



**URBAN
DESIGN**
HOUSING & PLANNING

Great Streets

Program Update



Presentation Agenda

- Overview of the Program
- State of the Program
- Proposed Update Process



Program Overview

History of the Great Streets Program

Early 1990's

The **concept of "Great Streets"** becomes popular in Austin through a RUDAT plan and work by the DAA.

1998

Austin voters approve **\$5 million in bonds** for downtown streetscape improvements.

Early 2000's

City Council adopts the Downtown Design Guidelines, Great Streets Plan and Great Streets Standards, and Great Streets Development Program.

2003

City Council **dedicates a portion of the parking meter revenue** to Great Streets

2014

City Council **establishes Great Streets as a Downtown Density Bonus Program (DDBP) gatekeeper** requirement.

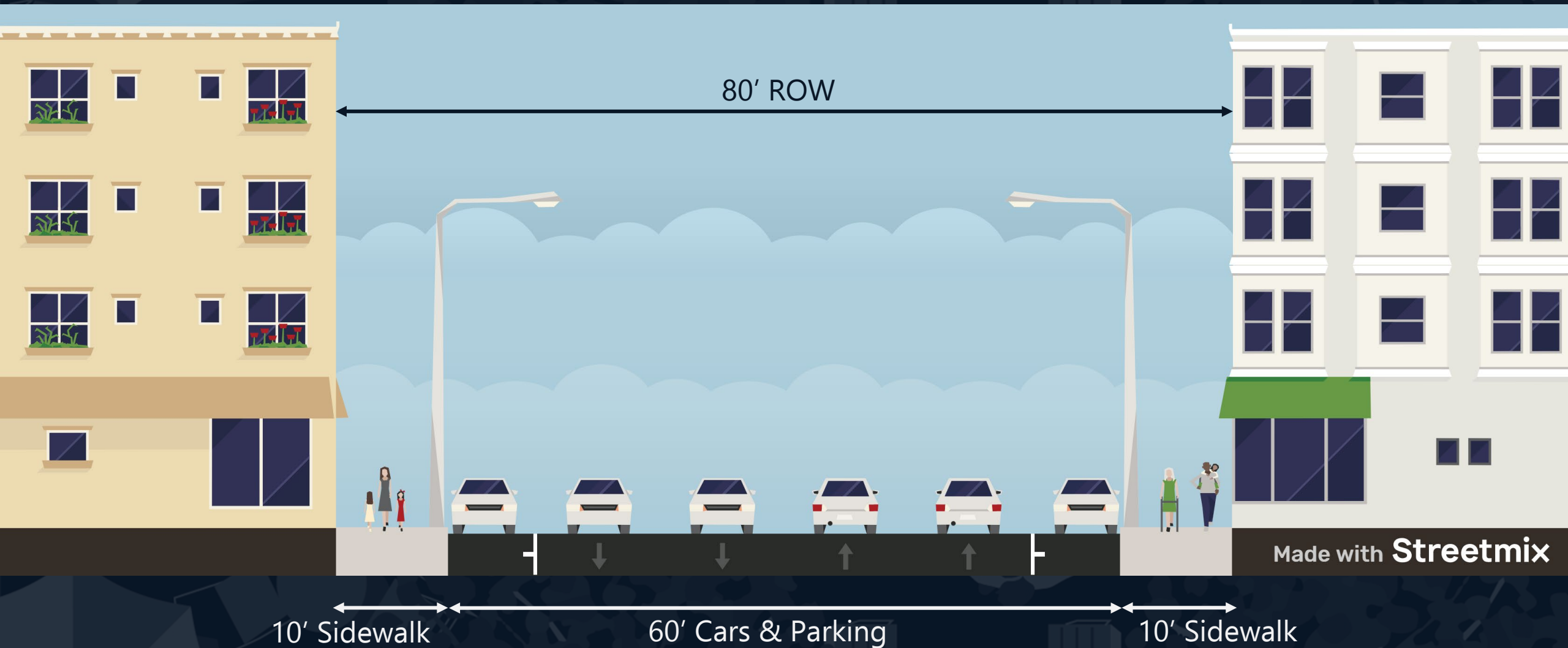
The Great Streets Program aims to enhance the livability, safety, and aesthetics of Austin's downtown streets by creating "streets for people" via **a more equitable balance of space between the roadway and the sidewalk zones and the implementation of enhanced streetscape standards.**

