

DESIGNWORKSHOP

REPUBLIC SQUARE MASTER PLAN REPORT

Austin, Texas

MASTER PLAN

July 22, 2013 FINAL DRAFT





Photo of "Auction Oaks" within parking lot, circa 1960.
(Photo courtesy of Austin History Center)

Purpose of this document

This document captures the process and outcomes of the master planning effort by Design Workshop undertaken from March through September 2012. The clients for the 1.8 acre site are representatives of the Parks and Recreation Department within the City of Austin (PARD). The objective of this phase was to develop a master plan guided by principles of sustainability and urban design connectivity to create a first-class, community-supported, functional urban park space.

Design Workshop's Legacy Design process emphasizes a deliberate approach to sustainable design solutions that is comprehensive of four Legacy categories: environment, community, art and economics. All aspects of the design process and foundational thinking for a project are captured in this document. *Issues* associated with the project and our client's *Critical Success Factors* are defined at the outset. The design team and client define a project *Vision*, a problem statement called a *Dilemma* and a design solution called a *Thesis*. These steps are intended to build a strong foundational story for the project that aligns the design team and client to the same *Principles* and *Legacy Goals*. DW Legacy Design® metrics are employed to ensure that the project is accountable to comprehensive *Legacy Goals* set at the beginning of the process.

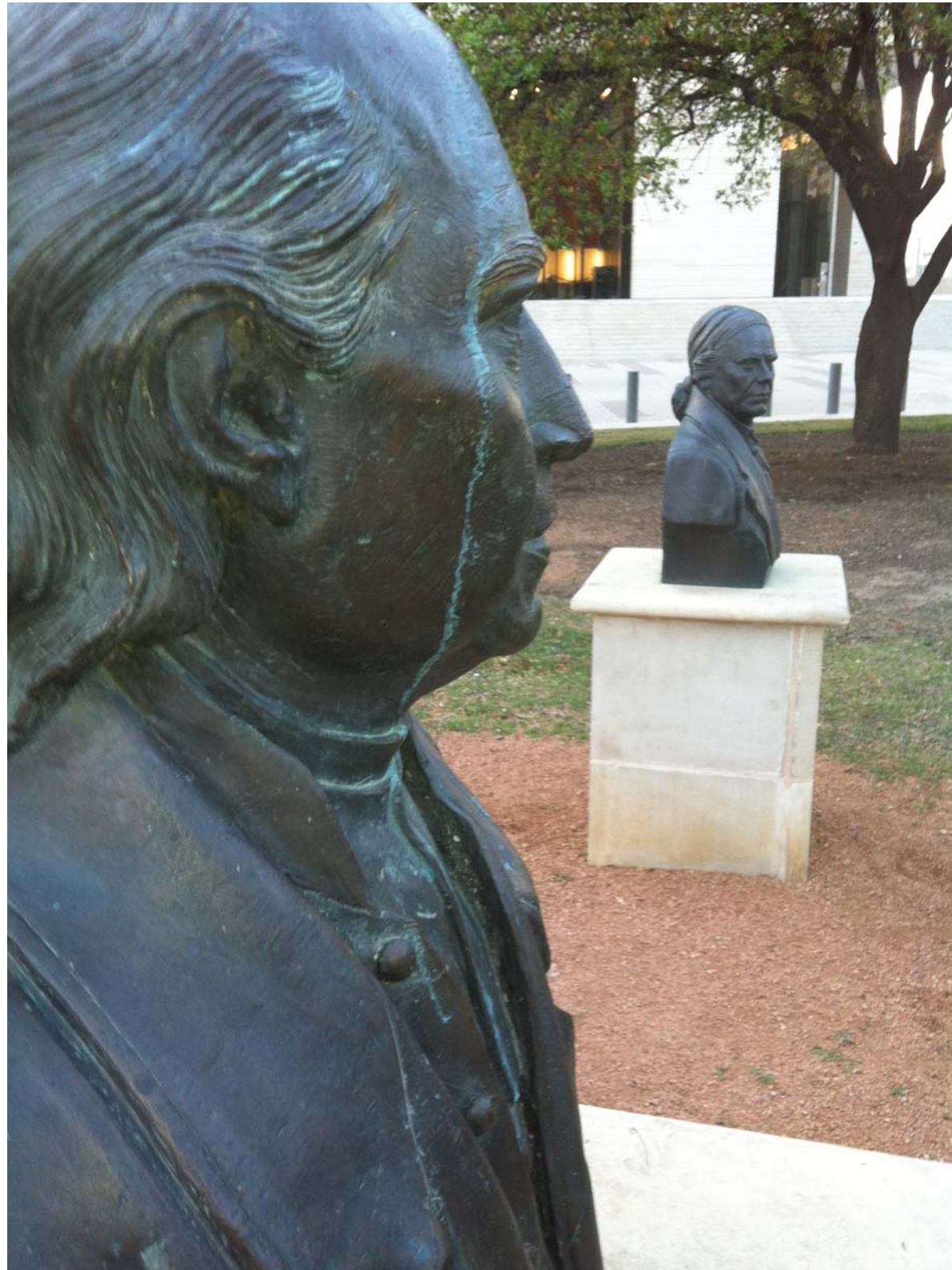
This document provides a visual and textual story of the design analysis, definitions and discoveries that led to planning solutions and conclusions. It is intended for client use in presenting the Master Plan vision to municipal officials for approvals, to educate the public on the decision-making process, and to serve as the foundation for the next phases of the design process in which the plan will evolve.

