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VISIONS

FOR AN EVEN GREATER AUSTIN

Project Opportunities and Various Indirect Lessons
by
Sinclair Black, FAIA

Why me?



My parents were entrepreneurial middle-class people in San Antonio. My father was an immigrant from the Netherlands who became vice president of a huge grocery chain. My mother, from deep East Texas, owned a jewelry store and a real estate company while I was growing up. They were both significant leaders in the growing suburb of Alamo Heights. My parents worked full time and my younger sister and I were primarily raised by our grandmother.

As a child, I had considerable freedom to roam the growing neighborhood. I spent my summers in East Texas with my grandmother where I picked cotton, rode bareback with my cousins, swam in local stock tanks full of snakes, fished with my uncle, and never wore shoes. In San Antonio during the school year, I spent my spare time riding my bike all over the region, including frequent trips to a home 5 miles away where a model train club met weekly. I got my driver's license at the age of 14 and I bought my first car for \$25, a 1939 Ford coupe with its engine removed and left in the trunk. I loved working on cars so much that I rebuilt a V8 engine and drove my hotrod away to college at 17.

In high school, I mostly made C's. Art class was the only class in which I made A's (which helped keep my GPA above water). I had a poor academic record at one of the best high schools in the country. The high school counselor told my mother that if I went to college I would likely flunk out. Clearly, I wasn't good enough at math to be an engineer, so she suggested architecture instead. I relied on my ability to draw which got me by, and after graduate school at Berkeley, I returned to Austin and taught architecture and urban design for 50 years, while still maintaining a small but successful professional practice.

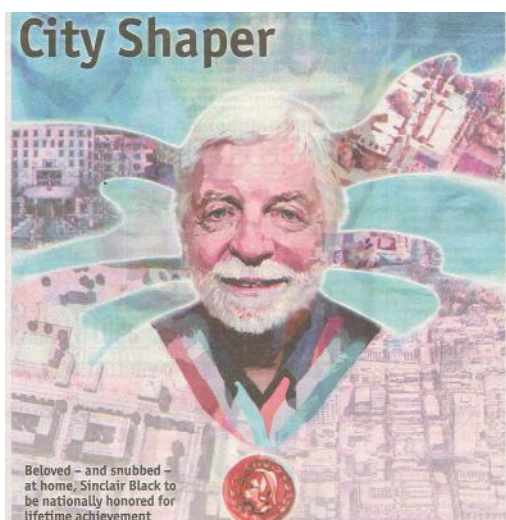
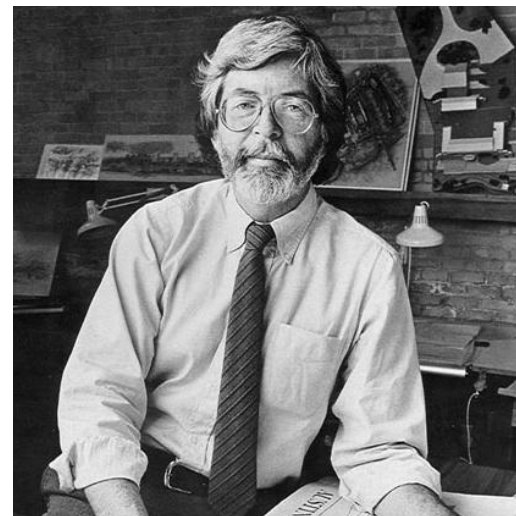
At my retirement from teaching at the University of Texas at Austin, School of Architecture, I reflected on the many things I was lucky to have in my professional life:

- A mother who was clear that if she ever had a son, she had a plan to encourage him to become an Architect by encouraging him to draw.
- Growing up in San Antonio, in a wonderful middle-class neighborhood with a truly fabulous school district.
- Being accepted into University of Texas at Austin when the School of Architecture did not yet require calculus.
- Keeping my grades up in the Design & Drawing courses and very little else.
- Graduating and obtaining an architectural license.
- Working at a large firm, right out of school. I was identified by Lamar Youngblood as a designer and spent 5 years designing for the firm.
- Getting a call from Alan Taniguchi (Dean at UTSOA) inviting me to go to lunch. He said he wanted me to teach a 3rd year studio at 2:00 p.m. "You mean today?" was my incredulous response, but one does not tell your mentor, "no thanks." That turned out to be my luckiest day.
- Attending graduate school at the University of California, Berkeley in 1969-1970, what a year to be there.
- Becoming the faculty sponsor for a 60-day student Tour of Europe in 1968.
- Being assigned the job of Interim Dean (1972-73), at the age of 32. I was followed by Charles Burnette (Dean 1973-75) and John Gallery (acting Dean 1976). Hal Box became Dean in 1976 and served for the next 16 years.
- Having Hal's support for my idea for "Studio Mexico," (a study travel program) which I ran with Logan Wagner for 7 years.
- Meeting Simon Atkinson and participating twice in the summer program in Oxford, England.
- Participating twice in Larry Doll's program for European Travel with UT/Virginia Tech students.
- Having Hal Box push me to submit for the Honor of Fellowship. Thanks Hal!
- Teaching for 50 years at UTSOA.
- Continuing to run my small firm, now called Black + Motal.

Most of all I'm lucky to have enjoyed:

- Great people to work with.
- Great clients who had dreams we could help realize.
- Great sites for all projects.
- Great consultants to help make it happen.
- Great contractors to build each project.
- Great partners in practice & dear friends like Andrew Vernooy, Stephi Motal, and Heyden Black Walker.

Over a lifetime, people become a container for lots of different experiences, influences, and insights. This reservoir then influences our way of thinking and allows us to create new solutions and combinations that can impact the way others see things as well. The forty visions that follow are hopefully examples of just that.



This is me, through the decades. Now in my 80's, it is a privilege to look back on many of my visionary ideas and share them with you. My hope is that these visions will inspire you to think outside the box about your own community and envision real change.

VISION 01

Texas Architect Article, 1981

Prospects for Downtown Austin

Creating an Urban Neighborhood and Reviving the Avenue



Michael Patrick

Aerial view of downtown Austin shows the relationship between the warehouse district and the active CBD to the north and Town Lake to the south.

An intense renewal of interest in downtown Austin is just one manifestation of what has become a consistent national trend in urban design: downtown America is increasingly perceived as a new area of opportunity. As the supply of energy diminishes, the cost of mobility increases, causing a tendency to centralize rather than disperse to the suburbs. But the revitalization and rebuilding of

American cities during the 1980s represents problems as well as opportunities.

The disruption of the traditional land value structure, the transportation systems, and the social/cultural patterns will be significant. The scale, as well as the surviving historic fabric of central cities, will be threatened by new development, while the economically disadvantaged will be

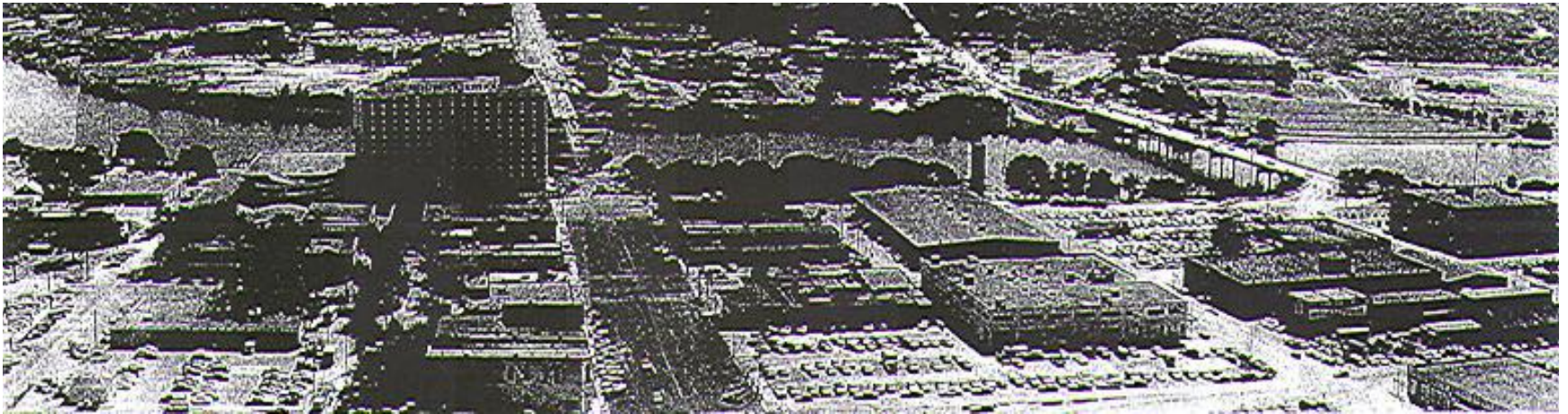
displaced into suburbs. The specter of gentrification is already very real.

The “large building” projects of the 60s and 70s contribute little to the central city as a place for people to be. They generate traffic, cast shadows, produce heat, create distortions in land value and cause uncomfortable microclimates that more often than not are uninhabitable, by humane standards. The opportunity we have is to rebuild our cities using the same creative energy that destroyed their best qualities. But new urban design processes will be required.

Urban Design-A Working Definition

Urban design exists as an activity but not as a profession. As an activity it can be defined as the physical expression of all the society’s intentions and constraints, hopes, laws and codes relative to a large geographical area. It addresses a long list of issues cutting across all public/private boundaries.

Architecture deals primarily with single owners, single properties and, usually, with the private sector; planning deals almost entirely with the policy and allocation aspects of the expenditures of public money. Architecture seldom transcends ownership boundaries, and planning as practiced by local governments rarely deals with physical reality in design terms. Urban design brings together the physical design tools of architecture and the policy powers of planning in order to shape the larger scale public/private environment and systematically manage its growth and change.



Panorama of Austin's 60-square-block, 375-acre warehouse district underutilized land and deteriorating structure

Derek Faulkner

The two key urban design issues in downtown Austin today are how to revitalize the wasteland of the warehouse zone between the CBD and Town Lake and how to revive the long-ignored Congress Avenue Historic District. The concepts and images which follow are drawn from two case studies conducted in response to these problems by students in the University of Texas at Austin School of Architecture. Neither study is intended as an actual plan; both should be considered academic exercises, drawn from reality, but not a part of the politics that surround any "real" proposal.

The Political Context

An analysis of the historical, governmental, political and economic context for urban design in Austin yielded several insights into why so little positive action has occurred. Often the lack of action stems from the inability to describe what an area or city wants to become. There is no consensus image of the future, nor is there any mechanism to generate one. There is no physical expression of hopes, desires and intentions (Urban Design) to serve as a medium for communication—only thick planning reports, full of abstract, opaque language.

The unreal expectations for land,

as expressed in overzoning by the city and overpricing by landowners, are precisely the forces that prevent realistic development. There is little cooperation between the public and private sides of the development equation; indeed, the prospect of action drives the polar opposites further apart.

Generally speaking, the planner-managers are stereotyped as uncreative bureaucrats lounging in the political safety of inaction. The developers are seen as opportunistic predators, void of social responsibility and motivated by greed alone. And city councils are perceived as an endless parade of hapless, overly ambitious incompetents. The general public has strong and widely differing opinions that cannot be easily articulated and focused, while every group or organization seems to have a hidden agenda that seldom includes cooperation with other interest groups.

The myth, distrust and greed supporting these stereotypical images have created a communication stasis. The stasis is unfortunate because, in the absence of consensus and cooperation, the private market continues to monopolize development opportunities in ways that are seldom in the long-term public interest.

Urban design and urban redevelopment will require new forms of public/ private communication and

cooperation.

The urban design process must clearly articulate people's intentions, must evolve with time and change, must be open-ended, adaptive and evolutionary.

And it must take place in the full view of everyone concerned. The public sector must provide physical design direction and policies to protect the public interest, while creating appropriate incentives for the private sector. When and if a physical design exists and when the incentives are in place, the private sector can respond with creativity, energy and initiative to make downtown come alive again.

The Physical Context

An analysis of the physical context for urban design generated an interesting typology of districts existing in Austin and, for that matter, in any Texas city. The typology describes four urban design zones.

Zone 1: Historic Zone, comprised of valuable individual structures, essentially intact. The issue is to protect and restore, while maintaining continuity and reinforcing basic qualities.

