

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This plan is the legacy of many years of thinking about Waller Creek – what it originally meant to the city, what it has become, and what it can be in the future. It is an outgrowth of a community process that has brought together many different people with many different points of view, united by the common understanding that Waller Creek has fallen short of its potential and that now, with the prospect of future flood control improvements, it can be reclaimed and reintegrated into the life of the city in a way that is uniquely Austin. Creek corridors play a multiplicity of purposes and are therefore susceptible to competing demands which tug and pull for priority. In many ways, the assertion of one value at the expense of others characterizes the past history of improvements along Waller Creeks. Conventional engineering approaches have been utilized to contain water flow, stabilize adjacent property and render more “usable” land, resulting in a narrow channelized corridor. In other areas, physical improvements were used to create a “pastiche”, overlaying imagery not necessarily appropriate or consistent with the inherent qualities of the creek environment. Paths were inserted into already overly constrained reaches in ways that violated the spatial integrity, tranquility, visual image and appearance as well as environmental health of the corridor.

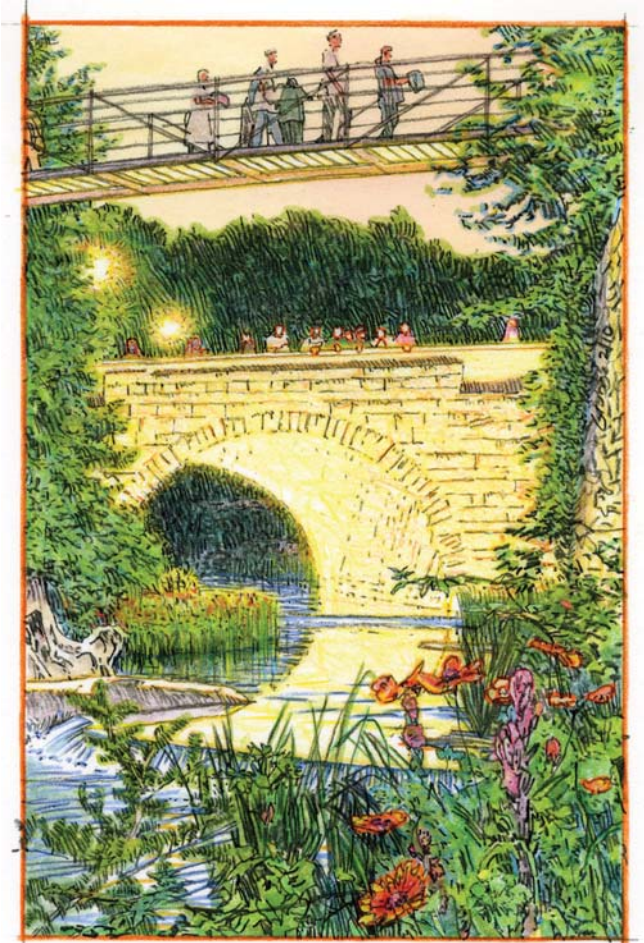
Vision for the Future

Of primary importance in setting the direction for the future of Waller Creek is reinstating its environmental value as a natural feature within the urban landscape. The plan envisions the restoration of the ecological functions of the creek corridor and emphasizes its role as a living element with unique amenity value that can contribute significantly to the identity and livability of the city, and to the economic vitality of the Downtown. The image of the creek as a stormwater channel will be replaced as a higher priority is placed on ecological diversity and sustainability and on a sensitive rebalancing of the multiple roles which the creek serves. Eroded banks will be repaired and riparian landscape re-established where possible. Activities, rather than turning away from the creek, will be oriented to it.

