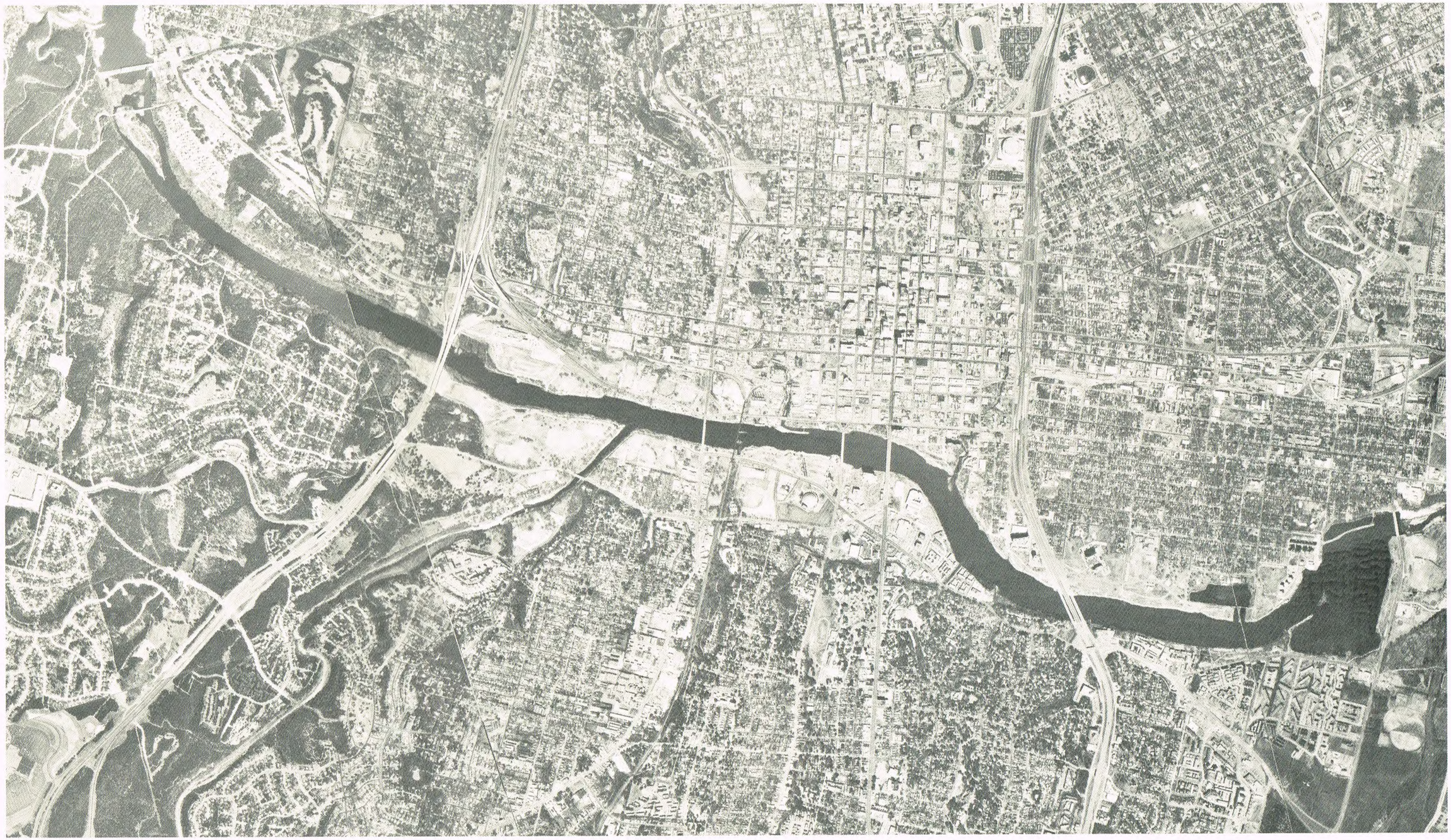
Part 3: Summary and Implementation



Summary and Implementation

This timely examination of land use conditions in the Town Lake and Colorado River Corridors revealed a number of overriding conclusions, which provides the basis for an implementation plan.

