



# PALM DISTRICT PLAN

## FINAL DRAFT



**HOUSING &  
PLANNING**

11/01/2022

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2019 the Austin City Council directed staff (Resolution No. 20190523-029) to develop a small area plan for the eastern edge of Downtown: The Palm District. Initial work on the plan began in the latter part of 2019 and early 2020 but was halted by the global COVID-19 pandemic. As 2020 wound down, staff resumed work on the project by developing and refining background documents, designing the public engagement strategy and planning process, conducting preliminary stakeholder outreach, and preparing for the formal kickoff of the planning process in May 2021. Beginning in 2019, Housing and Planning Department Staff convened a City of Austin Palm District Planning Team comprised of representatives from multiple City Departments including Convention Center, Parks and Recreation, Watershed Protection, Transportation, Sustainability, Economic Development, Real Estate, and the Corridor Program Office to provide input and review key deliverables throughout the process. HPD staff also met regularly with representatives from the Downtown Austin Alliance and Waterloo Greenway, as well as Travis County staff, and other key community stakeholders serving as partners in support of the planning process.

The Palm District planning process employed a five phase planning process:

- Pre-Planning—The project team researched the Palm District in preparation of developing the plan.
- Visioning—The project team engaged community and developed a draft vision and outline for the plan.
- Active Planning—Staff used the draft vision to identify recommendations and to develop multiple scenarios for the Palm District. As part of their partnership with the City in support of this process, the Downtown Austin Alliance engaged a professional urban design firm, Asakura Robinson, to assist with outreach, focus group facilitation, development of possible future scenarios and a preferred scenario for the draft plan.
- Draft Review—Staff developed the draft plan with guidance from city and key stakeholder partners and released the draft for public review and comments.
- Plan Adoption—During this time staff reviewed the plan with City of Austin Boards and Commissions, and brought forward a recommendation for consideration by the Austin City Council. If adopted, the plan will be an amendment to the [\*Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan\*](#).

The initial Visioning stage of public engagement included:

- Launching of the project’s SpeakUpAustin! website (<https://www.speakupaustin.org/palmdistrict>)
- Online and paper surveys in English and Spanish
- A Palm District interactive map
- Recordings of all the virtual events shared on the SpeakUpAustin! website
- Ongoing, targeted outreach to Austin’s Mexican American community, thought leaders and longtime residents.

Initially planned for Spring 2020 and delayed by the pandemic, the American Institute of Architects, building on the results of the initial community outreach, conducted a virtual design workshop modeled after their Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) program in July 2021. They virtually presented the results with a forceful call to action to realize the Palm District’s potential. To summarize the collective results of all these engagement efforts, Housing and Planning staff created the *Listening Report: What We Heard During the Visioning Phase*. As the documents were finalized,

they were posted to the SpeakUpAustin! website, as were recordings of the virtual events.

Staff next reviewed and analyzed the community input to develop the major themes. Their findings were released in February 2022 in the [Draft Vision Framework](#). The report included the draft vision:

The Palm District is a vibrant historic hub of downtown where the past is honored, culture is celebrated, and the future is shaped.

- Dense transit-oriented development is balanced with history and natural spaces creating physical connections that invite people to move easily to and through the district.
- The district is a dynamic place, growing and evolving, while actively retaining families and individuals who have traditionally called this place home.
- Creativity and innovation are cultivated, and people from Austin and beyond are welcome to live, relax, work, play, learn, and connect with others.

The vision framework included and expanded upon these vision elements:

- Inclusive Growth –Growth in the district will provide a prosperous future for longtime and recent residents and for established and new businesses. This future will provide opportunities to prioritize and celebrate the district’s cultural and historical institutions. Focusing on these important assets will enhance the entertainment, live music, tourism, convention, and innovation market sectors.
- Culture –The district will become a destination that celebrates its multi-cultural heritage by supporting and expanding the Red River Cultural District’s live music and entertainment economy and by preserving and enhancing the Mexican American heritage community assets and stories.
- Connection –Physical, cultural, and social connections will be strengthened within downtown and between East Austin and downtown.
- Nature –The natural environment will be preserved and enhanced by restoring existing natural and open spaces, and pursuing high standards of sustainable design and development with a focus on green infrastructure.

In August 2022, a series of four in-person workshops, hosted by the [Downtown Austin Alliance](#), were held at the Neal Kocurek Memorial Austin Convention Center. The professional consultant team from Asakura Robinson led community stakeholders through several exercises. Based on the exercises’ results and conversations with stakeholders, scenarios based on three different user experiences emerged:

- Live –Significantly increases mixed income housing to support the building of a more vibrant and diverse community.
- Work –Creates new office and mixed use opportunities throughout the district, with the goal of introducing more daytime, evening, and night activity across Palm District.
- Play –Maximizes greenspace in the area, spotlighting the investment in the [Waterloo Greenway](#) and making additional recommendations for programmed open spaces, such as skate parks and recreational play spaces for people of all ages and abilities.

The project team surveyed community on their preferences across the three themes and developed a Preferred Scenario based on the input received.

The Palm District Plan provides a summary of the planning process, and presents a refined vision framework, preferred development scenario, and an implementation plan including detailed recommendations.

# INTRODUCTION

Downtowns are complex places. They are full of history, and often define much of the character of their cities. However, on occasion, there are parts of downtowns where the history is richer, more layered, and more complex. In Austin’s Downtown, that place is the Palm District.

The history of the Palm District tells a story representative of too many parts of Austin, particularly of communities of color east of I-35, as well as other communities of color once located in various parts of our city. Segregation, disinvestment, disrupted communities, gentrification, displacement, and redevelopment are all part of the district’s story. Emblematic of this history is the District’s namesake, the Palm School. Its teachers educated generations of Austin’s Mexican American community members, but the area was cut off and isolated by the construction of I-35, forcing children to cross over the Interstate to attend classes. After the school’s closure, the building housed the Travis County Palm Square Community Center and Health & Human Services offices, which have since relocated. The Palm School site is owned by Travis County, and Travis County has been undertaking a process to explore options for the future of the site.

Since the 1960s, Red River Street has been the soul of Austin’s live music identity, reinventing itself to meet the demands of changing and varied musical tastes. In 2013, the city recognized Red River as a world-renown area with unique historic, economic and cultural heritage and created the [Red River Cultural District](#). It is managed by the Red River Merchants’ Association and exists to preserve live music and cultural tourism. Waller Creek, running north-south through the District, has shaped development of the District over time. Waterloo Greenway, a reimagined Waller Creek and 1.5-mile park system, will provide enjoyment, contemplation, and a respite from Downtown’s pavement, glass, and concrete for future residents and visitors. [Project Connect](#) will transform the area around 4th and Trinity into a regional transportation hub. In the southern part of the District, the Neal Kocurek Memorial Austin Convention Center is in the process of being re-imagined and will be reintegrated into the urban fabric. Further south, on the north shore of Ladybird Lake, the [Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center](#) is expanding to serve the Mexican American and broader Latinx community more fully. At the northern end of the District, the [Innovation District](#) provides space and opportunity for academia, medicine, and business to collaborate in creating advances in healthcare, technology, and life science industries.

Although outside the broader scope of the Palm District Plan, the reconstruction and re-imagining of I-35 will have a great impact on the District and provide a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reconnect East and West Austin physically, socially, and economically after decades of divide.



# EQUITY FRAMEWORK

## Palm District Initiative Equity Goals

Because of Austin's history, and this area's legacy of segregation and displacement, it is essential that the planning process apply a racial equity lens. During the pre-planning and visioning phase, the project team engaged the City of Austin Equity Office, the Community Archivist within the Austin History Center, and key community leaders to understand the history and on-going equity-based issues within the district and developed a draft Equity Framework for the planning process. These goals have guided the project team throughout the planning process and should continue as a lens through the implementation process.

- **Engage the community.** Create a vision grounded in equity.
- **Create a safe, welcoming place.** Work toward creating a multigenerational district that is safe and welcoming to a diverse array of residents and visitors including tourists, children, seniors, communities of color, and individuals vulnerable to displacement.
- **Preserve and interpret history.** Bring community, preservationists, and historians into the planning process, and identify ways to preserve physical historic resources and to remember and find ways to tell the story of the district's rich history, including its Mexican American history.
- **Enhance educational and cultural assets.** Engage public, private, and non-profit organizations who are currently delivering educational and cultural programming in the district. Work to preserve and create spaces for music, performance, arts, and education and engage local musicians and artists.
- **Provide economic benefits.** Work to support a development pattern that yields positive economic outcomes to the city as a whole, and that promotes a thriving local community. Work to provide economic opportunity for historically marginalized communities and small businesses. Ensure that economic growth generates community economic benefits to communities of color. Ask the question "who benefits?"
- **Increase access to housing.** Support implementation of housing production and preservation strategies that increase the number of housing units available to individuals at a variety of income levels, including those earning below 60% Median Family Income. Engage organizations that provide subsidized affordable housing and services to the homeless community and work to identify partnerships that can provide housing and needed wrap around services for the district's most vulnerable residents. Explore strategies that can prevent housing displacement in the future and help mitigate the impacts of past displacement.
- **Improve mobility and access.** Coordinate land use with transportation. In particular, work to coordinate future development of the district with transformational investments in IH 35 that could serve to reconnect East Austin with the district, and with development of a high capacity transit system under Project Connect. Support transportation investments that improve the ability of

residents and visitors to travel safely to and within the Palm District using a variety of travel modes. Consider the diverse mobility-related needs of the various individuals accessing the district.

- **Improve access to nature, enhance natural systems, and support an equitable, sustainable, resilient future.** Acknowledge and center the needs of frontline communities, such as those of East Austin, who have been historically burdened with harmful and toxic land use projects implemented through City policy and action. Push for equitable outcomes by empowering frontline communities to shape decisions that will create a district that provides benefits and opportunities for healthy living, employment, and affordable housing, while reducing harmful effects to the natural environment. Champion programs and projects that lead to climate resiliency and adaptation. The changing climate and its impacts will need to be managed through strategies such as the use of green infrastructure while actively working towards reducing urban heat island effects and lowering the production of greenhouse gasses. Support investments in environmental preservation, restoration, open space development, and sustainability in the district. Work to coordinate and support implementation of a network of open spaces and trails in the district that are welcoming to all people including Waterloo Greenway and Lady Bird Lake. Implement improvements to Brush Square and other parks, natural spaces, and urban natural systems throughout the District. Identify methods to help connect district residents and visitors to nature.