Cover Image: Rendering showing proposed promenade area along 5th St.

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PROJECT OVERVIEW



Sculptural busts of "Founding Fathers" Miguel Hidalgo and Jose Morelos were moved from Waterloo Park to just north of the deck at Republic Square due to the construction of the Waller Creek Tunnel in 2011.

Project Background

Republic Square has gone by many names and has hosted many uses since its inception in the 1830s. It was originally set aside as one of four “Public Squares” and has been a prominent social space for much of its history. It includes three of the most significant trees in the city. Frequently called the “Auction Oaks”, this group of trees formed the location of the auctioning of Austin’s original city lots in the 1800s. The trees have witnessed the transformations of the Park, as well as the city around it. Today, the Park is at the center of a rapidly changing district within downtown Austin. As a result of development pressure, several stakeholders in the area have initiated planning, programming and design efforts that revolve around the Park, with the most recent being an update of the “Vision Plan” created for the Park and Operations Plan.

City leadership and downtown interest groups all recognize the importance of planning for urban parks as community resources, and they intend to make places such as Republic Square more than incidental green space. Urban parks in downtown Austin should emphasize sustainable economics, community relevance, cultural significance, environmental leadership, and local pride. The Park should be a highly influential part of downtown, reaching into adjacent blocks to influence how redevelopment occurs.

Recent transportation planning around the Park has added a new and complex layer of activity. Effectively planning for such activity involves more than just installing a sidewalk along the edge of a busy street. It requires the careful creation of an environment that suits walking, bicycling, and transit, and it requires planning for speeds that allow for mobility and commerce while providing safe environments for pedestrians and bicyclists. Importantly, planning for urban parks should also consider the economic health of adjacent land uses and help plan for potential development and redevelopment that enhances the economies of local communities.



Park use during the week is dominated by nearby residents and their pets.



The Park hosts a wide range of events throughout the year.



Demolition of sidewalks and flat work beneath “Auction oak” trees as part of recent improvements. (Photo courtesy of DWG)



View of “Auction Oaks” prior to recent improvements. (Photo courtesy of DWG)

Photo by Daniel Woodruff

DW Legacy Design® Method

To generate the Republic Square Master Plan, Design Workshop employed the DW Legacy Design method, which begins with a narrative foundation for the project and then continues to advance the various components of that narrative throughout the design process.

At the outset, Design Workshop defined issues associated with the project and the project's Critical Success Factors, as developed in concert by the design team, the client and various stakeholders. In the initial stages of the project, the team worked with the client group to define a Project Vision, Project Dilemma, which is a problem statement, and a Project Thesis, which is a potential design solution. These steps led to a strong foundational story for the project from which the consultant team and the client were able to establish set of common principles and goals for the project. The consultant team used metrics based on existing site conditions and benchmarks from similar built projects to develop a set of project elements that can be measured. These metrics provide the consultant team with evidence that allows them to compare the Master Plan's Preferred Concept with the Park's existing conditions from the project's outset as well as with other comparable built projects. All metrics fall into four categories as defined by Design Workshop Legacy Design: environment, community, art and economics.