Town Lake

1. **Town Lake, its waterfront and its urban edge, represent a magnificent social and economic resource in the heart of the**

An unusual opportunity exists for the waterfront to become the centerpiece of superb and innovative urban design. Austinites treasure Town Lake, use it prodigiously, and will support public efforts to improve its use.

2. **Current land use policies and regulations are not facilitating urban development that is in harmony and sympathy with the Town Lake waterfront.** No urban design guidelines are in place to foster the best design and mix of activities. Much of the land use is not compatible in function and design.

3. **Given present trends and existing zoning, high density office buildings and surface parking could eventually dominate the waterfront landscape.** The urban edge environment is monotonous, singular and harsh to the pedestrian; unbridled public and private decisions are creating clutter, intrusions and misfits.

4. **A sense of urgency must be recognized to improve the land use guidance system and to commit to superior planning and design in the Corridor.** Economic pressures are intense in the Town Lake area; the future of the lake environment is being shaped now.

5. **Mixed land use and a pedestrian oriented environment are the essential ingredients for developing a rich and lively waterfront.** The mix of uses along Town Lake is dominated by offices.

6. **The eight urban creeks are integral parts of the Town Lake fabric and should receive more recognition as open space connectors, form-shapers, and focal points for pedestrian-oriented uses.** Urban design guidelines for the downtown creeks are not in place.

7. **Water quality in Town Lake fluctuates from good to poor; urban runoff degrades recreation and scenic values.** Much of Austin's drainage ends up in Town Lake: the creeks empty pollutants including sediment from construction, discarded household products (oil, antifreeze), toxic chemicals, litter and debris.

Colorado River

1. **The recreation potential of the river is excellent due to its free-flowing character, varied landforms, fishing and swimming opportunities, creek confluences and wooded shorelines.** It is imperative to expand existing creek greenbelts and parklands and acquire additional lands to protect and enhance scenic and recreation values.

2. **Public access is limited to the boat ramp at the Montopolis Bridge; users seek and create shoreline access trails.** A very active use pattern exists but is not adequately served.

3. **Extensive garbage dumping and debris along the shoreline detract from the natural, scenic qualities.** These activities also create health problems.

4. **Water releases for hydro-electricity and irrigation may occur at any time without warning creating potential jeopardy for river users.** Heavy rains can create a dangerous and debris-laden situation.

5. **The fragile water environment is constantly affected by lax watershed management, sand and gravel operations, direct sewage and industrial discharges, and upstream activities in the Highland Lakes watersheds.**

6. **The Capitol View corridor on the south shore provides the only view from existing parkland and deserves to be protected.**

7. **To protect the river from further environmental disturbance, the permitting process for sand and gravel operations should be evaluated.** Future expansion should be discouraged.

Action Priorities

This study of Town Lake and the Colorado River revealed a compelling need for community leaders to grasp the significance of scenic and recreational qualities of the waterfront. An immediate strategy is required for these resource values to become a catalyst for improving image and character of the waterfront environment.

In particular, four related themes have emerged as essential to waterfront development policy:

Waterfront image and personality. Buildings, parking lots and automobiles presently dominate Town Lake; sand and gravel operations dominate the river downstream. A new image and personality must be articulated, one that encourages suitable building intensities, appropriate development in superior ways, and the spontaneity, richness and diversity captured by great waterfront cities.

Waterfront compatibility. Buildings must be set back from the waters edge to allow for waterfront-related uses, both public and private. Preserving public access, both visual and physical, is essential to the waterfront image. The natural character of the waterfront should also be protected.

Pedestrian scale and activity. Enrichment of people use, animation, and architecture including mixed land use, should be the framework for a more human scale in the Corridor. Mixes which are people-oriented should be advocated in every project—for housing, recreation, dining, entertainment, festive shopping and cultural pursuits. The focus of land use regulations should be on the quality of design and to the pedestrian environment.

Development incentives. The usual response to growth and development pressures is to regulate for the purpose of compatibility. Yet, waterfront environments provide outstanding opportunities for the City to offer incentives to stimulate creative and innovative projects. The key to quality urban design will be the degree to which poorly conceived development is avoided, but flexibility and encouragement allowed to accomplish the extraordinary.