Zone 2: Partial Historic Fabric/Urban Infill Zone, made up of individual historic buildings, non-historic but compatible structures, new buildings that are out of scale and unrelated by material, form,



Larry Paul Fuller

LEFT: Typical warehouse district image—underdeveloped potential in the heart of the city. BELOW AND FACING PAGE: A variety of successful people places from this country and abroad which are perceived as models for civic design.

color, etc., and vacant sites. The problem is to create infill policies that protect the scale and texture of the district on the one hand and allow and promote new and sympathetic infill on the other.

Zone 3: Urban Infill Zone, an area where the original uses have changed radically, and the building stock has been destroyed, normally for parking. The street systems and utility systems are usually intact and property ownership is fractured. Interim land uses and speculation are the main characteristics creating tremendous inertia for positive change. These areas are usually very centrally located and can be considered “zones of opportunity,” despite their current problems.

Zone 4: New Fabric Zone, large-scale new construction, usually with one owner and usually removed from the existing infrastructure and context. Major problems are financing/time and the environmental impacts on other areas. This form of development has predominated because its profit potential is high relative to the other development types.

Schools of architecture, as well as

the profession, often deal with the fourth type (new construction), more and more with the first type (historic), but almost never have the opportunity to deal with the significantly more complex and difficult zones 2 and 3. These redevelopment zones are where much of the future building energy of this country will be concentrated. It is important for schools of architecture to deal with the anticipated future, as well as with the state of the art.

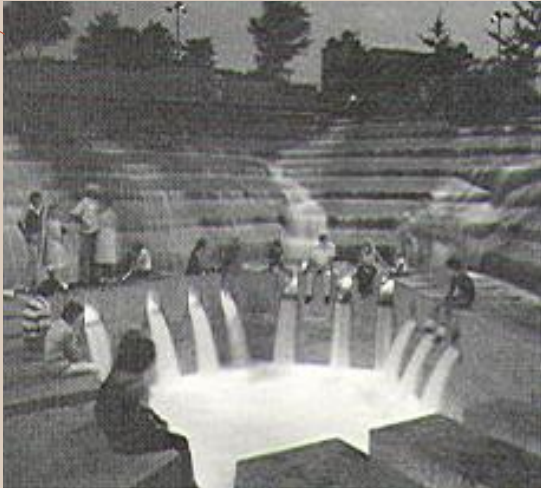
A Guiding Philosophy for Urban Redevelopment

Both of the urban design case studies presented in this article were based upon a guiding philosophical point of view clearly stated at the outset. Without the guiding philosophy and the values they represented, the work would have been impossible.

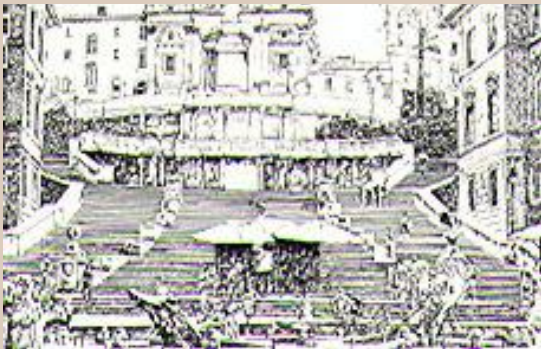
Growth and chance must be slow and deliberate over time, guided by a powerful and accepted set of policies—“PATTERNS”—generated with and adopted by the general public. These patterns constitute the DNA or genetic code for the process of development, insuring



Rockefeller Center, New York City.



Rockefeller Center, New York City.



Spanish Steps, Rome.

consistency and continuity over time while providing the vehicle for evolution and change.

The redevelopment process should be incremental, realistic and nondisruptive and inevitably a part of a whole. “Wholeness” is the goal now as well



Quincy Market, Boston. One of the most active and vital spaces in America.



Paseo del Rio, San Antonio. The Riverwalk is a totally unique type of city space and the primary catalyst in San Antonio's redevelopment.



Paley Park, New York City. Donated by a private citizen, this park influenced the creation of similar small urban people places throughout the U.S.

John Blood

as over a projected 30-year period for development. Redevelopment should be thought of as the process of repair of the physical environment through the creative manipulation of planning/policy/money/time/incentive/etc.

Traditional economic functions tend to centralize value. Unrestrained, these market functions victimize surrounding areas in order to focus value at the center.

Tools must be developed that will spread and equalize the entrepreneurial opportunity by balancing land value and developmental potential. This shift can be accomplished

by constraining this potential at one central point in order to spread opportunity throughout a zone (a fundamental precept of the "American Grid City"). The objective is smaller-scale developments on more sites, which will encourage the involvement of local entrepreneurs and local financing, thereby reducing dependence on large-scale, out-of-town developers.

Day/Night Activity and Horizontal Zoning. Mixed-use and "layered" zoning should be created to insure vitality and activity. Retail, commercial, and entertainment functions should be concentrated along new pedestrian edges, and office, housing, and government should be at second level or above. All future parking should be below grade. Service and entertainment functions should be located to encourage nighttime activity.

Continued Automobile Mobility. It is assumed that the automobile will be the basic mode of travel in the city, but alternatives should be developed and subsidized beginning now. Over the 30-year period projected for redevelopment, dependence on the auto will be diminished because alternative systems will begin to support new patterns of land use. As increased density and urban vitality replace parking spaces and abandoned property, the public transportation systems will become effective and efficient, reducing the cost of mobility.

AUSTIN: TWO CASE STUDIES

Sunbelt cities like Austin will be particularly hard hit by rapid future growth. Austin shares many problems with other Midwestern and Texas cities; a typical zone 3 urban infill area in its Warehouse District, as well as a zone 2 historic fabric/infill area on its main street, Congress Avenue.

Austin is just beginning to deal with these urban problems—and the first steps have been faltering and rocky. The

initial planning effort was made by the American Cities Corporation, a subsidiary of the giant Rouse Corporation. The failure of their proposed plan to gather support from any of the local citizen groups who reviewed it raised serious questions about what constitutes acceptable methods for downtown Austin revitalization.

The first case study, on Austin's Warehouse District, was conducted in the wake of the failure of the American Cities Plan. That study in turn led to the Congress Avenue study, which was prepared by two graduate students using the philosophical position and patterns developed in the studio.

The students were asked to address the question that the American Cities Corporation had failed to answer during the preceding six months: "How could Austin revitalize its central city and continue to be Austin?" In considering solutions, the emphasis was Urban Design with a bias for dealing with physical places for people and their activity. Terms such as "people-places," "greenway systems," "view corridor," "shopping streets," "facade compatibility," "alley pathways," and "mixed-use urban neighborhoods" were utilized to help deal with the concepts. Buildings were defined as integral components of the urban fabric rather than objets d'art on the landscape. Issues of energy, transportation, individual choice and city scale were addressed, as was the political reality of Austin as a context for action.

Images began to form, first in words, then by metaphor and, finally, by drawing and models: fewer surface parking lots, more open space; fewer large-scaled buildings, more smaller mixed use buildings; less reflective glass, more brick, wood, and stone; less energy waste and more conservation; less pavement, and, of course, more trees.

THE WAREHOUSE DISTRICT: A POTENTIAL URBAN NEIGHBORHOOD

In the Warehouse District study, two concepts emerged very quickly. First, that the 375-acre, 60-block area represented Austin's greatest opportunity to create a humane and energy-efficient district. Second, the definition of an "urban neighborhood" as an area of horizontal and vertical mixed-use zoning where people live, work, go to school and entertain themselves, an area based primarily upon pedestrian movement that puts a higher value on people places than on parking spaces.

The objectives and goals emerged as proposals to create a city that looks less like a Texas CBD and more and more like a neighborhood: Beacon Hill in Boston, residential London, or for that matter, 19th century Austin. Keeping Austin Austin was defined as keeping it from becoming Houston or Dallas.

The underlying assumptions are that the energy crunch is indeed real, that energy costs as well as the real cost of the faceless and seemingly endless extension of suburban development would increase geometrically, and that alternative life styles would be less energy wasteful, more limited in terms of space and orbit. The result would be more dense, more interesting concentrations of people, and more transportation choices.

Statistically, the overall plan called for 11,250,000 square feet of space to be developed over the assumed 30-year development period: 2,000,000 commercial, 4,500,000 office, 3,750,000 residential (2,500 living units), and 1,000,000 for city government in a new civic center. Thirty-two of the 375 acres would go to open space, and 4,000 cars would be parked underground.

The following list of patterns was developed

to guide the planning and design. (Each pattern is keyed to the drawing on page 41.) [Page 06]

- *Housing at the Edges of Amenities.* Housing would be built where people have the greatest opportunity for view, quiet and open space, essentially at the edge of Town Lake, and along the two major creeks entering Town Lake, Shoal and Waller Creeks. (1)

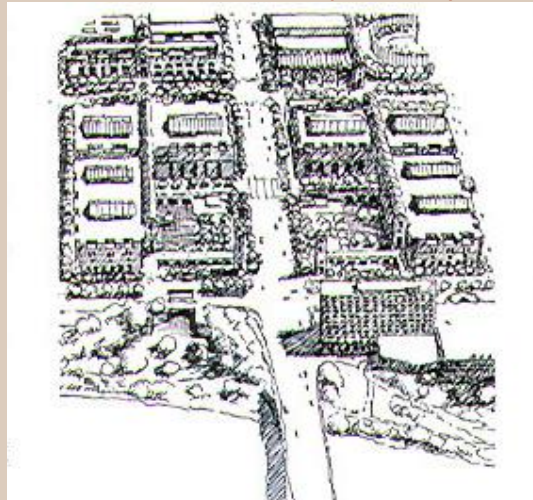
- *Park-and-Ride System on Existing Right-of-Way.*

The existing rail right-of-way would be used for a park-and-ride system serving northwest, east, and south-central neighborhoods with appropriate downtown shops. (2)

- *No At-Grade Parking in the Future.* All existing parking would be preserved for the present, and as development occurs, each project would provide its own parking. But in the interest of creating and maintaining the human scale of the street, no on-site/at-grade parking would remain at the end of the 30-year development period. The policies governing parking requirements will vary over time as the price of energy and the technological alternatives continue to change. (3)

Land Use and Infrastructural Patterns

- *Government Center at 1st & Congress* The most visible and important symbolic



space in downtown, other than the Capitol itself, is the intersection of Town Lake and Congress Avenue. Congress has never had the energy to "reach through" the warehouse zone to Town Lake with retail activity. The intersection is too important for anything other than a large important public building, such as the City Hall. The outdoor public plazas could bring the green from Town Lake up to 3rd Street, visually and psychologically shortening Congress Avenue. The symbolism of city government at one end of Congress Avenue and state government at the other seems appropriate. (4)

- *Community College at Palm School Site.* The ideal location for the downtown/East Austin-oriented campus of ACC would be the Palm School site on Waller Creek, now a speculative office building. The accessibility from downtown, UT, IH-35, and East Austin make it the optimum location for all types of students. The campus could also serve to mitigate the presence of IH-35 as a symbolic wall between downtown and the Mexican-American neighborhoods. (5)

- *Cultural Arts Center at Power Plant.* The large land area, the 200,000-square-foot industrial building, and the central, highly visible location of the soon-to-be-obsolete power plant make it ideal for the central facilities for Austin's cultural activities. Its proximity to Town Lake makes it neutral territory, equal with respect to north, south, east or west. The site is very accessible from



north-south and east-west arterials, as well as from the pedestrian trails on Town Lake and Shoal Creek. A rail transit system could stop at the site in the future. (6)

- *Transportation Center at 3rd and Congress.*

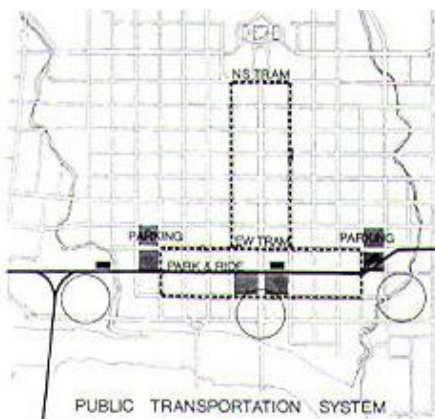
The site of Austin's original train station, demolished in 1965, would be the location of a new transportation center. Various forms of transit, including the park-and-ride system, the NS/EW trams, shuttles to the airport, and bus routes would all converge on this central facility. (7)

- *Downtown Parking.*

A system of "intercept parking" would reduce the number of cars moving to and parked in the heart of downtown and would, at the same time, increase the total parking capacity of the core area. Garages would be located between zones of commercial potential rather than directly in them, and would serve night traffic as well as daytime needs. (8)

