

Waller Creek District Master Plan

CITY OF AUSTIN • FINAL DRAFT: MARCH 2010

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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.

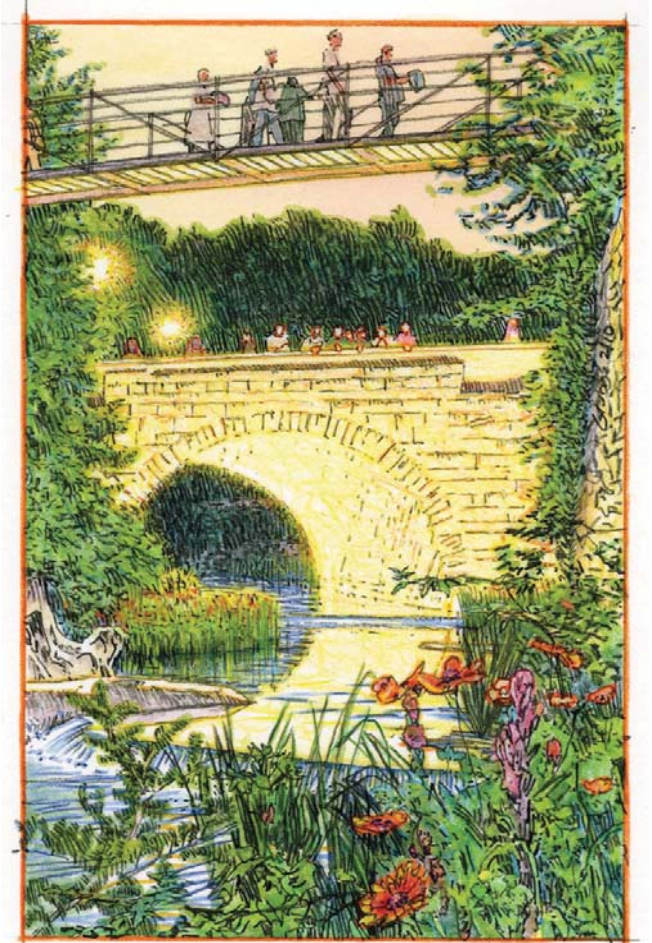
Vision for the Future

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.

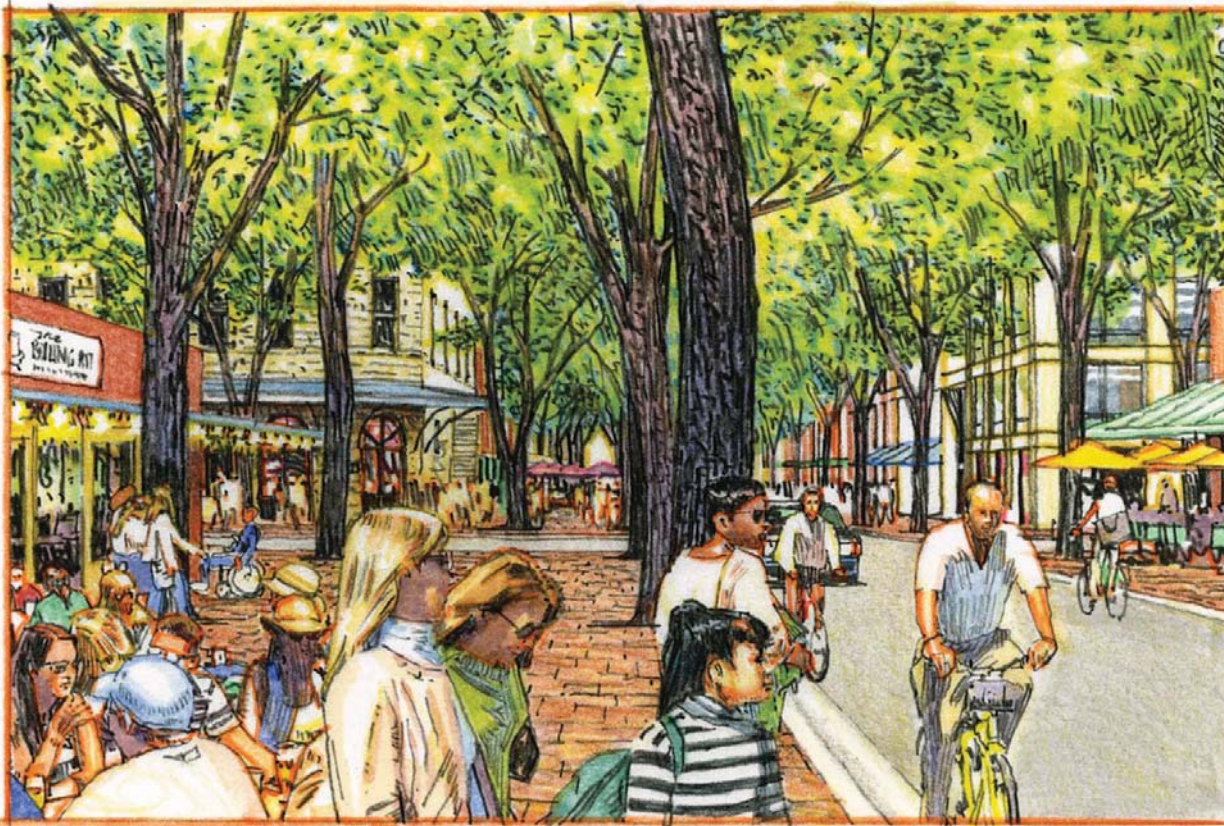
The landscape of the creek corridor will also be augmented by the parkland associated with it. Palm Park, Waterloo Park, Symphony Plaza Park and Symphony Plaza will be improved to reinforce the ecological identity of the creek corridor and become more attractive places for activities. Smaller pieces 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.