With these themes providing a guidepost for future decision-making and policy development, the following urgent actions are recommended, in priority order:

1. **Adopt the Corridor Study as a policy document to guide planning and development, including the goals, policies and recommended actions.**

2. **Extend the development moratorium for the following areas and require parks and planning staff to review all preliminary plans:**
   - **all projects fronting on Town Lake and adjacent to parkland until improved zoning and design guidelines are in place.**
   - **all projects fronting the Colorado River until annexation plans are developed for the south bank, zoning regulations are improved and design guidelines are in place.**
   - **for the Rainey Street area, the Auditorium site, and the Shoal Creek Pole Yard until comprehensive plans are developed.**
   - **for the issuance of demolition and moving permits for structures identified as priorities one and two on the Bell, Klein, Hoffman Survey of Cultural Resources, pending determination of historic designation by city, state or federal authorities.**
   - **for the Barton Springs Road/Butler Shores area and land west of the Auditorium Shores site until a comprehensive plan is developed, unless there is voluntary compliance with the spirit, goals and policies of this study.**

3. **Implement the following ordinance changes and additions:**
   - **Expand the boundaries of the existing Town Lake Overlay Zone and add new requirements including height and setback, basewalls, bulk, building access and orientation, parking, materials and design, and waters edge treatment.**
   - **Create a new "W" Waterfront Overlay Zone to provide performance criteria for all areas in the Corridor not covered by the Town Lake Overlay Zone, including the downstream river.**
   - **Amend the "L" Lake Commercial district to more appropriate uses and intensities; remove all uses not compatible with the waterfront and neighborhood.**
   - **Develop improved standards for the Creek Overlay Zone for Shoal and Waller Creeks.**
   - **Develop new standards for pedestrian zones and scenic arterials in the Town Lake Corridor.**
   - **Develop a Transfer of Development Rights Ordinance to encourage housing and preservation of natural and cultural resources.**

4. **Immediately develop a bonus and incentives system and performance standards to stimulate high quality development projects, including but not limited to:**
   - **Housing in the CBD (Central Business District) and DMU (Downtown Mixed Use) zone districts.**
   - **Pedestrian amenities such as sidewalks, landscaping, lighting, and street furniture in the CBD, DMU and L (Lake Commercial) districts.**
   - **A full range of bonuses and incentives such as waiving capital recovery fees, floor area bonuses, and transfer of development rights.**

5. **Immediately establish four areas as comprehensive planning districts and encourage joint public/private planning efforts to achieve the goals and policies outlined in this study. Areas to be designated are:**
   - **Waller Creek/Rainey Street**
   - **Shoal Creek/Seaholm Plant/Pole Yard**

- **Barton Springs Road/Butler Shores**
- **Palmer Auditorium/Barton Springs Road**

6. **Request City Manager to form a committee of key department heads to establish a city commitment to the goals and policies of this study, including procedural commitment (co-operative efforts) and actions (standards).**

7. **Appoint a Waterfront Advisory Commission to assist in comprehensive planning in the Corridor, and a Waterfront Design Review Board to provide technical advice on the design of waterfront projects.**

8. **Immediately place a moratorium on all major roadway and bridge improvements in the Corridor until a comprehensive plan is developed, or special criteria are developed to assure compatibility with goals and policies.**

9. **Promptly annex the south bank of the Colorado River below the Montopolis Bridge.**

10. **Immediately begin an 18 month planning effort to develop a long-range comprehensive plan for the Corridor, addressing both the waters edge and the urban edge; incorporate sector planning now underway.**

11. **Discontinue sale of any public land in the Corridor unless it is a part of a transaction which fosters waterfront goals, policies and actions recommended in this document.**

12. **Immediately consider acquisition of high density multi-family projects now offered for sale on the waters edge for the purposes of retaining affordable housing stock and eventual reclamation of the waterfront; consider innovative financing such as purchase and lease-back.**

13. **Continue a high level of city funding for Town Lake planning, acquisition and development, serving as the catalyst and stimulus for high quality response from the private sector.**

14. **Initiate water quality imperatives and time frames to include improving watershed protection strategies, applying proven methods of runoff control and treatment.**

