




MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor and City Council

From: Rosie Truelove, Director
Housing and Planning Department 

Subject: Update regarding Council Resolution No. 20190523-029, regarding Palm District Master Plan

Date: April 20, 2021

This memorandum serves to update City Council regarding Resolution No. [20190523-029](#) directing the City Manager to create the Palm District Master Plan, designating the Fifth Street Mexican American Heritage Corridor, negotiating options for public ownership and operation of the Palm School and surrounding site, providing funds for the Rainey Street District Fund, expanding the Austin Convention Center, and creating a Tourism Public Improvement District. To address the needed public input process and identify an engagement strategy recognizing the challenges resulting from the on-going public health emergency, staff is extending the timeline for this project to March 31, 2022.

As directed by the resolution, staff provided an overall work program to City Council in [July 2019](#), and provided a modified work program in [October 2019](#). The Housing and Planning Department continues to convene a regular coordination meeting across all involved city departments, and to develop and implement a detailed work plan for the overall Palm District Planning Initiative. In December 2019, staff applied to the American Institute of Architects (AIA) for support under the nationally recognized Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) Program and were selected by the National AIA through a competitive process in January 2020.

In February 2020, city staff, major district stakeholders, and members of City Council welcomed AIA staff to Austin and provided an orientation to the district in preparation for a formal public-facing AIA R/UDAT visit at a future date. Due to COVID-related travel restrictions, AIA has frozen the program but may be available to lend limited virtual support to the project during 2021.

Housing and Planning staff are continuing to work with the Communications and Public Information Office and other City departments to prepare for an appropriate public launch of the overall planning process in early 2021 with a goal of developing a draft plan by the end of 2021.

If you have any questions, please contact me at 512-974-3064 or rosie.truelove@austintexas.gov or Erica Leak, Development Officer, at 512-974-9375 or erica.leak@austintexas.gov.

cc: Spencer Cronk, City Manager
J. Rodney Gonzales, Assistant City Manager

Attachment

WORK PROGRAM FOR PALM DISTRICT PLANNING INITIATIVE (REFINED March 2021)

Purpose. The Palm District planning initiative will engage stakeholders to develop a comprehensive, focused small area plan for an area of downtown Austin which includes Palm School, Palm Park, Brush Square, the Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center (ESB-MACC), the Convention Center, the Red River Cultural District, the Downtown Station, the Austin Innovation District, Waller Creek, Rainey Street, and a portion of the Fifth Street Mexican American Heritage Corridor. This plan will also analyze the interface and connectivity between the study area and adjacent areas, including IH 35 and East Austin neighborhoods. The primary deliverables from this planning process will include:

- Amendments to the *Downtown Austin Plan*;
- Creation of a new *Palm District Plan*;
- Amendments to the *Waller Creek District Master Plan* as needed;
- Amendments to the Land Development Code as needed to implement the vision for the Palm District.

Background. The Palm District has a rich social, cultural, and built history, and is currently a dynamic area of downtown that is likely to undergo additional transformation as the City collaborates with stakeholders to improve Waller Creek, to address connectivity and community needs in the Rainey area, to preserve the Palm School, to preserve and enhance the Red River Cultural District, to develop the Fifth Street Mexican American Heritage Corridor, to implement an Innovation District in the vicinity of the Dell Seton Medical School, and to expand the Convention Center. Additional transformation will also result from reconstruction of IH 35 and from implementation of Project Connect. The area has been the focus of many recent public planning initiatives including:

- Rainey Street Area Rezoning (2004)
- Waller Creek District Master Plan (2010)
- Downtown Austin Plan (2011)
- Waller Creek Design Plan (2012)
- Hispanic/Latino Quality of Life Initiative (2013)
- Downtown Austin Wayfinding Master Plan (2013)
- Designation of Red River Cultural District (2013)
- Convention Center Master Plan (2015)
- Formation of Austin Innovation District (2017)
- Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center Master Plan (2018)
- Capital Metro Project Connect Vision (2019)
- Brush Square Master Plan (2019)
- University of Texas (UT) Center for Sustainable Development Analysis of Scenarios for Convention Center Expansion (2019)
- The Austin Core Transportation Plan including the Rainey Street Mobility Study (Underway)

As described in the UT Center for Sustainable Development Analysis:

- The Austin Convention center is a linchpin in the city’s downtown and overall economy.
- Austin’s downtown has a shifting center. The Convention Center is no longer on the eastern edge of the urban core—today, it is better described as lying near the center.
- The Convention Center and the Palm District occupy a connection point between important urban corridors.
- The location of the Convention Center presents the city with a strategic opportunity to link together many ongoing projects into an entire network of active public places. Redevelopment strategies for the Convention Center will need to recognize the problems and opportunities surrounding the new nexus and strive to resolve the conflicts inherent with competing interests and initiatives.