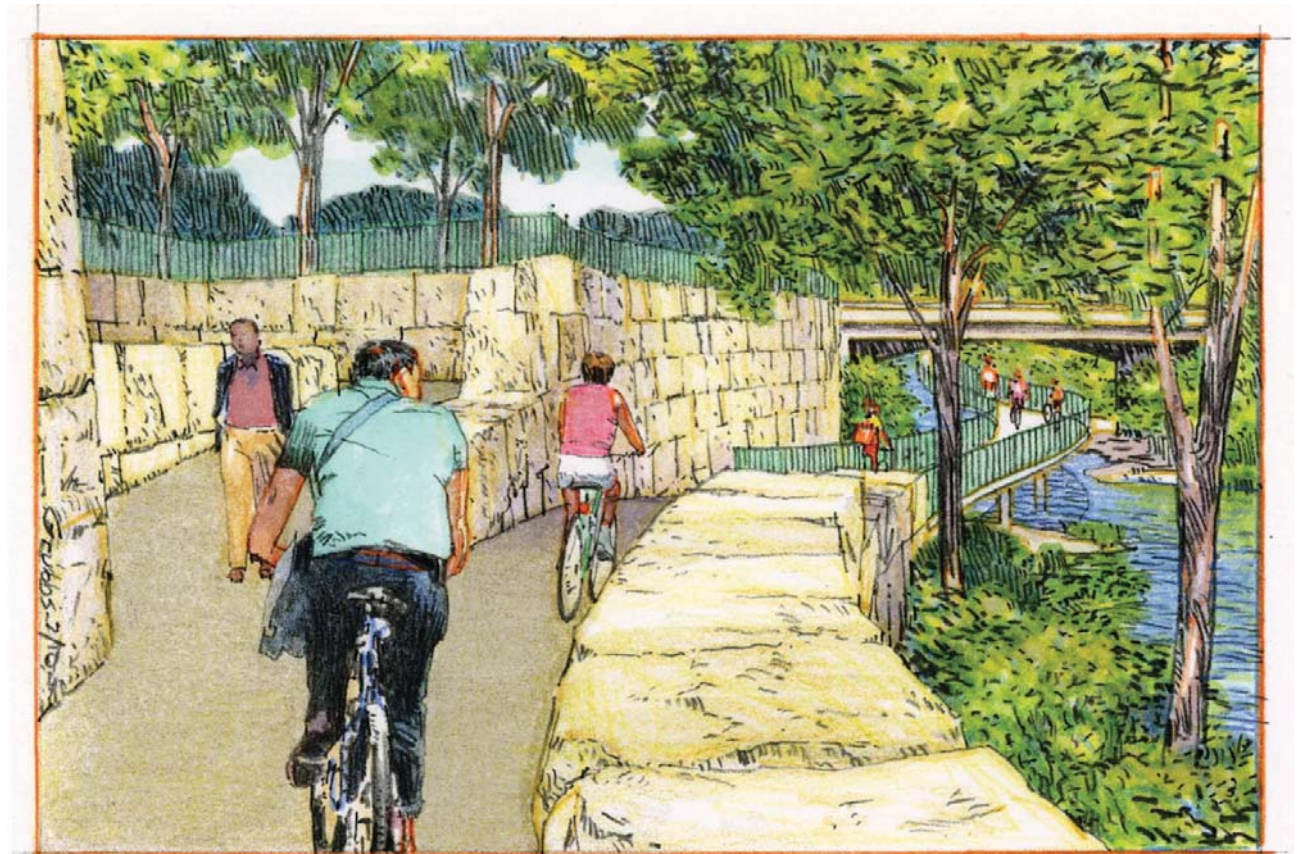
With all of these planned improvements, the value of Waller Creek will be extended well into the surrounding community. It will become a linear park and a positive public space that enhances the image and identity of the City, gives additional structure and orientation to the urban experience, connects 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.

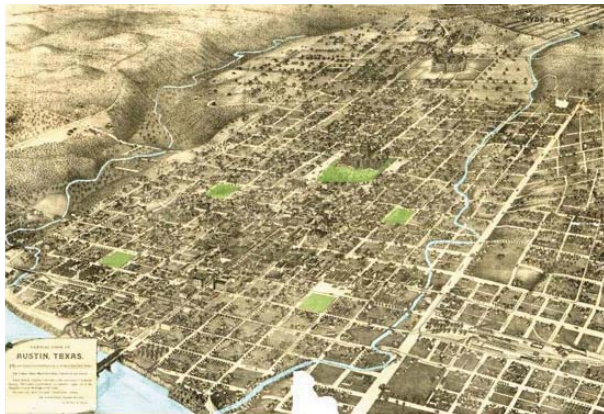
Cesar Chavez to Lady Bird Lake. South of Cesar Chavez, the plan emphasizes the connection of pedestrian and bicycle connections to the trail system of Lady Bird Lake. Though overgrown today by vegetation and only partially connected to the trail system along the lake, these trails feature massive limestone 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.

2. BACKGROUND

Rivers and Creeks within the City

Austin's identity as a city has been shaped by its relationship to water – the creeks and rivers that flow through its undulating landscape and the springs that rise up through limestone outcrops and scourings to animate and enliven urban life. The original grid of the city as laid out by Judge Waller in 1839 was contained by the meanderings of Shoal Creek and Waller Creek and bordered by the Colorado River. As with most riparian towns, life along creeks and rivers offered great benefits but it also came with great threats as well. Primary amongst these were the periodic inundations and severe flash floods characteristic to the specific transitional climate and environment of Central Texas. As a result, flood control improvements were associated with the earliest infrastructural investments made by city leaders. The damming of the Colorado led to the creation of the chain of lakes, from Lady Bird Lake to Lake Travis and beyond, and the parks and open spaces associated with them.

Implicit in the plan for the city was the recognition of the importance not only of local streams, creeks and rivers in shaping its local identity but also of the importance of the great rivers of Texas in shaping the state as a



Austin in 1890, showing Shoal Creek and Waller Creek.

whole. As the capital of Texas, the city plan was intentionally designed to reference the topography of the larger state, with each of the north/south streets named for the rivers and laid out in geographic order across the new terrain of the city. Thus the original plan for the capital city was conceived at two levels – within the immediate local environment of the site and symbolically within the context of the state of Texas, defined and bounded in different ways by its waterways.

The Challenge and Opportunity Today

Winding through the grid of streets, Waller Creek is a prominent feature that helped shape the historical evolution of the city. Once close to the eastern edge of town, it now lies within the heart of the city. But, despite its central location, the creek does not play a central role in the life of the community. Rather it is concealed within the Downtown, following a deep and narrow corridor that appears even deeper and is made narrower where it has been channelized. Periodic flooding has limited investment along the creek corridor, giving the area an underutilized and abandoned character. At the same time, projects that have been built in the last couple of decades turned away from the creek, locating parking and service functions along it.

Over time, Waller Creek slipped from the consciousness of the larger city and took on the trappings of neglect. Although attempts were made in the past to build pathways along the creek, they were not always successful. In the most constrained reaches of the corridor, they resulted in the addition of concrete stairs, pathways and ramps that take away the opportunity for landscape or that encroach into the natural creek banks and bottom. Some pathways became an attractive nuisance, leading people down to places that are unattractive, unsafe and unsanitary. The creek corridor became a refuge for homeless people who find shelter under the bridges and along the paths. Despite city maintenance and periodic clean up events, the creek is littered with trash and debris. Aging infrastructure exacerbates the problems of pollution, and water quality is affected by storm sewer discharges and the potential for leaking wastewater lines.

Waller Creek faces considerable challenges today. It has serious problems related to environmental health, safety and sustainability, image, appearance and identity, and connectivity within the corridor and to other parts of the city. Although many years have passed since Lyndon Johnson decried its condition in the 1930s, Waller Creek still remains essentially a negative element in the city, plagued by flooding, homeless encampments, pollution and neglect.