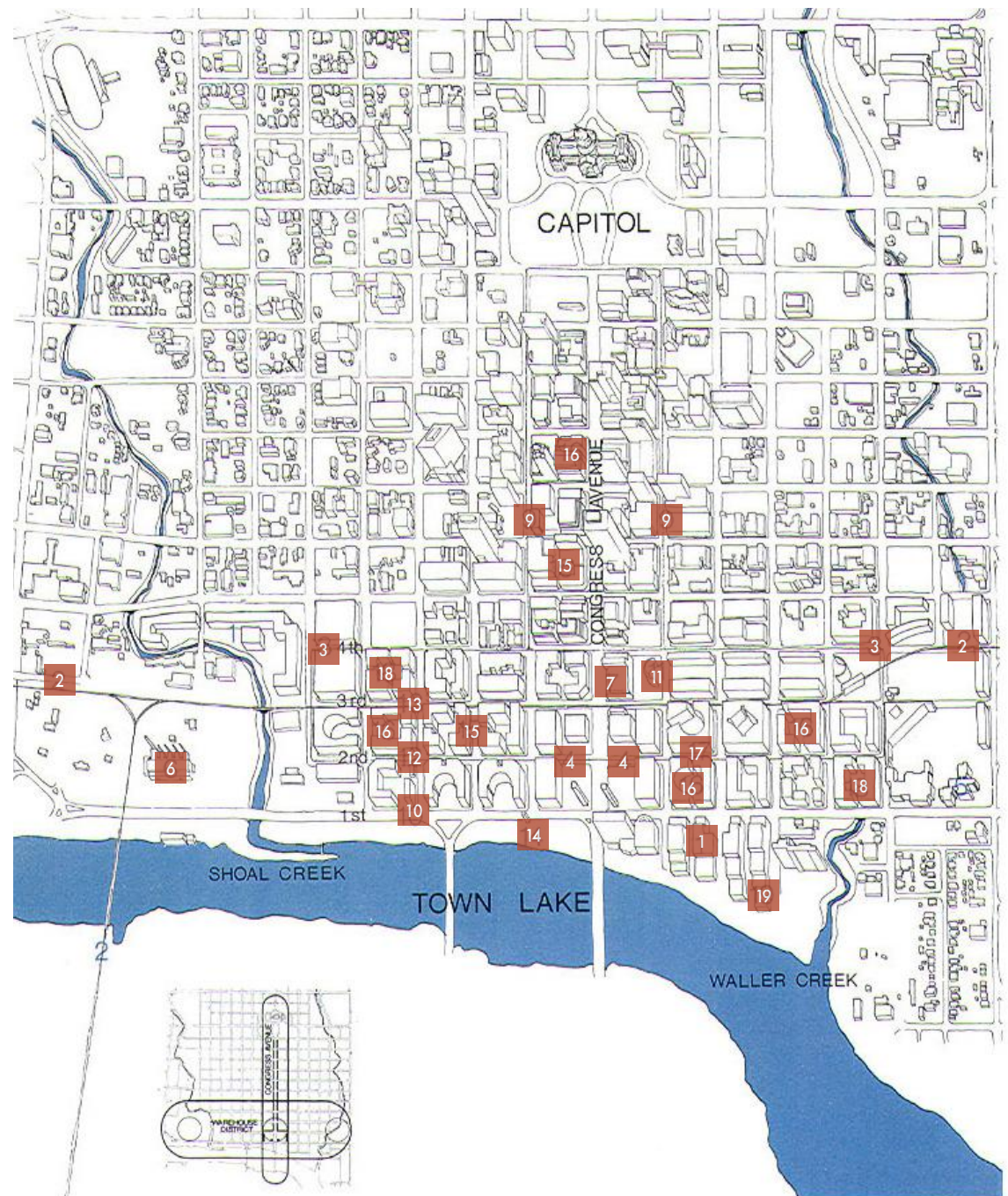
- *East-West and North-South Tram Loops.*

The new east-west axis of development would be served by a tram loop along 2nd and 6th Streets, connecting the transportation center on Congress to the other two park-and-ride stops, and to intercept parking at each end of the loop. (9)



- *First Street Isolated*

First Street has emerged as the major barrier between downtown and Town Lake. It would remain an important east-west corridor but should be redesigned to reduce the barrier effect. The five lanes would become four, with a tree median at the center and trees along both edges. (10)





- *Pedestrian Street System.*

North-south streets would be reserved for cars and east-west streets (2nd, 3rd, and 4th, all of which are dead-end on each end) for pedestrian paths. East-west auto traffic would then be concentrated on the 5th and 6th street couple and on 1st Street. (11)

- *Pedestrian Spine at 2nd Street.*

Second Street would be the primary east-west pedestrian street linking the Community College on the east and the Cultural Arts Center on the west to the City Hall at the center. (12)

- *3rd Street Retail Commercial Corridor.*



Third Street would remain the right-of-way for trolleys and small trams. The intercept parking at each end would be connected to Congress Avenue and the transportation center by a small tram with a very frequent headway. This high traffic would produce a vital retail, commercial atmosphere along 3rd Street from Waller Creek to Shoal Creek. (13)

- *Open Space System Greenway.*

In order to increase people's access to open space, greenbelt linkages from Waller Creek, from Shoal Creek, and from Town Lake would be extended into the fabric of downtown. The most important of these greenways would connect downtown with Town Lake, accomplished by cutting pedestrian connections under 1st Street. (14)



- *Paseo System.*

The alleys adjacent to Congress Avenue run north and south while all other alleys

are east-west and dead-end into Brazos and Colorado Streets. The east-west alleys would become pedestrian paths feeding the two north-south alleys paralleling Congress Avenue and linking Town Lake to the State Capitol complex. (15)

Building Form and Organization

- *People Places at Block Centers.*

Each block, approximately 276 x 296 feet, would have an open space at its center, linked to the east-west pedestrian streets and thereby to Town Lake. The character of these central spaces would vary from active and public in the commercial areas to essentially quiet and private in the residential areas away from Congress Avenue. (16)

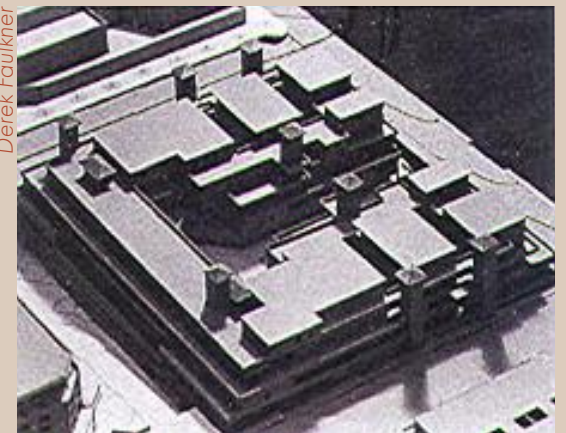
- *Minimum and Maximum Heights.*

All building within the revitalization zone would conform to a building envelope policy requiring a building of not less than two stories and not more than four stories. This policy would guarantee a consistency and continuity of bulk and scale throughout the zone, and would tend to eliminate inappropriate and inconsistent land uses. (17)

- *Building Form (Footprint).*

The building unit for the zone, defined by the existing street system as one complete block, is approximately 276 x 276 feet. All buildings would come to the property line in order to recreate the space of the street. To provide more developable area and to

Derek Faulkner



narrow the east-west pedestrian streets to a more manageable scale, an extra ten-foot strip along the north and south edges of blocks bordering 2nd, 3rd, and 4th streets could be offered as an incentive by the city. (18)

- *Building Animation.*

Each building would be required to provide outside spaces people—decks, terraces, balconies and roof spaces. In particular, terraces at the 4th level and use of the roof area would be encouraged. Tennis courts, greenhouses, day care centers, and community gardens are just a few of the logical uses of roof space. (19)



- *Solar Rights.*

The building envelopes would be tailored to conform to considerations of sun angles and energy conservation. As energy costs continue to rise, the blocking of solar access will become an important economic issue. On the north edge of each block, the top floors would be stepped back to allow winter sun to strike the east-west pedestrian paths. The south edges would have arcades to provide a shaded path in the heat of the summer. (20)



- *Energy Conservation.*

Exposure to the east and west would be minimized and controlled to reduce heat gain/loss problems. Building envelopes would be optimized as a trade-off between minimum perimeter and penetration of natural light. The central “people-places” of each block would bring sunlight to the interior of every building. Trees in the people places and along the east, south and west edges would reduce the solar gain of the building envelope. Trees, trellises and awnings would be used wherever possible to mediate between the buildings and the climate. (21)

The work of the studio is now being validated only one year later by the concepts of the recently published report of the President’s Council on Developmental Choices. That report put forward the concept of “the urban village,” a concentration of mixed-use development which provides energy- efficient life styles of maximum choice at minimum cost.

The Council concluded that five basic principles should guide further development: increasing compactness; acceleration of the infill process; increasing mix of land uses; greater transportation choice; and provision of a range of choice in housing type, price and location.

The most interesting thing is not the report’s content but the make-up of the council making the recommendations. For the first time, developers, politicians, transportation people and economists are agreeing with the basic tenets of urban design theory.

The Best Little Warehouse...

To seed revitalization of Austin's abandoned warehouse district, Austin architects Sinclair Black and Chartier Newton and engineer Jose Guerra—calling themselves the Cedar Street Partnership—bought five lots and three old warehouses on Fourth (formerly Cedar) Street in 1979. Although of little architectural distinction, the buildings did represent an earlier city scale and color, architects thought, and once refurbished would prove that the old warehouse district was salvageable. An important part of the project involved creating a courtyard between two of the buildings—one two-story warehouse on the west side and a three-story building on the east. The middle building had burned sometime in the '60s and previous owners had filled in the basement with dirt.

Instead of erecting a new building in its place to provide more rentable floor space, architects decided to enhance what they already had by providing more usable space, excavating between the two existing buildings below street level and opening up their long edges to daylight for the first time in 70 years. The courtyard serves as an "off-the-street, out-of-the-way people place," complete with trees. Building walls on the courtyard side, with much of the brick weakened by fire, were stuccoed in the profile of the building that was originally there. And trees were planted in a grass and concrete apron extending 12 feet out from the buildings into Fourth Street, which fit well into city plans to add walks and plant trees up and down nearby Congress Avenue.



Warehouses fronting on Fourth Street.



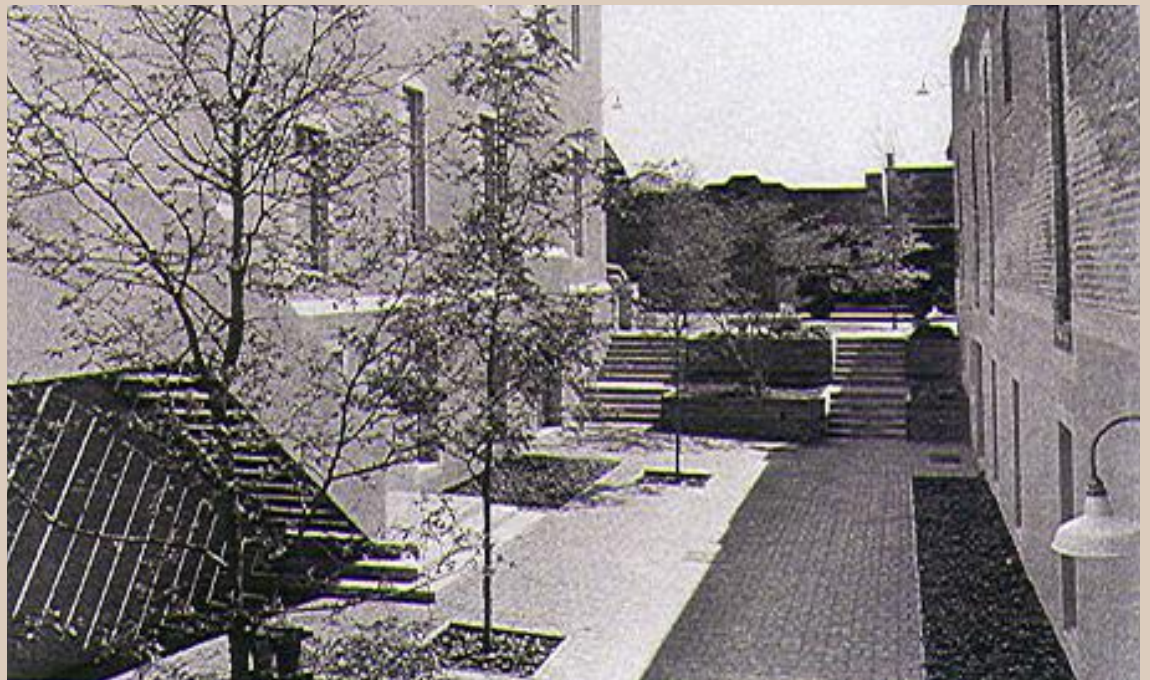
Courtyard, looking north.



