

STRATEGIC VISION AND PLAN FOR IMPROVEMENTS TO THE SANDBRANCH COMMUNITY



4/27/16

A blueprint for achieving social, economic, and environmental justice for the Sandbranch Community



Strategic Vision and Plan for Improvements to the Sandbranch Community

SANDBRANCH...EVERYBODY'S COMMUNITY!

Executive Summary

Power properly understood, is the ability to achieve purpose. It is the strength required to bring about social, political or economic changes. What is needed is a realization that power without love is reckless and abusive and that love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice. Justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love. - Martin Luther King

What We Believe

Vision: To achieve social, economic, and environmental justice for the Sandbranch Community.

Mission: To work collaboratively with a variety of civic, faith-based, and community entities to provide the Sandbranch Community with a safe water distribution system, sanitary water, sewer service, and other humanitarian and social services necessary to attain a quality of life worthy of the seventh wealthiest area of the United States of America.

Background

Sandbranch is an unincorporated community located in the southeastern corner of Dallas County. Because it is unincorporated, no city has responsibility for its water, sewage, trash pick up, or fire and police protection services.

Studies show Sandbranch has an estimated 40 active households with about 80-100 residents all of whom live below the federal poverty levels with average household incomes of about \$721 per month.¹ It is a historically African-American community created in the 1930s-40s and thought to have been settled even as early as post-slavery years as a freedman's settlement.² The population today is 87% Black, 10% Hispanic, and 3% White.³

Mt. Zion Baptist Church, through the non-profit organization Project Dream Haus, serves as the Sandbranch Community's primary source of social services and water distribution. This historic church, one of the oldest African-American churches in North Texas, was established in 1878 by 12 freed slaves under the leadership of Rev. Allen Hawthorne. The original location of the church was near what is now Simonds Road. In 1910, three Kleberg residents donated a plot of land to establish a Negro cemetery in

the southeastern section of Dallas County near the church. At least two of the founding families of Mt. Zion Baptist Church have loved ones buried in the Sandbranch Cemetery.

By all accounts, Sandbranch is a very stable community. And by “community” we mean an area populated by people who have constant relationships, quality friendships, and secure families. They trust each other. They cooperate with each other. They rely on each other. Studies have proven that being part of a stable community boosts mental and emotional health.⁴

To honor this sense of community, Mt. Zion Baptist Church, with Project Dream Haus, created the grassroots effort known as *Sandbranch...everybody's community!* to craft a plan for bringing water, sanitary sewer, and social services to the Sandbranch Community. The result is the *Strategic Vision and Plan for Improvements to the Sandbranch Community*, a two-pronged approach in support of the Sandbranch Community. The first prong addresses the need for water, sewer, and trash pick up services while the second prong addresses human and social services. The *Strategic Vision and Plan for Improvements to the Sandbranch Community* includes the specific, targeted goals, and strategies outlined below and detailed in this plan.

Goals and Strategies

Goal 1: Provide water, sewer and trash pick up service to Sandbranch Community.

Strategy 1: Operate Sandbranch Development and Water Supply Corporation.

Goal 2: Provide an array of human and social services to Sandbranch Community.

Strategy 1: Implement Code Inspection Plan.

Strategy 2: Implement Home Repair, Maintenance, and Upgrade Plan.

Strategy 3: Implement Social Services Plan.

Why A Vision and Plan for Improvements?

Sandbranch was established as a freedman's community where newly emancipated slaves started their lives as free men and women. Residents moved to Sandbranch to raise their families and live a peaceful existence in an area that was once the only part of the county where they were welcome. They found this naturally beautiful area, with tall trees, rich soils and an easily accessible water table, where they determined to build their community. Today Sandbranch is a rural oasis in the midst of suburban sprawl.

Residents of Sandbranch Community want and deserve the same services other residents of Dallas County take for granted. Providing Sandbranch water, sewer, and trash service is simply the humane thing to do. The residents of Sandbranch include some of the most vulnerable classes of people in the entire country. One of the most basic goals our government should meet is the protection of our most vulnerable citizens, those that our civilization otherwise leaves behind.

A small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history. - Mahatma Ghandi

Goal 1: Provide water, sewer and trash pick up service to Sandbranch Community.

Strategy 1: Operate the Sandbranch Development and Water Supply Corporation.

The Sandbranch Development Water Supply Corporation (SDWSC) was incorporated on March 16. Pursuant to the Texas Water Code, the purpose of a water supply corporation is to provide water supply, sewer service, or both for a municipality, a private corporation, an individual, or a military camp or base. The SDWSC is governed by a board of five individuals, all of whom are property owners in the community. The board is on a fast track to secure funding for a USDA SEARCH grant as a first step to obtain professional engineering services to identify the best method for bringing water and sewer services to Sandbranch. The board is taking all steps necessary to operate as a fully functioning water supply corporation on behalf of the Sandbranch Community.