The decision by the people of Austin in 1998 to invest in significant flood control improvements along Waller Creek will be looked upon as a landmark event in the history of the city, comparable to the damming of the Colorado River in 1893. With this investment, there is an exciting opportunity to reconnect and reorient the city to the creek and make it the centerpiece of a revitalized east side of Downtown. When completed in 2014, the mile-long Tunnel will remove 28 acres of Downtown real estate from the 100-year flood plain. But, it is important to recognize that the flood control project in itself will not change Waller Creek's negative image and identity. In order to foster redevelopment and reinvestment in this area, Waller Creek needs to be improved as a high quality amenity.

The vision that has emerged is that of a linear greenway winding through the Downtown and connecting Lady Bird Lake with Waterloo Park and to The University of Texas campus beyond. In addition to a north-south linear park, Waller Creek is also seen as a positive public space that can help to overcome the barriers that currently exist between Downtown and East Austin. The linear greenway is viewed as a catalyst for new development, not only for properties immediately adjacent to the creek, but for properties within the surrounding area. In order to realize its full potential, the creek corridor must be cleaned up, upgraded, and improved in order to make it feel safe and secure and a positive feature within the community. The natural landscape qualities of the creek corridor need to be reinstated and the image of the creek as a stormwater channel replaced with a more ecologically diverse, authentic and resilient environment, capable of serving multiple roles simultaneously. In so doing, the value of the creek corridor will be extended well into the surrounding community.



The planning process has included three Town Hall meetings hosted by the Waller Creek Citizens Advisory Committee as well as numerous stakeholder and focus group work sessions aimed at refining the vision, clarifying goals and understanding key technical parameters.

Community Participation in the Visioning Process

The community vision for Waller Creek began to be formally articulated during the Nation's Bicentennial with the publication of Austin Creeks (Horizons '76 Committee, 1974). This was the first document to celebrate the importance of Austin's urban creeks as the "green lifelines" of the city - calling citizens to action to restore these as a vital greenway network. Since that time, various plans and guidelines have been created, including the 1976 Lower Waller Creek Development Plan, the 1998 Heritage Austin "White Paper" on Waller Creek, the 1998 Waller Creek Charrette and the Waller Creek Greenway Action Plan (Greenways, 2000). As the Tunnel Project began, the Waller Creek Citizens Advisory Committee (WCCAC) was formed to provide oversight of tunnel and redevelopment projects. In addition, the 17-member WCCAC created a set of "Interim Waller Creek Design Principles" (September 2008) aimed at guiding property redevelopment pending the adoption of the Waller Creek District Master Plan—principles which implicitly describe a vision for the corridor.

In early 2009, the City of Austin engaged ROMA Design Group and its team of subconsultants to work with the City in the preparation of a Master Plan for Waller Creek. At the inception of the Master Plan process, the WCCAC provided ROMA with their aspirations and goals for both the district plan and the creek improvement components of the Master Plan, and this group has continued to be the principal "sounding board" for the project. The Committee has hosted two Town Hall meetings (May and November 2009), with a third and final community meeting planned for April 2010. It is anticipated that the WCCAC will provide the City Council with a set of recommendations prior to its action to adopt the Master Plan, and that they will stay involved to oversee the implementation of the creek improvement project. In addition to the Town Hall and WCCAC meetings, the City Planning and Development Review staff and the ROMA team have conducted numerous stakeholder focus groups and interviews, as well as technical coordination meetings, in order to refine the vision, clarify goals and understand key technical parameters. These meetings have included developers, individual public and private property owners, East Austin and Downtown neighborhood representatives, bicycle advocates, environmentalists, The Trail Foundation, the Austin Parks Foundation, University of Texas at Austin, the State of Texas, the Tunnel Project engineering team and key City staff from Watershed Protection, the Bicycle and Pedestrian Program, Parks and Recreation, Transportation, the Convention Center, Austin Energy and the Austin Water Utility.

3. PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

In looking toward the future, a number of key principles were formulated to guide the planning and design of the creek corridor and district. These were discussed and received enthusiastic community support at the Town Hall meeting in May 2009.

1. Enhance the ecological, hydrological and open space value of the creek corridor.
2. Create an interwoven web of appropriately scaled pedestrian and bicycle linkages to, across and along the creek corridor that connect Lady Bird Lake with UT, and East Austin and Rainey Street with the Downtown;
3. Promote development activity and investment along the creek and throughout the district.

The following sections of the plan are organized around the three principles identified above and expand on each in turn.

Enhance the ecological, hydrological and open space value of the creek corridor.

Environmental and Ecological Restoration

From an urban perspective, the restoration of the riparian landscape along the length of Waller Creek is of the highest priority and will have the most profound effect on its identity and amenity within the city. Waller Creek is an urban stream that reflects the urbanized character of its watershed and has over time, been affected by erosion and sedimentation, channelization, flooding, and degraded water quality. Despite the stresses that it has endured, it is a natural element with the resilience necessary to sustain and enrich life and contribute to urban and environmental quality.

Restoration of the creek channel involves a number of surface improvements to allow water to flow more effectively and to provide for improved environmental quality. Concrete paths resting directly on the creek floor are proposed to be removed to liberate the natural creek flow from these

obstructions. Low-lying creekside landscaped “benches” capable of periodic inundation would be incorporated along a number of reaches. These benches would emulate the natural terraces found at the edges of creeks and would support a greater diversity of plant and animal life and help to filter, cleanse and slow down storm discharges, to the greater benefit of the larger ecology of the city. The flood benches, properly designed, could also help to contain the base flow within a more confined channel, and thus heighten the sense of running water and a more active and lively creek flow. No deepening or cutting of the creek bed would be permitted, but some pools of deeper water will be protected as they contribute to the varied character of the creek.

Rich alluvial soils are a significant asset within any creek corridor, and Waller Creek is no exception. But, as urbanization has taken place the creek has had to work harder to transport water and its sediment load within increasing confinement. As a result, the creek is wider today than it was historically. The channel bed has been scoured in some areas, revealing limestone beds. In the downstream reaches, the stream banks are heavily eroded, exposing tree roots and storm drains to view. In these areas, there is the need to stabilize the slopes and prevent the further loss of alluvial soils and existing landscape and mature trees. A careful reconfiguration of steep and eroding creek banks with more gentle slopes and stepped terraces would not only provide greater stability but would also provide opportunities for new plantings of trees as well as under-canopy vegetation. These erosion control measures can be undertaken in an artful way utilizing natural materials, such as large stones and boulders, as well as matting and wattling to retain the earth.

Riparian planting, more than any other feature, reveals the presence of water in the landscape. An experienced eye can detect how much water is present by what kinds of plants are found along a creek or pond. Common plants within this plant community include rushes, willows and cypresses at the water's edge or in the water itself, transitioning to species such as elderberry, dogwood, baccharis, pecan, sycamore and bald cypress as well as other plants in upland locations. The integrity of a riparian corridor can be similarly discerned by the composition, maturity and density of plants and the number of “exotics” in the landscape.