Courtyard entry.



Second level architects' offices.



Courtyard, looking south..



Richard Segars

CONGRESS AVENUE: AN IMPORTANT CULTURAL HERITAGE

Congress Avenue is the most historic and symbolically important street in the state, and for that reason was put on the National Register of Historic Places in 1978. Although Austin has a well-written Historic Landmark Ordinance which empowers the city to create an historic district and to develop the design guidelines necessary to protect it, to date the Avenue has not yet been so designated. Until the city follows up on the initiative of the National Register district, the Avenue has no protection against incompatible or intruding structures, which tend to destroy the continuity of the street and the "view corridor" to the Capitol.

Congress Avenue has long since outlived its usefulness as a retail street, and is experiencing increasing pressure to become a single-use office park made up of high-rise buildings. Physically, the Avenue is deteriorated and uncared-for to the extent that it does not enjoy the ongoing renaissance of nearby 6th Street. Its scale and character are not at all appropriate

for the pedestrian. The street is too wide, the sidewalks are too narrow, and there is little or no shade on hot summer days. In general, business people on the Avenue have not been able to find the cooperative mechanisms that could help generate business in the few remaining retail stores.

Among the few existing bright spots on the Avenue are the Paramount Theatre, which has been restored and has embarked on an energetic program of performing arts, and the historic Tips Building, which has been restored as the headquarters for a local savings and loan.

A plan to beautify the Avenue by expanding sidewalks at certain points, and adding trees, is under consideration by a task force. The current scheme, which retains six traffic lanes, represents an unfortunate compromise to a more generous four-lane proposal which was scrapped after being approved and funded. The city council withdrew its support in the wake of a very negative campaign waged primarily by large downtown banks fearing changes in traffic patterns.

Philosophically, Congress Avenue was defined in the case study as Austin's greatest opportunity to recreate a prosperous humane environment out of the existing fabric, while protecting an important cultural heritage. The Avenue is a prototype of zone 2, i.e., new development as infill in a partially historic context. Every city and town in Texas has its Congress Avenue or Main Street, and usually they suffer from all the symptoms defined here.

One of the key aspects of the study was a survey of the impact of Historic Districts and beautification projects on similar streets in comparable cities. This study yielded undeniable evidence that business investment, employment, physical improvement and taxes all increased sharply as a result of historic designation. A study of Santa Barbara, California, as well as many other case studies, showed that the business community reacts to a proposal for historic district designation in predictable ways. At first, businessmen opposed the idea of historic districts and beautification; then they actively fought against it. Once the district was an accomplished fact, they quickly learned that they could profit from it. The most difficult to convince were not the local property owners, as one would guess, but the developers and speculators, who feared their potential for future development would be threatened. Usually, the local business owners get behind the district efforts once they are convinced that business will improve as a result.

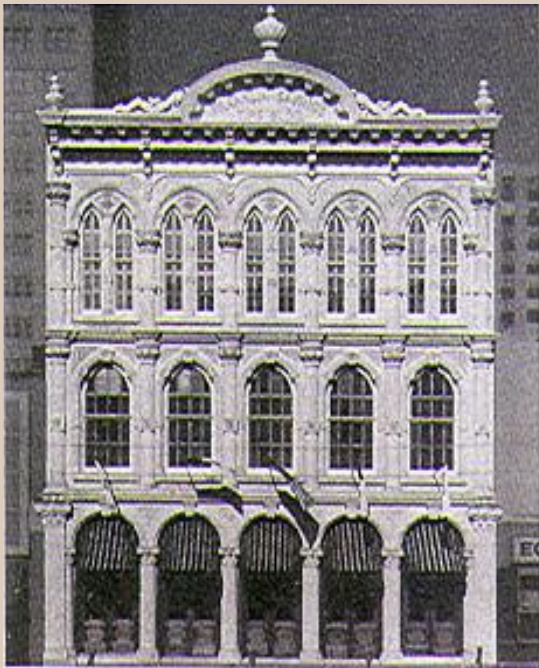
Congress Avenue presently has 2,325,000 square feet of existing space on its 11 full blocks of land area, of which 525,000 square feet is identified as historic, another 200,000 is classified as "contributing to the scale and texture of the street," 1,200,000 square feet is identified as non-contributing (e.g., the bus station and several high-rise banks). Another 400,000



Ken Emerson

Images of the Avenue

BELOW: Tips Building, recently restored by Bell, Klein and Hoffman for Franklin savings.



Richard Segars



BELOW: Paramount Theater, a "bright spot," restored by Bell, Klein & Hoffman.



Richard Segars

square feet is considered replaceable.

For the purposes of this study, a development envelope was assumed which establishes the following design guidelines:

Facades would be not less than two floors, nor more than four.

Maximum building heights would be 60 feet, with flexible setback provisions to insure a responsible facade height.

New building would be compatible with respect to material, scale, rhythm, texture, color and fenestration, and canopies and signs would be controlled to insure consistency and compatibility.

Despite what seem at first glance to be severe limitations, analysis of the development potential within these guidelines indicates that the square footage on Congress could be doubled in the next 10 years and the street would be better for it.

The historic district ordinance that has not been written for Congress Avenue will deal with all of the above issues in addition to zoning and parking.

The bottom line—to borrow a term from other sectors—seems to be that historic designation, combined with a commitment to the proposed beautification of the street

itself, is the only chance Congress Avenue has to once again be an economically viable place for people.



Sinclair Black is a professor of Architecture and Planning at the School of Architecture. University of Texas, Austin. He is a member of the National AIA Committee on Urban Design and maintains a small practice in Austin.

Patterns Specific to Congress Avenue

- *Historic fabric.*

Grants, low-cost loans, tax abatement programs, and Federal tax incentives must be provided to encourage the restoration of historic buildings. Local revolving funds must be created to provide incentive grants for preservation, restoration and adaptive reuse.

- *Re-creation of the Street.*

Continuity of new building, as well as protection of the existing historic fabric, would be insured by local ordinance. Congress is a linear space of enormous power and symbolism. It is a street of facades reflecting its rich cultural history as the central mercantile street of Austin until the 1930s. On facades facing Congress, this ordinance would regulate "visual compatibility factors": height, general proportion, rhythms of solids to voids, and the relationships of materials, textures, colors and roof shapes to existing structures.

- *Protection of the View Corridor.*

During the 60s and 70s two high-rise buildings were built on the east side of Congress. Both buildings are considered by Austinites to be unfortunate intrusions into the "view corridor" to the capitol. Height limitations and a setback formula on the Congress Avenue edges would preserve the scale of the street, protect the view corridor and help insure compatibility and continuity over the 11-block length.

- *Repair the Avenue.*

Congress avenue itself would be improved. The sidewalks are narrow, ugly and cluttered. There is little shade and almost no foliage. The scheme adopted should incorporate trees, widen side-walks, narrow the sprinting distance which actually and psychologically separates the sides of the street, and should generally demonstrate that someone cares about the Avenue, the people who use it, and the economic future of downtown.

- *Parking.*

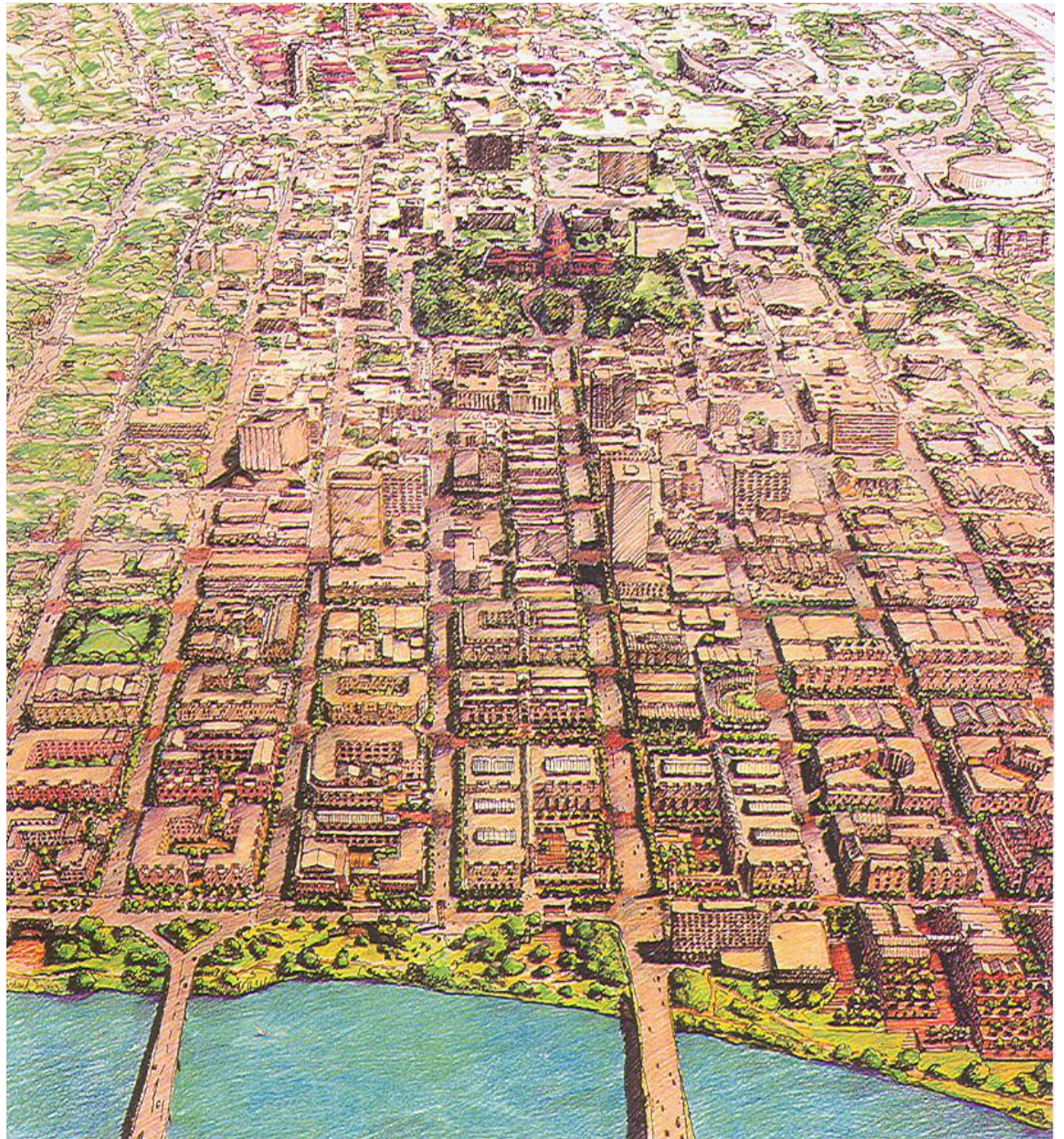
The original street was supported by close-in neighborhoods and the trolley system that served them. Both are long gone and the zone is clearly auto dependent. Parking should be provided, but only well away from the street itself and plans should be made to once again support it with public transportation.

- *Natural Light.*

The main problem of converting the long, narrow party wall buildings from retail functions to new uses, such as office space, is the lack of natural light. By selectively removing less valuable smaller buildings through cooperation among owners (leaving the facades), or by the generous use of atriums cut into existing buildings, natural light could be brought into the long side of the larger, remaining structure.

- *Shady People Spaces.*

New spaces created between buildings could link a tree shaded Congress Avenue with a tree-covered alley, creating a continuous pedestrian system which permeates the fabric of the blocks flanking the Avenue, links into the proposed open space network of the Warehouse District, and thereby into Town Lake as well as Waller and Shoal Creeks.



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Downtown Austin Urban Design in Texas
the Town Square Color in Texas Architecture

VISION 02

Great Streets Master Plan

The former director of Urban Design and Planning in San Francisco, Alan Jacobs, wrote a fantastic book in the late 1980s called *Great Streets*. This book analyzed and documented dozens of wonderful and lively streets around the world. It was largely illustrated with drawings he made during his travels.