Information Gathering

The first step in the design process involves gathering and assembling the facts at hand in order to understand the issues and opportunities surrounding the project. This comprehensive analysis helps to inform the plan.

Critical Success Factors:

The Design Workshop consultant team identified and confirmed the following Critical Success Factors for Republic Square with leadership from the Austin Parks and Recreation Department and through conversations with stakeholders. These factors reflect the results that are most important for the communities to consider the Republic Square planning process a success.

- The team shall inform the plan with a comprehensive analysis;
- The decision-making process shall be transparent and inclusive;
- The project shall develop the approach and outcomes so that they may serve as a prototype for other downtown parks in respect to furnishing and process;
- The project shall create a realistic (and therefore creative) operations and management strategy by providing an analysis of potential revenue generating sources including vendor and partnership opportunities;
- The project shall provide an implementation plan that includes priorities, sequencing and funding/leveraging opportunities;
- The project shall fully explore public art opportunities (including both temporary and permanent art, the existing sculptural busts and the planned 5th St Mexican-American Heritage Corridor);
- The project shall preserve the existing "Auction oaks" and other significant trees;
- The project shall integrate with "Great Streets" policy and implementation in the area;
- The project shall provide opportunities for multi-generational users;
- The project shall create a "signature" park, reflecting the identity of the neighborhood;
- The project shall suggest design parameters for the surrounding developments;
- The team shall prepare detailed construction documents for Phase 2 improvements within available budget;
- The plan shall accommodate maintenance by PARD or in partnership with other organizations.

Project Vision:

This is a continuation of a design process that is in partnership with the Austin Parks Foundation. The team must work with project stakeholders to update the Republic Square Vision Plan, with particular attention paid to Park frontages of West 5th St, Guadalupe St, West 4th St and San Antonio St, which may include future streetscape and right-of-way ("Great Streets") improvements. A vision and character of the Park shall be defined and crafted into the plan and design of future phases, with phase 2 construction documents focusing upon the parkland proper.

Project Dilemma:

This dilemma highlights the complexities of the project and the need to create a comprehensive solution. Republic Square has the potential to be a premier park for thousands of local and regional users, but its current incarnation is largely under-programmed and fails to reflect the dynamic spirit of Texas' capital city. Furthermore, the challenge of achieving broad support for the Park's re-design is complicated by the Park's significance to stakeholders at many levels, ranging from federal, state and city governments, to members of the community who frequent the Park during events, to people who work downtown and residents living near the Park. Additionally, with limited public open space nearby, the Park is subject to more intense use than other comparable sized urban parks, and without adequate planning for Operations and Maintenance it faces the possibility of being loved to death.

Project Thesis:

The project thesis is a proposed solution to the central problem or issue articulated in the project dilemma;

- Acknowledgement of the history of the site and other plans that will influence this process such as Phase One and surrounding neighborhood plans;
- Enhancement of the connections – cultural, physical, historical, artistic, emotional, ecological, and economic;
- Comparability to other outstanding, urban, destination parks (and where possible surpass existing case studies) ;
- Ability to pay for implementation;
- Ability to financially support on-going operations and maintenance.

Project Goals

The following goals helped provide direction for the Project's development:

- Ensure funding for the long term operations and maintenance of the Park.
- Ensure the Park increases hedonic value of adjacent properties.
- Manage grackle population.
- Increase habitat for birds, squirrels and butterflies.
- Increase the comfort of Park users.
- Increase the health of plant material.
- Manage the Parks stormwater on-site.
- Minimize the amount of potable water used at the Park.
- Use reclaimed water for irrigation.
- Reduce heat island effect.
- Create a carbon-neutral Park.
- Increase diversity of programming.
- Increase diversity soft programming.
- Ensure the continued flexibility of the Park
- Increase awareness of the Park's historical significance.
- Ensure the Park users feel safe in and around Republic Square 24 hours of the day.
- Ensure views into Park are open and clear.
- Create seamless connections to the Park for pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and people arriving by car.
- Incorporate the connection to the City's early history as a design narrative.
- Incorporate truly site specific cues into design and planning.
- Expand the seasonal interest of the Park to add dynamics.
- Increase the opportunities for creative expression in the Park.
- Allow local character to shine through in the design of the Park.
- Create an interesting view from above.
- Use local materials.