The landscape aesthetic represented by riparian plantings is different from what would ordinarily be found in parks, streets and other public spaces in the city. The riparian landscape is a naturally sustaining planting that gains order, diversity and complexity out of a combination of natural factors, primarily having to do with the periodic presence of water. Rather than being a groomed and manicured planting of irrigated greens or comprising a more formal composition of trees, the riparian landscape is a distinctive mix of riparian and other native and locally adapted trees, grasses and woody species that grow in thickets. They only offer cover, sustenance, nesting areas and corridors of movement for birds and other wildlife. In addition, these riparian landscapes can transition from the more natural settings adjacent to the creek to upland urban landscapes, public and private spaces as part of development projects and park settings to provide a rich source of visual interest and amenity for urban dwellers.

The restoration of native riparian landscape along the restored banks of the creek and on new benches and terraces even in the most channelized reaches, is an important step in bringing nature back into the city and fostering sustainability. Introducing riparian plantings, where possible, along the entire length of the creek corridor would punctuate the impor-



Extending the landscape of Lady Bird Lake.



Riparian zones in Central Texas include a diverse collection of native grass and grass-like vegetation along the creek edge as well as shrubs, small trees and shade trees along the banks and in the floodplain. (Photo credit: Rusty Ray and www.hillcountryalliance.org)



Native plants (credit: www.lostsprings.com)

tance of the creek as an element in the city, would break the uniformity of the urban pattern and add a layer of complexity to it. The restoration of the riparian landscape would heighten a sense of place, by virtue of the quality and character of the plant community and the vibrancy of life that is hosted there. It would further reinforce a sense of place by sheer contrast with the surrounding city. By visibly threading through the city, the landscape creates a strong element of continuity which enables the creek to be experienced from afar. At the same time, the landscape creates the environment that allows the creek to be experienced up close from the edge of the bank. A restored creek corridor is a positive asset to adjacent development and helps to create the environment for city revitalization and redevelopment efforts. It signals to everyone that we live in a healthy, vibrant and caring city and it is a resource that can further environmental education and awareness.

Riparian Restoration Strategies

The most effective way to achieve a healthy riparian corridor is to maintain and/or restore the appropriate vegetation. Healthy riparian zones are critical landscape components as they provide many ecological services including wildlife habitat, water quality improvement, stream bank stability and aquifer recharge. Riparian zones in Central Texas include a diverse collection of native grass and grass-like vegetation along the creek edge as well as shrubs, small trees and shade trees along the banks and in the floodplain. Strategies for restoring the Waller Creek riparian corridor should focus on creating a rich composition of plant species that provides ecological services while also supporting human activity and interest.

The riparian restoration strategy for Waller Creek includes the preservation of native plants and trees as well as the revegetation with a diversity of riparian plants and species. The preserved, revegetated and restored vegetation should work together to create a composition that mirrors the dominant plant species, relative species abundance, canopy cover and other characteristic elements of native riparian plant communities along Central Texas creeks. More specifically, the strategies that are a part of the enhancement of the riparian landscape are as follows:

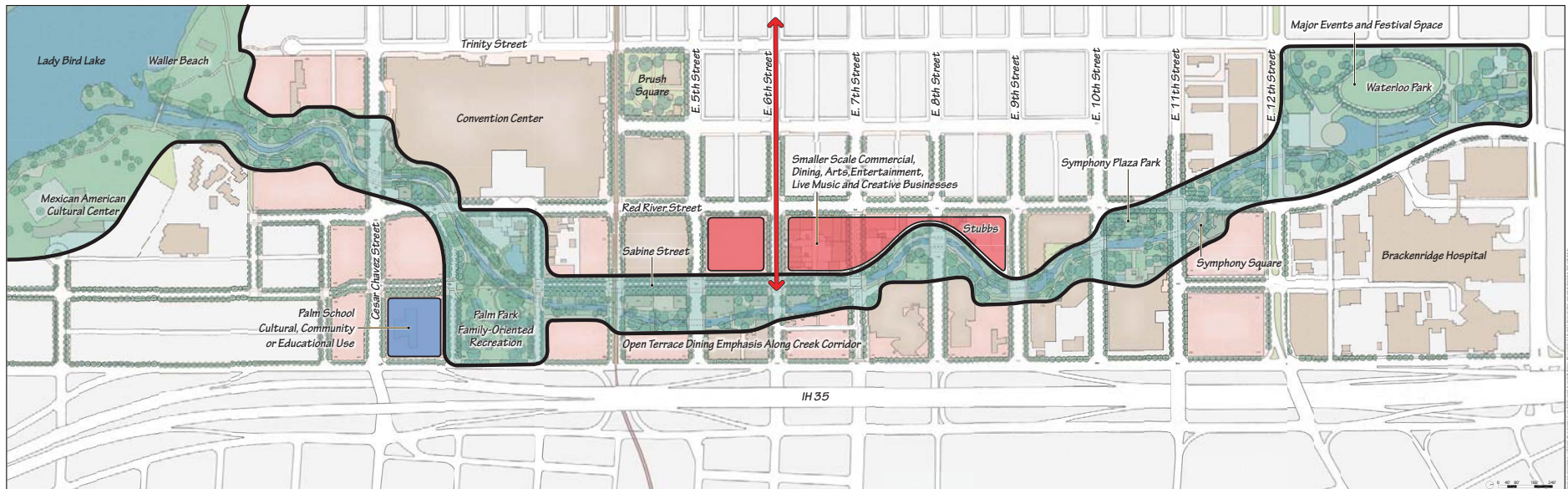
- **Native Plants and Tree Preservation.** Planting and preserving native trees and shrubs within the riparian corridor are vital activities in maintaining a riparian canopy, creating complex plant communities and providing erosion and sediment control in the earlier stages of the project. The Waller Creek corridor contains a mix of native vegetation and includes many high-quality, mature trees that contribute greatly to the overall character of the corridor. All native, healthy trees should be protected to the maximum extent possible, and such “protected trees” that are impractical to preserve in place should be relocated within the corridor, if possible. Additionally, special emphasis should be placed upon healthy native trees with trunks exceeding 24-inches in diameter. The City of Austin recognizes these superior trees as “heritage trees” and these trees are to be preserved.
- **Revegetation and Landscape Restoration.** The revegetation strategy should also focus on maintaining connectivity along the corridor, minimizing abrupt vegetative boundaries between adjacent land uses and creating vertical stratification of vegetation with the planting of herbs, grasses, shrubs, small trees and shade trees. Generally, the vegetative structure used at the corridor edge should be more diverse with a gradual transition from the interior conditions of the corridor. In addition, shading of the creek should be achieved by planting a mix of herbs, grasses, shrubs, small trees and shade trees along the creek edge and a mix of herbs and grasses along the flood benches.
- **Removal of Invasive Plant Species.** Invasive plant species degrade a riparian zone by creating competition for native plants and reducing the wildlife habitat along the corridor. Invasive species are prevalent along Waller Creek and detract from the ecological integrity of the corridor. A corridor-wide management plan should be created for control and subsequent management of any plant species currently listed on the City of Austin’s Native and Adapted Landscape Plants Grow Green invasive plant list. The plan should include Integrated Pest Management protocols for identifying and monitoring for additional invasive species that may colonize the site, for initial treatment and for follow-up treatments and long-term control.