The City's transportation mode hierarchy gives highest priority to:

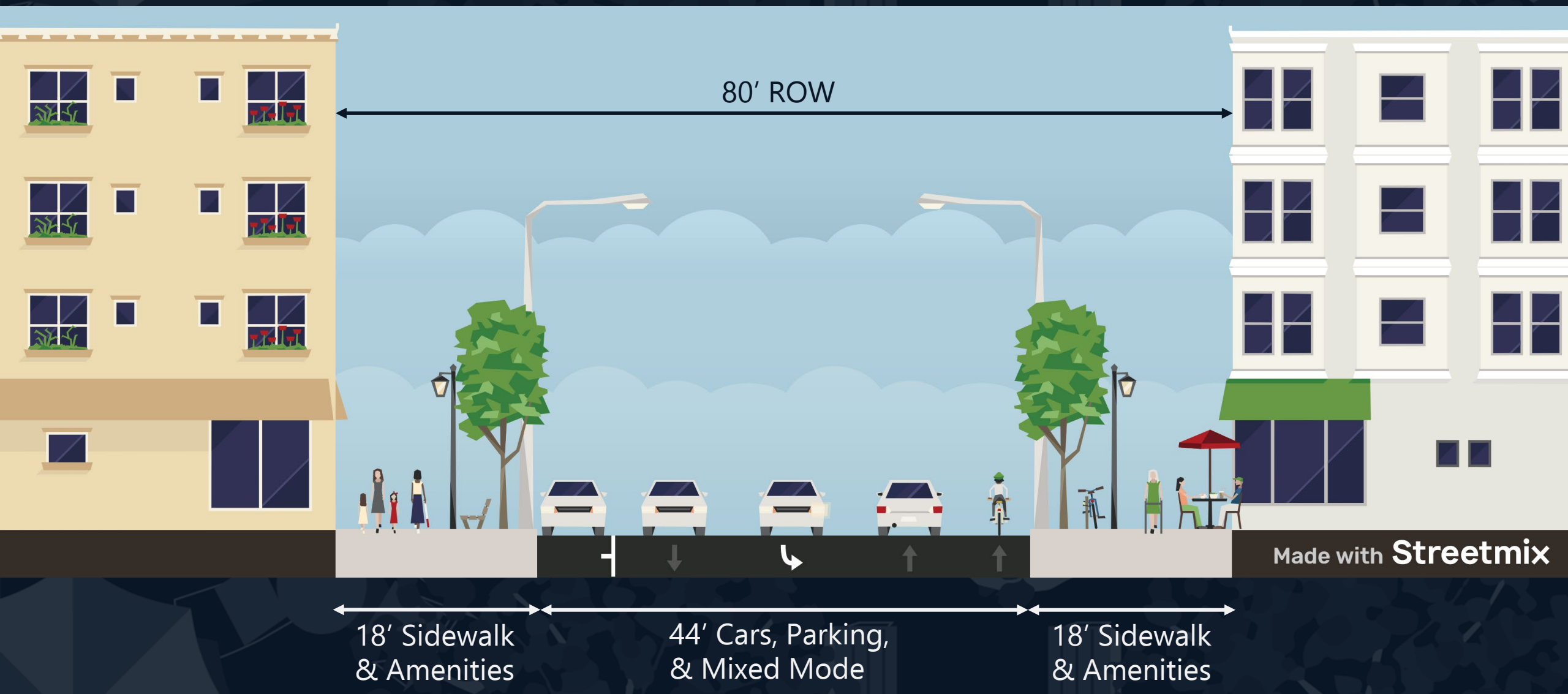
- Pedestrian travel,
- Transit use,
- Bicycle use,
- Automobile use.