# HISTORY

How we view the past depends on whose stories are being told. Being the oldest part of our city, the square mile of Austin’s Downtown is rich in history; however, too often the history that is told does not include everybody’s story.

## Land acknowledgment

In most established American cities, downtowns represent the oldest and most complex parts of their communities. They are the places where the European immigrants and their descendants first settled. In Austin, as in many other cities, these settlers were not the first people to live there. Before Austin was established in 1839 on the north bank of the Colorado River, native tribes such as the Tonkawas, Comanches, and Lipan Apaches camped and hunted along the area’s waterways.<sup>1</sup> However, as Austin grew, these native peoples were eventually displaced, often violently.

## Original Inhabitants of Central Texas

The first known peoples to live on these lands were the Tonkawa and later the Kiowa, Lipan Apache and Comanche. The Tonkawa belong to the Tonkawan linguistic family, which was made up of smaller tribes that lived in the region that extended west from central Texas and western Oklahoma to eastern New Mexico. The Tonkawa were well known as hunters of buffalo and deer. From about 1800 the Tonkawa were allied with the Lipan Apache. By 1837 the tribe had drifted to the southwestern frontier of Texas and were identified to be in Mexican territory. In 1845 Texas joins the United States and is granted all public lands. The policy of the federal government was to forcefully remove and relocate indigenous communities. This removal and relocation to reservations freed up land for settlers and “protected” smaller tribes from raids by the Comanche. In 1854 the Texas government created the Brazos Reservation near the mouth of Clear Fork along present-day Haskell and Throckmorton Counties sending the Tonkawa, Shawnee, Delaware, Wichita, and Caddoe nations to live there. In 1859 the U.S. government moved the Tonkawa people and other tribes from the Brazos Reservation to the Wichita Reservation near Fort Cobb, Oklahoma.<sup>2</sup>



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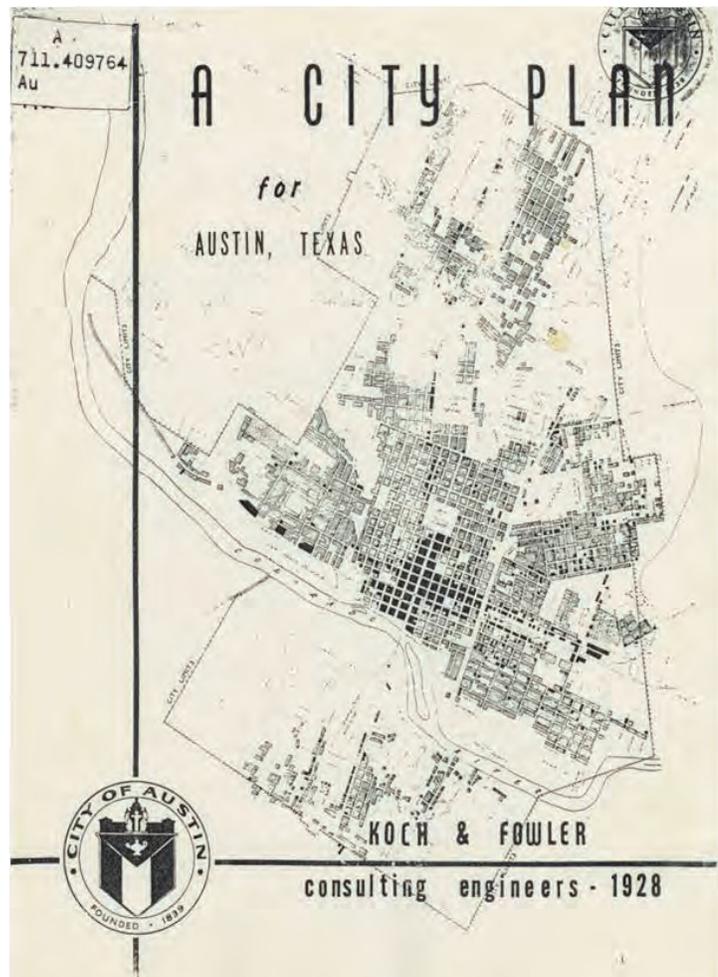
<sup>1</sup> Kearl, Biruta Clemins. “Brief History of Austin” <https://library.austintexas.gov/ahc/brief-history-austin#:~:text=In%20the%201830s%20the%20first,was%20named%20after%20Stephen%20F.> (Accessed 9/13/22)

<sup>2</sup> Tonkawa: The Tonkawa Tribe Official Website <http://www.tonkawatribe.com/history.html>; Cotera, Martha P. *Outline of Mexican American History in Austin*, 1996.

## Early City of Austin Planning

In 1839 the Waller Plan for Austin created a downtown grid, capitol square, and four other public squares. The 1928 City Plan for Austin, Texas advocated for zoning and land-use restrictions, municipal projects, roadway improvements, new schools, and new parks. The plan was to maximize the city's natural assets to make it an "ideal residential city" and "a cultural and educational center." Parks and boulevards were essential as were would-be improvements to the waterways within the City, including Shoal Creek and Waller Creek, which at the time were prone to flooding and were areas of the city where many Black and Mexican Americans had settled.

One of the 1928 Plan's most tragic impacts was the creation of the "Negro District," which "institutionalized racial geography" in the City, forcing African American residents and institutions to move east of what is now I-35. The Plan forced African American and Mexican residents who wanted access to city services to move east of what is today I-35. The implementation of the 1928 Plan's recommendations meant that schools and parks were segregated by race, "and that all the facilities and conveniences [were] provided the negroes in this district as an incentive to draw the negro population to this area." Rosewood Park was designated for African Americans, while in 1931 Parque Zaragoza was designated for Mexican Americans. The undue burden placed on East Austin residents by segregationist policies and the inadequate delivery of services was compounded by the 1931 zoning map. In implementing this map, City leaders zoned large swaths of East Austin "urban-industrial" which allowed intensive commercial and industrial uses to locate in residential areas. Over the decades, generations of East Austinites endured the environmental injustices caused by this legislative act, while west—and primarily white—Austin residents could live their lives with reasonable assurances that they would not have to suffer the same burdens.<sup>1</sup>



1 Sources: Contreras, Kalen. *East Austin Historic Survey*; Busch, Andrew M. *City in a Garden*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2017 (p. 76; p. 78)

### Freedman Settlements

After the Civil War approximately 13 to 15 freedman settlements took root in Austin. Several were located in the area surrounding Waller Creek and East Avenue (now I-35). These communities included Pleasant Hill, established in 1865 in the highlands above Waller Creek between 7th and 11th streets, and Masontown, established in 1867 and stretching east beyond East Avenue from 3rd to 6th Streets.

In her book *And Grace Will Lead Me Home: African American Freedmen Communities of Austin, Texas, 1865-1928*, archivist Michelle Mears writes that the communities consisted of small, substandard housing on unpaved streets. Freedman communities lacked access to transportation, streetlights, electricity, indoor plumbing and garbage pickup. And since communities were often situated along creeks that tended to flood, the living conditions were also dangerous. Freedman communities were anchored by self-help organizations, schools, and especially churches. Many of the congregations that were established in these communities still exist today. It is also worth noting that whites and Mexican Americans lived in these communities, and that African-Americans lived all over the city.



Portrait of Mary and Thomas Kincheon. The couple operated a farm that supplied milk and butter to Tillotson College. Kincheonville remained a freedman farming community until 1928 when the City of Austin forced and uprooted Black communities to the "Negro District."

## East Avenue and Interstate Highway 35

Early in the planning and development of the city, East Avenue served as the easternmost boundary of town. After the Civil War, aforementioned freedman communities were established in Austin, several of which were located in the area surrounding East Avenue and Waller Creek. These communities included Pleasant Hill, established in 1865 in the highlands above Waller Creek between 7th and 11th streets. Masontown, established in 1867 went beyond East Avenue from 3rd to 6th streets. Red River Street was also where many African Americans resided and opened businesses. As described previously, most neighborhoods where Black and Mexican residents lived were denied infrastructure and municipal services. Roads were unpaved, there was no transportation, streetlights, electricity, indoor plumbing, nor garbage pickup. Many of these communities were established near the city creeks which were prone to deadly flooding. By many accounts the area was not only home to African Americans and Mexican families, but was also home to German, Greek, Jewish, Lebanese and Chinese immigrants. Many neighbors established stores and restaurants along East Avenue as well as on Red River and Sixth Streets. For a time, East Avenue hosted large festivals and entertainment events. In the early 1920's Austin's Mexican community began celebrating Fiestas Patrias annually, in honor of Mexican Independence Day, the 16th of September. These celebrations took place on East Avenue between 7th and 8th Streets in 1920 and between 3rd and 4th Streets in 1921. In 1922 the Central Texas Fair Association held a show employing over 600 persons working concession stands and attractions on East Avenue between 6th and 11th Streets.



The Mexican community near East Avenue continued to grow as institutions such as Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church moved from Republic Square to East Austin. According to an article by the Austin American Statesman when East Avenue was paved in 1933 it was “among Austin’s most attractive thoroughfares.” Photographs from that era show wide park-like center medians with grass anchored by tall shade trees. Both sides of the avenue appear to have a mix of single-family homes, apartment complexes, and businesses fronting the street. The City Market House, located on East Avenue and East 7th Street, was completed in 1935 and partially funded by a Public Works Administration grant. The City Market held food giveaways and hosted giant stock shows. Well known institutions and businesses in the area included Matamoros Restaurant “El Mat” on East Avenue and 6th Street, Red and White Grocery facing the City Market on 7th Street and Samuel Huston College on the avenue between 11th and 12th streets.



