

Reunion Park: Reinventing the Reunion Tower Experience

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Figure 1: Reunion Tower at night

Reunion Tower is a staple of the Dallas skyline—a must see destination boasting 360-degree views from over 500 ft in the air. As one of the more uniquely designed towers—the top being a large sphere that lights up at night—the tower is one of the top places to visit in Dallas. While the city’s economy centers mostly on business, trade, and technology, Dallas hosts over 20 million tourists each year.² The tower’s visitor experience is limited to a viewing deck on the top floor and overpriced restaurants. In *The Image of a City*, Kevin Lynch discusses the concept of experience: “Nothing is experienced by itself, but always in relation to its surroundings, the sequences of events leading up to it, the memory of past experiences.”³ Without any additional features, tourists and residents are left with a less than a memorable experience. To offer both tourists and residents a more memorable experience with one of Dallas’ most striking features, as well as combat pressing community issues, this paper redesigns a green space beneath Reunion Tower into a functional park.

¹ Reinhart, Brian. “When Reunion Tower’s Last Restaurant Revolved, It Caused a Gruesome Accident.” *D Magazine*, April 24, 2023. <https://www.dmagazine.com/frontburner/2023/04/when-reunion-towers-last-restaurant-revolved-it-caused-a-gruesome-accident/>.

² “About Visit Dallas.” Visit Dallas. Accessed September 4, 2023. <https://www.visitdallas.com/about/#:~:text=More%20than%2022%20million%20people,restaurants%2C%20and%20they%20support%20jobs.>

³ Lynch, Kevin A. *The Image of a City*, 1960, 1

Background

Some of Dallas' biggest problems include health issues, sustainability, and the lack of tourism. The park would contribute to solving all three.

The obesity rate in Dallas hit 35.8% in 2023,⁴ and the city has consistently had one of the highest obesity rates in the United States. According to the Dallas Morning News—in a survey conducted by WalletHub—of the biggest 100 cities in the United States, Dallas ranks 44th in best places for an active lifestyle,⁵ just squeezing in to the upper half of the rankings. This could be a function of many aspects including its size and preferred mode of transportation as most residents prefer to commute via car versus by walking or biking. The park will provide an area for exercise in the center of downtown, which will help reduce Dallas' obesity. The development of a green space will also help the mental health of the population. Around 30% of people in Dallas suffer from serious mental illness, including anxiety, PTSD, and depression.⁶ Spending time in nature has been proven to improve mental health, reduce stress and anxiety, and promote overall physical and mental wellbeing.⁷

Dallas is also dealing with sustainability issues arising from a growing population. Dallas is facing a 1.4% annual increase in population—equating about 100,000 people this past year.⁸ Since Dallas' public transit system fails to provide consistent, quality service to its residents,⁹ most residents prefer to drive a personal vehicle to work and to run errands—unlike other cities like New York and Seattle, which have robust public transport 24/7. The use of public transport reduces per capita carbon emissions by 45%—a statistic that is non-existent in the city.¹⁰

⁴ “Study Finds Texas Has One of the Highest Obesity Rates in U.S.” Texas has one of the highest obesity rates in US. Accessed September 6, 2023. <https://spectrumlocalnews.com/tx/south-texas-el-paso/news/2023/01/07/texas-obesity-inequities->.

⁵ “These 2 North Texas Cities Are among the Nation's Hardest Places to Stay Fit, Study Says.” Dallas News, January 6, 2023. <https://www.dallasnews.com/news/healthy-living/2023/01/06/these-2-north-texas-cities-are-among-the-nations-hardest-places-to-stay-fit-study-says/>.

⁶ “Facts/Stats.” Dallas County Mental Health, August 28, 2023. <https://findhelpdc.com/facts-stats/>.

⁷ “How Nature Benefits Mental Health.” Mind. Accessed September 4, 2023. <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/nature-and-mental-health/how-nature-benefits-mental-health/>.

⁸ “Dallas-Fort Worth Metro Area Population 1950-2023.” MacroTrends. Accessed September 4, 2023. <https://www.macrotrends.net/cities/22966/dallas-fort-worth/population#:~:text=The%20current%20metro%20area%20population,a%201.52%25%20increase%20from%202020.>

⁹ Gonzalez, Migchalee. “DFW and the Transportation System Plaguing It.” North Texas Daily, April 13, 2022. <https://www.ntdaily.com/dfw-and-the-transportation-system-plaguing-it/>.

¹⁰ “5 Environmental Benefits of Sustainable Transportation.” Transportation, February 28, 2023. <https://transportation.ucla.edu/blog/5-environmental-benefits-sustainable-transportation.>

However, the development of a new public transport system or renovation of the current system would be both costly and time consuming. Offsetting the carbon emissions of personal transport offers a faster solution. This park will have a couple hundred, with each mature tree absorbing 48 pounds of carbon in one year. Since it only takes 7-8 trees to produce enough oxygen to provide enough oxygen for one person for one year, the trees alone will provide yearly oxygen for almost thirty people.¹¹

A third issue that this park will mitigate is the lack of tourism in the city. Tourism produces \$10 billion in annual revenue for Dallas—a small number compared to its almost \$600 billion economy.¹² In comparison to New York’s \$48 billion in revenue¹³ and Los Angeles’ \$35 billion in revenue,¹⁴ there is still significant room for improvement in Dallas’ tourism economy. If Dallas offers better attractions, tourism could help boost the economy even more and make Dallas a center of tourism and activity.