Traditional Downtown Austin 80' ROW



Example Great Streets 80' ROW



Community Benefits of Great Streets



Economic Development



Physical Health



Mental Health



Air Quality & Emissions



Equity & Inclusion



Affordability



Urban Heat Mitigation



Trees & Green Infrastructure



Culture & Heritage

**Great
Streets
Plan
Objectives**

**Elevating the
human
experience**

Amenities

**Activate the
sidewalk**

Safety

**Traffic
calming.**

**Discourage
traffic
through
downtown**

**Redistribution
of ROW**

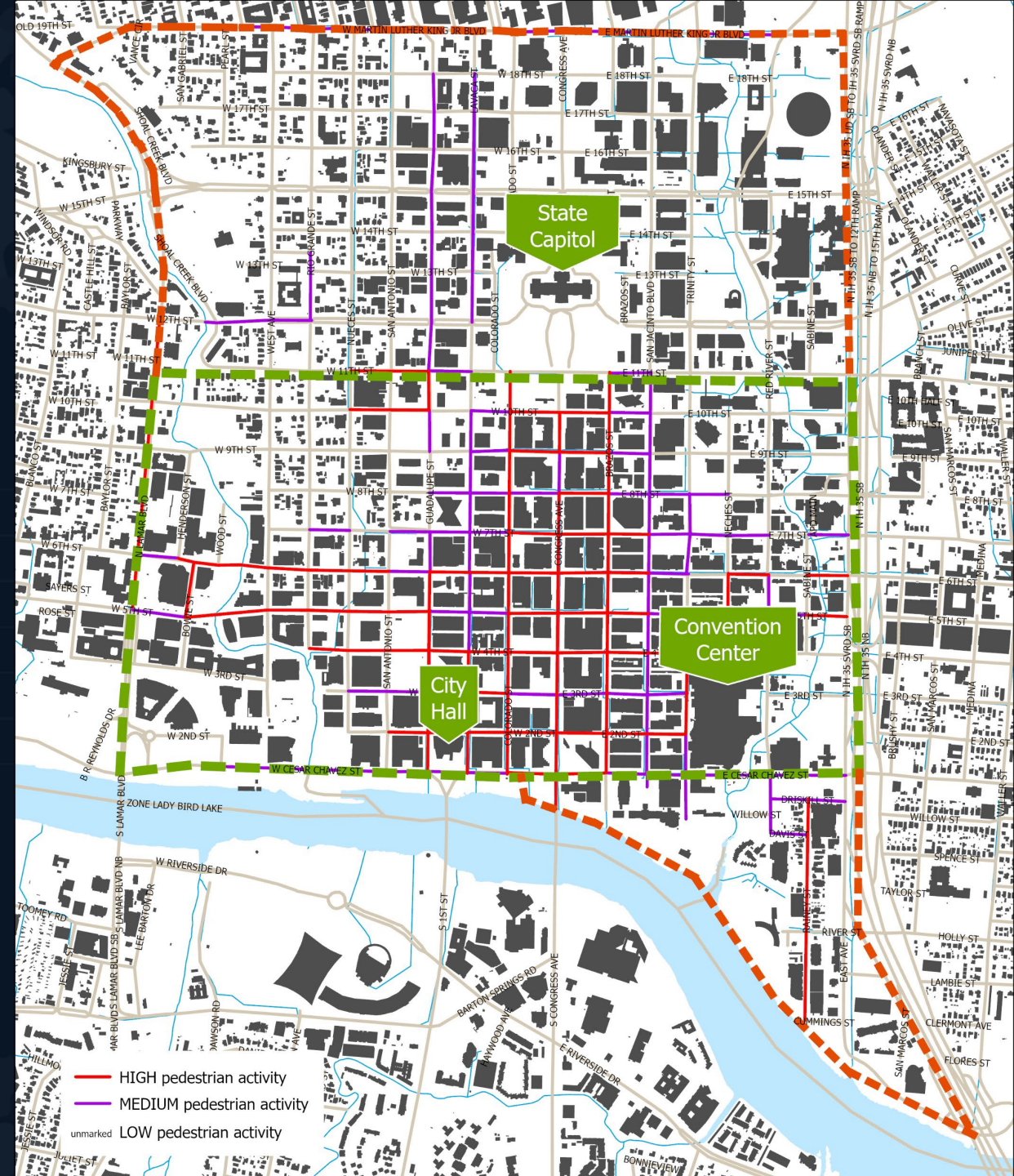
All downtown users become pedestrians at some point.