In the 1950s, the Parkway became a controlled-access expressway with underpasses at major intersections. The Interregional Highway project running through Austin was billed as the most modern and the “biggest and fanciest” highway of the era. The highway would be “dipping under and gliding over major cross streets and roads” cutting through farmland to connect to the Dallas Highway to the north and the San Antonio Highway to the south. The project was approved by Federal, State, County, and City authorities. State Highway Department and Federal aid funds were granted for construction while City and county funds were used to acquire right of way. Started just after WWII,

the project included the construction of the six-lane bridge crossing the Colorado River which at the time cost \$780,000. The final section built was stretched from 17th Street south to East 2nd street.

In 1956, traffic engineers including then district highway department engineer Ed Bluestein made the assertion that “four lanes are not enough” and anticipating that traffic counts for this stretch of the highway would reach upwards of 60,000 vehicles per day by 1975, made plan changes for this stretch to add 2 lanes each way, increasing the right of way needed from 200 feet to an additional 135 feet.



In 1957 plans for the lane expansion were approved and right-of-way acquisitions began with 150 feet approved to be acquired off the east side of East Avenue. The additional right of way acquisition for this stretch was paid for by federal (90%) and state (10%) program dollars. Frontage roads proposed for this new stretch downtown were to be three lanes on each side as opposed to the customary two lanes found in other sections of the highway. In 1962, as part of the Interstate Highway System, the expressway was widened towards the east and added the sloped retaining walls and concrete overpasses over Interstate Highway 35. The upper decks along a stretch of downtown were opened in 1975.

This physical barrier of Interstate 35 reinforced existing and continuing economic barriers and racial divisions between the communities of East Austin and those Downtown.

## Palm School

In 1839, Edwin Waller set the site aside for the construction of an armory that could protect the new capital of the Republic of Texas. In 1845, Texas joined the United States, and the armory became a federal installation. It remained an armory until 1888 when it was no longer needed by the United States government and was gifted to the City of Austin as land for a new public school. The Tenth Ward School was constructed and completed in 1892. The school's name was changed in 1902 to honor Sir Swante Palm, Sweden's former consul to the State of Texas, a University of Texas benefactor, and an Austin resident who served as alderman, justice of the peace, and postmaster for the city. The Jim Crow laws that legalized segregation did not specifically mention Mexican American segregation, but local interpretation of these laws allowed such separation of educational facilities.

The Palm School was one of the first public schools in Austin and served as the primary elementary school for Austin's Mexican American community until the 1970s. In the 1940s and 1950s, Mexican American and White children played in Palm Park, but only White children were allowed to swim in the park's pool. Mexican American children instead used nearby Waller Creek to cool off during the hot season. In 1949, the Palm School was enlarged due to growing enrollment.

George I. Sanchez Elementary School opened in 1976 in East Austin. New facilities at Sanchez Elementary drew children away from the aging Palm School. That same year, the Palm School closed after two decades of disrepair. In the 1980s, AISD sold the school, and its new owners converted it to offices.





PAUL SCHOOL

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EXCEPT FOR  
EMERGENCY  
VEHICLES

## Waller Creek/Waterloo Greenway

Austin owes its natural beauty in part to the rivers and creeks. But this same beauty can be hazardous under certain conditions. As the City of Austin began to grow, the creeks framing downtown, Shoal Creek to the west and Waller Creek to the east, funneled rainwater, waste, and debris southward toward the Colorado River. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, small industries such as brick manufacturing, mattress assembly, bottling facilities, lumberyards, and horse and mule lots were found near Waller Creek. These small industries employed Black and other non-white workers. "In 1880 the largest concentration of African American homes was centered from Red River Street and Waller Creek past East Avenue between Sixth and Twelfth Streets." This settlement was near those same industries that would hire them. The population of this area, known as the "East End," was varied. There were first and second generation Swedish, German, Italian and Syrian immigrants. Housing conditions in the area, as in other areas primarily inhabited by non-white residents, were substandard, overcrowded, and lacked access to municipal infrastructure.

While African Americans owned their homes at a rate comparable to whites, no African American houses in Clarksville or East Austin had plumbing or access to sewer systems. The area of the East End around East Sixth Street, especially at its intersection with East Avenue, was also the social and cultural heart for that African American community. Black-owned grocery stores, dry goods and clothing stores served the community as well as the other groups living in the area. Doctors, dentists, and lawyers, teachers, pastors, and funeral home directors offered professional services to the Black community.

The Ebenezer Baptist Church, organized in 1875, was constructed on 10th Street and San Marcos, near the commercial areas of East End. By 1929 most of the African American churches in Austin were located east of East Avenue. According to Andrew M. Busch's book *City in a Garden*, by the 1910s Black and Mexican residents were more likely to live near Waller and Shoal Creeks. At the time, land on the creeks was cheap due to the potential for flooding and the lack of municipal services. Creeks then provided a natural sewage system carrying away garbage and sewage to the Colorado.

In 1915, a flash flood killed 12 people along Waller Creek and 50 more across Austin. In 1928, the re-channelization of Waller Creek began. Palm Park was developed on its shore. During the 1920s, the area continued to thrive, with more immigrant communities working and living along Waller Creek.

In 1954 Austin began exploring urban renewal projects. The urban renewal project in the area that would eventually be home to Brackenridge Hospital displaced a largely Black community living along Waller Creek. In 1970, six blocks of houses were condemned, and their residents displaced to make room for Waterloo Park and other urban renewal projects.



C03659, Austin History Center, Austin Public Library



### **Emma S. Barrientos - Mexican American Cultural Center**

The desire for a Mexican American community cultural center goes back to the Chicano Movimiento of late 1960s. The Austin League of United Chicano Artists met with city officials about holding a solidarity march in support of striking workers of the Economy Furniture Company. In 1971, Cesar Chavez, the nonviolent organizer and leader of the United Farm Workers Union, visited Austin to show support for these striking workers. As Austin artists and activists found united causes, they also found cause for conversations regarding establishing a cultural center for the Austin Mexican American community. In 1974, El Centro Chicano opened. The following year Juárez-Lincoln University, which the community embraced as a learning, community, and cultural institution, opened on 715 E. First Street, with Rainey Street between it and the river.

Chicano activists and the Brown Berets protested the annual drag boat races at Festival Beach in 1978. Festival Beach was and continues to be the neighborhood park and primary public space near the river for Austin's Mexican American community. During the annual boat drag races, the city would fence off the park and charge for admission to see the races. The races also brought in crowds from other parts of the city who might not normally visit East Austin. Austin police swiftly arrested many of the protestors, and in doing so were called out for excessive use of force. The boat race issue led to the races being relocated the following year. Paul Hernandez, a founder of the Austin Brown Berets and longtime community activist from East Austin, commented on the races and protests: "It was really a land development issue. It was an issue of community rights and an issue of how the poor and the people of color and elderly people are treated vs. pleasure, luxury, and profit."

Community-run cultural institutions such as the Juárez-Lincoln Center and El Centro Chicano filled the need for a Mexican American cultural space for much of the 1970s. El Centro Chicano was burned down by an act of arson in 1978. Juárez-Lincoln University was firebombed in 1980 and in 1983 the Juárez-Lincoln building was demolished against the appeals for its rescue by community members. Community members asked the City of Austin to establish a cultural facility honoring the Latino community and the historic Rainey Street neighborhood. In 1986 Austin City Council appointed the first Mexican American Cultural Center Task Force, which ultimately recommended establishing a Mexican American cultural center.



## Red River Street and Cultural District

In the mid-1800's the neighborhood around 10th Street and Red River was nicknamed Germantown after a group of European immigrants who settled in the area. As mentioned in the short writeup about East Avenue, during the early years of the Reconstruction, Black freedman communities were established in the city, and Pleasant Hill and Masontown were two closest to Red River. The area began as a mostly residential and diverse community. Up until the 1940's Mexican American families lived along Red River, often renting dwelling units behind the businesses that fronted the street.

The 1920s saw several auto repair garages on the street, including Raven's Garage, which operated at 603 Red River from 1922-1977. In 1924, Austin Bottling Works moved into a newly constructed shop, as their business was growing. Austin Bottling Works for years produced soda and mineral water, including Dr. Pepper, Coca Cola, and ginger ale. By the time the Red River plant was opened, soda production was increasingly popular, and the company went in big on Ward's Orange Crush.

Since the early 20s, Red River had furniture stores. It is said that Simon Sidle, a son of freed slaves, helped establish Red River as "antique row" when he opened his first shop in 1917 at 807 Red River. For most of the '50s, '60s and '70s, the strip was dominated by used furniture stores and junk shops with names like Williams Do-Rite Swap Shop, Fairyland Antiques, Dutch Meyer's Trading Post, Red River Rats, Hurt's Hunting Grounds and J.B. Branton.

In 1930's Jose Carlin, a Mexican immigrant, opened the popular El Charro restaurant at 912 Red River Street. El Charro would be a mainstay at this Red River location for almost 40 years. In 1973, in the same building that once housed El Charro, a member only night spot took over. The Quorum Club was only accessible to members who had a key. University of Texas Regent Frank Erwin and pals were known to be members.

From a diverse immigrant and Black neighborhood, to working class shops, the most recent iteration of Red River is one of entertainment and community built around music and common understanding. Red River gave birth to psychedelic rock in 1966, when the 13th Floor Elevators debuted their first single "You're Gonna Miss Me" at the New Orleans Club. Janis Joplin sang just steps away at the 11th Door that same year. Those nascent Austin clubs were where Symphony Square is today.

While there were a few taverns throughout the neighborhood's history, the 1980's and 1990's saw a boom of bars and nightclubs on the strip. It was the location of country-



western clubs, gay bars, hip hop clubs, and rock bars.

Chances Club, also opened in the 1980's. Owned and operated by Sandra Martinez, Chances was a legendary lesbian live music bar. The Austin Chronicle described the bar as having created "one of the friendliest, wildest hybrids of underground music and gay culture." The bar at 900 Red River closed in 1994. In 2014, Cheer Up Charlies moved into that very same space, bringing back the ethos of inclusivity and a feeling of an open community.