- March 16, 2016 - Sandbranch Development and Water Supply Corporation approved by Texas Secretary of State to operate a water supply corporation.
- April 4, 2016 – First meeting of SDWSC; elected officers; named executive director; set regularly scheduled meeting times; and directed Executive Director Keahey apply for a USDA SEARCH grant.
- April 7, 2016 - SDWSC bylaws submitted to USDA.
- April 18, 2016 – SDWSC met, approved plan to name establish an Engineering Selection Committee composed of an expert panel of engineers to write RFP to procure an engineering firm per USDA SEARCH grant.
- April 19, 2016 - Executive Director Keahey and legal counsel conferred with the Engineering Selection Committee and began process of writing RFP.
- April 19, 2016 - Executive Director Keahey’s designee conferred with Communities Unlimited to schedule SDWSC board of trustee board training in May.
- April 25, 2016 - RFP completed and sent to select engineering firms. Responses due no later than 3 p.m., Tuesday, May 10.
- May 11, 2016 - Engineering Firm Selection Committee will meet to review responses to RFP and select the engineering firm for project. Selected firm, SDWSC's legal counsel, and the USDA representatives will then meet to define deliverables and assign payments for each deliverable. Upon completion, the selected firm will begin project.

Goal 1: Provide water, sewer and trash pick up service to Sandbranch Community.

Strategy 2: Secure trash collection service.

- Arrange for placement of one roll-off bin in the community on a short term, temporary basis so residents may dispose of household waste in a consistent, safe manner. Bin will be replaced as needed until permanent solution is in place.
- Identify waste management companies servicing areas in close proximity to the Sandbranch community and negotiate for one of them to add regular trash collection in the Sandbranch Community.
- Identify sources of funding for both temporary and long term trash collection services, and obtain those funds.



Alone we can do so little: together we can do so much. - Helen Keller

Goal 2: Provide human and social services to Sandbranch Community.

Strategy 1: Implement Code Inspection Plan.

Mt. Zion Baptist Church, with Project Dream Haus, has developed a Code Inspection Plan to inspect each structure in the Sandbranch community, in order to compile a list of Dallas County code violations that may be corrected in compliance with the Dallas County Floodplain Management Order and NFIP. This strategy is necessary to lay the foundation for Strategy 2 below. The Sandbranch community is currently in the floodplain of the Trinity River. According to residents, no house in the community has ever flooded. Nevertheless, in general, the Dallas County Floodplain Management Regulations (Court Order No. 2003-2054) and the National Floodplain Insurance Program (NFIP) requires property owners in a floodplain to bring their property up to current floodplain management standards in the event they improve their houses, where the costs to repair exceed 50% of the market value of the building. However, there are certain exemptions to this general rule. One exemption is that costs for all repairs necessary to correct code violations are excluded from the 50% threshold.

- Facilitate identification of independent, qualified code inspectors and make them available to the residents in Sandbranch.
- Inspectors will work for each resident to compile a list of all Dallas County code violations for that residence.
- Each code violation list will be shared with Dallas County's Floodplain Administrator.
- Repairs will not begin until the Floodplain Administrator agrees that the identified repairs are Dallas County code violations, the repairs of which would be in compliance with the Dallas County Floodplain Management Ordinance because they are not substantial improvements (Approved Repairs).
- Each Sandbranch resident will have access to their own legal counsel as needed to resolve any disagreements with Dallas County over identified code violations and repairs. Legal assistance will be provided by legal aid programs such as the Dallas Volunteer Attorneys Program, Legal Aid of Northwest Texas, and Community Building with Attorney Resources (Texas C-BAR). Additional legal services may be coordinated with professional organizations such as the Real Estate, Probate and Trust Law Section of the State Bar of Texas.
- The Code Inspection Plan will be conducted in phases throughout the community, managed to stay within the financial resources identified in Strategy 2 below, the legal resources needed by the residents, and general construction management needs.

There are only two things we should fight for. One is the defense of our homes and the other is the Bill of Rights. - Smedley Butler, Major General, USMC

Goal 2: Provide human and social services to Sandbranch Community.

Strategy 2: Implement Home Repair, Maintenance, and Upgrade Plan.

Mt. Zion Baptist Church, with Project Dream Haus, has developed a Home Repair, Maintenance, and Upgrade Plan designed to guide Sandbranch residents in securing grants, low-interest loans, and local non-profit assistance to help residents afford to construct Approved Repairs, increasing their quality of life. The following programs have been identified as potential sources of funds to pay for Approved Repairs.

- Dallas County Department of Health and Human Services – Weatherization Program
- Elder Options of Texas
- FHA Property Improvement Loan Insurance
- FHA PowerSaver Home Energy Retrofit Loan Pilot Program
- Texas Department of Aging and Disability
- Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs
- Texas Veterans Home Improvement Program
- USDA Rural Housing Loans
- USDA Rural Housing: Housing Repair Loans and Grants
- VA-Guaranteed Home Loan Program
- Veterans Affairs Regional Loan Center

Hunger, inadequate medical care, poor housing, and inferior schools are enemies of the sense of wonder. It is easier and less expensive in the long run to prevent a loss of imagination by providing adequate nutrition, housing, medical care, and schooling than it is to try to restore that loss. - Margaret Geller, Astrophysicist

Goal 2: Provide human and social services to Sandbranch Community.

