

INTRODUCTION

Plan Summary

This plan document is the culmination of a collaborative effort between North Lamar Combined Neighborhood Planning Area (NLCNPA) residents, property- and business-owners, and neighborhood representatives and the City of Austin's Planning and Development Review Department. The vision, goals, objectives, and recommendations found herein are meant to be stepping stones to an improved community and shall be implemented as such.

The NLCNPA plan was created in accordance with the City of Austin's Neighborhood Planning Program. The sections below provide a history of this program both throughout the City and within the NLCNPA.

Neighborhood Planning in the City of Austin

Adopted in 1979, the Austin Tomorrow Comprehensive Plan provided the foundation for neighborhood planning throughout the City. In order to guide the City's development and growth within its existing neighborhoods, that plan stated the need to "[d]evelop and implement specific, detailed plans tailored to the needs of each neighborhood" (Policy 511.1). Once adopted, the NLCNPA neighborhood plan will become an amendment to the Austin Tomorrow Comprehensive Plan.

In the mid-1990s, the Citizen's Planning Advisory Committee urged the City Council to consider a planning program to identify and address community needs and those issues related to development within the City's core neighborhoods. In 1997, City Council approved and adopted the neighborhood planning program to meet the broad initiatives set forth in the Austin Tomorrow Comprehensive Plan.

Neighborhood Planning in the NLCNPA

In late 2006, City Council directed Neighborhood Planning and Zoning Department¹ staff to begin the planning process in several neighborhoods, including those that make up the NLCNPA: Georgian Acres and North Lamar. Because the NLCNPA lies within an area of the City's urban core² that has largely been unplanned, the City Council thought it appropriate to initiate neighborhood planning here in 2006. Other defining factors and features that led to the creation of the NLCNPA neighborhood plan include:

- The amount of developable and vacant land within the area
- The presence of major arterial roadways, including North Lamar Boulevard, where much of the future development will be focused
- Development pressures
- The prevalence of crime and code enforcement violations

¹ In October 2009, the Neighborhood Planning and Zoning Department became the Planning and Development Review Department and will be referred to as such throughout the plan.

² The *urban core* was originally designated by the City Council as a priority planning area; it is also that dense portion of the City of Austin where development is to be guided through policies such as the neighborhood plans or other various tools.

- The current mix of commercial and residential zoning

The content of this plan, including its goals, objectives, and recommendations, was formed through a public planning process in which area stakeholders³ took part in numerous meetings, workshops, surveys, and public hearings before the Planning Commission and City Council.

Throughout the planning process, Planning and Development Review staff coordinated planning activities with other City of Austin departments and outside agencies or organizations to solicit their input regarding the plan's content. Representatives from these groups offered useful insight as to how they can help fulfill the goals, objectives, and recommendations found in the NLCNPA plan. The following departments and organizations participated in the planning process for the NLCNPA:

- Austin Police Department
- Health and Human Services Department
- Parks and Recreation Department
- Public Works Department
- Solid Waste Services, Code Enforcement Division
- Transportation Department
- Capital Metro Transportation Authority
- Texas Transportation Institute