15. **Pursue a commitment from the University of Texas to preserve the Brackenridge Tract on the Town Lake waterfront in a natural condition, and to provide for public access along the shoreline.**

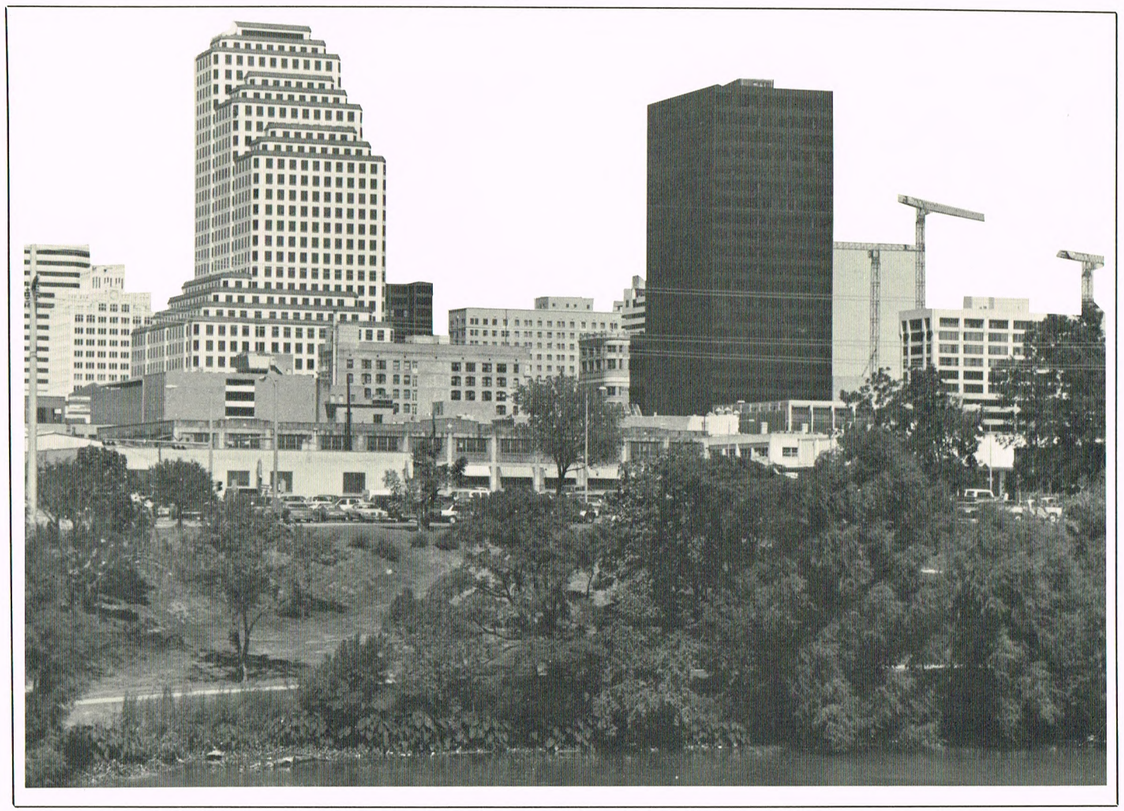
16. **Expand the present design contract for the Municipal Office Complex to include pedestrian linkage to the Town Lake waterfront.**

Future Planning

This study has demonstrated the urgency for a long-range comprehensive planning program, one that will recognize the significance of Town Lake and its waterfront qualities as the centerpiece for future development. A systems planning approach is essential; single purpose planning for roadways or parks or development projects will only exacerbate the complex problems now emerging.

In this regard, Town Lake could become the catalyst for superior urban design, influencing not only the image and personality of lower downtown, but the Corridor as well. Such an effort will require, however, a strong commitment to establish a comprehensive information base, to explore alternatives and to involve the citizens of Austin in planning decisions.

The Colorado River Corridor downstream is also in need of immediate attention. A more comprehensive assessment is required to focus on resource characteristics, multiple and conflicting land use objectives including recreation and resource extraction, and a method for regulating development. Public access to the river must be addressed not only by the City, but it should be considered as a commitment of county and state agencies as well.