Strategy 3: Implement Social Services Plan.

Mt. Zion Baptist Church, with Project Dream Haus, has developed a Social Services Plan on behalf of communities within an approximate 15 mile radius of the church. The communities include Sandbranch, Seagoville, Balch Springs, Wilmer, Hutchins, and Southeast Dallas. For three years, the church has provided an array of nutrition, clothing, medical, and back-to-school support and services. See Appendix B for a list of in kind goods and services Sandbranch Community has received as a result of Project Dream Haus efforts.

Food and Nutrition Services (Bert Roy Pantry)

- Operating North Texas Food Bank Weekly Fresh Produce Distribution – 581 people served/week.
- Distributing North Texas Food Bank Senior Box – 80 families served/month.
- Hosting SNAP Assistance registration monthly; approximately 350 families registered to date.
- Provided 100,000 bottles of water over course of 3 years.
- Provided 320 Christmas food boxes yearly for 3 years.
- Organizing May 14 – Sandbranch Tire Pick Up Event.
- Organizing June 11 – *Clean Sandbranch Day* Event.

Clothing Services (Deanna's Closet)

- Provided clothing for over 1,500 men, women, and children.
- Provided school clothing to 150 students.
- Provided home furnishing to 10 families.
- Provided toiletries to 150 families.
- Provided diapers, baby formula and clothing to 80 infants and children.

Medical Services

- Providing well care medical services through agreement with TWU College of Nursing-Dallas.
- Negotiating agreement with T.D. Jakes Ministries MegaCARE for various social services.

Back-to School and College Scholarship Services

- Provided school supplies to 200 students.
- Performed back-to-school haircuts for 75 youth.
- Awarded three college-bound students scholarships, laptops, printers, gift cards, and mini-refrigerators.

About Mt. Zion Baptist Church

Mt. Zion Baptist Church, through the non-profit organization Project Dream Haus, serves as the Sandbranch Community's primary source of social services and water distribution. This historic church, one of the oldest African-American churches in North Texas, was established in 1878 by 12 freed slaves under the leadership of Rev. Allen Hawthorne. In 1910, three Kleberg residents donated a plot of land to establish a Negro cemetery in the southeastern section of Dallas County near the church. At least two of the founding families of Mt. Zion Baptist Church have loved ones buried in the Sandbranch Cemetery. Originally, the church was located near what is now Simonds Road; however, in the late 1930s, church members, after working their day jobs and using their own skills, constructed its current building on Burns Drive. From its beginnings, the church has been active in the community by supporting voter registration drives, trash clean up efforts, and medical screenings. Pastor Eugene B. Keahey was named the church's pastor in 2013.

About Project DreamHaus

Project DreamHaus, formerly E. B. Keahey Ministries, was founded in 2001 by Eugene and Deanna Keahey with a mission *to help the underserved become self sufficient through education, economic awareness, and strong community development*. The ministry provides food, clothing, and support to those in need through the Bert Roy Mobile Food Pantry, Deanna's Clothes Closet, and *Sandbranch...everybody's community!*

Since 2014, Project Dream Haus has actively supported Sandbranch as well as citizens of Balch Springs, southeast Dallas, Seagoville, and Wilmer with millions of dollars of in-kind and financial donations. Because DreamHaus has no paid staff, all contributions go towards community outreach efforts. In addition to in-kind contributions, the *Sandbranch...everybody's community!* effort is guided by an unpaid advisory committee made up of business, education, legal, and public relations professionals whose pro bono fees have not yet been calculated.

As it offers these services, Project DreamHaus demonstrates its motto, "Changing Lives One Dream at a Time!"

About Sandbranch...everybody's community!

Sandbranch...everybody's community! is a grassroots effort organized by Project DreamHaus to bring water, sewage, and social services to Sandbranch, TX., an unincorporated community in the southeastern corner of Dallas County. Just 14 miles from one of the richest cities in America, Sandbranch is the poorest community in Dallas County. It has been without running water for over 30 years.

Sandbranch...everybody's community! is guided by an unpaid advisory committee made up of business, education, legal, and public relations professionals who believe giving a basic human right ---clean, drinkable water---to the citizens of Sandbranch is imperative.

Citations

¹ The Hunger Center of North Texas. *Sandbranch Community Survey*. November 2014.

² The Hunger Center of North Texas. *Sandbranch Community Survey*. November 2014.

³ The Hunger Center of North Texas. *Sandbranch Community Survey*. November 2014.

⁴ Kelson, Lexi. "Harvard Psychologists Unlock The Secret to Real Happiness." Retrieved from <http://www.lifehack.org/366551/harvard-psychologists-unlock-the-secret-real-happiness-2>.

⁴Vaillant, George E., Xing-jia Cui, M.D., Stephen Soldz, Ph.D. "The Study of Adult Development1" Division of Psychiatry, Brigham and Women's Hospital. Retrieved from <http://www.hms.harvard.edu/psych/redbook/redbook-family-adult-01.htm>