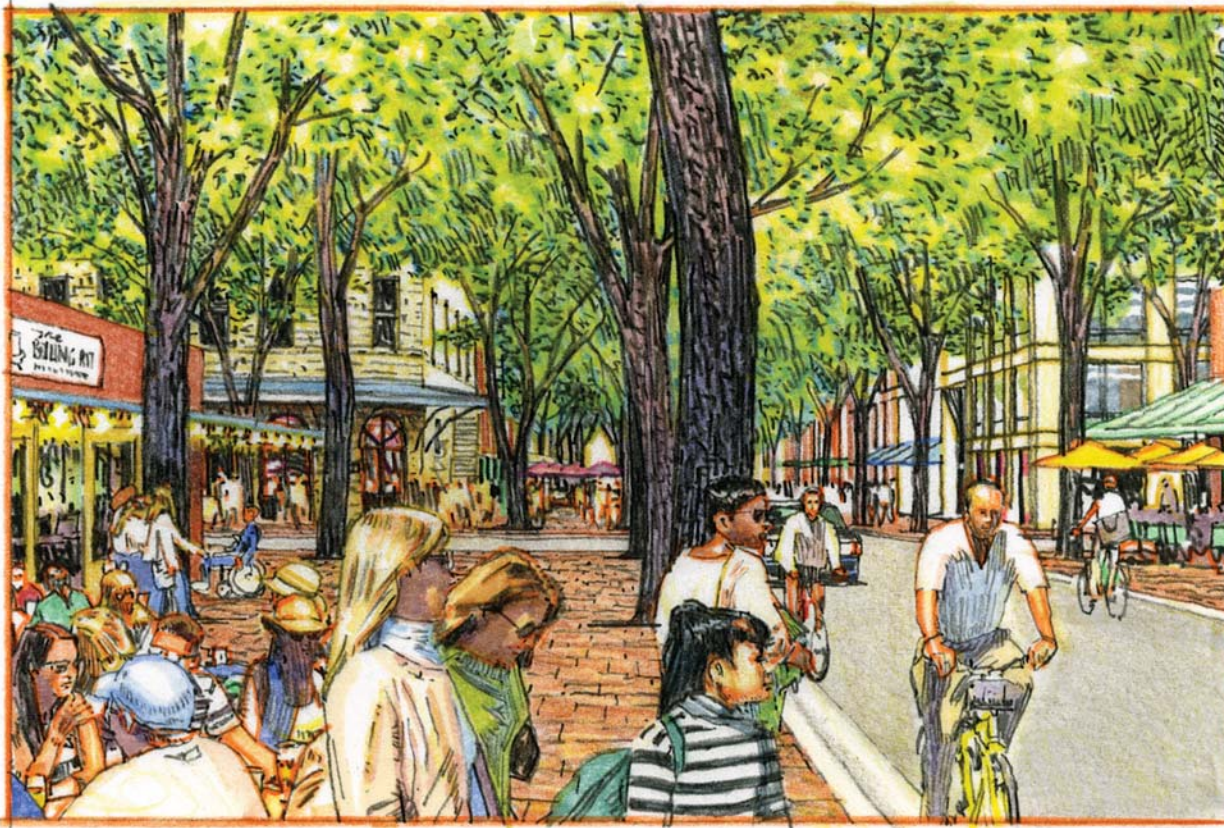
The landscape of the creek corridor will also be augmented by the parkland associated with it. Palm Park, Waterloo Park, Symphony Plaza Park and Symphony Plaza will be improved to reinforce the ecological identity of the creek corridor and become more attractive places for activities. Smaller pieces of parkland will be enhanced as attractive settings for outdoor dining and other activities that also contribute to the sense of landscape continuity. Public spaces along and adjacent to the creek will provide places for families to gather, children to play and people to linger and socialize. The open space vision that has emerged is that of a linear greenway that winds its way through downtown and that connects and extends the landscape qualities of Lady Bird Lake to Waterloo Park in a manner that integrates them with the adjacent community to enhance the urban environment and the ecological value of the creek corridor.

