

THE ROADMAP AND THE ROAD AHEAD

A Comprehensive Plan for the 21st Century

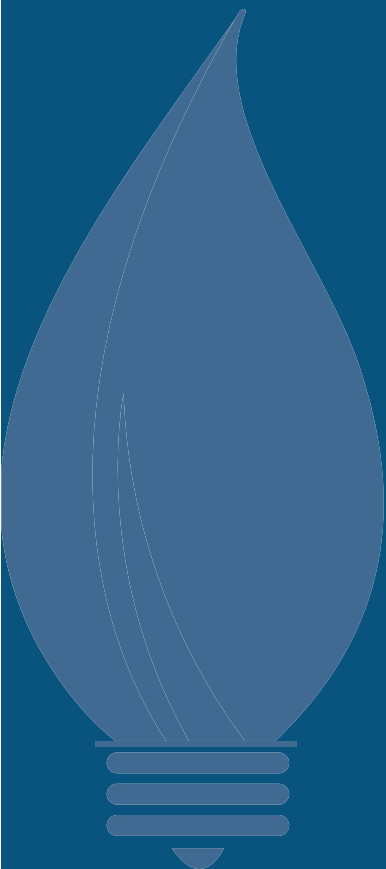
Thinking Big: The Beauty of a Comprehensive Plan

6 Key Challenges and Opportunities

Securing a Sustainable Future

Imagine Austin Core Principles for Action

The Road Ahead



A Vision for Austin's Future

As it approaches its 200th anniversary, Austin is a beacon of sustainability, social equity and economic opportunity; where diversity and creativity are celebrated; where community needs and values are recognized; where leadership comes from its citizens and where the necessities of life are affordable and accessible to all.

Austin's greatest asset is its people: passionate about our city, committed to its improvement, and determined to see this vision become a reality.

Through the process of comprehensive planning and the preparation, adoption and implementation of a comprehensive plan, the city intends to preserve, promote, protect and improve the public health, safety, comfort, order, appearance, convenience and general welfare; prevent the overcrowding of land and avoid undue concentration or diffusion of population or land uses; facilitate the adequate and efficient provision of transportation, water, wastewater, schools, parks, recreational facilities, housing and other facilities and services; and conserve, develop, utilize and protect natural resources.

- Article X. Planning; Charter of the City of Austin, Texas



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There are two primary choices in life: to accept conditions as they exist, or accept the responsibility for changing them.

- Denis Waitley, author and keynote speaker

A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Austin today is a model of livability, widely acclaimed as one of the top cities in the country. We have a distinctive and appealing vibe, a resilient economy, a growing national profile, good job and business opportunities, a fun and relaxed way of life, a beautiful natural setting for outdoor living and recreation, a thriving arts and live music scene, and a reasonable cost of living for a big city. In fact, we're so attractive that we draw more than one million visitors and many thousands of new residents annually.

Known as a "smart" city, we are also smart enough to not rest on our laurels. Maintaining our enviable economy and quality of life requires continuous adaptation as the world evolves around us. As a fast-growing city whose population is projected to nearly double over the next three decades, we are becoming more urban and diverse each year. Our attractiveness brings a central challenge: how to accommodate more people, in a considered and sustainable fashion, while preserving what we value so that we get better not just bigger.

Many of the changes Austin has seen are positive. Growth in recent decades has brought more employers and varied job opportunities; more interesting people with whom to meet and connect; a broader population base to support the visual, performing, media, and interactive arts, as well as our many nonprofits; a revitalized downtown; new transportation options; and greater tolerance and diversity. We have gained public parkland, a wealth of entertainment and dining choices, and many other amenities to enjoy with family and friends.



Children playing at Butler Park.

Austin has a true sense of place and culture. To be from Austin means something to people, conjuring images of Barton Springs, music, food, outdoor recreation, . . . open-mindedness. It's a little grungy, a little hippie, and a little country all rolled into one.

