



**URBAN  
DESIGN**  
PLANNING DEPARTMENT

# Great Streets

## Program Update





# Presentation Agenda

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

The background is a dark blue-grey color with various abstract geometric patterns. In the top left, there's a triangular grid pattern. In the center, there's a faint grid pattern. On the right, there's a pattern of vertical lines. The bottom left features a pattern of circles and squares. The overall design is modern and minimalist.

# 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.



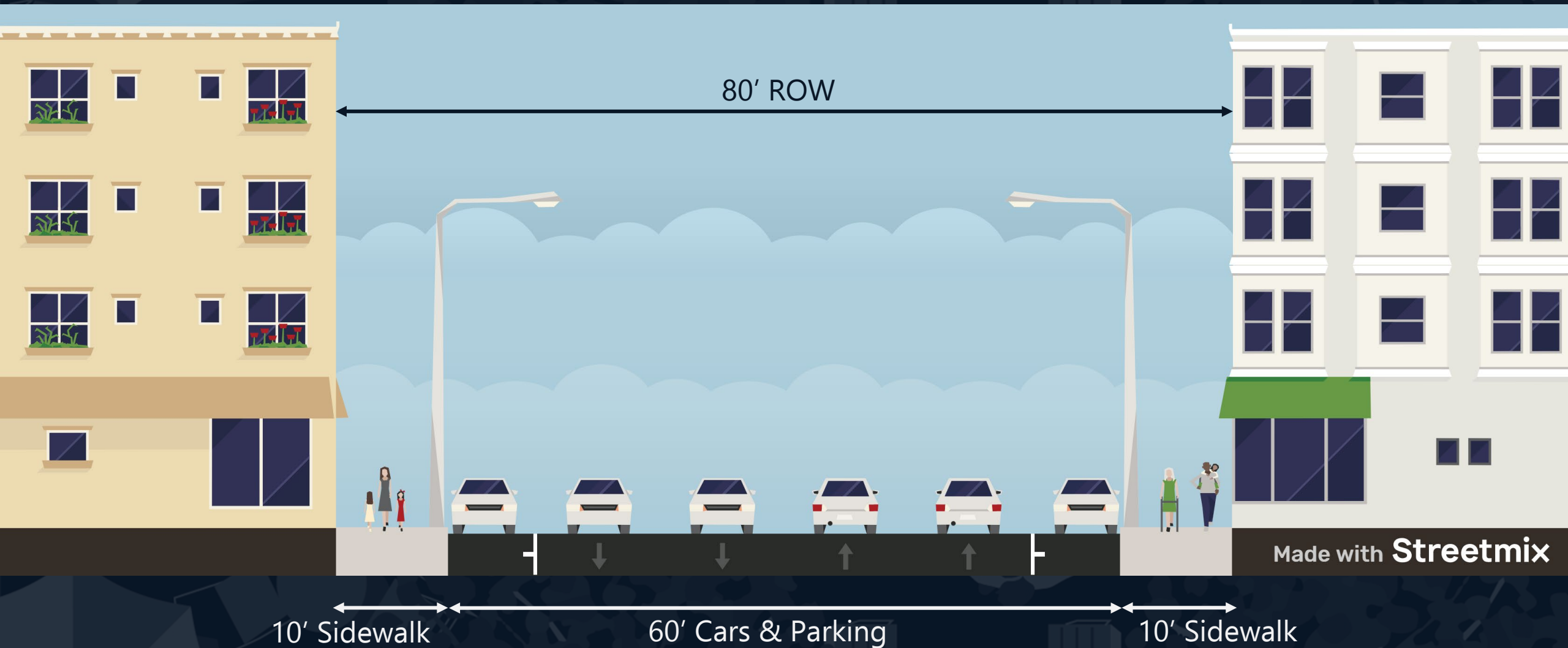
The Great Streets Program aims to enhance the livability, safety, and aesthetics of Austin's downtown streets by creating "streets for people" via **a more equitable balance of space between the roadway and the sidewalk zones and the implementation of enhanced streetscape standards.**