In the 1990s, Red River began to be known as Austin's live music district, with Emo's and Stubb's leading the way for the Mohawk, Beerland, Club DeVille, Room 710 and others; however, this strip was where the earliest Austin hippies went before the Vulcan Gas Company and the Armadillo World Headquarters opened.

In the early 1970s, wrecking balls wiped away all Red River businesses and residences from 10th St. to 19th St. (MLK today) as part of the Brackenridge Urban Renewal Project. Many of the displaced businesses were owned by Black Austinites, causing many to term the project "urban removal."



## Rainey Street Historic District

Rainey Street was originally a floodplain area when the city was first platted in the early 1800's. That designation ensured that the land values were low and that those who settled in the area were setting up homesteads or were squatting. Most houses that existed within the district before Rainey Street's current iteration were built between 1885 and 1937. Rainey Street was an extension of the Mexican and immigrant communities that clustered east of the capitol and around East Avenue. A major flood in 1935 damaged or destroyed several homes in the neighborhood.

The construction of Interstate Highway 35 in the 1950's and 1960's isolated Rainey Street from the larger Mexican Community just east of the highway. This physical bifurcation left the Rainey Street area susceptible to the encroachment of downtown-style development and land speculation.



In the late 1960s, at the northern end of the Rainey street neighborhood, Juárez-Lincoln University was established in the former East Avenue Baptist Church building at 715 East First Street. The University sprang from what was the Texas Chicano University, founded by the Mexican American Youth Organization. In November of 1980, the Rainey Area Neighborhood Association created and submitted to City Council the "Rainey Barrio Preservation Plan." The plan called for anti-displacement measures to be taken. It called out the shortage of housing for low and moderate income families, issues that have continued to disproportionately impact communities of color in Austin.

The plan also called for the Rainey Neighborhood, a "predominantly Mexican American barrio" to be designated to historical residential use. The plan called for stemming "the tide of higher intensity development that has been increasingly shifting the neighborhood toward an approximation of the Central Business District." The barrio plan stated that what absentee landowners were interested in was land speculation and investment, which is not what was important to the homeowners and community who lived there. The Austin City Council voted down residents' proposals for rent and speculation controls and the creation of a historic preservation district for Rainey Street. The neighborhood continued their efforts in the hopes of staving off encroaching development.

In 1985, the Rainey Street Historic District was officially recognized in the National Register of Historic Places. See the following Historic Districts section for more information.



# HISTORIC DISTRICTS

The plan area encompasses two National Register Historic Districts: Sixth Street, established in 1975, and Rainey Street, established in 1985. The City of Austin's Historic Preservation Office and Historic Landmark Commission are required to review certain construction projects within these districts. This review is limited to an advisory-only purview since there are no enforceable design standards or added protection for non-landmarked contributing buildings, as there are in locally- designated and zoned historic districts. The historic integrity and overall condition of both districts is at risk; however, 6th Street boasts many individual historic landmarks that receive regulatory protection. The Rainey Street NRHD has lost contributing buildings and most of its of cultural identity to development pressure and changing demographics since its designation.

## **Rainey Street National Historic District**

After being rezoned to Central Business District (CBD) zoning in the early 2000s, the area along Rainey Street south of Cesar Chavez Street transitioned from a single-family residential street to a major entertainment district. In recent years, the eclectic bars and restaurants of the entertainment district were replaced by larger condominium towers and hotels due to a strong market demand. The added commercial and residential activity has significantly diminished mobility in the district, and efforts are underway to improve options and safety for those traveling into the area.

In 1985 the Rainey Street area was nominated for National Register status. The following text, taken from the nomination, describes the district as it existed in the mid-1980s.

“The Rainey Street Historic District, situated west of IH-35, south of East 1st Street, and north of the Colorado River, is a residential ‘pocket’ which is comprised of 34 buildings, 21 of which are contributing to the district and 13 of which are noncontributing. All of the buildings within the district are used for residential purposes; only one structure is multifamily, and this is a two-story brick apartment building located on the southwest edge of the district. The majority of the houses within the district were constructed between 1885 and 1937; 41% of them are occupied by owners and the great preponderance are single-family dwellings. Although there is a considerable variety of architectural styles represented, the overall scale of the buildings is consistent and each structure shares with the others a similar relationship to Rainey Street. Lumber is the most common building material. The major intrusion in the district is the brick apartment house at the intersection of Driskill and River streets; less intrusive but similarly noncontributing buildings include structures which are severely deteriorated or which postdate the 1930s. While the architectural types along Rainey Street range from Victorian cottages to 1930s bungalows, the preponderance of the buildings date from the period 1885 to 1920, and includes many fine examples of T-plan and L-plan cottages and Pyramidal houses.”

A 2012 assessment by the Texas Historical Commission suggested that 23 buildings were eligible as contributing structures. The assessment has not been updated to account for the numerous historic structures lost since then. Since 1985, some buildings have become old enough to qualify for historic designation and the district's ties to Mexican American cultural history have come to the foreground.

### Sixth Street Historic District

The Sixth Street Historic District intersects the Palm District and extends along 6th west to Colorado Street. The presence of historic buildings within the district has led to tension between preservationists and property owners, due to occasional instances where the standards set out for landmarks or the historic district guidelines are not followed.

The National Register nomination for Sixth Street described the state of the district as it existed in 1975. Description from [National Register nomination](#) (1975):

“Austin’s Sixth Street Historic District represents in 1975 a significant concentration of Victorian commercial architecture dating from the last half of the nineteenth century, [as well as] a few structures from the early twentieth century. As Austin’s principal link to the settlements of East Texas, Sixth Street was a major thoroughfare from the year of the founding of Austin. During the 1870s and 1880s, Sixth Street was at the height of its importance and shared the honors of the major commercial district equally with Congress Avenue. The Sixth Street Historic District reflects that late 19th century character in its cohesive streetscapes of Victorian commercial buildings. Besides the two- and three-story vernacular limestone masonry buildings, the District contains the elaborate Richardsonian Romanesque Driskill Hotel, Austin’s first two skyscrapers, the 1878 Renaissance Revival Post Office and Federal Building and the 1912 Classical Revival Post Office. In addition to its architectural value, the Sixth Street Historic District represents a cross section of Austin’s business population in the late 19th and early 20th century.”



DRAPER  
STARTUP HOUSE

Yakuma Ramen

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# EXISTING CONDITIONS

In spring 2019, after two decades of intensive discussion about the eastern side of downtown, the Austin City Council directed staff to develop a plan for an area of downtown which has been named the Palm District. There are major initiatives underway that will fundamentally transform the district:

- Future expansion of the Convention Center
- Continued development of the Waterloo Greenway, including future improvements to Palm Park
- Future improvements to Brush Square
- Expansion of the Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center
- Development of the *Austin Core Transportation Plan* and related mobility improvements
- Implementation of Capital Metro Project Light Rail Transit lines
- Completed construction of a new downtown station for the Capital Metro Red Line
- Travis County's planning process to determine the future of the Palm School property
- Achieving the vision for Austin's Innovation District (nexus of innovation for healthcare, technology and life sciences industries) in the vicinity of the Dell-Seton Medical School
- Continued private development, enabled in part by construction of the Waller Creek Flood Control Tunnel
- Re-design and future lowering or tunneling of I-35 or IH-35 through Central Austin.

These initiatives will transform the district by bringing in new uses and activity, improving regional and local transportation connectivity, improving open spaces, and enhancing the public realm. *In the face of these changes, without leadership and a clear vision, the district could emerge fragmented and disjointed.* Moreover, without a unified sense of place reflecting important aspects of Austin's history and culture, the results of this change could, over time, erode the district's vibrancy.

Today, the Palm District is a dynamic area of downtown serving as the primary gateway for visitors to Austin, a cultural touchstone for Austin's Mexican American community, and a window into Austin's past. At night the area along Red River transforms into the heart of Austin's world-famous live music scene. To the north, a medical innovation district is emerging around the Dell-Seton Medical Center. To the south, a new high-rise neighborhood is being built and the Rainey Street Entertainment District continues to draw crowds. Along Waller Creek, improvements are underway to create the Waterloo Greenway, a unique chain of parks and trails, that will allow for greater access to the Creek.

At the same time, moving and traveling through the area can be challenging, and destinations can feel disconnected. I-35 looms as a physical barrier between downtown and the walkable neighborhoods of East Austin. The area is increasingly a victim of its own success as hotels and high rises replace restaurants, clubs, and music venues that previously generated more active street life. In the early to mid-20th century, this area was the heart of Austin's Mexican American community. Construction of I-35, closure of Palm School, and the Rainey neighborhood's rezoning to Central Business District (CBD) Zoning have transformed this area and removed its connection to East Austin over the last 50 years. As development continues, the area is at risk of continuing to lose the businesses and historic and cultural resources that tie to its past and contribute to its identity.

# STUDY AREA

The Study Area for the Palm District generally extends from 15th Street to Lady Bird Lake and Trinity to IH 35. The Study Area was identified based on direction included in the Council Resolution.



# INITIATIVES & AREAS OF INTEREST

## **Austin Innovation District**

The Innovation District is located on the in the northeastern quadrant of downtown and the northern end of Palm District. It's anchored by UT Austin's Dell Medical School, Dell Seton Medical Center, Central Health's Campus and Innovation Tower and is adjacent to Waterloo Park, the State Capitol Complex and several opportunity sites. The district aims to blend with the medical campus, Waterloo Park and Red River Cultural District.

The vision for the Innovation District is to create an inclusive community where Austinites collaborate to create new models of health and economic growth. It's both a physical place and a framework for collaboration between academia, industry, and technology.