Scope. The Palm District planning initiative will amend the Downtown Austin Plan to develop a new vision for the Palm District and would address the following elements:

- Historic Preservation and Cultural Resources
- Activities and Uses
- Density and Design
- The Public Realm
- Transportation and Parking
- Utilities and Infrastructure
- Leadership and Implementation

At a minimum, this planning process will be significantly informed by and impact the future evolution of Palm School, Palm Park, Brush Square, the Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center, the Convention Center, the Red River Cultural District, the Downtown Station, and portions of Waller Creek, the Waterloo Greenway, and the Fifth Street Mexican American Heritage Corridor.

This planning process will also be informed by past planning efforts and current initiatives in the areas, including the Austin Core Transportation Plan including the Rainey Street Mobility Study, and analysis of Convention Center expansion.

The study area will be evaluated to identify opportunities for coordination across initiatives and to identify potential areas of conflict. Recommendations will be designed to enhance existing plans and to maximize synergies among the various initiatives and components of the Palm District.

The planning process will include modifications to the existing Waller Creek District Plan and implementation strategies as directed by the resolution.

Engagement. The engagement process will involve stakeholders representing the Palm District as a whole, as well as stakeholders representing and impacted by various identified projects, including but not limited to:

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| • The Red River Cultural District | • The East Cesar Chavez Neighborhood Plan Contact Team |
| • The Raza Roundtable | • The Rainey Business Coalition |
| • The Rainey Neighbors Association | |

- The Town Lake Neighborhood Association
- The Austin History Center Association
- The Greater Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
- Hispanic Austin Leadership
- Hispanic Advocates Business Leadership of Austin
- The Downtown Austin Neighborhood Association
- Mexic-Arte
- La Peña
- The Tourism Commission
- Capital Metro
- AIA Austin
- Preservation Austin
- Visit Austin
- The ESB-MACC
- Waterloo Greenway
- Downtown Austin Alliance
- Our Austin Story
- The Trail Foundation
- Travis County Historical Commission
- Travis County
- The Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce
- Housing Authority of the City of Austin (Lakeside Apartments)
- Movability
- East Sixth Street Public Improvement District
- University of Texas
- Dell Seton Medical Center
- Texas Department of Transportation
- Relevant City of Austin Boards and Commissions
- Project Connect Advisory Net
- Residents, Businesses, and other Community Groups

The Communications and Public Information Office will support the Housing and Planning Department with meeting design, facilitation, and engagement analysis.

Resources and Project Budget. The Palm District Planning Initiative will be coordinated by the Housing and Planning Department and will rely on a multi-departmental team that includes staff support from Housing and Planning, Convention Center, Parks and Recreation, Austin Transportation, Economic Development, Watershed Protection, Real Estate, and the Communications and Public Information Office. The Housing and Planning Department does not anticipate needing additional staffing resources to support this effort currently.

Boundaries. In order to provide a starting point for this effort, a preliminary study area boundary for the planning initiative has been identified. The Palm District study area includes the existing Waller Creek District as well as the Rainey District and a portion of the existing Core/Waterfront District within the Downtown Austin Plan. We anticipate that the boundaries of the Palm District planning initiative will continue to be refined during the planning process based on identified planning needs. The initial boundaries of the study area are indicated in grey on the attached Palm District Context map as “Palm Study Area.”

Timeline and Tasks. This timeline has been adjusted since the [October 2019 memo](#) to reflect impacts of COVID public health emergency and Winter Storm Uri and may continue to be refined based on engagement needs and department workloads.

FALL 2019-Winter 2021		SPRING 2021	SUMMER 2021	FALL 2021	WINTER 2021-2022	SPRING 2022
TASK 1: Pre-Planning						
		TASK 2: Visioning				
			TASK 3: Active Planning			
				TASK 4: Draft Review		
					TASK 5: Plan Adoption	
		TASK 6: External Stakeholder Engagement				