As a member of the board of the Downtown Austin Alliance (DAA) and its streetscape committee, I took the book to meetings where we discussed Great Streets concepts in depth. We asked ourselves tough questions like, “Why doesn’t Austin have any great streets?” Lucy Galbraith of the DAA staff lobbied the public works department to create a Great Streets Master Plan until the assistant director reluctantly agreed to give the group the leftover money from a previous project, if she would just leave them alone.

The DAA selected Black + Vernooy, Girard Kinney, Donna Carter, and Elenor McKinney as the core Great Streets Team along with other consultants for the one-year effort to create a master plan for the central business district inspired by the book *Great Streets*. The city assigned Jana McCann and Susan Daniels to organize and oversee our master planning efforts.

The Great Streets Team, the Citizens Advisory Group, and the Technical Advisory Group met bi-monthly. The Citizens Advisory Group and the Technical Advisory Group were appointed by the city to advise our team. Bringing three different teams together with slightly different incentives with the goal of collaboration was a truly visionary move by the city that has never been replicated. It was a collaborative effort facilitating communication between the consultants, the bureaucrats, and the citizens. Together we were able to arrive at a consensus plan which was later adopted by the city council.

Our team studied a return to two-way streets, ADA implications, street and pedestrian lighting, retail frontages, tree plantings, utility systems and parking, sidewalk widths, and sidewalk cafes. The first street to be partially constructed according to the detailed guidelines contained in the Great Streets Plan was 2nd Street. This action resulted in an unbelievable increase of the tax base in that general area. The city has yet to fully realize the potential for the implementation of the Master Plan on a larger scale, which could revitalize the entire downtown area and expand along the arterials to the entire region.



A small segment of Second Street became the center of downtown life day and night as soon as the guidelines of Great Streets were implemented.

VISION 03

Central Park at Central Market

Our office was hired by the State of Texas to do a master plan for the development of 40 acres of vacant land at the northeast corner of 38th Street and N. Lamar Boulevard. That land was part of the approximately 400-acre historic state school, all of which is still owned by the State of Texas.

The 40 acres we dealt with was at an optimal location, which had been previously identified by a study as the centroid of Austin's regional wealth. Once the state decided to lease part of it under a long-term lease, every business wanted to be there.

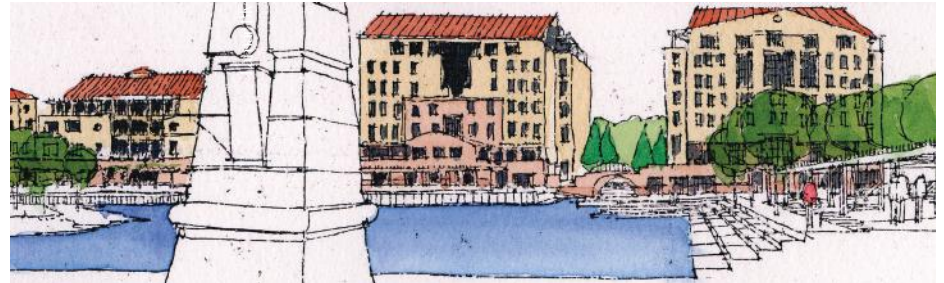
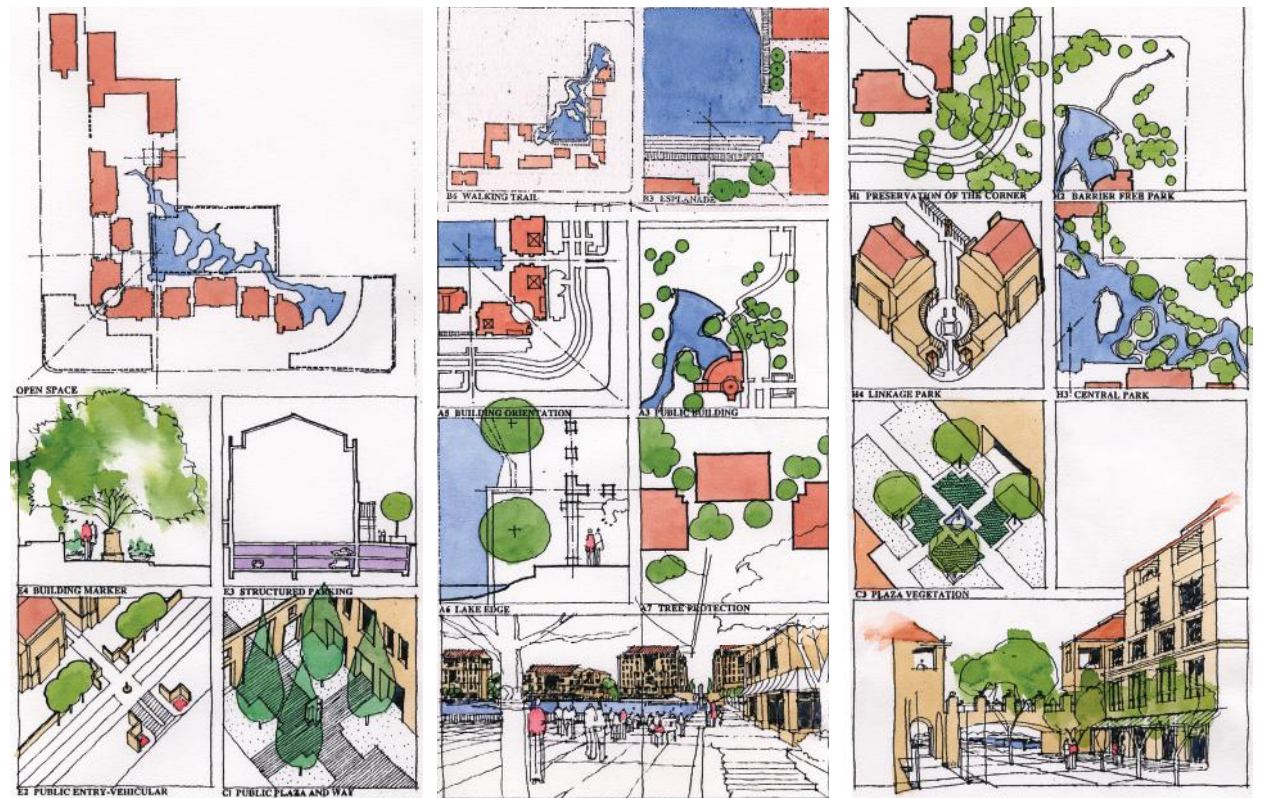
We did a master plan that included a small flood-controlled lake and the protection of hundreds of trees, along with a development of 860,000 square feet that included several medical buildings, a branch library, significant housing, several retirement buildings, and a modest retail center. We named it Central Park because it was so central to Austin and very park-like.

The planning principles illustrated in the diagrams here were a central park-like open space with all the buildings distributed along the 38th Street and N. Lamar edges. The diagrams show a small, peripheral, and heavily landscaped internal boulevard as a continuous buffer. Our vision defined building sizes and heights, the zones of spaces, buffers, and access points. We slowly worked the ideas into a series of public meetings with adjacent

neighborhoods. In the end, the vision for the project was widely accepted and unanimously approved by the planning commission and the city council as well as five adjacent neighborhoods.



Central Park Master Plan
Design Guidelines



Design guidelines for Central Park development

VISION 04

The First Central Market

After creating the site plan for the land at 38th Street and N. Lamar Blvd., we created a vision for a 40,000-square-foot HEB grocery store surrounded by several small and medium-sized retail businesses. Ultimately, the HEB program called for a 100,000 square foot store as the anchor for the entire site. The final buildout of the site includes a grocery store, retail spaces, the Heart Hospital, and a multi-family residential project, all set around parkland, the hike and bike trail, and a small lake.

We were so fascinated with the term “central” that we presumed this to be the name for the grocery store. Greg Thomas, an architect in my office, wrote “Central Market” directly on a watercolor we did for HEB which became the logo for the first Central Market as well as for all subsequent Central Markets.

HEB was in the process of trying to reinvent the concept of a grocery store. They had followed the development of Harry’s Market in Atlanta which operated like a regional vegetable market but in a simple retail building. I was sent to Atlanta to observe and analyze Harry’s operations and use his successful concepts to reinvent this new vision for HEB. The paradigm was completely different from a traditional grocery store. There was no storage, so everything was fresh and moved directly from the delivery trucks to the shelves of the store. I reported to HEB that the operation worked, and Harry did everything to create a better experience

for his shoppers, but he did so without paying attention to some important details. I felt certain that we could innovate on his basic idea to develop the template for Central Markets across Texas. The building at Central Park was constructed to be as low maintenance as possible. The concept included as big a porch as possible facing west, and a wonderful food court facing south toward the trees and the lake.

The outdoor patio area facing the central park quickly became a significant gathering space for people of all ages. That outdoor area often hosts bands playing live music for crowds of families. On quieter evenings, the outdoor seating for the restaurant allows for a beautiful view of the lake and the large oaks. The entire venue is still a very popular outdoor space 30 years later.



An outdoor, family-friendly music venue and restaurant remain popular after 30 years.

VISION 05

Reconnect Austin: Eliminating the Real Barriers, Don't Be Fooled

The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) has been trying to widen I-35 for several decades as it runs through Austin, dividing and isolating East Austin from Central Austin. It is a barrier that must be removed. Decades later most people don't even realize what the actual barriers are. While the elevated roadway has come to symbolize the barrier, the real barriers have been ignored.

The 3 main barriers are: the access roads, the ramps, and the open, uncapped ditch. TxDOT has been forced by public opinion to make a few positive changes in their design, but these are not enough to eliminate the real barriers. They plan to put the main lanes below grade level to remove the visual symbol, yet they plan to keep all the real barriers: the access roads, the ramps, and the "Big Ditch."

Reconnect Austin has proposed a solution to eliminate all the various barriers in one simple and seamless design. This alternative envisions below-grade main lanes and stresses capping the entire sunken freeway. By transforming the frontage roads into an urban boulevard in one right of way, the boulevard then becomes an integral part of the urban grid, taking full advantage of the future value of the edges of the boulevard.

The community alternative proposes a new way to enter and exit the main lanes below grade. Traffic leaving the highway moves from the main lanes to two collector-distributor (CD) lanes. The outside CD lane takes you directly to a portal ramp (an exit). The inside CD lane allows you to bypass the exit to the next exit. A portal ramp exits the CD lane and rises halfway to the surface underground leading to a right turn to emerge one block from the freeway and into the grid. This whole process is reversed to enter the freeway. Removing all barriers at grade level would lead to an enormous economic potential created by the boulevard. The edge of the urban boulevard could easily create at least 30 billion in new tax base that pays for the transformation of the corridor through tax increment financing and funds Austin's amenities (schools, trails, sidewalks, parks, etc.) forever.

VISION 06

Reconnect Austin: Different Opportunities

Reconnect Austin is a grass roots organization formed over 15 years ago by a group of advocates and citizens concerned that the barrier of I-35 through Austin would be made worse by the Texas Department of Transportation's (TxDOT) plan to expand I-35 to 20 lanes of traffic.

The community efforts of the Reconnect initiative took place at different times. First, there were the community efforts downtown where the majority of private development (and therefore new tax base) would be possible. A few years later, the lessons learned downtown were extended to the University of Texas campus. Lastly, community efforts stretched to the neighborhoods further north, including as many as ten distinct neighborhoods. The issues as well as the opportunities are distinctly different in the three zones. However, the basic principles are the same for each district.

The basic principles of Reconnect Austin's plan are:

- Make "future proofing" the number one priority.
- Sink the main lanes of the highway to free up taxable land at the ground level.
- Reinstate Austin's original grid over the highway, reconnecting all east/west streets.
- Use straightforward geometry to narrow the right of way from ~400 feet to 204 feet.
- Create an urban boulevard in the same right of way as the lowered lanes. This at grade boulevard would have an intersection at every east/west street, with slower traffic, hike and bike trails, transit, and 10,000 trees.

- Remove all three barriers; (1) collector distributor lanes replace the access roads below grade, (2) ramps become portal ramps accessible one block away from the boulevard edge, and (3) the open ditch is replaced by a complete cap.
- Create a tax increment zone to fund the reinvention of the whole corridor.
- Create a development agency to manage economic development in the revamped corridor.
- Create a comprehensive urban design plan vetted by a 3rd party consultant hired to ensure a beautiful outcome.

The TxDOT plans offer no advantages whatsoever. The planned expansion of the right of way of the highway is both immensely expensive (the current estimate is \$4.5 billion for 8 miles of highway) and disruptive to local communities. The direct monetary cost of the construction is only one factor in the total cost of the project, which must also include the depression of land values all along the highway and the often-invisible costs of air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

Widening I-35 to 20 lanes through the center of Austin has a significant negative impact on the city and the people who live in Austin. TxDOT should be responsible for mitigating that impact. TxDOT has created a liability for the city by requiring the city to pay for something that will never pay for itself.