In May 2017, the University Medical Center Brackenridge closed. The site was home to the community's hospital for more than 130 years. It was replaced by Dell Seton Medical Center at the University of Texas, the teaching hospital for the new Dell Medical School Campus built on UT Austin's land north of 15th Street. Capital City Innovation, a nonprofit to foster the development of an innovation district anchored by Dell Med is founded by UT Austin, Seton Ascension, Central Health, the Downtown Austin Alliance and Opportunity Austin. Austin's Innovation District continues to take shape and now has a flagship building, Innovation Tower, that will house healthcare, technology and creative industry partners. Redevelopment of the Innovation District includes realignment of Red River Street to follow its historic grid pattern through the district.

## **Red River Cultural District**

The Red River Cultural District is an entertainment area comprised of bars and clubs that serve as live music venues along and near Red River Street between East 6th and East 12th Streets. The Austin City Council approved a resolution creating the district in 2013, followed by the Texas Commission on the Arts (TCA) designating the area in 2020 as one of the state's few formally recognized cultural districts. As a 501(c)(3) charitable organization, the Red River Cultural District (RRCD) is managed by the Red River Merchants' Association.

Market pressures, in part stemming from the removal of property from the floodplain following completion of the Waller Creek flood control tunnel and music industry slow down due to the Covid-19 pandemic have caused this district to become increasingly fragile, and a number of iconic music venues have recently shuttered.

## **5th Street Mexican American Heritage Corridor**

2011 Austin City Council passed a resolution calling for the development of the 5th Street Mexican American Heritage Corridor. Running from Republic Park on West 5th to Saltillo Plaza on East 5th, the corridor will interconnect and enhance downtown's network of public places, celebrate the distinct history, culture and identity of the corridor, introduce public art, and reinforce an authentic sense of place. Studies show that the areas surrounding 5th Street were sites of the first Mexican and Mexican American communities. These communities were anchored by institutions such as Mexican Park (now Republic Square), Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe Catholic Church (1907), the first Mexican School (1916), and the Parochial School of Our Lady of Guadalupe (1918).

### **Palm School**

Located south of Palm Park, between the Convention Center and I-35, Palm School was one of the first public schools in Austin and served as the primary elementary school for Austin's Mexican American community until the 1970s. The Palm School building is owned by Travis County, and most recently housed Travis County Administrative Offices, including the Palm Square Community Center. Travis County Commissioners have adopted restrictions on future use of the property that would preserve the historic school building itself, and is undertaking a process to explore options for the future of this site. While City staff has been directed to work with the County to explore alternatives, the future of the site is uncertain, and the City does not have any direct control over it. While the City of Austin does not control the site and has not committed to restoration of the site, Austin City Council has indicated a strong desire to restore the Palm School and develop it as a cultural use that would interface with a redesigned Palm Park. There is considerable support for this concept from East Austin residents, who have significant and long-standing ties to the school site.

### **Waterloo Greenway**

In 2010, the Waller Creek District Plan was adopted. The District Master Plan set a vision for the restoration of the ecological functions of the creek, augmentation of public spaces along the natural path, and improving the linkages and connections in the area. In 2011, the construction of the Waller Creek Tunnel began, filling with floodwaters for the first time in 2015. In 2012 Austin voters approved \$13 million in bonds for redevelopment on the creek. In 2018, City Council approved \$110 million in capital funding for parks and trails through the Waller Creek District.

Through a public-private partnership the City of Austin is working with the non-profit Waterloo Greenway Conservancy to plan, design, and build a 1.5-mile-long park and trail system along Waller Creek from 15th Street to its confluence at Lady Bird Lake. The project is moving forward in phases, with an expected completion by 2026. Waterloo Park at the northern edge of the Greenway opened in 2020 and design and construction activities are underway on portions of the Greenway. Once complete, the 35 acres of connected green space – meandering from 15th St. along downtown's eastern edge to Lady Bird Lake – will be home to a wide array of natural and cultural destinations.

### **Convention Center**

Austin Convention Center fronts along East Cesar Chavez Street and encompasses six city blocks bordered by Red River Street on the east, 4th Street on the north and Trinity Street on the west. Waller Creek, an important public amenity with plans for enhancement, runs immediately adjacent to the southeast edge of the Convention Center facility.

Today, the Convention Center sits on a six-block site at the convergence of several dense downtown neighborhoods; however, at the time of its construction in 1992, the 441,000 square foot Neal Kocurek Memorial Austin Convention Center was located on the eastern edge of downtown. In May 2002, its Phase II expansion doubled to 881,400 square feet. With development occurring east of the Convention Center (the Fairmount) and to the south (Rainey Street), Downtown's center of activity has shifted eastward. As the expansion of the Convention Center moves forward, there is interest in increasing its functionality in a manner that positively contributes to the surrounding public realm.

The Austin Convention Center hosts events ranging from local to international conventions. The ongoing success of the Convention Center is a pivotal part of Austin's tourism and hospitality industry. To increase its competitive advantage over other cities, the City of Austin explored a variety of

expansion options.

In 2017, the Austin City Council contracted with the University of Texas at Austin's Center for Sustainable Development to develop and compare scenarios for the Austin Convention Center area. The Center released the Frameworks for Placemaking: Alternative Futures for the Austin Convention District report in early 2019. It identified seven scenarios. The City Council directed that future expansion of the Convention Center be generally consistent with "Scenario 5.2" of the Frameworks report. This Scenario called for westward expansion of the Convention Center across Trinity Street, as well as various improvements to connectivity and public space in the vicinity to create a coherent, well designed neighborhood. The Convention Center has reimagined the redevelopment and expansion within its existing footprint and will be designing a larger facility on a smaller footprint, connecting to the existing streetscape, and providing public and green space within the property lines.

### **Interstate 35 (I-35)**

While I-35 connects trucks, cars, and transit into downtown, the freeway forms a hard barrier between the Palm District and East Austin. Currently, I-35 is partially elevated between 15th Street and Lady Bird Lake. TxDOT's redevelopment of I-35 seeks to lower its main lanes. The City of Austin's Corridor Program Office and Austin Transportation Department are partnering with the Downtown Austin Alliance on Our Future 35 - Austin's Cap and Stitch Program, which is exploring options for I-35 that may include creating new open space on "caps" spanning the newly tunneled lanes. This could further reduce divide created by freeway's original construction.

Currently the City of Austin, in partnership with the Downtown Austin Alliance, is evaluating opportunities to provide new caps and stitches and improve mobility over I-35 as TxDOT moves forward with its I-35 Capital Express Central project to sink and widen the freeway.

### **The Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center**

The center is operated by Austin Parks and Recreation Department and is dedicated to the preservation, creation, presentation, and promotion of the cultural arts of Mexican Americans and Latino culture. In 1992, a Mexican American cultural center was part of the citywide bond package put before the voters. The referendum did not pass. In 1993, Council directed the city manager to explore the possibility of renovating the existing Public Works facilities located at 600 River Street as a home for the center. By 1998, the community had regrouped to place the center on another bond election. With the leadership of Hispanic elected officials and community leaders, the 1999 bond package was approved by the voters. The following year, the City authorized a professional services agreement with CasaBella + Del Campo and Maru, and Mexican Architect, Teodoro González de León, for architectural design and construction phase services. In January of 2000, the design team presented a master plan that galvanized the community behind a vision for the cultural center. The long-awaited groundbreaking ceremony took place in November of 2005. Construction of the Mexican American Cultural Center began in January of 2006, and the facility was completed in June of 2007. The reality of the long-time dream was finalized on September 15, 2007, with a ribbon cutting ceremony attended by thousands. In 2018, an update and new Master Plan for the expansion and upgrades to the cultural center was approved.

### **Transit Connections**

In 2010, the 32-mile Cap Metro Red Line commuter train opened on a single track connecting downtown Austin to the suburban community of Leander. Since then, Capital Metro has partnered

with the City to expand the MetroRail Red Line Downtown Station. In 2020, Austin voters approved an historic tax rate increase in support of the \$7.1 billion Project Connect plan. This comprehensive vision for public transit includes includes:

- a new light rail program
- four new bus rapid transit lines
- a new commuter rail line
- a neighborhood circulator service
- additional park and ride facilities
- enhancements to existing transit services.

Additionally, \$300 million have been set aside for anti-displacement efforts in the city. Once Project Connect is complete, the Palm District will be served by a new light rail line, a new commuter rail line, and multiple new bus rapid transit lines.

## Homeless Services

### **Austin Resource Center for the Homeless (ARCH)**

The ARCH first opened its doors in 2004 at 500 East 7th Street. Originally built to serve 300 adults daily, the need has grown, and the multi-service center now provides day resources to over 600 homeless men and women daily. Emergency overnight shelter space is available to 230 men each night. The ARCH is supported by funding from the City of Austin . Nine additional homeless service providers are co-located at the ARCH, providing various resources to the area's homeless population. 24/7 services include providing shelter, showers, basic needs, comprehensive case management and support services, and permanent supportive housing programs. Due to the facility's site in the urban core, expansion has been difficult. The center has converted a portion of its garage into pre-intake to accommodate growing numbers of people needing these services.

### **The Salvation Army Social Services Center (SSC)**

The Salvation Army Social Services Center located at 501 East 8th Street was built in 1987. The SCC is a low barrier, housing-focused emergency shelter currently providing 242 beds for individual men and women experiencing homelessness. Case management, employment assistance, a computer learning lab, rapid rehousing, and cold weather shelter are provided.

## Rainey Street

In 1999, City Council established the Convention Center Combining District (LDC 25-2-644) which disallowed the creation of new commercial parking in the area. In February 2004, City Council initiated the rezoning of properties in the Rainey Street Area, which is bounded on the west by Waller Creek, the south by Town Lake, the east by IH-35, and north by Cesar Chavez Street. This ordinance also directed the City Manager to develop zoning recommendations and an analysis of the infrastructure within the Rainey Street Area. In April of 2005 City Council approves zoning changes for Rainey Street and the immediate surrounding area. The Rainey Street Area zoning changes ranged from family residence (SF-3) district to multifamily residence medium density (MF-3) district, community commercial (GR) district, commercial liquor sales (CS-1) district, general commercial services (CS) district, and limited office (LO) district to central business district (CBD). The Central Business District zoning is intended for the commercial core area of Austin, permitting a wide variety of office, commercial, residential, and civic activities commensurate with the regional and statewide significance of downtown Austin and the adjacent State Capitol. This opened up the neighborhood for downtown-style commercial redevelopment and laid the groundwork for what Rainey Street is today - a busy nightlife destination with high-rise residential development.