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

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

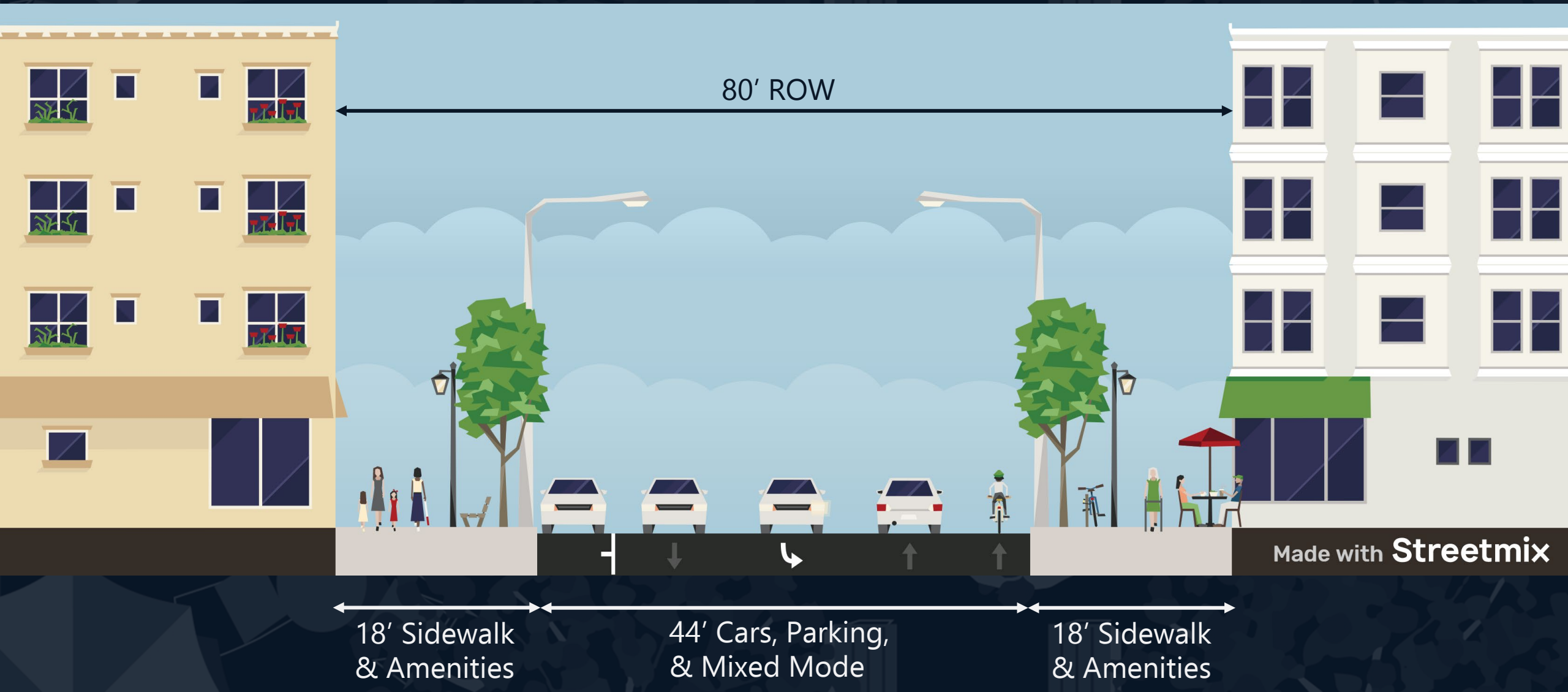


# Traditional Downtown Austin 80' ROW





# Example Great Streets 80' ROW



# Community Benefits of Great Streets



**Economic Development**



**Physical Health**



**Mental Health**



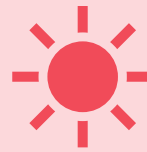
