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Fair Park could see hotels, festivals and new partners under Dallas' hybrid plan

Dallas is rolling out a hybrid plan for Fair Park that keeps city control but brings in private partners, aiming for more events, development and year-round activity



WFAA

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DALLAS, Texas — Fair Park may feel like the center of Dallas during the State Fair, but once the lights drop, much of the 277-acre space goes quiet.

City leaders say that's both the problem and the opportunity as they roll out a new vision for the historic park.

City staff has presented a new "hybrid" approach, a model that keeps the city in charge of core operations while bringing in private partners.

"We've got to be willing to have some trial and error," said Dallas City Council member Adam Bazaldua, who supports the plan.

The plan calls for more community events, more festivals and more economic development inside Fair Park.

Dallas Parks and Recreation Director John Jenkins said that could include retail, restaurants and even hotels.

“I don't have a problem saying we have underperformed, and that's why I made sure we heard the right folks, and we're going to partner with the right private sector experts to take Fair Park where it deserves to be,” Jenkins said.
He called the area an economic engine for the region.

“My timeline is yesterday, and I hope that we can keep the fire under our city manager's office to understand that this is truly a priority,” Bazaldua said.

The shift comes after Dallas took back control of Fair Park from Oak View Group in September, ending a six-year management deal that fell apart over issues involving maintenance, money and oversight.

Bazaldua described that breakdown as a lesson.

“I believe that it was a failure that was needed for us to look at how we can be more successful and effective as we move forward in the future,” he said.

The new approach also looks to partnerships with both existing and new nonprofits, including a proposed Cotton Bowl Foundation modeled after the Rose Bowl Foundation.

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