¹¹ Rakesh. “How Many Trees Does It Take to Produce Oxygen for One Person?” GoTreeQuotes, September 1, 2023. <https://www.gotreequotes.com.au/how-many-trees-does-it-take-to-produce-oxygen-for-one-person/#:~:text=Therefore%2C%20by%20mass%2C%20roughly%20740kg,of%20growth%20and%20overall%20size.>

¹² “Economic Indicators.” Economic Indicators | City of Dallas Office of Economic Development. Accessed September 4, 2023. <https://www.dallascodev.org/341/Economic-Indicators/#:~:text=The%20Bureau%20of%20Economic%20Analysis,and%20ranked%206th%20among%20MSAs.>

¹³ <https://www.investopedia.com/new-york-city-economic-tracker-july-12-2023-7565525#:~:text=Recovering%20every%20part%20of%20the,a%20report%20by%20McKinsey%20%26%20Co.>

¹⁴ <https://www.c-mw.net/la-tourism-and-visit-california-release-2022-tourism-statistics/#:~:text=Los%20Angeles%20Tourism%2C%20the%20official,Reaching%2091%25%20of%202019's%20levels.>

Park Design

Currently, Reunion Tower is surrounded by highways, streets, parking lots, and a hotel, as well as a sizable field just south of the tower (Figure 2). The proposed park design takes inspiration from Vitruvian park (located 20 minutes north of the tower) and intends to become a center for the community.

Before



Figure 2: the lot as of now

After

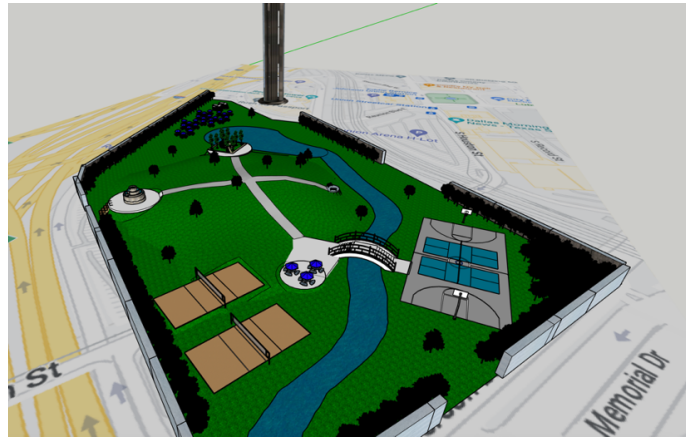


Figure 3: the redesigned lot

The lot's renovation into a park (Figure 3) includes a line of trees surrounding the park to provide sound insulation and a semi-porous boundary. Within the park, there are volleyball courts, pickleball courts, basketball courts, walking paths, and a water feature.

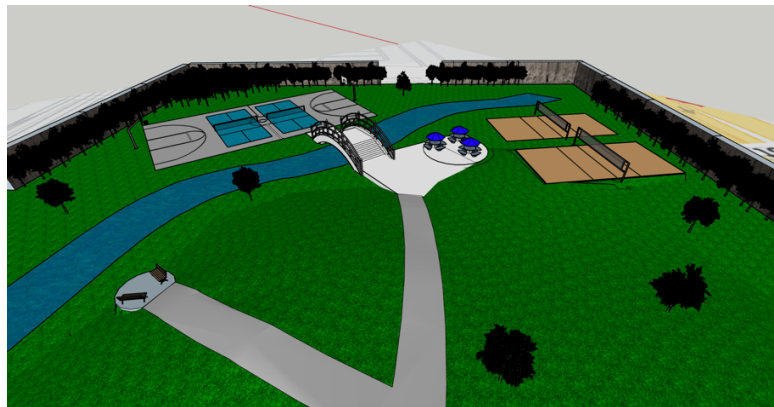


Figure 4: the south end of the redesigned lot

This park provides a space for various forms of exercise. Some of America's popular outdoor pastimes include volleyball, pickleball, and basketball, which will be accommodated for in the park (Figure 4). Beyond the sports in the park, there is also lots of room to walk around and enjoy the scenery. There is also a somewhat porous edge surrounding the park providing a backdrop to the activities it will host.