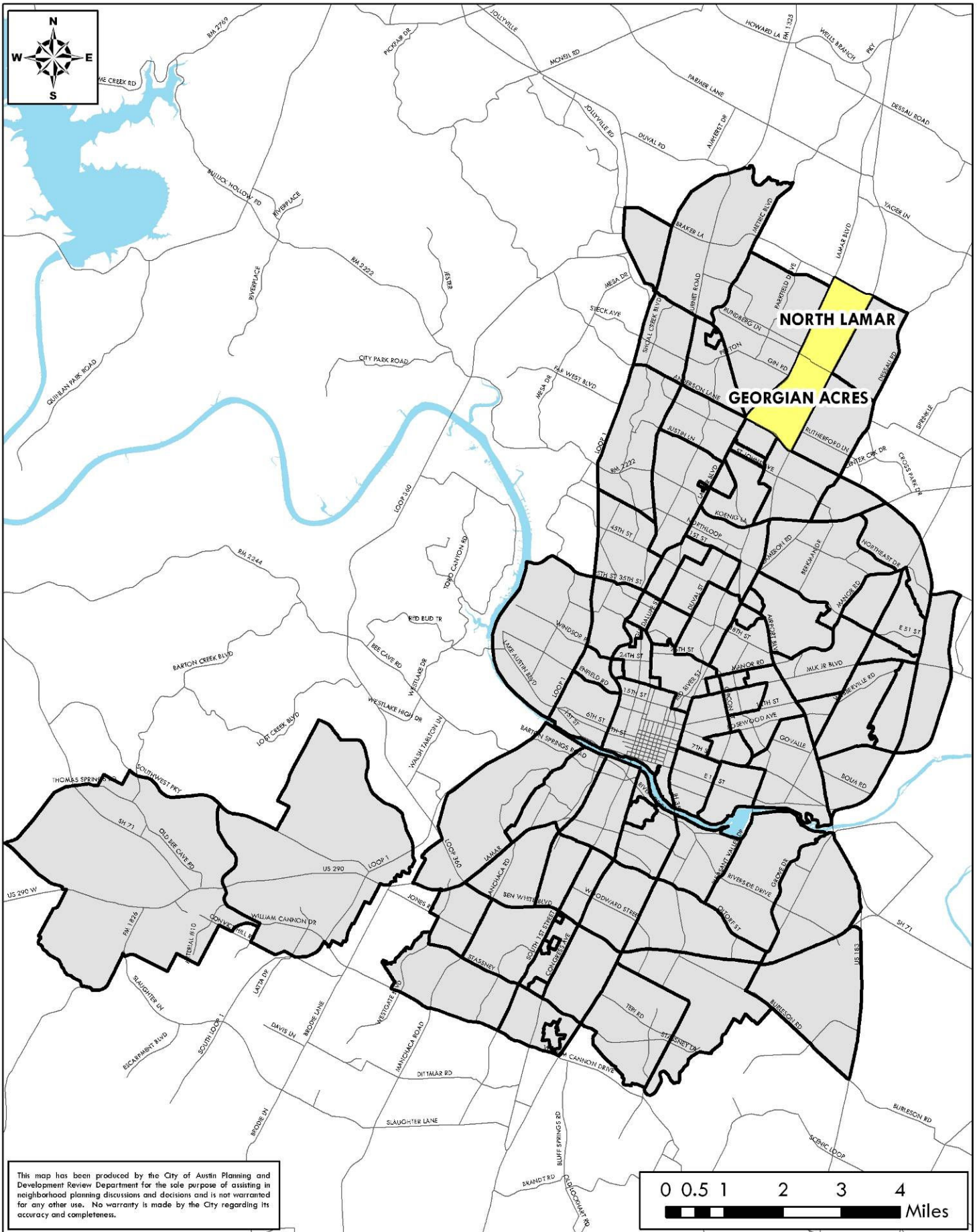
A more detailed explanation of the planning process can be found in the next chapter.

