The Heart of the Hill Downtown Action Plan - Summary of Initial Interviews and Group Workshops - May 5th and 6th, 2025

During the Mend Collaborative and Catalyst Group's initial site visit for the Heart of the Hill Downtown Action Plan, the project team conducted a series of one-on-one interviews and group workshops with city staff, elected officials, business owners, and board members from the Economic Development Corporation and Destination Advisory Board. These conversations offered valuable insights into current conditions, ongoing challenges, and aspirations for the future of Downtown Cedar Hill.

What People Love About Downtown Cedar Hill

- **Authenticity and History**: Many described downtown as having a "quaint," "old-town feel" with deep historic roots and a strong sense of place. The brick crosswalks, architecture, and legacy businesses like Sam's Pizza and 1846 Coffee contribute to a feeling of authenticity.
- **Community Spirit:** Downtown was frequently described as walkable, safe, and inclusive, with a loyal customer base and committed small business owners. Long-standing events like Country Day on the Hill contribute to a sense of tradition and pride.
- **Diversity and Creativity:** Stakeholders noted Cedar Hill's multicultural identity as a strength and celebrated the range of locally owned businesses and community-driven energy downtown.

Key Challenges Identified

- **Underutilized Properties and Vacancy:** Numerous participants pointed to vacant buildings, underperforming parcels, and unrealized development potential—particularly around Cedar and Main. Properties like the Texaco building and Phillips site were cited as missed opportunities.
- **Parking and Access:** Parking availability—especially near popular destinations like Babe's—was a recurring concern, along with pedestrian access and sidewalk conditions. Wayfinding and signage are limited, and participants worried that some visitors were unaware of downtown's location.
- **Regulatory Barriers:** Several business owners and stakeholders cited outdated zoning, the Conditional Use Permit (CUP) process, and alcohol-related ordinances as obstacles to activating spaces and attracting desired businesses.
- **Limited Nightlife and Activity:** While daytime activity is strong, downtown often feels empty in the evenings and on weekends without events. The lack of nightlife and flexible outdoor spaces limits its appeal as a destination.

Opportunities for the Future

- **More Downtown Housing:** There was broad support for introducing more housing downtown to create critical mass. Stakeholders suggested formats like townhomes, tri-plexes, and condos that align with Cedar Hill's character and avoid high-rise conflicts.
- **Expanded Events and Activation:** Many expressed interest in expanding the frequency and diversity of downtown events—including pop-ups, markets, and music—to drive foot traffic and engage more demographics, especially younger residents.
- **Development of City-Owned Land:** City-owned parcels near the rail line were viewed as high-potential sites for trailheads, mixed-use development, or public space enhancements that could help redefine the downtown experience.
- **Business Support and Growth:** Participants emphasized the importance of a vibrant and well-supported small business ecosystem. Suggestions included a downtown merchants association, simplified permitting, continued façade improvements, and more strategic marketing.
- **Trail and Open Space Connections**: Stakeholders recognized opportunities to connect downtown with nearby trails, parks, and adjacent neighborhoods—particularly through safe pedestrian crossings and improved infrastructure.

Vision for Downtown Cedar Hill in 2040

When asked to complete the phrase "In 2040, Downtown Cedar Hill will be…", responses captured a shared aspiration for a **lively, inclusive, and enduring** downtown. Words like **vibrant, home, fun, unique, well-kept, multicultural, and economically strong** were repeated across interviews.

Stakeholders hope to see a downtown that maintains its small-town charm while offering new amenities, gathering places, and opportunities for all residents to engage, live, and thrive.