



**DESIGN COMMISSION EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE  
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2015 3:00 PM  
ONE TEXAS CENTER ROOM 814 – 8<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR  
505 BARTON SPRINGS RD., AUSTIN, TEXAS 78704**

**Executive Committee Members**

\_\_\_\_\_ Evan Taniguchi – Chair

\_\_\_\_\_ Bart Whatley – Vice Chair

\_\_\_\_\_ Heyden Walker – Secretary

\_\_\_\_\_ Kelsey Oelze, Staff Liaison, COA-PZD

\_\_\_\_\_ Jorge E. Rousselin, Executive Liaison,  
COA-PZD

**AGENDA**

**CALL TO ORDER and Roll Call**

**1. CITIZEN COMMUNICATION**

The first five speakers signed up prior to the meeting being called to order will each be allowed a three-minute allotment to address their concerns regarding items not posted on the agenda.

**2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES (Discussion and possible action): None**

**3. NEW BUSINESS (Discussion and possible action)**

- a. Discussion and possible action on revision of Design Commission Bylaws;
- b. Discussion and possible action on revision and overview of Urban Design Guidelines;
- c. Discussion and possible action on creation of Infrastructure Guidelines; and
- d. Discussion and possible action on revision of Project Review Sheet.

**4. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**ADJOURNMENT**

The City of Austin is committed to compliance with the American with Disabilities Act. Reasonable modifications and equal access to communications will be provided upon request. Meeting locations are planned with wheelchair access. If requiring Sign Language Interpreters or alternative formats, please give notice at least 2 days before the meeting date. Please contact Kelsey Oelze in the Planning and Zoning Department, at [Kelsey.Oelze@austintexas.gov](mailto:Kelsey.Oelze@austintexas.gov), or (512) 974-2752, for additional information. TTY users route through Relay Texas at 711.

**BYLAWS OF THE  
Design Commission**

**ARTICLE 1. NAME.**

The name of the commission is Design Commission.

**ARTICLE 2. PURPOSE AND DUTIES.**

The purpose of the Commission is:

- A. The commission shall provide advisory recommendations to the city council as requested by the city council to assist in developing public policy and to promote excellence in the design and development of the urban environment.
- B. The commission shall:
  - 1.) offer policy recommendations regarding specific issues of urban design;
  - 2.) participate in developing design guidelines;
  - 3.) unless otherwise directed by the city council, for projects that require the approval of the Planning Commission or the Zoning and Platting Commission:
    - i. review a project only after a formal request by the project sponsor or applicant; and
    - ii. complete the review before the respective Planning or Zoning and Platting Commission takes final action;
  - 4.) provide citizen education and outreach regarding quality urban design;
  - 5.) provide a venue for citizen input on the design and development of the urban environment;
  - 6.) maintain liaison relationships with city staff and other boards and commissions; and
  - 7.) perform other activities as directed by the city council.
- C. The commission may appoint one or more of its members to serve as liaison to a project- specific community advisory group addressing urban design and planning issues at the formal request of the project sponsor.

**ARTICLE 3. MEMBERSHIP.**

- (A) The commission is composed of seven members appointed by the city council.
- (B) A member serves at the pleasure of the city council.
- (C) Commission members serve for a term of three years beginning August 1<sup>st</sup> on the year of appointment.

- (D) An individual commission member may not act in an official capacity except through the action of the commission.
- (E) A commission member who is absent for three consecutive regular meetings or one-third of all regular meetings in a rolling twelve month time frame automatically vacates the member's position subject to the holdover provisions in Section 2-1-27 of the City Code. This does not apply to an absence due to illness or injury of the commission member, an illness or injury of a commission member's immediate family member, or the birth or adoption of the commission member's child for 90 days after the event. The commission member must notify the staff liaison of the reason for the absence not later than the date of the next regular meeting of the commission. Failure to notify the liaison before the next regular meeting of the commission will result in an unexcused absence.
- (F) At each meeting, each commission member shall sign an attendance sheet which indicates that the member does not have a conflict of interest with any item on that agenda, or identifies each agenda item on which the member has a conflict of interest. Failure to sign the sheet results in the member being counted as absent and his/her votes are not counted.
- (G) A member who seeks to resign from the commission shall submit a written resignation to the chair of the commission, the staff liaison, or the city clerk's office. If possible, the resignation should allow for a thirty day notice so the city council can appoint a replacement.

#### **ARTICLE 4. OFFICERS.**

- (A) The officers of the commission shall consist of a chair, a vice-chair, and a secretary.
- (B) Officers shall be elected annually by a majority vote of the commission at the first regular meeting after October 1<sup>st</sup>. In the event a current officer becomes ineligible to serve as an officer, the commission may hold an emergency election as needed.
- (C) The term of office shall be one year, beginning November 1<sup>st</sup> and ending October 31<sup>st</sup>. An officer may continue to serve until a successor is elected. A person may not serve as an officer in a designated position of a commission for more than three consecutive one-year terms. A person who has served as an officer in a designated position of a commission for three consecutive terms is not eligible for re-election to that designated office until the expiration of two years after the last date of the person's service in that office. The commission may override the term limit provision for an officer by an affirmative vote of two-thirds of the authorized commission members.
- (D) A member may not hold more than one office at a time.

## **ARTICLE 5. DUTIES OF OFFICERS.**

- (A) The chair shall preside at commission meetings, appoint all committees, and represent the commission at ceremonial functions and approve each final meeting agenda.
- (B) In the absence of the chair, the vice-chair shall perform all duties of the chair.
- (C) The secretary shall support the staff liaison with meeting minutes regarding project review presentations and coordinating outreach to stakeholders affected by project review presentations.

## **ARTICLE 6. AGENDAS.**

- (A) Two or more commission members may place an item on the agenda by oral or written request to the staff liaison at least five days before the meeting. After first consulting with and receiving input from the staff liaison, the chair shall approve each final meeting agenda.
- (B) The commission liaison shall submit the meeting agenda through the online agenda posting system for each meeting not less than 72 hours before the meeting.
- (C) Posting of the agenda must comply with Texas Government Code Chapter 551 (Texas Open Meetings Act).

## **ARTICLE 7. MEETINGS.**

- (A) The commission meetings shall comply with Texas Government Code Chapter 551 (Texas Open Meetings Act).
- (B) Commission meetings shall be governed by Robert's Rules of Order.
- (C) The commission may not conduct a closed meeting without the approval of the city attorney.
- (D) The board shall meet monthly. In November of each year, the commission shall adopt a schedule of the meetings for the upcoming year, including makeup meeting dates for the holidays and cancelled meetings.
- (E) The chair may call a special meeting, and the chair shall call a special meeting if requested by three or more members. The call shall state the purpose of the meeting. A commission may not call a meeting in addition to its regular scheduled meetings as identified in its adopted meeting schedule, more often than once a quarter, unless

the meeting is required to comply with a statutory deadline or a deadline established by Council.

- (F) Four members constitute a quorum.
- (G) If a quorum for a meeting does not convene within one-half hour of the posted time for the meeting, then the meeting may not be held.
- (H) To be effective, a board action must be adopted by an affirmative vote of the number of members necessary to provide a quorum.
- (I) The chair has the same voting privilege as any other member.
- (J) The commission shall allow citizens to address the commission on agenda items and during a period of time set aside for citizen communications. The chair may limit a speaker to three minutes.
- (K) The staff liaison shall prepare the commission minutes. The minutes of each commission meeting must include the vote of each member on each item before the commission and indicate whether a member is absent or failed to vote on an item.
- (L) The city clerk shall retain agendas, approved minutes, internal review reports and bylaws. The Planning and Development Review Department shall retain all other documents. The documents are public records under Texas Local Government Code Chapter 552 (Texas Public Information Act).
- (M) The chair shall adjourn a meeting not later than 10 p.m., unless the commission votes to continue the meeting.
- (N) Each person and commission member attending a commission meeting should observe decorum pursuant to Section 2-1-48 of the City Code.

## **ARTICLE 8. COMMITTEES/WORKING GROUPS.**

### **COMMITTEES**

- (A) The Design Commission shall have the following committees:
  - 1. Executive Committee – Consists of the officers of the commission. The purpose of the Committee is to assist the Commission in creating annual reports, creation of monographs, interaction with Council members, and providing outreach to the community on Urban Design issues.
  - 2. By-laws / Policies, Rules, and Procedures – Reviews and propose amendments to the by-laws, policies, rules, and operating procedures of the commission.

- (B) Each committee must be established by an affirmative vote of the commission. A committee cannot meet until its creation is approved by the Council Audit and Finance Committee. Each committee shall consist of at least three commission members appointed by the chair. A staff member shall be assigned to each committee by the director of the Planning and Development Review Department.
- (C) The commission chair shall appoint a commission member as the committee chair, with the member's consent.
- (D) A majority of the total number of appointed committee members constitutes a quorum.
- (E) Each committee shall meet on a regularly scheduled basis at least quarterly.
- (F) Each committee shall make an annual report to the commission at the January commission meeting.
- (G) Committee meetings must be posted in accordance with Texas Government Code Chapter 551 (Texas Open Meetings Act).
- (H) At each committee meeting, a committee member shall sign in on a sheet provided and shall indicate that the member has no conflict of interest with any item on the committee meeting agenda, or identify each agenda item on which the member has a conflict of interest.

## WORKING GROUPS

- (A) The commission can determine the size of a working group but the number of commission members serving on the working group must be less than a quorum of the commission.
- (B) A working group may designate a chair, with the member's consent, but is not required to do so.
- (C) Quorum requirements do not apply to working groups.
- (D) Staff support will not be provided for working groups.
- (E) Working groups are not required to post their meetings in accordance with the Texas Government Code Chapter 551 (Texas Open Meetings Act).

## **ARTICLE 9. PARLIAMENTARY AUTHORITY.**

The rules contained in the current edition of Robert's Rules of Order shall govern the commission in all cases to which they are applicable, except when inconsistent with these bylaws or with special rules of order which the commission or city council may adopt.

## **ARTICLE 10. AMENDMENT OF BYLAWS.**

A bylaw amendment is not effective unless approved by the Council Audit and Finance Committee.

**The bylaws were approved by the Design Commission at their meeting held on February 28, 2011.**



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Jorge E. Rousselin  
Staff Liaison,  
Planning and Development Review Department

Development Services Process Coordinator  
Title

# ITEM 3B urban design guidelines for Austin

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City of Austin  
DESIGN COMMISSION

January 2009







# urban design guidelines for Austin

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## **Austin City Council, 2008-09**

Mayor Will Wynn

Mayor Pro Tem Brewster McCracken

Council Member Lee Leffingwell

Council Member Mike Martinez

Council Member Randi Shade

Council Member Laura Morrison

Council Member Sheryl Cole

## **Austin Design Commission**

Richard Weiss, Chair

Juan Coteria

Joan Hyde

Eleanor McKinney

James Shieh

Bart Whatley

Jeannie Wiginton

## **City Staff**

Erica Leak, Neighborhood Planning and Zoning

Jorge E. Rousselin, Neighborhood Planning and Zoning

The material contained in the Urban Design Guidelines was developed by the members of the City of Austin Design Commission and represents their best effort to illustrate clearly the subject of this report. The City of Austin, the Austin City Council and city employees are not responsible for any errors or inconsistencies contained in this report.

Original layout and photographs by Paul Lutey, City of Austin PECSD unless noted otherwise.

Cover photo by Jorge E. Rousselin

# timeline / acknowledgements

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On November 6, 1997, the Austin City Council by Resolution 971106-23 requested the Design Commission to develop design guidelines for downtown. For complete resolution, please see Page 79.

On May 18, 2000, the Austin City Council adopted, by Resolution 000518-92, the Downtown Austin Design Guidelines “as recommendations for all downtown development and redevelopment projects by both the public and private sector.”

On June 12, 2003, the Austin City Council adopted, by Ordinance 030612-93, amendments to Chapters 15-12 and 25-12 of the City Code relating to the use and development of property zoned Central Business District and Downtown Mixed Use.

February 2008 Austin Design Commission issues a revised version of the Downtown Design Guidelines, renamed, "Urban Design Guidelines for Austin."

The Design Commission would like to acknowledge all of the citizens who have served on the Commission during the drafting of the Downtown Design Guidelines and the Urban Design Guidelines:

Rebecca Allmon  
Milosav Cekic  
Calvin Chen  
Rob Dickson  
Edgar Farrera  
Paula Fracasso  
Kathleen Finley  
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Buster V. Hoffmeister  
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Michael Knox  
Polyanne Melton  
Chabi Mishra  
George Adams  
Erica Leak  
Jorge E. Rousselin

# contents

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1	Section One–Introduction
2	A Contextual History
3	The 1997 Downtown Initiative
4	The Guidelines Development Process
6	Shared Values for Urban Areas
10	A Vision for Our Urban Places
13	Section Two–Urban Design Guidelines
15	Organization of the Guidelines
17	Area-Wide Urban Guidelines
39	Guidelines for the public streetscape
57	Guidelines for plazas and open space
75	Guidelines for buildings
79	Section Three–Appendix



# The Importance of the City

*“... The city is in itself the powerful symbol of a complex society. If visually well set forth, it can also have strong expressive meaning. ...The common hopes and pleasures, the sense of community may be made flesh. Above all, if the environment is visibly organized and sharply identified, then the citizen can inform it with his own meanings and connections. Then it will become a true place, remarkable and unmistakable.”*

**Kevin Lynch: The Image of the City**

The work presented in this document is guided by the view that the city is the form of settlement which most clearly reveals our sense of collective identity, our belonging to a public with certain shared beliefs and values. It is guided as well by the belief that a city also reveals our collective diversity, our ability to benefit from our proximity while subscribing to differing opinions and values. In America, democracy—governance by the populace with equal access to opportunities—is assumed the ultimate cornerstone for citizenship and therefore also the ultimate guide for the design of cities. Thus the city becomes the *locus civitas*, the place of citizens.

Austinites are defined both by what we have in common and what we do not share with one another. We are eager to contest other beliefs, and it is this quality that gives our democracy its dynamic, healthy character. The creative process used to bring our opinions to accord is a source of originality and innovation which permeates our civic character. We are strengthened by this sense of participation.

As the site of the State Capitol, Austin is also the heart of Texas. Our city is inhabited by many municipal, county, state, regional, and federal governmental institutions, further charging Austin with the role of assuring a great public realm. Except for the Capitol Building, however, few of these institutions significantly contribute to that public realm. They tend to be disconnected from one another and lack public plazas, courtyards, or even a pleasant streetscape. What they seem to affirm is an indifference and even exclusion toward its citizens. In contrast to the message of the built environment, Austin is often characterized as an open, friendly, tolerant, freedom-loving, creative place—one whose citizenry is at once full of character and relaxed. Perhaps the spacious park land setting of our downtown on Lady Bird Lake and its somewhat loosely-structured urban form attest to these qualities.

Austinites are proud of their community. We expect, and have the right to expect, that current planning and redevelopment will provide amenities and environments which reinforce the entire range of desirable activities downtown. Each individual project is a part of a whole, and as such, should contribute its part to the quality of downtown and the community as a whole.

Since the Guidelines were created in 1999, much has happened to change the character of downtown and the city as a whole. The design of buildings and the pedestrian environments around them have found a larger place in public awareness, increasing expectations and hope that it will continue to respond to public concerns.

During part of the time since 1999, the Downtown Design Guidelines were used as a component of the Smart Growth Matrix, where projects which met the guidelines were awarded development incentives. Through the Design Commission's periodic project reviews, a greater understanding of the relationship between guidelines and development was afforded.

The revisions issued here are intended to respond to the changes in Austin and the lessons learned since the first set was issued.

## ***About This Version of the Guidelines***

The current 2008 revision of the original Downtown Design Guidelines includes a global refocus of the applicability, enlarging it to include any areas in the city which, through general agreement, seek to create and shape dense development. References to downtown and boundaries and districts have generally been removed, and the name has been changed to **Urban Design Guidelines of Austin**.

## A Contextual History

In 1838, President Mirabeau Lamar instructed Edwin Waller to create a new city in central Texas and Austin was born. By 1839 Mr. Waller had completed a plan illustrating a regular grid of streets and including commercial areas, residential areas, four symmetrically placed city squares, the State Capitol, a block dedicated for a university, and other amenities. While we can no longer see the once rich prairie nor appreciate the springs that once emanated from areas around Congress Avenue, the setting that receives central Austin and the grid that Waller laid out is still there, still visible. The original layout between East Avenue (now IH- 35) and West Avenue, and between the Colorado River and the Capitol Building remains the central core of our downtown and the geographical and psychological center of Austin.

The heritage of our city is a rich tapestry of cultures, including ancient native cultures, modern native cultures such as the Lipan and Mescalero Apaches, Spanish settlers prior to 1838, Mexican, African-American, Asian, and Anglo-American, among others.

Through the middle of this century, the construction undertaken in the downtown region in Austin clearly indicated that public officials and entrepreneurs, as well as the architects and engineers they commissioned, understood their responsibility to serve the community by building buildings that would serve structurally, functionally, and aesthetically, for the long term, certainly beyond their own lifetimes. In many cases these public structures exhibit the best design, materials, construction techniques, and craftsmanship available in the region at that time. The State Capital complex, including the capitol building, the Old Land Office, Lamar Bridge, and Tom Miller Dam are examples of state architecture that still stand to tell their stories well. Private sector buildings in this category include the Scarbrough Building, the Littlefield Building and the Paramount Theatre.

Austin's rich history as an active and vital human environment framed by beautifully designed and well crafted buildings is one of the factors that moved the City Council to commission the framing of the design guidelines.



*Original map of the “plan for Austin” commonly referred to as the Waller Grid.*



## The 1997 Downtown Initiative

In an attempt to capture the benefits of a strong economy while preserving what is best about Austin, the City Council, led by Mayor Kirk Watson, created the 1997 Downtown Initiative. This endeavor began by inviting the R/UDAT team to return to Austin and review progress on their earlier work. (See R/UDAT Revisited – 1997 “A Call To Finish.”) Responding to recommendations made by the R/UDAT team, and assessing the needs and opportunities of Downtown Austin, the City Council put together a series of resolutions to guide the continued revitalization of downtown. These resolutions included endorsement of The Heritage Austin process of public input and support for future action by Heritage Austin. They also endorsed public-private development for residential uses, financing plans for improvements to Waller Creek, and the creation of the Downtown Development Advisory Group. As a major component to the Downtown Initiative, the City Council passed resolution 971106-23 (see Appendix 1) which requested that the Austin Design Commission prepare draft design guidelines for the city’s downtown region. In addition the resolution stated, “that these guidelines should exemplify ideals such as pedestrian and bicycle mobility and urban core vitality expressed through past Council actions, previous planning studies and recommendations and community consensus building exercises such as the Citizen’s Planning Committee, the Heritage Society, and R/UDAT.”



*The corner of South 1st and West Annie Street exemplifies Austin's unique character.*



# The Guidelines Development Process

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The aim of this document is to promote positive and enriching development by assuring that it aspires to a greater architectural and urban design standard. This document, building originally on ideas put forward in *Heritage Austin: A Community Workbook* (1997) by the Heritage Society of Austin, attempts to elucidate this greater vision as well as generate the regulatory mechanism to achieve it.

Austin is rich in plans and directives for building a city. Some are referred to occasionally, but most have been ignored. The Design Commission has endeavored to incorporate the positive aspects of this past work, and present these Guidelines with the hope that they will be implemented and enhance our community through design.

## Values, Vision and Guidelines

Because the city is a community of people and not of buildings, and because people can come to community through shared values, the Commission sought first to articulate a set of commonly held values. These values then created the basis for a vision of downtown that includes the goals and aspirations which, if met, could shape our downtown into a great public place. From the goals the Commission then generated a set of clear and objective guidelines which describe specific actions to be taken by both public and private entities seeking to build in any dense area in Austin.

The current effort assumes that the articulated community values should also shape the urban environment throughout the city as it becomes more urban.



*The Austin City Limits Music Festival framed by the Downtown skyline.*

## Supporting Documents



*Congress Avenue in the 1930's. The State Capitol Building is in the background and two of Austin's most treasured buildings: the Scarborough and Littlefield Buildings on the left and right of the photo respectively.*

In the process of developing this document, the Design Commission consulted an extensive body of existing literature. Several of the documents within that library proved to be of special significance and were relied on heavily by the Commissioners in developing the guidelines. They are listed below.

### **Documents from Austin:**

- A Community Based Vision, Heritage Austin – 1998
- R/UDAT Austin – 1991
- R/UDAT Austin Implementation, A Call... to Action – 1992
- R/UDAT Revisited, A Call to Finish – 1997
- Architectural Design Guidelines, 6th Street National Register District, City of Austin Historic Landmark Commission – 1994
- Austin Convention Center District Design Guidelines, City of Austin —1990
- Town Lake Park Comprehensive Plan, City of Austin – 1987

### **Documents from other cities:**

- Downtown Design Guidelines, Portland, Oregon, Bureau of Planning – 1983
- Design Review, Standards, Guidelines and Process, City and County of Denver, B5 Downtown Zoning – 1995
- Urban Design Guidelines, City of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania – 1998
- Design Guidelines for Plano's Historic Areas, City of Plano, Planning and Transportation – 1993

### **Documents supporting civic art:**

- The Houston Framework: Community Vision and Initiatives for Civic Art and Design in the Houston/Harris County Region. Cultural Arts Council of Houston/Harris County – 1997
- Public ArtWorks: The Arizona Models, The Phoenix Arts Commission 1992
- Artery Arts Program: Concept Report, Massachusetts Highway Dept. 1993
- Artwork/Network: A Planning Study for Seattle, City of Seattle/Seattle Arts Commission – 1984

# Shared Values for Urban Areas

As stated previously, the city is a community of people and not only of buildings. The Commission believes that, for Austin, important shared values include:

## Humane Character

- Density
- Sustainability
- Diversity
- Economic Vitality
- Civic Art
- A Sense of Time
- Unique Character
- Authenticity
- Safety
- A Connection to the Outdoors

Although not necessarily exhaustive in scope, these shared values constitute the foundation for the guidelines that follow.

### 1 - Humane Character

Humane character is of value because it is the basis for comfort in a built environment, and people are more inclined to live, shop, eat or recreate in an environment that is physically and psychologically comfortable. The design of our city should demonstrate that it was built for people; it should foster a sense in inhabitants that this place was made for comfortable human living. Designers, developers and transportation engineers can move the physical nature of the city closer to an ideal human habitat, while recognizing that urban places are special and more concentrated. In the same way, the use of materials, the scale of construction, human amenities, the mitigation of sunlight, the level of complexity, and the amount of plants and trees may all be manipulated to suggest that urban areas have been designed for human use. This understanding will contribute to a sense of well-being as we feel well matched to our surroundings – as we feel that they have been designed for us. It will also promote the use of our sidewalks and streets by pedestrians, increasing the activity level and economic viability of the city core.