Chapter Structure and Content

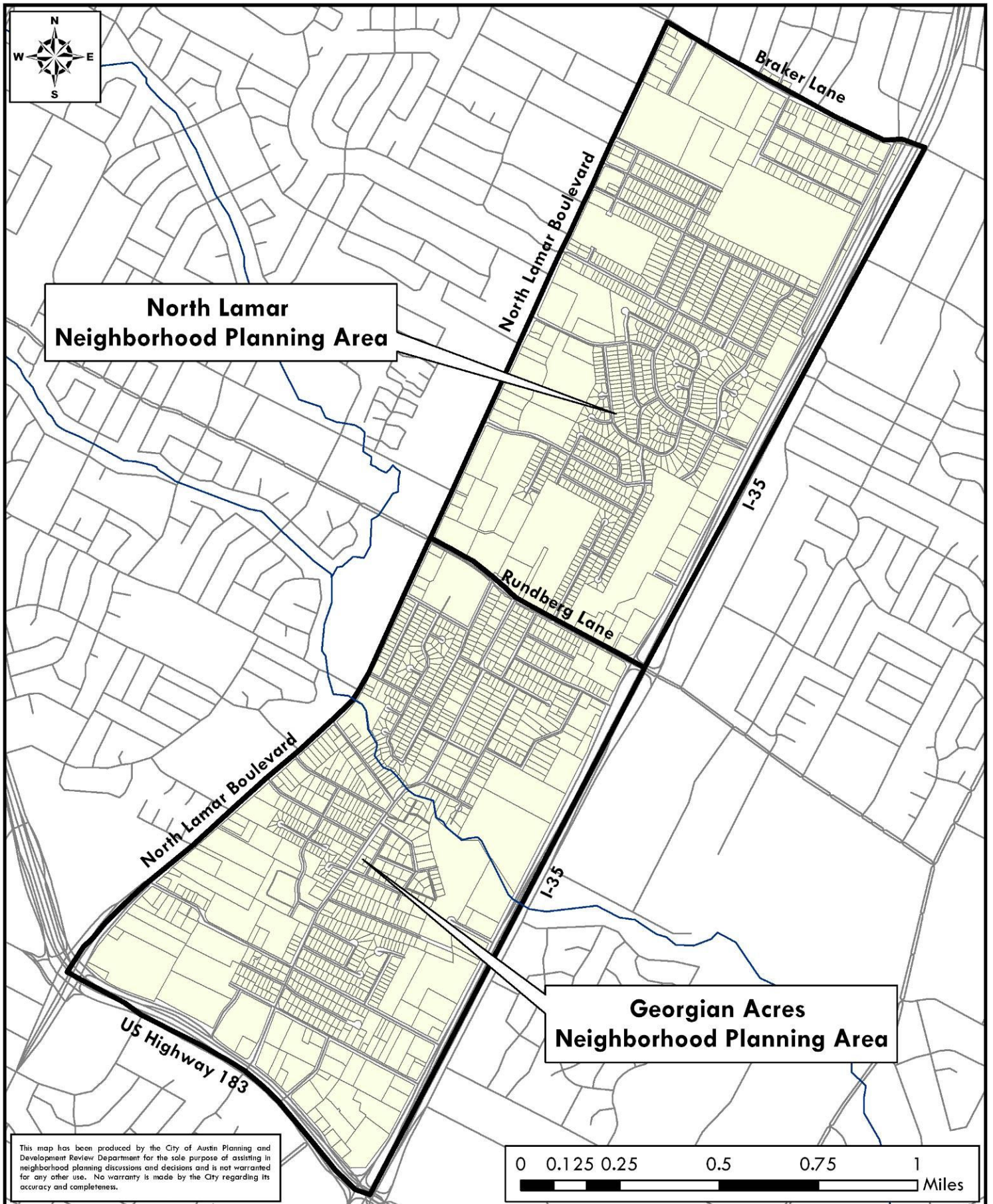
The NLCNPA plan should be thought of as a “workbook,” providing stakeholders with the framework to address those issues affecting their neighborhood. NLCNPA history, statistics, and other background information are offered in the plan's introductory chapters. Topic chapters, however, form the core of the plan. These topic chapters address the five main areas of focus identified by stakeholders at the beginning of the planning process: quality of life (including crime and code enforcement), parks and trees, transportation, infrastructure, and land use.

Each chapter opens with an overall goal for that chapter's specific topic. Objectives and recommendations follow that will help satisfy each of the plan's goals and overall vision for the neighborhood. Throughout the plan document, shaded boxes are used to offer additional resources or information to help address specific issues.

³ The term “stakeholders” is used throughout this plan. Within this document, “stakeholders” refers to those who either reside, work, own property, or some combination thereof, within the NLCNPA.



City of Austin Neighborhood Planning Areas



North Lamar Combined Neighborhood Planning Area

Planning Area Boundaries

A Community Vision:

A Future History of the North Lamar Combined Neighborhood Planning Area

As all of the goals and objectives of the North Lamar Combined Neighborhood Plan were realized, the whole of the planning area has become a more livable and sustainable community. As businesses began to reinvest along North Lamar Boulevard, more of people's daily needs have become located within a short walk or bicycle trip. This reinvestment has created redevelopment opportunities that allow more people to live closer to their daily necessities and within ready access to high-quality transit. As the sidewalk network is improved and the street trees mature, it has become easier and safer to walk to the store or transit. And, as homeownership rates continue to increase, people's personal investment in the community's quality of life motivates them to be actively engaged and committed to the health and well-being of their part of North Austin.

