



MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor and City Council Members

From: Jerry Rusthoven, Assistant Director/Interim Lead
Planning and Zoning Department *JR*

Date: October 10, 2019

Subject: Refined Work Program for Palm District Planning Process

On May 23, 2019, Austin City Council voted to approve Resolution No. 20190523-029 (Resolution). The Resolution covered many topics within the Palm District, including the Palm School, Rainey Street, the Fifth Street Mexican American Heritage Corridor, the Convention Center expansion, and a district planning process.

On July 31, 2019, Assistant City Manager Rodney Gonzales provided a memo to Council which covered the district planning process, in particular the direction to the City Manager to present a work program for the Palm District planning process.

Since distributing that memo and the initial work program to Council, a multi-departmental staff team has begun to analyze the area, to develop a public engagement strategy, and to conduct other pre-planning activities as called for in the draft work program.

Based on our continued review of the resolution and analysis conducted to date, as well as input from several area stakeholders, we are recommending refinements to the work program, including a modified study area boundary. The study area boundaries would be expanded to cover the full extent of Waller Creek between 15th Street and Lady Bird Lake as well as the Red River Cultural District. With this study area expansion, we also recommend that the initiative be referred to as the Waller Creek/Palm District Planning Initiative for greater clarity. Attached to this memo is a refined work program for the Waller Creek/Palm District Planning Initiative, including the modified study area boundary. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or Stevie Greathouse who serves as the project lead for this effort.

cc: J. Rodney Gonzales, Assistant City Manager
Spencer Cronk, City Manager
City Manager's Executive Team

Attachment

WORK PROGRAM FOR WALLER CREEK/PALM DISTRICT PLANNING INITIATIVE (REFINED 10/10/2019)

Purpose. The Waller Creek/Palm District planning initiative would engage stakeholders to develop a comprehensive, focused small area plan for an area of downtown Austin which includes Palm School, Palm Park, Brush Square, the ESB-MACC, the Convention Center, the Red River Cultural District, the Downtown Station, the Austin Innovation District, and portions of Waller Creek and the Fifth Street Mexican American Heritage Corridor. This plan would also analyze the interface and connectivity between the study area and adjacent areas, including the Rainey Street Historic District, IH 35, and East Austin neighborhoods. The primary deliverables from this planning process would include:

- Amendments to the *Downtown Austin Plan*;
- Amendments to the *Waller Creek District Master Plan* to create a Palm Subdistrict and to create a new vision for the Waller Creek/Palm District as directed in the resolution;
- Amendments to the Land Development Code as needed to implement the revised vision for the Waller Creek/Palm District including possible creation of one or more regulating plans

Background. The Waller Creek/ Palm District has a rich social, cultural, and built history, and is currently a dynamic area of downtown that is likely to undergo additional transformation as the City collaborates with stakeholders to improve Waller Creek, to address connectivity and community needs in the Rainey area, to preserve the Palm School, to preserve and enhance the Red River Cultural District, to develop the Fifth Street Mexican American Heritage Corridor, to implement an Innovation District in the vicinity of the Dell Seton Medical School, and to expand the Convention Center. The area has been the focus of many recent public planning initiatives including:

- Rainey Street Area Rezoning (2004)
- Waller Creek District Master Plan (2010)
- Downtown Austin Plan (2011)
- Waller Creek Design Plan (2012)
- Hispanic/Latino Quality of Life Initiative (2013)
- Downtown Austin Wayfinding Master Plan (2013)
- Designation of Red River Cultural District (2013)
- Convention Center Master Plan (2015)
- Formation of Austin Innovation District (2017)
- Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center Master Plan (2018)
- Capital Metro Project Connect Vision (2019)
- Brush Square Master Plan (2019)
- UT Center for Sustainable Development Analysis of Scenarios for Convention Center Expansion (2019)
- The Austin Core Transportation Plan including the Rainey Street Mobility Study (Underway)

As described in the University of Texas at Austin Center for Sustainable Development Analysis:

- The Austin Convention center is a linchpin in the city's downtown and overall economy.

- Austin’s downtown has a shifting center. The Convention Center is no longer on the eastern edge of the urban core—today, it is better described as lying near the center.
- The Convention Center and the Palm District as a whole occupy a connection point between important urban corridors.
- The location of the Convention Center presents the city with a strategic opportunity to link together many ongoing projects into an entire network of active public places. Redevelopment strategies for the Convention Center will need to recognize the problems and opportunities surrounding the new nexus and strive to resolve the conflicts inherent with competing interests and initiatives.