– Imagine Austin Community Forum

Series #1 participant

But other changes are negative. We now suffer from serious traffic congestion, loss of natural and open space to urban sprawl, Central Austin housing that is increasingly unaffordable for individuals and families, a sense of loss about a simpler Austin of the past, and too many low-wage jobs that lag behind Austin's cost of living. Most troubling, at least 20 percent of our children live in poverty, go to bed hungry, go without health insurance and adequate healthcare, and fail to graduate from high school.

The challenge now before us – in shaping the Austin of the 21st century – is to energetically leverage our strengths as we grow, while turning around the negatives. The Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan provides the roadmap.

The stakes are high. We must embrace the future that we want and work to make it happen.

THINKING BIG: THE BEAUTY OF A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

We are not lacking in the dynamic forces needed to create the future. We live immersed in a sea of energy beyond all comprehension.

– Thomas Berry, cultural historian and Earth scholar

The distinctive benefit of a comprehensive plan is that it confronts big issues in a big-picture way. Other city plans are more focused and deal with topics such as parks, solid waste, transportation, water, or smaller geographic areas. But only a comprehensive plan fully considers how the whole community's values, needs, people, and places are inter-related and interdependent. In creating this plan, we identified the defining issues that are central to Austin's future success.

Today, Austin tops numerous state, national, and international “Best Of” lists. This visibility is accelerating our attractiveness and population growth. As we grow and evolve, how can we preserve and amplify the special things we value about Austin? How can we face our more difficult problems, improve the city, and meet our challenges head-on?

6 KEY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Preserving Our Livability

Austin is a great place to live. We have a wealth of natural resources and recreational opportunities, friendly neighborhoods, a robust economy, and a thriving arts scene. As we welcome future generations, how can we best expand and share all of these amenities? How can we preserve our character and history, remembering the many different experiences and cultures that have made Austin what it is today? How will we increase housing and transportation choices for different types of individuals and families throughout Austin? How will we keep Austin healthy, safe, beautiful, and affordable?

Expanding Transportation Choices

Austin is a big city, so it's time to build a "big-city" transportation system. We need good roads, and we need to move people around the city and the region conveniently and safely, with or without a car. How can we offer more transportation choices? How can we encourage use of transit, bicycles, and walking? How can we build the kind of transportation network we'll need for sustainable development?

Tackling the Ethnic Divide

Austinites of color are now the majority, and our city is quickly becoming more diverse. Yet we are still dealing with the legacy of segregation and racism. Poverty and people of color both are concentrated east of the Interstate. Overall, Austinites living east of Interstate 35 are poorer, less healthy, lag academically, and share less equally in Austin's celebrated quality of life. How can we improve their lives while also protecting longtime Eastside residents from displacement? As a city, we want to tackle this divide and close the opportunity gaps. How can we help all Austinites have a voice, material comforts, and a reason to believe in a brighter future?

Protecting Our Natural Resources

Austinites enjoy an easy connection with nature and have a strong environmental ethos. We get out on our trails and greenways, lakes and rivers, parks and natural lands, and consider them a core part of what makes Austin special. But suburban growth is pushing Austin outward and encroaching upon and consuming these resources. How can we protect our waterways and watersheds, other natural resources and agricultural lands? How can we better connect our community with healthy, natural open spaces? How can we ensure an ample water supply for the Austin of 2050 and beyond?

Promoting Prosperity for All

Austin is an innovation leader, known for its high-tech industries, colleges and universities; youthful population; attractiveness to creative professionals; support for local independent businesses; and unique music and arts community. We need a strong business climate for large and small businesses. How do we help all Austinites find good jobs in our high-skill economy? How do we ensure that musicians, young families, and hourly workers aren't priced out of Austin? How can we help wage growth catch up to the rising costs of living to close the affordability gap? How can we expand job opportunities and enhance the skills of our labor force?

Collaborating Regionally

As the biggest city in Central Texas, Austin has a duty to provide regional leadership and invite its regional partners to collaborate on solutions. Issues such as transportation, water resources, growth and development, environmental protection, climate change, and economic prosperity are regional in scale and scope. We need a platform for regional governance and coordinated comprehensive planning for our collective future. How can Austin lead the way to forge a productive dialogue and set of agreements?