The North Lamar Combined Neighborhood Planning Area (NLCNPA) has emerged as the safe and livable place envisioned in 2010. The neighborhoods are now safe, clean, diverse, vibrant, and friendly. During the intervening twenty years, the hard work and cooperation of residents, property owners, business owners, the City of Austin and Travis County, and non-profit organizations addressed the major problems and issues that concerned the community when the neighborhood plan was adopted by the City Council in 2010.

Crime and Code Violations

After the plan's adoption, the NLCNPA has become a clean and safe community. The residents and business owners developed ongoing partnerships with the Austin Police Department and Travis County District Attorney's Office. Prostitution, drug sales, and associated criminal activities have dissipated throughout the neighborhood. The establishments associated with these activities have cleaned up their businesses or left the neighborhood. The area near the intersection of I-35 and Rundberg Lane, once a center of drug dealing and prostitution, is now a clean, thriving commercial corridor where a number of small, local businesses have set up shop.

The community has worked with City of Austin code inspectors to deal with activities such as illegal dumping, improperly and illegally operating businesses, nuisance properties, and other code violations to improve the quality of life for all residents.

North Lamar Boulevard

Since 2010, North Lamar Boulevard, north of US Highway 183, has emerged as Austin's international Main Street, attracting people from all over Austin and the Central Texas region. Vietnamese pho shops, Indian restaurants and grocery stores, East Asian markets and restaurants, and Mexican and halal butchers are down and across the street from one another. The spaces between these commercial establishments are filled with book stores, boutiques, coffee shops, a variety of other small eateries, and music stores that cater to all segments of Austin's increasingly diverse population.

While the commercial character has become more international, the built environment has become more urban. Slowly, as new investment was made along North Lamar Boulevard, parking lots and ageing single story strip malls disappeared as new buildings were constructed closer to the street and wide, tree-lined sidewalks replaced curb cuts, culverts,

and dirt paths. At the street level and along the bustling sidewalk, are shops, stores, and restaurants. Along some stretches of North Lamar Boulevard, the new development provides residential uses above the shops. It is interesting to note that many of these households do not have or need a car since most of their daily needs are within a short walk. Additionally, the high-quality transit service along North Lamar Boulevard quickly and efficiently connects them to the rest of Austin.

The Neighborhoods

In the interior of the NLCNPA, the neighborhoods largely retain their single-family character. The homes remain modestly-sized and reasonably-priced. As gas prices steadily increased and the tolerance for lengthy suburban commutes declined in the years since the plan's adoption, people began to look for close-in alternatives for their housing. After years of declining homeownership rates, the pendulum has begun to swing the other direction as more and more properties are switching from rental to owner-occupied. The neighborhoods of the NLCNPA—Georgian Acres, North Creek, and Mockingbird Hill—have once again become the choice of working-class families to buy their homes. As this trend continues, neighbors will work more closely with each other to improve the quality of their community.

Getting Around the Neighborhood

North Lamar Boulevard has evolved from a suburban to an urban roadway, and more and more local-serving businesses have begun to appear. The convenience of these businesses entices people out of their cars. Improvements to the sidewalk network, design changes along several streets, and a street-tree planting program create a pleasant walking environment. These changes have also made bicycle riding much more enjoyable. Changes made in subsequent City of Austin Bicycle Master Plans connect the neighborhoods much more safely and efficiently to the rest of Austin. Georgian Drive is known as one of the best walking and biking streets in the city.

Parks and Open Space

When the plan was adopted in 2010, there were limited opportunities for a neighborhood park but, after much work, an appropriate site was selected. The NLCNPA's newest park provides residents a pleasant refuge from their daily lives and creates the opportunities to be alone or engage with their fellow residents. The park's award-winning design reflects the diverse community along North Lamar Boulevard and is upheld as a national example.

The banks of Little Walnut Creek, although reinforced against erosion, provide natural open space for a healthy wildlife community in the middle of the city.