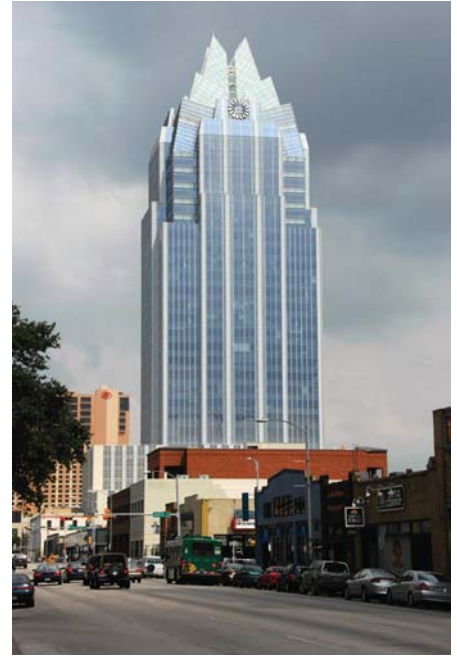
### 2 - Density

Density refers to the concentration of people, buildings and activities. With this concentration comes a great efficiency and vitality. We value density because density facilitates commercial and social interaction by simply placing many people together in a relatively compact space. The serendipity arising from this inevitable interaction is evident in all great cities of the world.

Density and concentration are not to be confused with overcrowding. According to Jane Jacobs in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, density is critical “to generate exuberant diversity in a city’s streets and districts.” In the same book Jacobs quotes Lewis Mumford on the function of the city (inset). In summary, density promotes vitality and diversity. In the suburbs where most often there is neither density nor diversity, it is a homogenous majority that defines the character of the community. Dense urban places are, by their very nature, highly diverse in character and therefore more representative and democratic in character, more experientially diverse and exciting.

### 3 - Sustainability

Sustainability is a value because a city that is self sustaining—that which achieves an ongoing and maintainable balance between the total resources it consumes and the total resources it creates—is better able to survive over a long time period. The city is a setting for our lives and the life of our families, and this constancy contributes to a sense of well being, a sense that we are part of a more civic whole. Sustainability considers that future generations in Austin should have flexibility and choice available to them as it was to our generation.



*West 5th Street heading toward Congress Avenue.*

## Shared Values for Urban Areas, contd.



*Providing opportunities for multi-modal transportation is critical in creating a vibrant urban environment.*

Sustainability addresses more than the simple effort to minimize energy consumption, emphasize “green” construction practices, and institutionalize recycling. It also encompasses the reuse of existing buildings, the creation of buildings with long life spans, and the creation of buildings with built-in flexibility to allow for differing future uses. Sustainability assumes that our community is a human community and that the built environment is an extension of the infrastructure which allows a dense population to live in a relatively small area in relative comfort. Sustainability also encompasses economic sustainability, leading to the conclusion that our economic health requires affordable commercial spaces and that investment in these spaces can provide returns necessary to support it.

### **4 - Diversity**

The support of diversity (the distinction of characteristics, qualities, or elements) is a societal strength and one of the central principles of democracy. A diverse place for living ignites the imagination, capturing cultural and business pursuits. Diversity fosters inclusive ownership of private, public, and civic amenities. Diversity in our built environment applies to function, culture, style, and use. Development which is multiuse or diverse in other ways will result in a city that evolves into a rich and vibrant place to live, work, and play, and will support continued economic growth.

### **5 - Economic Vitality**

Economic vitality describes a condition where all sectors of the economic machinery are working well and are working together. It represents a sustainable return on investment for all measures of urban life. Without the energy and vigor of the economy, downtown revitalization is not possible. The powerful draw that Austin has as a unique and highly desirable city can be enhanced by ensuring that future development does not result in a city in decline. Successful private projects will create higher property values in general and thus increase the tax base. Private projects, however, must be profitable if they are to expand the tax base and enrich the civic presence.

### **6 - Civic Art**

Art for public defines the public realm and distinguishes the fine points in a city. Art creates a civic good which can inform the inhabitants and the world of their commitment to the expression of a collective identity. Expressing this identity celebrates what is unique about the community, transforming the everyday, honoring and valuing the past, as well as expressing the community aspirations for the future.

Civic art stimulates the cultural life of the region. Civic art, whether initiated by the city or by private development, promotes economic development, cultural tourism, downtown and neighborhood revitalization, international prestige and recognition, and an improved quality of life for a community.

Civic art gives places back to the people; it leads visitors as well as inhabitants into the discovery of a city. Over time Austin has evolved through the many purposes, ideas, ideals, and the traditions of those who have shaped and lived here; a work of art or architecture over time becomes an important link to a city's past. From it future generations learn of the perceptions and attitudes of their predecessors. When the work is new, it can help people understand today's ideals and traditions and the changes going on around them.

Over time, our artists—whether they be fine artists, artisans, or folk artists— have shaped and created Austin in response to the rich natural resources of the region and the traditions and cultures they brought with them. They are a natural resource which should be supported.

### **7 - A Sense of Time**

A sense of time and its history is important to the protection of valuable resources and the continuity of our community. Moments of accelerated growth can cause the

## Shared Values for Urban Areas, contd.

destruction of resources, the value of which is often realized too late, after the resources are gone. Much of the development which will occur in the future has the opportunity to protect and reveal the history and stories of the place, while responding to the needs of the present. Our city is more valuable to us when we sense this continuity throughout the past, the present and plans for the future.

Austinites value the fact that we are simultaneously fiercely protective of our diverse natural and cultural environments, and forward-thinking—open to new technologies and encouraging change for the better. By valuing a sense of time, we recognize the importance that each moment in time be represented. As we create the future, we ensure that what we do now will someday become a part of a history that we will want to protect. Development will, in this way, take on the role of the story teller. Everything we build will become a story within the larger story of Austin. The decisions we make as we build, that is, how we tell the stories, will determine the way in which our history is manifested in downtown Austin. The stories told must be thorough, truthful, articulate, engaging, enduring and challenging.

### 8 - Unique Character

Through the singularity of its landscape and the diversity of its people, Austin has built a character which is unique, something increasingly rare and precious in a time when cities worldwide are becoming homogenous collections of buildings, highways and signs advertising similar lifestyles. Unique character succumbs to attack when cultural franchising is accepted as the most successful way for large enterprises to sell goods and promote services, buildings, businesses, food, clothing and entertainment. Our physical environment, under such conditions, becomes more homogenous and predictable. It can become a dehumanizing place, where individuals face a uniform environment beyond their control.

Austin is a collection of what we find valuable in our region—the river, the hill country, the State Capitol, parks, special places, building types, styles, architectural details, and town form, as well as the activities of commerce and special events. Within this collection of activities is an individual spirit which is valuable because it gives us a stronger sense of identity in a world which is quickly losing individuality. One reason for Austin's current growth is the attraction others feel to the differences it provides. Many people are moving here from cities which offer no sense of membership because they lack an individual identity. This sense of place is therefore a strong economic factor as well as a positive force in the creation of a healthy community.

### 9 - Authenticity

Because cities create, over time, a physical story of the life of that place and the people who live there, it is important that those who shape Austin do so with a sense of authenticity. This concept has value because a city shaped by it will be better able to create a sense of membership and community. By assuring that the physical story corresponds well to the authentic history, people will be more inclined to trust it, participate in it, and associate themselves with it. The closer a city aligns itself with what is genuine about itself, and the real lives of the people who live there, the stronger the connection people can make between themselves, their identity, the history of the place and the physical environment. In other words, the when, why and how a city formed. People are less inclined to associate with or feel connected to a place or thing which is contrived or unnatural.

As a value, authenticity suggests that Austinites would prefer to have a city whose image and physical context clearly references the time in which it was built and the activities and needs of the people who live and work there, rather than one created through false historical constructions or commercial imagineering designed to deceive the user through theatrical manifestations.

When authenticity has played a role in the creation of a city, buildings and spaces accumulate meaning and significance naturally over time. Here, the story of the place

*"Now the great function of the city is to permit, indeed to encourage and incite, the greatest potential number of meetings, encounters, challenges, between all persons, classes and groups, providing as it were, a stage upon which the drama of social life may be enacted, with the actors taking their turn as spectators and the spectators as actors."*

**Lewis Mumford**



## Shared Values for Urban Areas, contd.

can be told by the physical environment and people, by association, can relive the story of their own lives by moving through the city. In the same way that one reaffirms one's identity by visiting a childhood home, one is reminded of one's past by the physical part of one's hometown. The reminding can create a strong attachment to a city and to a community through the retelling of small stories on a daily basis.

Authenticity in this context refers to a real city where people live and work and explore personal and collective opportunities and conflicts. It refers to a place where one's assumptions about their physical surroundings can be trusted. Real stories will collect around places that people really inhabit.

### 10 - Safety

The creation of safe urban places, free from danger, is a difficult but important objective. Urban areas can be filled with strangers, inherently noisy and condensed. To attract people, it must also feel safe. We value safety because it frees people to fully engage themselves in chosen activities. A safe downtown provides a venue for these many activities. Making people feel safe among strangers and in the midst of such abundant activity can be facilitated by the design of streets, sidewalks and buildings, and by lighting and lines of sight. Public streets and other open places can help direct attention and promote the intuitive safety mechanism of observation. Design may facilitate safety by coding space, clearly identifying where it is safe to go.

### 11 - Connection with Outdoors

A connection with the outdoors is of value because it brings natural forces and elements such as sunshine, breezes, clouds, rain, shadow patterns, water and vegetation into urban places. Immersion in the natural environment adds complexity and transition to our experience of a day in contrast to the experience of a more static built environment. Outdoor environments offer options for reviving the senses and the lives of people who spend long periods indoors.

Austin is already distinguished by its value for outdoor connections, as seen in its strong legacy of parks and greenbelts, waterfronts and tree canopy, where people can enjoy both active and quiet pursuits. Residents have traditionally protected public green spaces and the right to be outdoors, and newcomers are attracted to Austin because of the opportunity it provides to connect with the natural environment. As the city becomes denser, access to the outdoors becomes even more important, requiring protection and enhancement of existing green spaces as well as the creation of new plazas and other urban forms of open space.



*Philosophers' Rock, a statue by Santa Fe artist Glenna Goodace, invites the audience to participate. One often find children sitting in their laps.*

# A Vision for Our Urban Places

When the fundamental basis for the guidelines was established, through the articulation of shared values, a vision for downtown was formulated, establishing the goals and aspirations which, if applied throughout the city, could ensure that new urban places were vibrant and exciting.

The eleven shared values described in the previous section are broad concepts. A more specific list of goals follows. These goals were derived from the shared values, but hold a complex and indirect relationship with them, where the lines between goals and values frequently overlap. Each goal is stated and its main point briefly explained. *Italicized in the margins are the specific shared values which the goal helps promote.*

## 1. Promote an intuitive understanding of the layout of any urban place.

The intensive use associated with thriving urban centers may be enhanced if the physical layout can be easily understood. Understanding requires that we form a mental map of the area. The logic of the place needs to be understood sufficiently to orient pedestrians.

## 2. Reinforce the sense of time and historical continuity.

This goal speaks to the preservation of historical buildings and other facilities and of historical planning, but equally important, speaks to the relationship among buildings built over time—including those built in the present time.

## 3. Foster physical continuity.

Physical continuity speaks to the freedom of movement in pedestrian, transit and automobile environments, but is most important in the pedestrian circumstance. Encouraging movement within an urban place allows comfort and promotes our staying there for a variety of activities.

## 4. Develop the public nature of all urban places.

The public nature of urban areas is most apparent in public open space—plazas, sidewalks, streets and parks. The design of the lower levels of buildings is also vital in promoting inclusion in the place.

## 5. Encourage a diversity of uses, activities and sizes of development.

Achieving this goal will require balancing the existing uses with additional uses that an urban area lacks, such as residential and destination retail. It will also require that we do so while allowing for differing economic status of the residents. Diversity should apply to retail, residential, commercial, office, entertainment, and all other sectors.

## 6. Encourage public and private investment in the future of Austin.

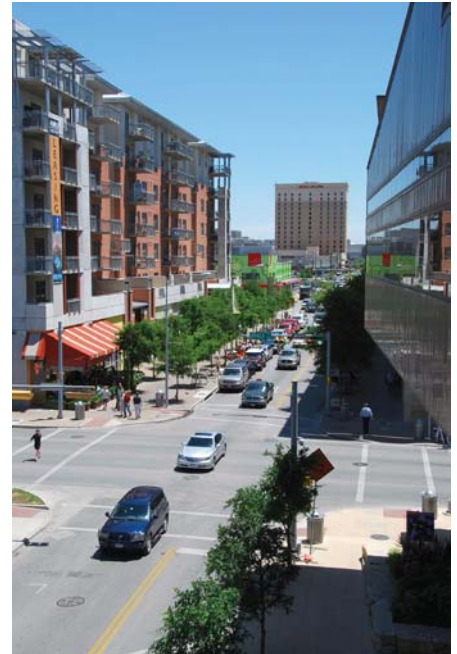
Perhaps no other goal provides more opportunity to demonstrate the value we place on civic behavior than this one. Where those who have gone before us have been willing to invest in the future—to regard the value of their investment over a long period—we generally have bridges, buildings and other structures which have endured and which we now regard as important to our history.

## 7. Reinforce the unique character of Austin.

To better promote a sense of connection to and membership with Austin, our urban places should be a unique signal for a unique place. Developing a unique character should start with what is already unique about Austin.

## 8. Create a safe urban environment.

All of the users of our urban places men, women, children, young and old, those with physical challenges, natives and visitors, customers and service personnel— should be considered when designing a dense environment. A safe urban environment will encourage economic activity and foster commerce.



*The emerging 2nd Street Retail/ Mixed Use District, as photographed from City Hall.*



*An example of the transportation hierarchy being accommodated in an urban setting*

#### **9. Create a comfortable urban environment.**

Comfort includes shelter from the harsh Texas sun and other weather, a reorientation of urban places away from a fast moving, automobile oriented place and to a slower moving, pedestrian-oriented population, and an understanding of intuitive way finding.

#### **10. Create a hierarchy of transportation which begins with pedestrians.**

The hierarchy in order of priority is:

- 1 Pedestrians
- 2 Public transit systems
- 3 Bicycles
- 4 Vehicles

#### **11. Actively promote civic art.**

Civic art promotes economic development, cultural tourism, downtown and neighborhood revitalization, international prestige and recognition, and an improved quality of life for a community. Art in a city describes the way in which the city honors spirit and soul. Public art can create a civic message that expresses community identity, myth and culture.

#### **12. Encourage a vibrant cultural atmosphere**

Arts, entertainment, and other cultural activities add richness and viability to our everyday lives. Such activity is an advantage to Austin because it promotes economic development, cultural tourism, downtown and neighborhood revitalization, international prestige and recognition, social service opportunities, and an improved quality of life for the community.

#### **13. Encourage intense street level activity.**

The street is a place for extra activities — sidewalk seating, vendors, waiting for a bus. Activities that don't require enclosed spaces or are enhanced by being outside should be added to the activities that already happen outside to create intense street level activity.

#### **14. Maintain a sense of connection to the natural environment.**

Austin's natural environment is a primary attribute. Every economically feasible effort to preserve, maintain and enhance Austin's natural environment should be pursued.

#### **15. Encourage an architecture whose design responds to functional needs and reinforces urban activities.**

Buildings designed to sculptural effect are not discouraged, but formalist aspirations should not be attained at the expense of functional requirements and a positive position within the requirements of other buildings and users. Architecture should respond to the whole array of human needs.

#### **16. Encourage quality building.**

Buildings in urban centers should have a permanence that some other areas of the city do not require. Quality adds to the overall value of any urban place.

#### **17. Promote urban residential uses.**

A residential component provides for 24 hour activity, a consumer base for retail activity, eyes and ears on the street, and reduces the need for transportation.

#### **18. Create an economically vibrant urban area.**

None of the values can be promoted without the economic engine to drive urban redevelopment.

#### **19. Strive for environmental balance.**

All development should take into consideration the need to conserve energy and resources. It should also strive for a small carbon footprint.

#### **20. Create an interconnected system of attractive open spaces.**

An interconnected system of attractive open spaces supports the pedestrian activity which creates vitality and provides a natural experience which can make dense urban development more comfortable and successful.





# urban design guidelines

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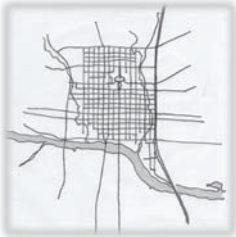
- 17 Area-Wide Urban Guidelines
- 31 Guidelines for the Public Streetscape
- 49 Guidelines for Plazas and Open Space
- 69 Guidelines for Buildings



## Organization of the Guidelines

These guidelines are divided into four categories: area-wide urban guidelines, public streetscape guidelines, plaza and open space guidelines, and building guidelines.

The four sections of the guidelines are explained in further detail below:



### area-wide urban guidelines

This describes issues which apply generally throughout any area where the urban design guidelines are applied.



### guidelines for the public streetscape

The major focus is on the streetscape environment which affects the pedestrian. This includes all the elements that can make a pedestrian comfortable such as the sidewalk, street trees, street furniture, and the facade of the building.



### guidelines for plazas and open space

These guidelines propose the adoption of a uniform philosophy through shared vision for open spaces and plazas within urban centers. This vision would result in the focus of pedestrian activity pre-eminently over vehicular modal transport in urban settings.

These guidelines adopt the principle that open spaces and plazas are public spaces, and that these natural public amenities encourage human occupancy.



### guidelines for buildings

These guidelines include recommendations for the physical makeup and shape of construction inside the property lines.



# area-wide urban guidelines

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AW.1 - Create Dense Development	19
AW.2 - Create Mixed Use Development	20
AW.3 - Limit Development Which Closes Downtown Streets	21
AW.4 - Buffer Neighborhood Edges	22
AW.5 - Incorporate Civic Art in Both Public and Private Development	23
AW.6 - Protect Important Public Views	24
AW.7 - Avoid Historical Misrepresentations	25
AW.8 - Respect Adjacent Historical Buildings	26
AW.9 - Acknowledge That Rooftops Are Seen From Other Buildings and the Street	27
AW.10 - Avoid the Development of Theme Environments	28
AW.11 - Recycle Existing Building Stock	29



## Create Dense Development

### Values Supported

Economic Vitality  
Diversity  
Unique Character  
Authenticity  
Sustainability  
Safety  
Civic Art

### Issue

Austin's central core presently benefits from its central business district, a major university and the State Capitol, combining to form a rich nucleus bounded by historic inner city neighborhoods, and interwoven with a natural fabric of parks and waterways. As the city grows it is increasingly important to support the core with additional nodes of density and connect them by rail and roadways.

Density combined with inviting streetscapes and open spaces can increase walkability, reducing our reliance on cars and allowing us to live, work, and shop without getting on a freeway.

The encouragement of dense development, downtown and in nodes, can redirect the focus of current growth away from the periphery, concentrating use in an area and increasing the efficiency of infrastructure and services.

### Recommendations

- Density should be expressed in terms of a floor to area ratio for commercial developments and units per acre for residential developments. Standards should be consistent with LEED Neighborhood Design Standards.
- It is recommended that all current limits on FAR be maintained, and that developments which adopt and abide by the Urban Design Guidelines along with Density Bonus and other specified requirements should be eligible for additional density on a case-by-case basis.



*This mixed use district has wide sidewalks, shade trees, awnings, and retail that create a welcoming urban streetscape that can accommodate Density.*



# Create Mixed Use Development

**Issue**

Employees who work in city centers frequently live outside them because there are few opportunities and services available to residents to support residential living. Large numbers of commuters leave the core each evening, taking with them the critical population necessary to support a well rounded urban environment.

A diversity of uses in a well planned development can better support residential development and decrease the need for commuting, thus creating a dense core where people are able to live, shop, recreate and work in a walkable area.

These principles are applicable in Downtown and anywhere density is desired, however just as a mix of uses is desirable, a mixed income environment is also critical in creating a sustainable community. Creating mixed income developments currently requires a mixture of subsidy and incentives, and many of the principles addressed in this document can be used as part of a city sponsored density bonus program.

**Values Supported**

- Diversity
- Safety
- Economic Vitality
- Authenticity
- Sustainability

**Recommendations**

- At least two different uses per half block are required. Low occupancy uses such as warehouses, storage, and parking will not be counted in the evaluation of mixed use functions.
- Secondary uses should occur at street level and be adequate in size to create a sense of variety at street level. As the size of the project increases, the number of street-level secondary uses should increase proportionally.



*Residential uses above retail storefronts.*

# Limit Development Which Closes Downtown Streets Create Developments with Connectivity and Human Scale Circulation

## Values Supported

Sense of Time  
Unique Character  
Authenticity  
Humane Character  
Safety  
Economic Vitality

## Issue

The original “Plan of the City of Austin” was conceived in 1839 by Edwin Waller and has come to be known as the Waller Grid. The plan has small regular blocks and is simple and easy to understand. As seen in the drawing of the grid created in 1839, the original city was bounded by Water Avenue (Cesar Chavez), North Avenue (Fifteenth Street), West Avenue and East Avenue (IH-35). The small blocks were divided into even smaller lots, which gave rise to the very human scale of the original buildings, still existent throughout downtown, but especially along Congress Avenue and Sixth Street. It is important to preserve and honor the heritage of this original plan and discourage the creation of super blocks which close streets in the Waller Grid.

This Principle also extends beyond the Waller Grid and in to any dense development. New Developments should be organized into walkable block systems that are easily navigated and contribute to an open and connected circulation network. Human scale pedestrian circulation should extend to neighborhood open space.

## Recommendations

- Multi-block developments which close existing streets should not be permitted within the original Waller grid.
- New Developments should be designed with networks of connected, circulation routes, focusing on multi modal transportation, pedestrian walkability, and open space.

- \* See map for outline of the original Waller Grid.
- \* See Guideline Area-Wide 6, Protect Public Views.



*The corner of West 6th Street and Lamar Blvd.*

## Buffer Neighborhood Edges

### Issue

Because the areas described in this document include properties along corridors and extends to the opposite sides of streets which form boundaries, the issue of the potential conflict between greater density and less density - or more urban and less urban - must be addressed. Our existing small scale neighborhoods contribute to the overall vitality of the city. They are an important part of the mix that creates an active community life in the central city. This residential character needs to be considered in the design and planning of adjacent dense development.

Conflicts may occur through the juxtaposition of Urban Development and existing private homes. Buffering of the neighborhood edges, through compatibility standards, respects their intrinsic value and serves to integrate them in to the urban fabric. The height, setback, scale, massing and detailing of adjacent commercial buildings should respond to existing homes. Vehicular access to new development and parking requirements should minimize impact on neighborhood traffic flow and avoid disturbing the neighborhood character.

Open spaces can be used as a buffer and to link residential neighborhoods to commercial development through expanded streetscapes, linear greenways, or neighborhood parks and plazas at their interface.

### Recommendations

- Projects should be planned to minimize increased use of adjacent neighborhood streets.
- Projects with frontage on a neighborhood street should limit public access from that street and limit business associated parking on that street so as to avoid significantly altering the residential character and scale of the existing street.
- Communication with neighborhoods is vital to creating successful urban infill projects.