A section drawing showing a sunken freeway with a beautiful boulevard in the same right of way on top, freeing up 30 acres for downtown development.

VISION 07

The Next 40 Acres: Underground I-35 Creates a 40-Acre Addition to UT Campus

The original University of Texas at Austin campus was referred to as “the 40 Acres.” Those 40 acres have today grown to more than 400 acres. The central campus constitutes about two-thirds of the total area, while about one-third remains isolated by IH-35. One prominent response to the spatial isolation and economic burden of an urban highway is the “cut and cap,” where the highway itself is depressed below ground level and capped with a continuous tree-lined boulevard to create ‘new’ urban land in the space of an old highway. The University of Texas could be a principal beneficiary of this process of unification.

The university is now discussing the idea of funding this cap where IH-35 currently divides the existing campus to create an additional 40-acre zone known as the “Sports and Entertainment District.” This new district would include additional campus facilities along with private development, such as hotels, restaurants, and retail, to help create the vibrant environment envisioned by the university.

The mechanics to achieve this are relatively simple. The city creates a tax increment financing district (TIF/TIRZ) that would include these “next 40 acres” to fund public investments in the new district and remove the barrier while gaining significant new opportunities to elevate the campus to its ultimate status as a world-class institution. There is just no downside.



Image of the surface boulevard with several points of safe pedestrian crossings from East Campus to Central Campus.

VISION 08

Austin City Hall, Early Vision

After many years of growth of city government, the city started to complain that the various departments were spread all over the region. Discussion started about the idea of consolidating those departments into one City Hall.

To get ahead of that initiative, my office developed a vision for a new City Hall. We started with the most symbolic site in the state, the intersection of Congress Avenue and the Colorado River. The most emblematic and significant building of the State of Texas government is the capitol building which sits at the north end of Congress Avenue, the main street of Texas. The idea was obvious (to our firm) that the city government and City Hall could exist at the south end in a symbolic juxtaposition.

We proposed that the two blocks of city facilities be defined by open, animated public plazas, connected directly to Town Lake (now Lady Bird Lake) for the people of Austin. Both sides of Congress Avenue between 1st and 3rd Streets were virtually vacant at that time, which presented an enormous opportunity.

We produced an urban design plan to locate the new City Hall chambers, the many silos of bureaucracy, a hotel, and two large plazas over parking, all connected directly to the Town Lake Park. In keeping with its past track record, the city declined the vision and decided to use land to the west (the current location at 301 W. 2nd Street) simply because it was city-owned.



Proposal for the municipal office complex demonstrating a symbolic and worthy location for city hall.

VISION 09

Austin Common: A 52-acre site on the South Shore of Town (Lady Bird) Lake

Austin's existing Long Center for the Performing Arts and Palmer Events Center are located on what was once a virtually vacant 52-acre site on the south shore of Town (Lady Bird) Lake. Even before these major civic buildings were built, it was clear that this was Austin's greatest opportunity to expand downtown across the lake, despite the incessant nattering from neighborhoods to the south. It seemed to us to be the best location for a new convention center.

We proposed a major mixed-use development, which included a convention center, a central park with a small lake, extensive housing, with retail and entertainment on every public edge. The images were inspired by both the Boston waterfront and the "Docklands" development in London.

When the "go-to" national development advisors were asked about the idea, they responded that it was probably the best proposed economic development idea in the United States.

Eventually, the politics went south, while the convention center went east and north of the lake to its present location, on land that would have otherwise been taxable.



Proposal for a major mixed-use development on a 52-acre parking lot on the Southshore of Town Lake.

VISION 10

Civilizing Campus Buildings

The University of Texas at Austin campus has a compelling history of great visions and the very best architecture. A bold master plan combined with a limited pallet of materials resulted in a cohesive pedestrian environment on a hilltop among hundreds of trees.

The thread of ideas and the last beautiful buildings were lost completely in the 1950s when the newer buildings became both larger and taller. Soon the eastern side of campus looked like an extension of the state capitol complex a few blocks to the south instead of part of the historic campus. At least the newer buildings were not pink granite.

In one of my design studios, I suggested that this tragic new reality could be partially mitigated with a fresh look at various aspects of the new environment. Among the issues were reinventing the entrance sequences

and symbols connecting the scaleless blocks to the campus through the landscape forms and materials. The students all pitched in to identify the needed changes including the reinvention of the vast East Mall and the unfinished North Mall which had become a parking lot.

Although subsequent master plans paid lip service to the problems, much more can be done to civilize the modern campus buildings and spaces.

The worst of the worst

UT, Austin | Aerospace Engineering and Engineering Mechanics



Image Courtesy: Google Street View

The best of the best

UT, Austin | Student Activity Center



Image Courtesy: Studio Balcones

UT, Austin | School of Information



Image Courtesy: University of Texas at Austin

UT, Austin | School of Architecture



Image Courtesy: University of Texas at Austin

Students were asked to find ways to give scale and character to campus buildings built after the 1950s.

VISION 11

A River Runs Through It, San Antonio

During my fifty years of teaching at the University of Texas at Austin School of Architecture, I taught many design studios at advanced undergraduate and graduate levels. At least one of the three or four projects each semester would be considered an urban design project.

One semester, I asked fourteen students to study fourteen vacant sites along the San Antonio River. I asked them all to put their work into a consistent and presentable format so the results could be published or exhibited. After a successful faculty review at the School of Architecture, I arranged for a second review in San Antonio at the American Institute of Architects (AIA San Antonio) headquarters space they had at the Pearl. I invited several local San Antonio leaders to engage the students in a “review process” that was unlike the ritual review process that was routine at the school. Local leaders who participated in that review included developers, politicians, and of course, local architects.

The event lasted all day with rich discussions due to the real-world input from the true stakeholders of San Antonio. The exhibit and the model were later moved to the offices of the San Antonio Downtown Alliance.

A few years later, I checked on the fourteen sites: all had been built on although not necessarily benefiting from the results of the studio work.



Fourteen UT Austin architectural students' projects on the San Antonio River corridor were exhibited and discussed by San Antonio leaders.

VISION 12

Expanding Convention Center Facilities at the Palmer Site, A New “Central Park” for Austin

The current convention center originated as a cost-effective idea and a major contribution to the economy, but it has become greatly impacted by surrounding development. Convention activities are already divided between the center and the Palmer Auditorium or exhibit hall. This proposal recommends limiting the extremely expensive rebuild planned for the current site. The alternative is connecting the existing site to the Palmer site by rail and building additional convention center facilities. Some of the advantages of the additional convention center facilities are the following:

The new expansion would feature a world class urban experience of rail and/or shuttle bus access from numerous downtown locations to the new convention facilities located in Town Lake Park with virtually the best skyline view of any city in the US.

One-third of the existing center, the northern most two blocks, would remain as the most often used section and continue in full operation until the new facilities are built. Prime urban land in Downtown Austin would be freed up for tax-paying private development. As much as \$60 million in land value would become available at the current site.

The additional facilities at Palmer offer adequate land and significant access from major arterials with the possibility of using the existing rail to create further access to the new center.

During the 10-year (or longer) construction period of the I-35 corridor, access to the existing center will be seriously compromised. Mopac Expressway, on the other hand, provides easy and direct access to the new center from the west.

An expanded Palmer site could host a 2,300-seat auditorium and 70,000 sq. ft. of exhibit space, all existing on untaxable land, which the current facility cannot provide now or in the future. Access to an on-site parking garage (~1600 cars) with an opportunity to increase that capacity.

A robust streetcar system linking downtown directly to the additional new site would allow significantly more access to the site.

The proposed site is located near several hotels, including the 1,400-room Hyatt. The addition of several more hotels near the site would be possible. South Shore Central (East of Congress Ave.) would become a perfect site for other hotels, connected by a short, scenic walk along the lake.

Palmer is an ideal location with respect to city amenities like the 10-mile corridor of Town Lake with hiking/biking trails. Imagine a newly defined “amenity district” that extends from Zilker Park on the west to Congress Avenue and beyond to the proposed South Shore Central, creating a true “Regional Central Park”.



An expansion of the convention facilities proposed at the Palmer Site creates a new Central Park for Austin.

VISION 13

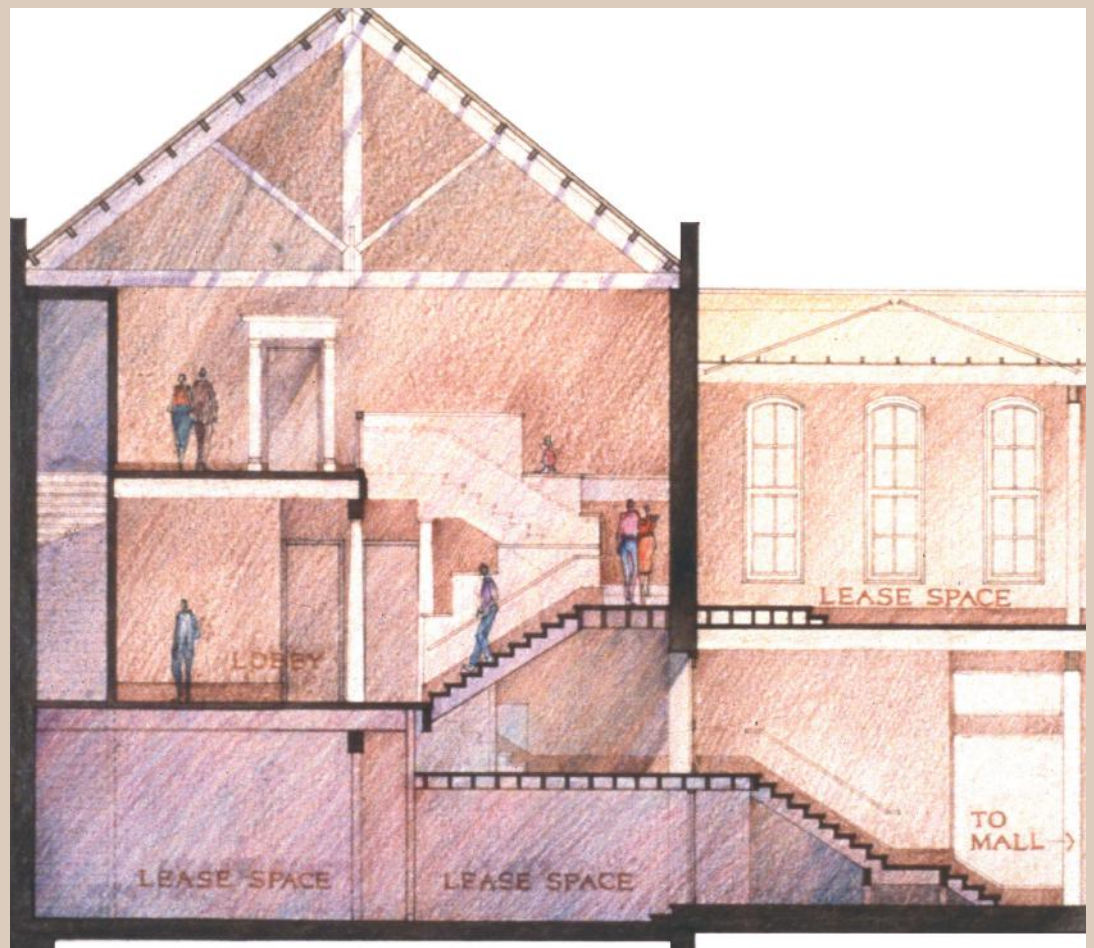
Galveston Common: On the Strand

Our firm, particularly Simon Atkinson, who at one point was a partner of Black + Vernooy, became involved with the Galveston Historical Foundation in the 1970s. We discussed the idea of a master plan to protect the historic district known as “The Strand”.

Galveston is one of the most historic cities in Texas. I became so interested in the historic collection of buildings that I bought two pre-Civil War buildings directly across the street from the Galveston Historical Foundation on the Strand. I got a low-interest loan from Moody Bank and proceeded to renovate the two adjacent structures. I rented out the spaces which included a large restaurant, a bookstore, a huge event space on the 2nd floor, and a small six-room hotel, all pivoting around an atrium that served both buildings for a total of 38,800 square feet. I named the overall project Galveston Common.