Parkland Improvement

Today, within the Waller Creek District, there are approximately 18 acres of parkland, not including Lady Bird Lake Park at the mouth of the creek. This parkland has the potential of enhancing the creek corridor and, at the same time, creating a more livable environment for the surrounding district. The parks serve in some cases to extend and punctuate the open space created by a revitalized and environmentally restored creek channel. In other cases, they disappear unnoticed and are subsumed either by adjacent development or by the eroded banks of the creekside. The parkland can contribute to the overall objectives for the creek corridor and for the district by extending the open space experience and providing a variety of recreational opportunities that will make the entire area a destination for all segments of the city's population. To fully realize the potential of the parkland, a number of improvements must be considered.

Waterloo Park comprises more than half the total open space acreage on Waller Creek. The 10-acre park forms the northern gateway into the open space corridor, is planned to be improved as part of the Tunnel Project and will include the new inlet structure. In addition to the improvements that will be made by the Tunnel Project, Waterloo Park is currently the subject of a master-planning process that will identify other proposed improvements. The adjoining parkland just south of Waterloo Park can, to a great extent, be considered an extension of Waterloo Park and a part of the northern gateway experience. Together, the parcels to the south of Waterloo Park comprise 2.7 acres and include the triangular parcel of land just south of Twelfth Street and west of Red River as well as Symphony Square, featuring a 350-seat amphitheater, and Symphony Plaza Park which includes the historic Orsey-Doyle House. An important early-action improvement related to all three of these parcels is the improvement of the intersection at Eleventh Street and Red River to create an ADA accessible alternative to the highly constrained creekside trail. Concurrently

enhancements should be made to the existing trail to correct what may be seen as an uncomfortable and unsafe environment not only for those who use the pathways but also for those who attend performances at Symphony Square or are likely to use the adjacent parkland. As a result, the pathways beneath these two bridges should 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. Further, the elimination of the connection under Red River Street would enable the fork in the pathway in the triangular parcel to the north to also be removed, opening up additional opportunities for creek side enhancements. In contrast to these two undercrossings, the connection under the Twelfth Street Bridge between Waterloo Park and the triangular parcel to the south is a strong linking element that strengthens the relationship between the two parks.



OPEN SPACE AND PEDESTRIAN ACTIVITY CONCEPT



Activities that add to the open space experience.



Palm Park – an Opportunity for Family Water-Oriented Activities

Although there isn't much that is needed to improve Symphony Square beyond the elimination and/or management of the below grade connections, there are improvements that are needed on the other two parcels within this area to enhance the relationship of the parkland to the creek corridor and to create a more engaging, attractive and usable open space. When shared parking opportunities are created in more appropriate locations, the surface parking lots should be removed and the parkland regraded to create a series of stepped green terraces. These improvements would not only relate the parkland more directly to the creekside environment but would also enhance the potential for passive recreational opportunities, such as picnicking, sitting, or just enjoying the riparian setting.

At the southernmost end of Waller Creek is Lady Bird Lake Park, one of the best and most distinguished parks in the Downtown and City as a whole. The park is approximately 42 acres in size within Downtown and includes approximately 10 miles of hike/bike trails. It not only provides access for pedestrians and bicyclists to and around the lake but it has evolved to become one of the community's most vibrant meeting places. The Tunnel Project has proposed a new outlet structure and a new boat-house close to the mouth of Waller Creek with associated improvements.

From Waller Creek's point of view, the preservation and enhancement of the relationship between Lady Bird Lake and its parkland and the creek corridor is one of the most important considerations. Today in the reach south of the Cesar Chavez Bridge, the Waller Creek corridor is approximately 220 feet wide and 1000 feet long. It is an uninterrupted stretch of land with mature vegetation that can be perceived as an extension of Lady Bird Lake Park. In the future, maintaining the spaciousness of the corridor, protecting the large trees, mitigating streambank erosion, creating linkages on both sides of the creek to the lake and enhancing the overall landscape and open space qualities are of paramount importance.

Situated between Waterloo Park and Lady Bird Lake is Palm Park, comprising 2.4 acres of land flanking the eastern bank of Waller Creek between Second and Third Streets and extending to the IH 35 frontage road. Although Palm Park has great potential, it has not been improved or upgraded for many years and is not well used today. Improvements are needed to enable it to better serve as a recreational resource for neighborhoods to the east (for which it originally served), and other parts of the city. These improvements could establish a stronger and more complemen-

tary relationship to the creek, the Convention Center and the District as a whole, allow for new trail linkages, protect the large specimen trees and restore the riparian landscape. At the same time, they could also incorporate the use of water as a theme from an interpretative and educational perspective as well as for interactive recreation and children's play and more fully engage the larger park in the process. As part of the park renovation efforts, the adjacent Palm School presents an opportunity to engage and reinforce the park, particularly if County services were to relocate or reconfigure, and be replaced or augmented with complementary community, cultural and educational activities.

In addition to these larger open spaces, there are also a number of smaller pieces of parkland that can be enhanced to create stronger continuity and activity within the open space corridor. They include two triangular parcels between Tenth and Eighth Streets which together contribute about 8,200 square feet of parkland within the creek corridor, approximately 0.7 acres of some small portions of parkland which are included within the creek corridor and the adjacent terraced banks between Seventh and Fifth Streets, an 8,700 square foot parcel of land between the Red River Bridge and the Cesar Chavez Street Bridge, a portion of which is also within the creek corridor. These small pieces create opportunity for riparian landscaping in the tightest portion of the corridor but at the same time they could also be used for outdoor dining or other activities under the shade of the trees and provide a source of revenue to the Parks and Recreation Department (PARC) or as a catalyst for adjacent uses.

There is also one major opportunity to create a new recreation and open space destination within the corridor in the long-term future. This is located on City-owned property currently occupied by Austin Police Department (APD) buildings and parking structures at the bend of Waller Creek between Ninth and Seventh Streets. These parcels are large enough so that as redevelopment of these parcels occurs and is encouraged to take place over the long term, portions can be reserved to create a significant amount of parkland that would enhance the creek experience, extend the open space qualities of Sabine Street, provide another significant recreational destination and node of activity and punctuate the natural form of the creek corridor. Even with the expanded parkland, the area will still retain significant redevelopment potential.

Create an interwoven web of appropriately scaled pedestrian and bicycle linkages to, across and along the creek.