Scope. The Waller Creek/Palm District planning initiative will amend the Downtown Austin Plan and Waller Creek District Plan to develop a new vision for the Waller Creek District including the Palm Subdistrict and would address the following elements:

- Historic Preservation and Cultural Resources
- Activities and Uses
- Density and Design
- The Public Realm
- Transportation and Parking
- Utilities and Infrastructure
- Leadership and Implementation

At a minimum, this planning process will be significantly informed by and impact the future evolution of Palm School, Palm Park, Brush Square, the Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center, the Convention Center, the Red River Cultural District, the Downtown Station, and portions of Waller Creek, the Waterloo Greenway, and the Fifth Street Mexican American Heritage Corridor.

This planning process will also be informed by past planning efforts and current initiatives in the areas, including the Austin Core Transportation Plan including the Rainey Street Mobility Study, and analysis of Convention Center expansion.

The study area will be evaluated to identify opportunities for coordination across initiatives and to identify potential areas of conflict. Recommendations will be designed to enhance existing plans and to maximize synergies among the various initiatives and components of the Waller Creek/ Palm District.

The planning process will include modifications to the existing Waller Creek District Plan and implementation strategies as directed by the resolution.

The Waller Creek/Palm District planning process will be led by the Planning and Zoning Department in coordination with and involving significant participation from several City Departments including the Convention Center, Economic Development, Parks and Recreation, Watershed Protection, Austin Transportation, the Office of Sustainability, and the Communications and Public Information Office.

Engagement. The engagement process will involve stakeholders representing the Waller Creek / Palm District as a whole, as well as stakeholders representing and impacted by various identified projects, including but not limited to:

- The Red River Cultural District
- The Raza Roundtable
- The Rainey Neighbors Association
- The East Cesar Chavez Neighborhood Plan Contact Team
- The Rainey Business Coalition
- The Town Lake Neighborhood Association
- The Austin History Center Association
- The Greater Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
- Hispanic Austin Leadership
- Hispanic Advocates Business Leadership of Austin
- The Downtown Austin Neighborhood Association
- Mexic-Arte
- La Peña
- The Tourism Commission
- Capital Metro
- AIA Austin
- Preservation Austin
- Visit Austin
- The ESB-MACC
- Waterloo Greenway
- Downtown Austin Alliance
- Our Austin Story
- The Trail Foundation
- Travis County Historical Commission
- Travis County
- The Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce
- Housing Authority of the City of Austin (Lakeside Apartments)
- Movability
- East Sixth Street Public Improvement District
- University of Texas
- Dell Seton Medical Center
- Texas Department of Transportation
- Relevant City of Austin Boards and Commissions
- Project Connect Advisory Net
- Residents, Businesses, and other Community Groups

The Communications and Public Information Office will support the Planning and Zoning Department with meeting design, facilitation, and engagement analysis.

