



South Central Waterfront Advisory Board

November 19, 2018

Mr. Joel Mills, Director
AIA Center for Communities by Design
1735 New York Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20006-5292

RE: Letter of Interest for a Sustainable Design Assessment Team follow-up for the South Central Waterfront

Dear Mr. Mills:

Six years ago, I was chair of a Council-appointed body called the Waterfront Planning Advisory Board (WPAB). At that time, the WPAB identified one area of Austin's waterfront, then called the South Shore Central, that faced particularly intensive redevelopment pressures and needed special planning attention. The WPAB voted to request assistance from the AIA, which launched Austin's successful application for an AIA Sustainable Design Assessment Team (SDAT). I'm happy to report that the *2012 Designing South Shore Central SDAT Report* became the springboard for a multi-year planning effort which resulted in the *2016 South Central Waterfront Vision Framework Plan (SCW Plan)*. The Austin City Council adopted the *2016 SCW Plan* as an amendment to Austin's Comprehensive Plan, *Imagine Austin*.

The WPAB has since been disbanded but in 2017 the City Council created the South Central Waterfront Advisory Board (SCWAB), which is charged to work with stakeholders and city staff to advise Council specifically on implementation of the *SCW Plan*. I now serve as the chair of the SCWAB, and we are fortunate that other current SCWAB members have been involved since the 2012 SDAT. We are also fortunate that the SCWAB has been expanded to include other representative stakeholders who became involved in the planning effort after the SDAT and who are needed to ensure balanced and expert advice on the implementation of the *SCW Plan*.

The *SCW Plan* establishes a framework for decision-making and recommends a series of implementation steps, some of which were first proposed in the *2012 SDAT Report*. These implementation steps include development and adoption of new development regulations and innovative financial tools, leveraging the single city-owned property in the district at One Texas Center for affordable housing, and establishing a new governance entity that can coordinate funding and foster public-private partnerships.

The City is making progress with some of the implementation items that are called for in the *SCW Plan*, and the SCWAB is providing ongoing review and advice to the Council on further implementation. But we are also at the point where we might benefit from fresh eyes and impartial advice on how to move forward with some of the more intractable implementation items. To that end, the SCWAB voted at its November 2018 meeting to send this letter of interest to explore a follow-up consultation visit with the original SDAT volunteers.

Austin has a strong precedent for working with the AIA for both an initial consultation and a follow-up consultation. In 1991, the AIA provided design assistance to help Austin establish a vision for the future of our downtown through your Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) program. That 1991 R/UDAT inspired Austin to work together to refine the vision, implement key recommendations, and move our downtown forward. But we benefited tremendously when the AIA team returned in 1997 for the follow-up visit. Many Austin citizens remember and credit the initial and follow-up AIA design assistance for our downtown as pivotal to focusing on the priorities, galvanizing our community, and inspiring our leadership to accomplish so much of what our downtown is today. In the same way, we believe that a revisit from the 2012 SDAT volunteers could help us take our South Central Waterfront vision to the next level.

There are many specifics we could share to explain where we now stand and the assistance we now need to move forward with implementation of the *SCW Plan*. Broadly speaking, our overall challenges and how an *SDAT Revisit* might address those challenges could be summarized in these three ways:

- Currently we only have one council member who was around during the 2012 SDAT, and nearly half the council is new since the adoption of the *2016 SCW Plan*; Austin's City Manager has only been on the job less than a year. Likewise, the wider community was actively engaged throughout the four-year planning process that led to the 2016 plan adoption, but there has been little opportunity to engage with the wider community since we've moved into the incremental and often technical process of implementation. How could the *SDAT Revisit* reengage city leadership and the community to raise awareness of the work accomplished, to highlight the critical juncture and opportunity that is at hand, and to prioritize and focus on the most critical implementation steps?
- The SCWAB is charged with working with stakeholders and city staff to provide advice to the City Council on implementation of the *SCW Plan*. How could the *SDAT Revisit* support the SCWAB to be more effective and build on the connections that the SCWAB has made with staff, property-owners, and neighborhoods to energize the implementation process?
- Austin has experience with implementing districtwide redevelopment visions on city-owned lands, but the South Central Waterfront is made up of 34 private properties with a single city-owned property. One of the key implementation recommendations from the *SCW Plan* is to create a development corporation which could coordinate multiple funding tools and incentives (including TIF, PID, development fees associated with a new opt-in regulation, CIP, philanthropy), facilitate reviews and assist with execution of public and private projects, and structure public-private partnerships. How could the *SDAT Revisit* convene and engage decisionmakers to further the creation of this new approach?

If the AIA Center for Communities by Design is willing to consider an *SDAT Revisit* and can outline the requirements, the SCWAB can reach out to city leadership, AIA Austin, and other necessary stakeholders to explore this opportunity further.

Sincerely,



Brooke Bailey
Chair, South Central Waterfront Advisory Board

cc: Alan Holt, Planning & Zoning Department, executive liaison to SCWAB