The Plan also calls for the improvement of pedestrian and bicycle linkages to, across and along the creek corridor to connect Lady Bird Lake with UT and East Austin and Rainey Street with Downtown. In undertaking the improvements, the Plan recognizes that the movement systems within the creek corridor need to be scaled and appropriately integrated with the desire to enhance the landscape and amenity value of the corridor. It therefore seeks a broader approach to achieving the pedestrian, bicycle and movement system objectives. Along the creek corridor, the Plan promotes a light-handed approach to the pathway system. It also recognizes the importance of utilizing multiple routes that allow some adjacent streets to become part of the open space system and serve as key elements in pedestrian/bicycle movement as well. In this manner, a more interesting, diverse and multi-faceted environment will be created, with each component of the movement system working together in an orchestrated manner.

The vision for the future is not to set the creek apart from the city and isolate it from its surroundings but rather to integrate it more fully with the surrounding urban life. The Plan calls for extending the amenity value of the creek, enabling it to be shared with the greatest number of people as possible. In the tighter portions of the creek, improvements are proposed that will reach out to embrace a broader domain with a more complex



View to midblock pedestrian crossing and historic Seventh Street Bridge.



Sabine Street is envisioned as a linear promenade paralleling Waller Creek and serving as the principal trail between Third and Seventh Streets.

and finely scaled system of pedestrian connections. More meaningful and important roles are proposed for underutilized streets, new streets will be extended and block patterns completed, and public spaces and parks tied together to create more lively and engaged places for people.

The Tunnel Project, along with the improvements of the creek corridor, will create enhanced opportunities for redevelopment. The redevelopment of the private and public lands adjacent to the corridor are not only an important step in providing the economic basis for the tax-increment financing district, but they are also important because they create an intensity of activities and uses that will help enliven the creek corridor and create a more vital district. The Plan proposes a variety of different scales and types of uses, from live/work and small scale buildings to more intensive office and residential uses and cultural/institutional complexes. Terraced dining is encouraged adjacent to the creek, where it can be accommodated in keeping with the natural slope of the banks and the riparian vegetation. A broad spectrum of new development opportunities will contribute to the diversity of living and working environments in the city, will build a population with direct interests in the on-going quality of the creek corridor and will create a vibrant and vital place within the heart of the city.

With all of these planned improvements, the value of Waller Creek will be extended well into the surrounding community. It will become a linear park and a positive public space that enhances the image and identity of the City, gives additional structure and orientation to the urban experience, connects and reinforces activity centers, and serves as an attractive destination. It will then also be a catalyst for redevelopment and revitalization, a centerpiece of a revitalized east side of Downtown and an attractive amenity that helps to overcome the barriers that exist between Downtown and East Austin. The improvements will bring newfound richness and meaning to life on Waller Creek and will help instill a sense of pride in the community that is essential to the management and maintenance of this valuable resource over time.

Plan Summary – Reach by Reach

Waller Creek, as defined by the study area of this Master Plan, from Waterloo Park to Lady Bird Lake can be divided into five distinct reaches, each with its own unique characteristics, opportunities and constraints. These are discussed from north to south as follows:

Waterloo Park to Tenth Street Reach. Waterloo Park will be improved as part of the Tunnel Project, and become the northern terminus of the creek corridor. The parkland on either side of Symphony Square will be reconfigured to create a more positive relationship to the creek corridor. This will be achieved as redevelopment occurs on surrounding sites, enabling the existing surface parking lots to be relocated and for shared parking opportunities to be created. Along the creek, the Master Plan calls for the trail to cross at the Eleventh and Red River Street intersections at grade. In addition, due to the low clearances and highly constrained conditions of the pathways under these bridges, it is proposed that the pathways beneath these two bridges either be closed to public pedestrian and bike circulation, or be significantly upgraded with improved lighting, maintenance, and heightened security patrols. If closed to the public, the undercrossing beneath the Eleventh Street Bridge could still be retained for use by Symphony Square and its amphitheater, which will continue to function as a performance space and destination.