- Austin Great Streets Plan, 2001



Program Boundaries

- North: 11th Street (GSDP) or MLK (GSMP)
- East: IH-35
- South: Cesar Chavez St
- West: Lamar Blvd



Implementation

Great Streets standards are implemented via 3 main avenues:

- Supplemental funding to **City CIP projects**, specifically street reconstruction projects, to provide enhanced streetscapes.
- Via the **Great Streets Development Program (GSDP)**, for projects implementing enhanced streetscapes voluntarily. Cost sharing between City and Developer, elements built and maintained by the project.
- Great Streets as a gatekeeper requirement for projects participating in the **Downtown Density Bonus Program (DDBP)**. Elements built and maintained at project's expense.



Funding

- Initially, Great Streets projects were implemented through the **1998 bond funding** and the **Smart Growth Matrix process**, which offered fee waivers for development projects that incorporated desired improvements.
- In 2003, City Council established the **Great Streets Parking Meter Fund** which sets aside 30% of the revenues collected from downtown parking meters within the program's boundaries. The fund generates approximately \$728,000/year and is the primary source of on-going funds for Great Streets.
- There is a proposal for a **fee-in-lieu option** currently in review for projects that cannot implement Great Street elements due to jurisdictional control.

Austin's Urban Design Guidelines (UDG's)

- Developed by the members of the City of Austin Design Commission
- Established 1999, Updated 2008
- “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.”
- **Great Streets are one implementation mechanism for that vision**
- **Also undergoing a current update process**



Area-wide Urban Guidelines



Guidelines for Public Streetscapes



Guidelines for Plazas & Open Space



Guidelines for Buildings



The background is a dark blue-grey color with various abstract geometric patterns. In the top left, there's a triangular grid. In the top right, there are stylized, overlapping shapes that look like leaves or petals. In the bottom left, there are more geometric shapes, including circles and triangles. In the bottom right, there are more stylized leaf-like shapes. A faint, light grey grid is visible across the middle section of the image.

State of the Program

Program Successes

- Approx. 211 blocks of Great Streets standards have been implemented
- Program has been prioritized by Council, as demonstrated by inclusion as a DDBP gatekeeper requirement
- Funded program & financial assistance available for some projects
- Have been successful in finding creative design solutions when necessary

Makes very **clear**
the space for
people and space
for vehicles.

Guarantees
beautiful
project
frontages.

The standards
help in
negotiations
with developers.

Implementation
has been easy
where ROW is
sufficient.

Creating
consistent,
equitable all-access
streetscapes.

Pulls back R.O.W.
for the
pedestrians, critical
for our growing
downtown.

COLORADO STREET

Before



After



Program Challenges

- Competition for ROW space
- Vehicular Access & Movement
- Utility Conflicts
- Financial Impact on Projects
- Standards & Materials need Modernization
- Procedural Lack of Consistency
- Lack of Data and Metrics

Very clean, almost **"Domain-like"**, downtown businesses want to be "weird".

The fees paid into the Great Streets program are **not being utilized**.

The prescriptive design requirements have **cost us opportunities**.

Significantly increases **implementation & maintenance costs**.

Lack of understanding of the intent vs prescribed standards.

Award caps need to be increased to encourage participation.

When conflicts arise, the **pedestrian realm is always what suffers**.