### Values Supported

Humane Character  
Safety  
Sustainability  
Diversity  
Economic Vitality



*Traditional Bungalows are treasures in Central Austin Neighborhoods. New Development in existing neighborhoods must be compatible with the scale and character of the existing context.*



## Incorporate Civic Art in Both Public and Private Development

### Values Supported

Sense of Time  
Unique Character  
Safety  
Sustainability  
Authenticity  
Diversity  
Humane Character  
Economic Vitality

### Issue

Civic art can be traditional artwork created for public spaces as well as artisan-crafted architectural details. These can define the public spaces they help form and the small detail in a city's fabric, providing a rich language that expresses the values a society upholds or rejects.

Art which includes references to Austin's geography, landmarks, history, diverse ethnic cultures, industry, local craft, and other cultural attributes can increase our sense of belonging by associating us with a place imprinted with a specific image or feel rather than one which looks and feels like any other modern American city. While buildings are built of standardized products, and look more and more alike throughout the world, civic art can provide visitors as well as inhabitants with multiple and layered expressions of a history and culture that is unique to that place.

As the world we build increasingly isolates and protects us from our climate and from the infrastructure which controls it for us, our understanding of natural processes and our relationship to them are increasingly obscured. Art which articulates and draws attention to these natural processes can help reconnect us with nature. By focusing our attention on the way we impact nature, it can teach us sustainability.

Civic art can reveal and celebrate:

- the historical underpinnings of Austin
- Austin's diverse cultural traditions
- the connections to the city's natural systems such as highlighting greenway trails
- the pedestrian world
- the gathering places of the city
- the utility infrastructure of the city
- the transportation network by enhancing bus shelters, street furniture or street light standards
- through memorial and commemoration
- interaction in public open space through dynamic civic art.

### Recommendations

- Encourage civic art that highlights nature's processes.
- Encourage developers of new projects to incorporate artists into the design team from the inception of planning in order to integrate works of art into their projects.
- Civic art should :
  - Be incorporated into public plazas and infrastructure projects such as bridges, transit systems, highways, roadways or water tunnels.
  - Explore opportunities to express local history and identity through functional and ornamental design elements and works of civic art.
  - Mark gateways and significant intersections of Austin.
  - Create a system of Historical/Cultural/Information points which could:
  - Establish a set of strategic points within the city that would both unify as well as mark unique places in the urban context.
  - Take the form of plaques mounted on buildings, information on transit shelters, murals, commemorative sculpture, elements in the sidewalk, walking tour brochures.
  - Provide elements, programs or brochures that tell what happened in a place.
  - Be commissioned for stand alone public art that provides community identity and that is not necessarily tied to a building project.



*The Austin GuitarTown Project celebrated the Live Music Capitol and Civic Art with 50 guitar sculptures painted and decorated by local artists and celebrities.*

## Protect Important Public Views Downtown

### Issue

The preservation of certain views in downtown, toward and away from the surrounding hills and toward the river, can greatly enhance the experience of living in the city. Views to the west and south are of tree covered hills which provide an attractive contrast to the buildings downtown. These particular views are unique to Austin and help distinguish it from other cities, reinforcing its unique character. They also help people orient themselves within the downtown street grid.

### Values Supported

Unique Character  
Humane Character

### Recommendations

- Development should not obscure existing views through the public right-of-way.
- Pedestrian bridges and building fly overs should not be permitted anywhere downtown.



*Auditorium Shores framed by the developing Austin Skyline.*

## Avoid Historical Misrepresentation

### Values Supported Issue

Sense of Time  
Unique Character  
Authenticity

Like most cities, Austin is created from buildings of many eras, each illustrating a piece of the history of the city. Over time, construction methods, engineering practices, building styles, and uses change in a natural evolution of technology, economy, and architectural values. One need not be a historian to notice the difference between buildings of different eras, nor be well versed in civic planning to appreciate the sense of continuity created when buildings from many generations combine in one urban setting. Their differences speak to the passage of time and to the variety and creativity of the human spirit. It can also reveal certain truths about a town which contribute to our understanding self awareness.

However, we have the ability today to cover our contemporary buildings with exteriors which exactly duplicate the appearance of buildings of other times. While supposedly providing the city with charming old-world buildings, this prospect will create confusion about the authenticity of the truly old buildings, devaluing them in the process. If new buildings take on the appearance of old ones, it will become difficult to know which buildings are really old.

### Examples

Positive Historical representation:

Chartres Cathedral was begun in 1135 and completed in 1160. After a fire in 1194 which destroyed the eastern half of the church, reconstruction was undertaken in a much more ornate style, then popular, rather than the early Gothic of the original. The result is both a wonderful and authentic building, and a great story about the evolution of engineering, taste, and artistic development.

Unauthentic physical surrounding: Concerned that new construction would destroy the charm and character of its original adobe building stock, the city of Santa Fe adopted guidelines requiring new construction to appear that it was made of adobe. Rather than build from adobe, traditionally constructed homes now typically receive thin plastic coatings colored to look like mud. Polystyrene insulation under the coating is rounded at the corners in a faux-adobe exercise that has created an overwhelming sensation that all that looks like adobe really is not.

### Recommendations

- Buildings date the historical development of the city. It is important that any mimicry of past architectural styles not be exercised in such a way that the historical record becomes confused.
- New downtown buildings should be designed in such a way that they don't appear to have been built significantly earlier than they were.
- This guideline does not preclude consideration of the use of materials, scale or massing found on older buildings (See guideline Building 6, Create Quality Construction).

## Respect Adjacent Historical Buildings

### Issue

Austin's stock of older buildings is made up of relatively small, highly detailed masonry buildings with wood frame windows broken into multiple panes of glass. While similar buildings can still be built today, more typical are buildings which are taller, more likely to span an entire block, and constructed of panels of glass, smooth stone or concrete panels.

The way buildings are built today can easily leave the older building stock appearing out of place, primarily because of the difference in size, or massing. A very large building next to a very small one will make the smaller seem insignificant unless some gesture is made by the larger.

Awkward juxtapositions can also be felt when adjacent buildings differ greatly in their sense of scale, and the degree to which they are articulated on the exterior.

### Recommendations

- Dense development should respond to adjacent historically zoned buildings and avoid creating awkward or incompatible design solutions.
- Compatible designs should not be created through historic replication, but should reflect a consideration of the scale, material and massing of the adjacent historic buildings.
- These may include small setbacks of upper stories so that at street level new buildings are consistent with the adjacent older building.
- Utilize transfer of development rights (tdrs) or other mechanisms to preserve the historic fabric.

### Values Supported

Humane Character  
Sense of Time



*The CSC building is a modern structure that complements the Historic Schneider building in scale and articulation.*



## Acknowledge That Rooftops Are Seen From Other Buildings and the Street

### Values Supported

Values Supported

Humane Character

Economic Vitality

### Issue

As a city grows in size it will also grow skyward, and an incidental and desirable attraction emerges: spectacular views. This element of a city center draws the attention of companies, clients, tenants, tourists and shoppers. Views from above inspire pride in citizens and encourage tourists to return. Unfortunately, roofs are generally crowded with unsightly service equipment, put there because it is considered out of view. Because it is easily seen from other buildings of equal or greater height, and frequently seen from the ground, this practice detracts substantially from the views downtown should offer.

### Recommendations

- Roofs should be designed and constructed in such a way that they acknowledge their visibility from other buildings and from the street. Mechanical equipment should be screened when visible from the street or from potential or existing buildings nearby.
  - Unused equipment should be removed from view.
  - Utilize green roofs to provide for aesthetic as well as functional considerations.
- \* See also guideline Streetscape 11, Screen Mechanical Equipment



*View of Downtown buildings from atop the 360 Condominiums.*



# Avoid the Development of Theme Environments

Issue

The city can be a model of the values we hold as a community. If these include a sense of time, a unique character, and authenticity, then it is important that we are careful in the way we recreate the past through our buildings.

While past models and styles are often used to establish a physical identity for new development, the recent phenomenon of theme environments and theme parks, does this in a cold commercial way, degrading the original with caricatures intended to attract attention with fake images.

While American city founding generally contained some fakery in the architecture, there is a difference between our tradition of using trends from the past to create a place in the wilderness, and recreating popular existing places for entertainment.

*“There is an important difference between today’s thriving entrepreneurship of illusion and the impulses that invented identities for raw land and new communities in the past. Those earlier identities were an investment in character for rapidly growing new settlements, an attempt to establish some ready-made sense of place to define and speed development. Today’s themed creations are not, and never will be, real places; they are not meant to be. They are made for the moment, instant environments intended to serve only as temporary, substitute events, conceived and carried out as places to visit in which novelty, experience, and entertainment are sold for immediate profit and a short period of time. They are based on proven, family-oriented entertainment formulas. To embrace their limited and exclusionary objectives is to forfeit the larger needs of place and society. To imitate their poverty of reference is to lose all we know about the past. To think that American cities can learn from them is to embrace the most dangerous illusion of all.”*  
-(1997) Ada Louise Huxtable, The New Press, New York

Values Supported

Sense of Time  
Unique Character  
Authenticity

Recommendations

- Mock representations or caricatures of past of imaginary places, popularly referred to as “theme environments” or “theme parks” should not be created.

## Recycle Existing Building Stock

Values Supported	Issue
Authenticity Sustainability Sense of Time Unique Character Diversity	Existing buildings can provide a sense of continuity through the many memories people have associated with them. Keeping buildings can reinforce unique qualities of a place and so may be more valuable than the cost of the materials alone. It is therefore important that even buildings which are not historically designated be preserved and integrated into new development when possible.

### Recommendations

- The recycling of Austin's building stock is highly encouraged.



*Instead of being demolished, this building on East 11th Street was renovated as an adaptive re-use.*



# guidelines for the public streetscape

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PS.1 - Protect the Pedestrian Where the Building Meets the Street	33
PS.2 - Minimize Curb Cuts	34
PS.3 - Create A Potential for Two-Way Streets	35
PS.4 - Reinforce Pedestrian Activity	36
PS.5 - Enhance Key Transit Stops	37
PS.6 - Enhance the Streetscape	38
PS.7 - Avoid Conflicts between Pedestrians and Utility Equipment	39
PS.8 - Install Street Trees	40
PS.9 - Provide Pedestrian-Scaled Lighting	41
PS.10 - Provide Protection from Cars/Promote Curbside Parking	42
PS.11 - Screen Mechanical and Utility Equipment	43
PS.12 - Provide Generous Street-Level Windows	44
PS.13 - Install Pedestrian-Friendly Materials at Street Level	45



## Protect the Pedestrian Where the Building Meets the Street

### Values Supported

Unique Character  
Dense Urban Character  
Humane Character  
Economic Vitality

### Connection with the Outdoors



*For pedestrians, even simple awnings extended over windows can provide adequate protection from the elements.*

### Issue

The comfort of the pedestrian is crucial to the development of any dense development which strives to be economically viable. This is especially the case today, when people have come to expect the climate control found in contemporary buildings. Like much of the south, Austin has many months of extremely hot and humid weather; it can also have very cold and wet winters. The tendency to dash across a parking lot from an air conditioned car into an air conditioned building is normal behavior in Texas today, and so is the tendency to shop or eat only in places where parking can be found directly in front of the store or restaurant.

Making the transition to a pedestrian oriented streetscape will require special attention to the comfort of the walker. Dense development can increasingly expect pedestrians to arrive by mass transit and walk to their destination. Because they are the economic base for any development it is important that pedestrians are comfortable. They will choose the most comfortable route, avoiding blocks which are less comfortable or which create gaps in the continuity of the protection.

### Recommendations

- Overhead cover, offering adequate pedestrian protection from the sun and rain should be provided along the right-of-way where downtown buildings meet the street. This should occur between nine and fourteen feet above the level of the sidewalk, and should provide a minimum of eight feet of cover in width. Cover should not project closer to the curb than three feet.
- Overhead cover at the sidewalk may provide continuous protection without being continuous itself.
- Cover may take the form of either a projection from the building, an arcade, or a combination of the two. Arcades shall be open to the street.
- Projections may take the form of fabric awnings which are retractable, fabric awnings which are not retractable, or fixed non-fabric projected covers.
- Projected covers may be occupied by the building user, but should be accessed only from the building and not from the sidewalk. Where projected covers are occupied, they may also be supported by columns which fall in the right-of-way. Columns in the right-of-way should not interfere with pedestrians or emergency functions of the sidewalk. Maintain clear sidewalk width not interrupted by columns. Provide sufficient space between curb and columns to accommodate the potential of vehicles jumping the curb.
- Where buildings have been permitted to pull significantly away from the property line, a free standing cover should be provided along the right-of-way. Owners are encouraged in this condition to provide pedestrian cover additionally at the edge of the building where it does not touch the property line.
- Existing buildings which experience significant renovation should provide pedestrian protection as well. Landmark buildings may comply by installing a detached cover in front of the building.

## Minimize Curb Cuts

**Issue**

The safety and comfort of people walking on a sidewalk is of greater concern than the convenience of a driver; pedestrians are the primary concern. Every time a car crosses the sidewalk there is a potential danger and inconvenience to the pedestrian. For this reason, places where cars cross the sidewalk should be minimized.

**Values Supported**

Values Supported  
Dense Urban Character  
Safety

**Recommendations**

- Curb cuts should be minimized, and concentrated at mid-block.
- Development downtown should place curb cuts at original alley locations where possible.
- Specialty pedestrian paving, such as pavers, should continue at a level walking surface across mid-block curb cuts.
- Overhead cover should continue across curb cuts where possible.

## Create a Potential for Two-Way Streets

Values Supported	Issue
Dense Urban Character Safety Economic Vitality	Loading and parking entrances shape the buildings and influence the flow of traffic on adjacent streets. Ideally, all streets in dense urban development will be two-way. Developments which create access designed to work only on one-way streets, such as angled entrances or ramps parallel to the street, will not work if traffic directions are changed. Where one-way streets exist or are planned, entrances should be designed in a flexible manner that can be adapted to street conversions and ever changing traffic demands.

### Recommendations

- Driveways should be designed to function in both one-way and two-way street system.



*Cesar Chavez Street has been converted from a one-way street to a two-way.*



## Reinforce Pedestrian Activity

### Issue

Pedestrian related concerns are a priority in the creation of a successful urban environment. Tourism, conventions, and daily business all create pedestrian traffic. Currently, vehicular needs dominate the streetscape at the expense of pedestrians. In some areas, discontinuous sidewalks force pedestrians into the street to compete for space.

Major points of interest downtown, such as the State Capitol, Town Lake, the Four Squares, Shoal and Waller Creeks, the Convention Center and the Warehouse District need better pedestrian connections. Improved wayfinding tools such as signs and graphics together with continuous and adequate sidewalks would encourage walking.

### Recommendations

- Appropriately wide sidewalks should be provided from corner to corner along all property lines.
- Sidewalks should abut the street curb. Sidewalks extending on and of private property will meet at grade.
- Blocks without pedestrian connections should be identified and prioritized for sidewalk construction.
- Develop a Way Finding Master Plan which incorporates such tools as specialty pavements, signs and graphics to facilitate pedestrian movement.
- A new street sign system which unites downtown and other urban centers should be developed.
- Encourage street vendors, sidewalk cafes, etc. – food attracts pedestrian activity.
- Buildings should address the streetscape and reinforce pedestrian activity.

### Values Supported

Dense Urban Character  
Humane Character  
Safety  
Economic Vitality  
Civic Art  
Connection to the Outdoors



*By tipping the balance of vehicular activity to that of the pedestrians, the streetscape becomes a vibrant livable place.*

## Enhance Key Transit Stops

Values Supported	Issue
Dense Urban Character Humane Character Safety Sustainability Economic Vitality Civic Art	<p>The increased use of public transportation is central to the creation of viable and sustainable dense development. However, because of the poor image of transit and the lack of amenities and proper signage at transit stops, only a very small percentage of people use public transit. Increasing the use of alternate modes of transportation should be a city-wide goal as downtown develops and additional dense nodes are created. The encouragement of alternate modes of transportation over the single-occupancy vehicle should be primary goal within city policy.</p>

### Recommendations

- Reduce and consolidate the overall number of transit stops in throughout the city.
- Enhance and make markedly visible stops which are located near important pedestrian crossings, at bus route transfer stations and at culturally or historically important places.
- Adjacent developments should incorporate enhanced transit stops and shelters into their design.
- Developments should address enhanced transit stops as public places.
- Consider pedestrian comfort and safety and provide adequate space, shade, and trees at transit stops in the development of site plans.
- Transit station enhancements might include:
  - o lighted transit “signal” indicating transit stop by name, e.g., “Fourth Street at Congress”, ”Transfer Station”, “Convention Center Station”, “Brush Square Station”.
  - o legible route number graphics
  - o full shelter with benches
  - o city location map
  - o bus route map and schedule
  - o public telephone • water fountain • waste receptacle
  - o advertising surface
  - o district related enhancements, such as particular paving type or logo
  - o “Cultural Information Point”  
(see downtown “culture framework plan” proposal)
- Incorporate civic art into key transit stops

## Enhance the Streetscape

### Issue

Circulation from one part of a development to another without relief can be daunting to some pedestrians. Streetscape amenities such as benches, trash receptacles, planters, pole lights, kiosks, telephones, news stands, drinking fountains, bike racks, sculpture, and water features enliven and support the public domain. Cafe tables in the right-of-way can bring activity to the street. They can provide a wonderful means of people watching for diners and pedestrians. Consideration should be given to unification of these elements within a block and from street to street.

### Values Supported

Dense Urban Character  
Humane Character  
Economic Vitality  
Civic Art  
Connection to the Outdoors

### Recommendations

- Dense development is encouraged to provide street furniture in the public right-of-way for pedestrian use. High priority should be given to streets identified in the Great Streets Program.
- Coordinate street furniture with the Great Streets program where applicable.
- Street furniture may be fixed to the sidewalk if adequate clear passage for pedestrians and emergency access is provided. Avoid intrusions into the accessible route.
- Cafe tables and kiosks may occupy a portion of the public right-of-way if adequate clear passage for pedestrians and emergency access is provided.
- The design of street furnishings should unify areas with distinct character. Participation from private property owners is encouraged.
- Appropriate planting may be provided as well.
- The use of Austin artisans and artists in the creation of street furniture is encouraged.



## Avoid Conflicts between Pedestrians and Utility Equipment

### Values Supported

Humane Character  
Safety

### Issue

Utility equipment is frequently allowed placement in the public right-of-way. This not only results in unsightly sidewalks, but creates conflicts with pedestrian traffic. Utility boxes mounted on low poles at street corners block pedestrian traffic in a place where continuity is particularly important.

The amount of power and communication wiring attached to poles in the right-of-way will grow as development fills in and service requirements increase. New utility upgrades and service to properties should be installed below ground. Above ground support for these services is discouraged to avoid clutter at the streetscape.

### Recommendations

- Utility connections and support should be located in the furnishings zone to avoid conflict with pedestrian movement in the right-of-way and maintain accessible routes.
- Placement of utilities should be considered as a design element and be clearly dimensioned on site plans - where the information is available.
- Above ground utilities should be visually compatible with other streetscape elements.
- Utility lines (wires) should be placed underground in the public right -of-way.



*Utility equipment in the public right of way conflicts with pedestrian movement and comfort.*



## Install Street Trees

### Issue

Trees improve air quality, reduce storm water runoff, provide cooling effects for the urban heat island, increase property values and create urban wildlife habitat. They can also greatly increase the quality of life in downtown.

As State Forester James Hull said, "...There is no question that trees are a valuable part of the city infrastructure and need to be managed as proactively as the streets and public utilities."

The importance of healthy trees will increase as the density of downtown increases. Lack of adequate growing conditions for trees contributes to their ultimate decline.

### Recommendations

- Trees should be provided along major pedestrian corridors.
- Consider that the life span of street trees in dense urban areas is frequently limited by soil volume. Provide as much soil volume as possible to support sustained tree growth in existing or new sidewalks. .
- Consider the use of structural soil or continuous street tree trenches to provide maximum soil area for roots to spread, and water and air to penetrate.
- Locate trees in expanded sidewalk areas in the parking zone to provide more area for root systems.
- Allow sufficient room for tree canopies to grow and develop without conflict with other building elements.
- Install irrigation systems to provide adequate water to establish and maintain trees. Provide drainage to storm sewer or install dry wells.
- In high pedestrian use areas, install tree guards to protect the trunks from damage
- Consider the design of street tree layout in relation to the buildings and other streetscape elements.
- Select trees which are adapted to the harsh conditions of a dense urban environment.

### Values Supported

Unique Character  
Dense Urban Character  
Humane Character  
Sustainability



*Street trees along 2nd Street.*

## Provide Pedestrian-Scaled Lighting

### Values Supported

Humane Character  
Safety

### Issue

Light quality can strongly affect the character of a place. Harsh light creates an environment which seems inhuman, while too little light creates an environment which feels unsafe.

The size and scale of lights and light poles will also impact the character of the streetscape. Light fixtures scaled to the movement of cars will suggest to pedestrians that they are in a car's environment and that they may not be safe.

Both the scale of fixture and type of lighting can easily create the sense that the sidewalks—and all of downtown—are the domain of the pedestrian.

### Recommendations

- Urban Streets should be lit by pedestrian-scaled fixtures emitting warm light.
- A minimum of 1 foot candle of warm light should be provided in all space between the building face and the curb along all streets.
- Lighting may be provided through the use of pedestrian-scaled pole fixtures, or fixtures may be attached to the face of the building. The type and size of pole fixtures should be as consistent as possible along a single block.
- The City of Austin is encouraged to create a set of recommendations for street lighting, outlining areas where a consistent character should be maintained, and describing that character.



*Streetlights set to the scale of the pedestrian create a comfortable space where people feel safe.*

## Provide Protection from Cars/Promote Curbside Parking

### Issue

The design of the streetscape should make people walking there as safe as possible; it should make them feel a sense of safety as well. It may be impractical to assume that effective barriers could be provided along the curbs of every street in a dense development, protecting pedestrians from the possibility of being struck by a car. But a degree of protection can be created in fairly easy and inexpensive ways.

Perhaps the best protection for the sidewalk would be cars parked along the curb. Parking meters would provide some protection too. Where there is no parallel parking at the curb, small bollards, heavy planters or other similar devices may provide some protection.

Parking along the street edge can provide a buffer between busy automobile traffic and pedestrian movement. It also acts as a traffic calming feature, slowing drivers in the curbside lane.

### Values Supported

Humane Character  
Safety

### Recommendations

- Buffers from cars should be provided along the sidewalk edge.
- This protection may take the form of cars parked in metered parking spaces, trees, planters, or bollards.
- Curbside parking is encouraged along all busy downtown streets.
- Where right-of-way is 80' or less, parallel parking is encouraged.



*Pedestrians should feel safe as they walk along the sidewalk. Streetside parking and trees can create buffers which protect the pedestrian from the danger of moving vehicles.*

# Screen Mechanical and Utility Equipment

Values Supported	Issue
Humane Character Economic Vitality	Mechanical equipment is necessary to the function of the buildings which comprise a successful city center. Unfortunately, space must be found for components that are sometimes large, noisy and unsightly. Mechanical equipment, particularly when added after the building is in use, can interrupt the streetscape and public views, decreasing the comfort and livability throughout the area. The same care should be applied to other utilities and dumpster/trash facilities.

