FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Contact: Lance Koppa, Community Relations/PIO, 214-559-9487

HIGHLAND PARK CALLS SPECIAL ELECTION ON DART MEMBERSHIP

HIGHLAND PARK, TX – The Town of Highland Park has called a Special Election for May 2, 2026, to allow residents to decide whether the Town should withdraw their status as a member city of the Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) system. The election will allow Highland Park voters to determine whether continued participation in DART aligns with the community's priorities, mobility needs, and long-term fiscal strategy.

Since joining DART in 1983, the Town has dedicated 1% of its local sales tax to the transit agency, half of what the Town is allowed to retain locally. Over the past four decades, Highland Park has contributed more than $107 million to DART, including more than $8 million annually in recent years. Despite these substantial contributions, the Town receives minimal direct transit service, with no light rail operations within its boundaries and only a single bus route along Preston Road.

"Highland Park taxpayers have invested in the regional system for more than 40 years," said Mayor Will Beecherl. "This election ensures that our residents—who fund this contribution—have a say in whether the return on that investment meets the needs of our community today."

An independent analysis found that in 2023, Highland Park contributed approximately $6.3 million to DART, while DART spent only $1.9 million within the Town, primarily to operate the Preston Road bus route, which averages about 60 riders per day. Based on the Town's current annual contribution of approximately $8 million, this equates to an estimated cost of $366 per ride. While modest compared to DART's $1.7 billion annual budget, Highland Park's contribution represents a significant fiscal commitment for a municipality of just 2.2 square miles, particularly as the Town continues to maintain and modernize its century-old infrastructure system.

DART promotes itself as a regional transit agency. However, its funding is derived almost entirely from the 13 remaining member cities. A truly regional transportation framework would require a fair and inclusive funding model that makes participation equitable and attractive to all municipalities, something DART has not achieved, as its membership has not expanded despite decades of regional growth.

"DART is structured as a regional system, but its funding model relies almost entirely on a handful of member cities," said Mayor Beecherl. "A truly regional transportation approach must be funded regionally, not disproportionately by a small number of municipalities."

The Town of Highland Park raises an important question: *Is it fair for non-member municipalities and their residents to benefit from the DART system while the full financial burden continues to rest on just thirteen member cities and their taxpayers?*

###

Background on the Town of Highland Park and DART:

Highland Park currently shares a single DART Board representative with three other member cities, two of which receive light rail service. This structure often results in competing priorities and minimal influence for Highland Park on decisions that directly affect how its taxpayer dollars are spent. This arrangement effectively amounts to taxation without meaningful representation, as Highland Park contributes millions annually to DART but lacks proportional authority in its governance. This inequity underscores the Town's call for governance reform to ensure fair representation, fiscal accountability, and balanced decision-making across all member cities.

When Highland Park joined DART in 1983, Texas law did not yet allow municipalities to dedicate local sales tax revenue for other purposes. That changed in 1989, when the Texas Legislature amended the Development Corporation Act to authorize cities outside of regional transit authorities to use an additional one-percent sales tax for economic or community development. This legislative shift created a lasting fiscal inequity between cities that contribute 1% of their local sales, half of what they are allowed to retain locally, to support regional transit and those that retained that capacity for local priorities.

Further compounding these fiscal challenges, the 2019 enactment of Senate Bill 2 limits most local governments to no more than a 3.5% annual increase in property tax revenue without voter approval. This restriction, combined with Highland Park's commitment of half of its local sales tax to DART, places the Town at a distinct fiscal disadvantage. Town officials note that these combined constraints have made it increasingly difficult to invest in essential municipal priorities such as public safety, emergency response, and infrastructure modernization.

Next Steps:

While the Town has called this election, Highland Park remains committed to regional collaboration and intends to continue partnering with DART on projects that benefit both parties. Town officials have emphasized that DART's current financial and governance structures are no longer sustainable or equitable for Highland Park, and that a new approach is needed to ensure fairness, accountability, and alignment between cost, representation, and service delivery.

If approved by voters, withdrawal from DART would follow the procedures outlined in state law, including required timelines and financial reconciliation. More information will be shared on the Town website: www.hptx.org as it becomes available.

About the Town of Highland Park

Founded in 1913, Highland Park is a premier residential community committed to exceptional public services, fiscal stewardship, and a high quality of life for its residents.

###