Streets as Public Spaces

With its Great Streets Program, Austin has recognized the role of streets to be more than that of moving vehicular traffic and their importance as multi-use corridors that serve as part of the open space system of the city. Streets provide light, air, greenery and landscape as well as space for the sociable engagement of the population. In addition, streets serve to organize adjacent development into reasonably scaled blocks that create connectivity between different parts of the city. In some cases, large assembled parcels, such as the Convention Center, may be needed for the function they serve but at the same time they create large unbroken blocks which diminish connectivity, linkage and scale. Cities with a finer grain pattern of blocks created by perimeter streets and punctuated by alleys are recognized for making a more pedestrian oriented pattern and integrating the public and private realms in a way that provides for a more vibrant and interesting place.

Within the Waller Creek District, there are a few streets that need to be extended and completed in order to perform the important functions identified above. These include Sabine Street between Fourth and Third Streets and between Second and Driskill Streets as well as Second Street from Red River to the IH 35 frontage road. Together these streets will complete the pattern of unfinished blocks east of the Convention Center and help to create better linkages, continuity and a human scale to the adjacent environment. Extending Sabine Street in this way will help connect the Rainey District to the Waller Creek District and the rest of Downtown. These street linkages will also enhance the opportunities for adjacent development by not only providing access but also helping to create more appropriate frontages for future uses.

There are also other potential improvements to the street system within the district that will enhance its open space qualities. All of the east/west cross streets within the district are already proposed to be improved to the Great Streets standards as part of the Downtown Plan. This would include widening sidewalks, creating continuous street trees and thus enhancing

the landscape and open space qualities of the streets. In the north/south direction, Red River Street needs to also be enhanced in a similar manner as the cross-streets.

By far, the greatest opportunity within the Waller Creek District is Sabine Street. Sabine Street parallels the west side of the creek corridor and with its proposed extension will connect the district from Seventh to Third Streets. There is sufficient space within the 80-foot of right-of-way to allow the street to be rebalanced, with 70% utilized for landscaping and improved open space. A richly landscaped environment with a triple row of trees (two rows on one side and one row on the other), a wide pedestrian promenade and space for outdoor cafés and seating can extend the sense of the landscape and open space character of the corridor. Further, it can help to create a more sociable and attractive setting for the public life of the city which in turn can become a catalyst for the revitalization of the area as a mixed use district, housing cultural, creative and entertainment uses tied to East Sixth Street.



ILLUSTRATIVE PLAN: THIRD TO SEVENTH STREETS



Creek experience connected and integrated with active streetfronts.



Streets as a part of the open space system and pedestrian/bicycle circulation.

Sabine Street also offers the opportunity to in effect broaden the boundaries of the creek corridor within its most constrained reaches. The buildings that are currently located on very small parcels can be brought into a larger landscaped island setting, where they will have two positive frontages – one facing the creek and the other facing the landscaped promenade space along Sabine Street. In addition to Sabine Street, the mid-block alley remnants in the portion of the creek corridor between Seventh and Fourth Streets can play a significant role in creating a smaller scale network of linkages that will increase variety and interest of the pedestrian experience. These can be extended further to bridge over the creek thus interconnecting both banks of the corridor and linking them more closely to Sabine Street.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Linkage

Pedestrian and bicycle movement serves not only as a form of transportation but also as a significant component of the recreational experience of the city. In fact, bicycling, walking, jogging, strolling are the fastest growing and most preferred recreational activities in urban areas today. From this standpoint, the connection of the Waller Creek District to the existing system of trails along Lady Bird Lake is one of the most critical objectives of the enhancement program. It is also important to recognize that the quality of pedestrian and bicycle movement and the opportunity for multiple and interesting destinations along the route are of equal or even greater importance than the establishment of a continuous single corridor of movement.

Any movement system must be planned in consideration of its fit with the environment that it is intended to traverse and connect. A critical consideration is the scale of the movement system relative to its context and the desire to create a way of moving through an area without diminishing the quality of the experience nor the value to adjacent uses. There are reaches of the Waller Creek corridor that are severely constrained in size. In general, most of the corridor is no wider than the average Downtown street, and is significantly narrower in several locations. Creating a continuous path of movement within the creek channel is not feasible due to low-lying bridge structures. But, it also, in many cases, would not be desirable because it would seriously compromise other values for the creek corridor and degrade the quality of the environment and the experience of moving through the landscape.

Linkages within the district need to be integrated into the urban pattern in a way that will add to the amenity value of the creek and its potential for ecological enhancement and public-oriented activities. Pedestrian and bicycle movement should contribute positively to redevelopment, complement the identity of the creek corridor and extend the vitality and enjoyment of the district. As a result, the plan proposes connectivity through multiple paths of movement, both within the creek corridor and on city streets, in an interconnected and looped system. The concept combines movement within the corridor with movement along adjacent streets and it includes at grade crossings at intersecting streets with below-grade movement under some of the bridges. This interconnected system would not diminish the quality of the experience for pedestrians and bicyclists but rather enrich the experience by diversity and complexity and its engagement with the surrounding environment. In this way it would become a more observable and integrated part of the larger urban experience of the Downtown and the City, rather than an isolated and separated experience from the daily urban life.

The improvement and extension of Sabine Street is key to the improvement of the pedestrian and bicycle connections through the Waller Creek District. The street would be redesigned to take on a new role within the city, extending all the way from Seventh Street to Third Street where it would branch within Palm Park to provide direct access along two routes to the Lady Bird Lake Trails and other recreational and cultural activities. One of these routes would extend Sabine Street to Driskill Street through a new signalized intersection at Cesar Chavez and would proceed at grade to the lake, or to River Street which provides a safe linkage beneath IH 35 to East Austin. This route would also connect with the trail on the east bank of Waller Creek via Driskill and Davis Streets. The Davis Street connection would be achieved through an easement on private property and the Driskill Street connection would be integrated with the future development of that private property.

At Sabine and Third Streets, the westerly fork of the bicycle/pedestrian route would proceed within the creek corridor on an elevated boardwalk bridge-like structure under the Red River and Cesar Chavez Bridges to connect to the existing creekside trail leading to Lady Bird Lake. This boardwalk is envisioned as a delicate structure of wood and steel, lightly passing through the creek corridor with minimal disruption to the landscape. As the project progresses into the implementation phase, the City



BIKE-PEDESTRIAN CIRCULATION CONCEPT



Pathways with a light touch through the landscape.



Sometimes a light bridge structure is required.



Bicycle and pedestrian friendly streets can be part of the system.

will explore how another point of connection to the street could be made within the parkland north of the Ironworks BBQ.