### Recommendations

- Mechanical equipment should be screened from view and located away from the street edge.
- Particular attention should be given to mechanical equipment at street level. This should be screened in a way appropriate to the streetscape.



## Provide Generous Street-Level Windows

### Issue

Long windowless walls prohibit visual connection between the inside of the building and the sidewalk. People inside have no knowledge of those on the street and people on the street cannot see inside. Walls with no windows can project the sense that people outside are not trusted and that the area is not populated. It is this inability to see inside, and to be seen from the inside which creates the pedestrian's sensation of danger, and the real danger in unobserved places.

Windows not only create a feeling of trust and openness in a city, they also instill in people on the street the feeling they could be assisted if in danger. This phenomenon, "eyes on the street," can help reduce crime by increasing the potential that offenders would be seen.

### Recommendations

- The lower two levels of buildings, where they face the street, should be made highly transparent, through the use of windows or fixed glass panels.
- A minimum area of glass, meeting the most restrictive percentage described in the Design Standards, Subchapter E, is required.
- The use of reflective or highly tinted glass is discouraged.

### Values Supported

Humane Character  
Safety



*Windows on the street facade create a friendly connection between pedestrians and the people and functions inside.*

## Install Pedestrian-Friendly Materials at Street Level

### Values Supported

Sense of History  
Unique Character  
Humane Character  
Diversity



*The streetscape should be composed of materials friendly to the pedestrian. Wooden benches, cobble stones, and trees set in planters creates a story that tells the pedestrian about the character of the surroundings.*

### Issue

As buildings meet the street they come into contact with people in a very physical way. Close up, we are able to get much more information about a design or material than we can when it is high above the street. Here we are able to see it close up, to run our hands along the sides, see ourselves reflected in the shiny places and observe the attention given to the craft in the materials. We also have a tendency to attribute to a city the attitudes projected by its primary buildings. If these seem inhospitable, the city feels hostile. If they seem well built, the city seems strong and vital. If they seem cheap and temporary, it suggests that we don't care about the quality of our environment, our downtown or the people in it.

It is important that the materials and construction of streetscapes and buildings downtown, at least on the lower floors, provide a level of detail and quality which is physically and emotionally comfortable for the pedestrian.

### Recommendations

- Building materials at street level should be pedestrian friendly and durable.



## preface to the Guidelines for Plazas and Open Space

This section of the Urban Design Guidelines challenges outdoor spaces to become truly public places by creating comfort and amenities available to everyone. Outdoor places can be well adjusted to the uses expected of them if consideration of their specific place within the larger downtown is made.

Public open space can accommodate and encourage the interaction of the wide social, cultural, ethnic, economic and age diversity that exists in our city. At each scale, from the largest regional park to the smallest “vest pocket” courtyard or plaza, and along all our public streetscapes and trails, the design of these spaces should always seek to allow citizens from all areas of the city and all walks of life to interact in comfort and safety.

The guidelines focus primarily on plazas, the types of open spaces associated with dense development, while recognizing the need for a continuous open space network that links major public open spaces throughout the city.

To aid the discussion of appropriate outdoor development, the Commission has borrowed on the work of Marcus and Francis’ People Places; Design Guidelines for Urban Open Space, 1998, which proposes that plaza design can be enhanced by the use and study of specific types of outdoor spaces and that the use of these types is based primarily on their size, location and orientation. At the same time, we have tried to make the guidelines here specific to Austin, its climate and the character of its people.

Illustrations created by the Commission are included below describing the primary types. They are described as follows:

**Street Plaza** - widened sidewalk, bus-waiting spaces, arcaded plaza.

**Corporate Foyer** - decorative porch, impressive forecourt, primary entrance to large building.

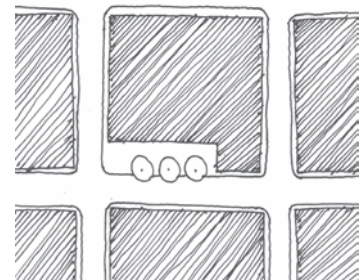
**Urban Oasis** - sheltered plaza with high concentration of planting and shade.

**Grand Public Plaza** - city wide plaza for concentrated public use and gatherings.

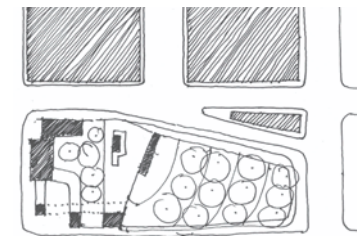
**Pedestrian Mall** - widened sidewalks both sides of street, transit / rail corridor, common attraction.

**Thru-block Pedestrian Corridors** - means of traveling across the block at ground level.

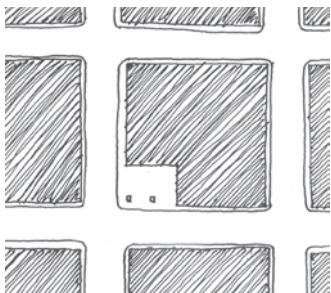
**Public Square** - the four original squares of Austin.



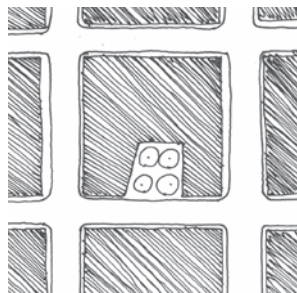
*Street Plaza*



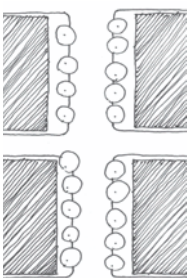
*Corporate Foyer*



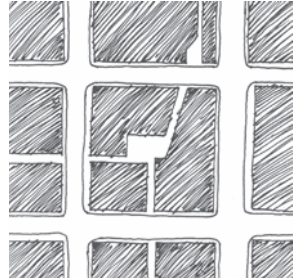
*Urban Oasis*



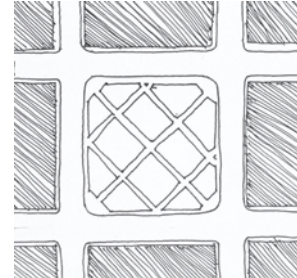
*Grand Public Plaza*



*Pedestrian Mall*



*Thru-Block Pedestrian Corridor*



*Public Square*



# guidelines for plazas and open spaces

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PZ.1 - Treat the Four Squares with Special Consideration	51
PZ.2 - Contribute to an Open Space Network	52
PZ.3 - Emphasize Connections to Parks and Greenways	53
PZ.4 - Incorporate Open Space into Residential Development	54
PZ.5 - Develop Green Roofs	55
PZ.6 - Provide Plazas in High Use Areas	56
PZ.7 - Determine Plaza Function, Size, and Activity	57
PZ.8 - Respond to the Microclimate in Plaza Design	58
PZ.9 - Consider Views, Circulation, Boundaries, and Subspaces in Plaza Design	59
PZ.10 - Provide an Appropriate Amount of Plaza Seating	60
PZ.11 - Provide Visual and Spatial Complexity in Public Spaces	61
PZ.12 - Use Plants to Enliven Urban Spaces	62
PZ.13 - Provide Interactive Civic Art and Fountains in Plazas	63
PZ.14 - Provide Food Service for Plaza Participants	64
PZ.15 - Increase Safety in Plazas through Wayfinding, Lighting, & Visibility	65
PZ.16 - Consider Plaza Operations and Maintenance	66



## Treat the Four Squares with Special Consideration

**Values Supported**  
 Sense of Time  
 Unique Character  
 Humane Character  
 Connection to the Outdoors

### Issue

Downtown Austin's four squares were established by the original Waller Grid in 1839. While one square has been lost to development, it is important that the remaining plazas continue to serve as public amenities. Public squares in a grid are a traditional urban feature in Texas, and link our lives with the lives of those who lived before us, and so deserve to be celebrated by the special consideration of adjacent development. These squares can also provide cues about our location in the city. By recognizing the square, we place ourselves in the grid intuitively and understand where we are at that moment. They can create—if easily distinguishable—a powerful mental map of downtown. They also provide us with a sense of the scale and size of downtown further linking its identity to the physical streetscape of the core.

A hollow in the fabric of the city can be enhanced by the creation of strong edges on all sides, creating greater contrast and focusing the public's attention on these unique urban features. If this strong built edge can be consistent on all sides, the sense that these are unique places will be further enhanced.

### Recommendations

- Development facing the four public squares established by the historic Waller Plan should receive special architectural consideration.
- Buildings facing the squares should provide a fairly consistent building height, and make an effort to establish the civic significance of the square through a unique architectural treatment.
- Primary building entrances should front the square.
- Loading docks should not face the public squares.
- Developers should also reference applicable existing requirements of the Downtown Parks Combining District ordinance (§13-2-174 in the Land Development Code).



*A 'hollow in the fabric of the city' is enhanced when defined by dense urban structures on all sides*



## Contribute to an Open Space Network

### Issue

Successful pedestrian environments rely on inviting walking paths and an interconnected network of open spaces. Some developments will incorporate plazas as part of an open space network, but others may play a more supportive role by providing strong connections, responsive design elements, or supportive services.

### Recommendations

- Identify major open spaces in the vicinity of proposed development.
- Consider pedestrian movement through and to open spaces when locating building entrances and pedestrian-oriented uses.
- Provide enhanced sidewalk connections to nearby open space.
- Use design elements such as building configuration and streetscape design, including lighting, to support visual and pedestrian connections to open space.
- Provide ancillary support services such as food service and recreational equipment for use in nearby open space.

### Values Supported

Humane Character  
Sustainability  
Diversity  
Unique Character  
Connection to the Outdoors



*Providing Inviting, interconnected walking paths in a network of open spaces ensures a successful pedestrian environment*

## Emphasize Connections to Parks and Greenways

Values Supported	Issue
Humane Character Sustainability Diversity Unique Character Connection with Outdoors	Parks and greenways are generally public entities and usually more natural in form and materials than the surrounding urban environment, but they should be integrated with the city. Dense developments should consider visual and functional connections to nearby green spaces as well as the positive impact that can be made on the development's microclimate. Pedestrian scaled lighting should be included to enhance the visual connection.

### Recommendations

- Incorporate views and prevailing breezes into the site planning and design of proposed developments.
- Limit building heights to avoid undesirable shadows on parks and public squares.
- Provide clear, well-lit connecting pathways to parks and greenways.
- Provide pedestrian scaled light fixtures which create a warm light on urban greenways such as Waller Creek and downtown portions of Town Lake.
- Provide bicycle racks where appropriate.



*Natural in form and materials Parks and greenways should be integrated with the city*

# Incorporate Open Space into Residential Development

**Issue**

Residential development in dense areas follows a different model than detached single-family housing. The absence of lawns and yards associated with resident’s homes need not mean an absence of private space to be outdoors. In lieu of front and back yards, outdoor space for apartments and condominiums should take more urban forms and will generally occupy less square footage. Common outdoor areas contribute to a sense of community, and a variety of open spaces may be provided in residential developments along a continuum from public to private.

**Values Supported**

- Humane Character
- Sustainability
- Diversity
- Unique Character
- Connection with Outdoors

**Recommendations**

- Provide public open spaces such as plazas where appropriate, especially at entryways.
- Provide community open spaces such as roof decks, pools and patios.
- Provide small private open spaces such as balconies and terraces associated with individual units.



*Common outdoor areas contribute to a sense of community”*

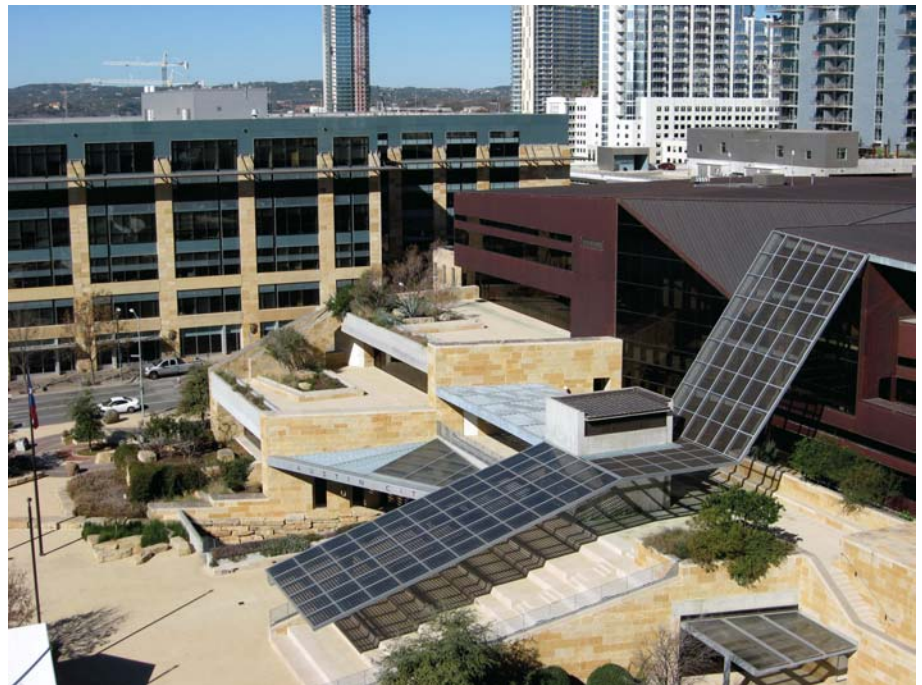


## Develop Green Roofs

Values Supported	Issue
Humane Character Sustainability Diversity Unique Character Connection with Outdoors	<p>Green roofs are roofs that incorporate significant amounts of vegetation on their surface. They are especially suited to the dense urban environment because they create roof amenities, provide attractive views from other buildings, reduce the urban heat island effect, reduce stormwater runoff, and reduce heating and cooling loads. While green roofs might have been considered experimental in the recent past, this type of roof design is becoming more mainstream as the body of research and successful examples grows steadily each year. In any case, green roofs contribute to a healthier, more sustainable downtown environment.</p>

### Recommendations

- Provide a vegetative surface on a significant portion of the roof.
- Provide the infrastructure and maintenance to support the green roof.
- Incorporate amenity space for building users and/or public.
- Provide opportunities to grow gardens.



*Green roof over City Hall.*

## Provide Plazas in High Use Areas

### Issue

Urban plazas should be designed with public use as a priority. The use of public open space is often dependent on the real estate maxim of “location, location, location.” Therefore, it is important to analyze the location of a proposed plaza in terms of the existing plazas in the area, the linkage to a downtown pedestrian and transit system, the primary population to be served, and the diversity of potential users. Creating open space in a dense development without coordinating the size and use with other nearby plazas can result in declining use in the others. Conversely, areas with too few outdoor spaces will generally be overused. Care should be taken to coordinate plazas with their catchment areas.

### Values Supported

Density  
Humane Character  
Diversity  
Sustainability  
Connection to the Outdoors

### Recommendations

- Consider the need for a new urban plaza based on the catchment area of potential users. The catchment area extends 450 feet in all directions from the center of the proposed plaza.
- Review the need for a high use corner location versus the oasis potential of a mid block cul-de sac or pedestrian thoroughfare.
- Consider the number of potential workers in the catchment area to ensure a lunchtime clientele.
- Provide diversity in ground level retail to encourage daytime use by workers, tourists, and shoppers.
- Design the plaza as a catalyst to enhance urban pedestrian and transit circulation patterns.
- Link the plaza to an urban open space plan which provides and encourages safe pedestrian walkways.



*Coordinate the location of new urban plazas with their catchment areas*



## Determine Plaza Function, Size, and Activity

**Values Supported**  
 Humane Character  
 Diversity  
 Sustainability  
 Connection to the Outdoors

### Issue

Downtown plazas should be designed through the consideration of the function, size, and activity of the open space in relation to the urban context around it. They should not be viewed as leftover exterior space to enhance, but rather as opportunities to create enlivened places for people to enjoy. The function could be simply a visual setback for a building and transition zone or it could be a transit stop, place for lunchtime relaxation, or sidewalk cafes. The size may affect the comfort of its patrons and determine appropriate activities. Larger spaces may accommodate displays, exhibits, and performances. Plaza design should always consider the diversity of uses and activities that might occur such as passing through, relaxing, and the needs of different user groups.

### Recommendations

- Determine plaza function, which may include:
  - a) visual setback for building
  - b) transition zone from street to interior foyer
  - c) lunchtime relaxation and sidewalk cafes
  - d) transit stop
  - e) exhibits or performances
- Determine plaza activities, and consider:
  - a) if the plaza is to accommodate pedestrian traffic, eliminate barriers between the sidewalk and the street.
  - b) if the plaza is to accommodate stopping and relaxing, provide dense furnishings, focal elements, and defined edges.
  - c) if the plaza is to accommodate concerts or rallies, provide unimpeded open space.
- Provide active areas which accommodate public interaction as well as areas which provide a more relaxed and secure experience.
- Consider sight lines when designing plazas for public gathering or events.
- Encourage heavy use across varied activities to minimize vandalism.



*An urban plaza can provide an opportunity to create enlivened places for people to enjoy*

# Respond to the Urban Microclimate in Plaza Design

## Issue

The semitropical climate in Austin offers short winters and long, hot summers. Annual rainfall is approximately 30 inches per year. Temperatures in the 90’s and above often last from May through September. Heat stored in the concrete and asphalt can create a microclimate at least ten degrees hotter than in undeveloped areas. Tall buildings block southeast breezes and, during the winter, “blue-northers” can come in quickly, dropping the temperature 40 degrees in two hours.

As a result, our urban plazas need special attention to make them habitable during the summer months and inviting in the winter months. Open spaces should be located to receive and encourage southeast breezes, yet block the blue-northers. Shade should be provided by vegetation, canopies, and trellises. Water can be used as a cooling element, and the use of adjacent air-conditioned indoor public spaces can help temper spaces near entrances.

## Values Supported

- Unique Character
- Humane Character
- Sustainability
- Connection to the Outdoors

## Recommendations

- If possible, site the plaza to receive summer breezes from the southeast.
- Provide filtered shade by means of deciduous trees and vine covered trellises which reduce temperatures in summer, yet allow sun in the winter.
- Provide continuous shade by means of arcades, canopies, and awnings adjacent to buildings.
- Consider the use of ceiling fans in exterior overhead structures to create air movement.
- Minimize the amount of hard plaza pavement which retains heat. Provide only the amount necessary for projected pedestrian circulation and volume.
- Maximize the amount of vegetation in trees, shrubs, groundcovers, and vines which cool the surrounding areas.
- Calculate sun-shade patterns as seating locations are developed.
- Provide water features where appropriate.
- Consider the use of air-conditioned indoor public spaces adjacent to the outdoor spaces.



*Water can be used as a cooling element to make plazas habitable during the summer months*



## Consider Views, Circulation, Boundaries, and Subspaces in Plaza Design

Values Supported	Issue
<p>Values Supported</p> <p>Humane Character</p> <p>Sustainability</p> <p>Economic Vitality</p> <p>Connection to the Outdoors</p>	<p>The design of outdoor plazas should consider how they will be used by people. The layout of a plaza affects pedestrian circulation between the plaza and the streetscape, between the plaza and the building, and should take into account the ability to create subspaces for relaxation. The layout can enhance or block views, invite people in, or keep people out.</p>
<b>Recommendations</b>	

- Define the plaza as a distinct space.
- Create a strong connection between the plaza and the adjacent public right of way. Large grade changes may not be appropriate.
- Where appropriate, extend planting into the public right of way to draw attention to the plaza.
- Provide direct pedestrian routes from sidewalks to building entrances.
- Provide easy access to ground level retail as well as seating and viewing areas.
- Provide opportunities for pleasant meandering shortcuts.
- Guide pedestrian flow through the use of built elements.
- Accommodate the needs of the disabled, elderly, and parents with strollers with easy access to each level.
- Consider the transition between the interior and exterior building uses at the plaza level. Ensure that one does not interfere with the other.
- Design the edges with nooks and corners to provide a variety of seating and viewing opportunities.
- Provide subspaces to accommodate small groups within a larger plaza area.
- Make subspaces inviting with human-scale dimensions and elements.
- Define subspaces with grade changes, planting diversity, or seating arrangement.



*Plazas can invite people in or keep people out. Plazas should reflect how people will use them*

## Provide an Appropriate Amount of Plaza Seating

### Issue

Urban plazas are the outdoor rooms in dense developments. They are the places where people gather to relax and socialize. Research has shown that the most important element in encouraging plaza use is an adequate amount of seating. A link between the size of the plaza and the amount of seating provided has been established through the study of successful outdoor spaces. In addition, location and orientation of seating, types and styles of seating, and materials have been shown to be important in determination of use.

### Values Supported

Density  
Humane Character  
Diversity  
Sustainability  
Connection to the Outdoors

### Recommendations

- Provide one linear foot of seating per each perimeter linear foot of the plaza.
- Provide for a variety of seating locations which accommodate the needs of various sitters.
- Place seating in shaded areas as well as in sunny areas. Shade may be created by trees, trellises, canopies, umbrellas, or building walls.
- Place seating where sitters can watch passersby.
- At least 50% of recommended seating should be secondary, in the form of steps, planter seat wafts, retaining walls, or mounds of turf.
- Seating wall heights should be approximately 16-18"
- Provide benches that are wide enough to serve many needs.
- Provide some linear or circular seating which encourages interaction.
- Provide backless benches, right angle arrangements, or movable chairs and tables to accommodate groups.
- Provide seating materials that are inviting and which do not damage clothing.