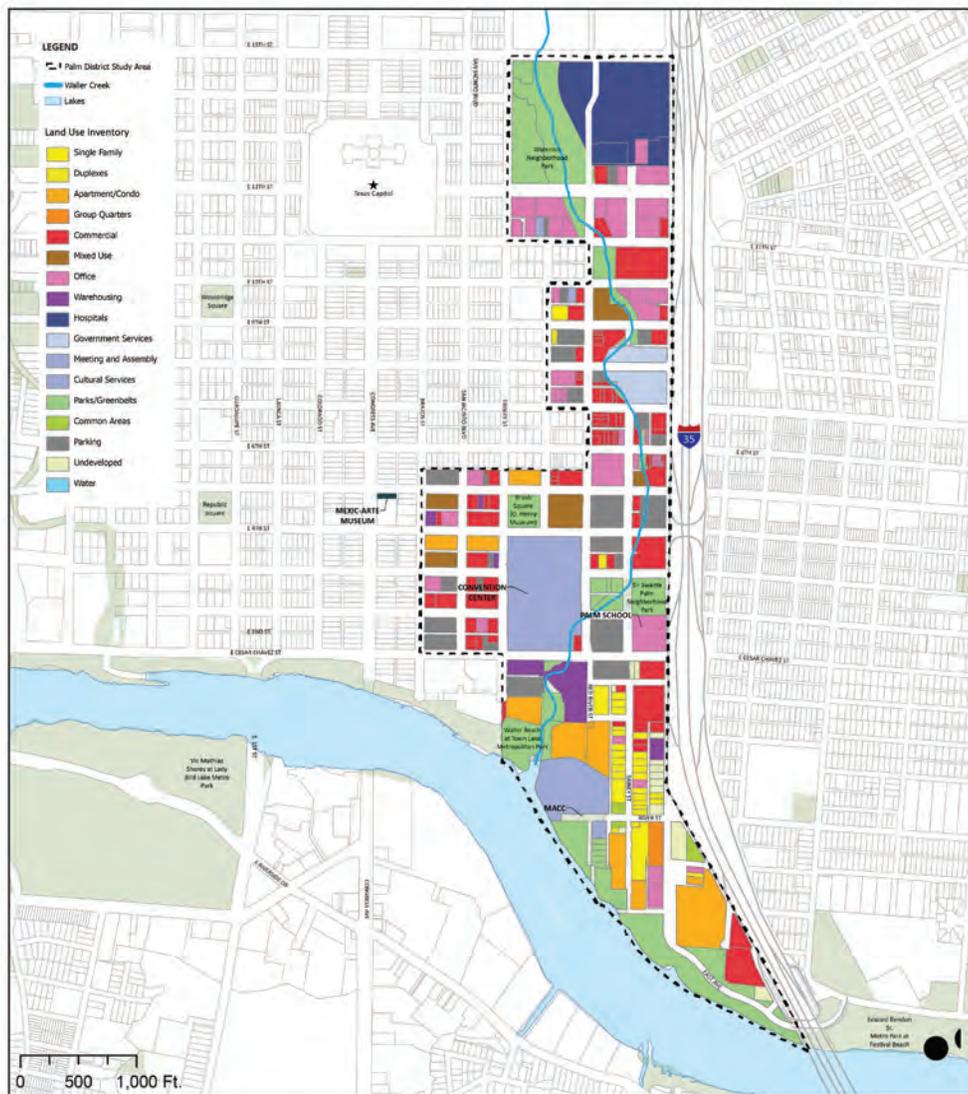
While commercial development already existed in various locations throughout the Rainey neighborhood, in 2009, the first bar owner purchased four houses on a corner of Rainey Street, triggering the change from residential neighborhood to entertainment district. As businesses continued to enter this neighborhood, property taxes rose, and families were forced to move further east. Although zoned for downtown development, the Great Recession thwarted the expected redevelopment for several years. However, as the economy recovered and capital markets reopened, the process of reimagining the neighborhood began in earnest as high-rise developments emerged. This process continues today.

## Sixth Street

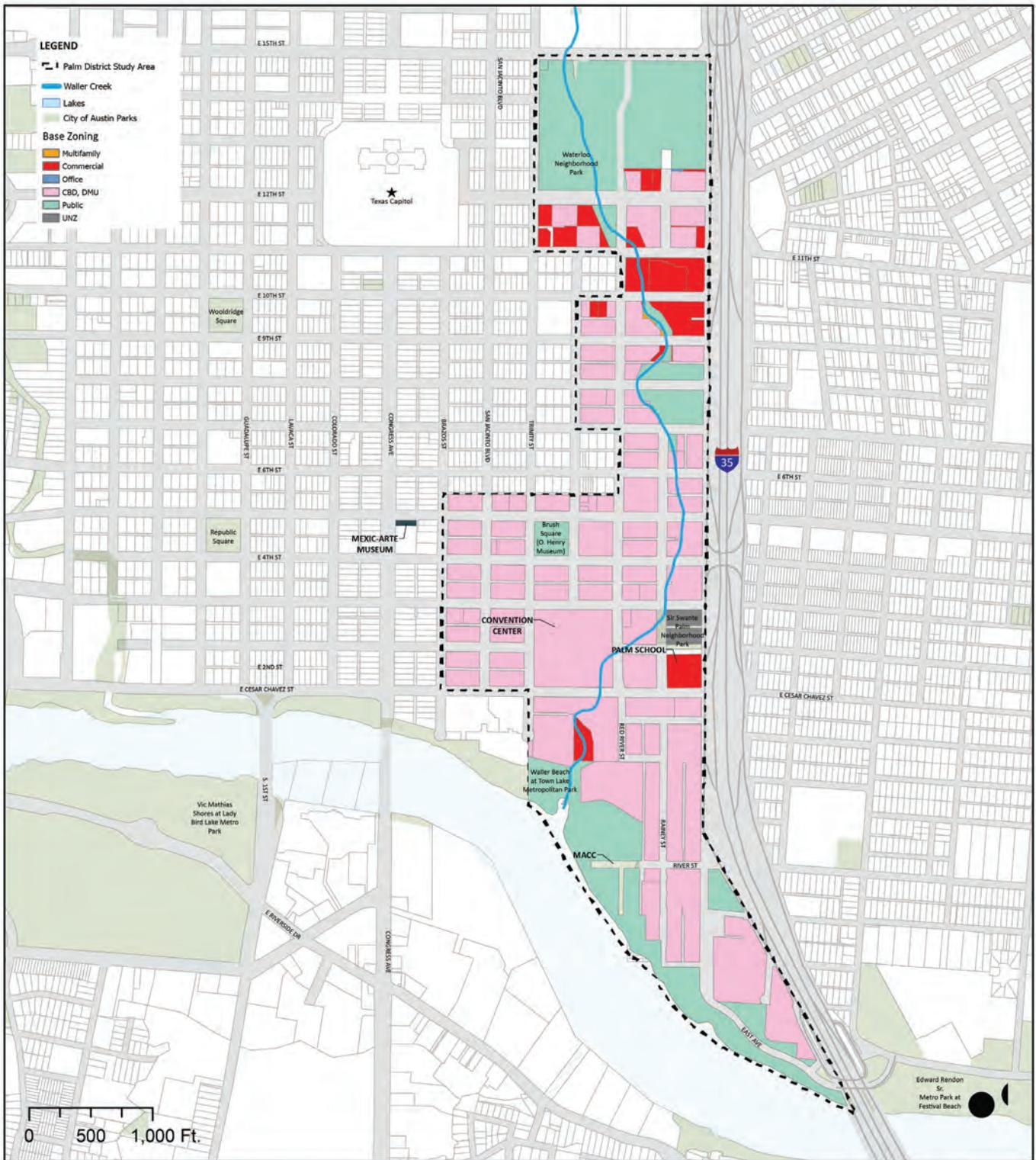
The Sixth Street Historic District intersects the Palm District and extends along 6th Street west to Colorado Street. This thriving commercial and entertainment corridor is rich with historic buildings and an active night life. It complements the Red River Cultural District as a music heritage area.

# EXISTING LAND USES

The Palm District has diverse land uses with the most prevalent being Commercial, Office, and significant high-rise residential component in the Rainey District. Over the past decade, in Downtown Austin there have been development proposals and actual construction that has and continues to transform the skyline of this part of the city. The same permissive zoning is also available within the Palm District. Two sets of regulations have and will continue to affect development in the District are Capital View Corridor which limits building heights and the Downtown Density Bonus which can significantly increase the building height by allowing greater floor-to-area ratios (FAR).



