooms. Mowers would create the paths, which could move and change with the seasons.

The gardening club suggested harvesting seeds from existing wildflowers to supplement purchased seeds that would then be hand-scattered. Park board members and the master gardeners also donated plants from their own gardens to spruce up a trailhead leading into the park.

"They're super excited that there's this little untouched gem," Ponder told the Fairview Town Council when presenting the board's new proposal for the park in November 2022. "It has a lot of wildflowers and a lot of native life already there," she said. "We're looking for a way to make the land kind of useful and interesting to all Fairview residents but still leave it natural, because it's beautiful."





Ponder asked council to rename the park "Coyote Meadow" to better reflect its purpose.

The Town council unanimously approved the plan and new name, and volunteers spent a day in early December crisscrossing the field and tossing the seeds.

Walking through Coyote Meadow in late June, Ponder and Powell pointed to plants that have now blossomed. The women grabbed tufts of feathery milkweed fibers and let the wind help with propagation.

Ponder said that small signs placed along the mowed paths direct visitors to download a plant-identifier app to help them learn more about the various flora and discover what grows well in the region. "I really don't expect that this is going to draw thousands of people," she said. "I think it will

probably just get more people out here with their cameras."

It will also attract pollinators, which is crucial to maintaining a healthy meadow. But that's where patience comes in. To reach its full effect, the field will need to be reseeded over the course of several years.

Ponder said, "It's important to remember that in year one, a garden sleeps; year two, it creeps; and year three, it leaps."

It's all fitting, because carefully monitoring growth has helped shape Fairview's unique nature. ★