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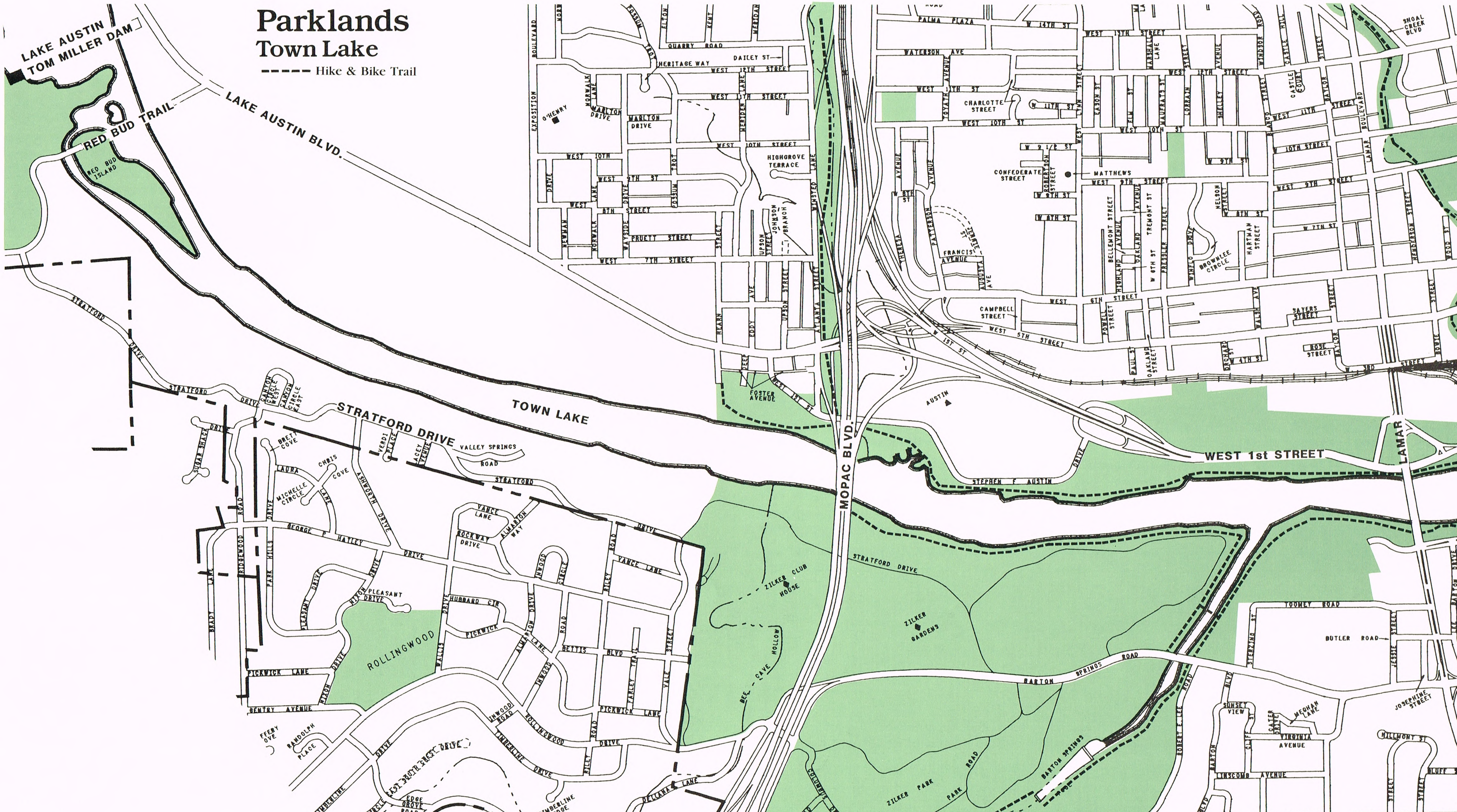