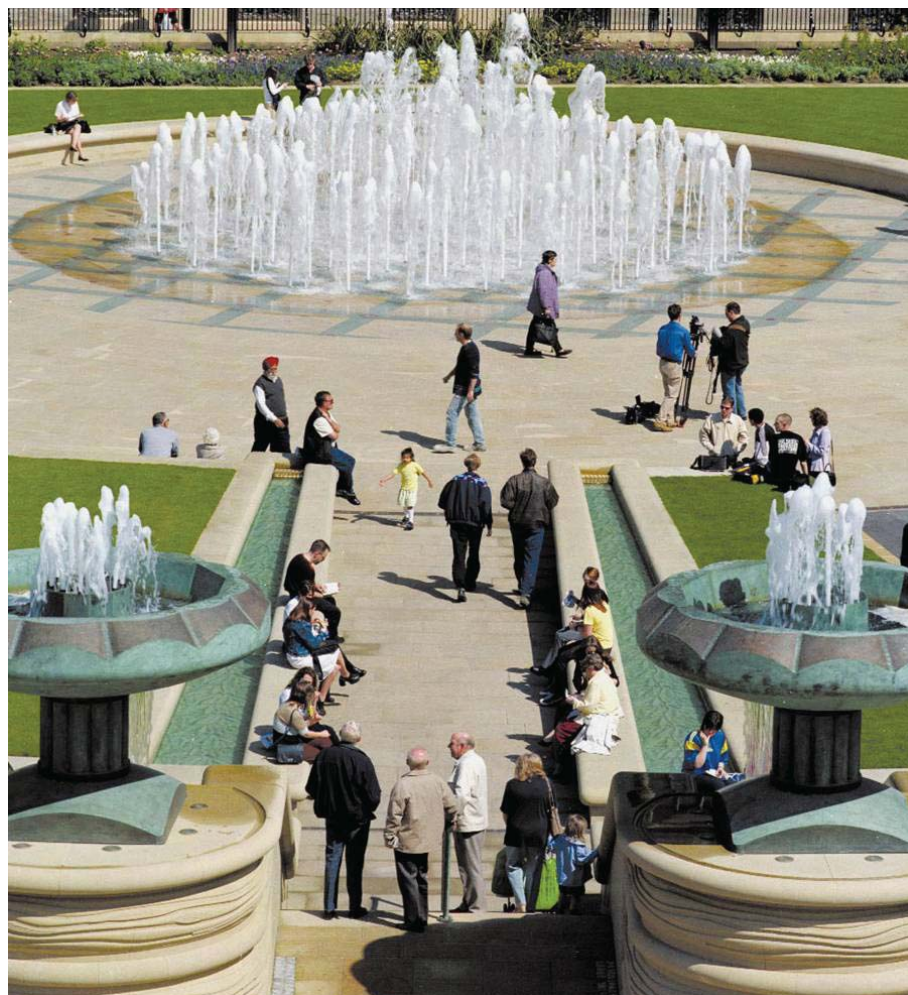


*Serving as the outdoor living rooms of the city, Urban plazas require an adequate amount of seating.*

## Provide Visual and Spatial Complexity in Public Spaces

Values Supported	Issue
Humane Character Diversity Sustainability Connection to the Outdoors	Broad expanses of hard paving create uninviting and alienating environments. Framed views, changes in level, subspaces, different places to sit, and trees and shrubs create a diversity of places for people to use and enjoy. A wide variety of forms, colors, and textures offer a humane character to our public open spaces.
	<b>Recommendations</b>

- Frame views out of the plaza, where appropriate, to visually link the plaza with the rest of the city.
- Visually connect subareas within the plaza.
- Physically separate subareas with modest level changes where appropriate.
- Physically connect level changes with ramps as well as steps.
- Provide an elevated area with wall or railing to lean on for people watching.
- Avoid dramatic grade changes which discourage public use.
- Where plazas are sunken, provide focal points to draw people downward.
- Where plazas are raised, use plantings or other elements to draw people upward.
- Use plants or other elements to define different areas within the plaza.



*Framed views, changes in level, subspaces, different places to sit, and trees and shrubs create a diversity of places for people to use and enjoy*



## Use Plants to Enliven Urban Spaces

### Issue

Humans are part of the biological world and comfort is our judge for the quality of our habitat, natural or un-natural. Plants provide an intimate connection to this world and a respite from the built interiors of office buildings, apartments, and condominiums. Groupings of plants can create urban oases. Trees offer shade to help cool the city. Their leaves catch the breeze and respond to weather changes. Flowering shrubs and vines provide a connection to the seasons, color, texture, and fragrance. Panels of turf provide green spaces which soothe the eye and invite relaxation.

Native plants are adapted to the vagaries of our climate. They have a better opportunity for survival in the harsh urban environment. In addition, native plants celebrate the unique character of Austin and the Texas Hill Country. Plants have requirements for growth such as orientation, soil depth and width, water, nutrients, and drainage. Design and detailing of plazas should accommodate these requirements.

### Recommendations

- Consider the impact of expanses of paving on the heat gain of the plaza. Cover at least 30% of the plaza surface in plant material.
- Select a variety of native and adapted plants -trees, evergreen shrubs, flowering shrubs, vines, groundcovers, perennials, and annuals - to provide color, texture, and fragrance.
- Use feathery-leaved trees to provide a see through effect to subspaces within the plaza.
- Consider the eventual height and mass of mature plants in regard to views, shade, and maintenance.
- Provide adequate soil depth and width to encourage healthy growth. Provide underground irrigation and drainage to all plantings to ensure their survival.

### Values Supported

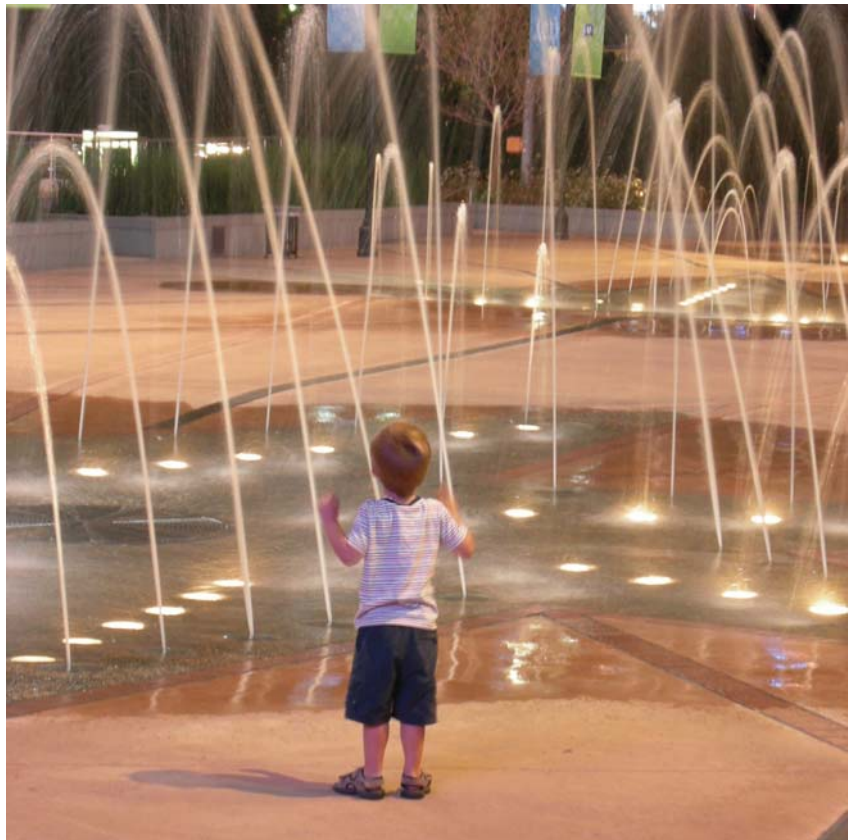
Unique Character  
Humane Character  
Diversity  
Sustainability  
Connection to the Outdoors



## Provide Interactive Civic Art and Fountains in Plazas

Values Supported	Issue
Sense of History Unique Character Humane Character Civic Art Connection to the Outdoors	Civic art, sculpture, and fountains are popular features in urban plazas world wide. They function best when they promote interaction and communication among people who use the space. In Austin, we have the opportunity to select civic art which speaks to our unique character and sense of place. It can tell the story of our natural and cultural heritage in a way which enriches our experience and understanding of our history.
	<b>Recommendations</b>

- Include civic art in the plaza design. Consider any built element as an opportunity for art, such as manhole covers, paving, railings, overhead structures, signage, etc.
- Select art which communicates a relationship to our sense of place, creates a sense of joy and delight and stimulates play and creativity.
- Include fountains for visual attraction, to screen traffic noise, and for cooling effects.
- Provide art, sculpture, and fountains with which people can interact by means of touch, movement, and play.
- Locate sculptures to not impede pedestrian circulation patterns and lines of sight.
- Scale sculptures and fountains to the size of the plaza.
- Link civic art in plazas with a downtown civic art plan. Consider the opportunities of a downtown art walk.



*An urban oasis can use water to create an urban microclimate and calm Austin's harsh summer*

## Provide Food Service for Plaza Participants

### Issue

In William Whyte's book, *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, field researchers concluded that plazas with food service attract users more frequently than those which do not. Food concessionaires benefit and more people are drawn to nearby shops which increases the economic vitality of the district. Increase of liveliness and activity increases security and leaves little room for vandals. Food services may take the form of indoor/outdoor restaurants, cafes, food kiosks, and vendors.

### Values Supported

Humane Character  
Economic Vitality  
Safety  
Sustainability  
Connection to the Outdoors

### Recommendations

- Locate food service in and next to the plaza.
- Consider a variety of food service options from cafes to vendors.
- Design the plaza to accommodate vendors. These can add vitality, promote security, and draw people to the ground level retail.
- Provide space for vendors which is highly visible and accessible, yet out of the way of direct pedestrian traffic.
- Provide comfortable places to sit and eat.
- Provide drinking fountains, rest rooms, telephones for users.
- Distribute trash containers around the plaza.

## Increase Safety in Plazas through Wayfinding, Lighting, & Visibility

Values Supported	Issue
Humane Character Safety Sustainability Connection to the Outdoors	To encourage the feeling of safety in urban plazas both during the daytime and at night, designs need to include appropriate wayfinding and lighting. Plaza layout needs to promote visibility both into and out from the plaza.
	<b>Recommendations</b>

- Highlight the main building entrance with lighting, signage, materials and detailing
- Provide directional signs linking the plaza to transit stops, taxi stands, nearby neighborhood streets, and orientation within the district
- At adjacent interior lobbies, provide signs directing visitors to reception, elevators rest rooms, telephones, restaurants, etc.
- Provide lighting which promotes a feeling of safety at night. Be sure to light corners and out of the way locations.
- Link plaza lighting to streetscape lighting.
- Design for visibility from the street and the ability to see through from one part of the plaza to another.



## Consider Plaza Management and Maintenance

### Issue

In many urban plazas the future management and maintenance is not considered in the conceptual design. How the space will be used should be an integral part of the design process. If the plaza is to be used for special events, exhibits and performances, the layout needs to be flexible. Temporary canopied shade, a stage, a place for concessions, and information kiosks may need to be provided. Maintenance issues will affect the design of fountains and irrigation systems, the selection of materials, plants, righting, and civic art.

### Values Supported

Diversity  
Sustainability  
Unique Character  
Connection to the Outdoors

### Recommendations

- Develop management policies toward special events.
- If special events are planned, provide a flexible stage and audience area away from the main circulation path.
- If movable chairs and speakers are used, provide a place for interior storage.
- Provide for exterior electrical needs of lighting and speaker systems.
- Provide attachment locations for banners, decorations, and temporary signs.
- Provide information kiosks to post scheduled events.
- Provide locations for temporary concessions.
- Calculate the operational costs of running fountains and irrigation systems.
- Design fountains to prevent overspray onto adjacent paving.
- Program irrigation controllers to water in early morning for the most efficient use of water and to avoid interference with pedestrian traffic.
- Plan and provide for adequate maintenance, recognizing the specialized nature of maintaining plantings and site elements
- Have a maintenance plan in place prior to project completion
- Provide an adequate number of litter containers and an appropriate collection schedule. Coordinate with other plaza furnishings.
- Select built materials for durability and longevity.
- Select plant materials for low water use and low maintenance.
- Consider hiring a plaza manager to ensure that the plaza remains an inviting, user friendly urban amenity.





# guidelines for buildings

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B.1 - Build to the Street	70
B.2 - Provide Multi-Tenant, Pedestrian-Oriented Development at the Street Level	71
B.3 - Accentuate Primary Entrances	72
B.4 - Encourage the Inclusion of Local Character	73
B.5 - Control On-Site Parking	74
B.6 - Create Quality Construction	75
B.7 - Create Buildings with Human Scale	76

## Build to the Street

### Issue

The place where the building and the sidewalk meet is of prime importance in any urban environment. This is the moment in a pedestrian network where the interaction between people on the sidewalk and businesses in the buildings is most intense. It is a threshold across which commerce and activity must cross. Street level restaurants, shops, stores and businesses are all accessed at that line, and the more continuous it is the greater possibility for success they will all experience. A gap in the length of facades will create an area of low activity and low commercial potential in the same way a vacant lot will, and should be avoided wherever possible.

Buildings, as they meet the ground, also form the space around our city streets. The shape of the streetscape is created by the height and location of the buildings which line the sides. A mid-rise street wall which aligns fairly consistently with the street edge implies that the individual buildings defer to the street. Buildings which meet the street acknowledge the greater importance of the public space through which the streets run. They can, in this way, create an awareness of the greater importance of the civic whole, where building facades are shaped by the public spaces rather than the other way around.

### Recommendations

- Urban buildings should be built to the property line to the greatest extent possible when the property line is adjacent to the street - except where additional sidewalk width is needed or desired to create 12 -18' wide sidewalks.
- Building facades should be viewed as part of the public realm and designed accordingly.
- Developments should meet the property lines at the lower four floors. Provisions will be made for exceptions such as arcades on the lower floor and for public plazas which follow the guidelines on outdoor spaces.

### Values Supported

Sense of History  
Dense Urban Character  
Economic Vitality  
Safety



*When buildings meet the street they acknowledge the greater importance of the public space and create an awareness of the greater importance of the civic whole*

## Provide Multi-Tenant, Pedestrian-Oriented Development at the Street Level

Values Supported	Issue
Dense Urban Character Sustainability Diversity	The street level of buildings holds the greatest potential for pedestrian use and walk-in commercial activity. The lower two levels of urban buildings should provide a framework for exploiting that potential.
Economic Vitality	Pedestrian oriented cities require that the scale of activity be compressed to something much smaller and more intimate than one appropriate to cars. People walking on the sidewalk move much slower than cars and their attention is naturally more focused. Because of this, buildings which offer only one walk-in business or retail opportunity at street level will frustrate the natural behavior of pedestrians.

### Recommendations

- Buildings should provide street-level, pedestrian-oriented uses on all street fronts.
- A public plaza which follows the guidelines on outdoor spaces may be considered a pedestrian-oriented use. If a single building occupies an entire street front on a block, the public plaza may occupy no more than half the block. Pedestrian-oriented uses in the building should face the plaza. The plaza design should recognize the responsibility to define the street.
- No more than 25% of net street frontage should be occupied by uses which have no need for or discourage walk-in traffic. Drive-through facilities are not allowed.
- Building design should encourage multi-tenant occupancy at the lower two floors.



*Buildings can provide a framework for exploiting the potential pedestrian use and walk-in commercial activity*

## Accentuate Primary Entrances

### Issue

City dwellers will feel more comfortable in a dense environment if they feel welcome and accommodated. If the streetscape offers cues to the use of buildings, and is clearly defined as a human place, people may be less frustrated living and working there.

Primary entrances connect to lobbies and elevators, while storefront entrances open onto ground level businesses. Because buildings seen from the street present foreshortened views, it is often difficult to distinguish one from the other—even when a large opening has been created for the lobby entrance. Providing some indication from the sidewalk about the location of the entrance can make using the building more comfortable.

Larger buildings which do not provide lobby entrances on each street may force pedestrians to search for the way in. Not only can buildings provide indications of the entrance locations, but they can offer multiple ways into the building, making downtown more comfortable for everyone.

Ease-of-use issues like this can increase the sense that an urban place was created for and belongs to everyone. Buildings which cooperate with larger scale, city wide issues regarding the way people move can assist in creating a more successful development.

### Recommendations

- Large buildings which front multiple streets should provide multiple entrances. Building entrances which connect to a central lobby should be distributed on different street facing facades.
- Primary building entrances should be accentuated. These entrances should be designed so that they are not easily confused with entrances into ground level businesses.
- Primary entrances should be recessed off the sidewalk to limit conflicts between swinging doors and pedestrians.
- Civic art and artistic crafting of building materials can help distinguish building entrances.

### Values Supported

Humane Character

Safety

Civic Art



*When the streetscape offers cues to the use of buildings, and clearly defines it as a human place, people may be less frustrated living and working there.*



## Encourage the Inclusion of Local Character

### Issue

#### Values Supported

Sense of Time  
Unique Character  
Authenticity  
Humane Character  
Sustainability  
Civic Art

Our city is a collection of what we find valuable in our region, the visual form of the city with its special places, building types, architectural details and town form, as well as the everyday and special activities of our diverse population and their individual and collective cultures. Within this collection of activities lies an individual spirit, valuable because it gives us a stronger sense of identity in a world which is quickly losing individuality.

One reason for the growth Austin is currently experiencing is the attraction others feel to Austin's unique character, rich with its network of economic, social, physical and cultural life. Many people are moving here from cities which offer little sense of membership because they are too similar to other cities, and because they don't possess the quality of living that one finds in Austin. The fact that individuals and corporations find it unique, memorable, distinctive, and humane is a strong economic force and a key element in the creation and nourishment of a healthy community.

#### Recommendations

- The use of quality local materials is encouraged / local character should be included in the design.
- Care should be taken to avoid nostalgic reproductions, but to use the materials in a meaningful manner
- Encourage the participation of local artists and artisans in detailing and materials.
- Building design should exhibit a response to the local climate.



*Expressing Austin's unique character, rich with its network of economic, social, physical and cultural life is a key element in the creation and nourishment of a healthy community*

## Control On-Site Parking

### Issue

As density increases in any area, parking requirements will increase in the short term, and should be planned for and developed as an integral component of a successful urban center. Throughout the transformation of our dense areas into pedestrian-oriented places — places with transportation options, and a significant resident population — the number of parking spaces will need to increase dramatically. Acknowledging this, and the positive and negative impact that structured parking can have on the fabric of a city, requires that attention be paid to the potential conflicts on-site parking can create.

Parking garages are generally considered necessary but unfortunate and expensive components to downtown projects. Their costs can vary widely depending upon the complexity of the design, and are difficult to recoup. These factors contribute to a pattern of development seen across the country where open sided concrete frame garages with sloped floors take the place of habitable buildings. The problem with these structures is not what they create—useful storage for cars—but in what the typical model tends to displace—pedestrian oriented street-level activity and multi-uses per block.

### Recommendations

- Parking should be located below grade, or in interior courts above grade. It should not occur at grade along property lines which are adjacent to a street.
- Where above ground structured parking is located at the perimeter of a building, this should be screened in such a way that cars are not visible from adjacent buildings or the street.
- Above ground parking should be designed in such a way that neighboring buildings are not adversely affected by headlights.
- Structured parking should not be treated in such a way that it is indistinguishable from inhabited areas of the building.
- Inhabitable space must occupy at least 50% of the cumulative length of the streetwall of the building. Where a building occupies an entire block, the inhabitable streetwall must be distributed so that it is not all located on one half of the block.
- Certain streets may be so important that parking in the streetwall along them will not be allowed.
- Shared Parking requirements can help alleviate parking requirements without building additional infrastructure.

\*\* streetwall is vertical face of a building in levels two, three, four, five and six, where they are adjacent to a public street. These are the faces of the lower portion of the building which are visible from the sidewalk and which — other than the ground level — have most impact on the character of the street. Because the ground level is addressed, separately, it is not defined as part of the streetwall. The percentage of streetwall occupied by inhabitable space is calculated per level.

### Values Supported

Dense Urban Character  
Humane Character  
Diversity  
Economic Vitality



*Above ground on-site parking at the street face unfortunately displaces pedestrian oriented street-level activity and multi-uses*

## Create Quality Construction

### Values Supported

Sense of History  
Authenticity  
Humane Character  
Sustainability



*Well-built buildings provide social and economic value, holding their value longer and enhancing the economic viability of the whole city center*

### Issue

The well-built building can provide a sense of continuity and history simply by having stood for a long period of time. This is because buildings can tell a history of our town as part of the urban fabric. They can remind us of our past and the story of our lives in Austin, and make us feel that we belong to something bigger than ourselves. Their appearance can affect our immediate sense of pride, and our developed sense of continuity; the slower the physical world around us changes, the more permanent it feels, and the more we will feel a part of a town that existed before us and will exist after us.

Urban buildings should not only provide the appearance that they will be there for a long time, they should also provide facades and structures which actually will be there for a long time. Well-built buildings provide greater resale value, and holding their value longer can help the economic viability of the whole city center. Property can be affected by the value of adjacent property, and as poor quality buildings age, the value of its neighbors may decrease.

A stock of quality buildings which can be used for a relatively long time can also be a better use of natural resources. If the design and construction facilitate extended use, less energy may be spent creating new building materials. Energy costs could easily be higher in the future, raising construction costs and limiting incentives for new construction.

Further, reconstruction and mitigation of problems related to poor building methods affects more than just the property owner. It impacts the city's movement around the building as scaffolding is installed at the sidewalk and as traffic is impacted by the work.

### Recommendations

- Buildings should be built as high-quality, long-term components of the urban fabric.
- Buildings should be constructed as maintenance free as possible and should be designed to achieve a life span greater than seventy-five years.
- A building is at the end of its lifespan when factors including operating or maintenance costs, repair or reconstruction costs, pressure for more flexible spaces, among others, outweigh the cost of building a new similar building.
- Buildings should have a built-in flexibility to their design and recognize that buildings frequently undergo alterations to conform to uses not considered in the original design.
- Consideration should be given to floor-to-floor heights and structural grids as they may impact possible future uses.
- Consideration should be given to the pedestrian's visual and tactile experience in the selection and configuration of building materials.
- Consideration should be given to the design of exterior walls and skins of buildings. These should not be considered sacrificial surfaces to be replaced several times in the life of the building.

## Create Buildings with Human Scale

### Issue

Cities are large manmade environments, and while they provide many necessities we have come to expect from our world, they are still not natural environments, but designed places which can be uncomfortable and unhealthy as easily as they can be comfortable and appropriate. With proper attention to design, cities can be comfortable, appropriate and inspiring.

Contemporary building materials are typically machine made rather than hand made, and are frequently installed without alteration or customization. Through this historical inevitability, recent buildings inadvertently present this industrial reality as an aesthetic, deferring to the industrial and eliminating evidence of human hands and craft.

However, the use of modern building materials does not condemn a city to an inhumane character, as any materials may be used to create human scale in a design.

The phenomenon of standardization has exerted similar pressure on the form of contemporary buildings. Structural components are less costly when uniformly designed and mass produced. Fortunately, the industry has seen innovations which make non-standard parts less costly for a more appropriate and humane consideration of the user.

A city which appears to be created to fit people can generate in those who live there the feeling of belonging to a community.

### Recommendations

- Buildings should be designed with a variety of scales, creating a scale and level of detail at the street level appropriate to the pedestrian.
- Clearly articulating different uses at lower building levels will aid in creating a sense of human scale in mid- and high-rise buildings. Addressing human scale may further be achieved through architectural detailing, and by variation in the three dimensional character of the building mass as it rises skyward. Monolithic, vertical extrusions of a maximum building footprint are strongly discouraged.
- The lower floors should be differentiated architecturally.
- Where existing adjacent buildings have a consistent massing, this should be continued.