The economy in Texas collapsed in the 1980s, and tourism, the lifeblood of Galveston’s economy, came to a halt. In an act of desperation, I put a large FOR SALE banner in a second-floor window of the building.

The eventual sale gave me enough cash to keep my 4th Street property in downtown Austin as well as invest in other ventures.





View of two historic buildings on the Strand and the two atriums within.

VISION 14

Congress Avenue, A Complete Vision

The currently proposed plan for the downtown segment of Congress Avenue is generally a good one, but I propose a few refinements that are listed below:

1. Parallel parking with wide sidewalks is a first step towards the ultimate Great Street.
2. Create a plaza without cars north of 7th Street, as long as Brazos and Colorado are converted back to 2-way streets.
3. All east/west cross streets must be converted back to 2-way.
4. "Future proofing" of the avenue should include a detailed plan for streetcars. Put rail transit where people want to go.
5. Further consideration should be given to Congress Avenue as the "Main Street of Texas."

North End:

- Speedway through the UT campus is a virtual extension of Congress Avenue and has been reimagined as a major corridor of campus activity.
- Congress Avenue at MLK should be treated as a major civic place connecting UT and the state complex.
- Congress Ave at 11th should become the location of the State Visitor Center with a major hotel, conference center, and civic plazas on both the east and west corners.
- Congress Avenue from the capital to the UT campus has been recently reimagined as a pedestrian mall with underground parking.

South End:

- The intersection of Congress Avenue, Cesar Chavez, and Lady Bird Lake (formerly Town Lake) needs to become a significant activity place for the avenue as well as for the lake.
- The bridge should become an important civic place, with widened sidewalks, a plan for future rail, and viewing decks with shade.

South Congress to Riverside:

- Beyond the bridge, the edges of Congress should be envisioned for future development, particularly the "South Shore Central" site on the east side.
- Symbolically, the avenue should be celebrated with a large traffic circle at the intersection of Riverside Drive, not unlike the "Dupont Circle" in Washington.

South Congress to Oltorf:

- Wider sidewalks and parallel parking should be extended from Riverside to Oltorf Street and celebrated with another large circle to announce the arrival from the South. Small, periodic roundabouts could eliminate all left turns, making the "Main Street of Texas" a safe street.



To realize the potential of Congress Avenue requires specific urban responses to the many different and unique conditions from north to south.

VISION 15

Green Water Treatment Plant

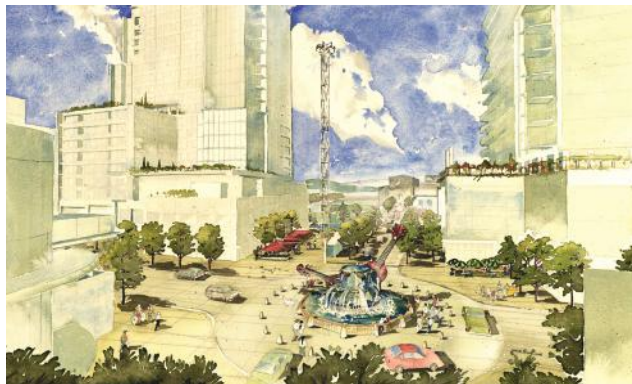
Austin's primary water treatment plant was located at the confluence of Shoal Creek and Lady Bird (formerly Town) Lake. The plant had been abandoned in favor of other sites and technologies for water treatment years earlier.

Forrest City, one of the largest and most creative developers in the US, contracted with both Don Bosse, a prominent landscape architect in Austin, and our firm to help them craft a vision of what could and should be built on this very important site to replace the industrial water treatment plant.

We worked together for a few weeks on a program and images for a very dense, mixed-use complex, connected to the city center by Lady Bird Lake, First, Second, and Third Streets, Shoal Creek Trail, and the cross-town rail line. Our specific plan didn't come to fruition, but other developers and designers gradually paid attention to the potential of the area.

Since then, the Seaholm District, the new Central Library, and several new high-rise buildings have emerged, creating one of Austin's most successful activity zones.





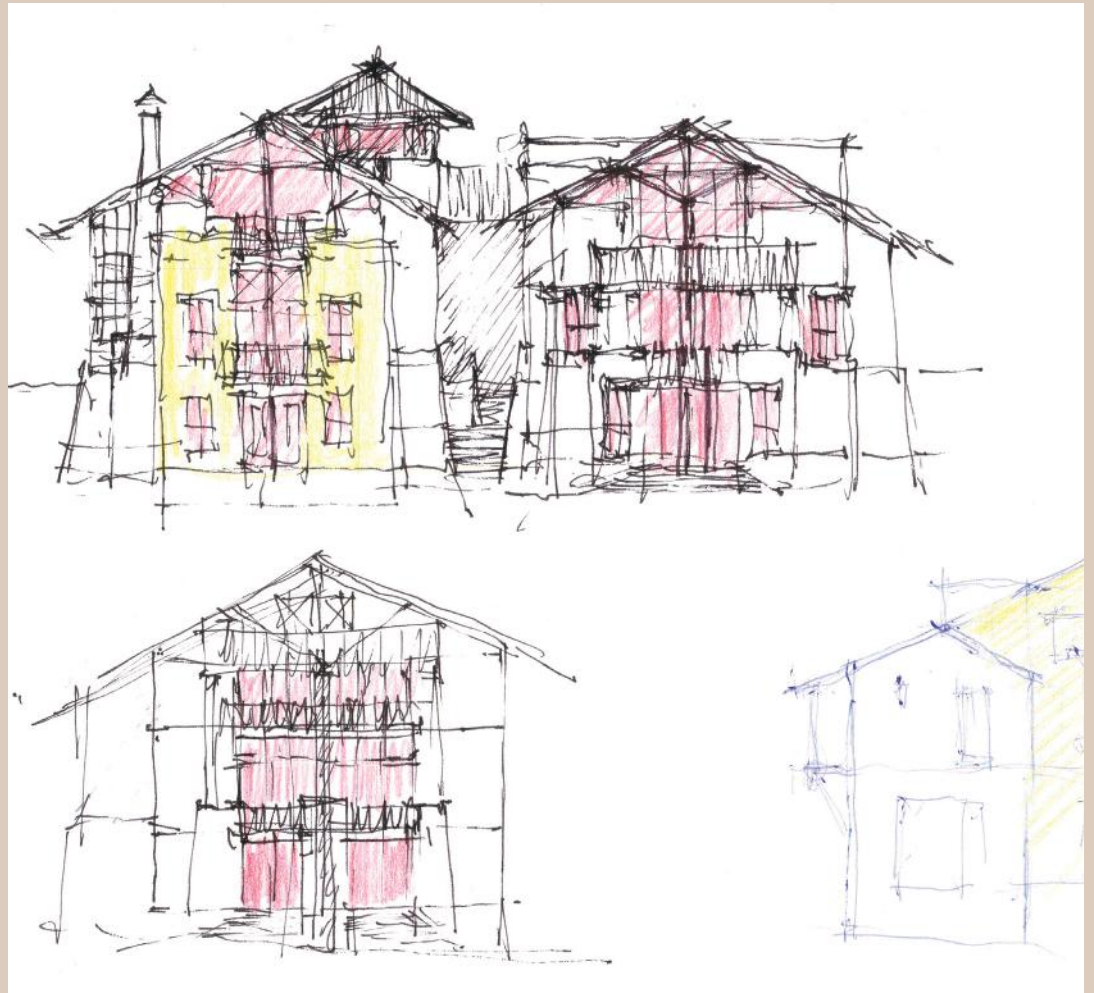
An early proposal for redevelopment of the southwest corner of downtown. The site has now become home to the Seaholm mixed-use district, a new Austin Public Library, and several high-rise buildings.

VISION 16

Marshall Ranch, Hill Country

Marshall Ranch was the name of a 1,500-acre tract of land on Lake Travis within the city limits of Lago Vista. The plans called for an 18-hole golf course which would become Gary Player's home course. Our firm was hired to develop urban design guidelines and to design the clubhouse, various community amenities, and even a major utility structure. The numerous design projects included townhomes, single-family homes, and even a home for Gary Player and his wife, overlooking the 10th green.

The whole project stopped when the lender went into receivership. Twenty years later, the infrastructure investments continue to deteriorate as the entire site has yet to be developed.





Rendering of the proposed golf clubhouse.



Hilltop Condominium Complex

VISION 17

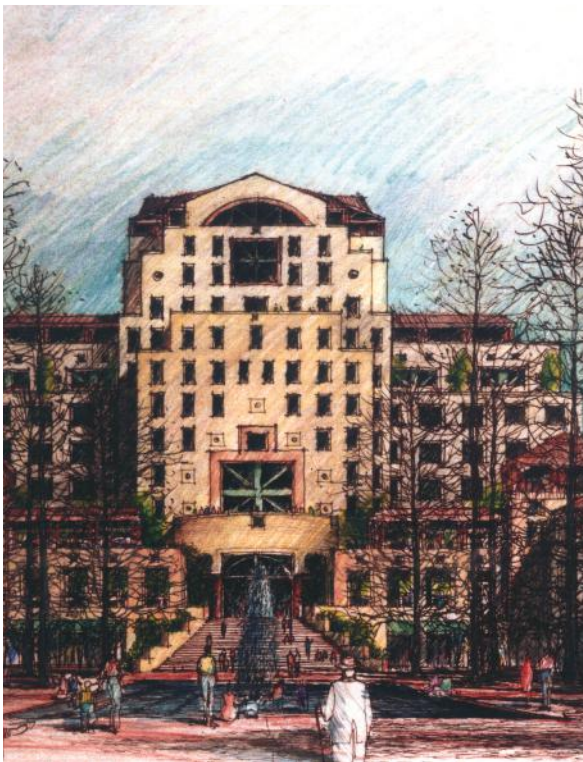
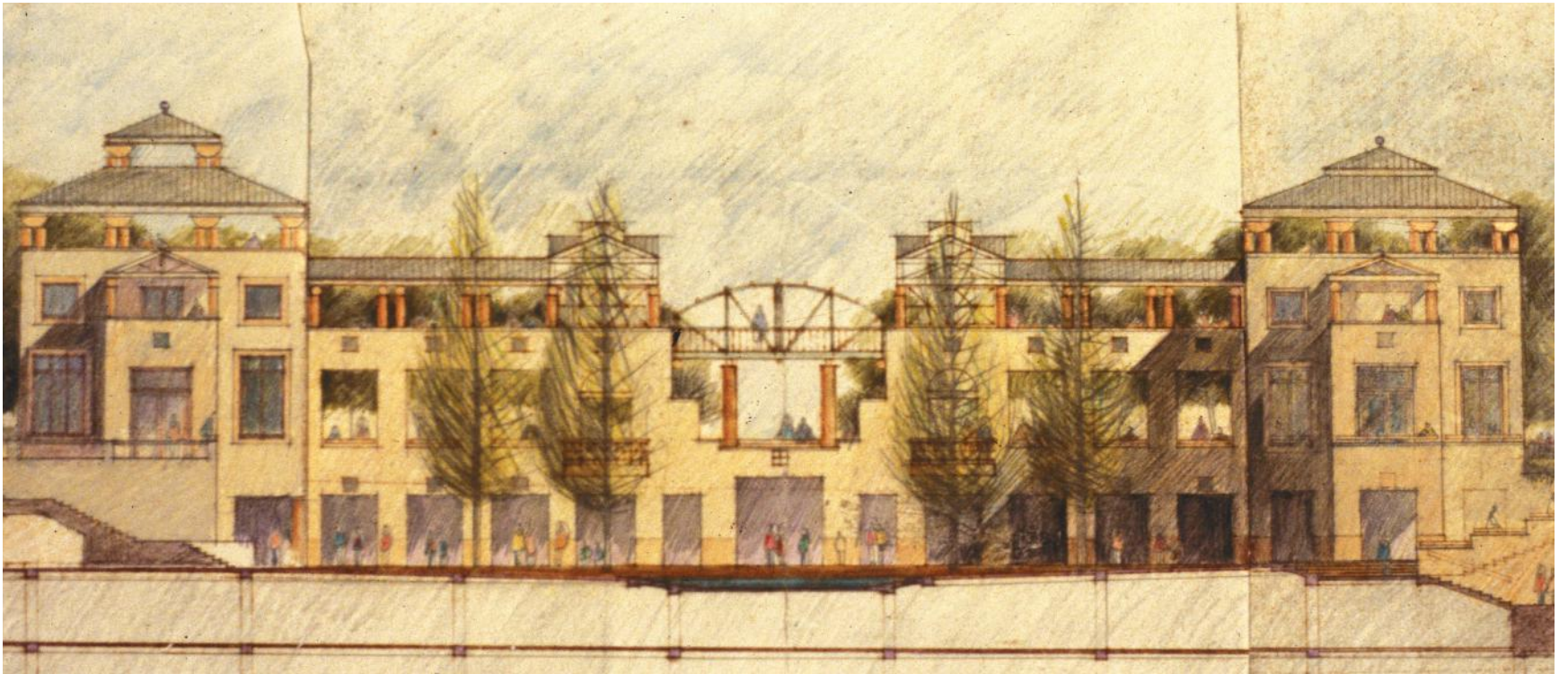
Municipal Office Complex (M.O.C): A Competition for a New City Hall

In 1983, the City of Austin hired Roma, a California architectural firm, to oversee an international design competition. That program called for a new city hall including significant open public space, a large office building, and a hotel.