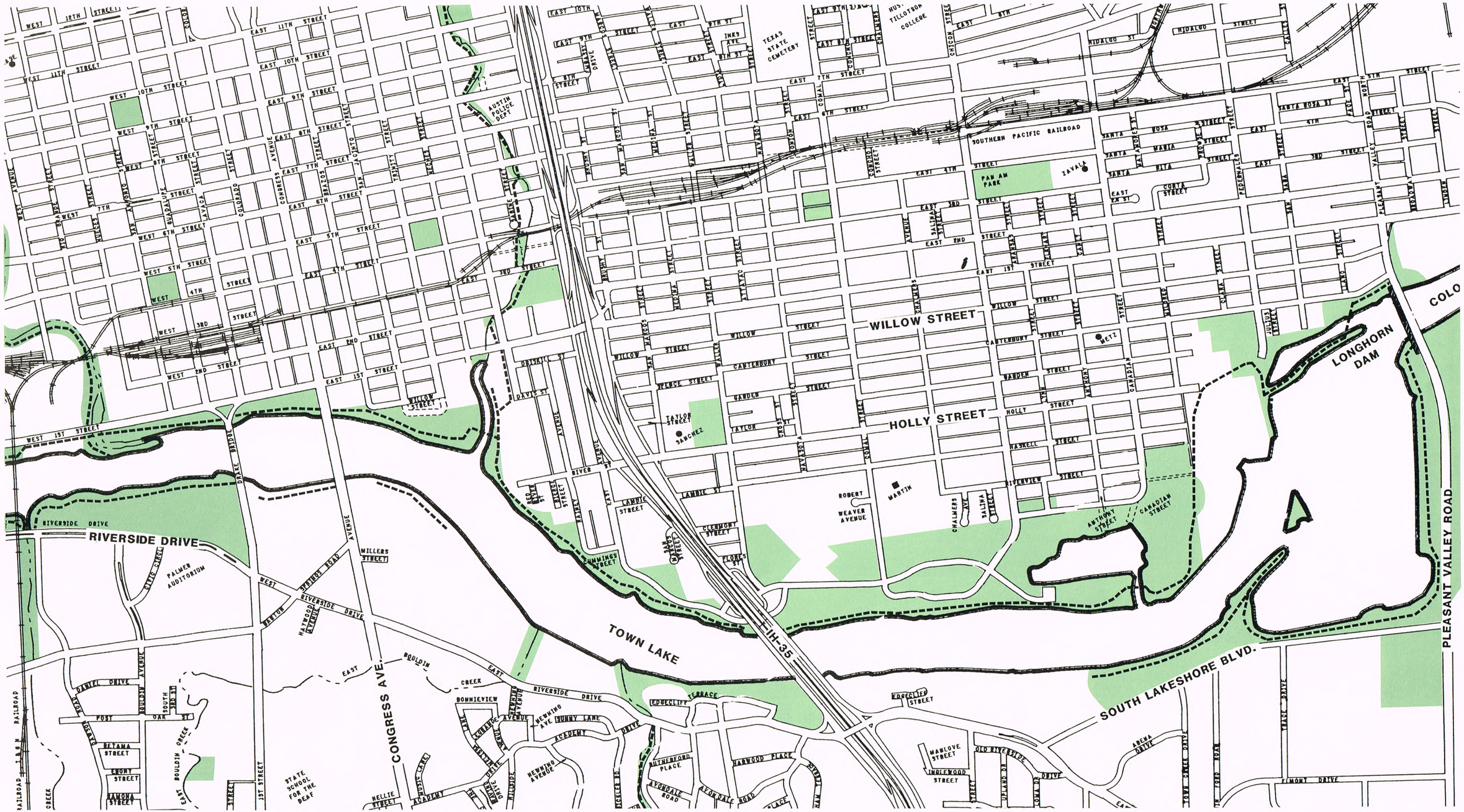
Supplement