*Human scale can be created while using modern building materials. With proper attention to design, cities can be comfortable, appropriate and inspiring*

### Values Supported

Humane Character  
Safety  
Sustainability







## Glossary

<b>Density</b>	The relative amount of habitable building in a bound area. This is usually expressed in amounts of Floor Area Ratios for commercial projects and units per acre for residential projects (see below). Mixed use projects can use a combination of standards.
<b>Floor Area Ratio</b>	The relationship between the area of land inside the property lines and the gross area of building built on that land. As the illustration below expresses, there can be many ways to achieve the same floor area ratio. A one-story building built over the entire property will result in a floor area ratio of 1.0 or one-to-one. A two-story building built over half the property creates the same floor area ratio. A three-story building built over half the property equates to a floor area ratio of 1.5 or one and a half-to-one.
<b>Façade</b>	literally, face. Usually the vertical outside wall of a building. Usually exposed to view.
<b>Structure</b>	A frame created to support a building. Floors, walls and roof are all attached to the structure.
<b>Arcade</b>	A covered public sidewalk, typically carved from the ground floor of a building and adjacent to a public street.
<b>Setback</b>	A distance from the property line to the building.
<b>Pedestrian-Oriented Use</b>	Businesses which promote and are promoted by the greater use of public sidewalks. As opposed to those which are accessed primarily by cars, and those for whom walk-in business is of little value.
<b>Street Level</b>	The first floor of a building to forty feet inside the property line.
<b>Grade</b>	The level of the ground at the outside of the building.
<b>Structured Parking</b>	Multi-story buildings created to store automobiles.
<b>Streetwall</b>	The vertical face of a building in levels two, three, four, five and six, where they are adjacent to a public street. These are the faces of the lower portion of the building which are visible from the sidewalk and which – other than the ground level – have most impact on the character of the street. Because the ground level is addressed, separately, it is not defined as part of the streetwall. The percentage of streetwall occupied by inhabitable space is calculated per level.





## Resolution requesting Design Commission to Develop Design Guidelines for Downtown

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### RESOLUTION 971106-23

WHEREAS, Austin's current economy promises to bring new development to the downtown area which should be consistent with Austin's character; and

WHEREAS, the Austin City Council provides policy direction to the development community and staff for encouraging desirable development; and

WHEREAS, past Council actions such as creation of the Public Improvement District, code changes and incentives encouraging downtown housing, and approval of sidewalk cafes on public right of way have enhanced the vitality of downtown; and

WHEREAS, other community planning exercises such as the Regional Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT), the Heritage Society, and Citizen's Planning Implementation Committee have taken place which have expressed a vision for downtown; and

WHEREAS, other cities have found ways to preserve their character through the development and use of design guidelines; and

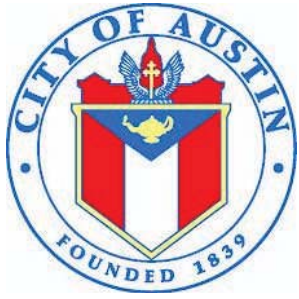
WHEREAS, the City has a resource such as the Design Commission, which makes recommendations on architectural excellence for the community; NOW, THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF AUSTIN:

The City Council requests that the Design Commission prepare draft design guidelines for the city's downtown region within 60 days; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That these guidelines should exemplify ideals such as a pedestrian and bicycle mobility and urban core vitality expressed through past Council actions, previous planning studies and recommendations and community consensus building exercises such as the Citizen's Planning Committee, the Heritage Society, and R/UDAT



CITY OF AUSTIN  
DESIGN COMMISSION

**DRAFT**

**ITEM 3D**

INTERIM  
INFRASTRUCTURE DESIGN GUIDELINES



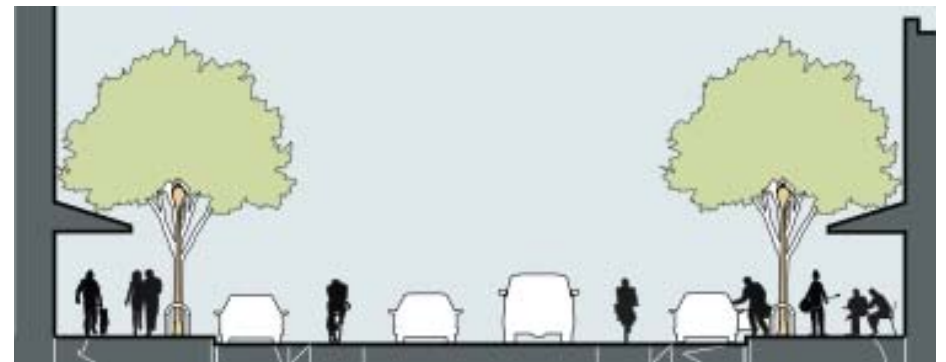
Mueller Water Tower



Seaholm Bridge (proposed)



Seaholm Wall (proposed)



Great Streets

# Introduction

The Design Commission provides advisory recommendations to the City Council on matters pertaining to the quality of proposed urban development, and as requested by the Council, assists in developing public policy and in promoting excellence in the design and development of Austin's built environment. In our capacity as stewards of Austin's built identity, Council has asked the Design Commission to broaden its scope to include policies and standards for the design and review of the infrastructural components of our city. This Manual of Infrastructure Design Guidelines is meant to complement both the city's Urban Design Guidelines, and the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan. The Infrastructure Design Guidelines address the design character and construction of components and systems that structure and support the ongoing development and growth of the City of Austin and aim to enable the City to attain its vision of becoming the most livable city in the country. Design excellence in infrastructure contributes to sustainable growth and supports Austin's civic identity.

## What is Infrastructure?

Infrastructure can generally be defined as the set of interconnected structural components that provide the necessary supporting framework for urban development. Typically referring to the technical structures that support a society's needs, such as roads, bridges, water supply, sewers, electrical grids, telecommunications, and so forth, infrastructure is comprised of "the physical components of interrelated systems providing commodities and services essential to enable, sustain, or enhance societal living conditions." [Fulmer, 2009]. The Design Commission is primarily concerned with achieving excellence in the design of such structures and systems.

Infrastructure plays two primary roles in the design of urban environments: performative, and connective. Performative in this context refers to the capacity of the infrastructure to accomplish the technical function for which the system has been designed, be it the distribution and collection of water, electricity, transportation, etc., or the provision of systems of public space, streets, sidewalks, etc. Performative standards and criteria are the purview of City Staff and City Departments. Connective refers to the ability of infrastructure to integrate disparate urban development components and projects into an integrated system.

Because of Austin's extraordinary rapid growth and its focus on becoming a more "compact-and-connected" city, the need for new infrastructure to support new development has increased as well, almost becoming out of control. To ensure that these infrastructure projects do not have an adverse effect on the public realm, and that they are integrated into the concept of smart growth, the City Council passed Resolution 20100819-035, which assigned the Design Commission to develop guidelines for these infrastructure projects. This document will be quite similar to the Urban Design Guidelines produced in 2009, and will reflect many of the visions of the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan, which was adopted in 2012. The Manual of Infrastructure Design Guidelines (IDG) will provide the necessary framework for all future, applicable public infrastructure projects with the goal of enhancing Austin's quality of life. The IDG focuses on projects that have a significant impact on the public realm and will build on values expressed in the Urban Design Guidelines and Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan.

Connective also refers to the socially supportive role that infrastructure may play in enhancing the quality of life of the citizens of Austin. The Design Commission seeks to work with and advise City Staff, City Departments, and developers on ways to attain excellence in the design and integration of the physical and social systems of our city.

The Infrastructure Guidelines outline the vision, principles and connective design criteria that are required for the design of our city's urban structure. The Infrastructure Design Guidelines provide the necessary framework for the design of a compact, connected and sustainable urban environment for Austin. The Design Commission's role in evaluating infrastructure proposals is to ensure that each development project is designed adequately and systematically reflects the values and principles espoused by the framework in order to realize the goals of the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan.

# The Merits of Integrated Infrastructure

As the City of Austin strives to implement its compact, connected and sustainable agenda for the future, the necessity to integrate the various infrastructural systems that organize, construct and service the metropolitan landscape is of vital importance. The urban environment has become a complex organism requiring the expertise of many professionals, from multiple disciplines, to construct and manage. This complexity is reflected in the multiple departments that are responsible for the various components of infrastructural design within the city. The segregation of technical expertise, into distinct city departments, is a reflection of the segmentation of professional responsibility that has evolved with modern society. This disciplinary separation encourages the use of infrastructural solutions that are designed to solve singular dilemmas, without full consideration of the consequent effect on the totality of the urban environment. The urban landscapes, produced by this disciplinary separation, are comprised of systems of infrastructure that are engineered and implemented to function for individual purposes and are rarely integrated into the type of complex multi-functional systems needed to service the contemporary city.

Best design practices have shown that integration provides benefits that are social, environmental and economic. Planning for land-use development and mobility issues, for example, are often separately considered spatial planning disciplines. However, in practice there is a strong connection between land use issues and mobility factors, these issues strongly influencing each other in terms of livability and the subsequent financial-economic positions of neighborhoods. While optimizing a particular design may satisfy the technical engineering requirements necessary for infrastructure to perform a singular function, the resultant urban landscape is often dispersed, disconnected, and unsustainable.

The construction of a compact and integrated urban environment requires that the design and construction of infrastructural systems be able to operate on several levels. Systems must be both performative and connective. This is best accomplished by assimilating multiple purposes within an integrated system. Integrated infrastructure has the ability to respond to issues of mobility across a range of uses from the pedestrian, to bicycles, automobiles and public transportation, while additionally responding to the ecological needs of storm water mitigation, and the social roles of public space, all within the mechanisms of an integrated system.



# 10 Core Principles for an Integrated Infrastructure

## 1 CONTEXTUAL

Infrastructure should be thoughtfully designed and adapted to enhance surrounding neighborhoods and environments.

Context is the physical scale, space and ambience of a place and establishes the built and natural forms within which individual buildings and infrastructure are sited. As such, the design of infrastructure affects the balance between natural ecosystems and the built environment.



## 2 CONNECTED

Infrastructure should be strategically planned to so as to facilitate multi-modal linkages and pathways through the city.

Infrastructure should be designed bind the districts, neighborhoods and public spaces of the city together so as to create a vital social, economic and ecologically responsible urban environment.





# 3

## INTEGRATED

**DRAFT**

Infrastructure should be designed to accommodate competing interests in the urban environment.

A well-designed and efficient urban infrastructure must allow for the intensification of functions in the urban environment by providing for the integration of social and technical systems. This requires an integrated approach to design that supports multiple simultaneous programs and functions.



# 4

## COMPACT

Infrastructure should be designed to promote sustainable urban environments.

Infrastructure that supports compact urban development should be designed to sustain a relatively high-density urban environment comprised of mixed land uses. It must provide for an efficient public transport system and be structured to encourage walking and cycling, low energy consumption, and a reduced carbon footprint. A compact urban population, served by suitable public infrastructure will provide opportunities for social interaction, the building of community and increased public safety.





# 5

## SUSTAINABLE

**DRAFT**

Infrastructure should aspire to improve the quality of life for its citizens, while living within the carrying capacity of the supporting eco-systems.

Sustainable infrastructure provides for environmental, economic, and social equity in the urban environment. The built environment is an extension of the ecological systems that allows for a dense human population to live in a compact area in relative comfort. Sustainable infrastructure practices encompass: low impact development practices to protect water resources, public transportation systems, distributed energy systems, and the provision of wildlife corridors to protect the health of the natural environment.

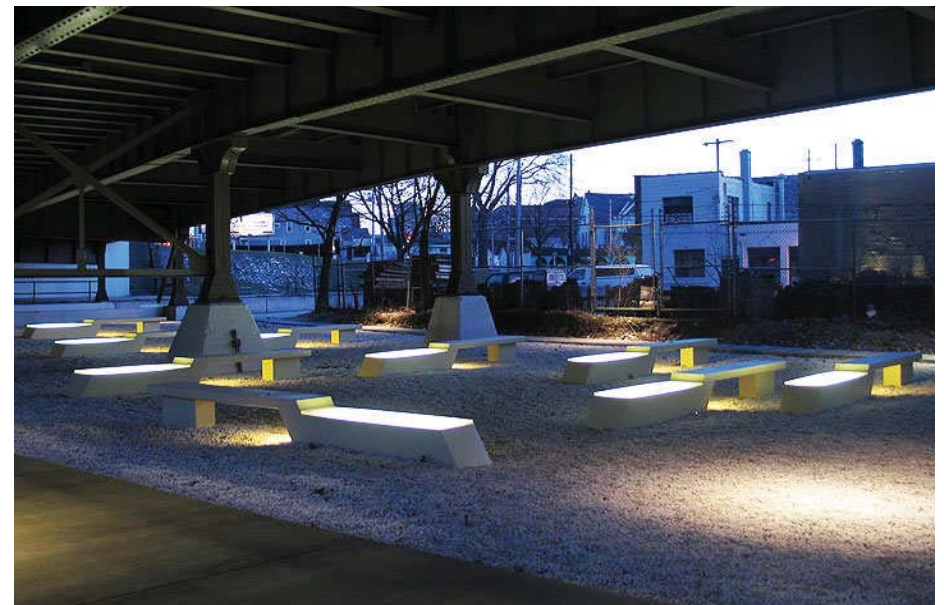


# 6

## HYBRIDIZED

Infrastructure should be designed for the efficient integration of multiple programs and uses.

Constructing a compact city requires that infrastructure be designed efficiently in order to provide for a multiplicity of uses within a single area. This technique of hybridization can contribute to the activation of urban areas that would otherwise be vacated, and provides for the continuous use of urban space for diverse programs and events.



# 7

## HUMANE

**DRAFT**

Infrastructure should contribute to the creation of a vibrant public realm with superior public spaces.

The design of infrastructure can either divide communities, or bring them together. Urban Infrastructure performs an important social role in the city, and proper consideration should be given to the role public space plays in the formation of an accessible and civilized urban landscape, one that serves the entire urban population.



# 8

## ECOLOGICAL

Infrastructure should provide for healthy natural environments.

The unification of natural systems into the city helps to soften the impact of a dense cityscape and provides city dwellers with pockets of respite from the activities of urban life. A healthy environment is created through the use of green infrastructure to support communities of plants and animals, transforming parks and water bodies into spaces for community activities. The integration of nature is not only aesthetically pleasing, but also improves the air quality and mitigates heat island effects in the city.





# 9

## TIMELESS

**DRAFT**

Infrastructure should recognize the historic significance of important buildings and places.

Culturally important places are constructed incrementally over long periods of time. This aspect can reinforce the authenticity of a place while providing the basis for contemporary urban lifestyles.



# 10

## INCLUSIVE

Decisions about infrastructure should be made with the participation of the effected community.

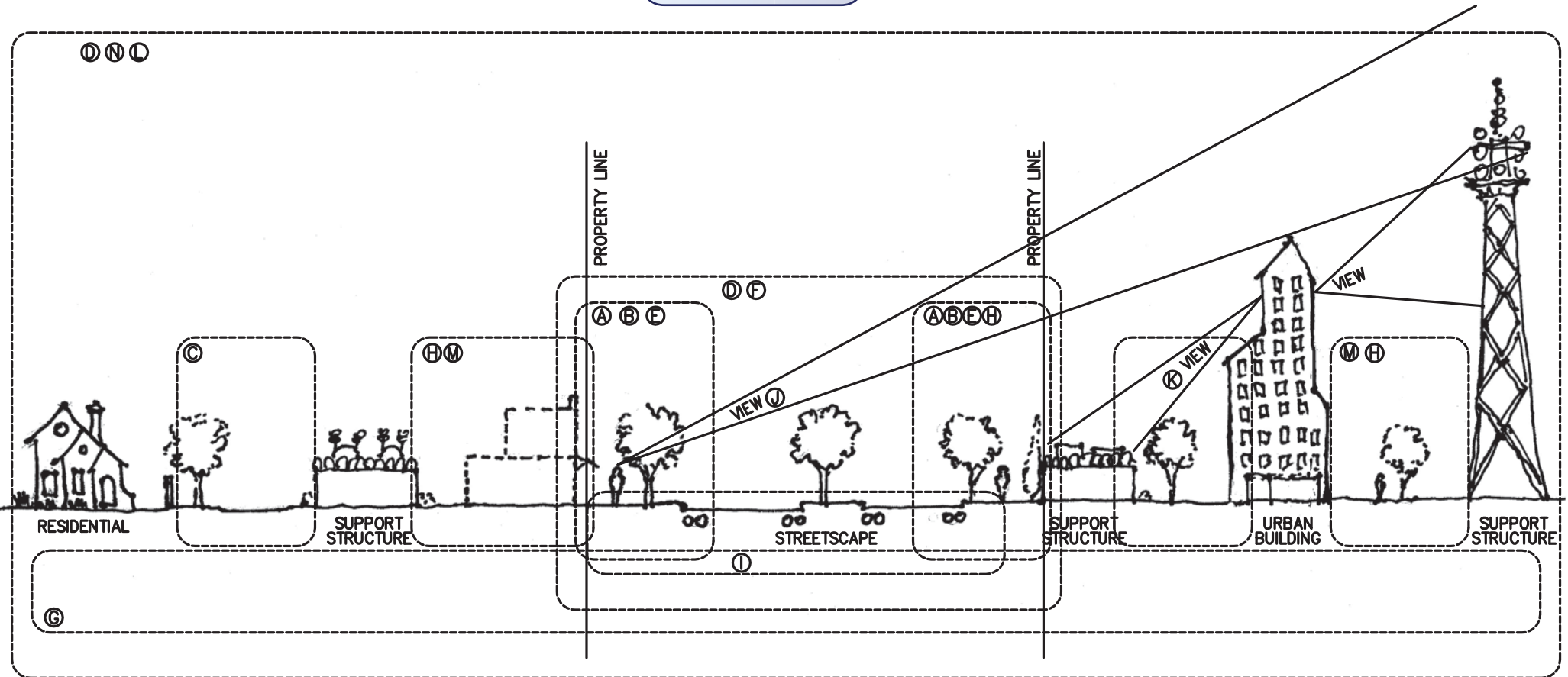
From the seemingly trivial activities of everyday life (e.g. using a plastic bag) to the overtly transformational (e.g. growing the city), citizens have a role to play and a responsibility. It is only through the sum total of individual choices, of individual actions, that change will come about.

Residents and stakeholders must be part of the planning and designing of their cities and their communities. They must also be part of delivering a new vision: by choosing to walk, by engaging each other, by generating awareness, and by demanding higher standards.



# DRAFT

DNL



- Ⓐ URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES
- Ⓑ COMMERCIAL DESIGN STANDARDS
- Ⓒ COMPATIBILITY STANDARDS
- Ⓓ PLANNING AREAS / NEIGHBORHOOD PLANS
- Ⓔ PEDESTRIAN FRIENDLY
- Ⓕ MULTI-MODAL TRANSIT
- Ⓖ GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE
- Ⓗ PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT
- Ⓘ INFRASTRUCTURE MAINTENANCE
- ⓵ VIEWS FROM RIGHT OF WAY

- Ⓚ VIEWS FROM ABOVE
- Ⓛ COMPACT AND CONNECTED
- Ⓜ QUALITY PEDESTRIAN OPENSOURCE
- Ⓝ IMAGINE AUSTIN COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
- Ⓞ
- Ⓟ
- Ⓠ
- Ⓡ
- Ⓢ
- Ⓣ



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# Austin Design Commission

Board/Commission Recommendation

**20130722-004A**

Update to Mayor and Council on crafting of Infrastructure Design Guidelines  
as requested by Resolution No. 20120816-060.

Unanimously approved by the Design Commission on a 7-0 vote.

July 30, 2013

Dear Mayor and Councilmembers,

We would like to update you on our progress in developing the new Infrastructure Design Guidelines for the City of Austin in response to City Council Resolution 20120816-060. Infrastructure comprises a significant part of the urban environment and approaching this issue has presented a tremendous challenge to the Commission. After numerous discussions with staff, departments, and within the Commission, we are developing a clear framework to address infrastructure related projects. The Urban Design Guidelines has served as the model to ensure that the document will be familiar and fit in with current expectations and process. The focus of the guidelines is to shape its relationship to the urban landscape and not affect the technical requirements.

Given the complexity of the work, the Design Commission requests staff assistance for the next fiscal year. Specifically we will need 2 staff personnel for 6 months to work on graphics, editorial, photo selections, and desktop publishing on a part time basis.

The following document is the Introduction and Table of Contents for the Infrastructure Design Guidelines. A version with more detailed information will be distributed to the appropriate departments for review and comment. We will continue to develop the document and interface with the departments to ensure inclusion and understanding of its proper use.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to explore and address such an important issue of for the City.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us anytime.