Proposed Update Process



Goals of the Update

Focus on the entirety of the **downtown experience**

Work **flexibility and conflict resolution** into the standards

Holistic conversations around all things ROW related

Create champions internally and externally for the program

Align the program with other major initiatives

Modernization and Clarification of the standards

Ensure continued and consistent **funding and accountability**

Incorporate **performance measures** with physical standards

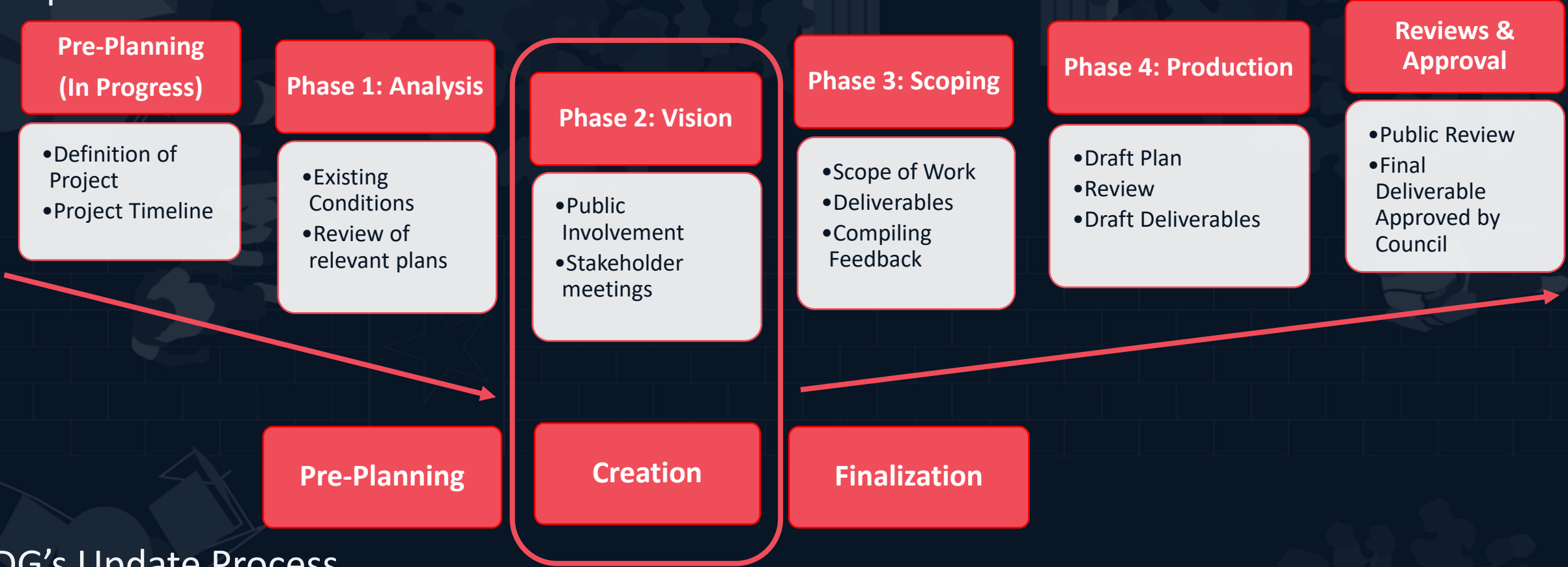
Set up a process for better **data collection and metrics** tracking

Outcomes of the Update Process

- Reinvigorated Public Interest
- Holistic Program Update
- Expanded Boundaries
- Modernized Standards
- Updated Materials
- Partnerships with other Depts
- Increased Program Funding
- Clear Processes & Procedures



GS Update Process



UDG's Update Process (per Design Commission)



Engagement & Outreach

- 1-on-1 personal conversations
- Round table meetings
- Topical focus groups
- Small-group workshops
- Interactive public art and tactical urbanism installations
- Strategic departmental & external supporters

Conclusion

- The program **has been successful, but faces challenges** that can and should be addressed with an update;
- We now **have the staff** to lead this effort;
- With **growing interest from council, commissions, and community members**, we would like to kickoff this process as soon as possible!