At the northerly end of the Sabine Street bike/pedestrian corridor, pedestrians and bicyclists would cross Seventh Street at a signalized intersection and descend into the lower elevations on the eastern side of the creek. In addition to the at grade crossing of Seventh Street, the City may consider retaining the existing under-bridge passage (which will remain susceptible to flooding) or construct an elevated boardwalk under the center of the bridge span. Users then would pass under the Eighth Street Bridge and then back up to cross Ninth Street at a new mid-block crossing. The trail would continue along the east side of the creek and descend under the Tenth Street Bridge and then ascend to the intersection of Eleventh and Red River where it would cross at grade or underneath the bridges and proceed northward under the Twelfth Street Bridge to Waterloo Park and to Red River Street beyond. This would constitute the principal proposed recreational pedestrian/bicycle movement corridor for the Waller Creek District, an accessible pathway of more than one mile in length.

This corridor would be complemented by a parallel but more direct route for bicycle movement along Red River Street, which would extend all the way from UT to Lady Bird Lake. These two north/south movement corridors would be interconnected with the proposed Lance Armstrong Bikeway on Fourth Street and the bike lanes on Eleventh Street, as well as the “sharrows” proposed for many of the other cross-streets.

Design Parameters for Public Spaces

At a more specific and detailed level, the proposed improvements within the creek corridor should be designed to advance best practices of ecological design. They should protect, restore and stabilize the banks and bottom of the creek, improve water quality and flow and preserve and reintroduce riparian vegetation at many levels, to create a very rich landscaped environment. Paths, trails and pedestrian bridges should traverse the creek landscape lightly, revealing a succession of unique natural features – cretaceous limestone outcrops, distinctive riparian vegetation, meanders, riffles and pools, as well as historic stone bridges, stone walls and buildings that line the creek. Lighting should create an attractive night-time scenic quality with dramatic but subtle effects that heighten our awareness and comfort, encourage uses and activities that spill into outdoor spaces thus

contributing to their sociability and vitality. Over time, as part of larger City improvements, plans should be implemented to remove the pipes slung under the bridges. The remains of aging, obsolete or failed infrastructure projects should also be removed along with structures built into the bed of the creek including concrete, plaster and other materials that have sloughed off into the channel.

The plan recommends that the new walkway systems be built to accessibility standards and for protection against flooding. New walkways should be built above the 100-year flood level wherever possible, and eight feet of overhead clearance is preferred while 80” is required below the bridges. In some cases, in order to achieve an adequate clearance portions of trails may be required to descend below the flood level for a short stretch. In these cases, the City may decide to let them be inundated on occasion and provide convenient alternative routes. Alternatively, low walls may be used to protect the trail against flooding. Currently, some portions of the creek-side trail (such as the 12th Street Bridge) are already adjoined by a low wall or curb which, presumably, provides some protection from flooding. Where walls need to be raised or added for flood protection, (for instance, at 12th Street and 10th Street), sump pumps should be provided for storm water evacuation and wash-down.

For the most part, all walkways along the creek should be designed so that they have a slope of less than five percent, for more gentle and gradual transitions between lower areas adjacent to the water and upper areas within the City. Gradual and stepped side slopes should be encouraged to minimize abrupt changes in grade of over 30 inches and the need for guardrails. Stairs should also be minimized with a greater emphasis on more natural changes in grade, integrated with the topographic structure of the creek. The use of shallow slopes (i.e., less than five percent) should be implemented on the walkways to avoid the need for ramps and landings as well as guardrails and handrails and to create a more open and attractive environment for movement.

All pedestrian priority trails should be signed and posted. However, walkways that accommodate both bicycles and pedestrians should have a minimum 12 feet clear width and guardrails, where necessary, should be 54 inches high. Pedestrian trails should be six to eight feet wide and should avoid the need for guardrails with sloped banks, but if needed should be a minimum of 42 inches in height. All guardrails should be a minimalist

design with members as thin and transparent as possible so as not to overly intrude into the larger riparian landscape of the creek. The mid-block pedestrian bridges between Third and Seventh Streets should be 6-feet wide with 42-inch guard rails.

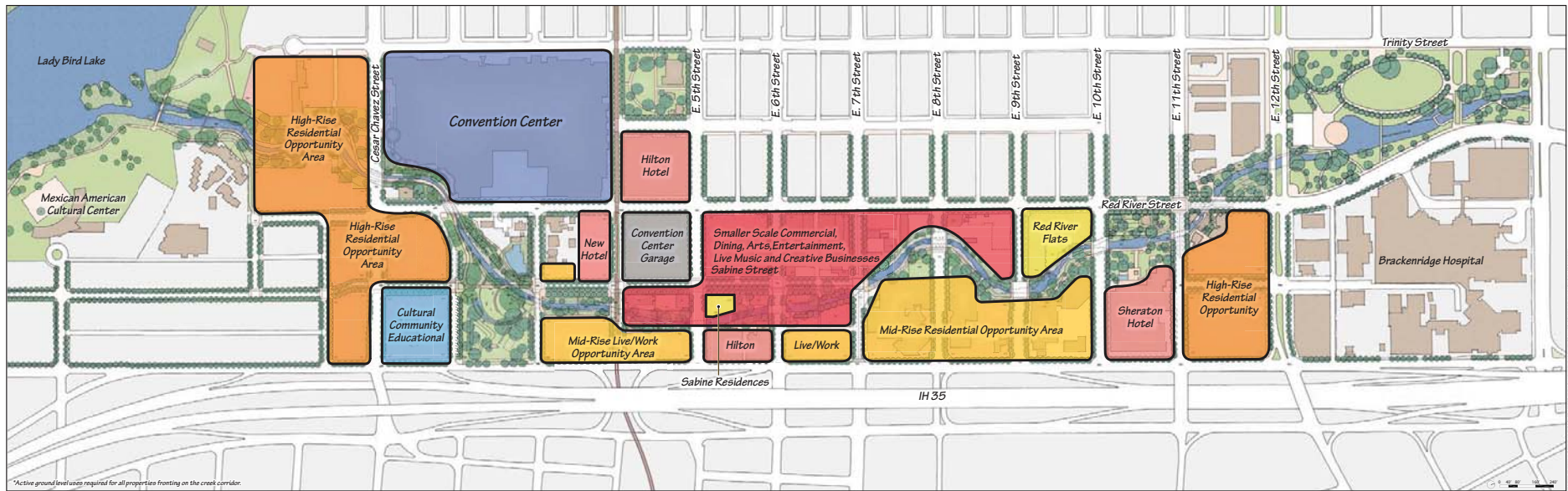
In some places, boardwalks are proposed as a light structural element in order to minimize disruption of existing creek banks and vegetation. These structures are envisioned as artistic elements within the riparian landscape. The surfaces of the boardwalk, as with all of the trails, should be non-slip and, to further their transparency, be comprised of narrow slats utilizing materials that are both durable and sustainable. Any supporting structures should be designed to minimize the number and size of columns and these should be placed centrally under the deck so as to maintain the light appearance of the boardwalk structure.

Promote development activity and investment along the creek and throughout the district.