Sincerely,

James Shieh  
Chair, Design Commission



# Table of Contents

<b>Section 1</b>	<b>Introduction (DA &amp; HH)</b>	<b>1-1</b>
1.1	Design Commission Mission for Infrastructural Design	1-1
1.2	The Virtues of Integrative Design	1-1
1.2.1	Examples of Integrative Design (Great Streets)	1-1
<b>Section 2</b>	<b>Contextual History (ET &amp; HH)</b>	<b>2-1</b>
2.1	Significance of Infrastructure	2-1
2.2	Define Infrastructure	2-1
2.3	Existing City of Austin Infrastructure Guidelines	2-1
2.4	Technical Criteria Manuals Currently in Use	2-2
<b>Section 3</b>	<b>Values and Vision for the Design Commission (DA &amp; JC)</b>	<b>3-1</b>
3.1	Design Principles- Specific to Infrastructure	3-1
3.2	Introduction to Values	3-1
3.2.1	Humane Character	3-2
3.2.2	Density	3-2
3.2.3	Sustainability	3-2
3.2.4	Diversity	3-3
3.2.5	Economic Vitality	3-3
3.2.6	Civic Art	3-3
3.2.7	A Sense of Time	3-4
3.2.8	Unique Character	3-4
3.2.9	Authenticity	3-5
3.2.10	Safety	3-5
3.2.11	Connection with Outdoors	3-5
3.2.12	Compact and Connected	3-6
3.3	A Vision for Our Infrastructure	3-6
3.3.1	Promote an intuitive understanding of the layout of any urban place	3-6
3.3.2	Reinforce the sense of time and historical continuity	3-6
3.3.3	Foster physical continuity	3-6
3.3.4	Develop the public nature of all urban places	3-6
3.3.5	Encourage a diversity of uses, activities and sizes of development	3-6
3.3.6	Encourage public and private investment in the future of Austin	3-7
3.3.7	Reinforce the unique character of Austin	3-7
3.3.8	Create a safe urban environment	3-7
3.3.9	Create a comfortable urban environment	3-7
3.3.10	Create a hierarchy of transportation which begins with pedestrians	3-7
3.3.11	Actively promote civic art	3-7
3.3.12	Encourage a vibrant cultural atmosphere	3-7
3.3.13	Encourage intense street level activity	3-8
3.3.14	Maintain a sense of connection to the natural environment	3-8
3.3.15	Encourage an architecture whose design responds to functional needs and reinforces urban activities	3-8
3.3.16	Encourage quality building	3-8
3.3.17	Promote urban residential uses	3-8
3.3.18	Create an economically vibrant urban area	3-8

3.3.19	Strive for environmental balance.....	3-8
3.3.20	Create an interconnected system of attractive open spaces.....	3-8
<b>Section 4</b>	<b>Design Guidelines (JS &amp; BW) .....</b>	<b>4-1</b>
4.1	Area Wide Guidelines .....	4-1
4.1.1	Site Selection.....	4-1
4.1.2	Infrastructure Development Should Align with Sustainability Goals.....	4-1
4.1.3	Buffering Against Adjacent Uses .....	4-2
4.1.4	Minimize Public Risk .....	4-2
4.2	Mobility Components .....	4-2
4.2.1	Bridges.....	4-2
4.2.2	Rail.....	4-2
4.2.3	Bus .....	4-2
4.2.4	Parking Lots.....	4-2
4.2.5	Wayfinding.....	4-2
4.3	Mobility Systems- Infrastructure Along Roads, Pathways.....	4-3
4.3.1	Seen and experienced infrastructure – systematic.....	4-3
4.3.2	Roads and Pathways.....	4-3
4.3.3	Reference Urban Design Guidelines – Guidelines for the Public Streetscape .....	4-3
4.4	Ecological Infrastructure .....	4-3
4.4.1	Watersheds.....	4-3
4.4.2	Parks & Conservation Areas.....	4-4
4.4.3	Landscape Systems .....	4-4
4.5	Utilities.....	4-4
4.5.1	Unseen and Not Experienced.....	4-4
4.5.2	Importance.....	4-4
4.5.3	Factors to consider.....	4-4
4.5.4	Water Detention, Treatment.....	4-5
4.5.5	Water Towers .....	4-5
4.5.6	Utility Buildings.....	4-5
<b>Section 5</b>	<b>Process (JS &amp; JW).....</b>	<b>5-1</b>
5.1	Qualifying Projects.....	5-1
5.1.1	Use the checklist (similar to Urban Design Guideline Checklist currently used).....	5-1
5.1.2	Staff to Promote Design Coordination (City Architect).....	5-1
5.2	Requirements for Submission to the Design Commission.....	5-1
5.2.1	Reasons to have set process standards.....	5-1
5.2.1.1	Clear Guideline Implementation Process.....	5-1
5.2.2	Design phase when to come to Design Commission .....	5-1
5.2.3	Cross Department Cooperation .....	5-2
5.2.4	Exhibits required – focus is to depict the relationship to the public experience .....	5-2
5.2.5	Schedule.....	5-2
5.2.6	Expected Outcomes.....	5-2
5.2.7	Process for Stakeholder Engagement .....	5-2
5.2.7.1	Current Stakeholder Project Involvement philosophy .....	5-2
5.2.7.2	Stakeholder Process/Objectives .....	5-2
5.2.7.3	Stakeholder Input and Fiscal Responsibility .....	5-3
5.3	Integrative Department Processes .....	5-4
5.3.1	Integration of Technical Criteria Manual Across Departments.....	5-4
5.3.1.1	Strategic Facilities Governance Committee .....	5-4
5.3.1.2	Capital Planning Office .....	5-4

5.3.1.3 Real-estate..... 5-4

5.3.1.4 Building Department ..... 5-4

5.4 Challenges and Benefits of Integrated Design ..... 5-4



# Section 1

## Introduction (DA & HH)

The Design Commission provides advisory recommendations to the City Council on matters pertaining to the quality of proposed urban development, and as requested by the Council, assists in developing public policy and in promoting excellence in the design and development of Austin's built environment. In our capacity as stewards of Austin's built identity, Council has asked the Design Commission to broaden its scope to include policies and standards for the design and review of the infrastructural components of our city. This annual of Infrastructure Design Guidelines, is meant to complement both the city's Urban Design Guidelines, and the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan. The Infrastructure Design Guidelines address the design character and construction of components and systems that structure and support the ongoing development and growth of the City of Austin and aim to enable the City to attain its vision of becoming the most livable city in the country.

Infrastructure can generally be defined as the set of interconnected structural components that provide the necessary supporting framework for urban development. Typically referring to the technical structures that support a society's needs, such as roads, bridges, water supply, sewers, electrical grids, telecommunications, and so forth, infrastructure is comprised of "the physical components of interrelated systems providing commodities and services essential to enable, sustain, or enhance societal living conditions." [Fulmer, 2009]. The Design Commission is primarily concerned with achieving excellence in the design of such structures and systems.

Infrastructure plays two primary roles in the design of urban environments: performative, and connective. Performative in this context refers to the capacity of the infrastructure to accomplish the technical function for which the system has been designed, be it the distribution and collection of water, electricity, transportation, etc., or the provision of systems of public space, streets, sidewalks, etc. Performative standards and criteria are the purview of City Staff and City Departments. Connective refers to the ability of infrastructure to integrate disparate urban development components and projects into an integrated system. Connective also refers to the socially supportive role that infrastructure may play in enhancing the quality of life of the citizens of Austin. The Design Commission seeks to work with and advise City Staff, City Departments, and developers on attaining excellence in the design and integration of the physical and social systems of our city.

These Infrastructure Guidelines outline the vision, principles and connective design criteria that are required for the design of our city's urban structure. The Infrastructure Design Guidelines provide the necessary framework for the design of a compact, connected and sustainable urban environment for Austin. The Design Commission's role in evaluating infrastructure proposals is to ensure that each development project is designed adequately and systematically reflects the values and principles espoused by the framework.

### 1.1 Design Commission Mission for Infrastructural Design

### 1.2 The Virtues of Integrative Design

#### 1.2.1 Examples of Integrative Design (Great Streets)





## Section 2

### Contextual History (ET & HH)

#### 2.1 Significance of Infrastructure

(CALC. percentage of Austin service area dedicated to infrastructure)

#### 2.2 Define Infrastructure

#### 2.3 Existing City of Austin Infrastructure Guidelines

Due to the recent adoption of the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan, which is built around the concept of “compact and connected”, infrastructure suddenly takes on a new meaning, as it will be the element that connects the activity centers, whether it’s transportation, utilities, or green space/watersheds. So, this is a good time to reassess what infrastructure is, or needs to be, as we face many environmental challenges for the next thirty years, something the new Comp Plan espouses as tantamount for Austin’s future. Infrastructure must now support smart, positive development in a sustainable way.

But, some of this reassessment of infrastructure already has a good start, in such City of Austin planning efforts as those listed below. It’s great when infrastructure is addressed in these master plans, as it can be specific to that area or concept, but when it doesn’t apply to a certain area or concept, the Infrastructure Design Guidelines will need to be implemented.

- The Great Streets Master Plan- promotes walkability through smart streetscape design and integrates bicycle paths and public transportation, encouraging less reliance on the automobile. The Bicycle Master Plan goes even further in developing bike routes throughout the City.
- The Austin Resource Recovery Master Plan- promotes minimal waste by through recycling. The goal is to keep 90% of discarded materials out of the landfill by 2040.
- The Watershed Master Plan- assesses erosion, flood and water quality problems in Austin. It also prioritizes and implements effective solutions that address all three problems.
- Airport Boulevard, Riverside Drive, Burnet Road Corridor Studies- these separate studies envision transforming these areas from auto-dominated, aging corridors, to people-oriented destinations with lots of people living, working and playing within walking distance of transit. The Airport Blvd Study goes one step further in implementing form-based code, which can control environmental standards in a more sustainable manner than traditional zoning.

Transit Oriented Design Ordinance and Station Standards- TOD district boundaries are established and TOD district zoning classification is identified. The Station Area Plans include specific design standards and development goals for each TOD district (located around transit stops on the city’s rail line), including land use regulation, density, building height, site and building design, and general standards.

## 2.4 Technical Criteria Manuals Currently in Use

## Section 3

# Values and Vision for the Design Commission (DA & JC)

### 3.1 Design Principles- Specific to Infrastructure

Design plays an important role in the development of a compacted and connected urban fabric that functions well. A sustainable, compact and connected city is an element of the vision of the comprehensive plan, Imagine Austin.

Design Guidelines are not to conflict with safety codes, federal guidelines, Homeland Security, or other similar safety standards.

Design principles should not rely on interpretation by staff, but instead should be a clear checklist. The design principles are meant to give a broad vision so that city departments can continue to make specific guidelines that are most applicable to them.

### 3.2 Introduction to Values

To paraphrase the Urban Design Guidelines, the city is a community of people and how people interact with buildings and the infrastructure is informed by values shared by the people. The Commission believes that, for Austin, important shared values include:

- Humane Character
- Density
- Sustainability
- Diversity
- Economic Vitality
- Civic Art
- A Sense of Time
- Unique Character
- Authenticity
- Safety
- A Connection to the Outdoors

The design of our Austin infrastructure, as well as the design of our buildings, must be based on the people's basic shared values

Although not necessarily exhaustive in scope, these shared values constitute the foundation for the infrastructure design guidelines that follow.

### **3.2.1 Humane Character**

Humane character is of value because it is the basis for comfort in a built environment, and people are more inclined to live, shop, eat or recreate in a city whose infrastructure supports an environment that is physically and psychologically comfortable. The design of our infrastructure, whether streets, parks or even underground or overhead utility systems, should demonstrate that it was built for people; it should foster a sense in inhabitants that this place was made for comfortable human living. Designers, developers and transportation engineers can move the physical nature of the city closer to an ideal human habitat, while recognizing that urban places are special and more concentrated. In the same way, the use of materials, the scale of construction, human amenities, the mitigation of sunlight, the level of complexity, the design of streets, open space, water, waste water and power systems, communication systems, and the amount of plants and trees may all be manipulated to suggest that urban areas have been designed for human use. This understanding will contribute to a sense of well-being as we feel well matched to our surroundings – as we feel that they have been designed for us. It will also promote the use of our sidewalks and streets by pedestrians, increasing the activity level and economic viability of the city core. Humane character is achieved when people no longer distinguish infrastructure separately from the built environment, when they no longer perceive it as an obstacle.

### **3.2.2 Density**

Density refers to the concentration of people, buildings and activities. With this concentration comes a great efficiency and vitality. We value density because density facilitates commercial and social interaction by simply placing many people together in a relatively compact space. The serendipity arising from this inevitable interaction is evident in all great cities of the world.

Density and concentration are not to be confused with overcrowding. According to Jane Jacobs in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, density is critical “to generate exuberant diversity in a city’s streets and districts.” In the same book Jacobs quotes Lewis Mumford on the function of the city. In summary, density promotes vitality and diversity. In the suburbs where most often there is neither density nor diversity, it is a homogenous majority that defines the character of the community. Dense urban places are, by their very nature, highly diverse in character and therefore more representative and democratic in character, more experientially diverse and exciting.

Infrastructure can enhance the nature of a dense urban environment or, when not well designed, can in effect turn density into unhealthy overcrowding.

### **3.2.3 Sustainability**

Sustainability is a value because a city that is self sustaining—that which achieves an ongoing and maintainable balance between the total resources it consumes and the total resources it creates—is better able to survive over a long time period. A sustainable infrastructure is an infrastructure which promotes a healthy urban ecology. The city is a setting for our lives and the life of our families, and this constancy contributes to a sense of well being, a sense that we are part of a more civic whole. Sustainability considers that future generations in Austin should have flexibility and choice available to them as it was to our generation.

Sustainability addresses more than the simple effort to minimize energy consumption, emphasize “green” construction practices, and institutionalize recycling. It also encompasses the reuse of existing infrastructure, the creation of an infrastructure with long life spans, and the creation of an infrastructure with built-in flexibility to allow for differing future uses. Sustainability assumes that our community is a human community and that the built environment is an extension of the infrastructure which allows a dense population to live in a relatively small area in relative comfort. Sustainability also encompasses economic sustainability, leading to the conclusion that our economic health requires an affordable infrastructure that supports the commercial spaces and that investment in these spaces can provide returns necessary to support it.

### **3.2.4 Diversity**

The support of diversity (the distinction of characteristics, qualities, or elements) is a societal strength and one of the central principles of democracy. A diverse place for living ignites the imagination, capturing cultural and business pursuits. Diversity fosters inclusive ownership of private, public, and civic amenities. Diversity in our built environment and infrastructure applies to function, culture, style, and use. Development which is multiuse or diverse in other ways will result in a city that evolves into a rich and vibrant place to live, work, and play, and will support continued economic growth.

### **3.2.5 Economic Vitality**

Economic vitality describes a condition where all sectors of the economic machinery are working well and are working together. It represents a sustainable return on investment for all measures of urban life. Without the energy and vigor of the economy, downtown revitalization is not possible. The powerful draw that Austin has as a unique and highly desirable city can be enhanced by ensuring that future development does not result in a city in decline. Successful private projects and the infrastructure to support them will create higher property values in general and thus increase the tax base. Private projects, however, must be profitable if they are to expand the tax base and enrich the civic presence.

### **3.2.6 Civic Art**

Art for public defines the public realm and distinguishes the fine points in a city. Art creates a civic good which can inform the inhabitants and the world of their commitment to the expression of a collective identity. Expressing this identity celebrates what is unique about the community, transforming the everyday, honoring and valuing the past, as well as expressing the community aspirations for the future.

Civic art stimulates the cultural life of the region. Civic art, whether initiated by the city or by private development, promotes economic development, cultural tourism, downtown and neighborhood revitalization, international prestige and recognition, and an improved quality of life for a community.

Civic art gives places back to the people; it leads visitors as well as inhabitants into the discovery of a city. Over time Austin has evolved through the many purposes, ideas, ideals, and the traditions of those who have shaped and lived here; a work of art or architecture over time becomes an important link to a city's past. From it future generations learn of the perceptions and attitudes of their predecessors. When the work is new, it can help people understand today's ideals and traditions and the changes going on around them.

Over time, our artists—whether they be fine artists, artisans, or folk artists— have shaped and created Austin in response to the rich natural resources of the region and the traditions and cultures they brought with them. They are a natural resource which should be supported.

Infrastructure presents a particularly rich opportunity for the inclusion of civic art. Vehicular and pedestrian pathways, wayfinding systems, public transportation stops and urban open space and parks provide rich opportunities for civic art.

### **3.2.7 A Sense of Time**

A sense of time and its history is important to the protection of valuable resources and the continuity of our community. Moments of accelerated growth can cause the destruction of resources, the value of which is often realized too late, after the resources are gone. Much of the development which will occur in the future has the opportunity to protect and reveal the history and stories of the place, while responding to the needs of the present. Our city is more valuable to us when we sense this continuity throughout the past, the present and plans for the future. The design of infrastructure should not interfere with this sense of time.

Austinites value the fact that we are simultaneously fiercely protective of our diverse natural and cultural environments, and forward-thinking—open to new technologies and encouraging change for the better. By valuing a sense of time, we recognize the importance that each moment in time be represented. As we create the future, we ensure that what we do now will someday become a part of a history that we will want to protect. Development will, in this way, take on the role of the story teller. Everything we build will become a story within the larger story of Austin. The decisions we make as we build, that is, how we tell the stories, will determine the way in which our history is manifested in downtown Austin. The stories told must be thorough, truthful, articulate, engaging, enduring and challenging.

### **3.2.8 Unique Character**

Through the singularity of its landscape and the diversity of its people, Austin has built a character which is unique, something increasingly rare and precious in a time when cities worldwide are becoming homogenous collections of buildings, highways and signs advertising similar lifestyles. Unique character succumbs to attack when cultural franchising is accepted as the most successful way for large enterprises to sell goods and promote services, buildings, businesses, food, clothing and entertainment. Our physical environment, under such conditions, becomes more homogenous and predictable. It can become a dehumanizing place, where individuals face a uniform environment beyond their control. . Much of our infrastructure, particularly vehicular and pedestrian circulation has the potential to exacerbate this siege on our unique character. It is imperative that the design of infrastructure projects be reviewed to ensure the maintenance of Austin's unique character.

Austin is a collection of what we find valuable in our region—the river, the hill country, the State Capitol, parks, special places, building types, styles, architectural details, and town form, as well as the activities of commerce and special events. Within this collection of activities is an individual spirit which is valuable because it gives us a stronger sense of identity in a world which is quickly losing individuality. One reason for Austin's current growth is the attraction others feel to the differences it provides. Many people are moving here from cities which offer no sense of membership because they lack an individual identity. This sense of place is therefore a strong economic factor as well as a positive force in the creation of a healthy community.



### 3.2.9 Authenticity

Because cities create, over time, a physical story of the life of that place and the people who live there, it is important that those who shape Austin do so with a sense of authenticity. This concept has value because a city shaped by it will be better able to create a sense of membership and community. By assuring that the physical story corresponds well to the authentic history, people will be more inclined to trust it, participate in it, and associate themselves with it. The closer a city aligns itself with what is genuine about itself, and the real lives of the people who live there, the stronger the connection people can make between themselves, their identity, the history of the place and the physical environment. In other words, the when, why and how a city formed. People are less inclined to associate with or feel connected to a place or thing which is contrived or unnatural.

As a value, authenticity suggests that Austinites would prefer to have a city whose image and physical context clearly references the time in which it was built and the activities and needs of the people who live and work there, rather than one created through false historical constructions or commercial imagineering designed to deceive the user through theatrical manifestations.

When authenticity has played a role in the creation of a city, buildings and spaces accumulate meaning and significance naturally over time. Here, the story of the place can be told by the physical environment and people, by association, can relive the story of their own lives by moving through the city. In the same way that one reaffirms one's identity by visiting a childhood home, one is reminded of one's past by the physical part of one's hometown. The reminding can create a strong attachment to a city and to a community through the retelling of small stories on a daily basis.

Authenticity in this context refers to a real city where people live and work and explore personal and collective opportunities and conflicts. It refers to a place where one's assumptions about their physical surroundings can be trusted. Real stories will collect around places that people really inhabit.

### 3.2.10 Safety

The creation of safe urban places, free from danger, is a difficult but important objective. Urban areas can be filled with strangers, inherently noisy and condensed. To attract people, it must also feel safe. We value safety because it frees people to fully engage themselves in chosen activities. A safe downtown provides a venue for these many activities. Making people feel safe among strangers and in the midst of such abundant activity can be facilitated by the design of streets, sidewalks and buildings, the many infrastructure elements that people confront, and by lighting and lines of sight. Public streets and other open places can help direct attention and promote the intuitive safety mechanism of observation. Design may facilitate safety by coding space, clearly identifying where it is safe to go.

### 3.2.11 Connection with Outdoors

A connection with the outdoors is of value because it brings natural forces and elements such as sunshine, breezes, clouds, rain, shadow patterns, water and vegetation into urban places. Immersion in the natural environment adds complexity and transition to our experience of a day in contrast to the experience of a more static built environment. Outdoor environments offer options for reviving the senses and the lives of people who spend long periods indoors.

Austin is already distinguished by its value for outdoor connections, as seen in its strong legacy of parks and greenbelts, waterfronts and tree canopy, where people can enjoy both active and quiet pursuits. Residents have traditionally protected public green spaces and the right to be outdoors, and

newcomers are attracted to Austin because of the opportunity it provides to connect with the natural environment. As the city becomes denser, access to the outdoors becomes even more important, requiring protection and enhancement of existing green spaces as well as the creation of new plazas and other urban forms of open space.

### **3.2.12 Compact and Connected**

## **3.3 A Vision for Our Infrastructure**

When the fundamental basis for the guidelines was established, through the articulation of shared values, a vision for downtown was formulated, establishing the goals and aspirations which, if applied throughout the city, could ensure that new urban places were vibrant and exciting.

The eleven shared values described in the previous section are broad concepts. A more specific list of goals follows. These goals were derived from the shared values, but hold a complex and indirect relationship with them, where the lines between goals and values frequently overlap. Each goal is stated and its main point briefly explained. *Italicized in the margins are the specific shared values which the goal helps promote.*

### **3.3.1 Promote an intuitive understanding of the layout of any urban place**

The intensive use associated with thriving urban centers may be enhanced if the physical layout can be easily understood. Understanding requires that we form a mental map of the area. The logic of the place needs to be understood sufficiently to orient pedestrians.

### **3.3.2 Reinforce the sense of time and historical continuity.**

This goal speaks to the preservation of historical buildings and other facilities and of historical planning, but equally important, speaks to the relationship among buildings built over time—including those built in the present time.

### **3.3.3 Foster physical continuity.**

Physical continuity speaks to the freedom of movement in pedestrian, transit and automobile environments, but is most important in the pedestrian circumstance. Encouraging movement within an urban place allows comfort and promotes our staying there for a variety of activities.

### **3.3.4 Develop the public nature of all urban places.**

The public nature of urban areas is most apparent in public open space—plazas, sidewalks, streets and parks. The design of the lower levels of buildings is also vital in promoting inclusion in the place.

### **3.3.5 Encourage a diversity of uses, activities and sizes of development.**

Achieving this goal will require balancing the existing uses with additional uses that an urban area lacks, such as residential and destination retail. It will also require that we do so while allowing for differing economic status of the residents. Diversity should apply to retail, residential, commercial, office, entertainment, and all other sectors.

### **3.3.6 Encourage public and private investment in the future of Austin.**

Perhaps no other goal provides more opportunity to demonstrate the value we place on civic behavior than this one. Where those who have gone before us have been willing to invest in the future—to regard the value of their investment over a long period—we generally have bridges, buildings and other structures which have endured and which we now regard as important to our history.

### **3.3.7 Reinforce the unique character of Austin.**

To better promote a sense of connection to and membership with Austin, our urban places should be a unique signal for a unique place. Developing a unique character should start with what is already unique about Austin.

### **3.3.8 Create a safe urban environment.**

All of the users of our urban places, men, women, children, young and old, those with physical challenges, natives and visitors, customers and service personnel— should be considered when designing a dense environment. A safe urban environment will encourage economic activity and foster commerce.

### **3.3.9 Create a comfortable urban environment.**

Comfort includes shelter from the harsh Texas sun and other weather, a reorientation of urban places away from a fast moving, automobile oriented place and to a slower moving, pedestrian-oriented population, and an understanding of intuitive way finding.

### **3.3.10 Create a hierarchy of transportation which begins with pedestrians.**

The hierarchy in order of priority is:

1. Pedestrians
2. Public transit systems
3. Bicycles
4. Vehicles

### **3.3.11 Actively promote civic art.**

Civic art promotes economic development, cultural tourism, downtown and neighborhood revitalization, international prestige and recognition, and an improved quality of life for a community. Art in a city describes the way in which the city honors spirit and soul. Public art can create a civic message that expresses community identity, myth and culture.

### **3.3.12 Encourage a vibrant cultural atmosphere**

Arts, entertainment, and other cultural activities add richness and viability to our everyday lives. Such activity is an advantage to Austin because it promotes economic development, cultural tourism, downtown and neighborhood revitalization, international prestige and recognition, social service opportunities, and an improved quality of life for the community.

**3.3.13 Encourage intense street level activity.**

The street is a place for extra activities — sidewalk seating, vendors, waiting for a bus. Activities that don't require enclosed spaces or are enhanced by being outside should be added to the activities that already happen outside to create intense street level activity.

**3.2.14 Maintain a sense of connection to the natural environment.**

Austin's natural environment is a primary attribute. Every economically feasible effort to preserve, maintain and enhance Austin's natural environment should be pursued.

**3.3.15 Encourage an architecture whose design responds to functional needs and reinforces urban activities.**

Buildings designed to sculptural effect are not discouraged, but formalist aspirations should not be attained at the expense of functional requirements and a positive position within the requirements of other buildings and users. Architecture should respond to the whole array of human needs.