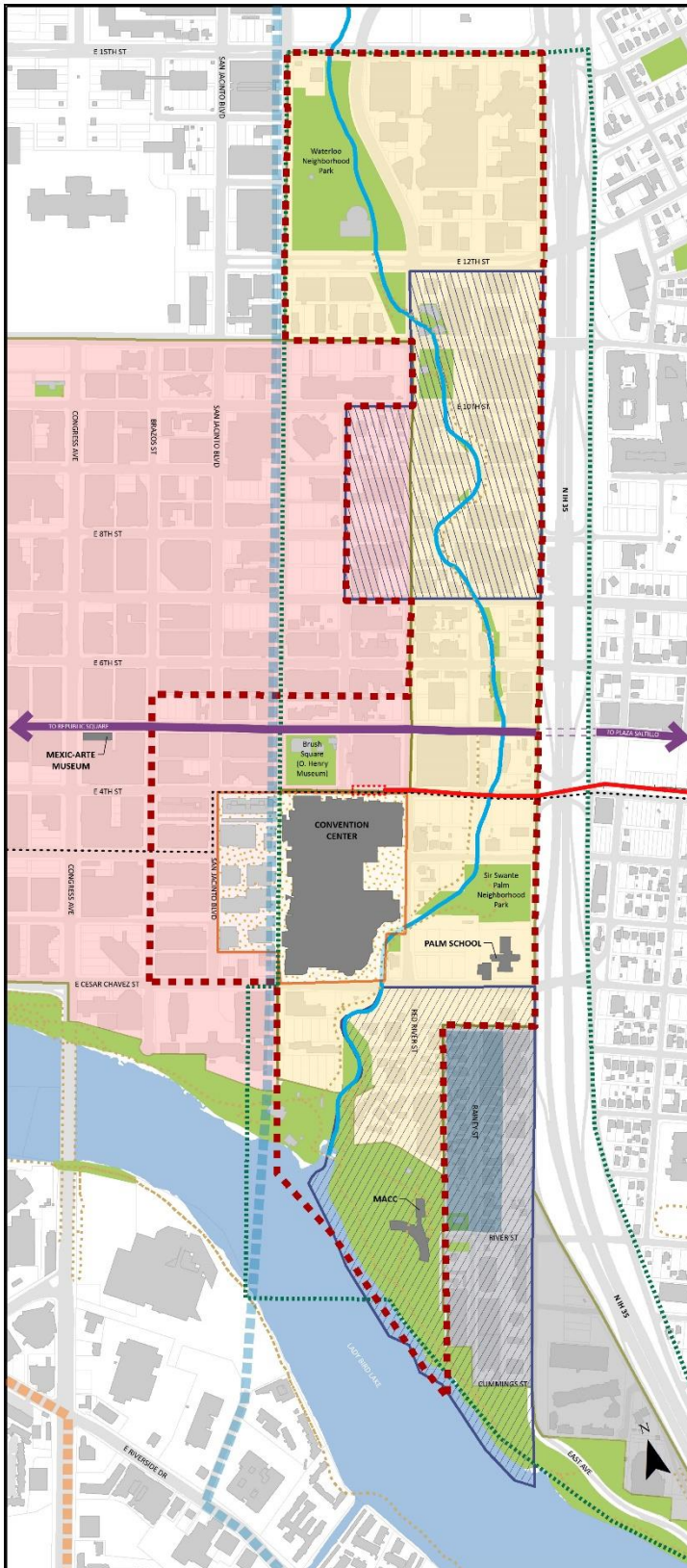
Resources and Project Budget. The Waller Creek/Palm District Planning Initiative will be coordinated by the Planning and Zoning Department and will rely on a multi-departmental team that includes staff support from Planning and Zoning, Convention Center, Parks and Recreation, Austin Transportation, Economic Development, Watershed Protection, Real Estate, and the Communications and Public Information Office. The Planning and Zoning Department does not anticipate needing additional staffing resources to support this effort at this time.

Boundaries. In order to provide a starting point for this effort, a preliminary study area boundary for the planning initiative has been identified. The Waller Creek/Palm District study area includes the existing Waller Creek District as well as a portion of the existing Core/Waterfront District within the Downtown Austin Plan. We anticipate that the boundaries of the Waller Creek/Palm District planning initiative will continue to be refined during the course of the planning process based on identified planning needs. The initial boundaries of the study area are indicated in red on the attached Waller Creek/Palm District Context map as “Waller Creek/Palm Study Area.”

Waller Creek/ Palm District Context Map

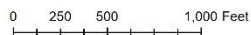
Red Boundary = Suggested Boundary for Waller Creek/Palm District study area based on direction from Council Resolution. Boundary could continue to shift over the course of the planning process.

Note: Planning process will engage stakeholders beyond the boundary, and planning activities could occur outside of the proposed boundary or focus on particular subareas within the boundary.



LEGEND

- Waller Creek / Palm Study Area Boundary
- Convention Center Study Boundary
- Key Buildings
- Lady Bird Lake
- Lance Armstrong Bikeway
- Parks and Trails**
- Parks and Squares
- PARD Trails and Urban Trails
- Existing and Proposed Cultural Districts and Neighborhood Associations**
- 5th Street Mexican American Heritage Corridor
- Red River Cultural District
- Rainey Neighbors Association, Inc.
- Rainey National Register Historic District
- Downtown Austin Plan**
- Rainey Street District
- Waller Creek District
- Core/Waterfront District
- Project Connect**
- MetroRail Red Line (Existing)
- Blue Line (Proposed)
- Orange Line (Proposed)
- Red Line Downtown Station (Future)
- Waller Creek Initiative**
- Waller Creek
- Waller Creek District (Joint Development Agreement)



Timeline and Tasks. This preliminary timeline will be refined as staff across multiple city departments begin work during Task 1, Pre-Planning.

FALL 2019	WINTER 2019-2020	SPRING 2020	SUMMER 2020	FALL 2020	WINTER 2020-2021	SPRING 2021
TASK 1: Pre-Planning						
		TASK 2: Visioning				
			TASK 3: Active Planning			
				TASK 4: Draft Review		
					TASK 5: Plan Adoption	
		TASK 6: External Stakeholder Engagement				