**Air Quality & Emissions**



**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.

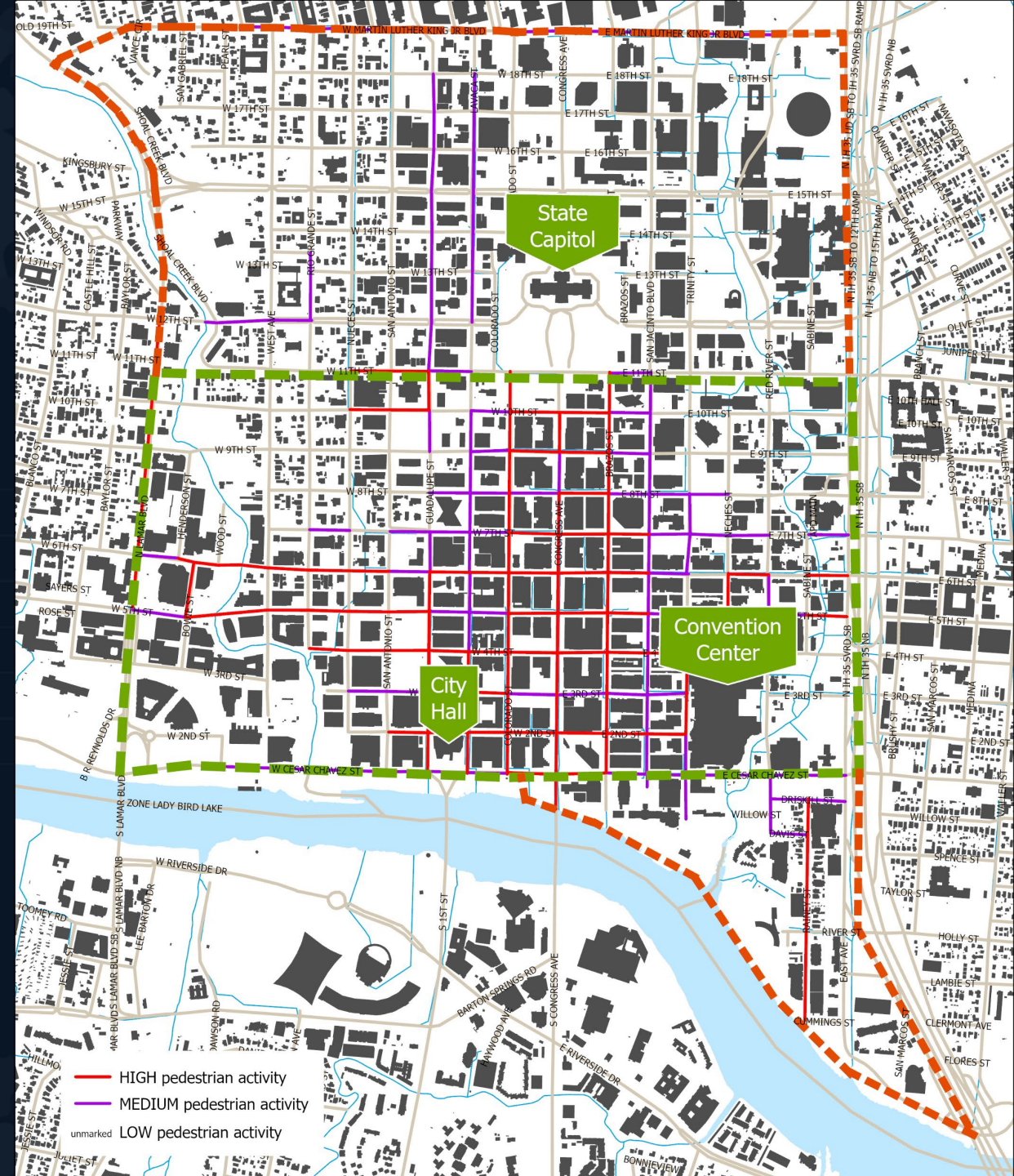
- Austin Great Streets Plan, 2001





# Program Boundaries

- North: 11<sup>th</sup> 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 **fee-in-lieu option** 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