Land Use and Development

The implementation of the Tunnel Project will remove many sites within the Downtown from the 100-year floodplain and is an important prerequisite for revitalization and development to take place. But for the Waller Creek District to achieve its full potential, the image, identity and amenity value of the creek corridor must be improved and a more sociable environment needs to be created. By improving the corridor in this way, the environment will be greatly enhanced for future development of the area. The Master Plan provides recommended standards intended to guide the form and character of future development within the District, and its relationship to the creek and to other public spaces including streets and open spaces, as set forth in the following section.

From a development standpoint, the district offers a wide variety of opportunities. From a regulatory perspective, the size and scale of future projects are most significantly affected by the Capitol View Corridor (CVC) height limitations. These restrictions will help to foster a diversity of building types and scales of future development which will add to the interest and attractiveness of the area as well as the opportunities for investment. In addition to the large number of private development opportunities, there are also significant publicly-owned parcels, like the Police Department,



LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT

which have turned their backs to the creek corridor and can be redeveloped in the larger public interest. The diversity of development opportunities – small and large, public and private, will help to create a more economically viable district, by allowing a wide range of investors to participate in the area's transformation.

In the preparation of the Master Plan, the maximum development capacity of the Waller Creek Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District was projected by analyzing and modeling each of the opportunity sites greater than one-quarter block in area. (The TIF area extends beyond the Waller Creek District planning area to include much of the Rainey Street District to the south.) This projection indicates that the opportunity sites could yield up to 11.4 million square feet on public and privately owned land, or an overall average Floor Area Ratio of 9:1. A total of 9.5 million square feet of development is projected on privately-owned sites or an overall average FAR of 10:1. As shown on the sketch model (see page 46), this projection

takes into consideration the limitations of the Capitol View Corridors and assumes some increased density achieved, beyond base zoning maximums. It is important to note that these projections describe only the estimated development capacity of the site and do not necessarily represent what the real estate market may actually produce or what an individual property owner may decide to do with a property.

From a land use standpoint, residential, hospitality and smaller scale commercial, uses, represent three of the most significant development opportunities within the area. Beyond these are opportunities for small-scale offices and creative businesses which may want to own their own property and have a more distinctive and individualized identity. Live/work lofts and townhouse units that combine residential and commercial activity could also be developed on the many small sites constrained by the CVCs within the area. In some cases, there are also opportunities for smaller scale buildings with ground level retail, restaurant and entertain-

ment uses, with upper level rental office and/or residential uses for those seeking more of a vibrant and publicly oriented environment in which to live and work. In all cases, regardless of the upper story uses, active ground level uses are desired to create activity and a more vibrant district, as well as greater social sustainability adjacent to the creek corridor.

Residential uses would be of benefit to the district in bringing a larger population into the area and establishing a sense of neighborhood. Residential uses can take advantage of the proximity to the open spaces within the corridor and the activities planned within the parks and open air dining along the creek. There are excellent opportunities for housing of a variety of types and scales and appealing to different income groups as well. Large scale, high rise residential development opportunities (above 120 feet in height) exist at either end of the district – both to the south of Palm Park along both sides of Waller Creek, and to the north, between Eleventh and Twelfth Streets adjacent to Symphony Square and Brackenridge Hospital.



High-rise development opportunities.



Mid-rise residential and live/work lofts.

Mid-rise residential opportunities (up to 120 feet in height) exist on the east side of the corridor between Seventh and Ninth Street, on the Austin Police Department properties. These sites are large enough to enable any future redevelopment to be implemented in a garden-like setting that both benefits from the amenity value of the creek corridor and extends it into the development itself. Low-rise residential development opportunity sites (below 60 feet in height) including the possibility of live/work projects exist on the east side of the creek corridor, between Third and Seventh Streets.

The half-block between Third and Fourth Streets and between Red River and the Sabine Street extension across from the Convention Center garage would be an excellent site for an additional hotel within the district. It is catty-corner from the existing Hilton Hotel and adjacent to the future recreational and open space improvement of Palm Park. Alternatively, this site and its relationship to the Fourth Street passenger rail could also become an excellent site for residential high-rise development. The site is large enough that these two uses could be integrated in a way that would be beneficial for both.

It is envisioned that small scale commercial uses would be focused primarily on both sides of the creek corridor and along Sabine Street between Third and Seventh Streets and on the west side of the creek corridor to Red River between Seventh and Ninth Streets. One of these blocks is currently the location of Stubb's, a popular live music venue in the renowned Red River live music district. In addition the blocks between Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Streets between Sabine Street and Red River offer additional opportunities for the small scale "creative community" business and live/work opportunities which could help to link the Sixth Street Entertainment District to the Waller Creek/Sabine Street area. These lower-rise developments under the CVCs have the potential to be more affordable as they could be "stick-framed", rather than the more expensive steel and concrete construction required for mid and high-rise buildings.

Significant consideration must be given to creating public parking, particularly in the central portion of the creek corridor in order to maintain the fine grain and intimate scale of activities within smaller parcels. Parcels smaller than one-quarter block cannot realistically provide on-site structured parking. A shared parking facility could be located within future development on the parcels east of Symphony Square between Eleventh and Twelfth Streets, where it could provide for the smaller-scaled parcels along the creek corridor and an anchor destination for vehicles arrival into

the district. Additional public parking should also be located in the area between Fifth and Seventh Streets, utilizing the City's Parking Enterprise, to provide a more centralized facility for the commercial, recreational and entertainment uses along the creek corridor, Sabine Street and Sixth Street.

Waller Creek District and Creative Community

In its initiatives and policies related to the "Creative Community", the Downtown Plan calls for the Waller Creek District to be the key Downtown district identified with the creative community. The district is envisioned as a place for artists of all kinds to practice (studios, performance spaces, etc.), a place where creative support industries may be found, and even a place where artists and individuals involved in creative industries can live affordably. The nationally-renowned, cutting-edge live music scene on Red River should be protected, if possible, and incentives developed for subsidizing the relocation of these venues to East Sixth Street should they be displaced by redeveloping Waller Creek District properties. Waller Creek is not only Austin's opportunity to create a highly unique creek corridor and trail system, but incentivizing it as "home" to Austin's creative community will help to give this emerging district an authentic Austin flavor, and it will make a strong statement to both residents and visitors about the importance of the creative community in our city.

Further, the public trail and creek improvement project provides an opportunity to engage the creative community at a number of levels: in the design of public art and public spaces that could be located along or near the pathways and in developing designs for the various functional elements of the public improvement project, such as small bridges, guardrails, water fountains, bike racks, benches, etc. In addition, artists should be commissioned to enliven the creek corridor with live music, dance, performance, poetry readings, outdoor art classes, etc., that could begin today, not needing to wait for the completion of the public trail improvement project.

The City's Art in Public Places Program requires a two percent contribution from most, above-ground (visible) public projects, so substantial funding would be dedicated from the public improvement project budget to create permanent "artworks". It is recommended that artists are included as key members of the architectural design team hired by the City to do the final design and engineering for the improvement project, so the artists' contributions are as integrated as possible in the overall design of the project.