**Palm District - Land Use Map**  
 CITY OF AUSTIN | PLANNING AND ZONING DEPARTMENT  
 Created on 10/12/2022



**Palm District - Base Zoning Map**  
 CITY OF AUSTIN | PLANNING AND ZONING DEPARTMENT  
 Created on 10/12/2022

### **Downtown Density Bonus Program Today**

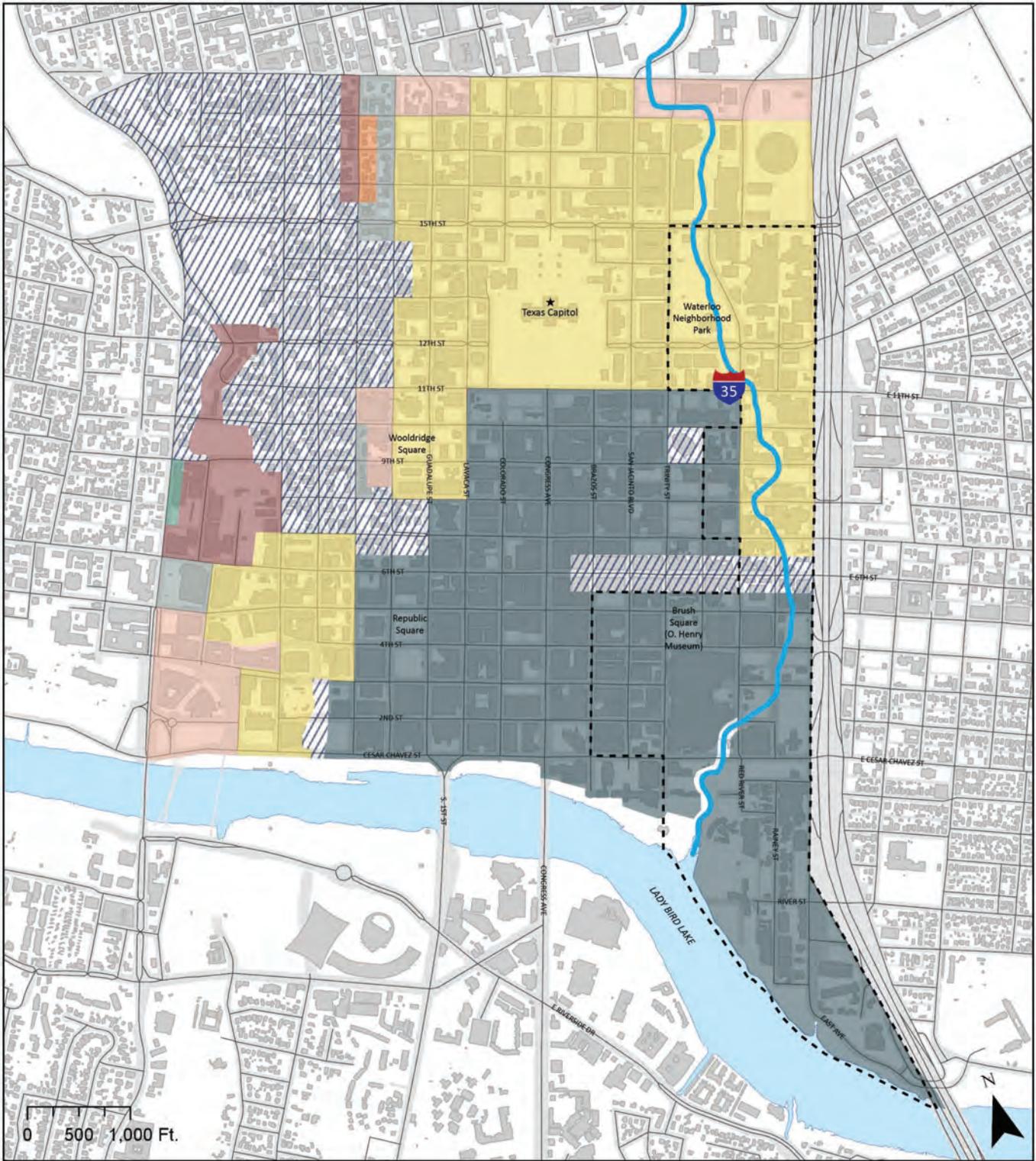
The Downtown Density Bonus Program (DDBP), developed as part of the Downtown Austin Plan, was put in place by the City Council to incentivize development and redevelopment that will provide community benefits in downtown Austin through the modification of development standards on certain downtown properties. The voluntary, bonus-based program is one of the few tools available to local municipalities in Texas since inclusionary zoning is not allowed in the state.

The administrative process found in Land Development Code section 25-2-586 applies to certain eligible properties downtown as identified by the Downtown Districts Map. In order to participate, program requirements need to be met which include:

- Gatekeeper requirements, including Great Streets standards
- Provision of community benefits
- A pathway to achieve greater height and density beyond those in the Districts Map
- Affordable housing requirements for owner and rental-occupied units.

### **Base Entitlements**

Most of the district is covered by Central Business District Zoning which allows a broad array of uses and development types, and is generally the most intense zoning designation in the city. Within this zone, heights are generally unlimited unless the site is impacted by a designated Capitol View Corridor. Development square footage is limited to a floor area ratio of 8 to 1, unless the property owner requests additional floor area through the downtown density bonus program.

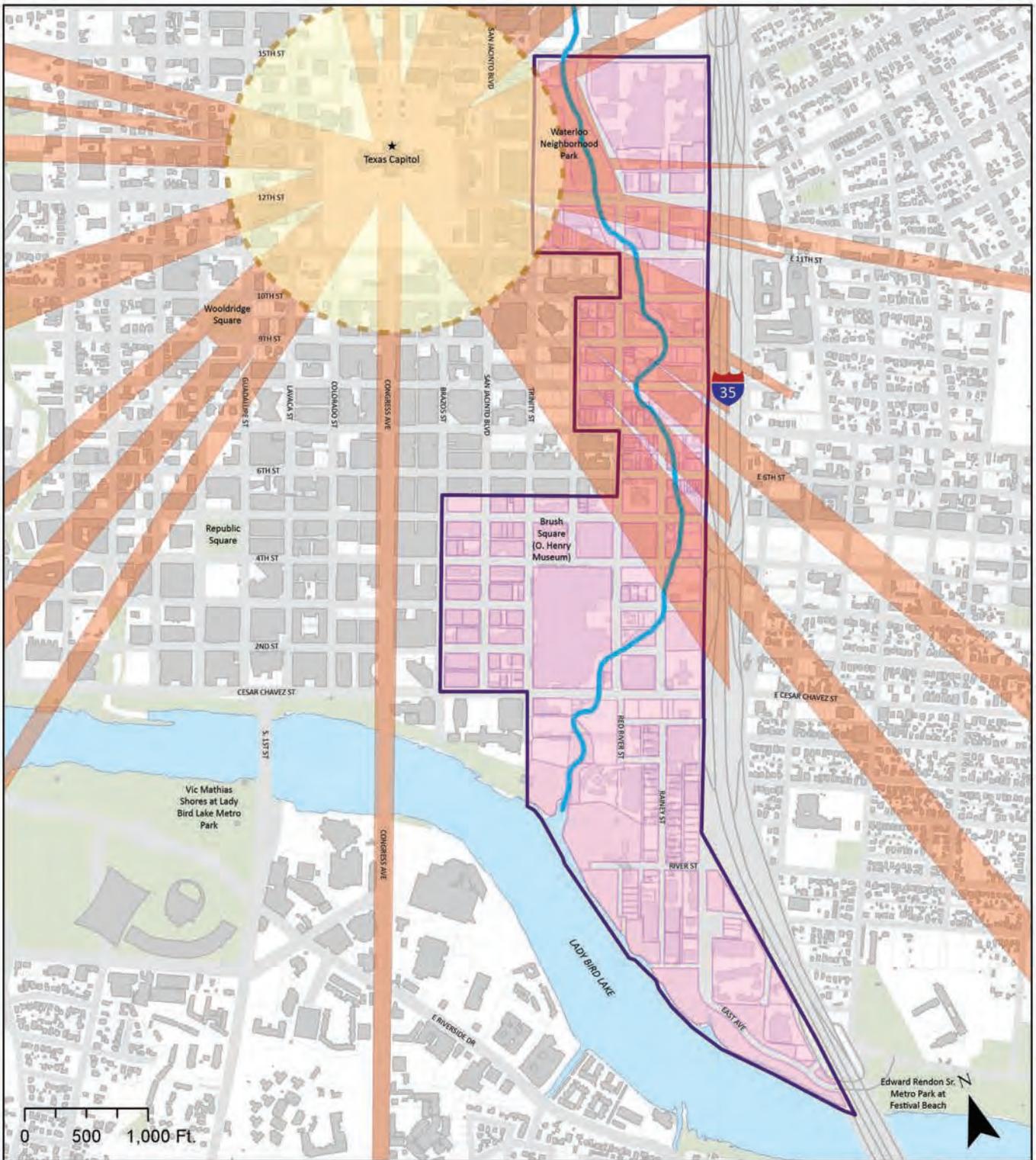


### Palm District- Downtown Density Bonus Map

CITY OF AUSTIN | PLANNING AND ZONING DEPARTMENT  
 Created on 02.12.2020



- Palm District Study Area
- Street Centerline
- Lakes
- Waller Creek
- 50 Feet
- 90 Feet
- 100 Feet
- 120 Feet
- 200 Feet
- 400 Feet
- No Height Limit
- Areas Ineligible for Density Bonus



### Palm District- Capitol View Corridor/ Capitol Dominance Overlay

CITY OF AUSTIN | PLANNING AND ZONING DEPARTMENT  
 Created on 02.12.2020



- Palm District Study Area
- TCAD Parcels
- City of Austin Parks
- Capitol Dominance Overlay
- Lakes
- Capitol View Corridors Overlay
- Waller Creek

# ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

The Housing and Planning Department led an outreach and engagement process bringing together the thoughts and ideas of a broad range of community stakeholders and institutional partners to inform and develop the goals and future vision for the Palm District. This robust community engagement strategy was grounded using an equity lens. Intentional steps were taken to elevate the voices of community members that have cultural and historic ties to the district, some of whom no longer live in the vicinity of the district due to gentrification and displacement caused in part by past planning decisions.

Early engagement efforts were entirely moved online due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

## **Organizational Briefings and Inter-agency Coordination**

Beginning in 2019, staff held regular briefing meetings with various city boards and commissions, key city departments, external organizations, and community-based organizations and invited them to participate in the planning process. City departments and external partners were consulted on the various products created throughout the planning process including the draft Vision Framework, American Institute of Architects workshops, the framework desired outcomes, preferred scenarios, and plan document.

## **Targeted Outreach to East Austin Thought Leaders**

In late Summer 2021, Martha P. Cotera (dba Information Systems Development) was contracted to engage East Austin community members with cultural and historic bonds to the Palm District. A series of interviews, focus groups, and small group meetings were held with East Austin Mexican American community leaders, current and former elected officials, Palm School alumni, Rainey Street Historic District residents and advocates, and current and former East Austin residents. Also targeted were organizations such as Raza Roundtable, PODER, HABLA and Nuestro Grupo/Academia Cuauhtli, Mexic Arte Museum, La Peña, with well documented involvement in the district.