Tenth to Seventh Street Reach. The next reach to the south along Waller Creek, between Tenth Street and Seventh Street, is characterized by a significant amount of publicly owned land. Here, there is a major opportunity to create new public parkland and open space improvements as redevelopment takes place on City-owned parcels currently occupied by the Austin Police Department. These would open up and create more gracious and inviting public spaces within the corridor, punctuate the natural meander in the landscape, and establish an attractive setting for activities that extends the amenity value of the creek and its linkage with the larger city.



The existing stone retaining walls and switchback ramp south of the Cesar Chavez Bridge will be restored as part of the trail system and linked with an elevated boardwalk structure to the north.

Seventh to Fourth Street Reach. In this reach, the creek is channelized and the corridor tightly constrained. As a result, the plan emphasizes positively extending the influence of the creek environment and creating a finer-grain network of connections to it. The Master Plan recommends that Sabine Street be redesigned as a well landscaped bicycle/pedestrian promenade, interconnected with the creek corridor by a series of pathways, courtyards and new mid-block pedestrian connections. These mid-block connections will align with existing alleys and will link to pedestrian bridges to further engage the east and west sides of the creek and to improve visibility and accessibility to it.

At the northern gateway to Sabine Street, a new at-grade pedestrian crossing is proposed at Seventh Street, which is targeted for conversion to two-way circulation, thus enabling cyclists to connect to the Red River Street corridor. Along with the at-grade crossing, landscape improvements along the creek corridor will add to the amenity of the setting and recreational or dining terraces are encouraged to create a sociable and convivial environment within the district. The City could choose to retain the existing trail and undercrossing of the historic Seventh Street bridge, but this trail does not meet recommended standards for clearance, is subject to flooding in a 100-year event and does not meet accessibility standards. An alternative would be to remove the overhead utility pipe and build an elevated boardwalk and accessible ramp that would connect directly to Sabine Street. However, given the low vertical clearance in this location, even with the removal of the overhead utility pipe, it will be difficult to achieve a new trail that is entirely out of the 100-year flood.

Fourth to Cesar Chavez. The reach to the south of Fourth Street to Cesar Chavez lies in the shadow of the Convention Center. Here the Plan proposes the extension and completion of streets to re-establish a more pedestrian-oriented pattern with a stronger focus of activities within Palm Park. Sabine Street is proposed to be extended from Fourth Street where it intersects with the Lance Armstrong bikeway to Third Street. At this point the plan recommends pursuing the enhancement of several routes of the trail system, including a light boardwalk structure that would “tip toe” under the Red River and Cesar Chavez bridges and connect Third Street with the trail and creekside improvements south of Cesar Chavez Street. Here the City could choose to provide another connection to the boardwalk as shown in the option illustrated on page 39. An extension of Sabine Street is also recommended from south of Palm Park and extending across a new signalized intersection on Cesar Chavez to Rainey Street. Rainey Street will in turn then connect to both the Davis and Driskill Street trails on the east side of the creek to Lady Bird Lake. In addition, Second Street is proposed to be extended from Red River Street to the IH 35 frontage road. Day to day activities will be reinvigorated within these streets and public spaces along with opportunities for special events, fairs, festivals and markets that enrich the life of the city. The linear thread of the creek, the continuity of access from north to south within the district, the east/west linkages across the creek and improved activity linkages to East Austin will help to reduce the barrier effect of IH 35.

Cesar Chavez to Lady Bird Lake. South of Cesar Chavez, the plan emphasizes the connection of pedestrian and bicycle connections to the trail system of Lady Bird Lake. Though overgrown today by vegetation and only partially connected to the trail system along the lake, these trails feature massive limestone blocks that are extraordinary in scale and majesty, creating a fitting entrance to the lake that the new improvements will tie into. On the west, the boardwalk structure will transition from below the Cesar Chavez bridge to the trail and up the existing switchback to connect to city level and the front door of the Convention Center. The trail will also continue to the south directly to the Lady Bird Lake trail system. On the east side of the creek, the plan calls for two new trail connections at Davis and Driskill streets, to provide direct pedestrian and bicycle connections to the Mexican American Cultural Center and the Lady Bird Lake trails.