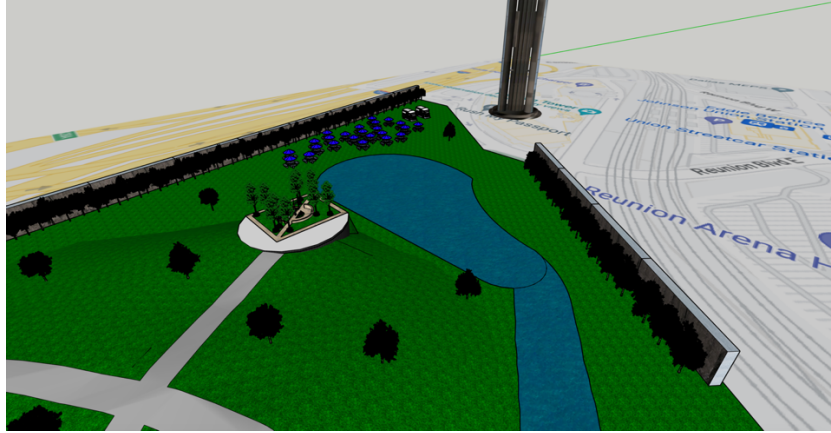


Figure 5: the north end of the redesigned lot

In the top corner of the park (Figure 5), there will be food trucks on the weekends during the mealtime hours. Food trucks are always a great way to attract people to a park area and providing places to sit make the space even more inviting.

Design Rationale

As stated by Susan Herrington, “Functionalism remains important because it attempts to address the needs of the people who will ultimately use the designed landscape.”¹⁵ Therefore, while aesthetics of the park were considered, the primary concern of the design was considering functionalism and addressing Dallas’ primary community challenges.

To combat Dallas’ public health issues, the park offers numerous ways for people of all ages to exercise. A pickleball/basketball court is a great way to connect the older and younger generations. As the fastest growing sport in the United States for two years in a row, Pickleball is proving to be a popular way to exercise within American communities.¹⁶ Another popular way to exercise is beach volleyball. Both sports are great forms of exercise, burning both fat and calories, as well as increasing aerobic capacity. The trails are conducive to one of the best forms of exercise: walking, which allows people to improve their health while enjoying themselves and the view of Reunion Tower at the same time.

The park also increases Dallas’ sustainability. The trees lining the edges and dotted around the park will not only provide shade and beauty to the area but also absorb almost 10,000 pounds of CO₂ each year. Second, the pond will provide an area for an underwater ecosystem. Water will flow from the south end of the park towards the main pond at the north end. The water will move slowly, providing a good habitat conducive to an underwater ecosystem. On top of creating a good habitat, the underwater plants will provide additional CO₂ absorption and O₂ production. Once the water flows into the pond, it will then be pumped to the top where it will continue within this cycle.

The new park will also promote tourism by allowing tourists and residents to experience one of Dallas’ most famous attractions from below. The tower, before, could only be appreciated from the smelly, busy streets and from inside its summit. Now, the park offers a new, comfortable, and sociable means of appreciation. By providing a new and improved way to enjoy one of Dallas’ most popular sites, residents and tourists now have an excellent reason to come visit the landmark. The increased visitation will also promote business to other significant places in the area, including the Perot Museum, the Sixth Story Museum, Klyde Warren Park, the Meyerson Center, and the Holocaust Museum.

¹⁵ Herrington, Susan. *Landscape theory in Design*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2017, 35

¹⁶ Mullen, Shannon. “America’s Fastest-Growing Sport Is a Cross of Tennis, Pingpong and Badminton.” NPR, February 19, 2022. <https://www.npr.org/2022/02/19/1081257674/americas-fastest-growing-sport-pickleball>.

The park also promotes a sense of community. The choices of courts promote sports that allow cross-generational communication. William Whyte, author of *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, argues that walking promotes “‘traveling conversations’ the kind in which two men move about, alternating the roles of straight man and principal talker.”¹⁷ Since there are lots of places to walk in the park, this type of social interaction is inherent in the park’s design. The large hill and the bridge provide what is called a change in level. Gordon Cullen references the “functional use of levels to join or separate the activities of [park] users.”¹⁸ The allows separation but also easy access to different park features. Creating a hard but somewhat porous edge surrounding the park provides easy access but also a sense of enclosure—both essential to creating a vibrant and successful park. Gordon Cullen references “enclosure” as a method of allowing the eye to react “to the fact of being completely surrounded” and in the process, keeping the eye ‘entertained’ as it scans the surrounding area.¹⁹ These two elements—change in level and enclosure—make the park conducive to promoting a strong sense of community.

Conclusion

Reunion Park will be a place centered around community. A place where people can be healthy and feel good. A place where people can have fun. Dallas has not historically been a healthy or fun city, so this park will provide a great opportunity to promote the health, sustainability, tourism and wellbeing of the greater Dallas community.

¹⁷ Whyte, William Hollingsworth. *The social life of small urban spaces*. New York: Project for Public Spaces, 2018. 21

¹⁸ Cullen, Gordon. *The Concise townscape*. Abingdon: Architectural Press, 2015, 39

¹⁹ *The Concise Townscape*, Gordon Cullen, 47

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