The interviewers gathered interviewees' stories, desires, and thoughts about the Palm School and Park, the Rainey Street Neighborhood, Waterloo Greenway, the potential 5th Street Heritage Corridor, and other aspects of the Palm District.

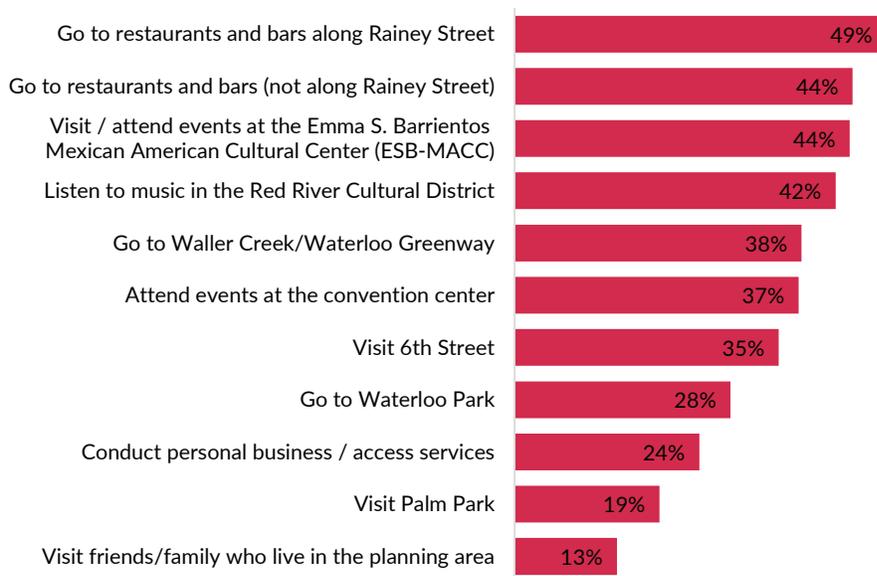
From her work with the East Austin stakeholder groups, Martha Cotera produced an in-depth report that includes a historic framework outlining the Mexican American contributions and political efforts in the City of Austin and in the planning area specifically. The report includes the challenges of both displacement and the work of advocacy for the preservation of historic and cultural features in the Palm District. East Austin community stakeholders also provided a comprehensive list of recommendations for key areas of the Palm District. Many of the recommendations from the report and from input gathered through other plan process exercises have been incorporated into the Palm Plan recommendations. The full East Austin engagement summary report can be found in the plan appendices.

## Community Visioning Forums

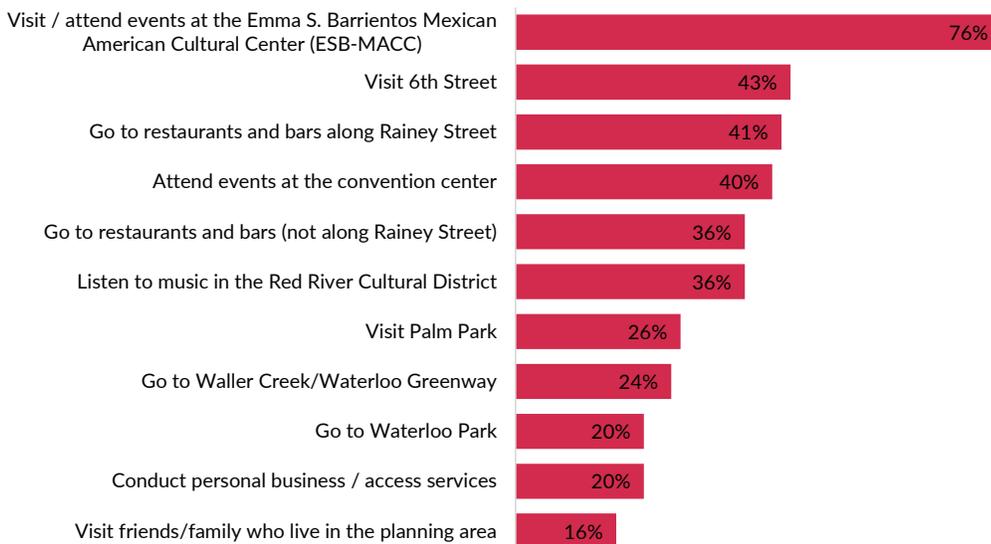
The visioning process kicked off in Spring 2021 with a series of Community Visioning Forums that were open to the public and took place online. The goal of these meetings was to solicit input from a broad range of community stakeholders and to allow them to share their impressions of the district. Over 150 participants combined joined one of two virtual sessions.

For community members and stakeholders who could not attend the visioning forums, an online survey and interactive map of the district provided opportunities for them to share their input and impressions of the district. Recommendations and input received during this phase helped in the creation of the desired outcomes of the Vision Framework.

### Why do you visit?



### Hispanic or Latinx Response



Answers to questions in the visioning survey were segmented for respondents who self-identified as Hispanic/Latinx.

### **Partnership with American Institute of Architects**

The City Council Resolution authorizing staff to begin planning efforts in the Palm District encouraged seeking out design assistance from the American Institute for Architects (AIA) via the Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) grant. The grant application was accepted in 2019, but as efforts began to take shape, the Covid 19 pandemic struck, halting and altering plans for the AIA design team. HPD staff coordinated with AIA during the Spring and Summer of 2021 to hold a smaller-scale, virtual design event conducted in late July.

The AIA team hosted a stakeholder workshop on Friday, July 23, 2021. The workshop was attended by 62 individuals representing key district organizational and institutional stakeholders. AIA design and planning experts then spent the weekend developing independent recommendations which were reported back to the community during a public webinar the following Monday.

The AIA report recommendations were made by an unpaid volunteer team of AIA-affiliated national experts and while the recommendations reflect a talented body of experience and insight from beyond Austin, these recommendations have not been officially endorsed by the City of Austin.

For the full AIA Communities by Design Report see the appendices section.

### **Downtown Austin Alliance Scenario Workshops**

Five in-person focus group workshops were held in August 2022. The workshops were hosted by Downtown Austin Alliance and led by a design team from Asakura Robinson. The session groups were split into three geographies (north, central, south) of the district to capture detailed input from stakeholders who lived, worked, and had specific knowledge of projects and history of those geographies. Three scenarios were then developed by Asakura Robinson based on the work done during the focus group exercises and from the conversations with stakeholders. The scenarios were then presented to stakeholders and to the public for input via an online survey. The results from the survey and stakeholder input produced the preferred scenario found in this plan.

### **Engagement Tools**

The SpeakUp Austin! website served as the centralized hub for all Palm District Planning Initiative online engagement efforts. The initial Palm District Visioning online survey was launched in May 2021. The results were collected from May to November 2021. Survey respondents who chose to self-identify were 55% Hispanic or Latinx, a segment of the community that was targeted for in-depth stakeholder engagement. Recommendations and input received during this phase helped in the creation of the desired outcomes of the draft Vision Framework. There have been over 3,000 active participants engaged via the Palm District SpeakUp Austin! website over the duration of the planning process.

Over 3,000 informational postcards were mailed out to property owners and utility account holders within 500 feet of the district. Postcards, flyers, window and yard signs were distributed throughout the district and the surrounding East Austin area by stakeholder partners and volunteers.

Social media posts by HPD and our partners announced project events and shared promotional materials. The project team maintained an interest list for the project and provided regular updates to the list.

Press releases were issued providing information about the project and announcements of the various events and workshops. The project and visioning forums received coverage in local print and television news stories.

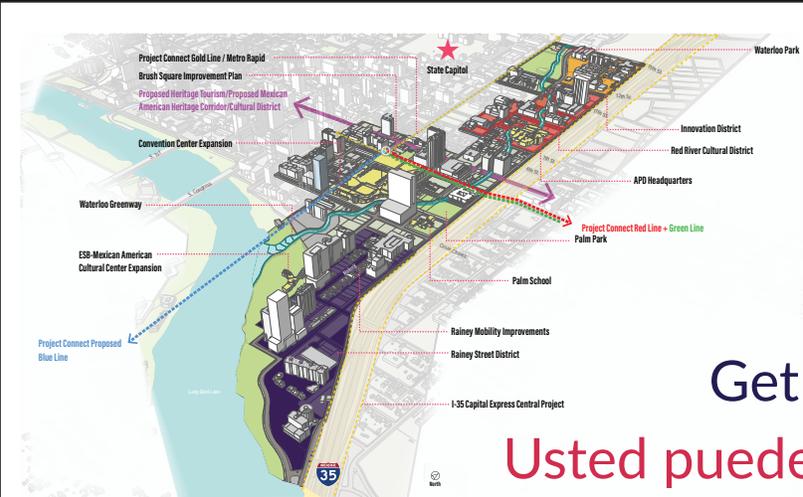
*Vision Framework* Follow up Survey – over 75 participants weighed in on the draft *Vision Framework*. Many of the comments called for more specific actions targeted to achieve the desired outcomes.

Scenarios Survey - over 390 participants reviewed draft district development scenarios via survey and provided input on elements that should be included in the preferred scenario.

### Language Access

Throughout the planning process, materials and activities have been made accessible in English and Spanish. Core materials have been translated including website, survey, flyers, postcards, historic timeline, and videos. Interpretation services were provided at virtual community visioning forums and the American Institute of Architects Webinar. Targeted outreach to East Austin thought leaders has included Spanish language interviews and meetings as requested.

Comments from the community stakeholders and institutional partners during the vision workshops, vision survey, framework feedback survey, scenario workshop and survey, and plan feedback survey contributed to the production of this plan.



**Get involved.**  
**Usted puede participar.**

The Housing and Planning Department is leading a planning process to help guide future decisions for the Palm District. Your input is needed to help shape the future of the area.

El Departamento de Vivienda y Planificación está iniciando un proceso de planificación que ayudará a guiar decisiones en el futuro para el Distrito Palm. Tus ideas son necesarias para darle forma al futuro de esta área.