Parklands
Town Lake

----- Hike & Bike Trail

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ARENA DRIVE
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TRACE DRIVE
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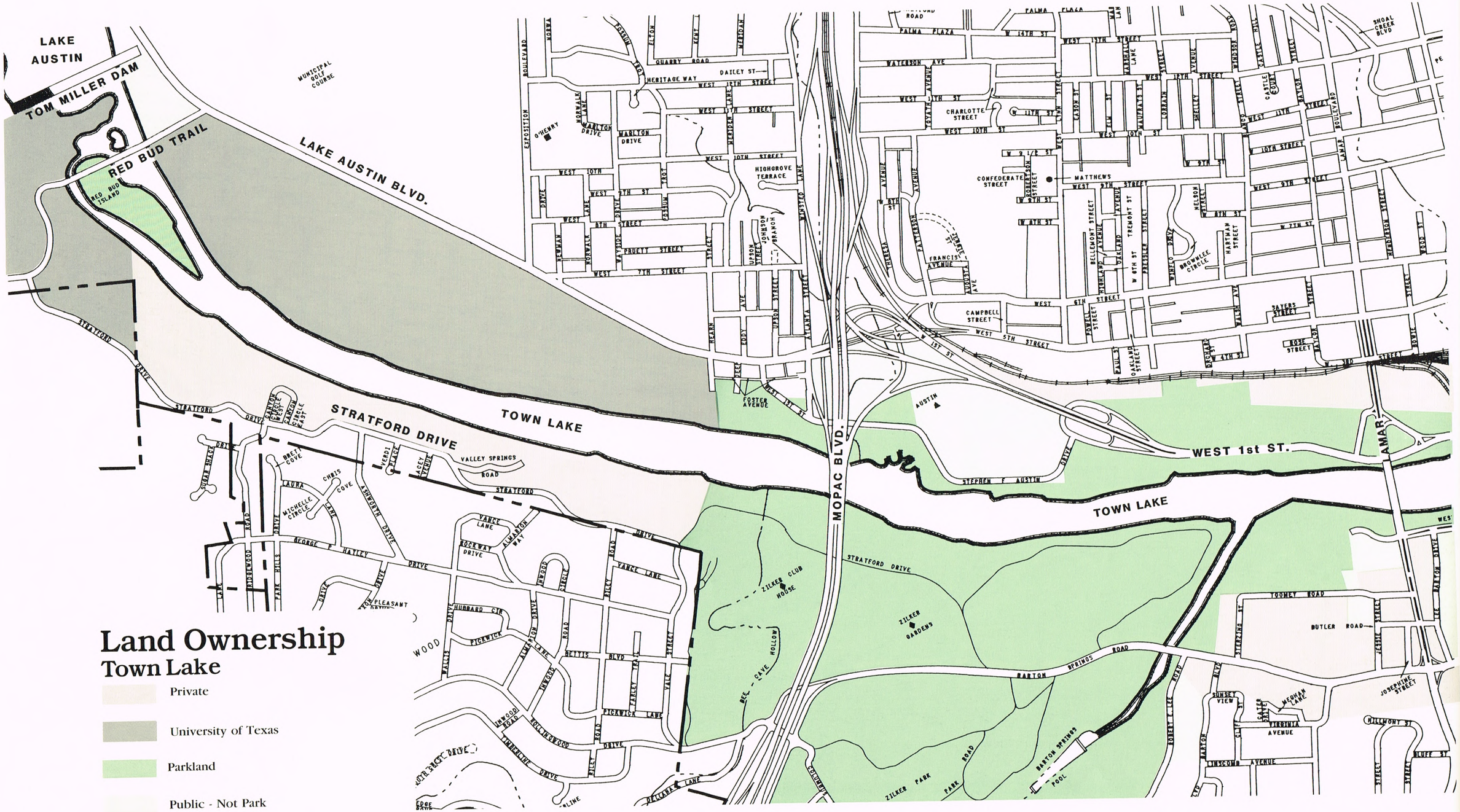
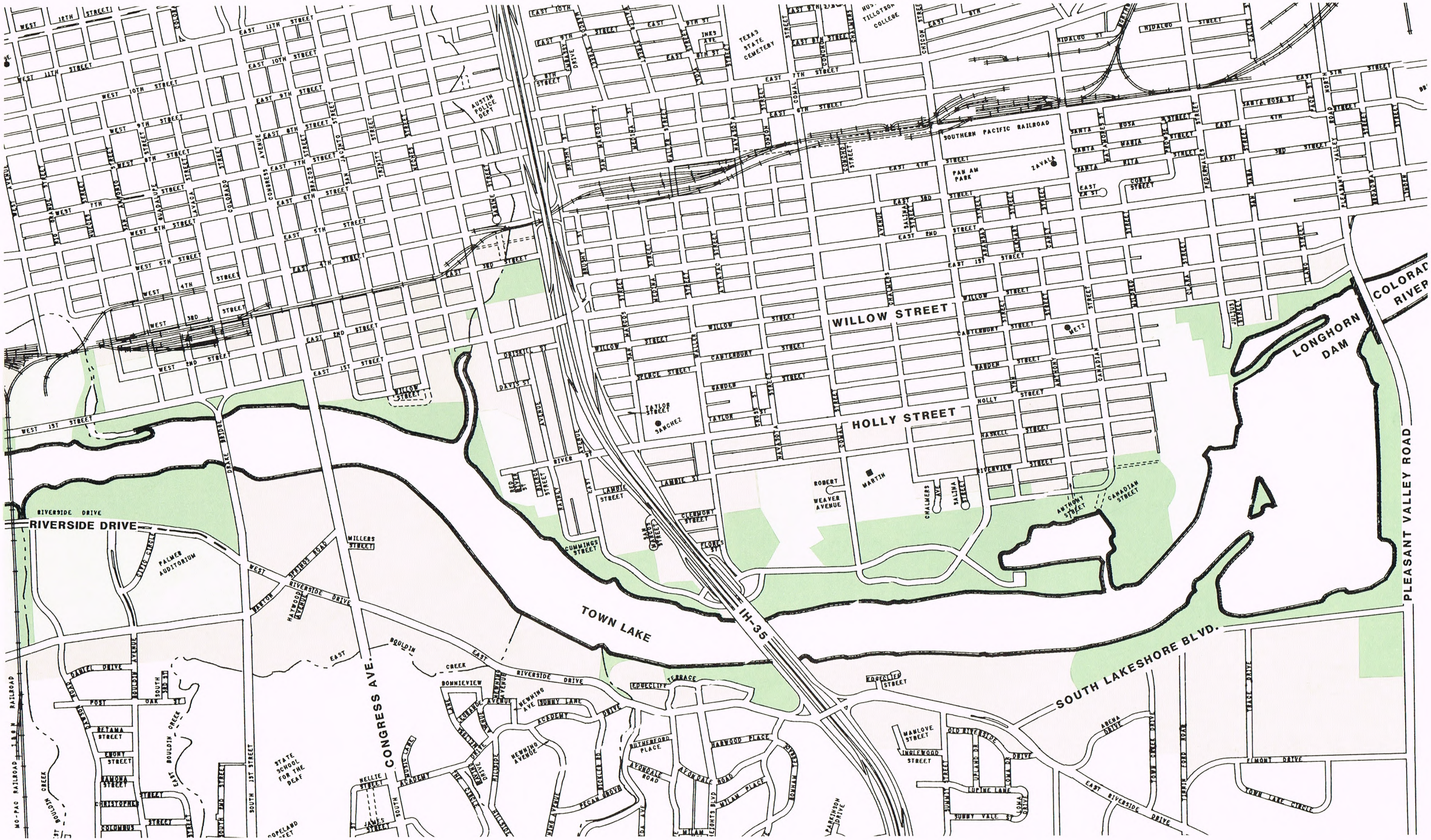


Land Ownership
Town Lake

- Private
- University of Texas
- Parkland
- Public - Not Park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LOWA DR
LUPINE LANE
SUNNY VALE ST
ABENA DRIVE
EDMONY DRIVE
TOWN LAKE CIRCLE
TOWN CREEK DRIVE
TRACK ROAD
PARKINSON DRIVE

Views And Vistas

Town Lake

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Dan Drentlaw, OLDS; Land Use and Zoning

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Carolyn R. Kelley, PARD; Production Coordinator/Photography

Sue Welch, PARD; Manuscript Preparation Coordinator

Toni Lenz, PARD; Task Force Transcriber/Preproduction

Kathryn Fineg; Design and Production/Color Maps

John L. Shobe; Design and Production/ Photography

Phillip Puzick, PARD; Maps

Peter Marsh, PARD; Maps

Jean Page, OLDS; Maps

David Hubbard, Accugraphics; Reprographics Consultant

Steve Craddock, OLDS; Maps

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