Although there were heavily wooded portions of the NLCNPA in 2010, there were other areas with little or no tree canopy. In the years following the adoption of the plan, the community, working with the City of Austin and several other organizations, sought to create a lush urban forest. Focused plantings have matured and the urban forest in this part of Austin is having the desired effect—shading in the summer, cleaning the air, and cooling the city.

A Sustainable Community

As the cost of fossil fuels continue to climb, people in the NLCNPA look to alternatives to power their homes, businesses, and transportation. Changes to the City of Austin Land Development Code have made it easier to install small-scaled wind generators. Incentives and improvements in technology make solar power a more cost-effective and -efficient energy source. At new commercial and mixed-use developments, people are able to charge their plug-in cars, electric bicycles, and electric scooters and motorcycles.

Throughout the NLCNPA, community gardens appear in empty lots, at houses of worship, at large apartment complexes, and in other open spaces previously covered with grass. In the single-family areas, people have converted portions of their yards to vegetable gardens. Those who did not plant gardens have begun to plant more draught-tolerant plant species and engage in more sustainable landscaping practices.

In the years since the adoption of its neighborhood plan, the NLCNPA has become many things to many people. It is many scales: neighborhood, community, and region. It is many modes: by bike, bus, car, or foot. It is many uses: residential, commercial, civic, and mixed use. It is a place to shop, to visit, to do business, and to enjoy. But, most of all, it is a place to call home.

Neighborhood Plan Goals

The following five goals were developed by NLCNPA stakeholders at the Vision and Goals Workshop held January 24, 2008. Each of these goals is to be upheld through the implementation of the objectives and recommendations found throughout this document.

Quality of Life Goal: The North Lamar Combined Neighborhood Planning Area shall be a safe, healthy, and well-maintained neighborhood that promotes and preserves the quality of life for both residents and business-owners.

Parks and Trees Goal: Achieve and maintain healthy, sustainable, functional, quality, safe, and aesthetically-beautiful parks and green spaces that provide opportunities for cultural interactions within the North Lamar Combined Neighborhood Planning Area.

Transportation Goal: Pedestrians, motorists, transit users, bicyclists, and mobility-impaired neighbors should be able to safely and efficiently travel throughout the North Lamar Combined Neighborhood Planning Area and to the rest of the City.

Infrastructure Goal: Develop infrastructure within the North Lamar Combined Neighborhood Planning Area that upholds the safety of residents and property- and business-owners.

Land Use Goal: Create a well-balanced land use pattern that benefits everybody in the North Lamar Combined Neighborhood Planning Area by assigning appropriate land uses to particular properties.

Priority Action Items

During the planning process, NLCNPA stakeholders identified seventeen priority action items. These priority action items are those projects or initiatives most desired to improve the quality of life throughout and enhance the resources within the NLCNPA. The priority action items also serve as a foundation for the NLCNPA Contact Team's recommendations for future implementation efforts in their neighborhood.

At the Final Open House held on March 6, 2010, participants were asked to rank the priority action items in order of their importance or for their potential impact(s) on the neighborhood. The priority action items are listed below according to the rankings received at the final open house:

- Priority Action Item 1** Construct new sidewalks along:
- the south side of Applegate Drive, between North Lamar Boulevard and Brownie Drive
 - North Lamar Boulevard (several locations)
 - the west side of Brownie Drive, between West Applegate Drive and East Grady Drive
 - the north side of West Grady Drive, between North Lamar Boulevard and Georgian Drive
 - the entire north side of Powell Lane
 - the south side of East Lola Drive
 - the entire north side of Deen Avenue
 - the entire north side of Carpenter Avenue
 - the south side of Diamondback Trail between Brownie Drive and the I-35 frontage road
 - either side of Turner Drive, between West Grady Drive and West Applegate Drive
 - either side of Georgian Drive, between Grady Drive and West Applegate Drive
 - either side of Jean Drive, between East Grady Drive and West Applegate Drive
 - either side of McMillan Drive, between East Grady Drive and West Applegate Drive
 - the south side of East Wonsley Drive, between Georgian Drive and the I-35 frontage road
 - the south side of Middle Lane, between North Drive and Capitol Drive (Recommendation 70)
- Priority Action Item 2** Increase Austin Police Department patrols throughout the NLCNPA. (Recommendation 5)
- Priority Action Item 3** Conduct a traffic-calming study to determine possible design changes to the NLCNPA street network to

facilitate traffic flow and reduce hazards throughout the neighborhood. If warranted, implement the recommendation(s) from the traffic-calming study. Special emphasis should be placed on the following thoroughfares:

- Grady Drive
- Masterson Pass-Diamondback Trail
- Powell Lane
- Georgian Drive, between US Highway 183 and Rundberg Lane
- East Drive
- Beaver Street (Recommendation 79)

Priority Action Item 4 In order to preserve the large-lot rural character of the northeastern corner of the Georgian Acres NPA, zoning requests for intense residential development should be denied. (Recommendation 120)

Priority Action Item 5 Consider the incorporation of the following amenities within the design of a new park:

- Drinking fountains for both people and dogs
- Interactive water fountain
- Benches
- Picnic tables
- A pavilion and/or an area that can be reserved for various functions
- Bar-B-Que pits and/or grills
- Trash cans
- “Mutt Mitt” stations with bags and receptacles for pet waste
- Playground equipment
- Walking trails
- Exercise equipment similar to that found at Barrington Park
- An area for a community garden
- Large open space to allow for various activities, including football and kite-flying (Recommendation 47)

Priority Action Item 6 Plant hardy, long-lasting, and drought-tolerant trees throughout the NLCNPA. Specific areas include:

- North Lamar Boulevard, between Braker Lane and US Highway 183

- I-35, between Braker Lane and Barwood Park
- Rundberg Lane, between North Lamar Boulevard and IH-35
- The Chinatown Center and the adjacent property to its east
- The Crockett Center
- The commercial and multi-family properties located along I-35, between Showplace Lane and Little Walnut Creek
- The residential area bounded by Diamondback Trail to the north, Doc Holliday Trail to the east, East Garrett Run to the south, and Derringer Trail to the west (Recommendation 60)

Priority Action Item 7 Guarantee the anonymity and safety of those neighbors reporting code violations. (Recommendation 13)

Priority Action Item 8 Limit the construction of new fast food restaurants throughout the NLCNPA. (Recommendation 31)

Priority Action Item 9 Limit the construction of new, large multi-family residential complexes throughout the NLCNPA. (Recommendation 121)

Priority Action Item 10 Encourage greater investment in those properties owned by absentee landlords. (Recommendation 20)

Priority Action Item 11 Examine the feasibility and support for a local farmers' market. (Recommendation 33)

Priority Action Item 12 Examine flooding issues at the following locations:

- Georgian Drive, just north of US Highway 183
- East Drive, just north of Florence Drive
- Intersection of Shepard Drive and Cooper Drive
- Intersection of Rundberg Lane and the I-35 service road
- North Creek Drive, just north of Rundberg Lane
- Vacant lot north of Showplace Lane
- Masterson Pass, just west of Garrett Run
- Applegate Drive, just west of Turner Drive
- Intersection of Grady Drive and North Lamar
- Intersection of Grady Drive and Turner Drive
- Intersection of Grady Drive and Georgian Drive
- Intersection of Grady Drive and Brownie Drive

- Intersection of Middle Lane and the I-35 frontage road (Recommendation 111)

Priority Action Item 13 Place restrictions on the development of new hotels/motels along I-35. (Recommendation 139)

Priority Action Item 14 Report all substandard living conditions to the City's Code Compliance Department via 311. (Recommendation 18)

Priority Action Item 15 Communicate with the Austin Police Department regarding the enforcement of traffic regulations throughout the NLCNPA. These traffic regulations include:

- Speeding
- "No Through Trucks," especially along Grady Drive
- Jaywalking (Recommendation 80)

Priority Action Item 16 Improve street lighting throughout the NLCNPA. (Recommendation 103)

Priority Action Item 17 Increase patrols near all Capital Metro bus stops within the NLCNPA. (Recommendation 104)



Participants at the March 6, 2010, Final Open House discuss the plan's objectives and recommendations.