# Great Streets & UDG's Overlap

- Add art in both public & private development
- Protect pedestrian where building meets street
- Create a potential for two-way streets
- Reinforce pedestrian activity
- Enhance key transit stops
- Enhance the streetscape
- Avoid pedestrians & utility equipment conflicts
- Install street trees
- Provide pedestrian-scaled lighting
- Provide protection from cars
- Promote curbside parking
- Screen mechanical and utility equipment
- Add pedestrian-friendly materials at street level









The background is a dark blue-grey color with a complex, abstract pattern. It features a grid of small squares, some of which are filled with lighter shades. Overlaid on this grid are various geometric shapes, including circles, triangles, and rectangles, some of which are also filled with lighter shades. The overall effect is a textured, layered look.

# **State of the Program**

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# 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**.

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# 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

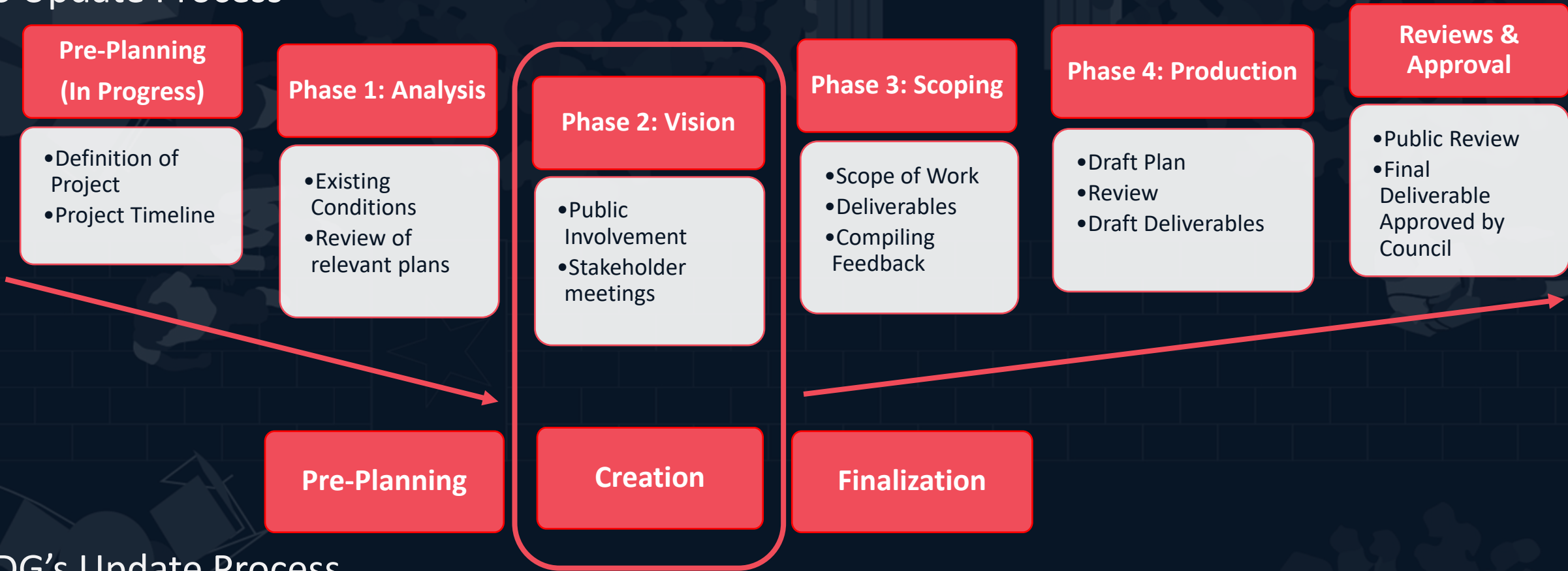


# Outcomes of the Update Process

- 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!