**3.2.16 Encourage quality building.**

Buildings in urban centers should have a permanence that some other areas of the city do not require. Quality adds to the overall value of any urban place.

**3.3.17 Promote urban residential uses.**

A residential component provides for 24 hour activity, a consumer base for retail activity, eyes and ears on the street, and reduces the need for transportation.

**3.3.18 Create an economically vibrant urban area.**

None of the values can be promoted without the economic engine to drive urban redevelopment.

**3.3.19 Strive for environmental balance.**

All development should take into consideration the need to conserve energy and resources. It should also strive for a small carbon footprint.

**3.3.20 Create an interconnected system of attractive open spaces.**

An interconnected system of attractive open spaces supports the pedestrian activity which creates vitality and provides a natural experience which can make dense urban development more comfortable and successful.

## Section 4

### Design Guidelines (JS & BW)

#### 4.1 Area Wide Guidelines

##### 4.1.1 Site Selection

- Issue: Guidelines are needed to help the city select and negotiate on the purchase of proper infrastructure sites. Proper siting is intrinsic to infrastructure that successfully blends with the urban environment. Decorating a blank wall or fence that faces a street will not help make that section of street more pedestrian friendly. Due to contract negotiations, the land purchase process is not open for public review.
- Recommendations:
  1. Land for infrastructure should be acquired with a strong consideration on how the location selected supports a high quality urban environment.
  2. Area for infrastructure within a private development should be vetted by the city.
  3. A potential infrastructure site's roadway type classification and neighboring uses can guide consideration of the appropriateness of a site. The city should develop a site selection decision matrix in cooperation with the Design Commission.
  4. Each city department should have a master plan, and long-range projections, in relation to infrastructure, should be coordinated between departments.

##### 4.1.2 Infrastructure Development Should Align with Sustainability Goals

- Issues: Environmental and social values of a project should be communicated in dollars. Projects should be assessed for their contribution to the economy and their total project cost (life-cycle). (The sustainability goals for the city are ...)
- Recommendations:
  1. Capture water from public right of way in a sustainable manner using above ground pre-treatment with elements such as porous concrete, dry swales, and rain gardens.
  2. Apply sustainability valuation to a project that is proposing value engineering.
  3. Maximize the use of cool pavement strategies.
  4. Design larger projects (over \$5 million valuation ?) to be context sensitive using elements as public art, place-making features, and outreach.
  5. Utilize native plantings.
  6. Larger projects (over \$5 million valuation ?) shall have a monitoring and commissioning plan.

7. Minimize use of toxins and VOCs.
8. Use recycled and reclaimed materials.

#### **4.1.3 Buffering Against Adjacent Uses**

- Issue: Some infrastructure projects may be incompatible with nearby uses, like the placement of an odor control facility next to residential or the placement of a walled substation on a pedestrian priority way or core transit corridor.
- Recommendations:

#### **4.1.4 Minimize Public Risk**

- Issues: Safety.
- Recommendations:
  1. Landscaping should not block views of motorists to other motorists, cyclists or pedestrians.
  1. Provide pedestrian areas of refuge in the center of right of ways over 120' wide.
  2. Provide bulb-outs at street intersections where streets have street-side parking.

### **4.2 Mobility Components**

#### **4.2.1 Bridges**

- Issues:
- Recommendations:

#### **4.2.2 Rail**

- Issues:
- Recommendations:

#### **4.2.3 Bus**

- Issues:
- Recommendations:

#### **4.2.4 Parking Lots**

- Issues:
- Recommendations:

#### **4.2.5 Wayfinding**

- Issues: Landmarks, protected views, signalization
- Recommendations:



## 4.3 Mobility Systems- Infrastructure Along Roads, Pathways

### 4.3.1 Seen and experienced infrastructure – systematic

- Roads and Pathways

1. Elements

### 4.3.2 Roads and Pathways

- Most prominent infrastructure that we rely on every day.
- It ties our destinations together.
- However it is often overlooked
  1. Spend efforts designing the destinations
  2. Cost
- Opportunities
  1. Express local character (of city or neighborhood) to the journeymen
    - a. Indulge them to stop
    - b. Express pride in the area
    - c. Respect historical significance
    - d. Four Squares
  2. Break up monotony of the journey
    - a. Trees
      - Rhythms or clusters
    - b. Lighting
    - c. Signage
    - d. Paving
  3. Great Streets
- Dangers
  1. Along long lengths, using same specs
    - a. Can become monotonous without changes

### 4.3.3 Reference Urban Design Guidelines – Guidelines for the Public Streetscape

## 4.4 Ecological Infrastructure

### 4.4.1 Watersheds

- Issues:
- Recommendations:

#### **4.4.2 Parks & Conservation Areas**

#### **4.4.3 Landscape Systems**

### **4.5 Utilities**

#### **4.5.1 Unseen and Not Experienced**

1. Underground
2. Invisible
3. Overhead
  - a. Although “seen” experience can be lessened or eliminated
4. Water detention
  - a. Can be underground as well

#### **4.5.2 Importance**

1. Life blood of a City
2. Organization of city
  - a. Compact and Connected
3. Ease of maintenance
4. Ease of expansion

#### **4.5.3 Factors to consider**

1. Manifests what is seen
  - a. Importance of organization
2. Minimize impact of Utility Work
3. Coordinate for Easy Access and Maintenance
4. Bury utility infrastructure
5. Overhead lines
  - a. Water quality and detention
6. Use trenchless technologies when possible
7. Develop and Enforce Site Protection Plan
8. Protection of Existing and Future Planted Areas

9. Protect Water Sources During Construction

10. Overhead utility – additional consideration

- a. Support system
  - Design
  - Rhythm
- b. Height of system

11. Visibility scale

#### **4.5.4 Water Detention, Treatment**

#### **4.5.5 Water Towers**

#### **4.5.6 Utility Buildings**



## Section 5

### Process (JS & JW)

#### 5.1 Qualifying Projects

##### 5.1.1 Use the checklist (similar to Urban Design Guideline Checklist currently used)

- Based upon Infrastructure Guidelines
- Comment on how addresses each point
- Comment is need help with specific items

##### 11.1.2 Staff to Promote Design Coordination (City Architect)

#### 5.2 Requirements for Submission to the Design Commission

##### 5.2.1 Reasons to have set process standards

- Clear set of tools
- Provide efficient path
- Meaningful discussion
- Assistance to help focus

##### 5.2.1.1 Clear Guideline Implementation Process

- Issue: Guidelines that are unclear or that do not provide a mechanism to deal with special circumstances become irrelevant.
- Recommendations:
  1. The Design Commission should comment on cases where the Infrastructure Guidelines seem to be in inherent conflict with the proposed infrastructure project.
  2. Departments should create design criteria based on the guidelines to incorporate in their standard workflow and to coordinate with other departmental requirements and standards.
  3. Departments should implement management tools that help coordinate work between departments in the most early planning phases of infrastructure projects.

##### 5.2.2 Design phase when to come to Design Commission

- 75% Schematic Design Phase
- Early enough so direction suggestions can be considered

### **5.2.3 Cross Department Cooperation**

- List of Departments in the Team and role that they play
- Department representatives available to present

### **5.2.4 Exhibits required – focus is to depict the relationship to the public experience**

- Area map within 500'
  - Zoning
  - FLUM
- Site plan thru adjacent right of way
- Site Section extending thru right of way
- Elevations with height (scale figures) and materials

### **5.2.5 Schedule**

- Design Phases
- Construction start and completion

### **5.2.6 Expected Outcomes**

### **5.2.7 Process for Stakeholder Engagement**

#### **5.2.7.1 Current Stakeholder Project Involvement philosophy**

- Project team assigned for large and complex projects
- Stakeholder process is handled on case by case basis depending upon:
  1. Location
  2. Number of stakeholders impacted
  3. Nature of the project impact on the public realm/interface
- Activities initiated through the PIO offices of sponsoring departments (AWU, AE, Parks, Transportation, AAR) and Public Works working collaboratively.

#### **5.2.7.2 Stakeholder Process/Objectives**

- Notification of stakeholders
- Stakeholder meetings to provide information on type of infrastructure project and the need (function)
- How project adheres to neighborhood plan
- Discuss and gain input on how project may impact stakeholders.



- Determine areas of input team would like from stakeholders
- Project team to demonstrate for feedback, to the extent possible,
  1. Project drawings-(schematic design)
  2. Models
  3. Landscaping samples
  4. Fencing samples
  5. Lighting fixtures
  6. Sustainability features
  7. Green standards, etc.

### **5.2.7.3 Stakeholder Input and Fiscal Responsibility**

- Issues: Public process should be tailored based on the type and amount of impact to the public realm a project would have. An example of tailoring a public process based on the intensity of the project, is that PARD uses a third party facilitator when there is no existing park master plan. Otherwise projects are vetted with the public by PARD staff, using their standard tools and guidelines. Costs associated with incorporating a public process or additional design in infrastructure planning should take into account lifecycle costs such as maintenance, and the positive economic impacts that well design urban spaces can have on a city.
- Recommendations:
  1. The extent of a needed public process can be determined by the amount of feedback or concern that is generated after the city sends out notification of an infrastructure project in plain speak with graphics that communicate what is being proposed.
  2. Larger, or more impactful projects, should follow a public input process regardless of notice feedback received from the public. Examples of more impactful projects are electrical substations, water towers, and new bridges.
  3. The Design Commission can facilitate public input by having a project as an agenda item at one of their meetings.
  4. Early in the planning process, design integration and stakeholders should be identified.
  5. Stakeholder and Design Commission interfaces can be streamlined with clear guidelines and expectations.
  6. Implement a system to measure design success of major infrastructure projects

## 5.3 Integrative Department Processes

### 5.3.1 Integration of Technical Criteria Manual Across Departments

#### 5.3.1.1 Strategic Facilities Governance Committee

#### 5.3.1.2 Capital Planning Office

#### 5.3.1.3 Real-estate

#### 5.3.1.4 Building Department

## 5.4 Challenges and Benefits of Integrated Design

- Site Section extending thru right of way
- Elevations with height (scale figures) and materials

### **5.2.5 Schedule**

- Design Phases
- Construction start and completion

### **5.2.6 Expected Outcomes**

### **5.2.7 Process for Stakeholder Engagement**

- Current Stakeholder Project Involvement philosophy
  - Project team assigned for large and complex projects
  - Stakeholder process is handled on case by case basis depending upon:
    1. Location
    2. Number of stakeholders impacted
    3. Nature of the project impact on the public realm/interface
  - Activities initiated through the PIO offices of sponsoring departments (AWU, AE, Parks, Transportation, AAR) and Public Works working collaboratively.
- Stakeholder Process/Objectives
  - Notification of stakeholders
  - Stakeholder meetings to provide information on type of infrastructure project and the need (function)
  - How project adheres to neighborhood plan
  - Discuss and gain input on how project may impact stakeholders.
  - Determine areas of input team would like from stakeholders
  - Project team to demonstrate for feedback, to the extent possible,
    1. Project drawings-(schematic design)
    2. Models
    3. Landscaping samples
    4. Fencing samples
    5. Lighting fixtures

6. Sustainability features
7. Green standards, etc.

### 5.3 City Departments to Update Technical Criteria Manuals and Demonstrate Design Principle Integration.

### 5.4 Tools



## DESIGN COMMISSION PROJECT REVIEW SUBMITTAL AND PROCESS

### INTRODUCTION

The [Design Commission](#) provides advisory recommendations to the city council to assist in developing public policy and to promote excellence in the design and development of the urban environment. The Commission seeks to foster a pedestrian-oriented, walkable city.

It is requested projects be presented to the Design Commission in their Conceptual/Schematic Design phase. For municipal buildings and associated site development projects seeking [Subchapter E Design Standards Alternative Equivalent Compliance \(AEC\)](#) shall be presented to the Commission before AEC is granted accordance with [City Council Resolution No. 20100923-086](#).

It is strongly recommended that each applicant meet with Staff to make submission for Design Commission review. Please see Staff contact information at the end of this document.

### MINIMUM ITEMS TO BE SUBMITTED IN AN ELECTRONIC (Adobe PDF) BACKUP PACKET TO CITY STAFF:

1. Complete Project Submittal Consideration Sheet. In the narrative, include (as applicable) project use(s), square footage of use(s), number of dwelling units, number of floors, height, amount of open space, FAR, nearby transportation, and surrounding context.
2. Describe how the Commission can assist in making your project better for the community. Please be as specific as possible.
3. Provide vicinity plan locating the project in the city, vicinity plan showing a minimum 9 block area around the project, conceptual site plan, floor plan diagram, exterior elevation and/or conceptual 3D view. Sheets to be no larger than 11x17. Submitted drawings should demonstrate compliance with Subchapter E Design Standards, as applicable.
4. List any sustainability highlights and community benefits offered.
5. Relate the project to applicable items addressed in the Urban Design Guidelines.

### OTHER ITEMS THAT MAY BE SUBMITTED / PRESENTED (but not included in printed Commissioner standard backup package)

Provide any other materials (narrative / graphics / slide images) to further describe the project.

## REVIEW PROCESS

1. Applicant submits documents to Staff a minimum of ten days prior to the posted item for review on the agenda (see Design Commission [Calendar of Regular Meetings](#)).
2. Staff reviews submittal for completeness.
3. Design Commission meets and hears a presentation by the Owner/Applicant/Architect. Staff provides backup to Commissioners, including letters/decisions from other Boards and Commissions.
4. Design Commission may direct a Project Review Working Group to meet on a project and further refine Commission comments. If this happens, the Project Review Working Group will take comments from the full Design Commission meeting, add their comments, and coordinate with the Design Commission Chair to issue a letter to Council. The Project Review Working Group shall meet prior to the next regularly-scheduled Design Commission to finalize comments on any project submittal. The goal is for this to happen in a 1 month timeframe.
5. At the end of a project review, the Design Commission will submit a letter to City Council, or it will rely on comments at a meeting being recorded in meeting minutes.
6. After completion of a Project Review Letter, either by the full Commission or by the Project Review Working Group. Staff will forward any Design Commission letter to applicable Boards/Commissions and the Council department liaison for distribution to the Mayor and City Council.
7. Design Commission may request that an Owner/Applicant or City Staff submit an update report in the future so that the Commission can review progress as a project is further detailed.

## GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

### ***Incomplete Applications***

Should Staff determine that the application is incomplete; it shall be returned to the applicant and not be posted on agenda for consideration by the Commission.

**Submissions without the required Adobe PDF electronic file shall be deemed incomplete.**

### ***Public Notice***

Posting of public notices on the proposed project site or giving notice to adjacent property owners is not required by the enabling ordinance of the Design Commission. The posted agenda for the Design Commission meetings serves to inform the public of subjects considered by the Commission. The applicant shall note that the concomitant regulatory procedures by other boards and commissions have legal public notice requirements. Actions taken by the Austin Design Commission shall be in respect of and in compliance with such local ordinances and project review procedures.



***Design Commission Advisory Recommendations***

The Commission will consider Project Review Applications during its regularly scheduled monthly public meetings and may issue an advisory recommendation in the form of a Project Review Letter. The Letter will be sent to the applicant, the chair of the applicable planning commission of the City, the liaison department and the City Council.

***Limits on Resubmissions***

Applicants are limited to two (2) resubmissions per design phase (as described herein) and shall notify Commission Staff of the intent and desire to resubmit project(s) for review within seven (7) days of the action vote by the Commission. The Commission shall consider such resubmissions prior to issuing the Project Review Report.

***Rebuttal of Project Review Report***

Since the Commission issues advisory recommendations only, there is no instance for appeals to the Commission. Rebuttals of such advisory recommendations may be made by the Applicant to the applicable planning commission, city department or City Council in accordance with applicable standard processes and procedures.

***Urban Design Guidelines***

A copy of the Urban Design Guidelines for Austin can be found at the following location: [UDG for Austin](#).

***Staff Contacts***

By appointment, City Staff is available for consultation on submittal requirements. To schedule a pre-submission conference or for information on any of the above submittal requirements please contact:

**Kelsey Oelze, Staff Liaison**

Urban Design - Planning and Zoning Department  
City of Austin, One Texas Center, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor, 505 Barton Springs Rd., Austin, TX 78704  
P: (512) 974-2752; E-mail: [kelsey.oelze@austintexas.gov](mailto:kelsey.oelze@austintexas.gov)

**Jorge E. Rousselin, Executive Liaison**

Urban Design - Planning and Zoning Department  
City of Austin, One Texas Center, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor, 505 Barton Springs Rd., Austin, TX 78704  
P: (512) 974-2975; E-mail: [jorge.rousselin@austintexas.gov](mailto:jorge.rousselin@austintexas.gov)



**City of Austin**  
**Design Commission – Project Submittal Consideration Sheet**

<b>Project Name:</b>		
<b>Project Location/Address:</b>		
<b>Applicant:</b>	<b>Property Owner:</b>	
<b>Mailing Address:</b>	<b>Mailing Address:</b>	
<b>Phone Number:</b>	<b>Phone Number:</b>	
<b>Project Architect/Engineer:</b>	<b>Project Start Date:</b>	<b>Project End Date:</b>
<b>Mailing Address:</b>	<b>Phone Number:</b>	
<b>Is project subject to redevelopment site plan or zoning application approvals?</b>  <b>Yes                      No</b>	<b>Anticipated Dates of Action</b>  <b>Planning Commission:</b> <b>City Council:</b>	
<b>Narrative Description of Proposed Project (including entitlements that you are seeking; attach or add additional page(s) as necessary) :</b>		
<b>Is Alternative Equivalent Compliance (AEC) requested for this project?</b>  <b>Yes                      No                      If yes, please refer to following page</b>		
<b>Current Status of Submittal:</b>		
Conceptual	Schematic	Design Development
<b>Do you have a copy of the Urban Design Guidelines for Austin?      Yes                      No</b> <b>If not, please see:</b> <a href="http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/downtown/downloads/urban_design_guidelines_for_austin.pdf">http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/downtown/downloads/urban_design_guidelines_for_austin.pdf</a>		
<b>Please fill in the subsequent information on the following pages.</b>		



**City of Austin  
Design Commission – Project Submittal Consideration Sheet (Continued)**

Relate the project to applicable items addressed in the Urban Design Guidelines for Austin. For an explanation of each guideline, please review the document at:  
[http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/downtown/downloads/urban\\_design\\_guidelines\\_for\\_austin.pdf](http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/downtown/downloads/urban_design_guidelines_for_austin.pdf)

***ALTERNATIVE EQUIVALENT COMPLIANCE (AEC)***

***Is AEC being requested for this project?***                      **Yes**                      **No**

If yes, please explain nature of request including alternatives offered and entitlements sought. Attach additional page if necessary.

***AREA WIDE GUIDELINES***

***1. Create dense development***

incorporated,                      need input,                      N/A

***2. Create mixed-use development***

incorporated,                      need input,                      N/A

**3. Limit development which closes downtown streets**

incorporated,                      need input,                      N/A

**4. Buffer neighborhood edges**

incorporated,                      need input,                      N/A

**5. Incorporate civic art in both public and private development**

incorporated,                      need input,                      N/A

**6. Protect important public views**

incorporated,                      need input,                      N/A

**7. Avoid historical misrepresentations**

incorporated,                      need input,                      N/A

**8. Respect adjacent historic buildings**

incorporated,                      need input,                      N/A

**9. Acknowledge that rooftops are seen from other buildings and the street**

incorporated,                      need input,                      N/A

**10. Avoid the development of theme environments**

incorporated,                      need input,                      N/A

**11. Recycle existing building stock**

incorporated,                      need input,                      N/A

## **GUIDELINES FOR THE PUBLIC STREETSCAPE**

### ***1. Protect the pedestrian where the building meets the street***

incorporated,	need input,	N/A
---------------	-------------	-----

### ***2. Minimize curb cuts***

incorporated,	need input,	N/A
---------------	-------------	-----

### ***3. Create a potential for two-way streets***

incorporated,	need input,	N/A
---------------	-------------	-----

### ***4. Reinforce pedestrian activity***

incorporated,	need input,	N/A
---------------	-------------	-----

### ***5. Enhance key transit stops***

incorporated,	need input,	N/A
---------------	-------------	-----

### ***6. Enhance the streetscape***

incorporated,	need input,	N/A
---------------	-------------	-----

### ***7. Avoid conflicts between pedestrians and utility equipment***

incorporated,	need input,	N/A
---------------	-------------	-----

### ***8. Install street trees***

incorporated,	need input,	N/A
---------------	-------------	-----

### ***9. Provide pedestrian-scaled lighting***

incorporated,	need input,	N/A
---------------	-------------	-----

### ***10. Provide protection from cars/promote curbside parking***

incorporated,	need input,	N/A
---------------	-------------	-----

**11. Screen mechanical and utility equipment**

incorporated,                      need input,                      N/A

**12. Provide generous street-level windows**

incorporated,                      need input,                      N/A

**13. Install pedestrian-friendly materials at street level**

incorporated,                      need input,                      N/A

**GUIDELINES FOR PLAZAS AND OPEN SPACE**

**1. Treat the four squares with special consideration**

incorporated,                      need input,                      N/A

**2. Contribute to an open space network**

incorporated,                      need input,                      N/A

**3. Emphasize connections to parks and greenways**

incorporated,                      need input,                      N/A

**4. Incorporate open space into residential development**

incorporated,                      need input,                      N/A

**5. Develop green roofs**

incorporated,                      need input,                      N/A

**6. Provide plazas in high use areas**

incorporated,                      need input,                      N/A



**7. Determine plaza function, size, and activity**

incorporated,                      need input,                      N/A

**8. Respond to microclimate in plaza design**

incorporated,                      need input,                      N/A

**9. Consider views, circulation, boundaries, and subspaces in plaza design**

incorporated,                      need input,                      N/A

**10. Provide an appropriate amount of plaza seating**

incorporated,                      need input,                      N/A

**11. Provide visual and spatial complexity in public spaces**

incorporated,                      need input,                      N/A

**12. Use plants to enliven urban spaces**

incorporated,                      need input,                      N/A

**13. Provide interactive civic art and fountains in plazas**

incorporated,                      need input,                      N/A

**14. Provide food service for plaza participants**

incorporated,                      need input,                      N/A

**15. Increase safety in plazas through wayfinding, lighting, & visibility**

incorporated,                      need input,                      N/A

**16. Consider plaza operations and maintenance**

incorporated,                      need input,                      N/A

## **GUIDELINES FOR BUILDINGS**

### ***1. Build to the street***

incorporated,	need input,	N/A
---------------	-------------	-----

### ***2. Provide multi-tenant, pedestrian-oriented development at the street level***

incorporated,	need input,	N/A
---------------	-------------	-----

### ***3. Accentuate primary entrances***

incorporated,	need input,	N/A
---------------	-------------	-----

### ***4. Encourage the inclusion of local character***

incorporated,	need input,	N/A
---------------	-------------	-----

### ***5. Control on-site parking***

incorporated,	need input,	N/A
---------------	-------------	-----

### ***6. Create quality construction***

incorporated,	need input,	N/A
---------------	-------------	-----

### ***7. Create buildings with human scale***

incorporated,	need input,	N/A
---------------	-------------	-----