We entered and were selected as “Best of Show.” At the same time, the city selected a developer to implement the project. We shared an office in one of their buildings until the state economy collapsed again in the late 1980s.

Unfortunately, the City canceled the initiative at exactly that moment when the city was the only entity that had a tax base and a flawless credit rating. In other words, they were the only entity that could proceed with the project, taking advantage of bargain prices while shoring up the local economy. City Council’s failure is a shining example of failure of leadership.

Much later, the city council hired a firm from Arizona to design the city hall building at Cesar Chaves and South First Street.. The original idea of consolidating city functions in the interest of efficiency and enhanced communication within the city bureaucracy was ignored. Instead, the symbolic seat of power was built on the central site that could have been a plaza for the public. This failure prompted me to consider writing an article entitled: Austin, Texas, Lost Opportunity National Park.



Overall view of the proposal for the Municipal Office Complex

Proposed Central Plaza and new City Hall.

VISION 18

North Capitol Approach

One of Austin's greatest assets is that the primary elements of the city, the downtown area, the state capitol complex, and the University of Texas campus, are stacked south to north and connected by one central axis, Congress Avenue.

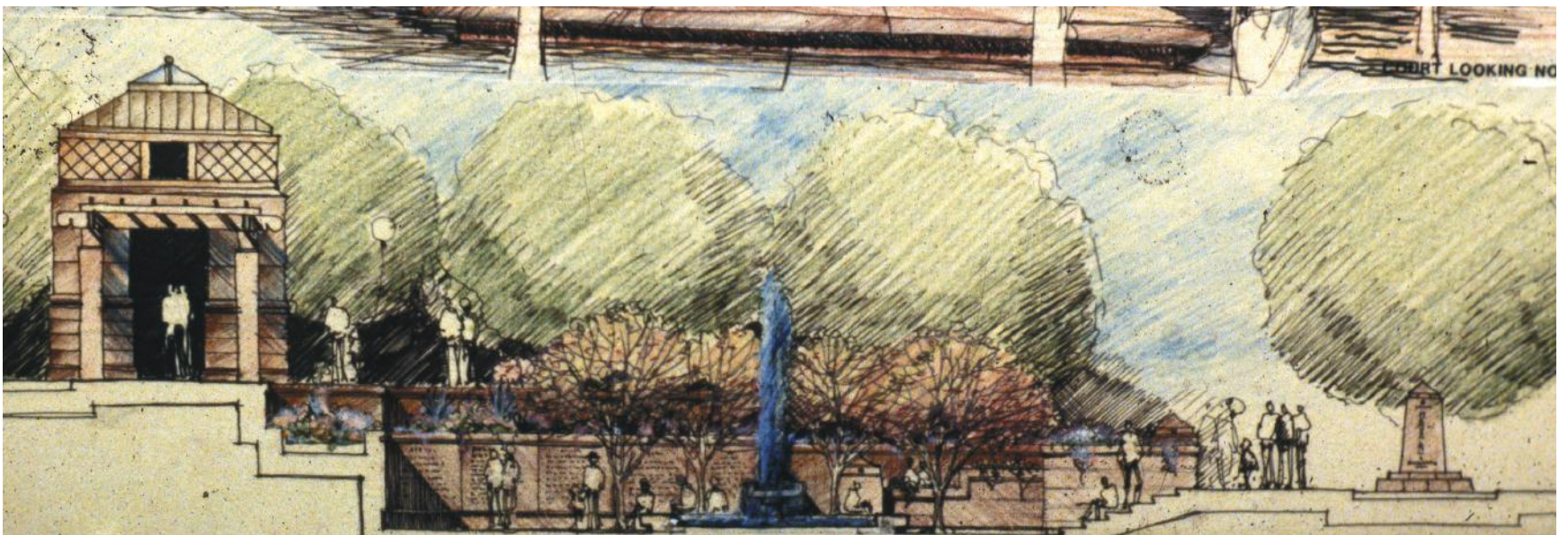
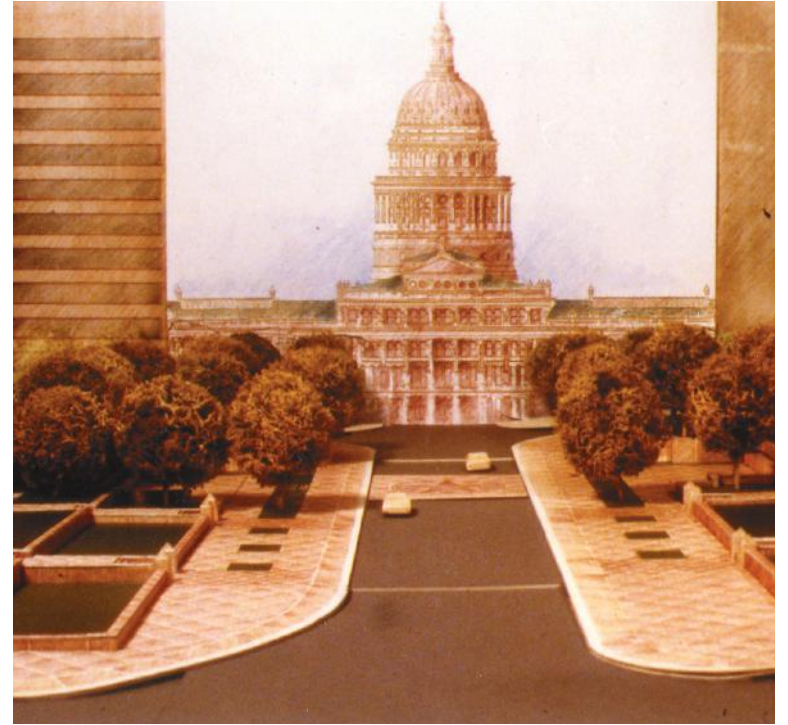
Our firm was hired by the state to explore that segment of Congress Avenue between the University and the capitol. We labeled it the "North Capitol Approach", where many new and scaleless office blocks were being built for the state bureaucracies in one area.

Our firm envisioned an expansive open space along Congress Avenue, stretching south from the University campus. The overall intention was to create a significant public image for the entire complex to bring a sense of dignity to the public realm. Our plans included an expanded pedestrian territory, enhanced mixed-use opportunities, and emphasized park space (two full blocks).

Shortly after we started our work, we were asked to incorporate two memorials into the two parks, one for the Korean War and one for the Vietnam War. These memorials were to be financed by pledges from big oil interests from Houston. When the state economy hit a wall, those pledges were withdrawn.

Sometime later, the Bob Bullock Museum was built on the western side of Congress Avenue at MLK Boulevard. That museum is likely the worst museum building ever designed. Unfortunately, it occupies the full block west of Congress Avenue, compromising any significant connection between the University and the state complex.

Among the many recommendations from our design efforts, we suggested reinforcing the mall-like quality of Congress Avenue between the University and the capitol. We also suggested an underground garage below this segment of the street, thereby freeing three full blocks on the eastern side of the state complex which were wasted on underused parking garages. Twenty-five years later, the state did follow through with the underground garage and the mall-like quality of Congress Avenue.



A proposal to create the North Capitol Approach between the University of Texas and the State Capitol Building

VISION 19

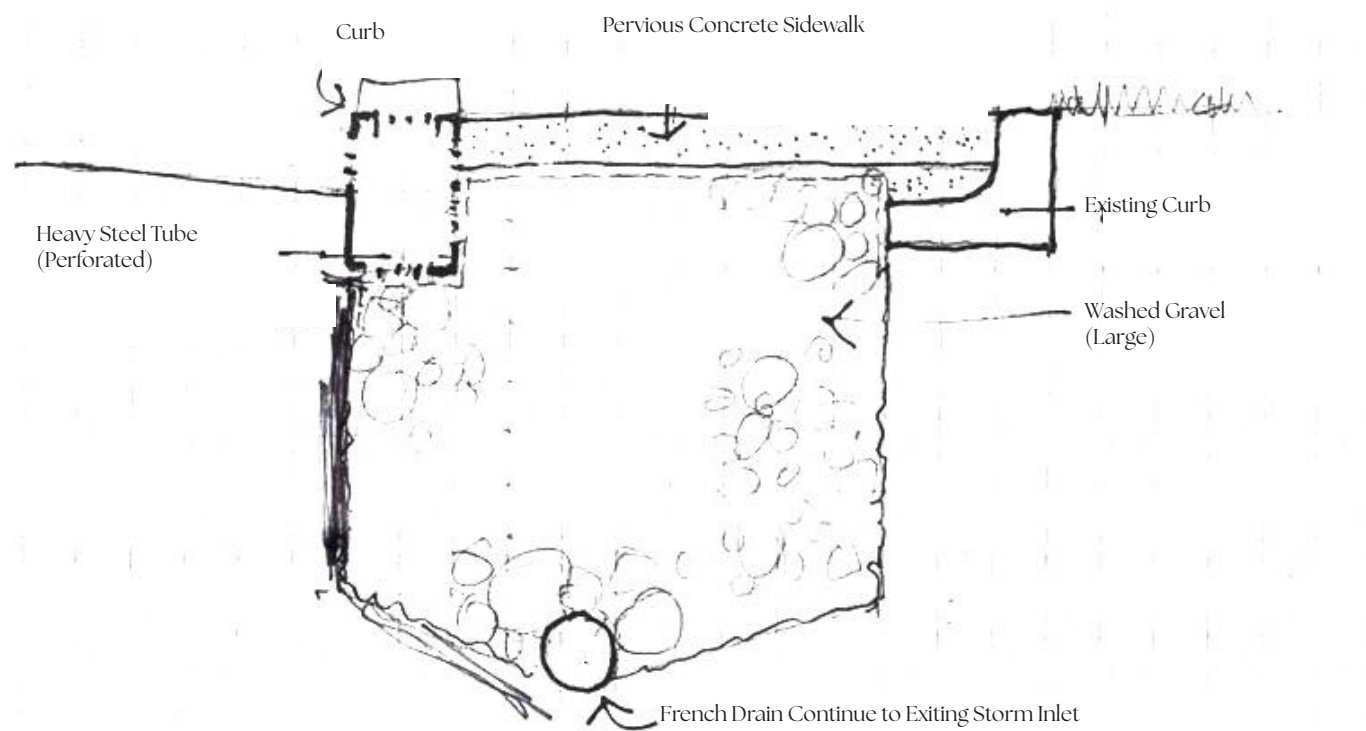
100 Year Cure for Flooding and Water Pollution

As impervious cover increases, primarily in the streets, so does flooding and polluted runoff. The Public Works Department solution is an extensive and expensive storm sewer system to collect the water and convey it as directly as possible to Lady Bird Lake, pollution and all. It would be virtually impossible to rebuild this system due to the costs and wholesale disruption. Keeping this system by making it effective and addressing the pollution that comes off the streets incrementally would be far less costly and far more effective. This change would happen one street at a time, with no major disruption to the overall system. Currently, the polluted runoff is collected by the curbs and conveyed to the nearest downhill inlet.

Imagine an alternative, additional system that collects the water, filters it and delivers it directly underground to that same existing inlet. The new addition to the storm system involves a 5 ft wide and 5 ft deep trench at the curb filled with gravel and capped with pervious concrete. This system is drained by a french drain connecting directly to the existing system. Layers of filter cloth could remove pollutants, even as filtration into the soil is promoted by the slowing down of the runoff process. This creates an approximation of nature's way of limiting flooding.

There are numerous other benefits:

1. The flood control capacity would be amplified significantly.
2. The street runoff pollution would be reduced significantly.
3. Small islands would protect existing curb cuts and become the optimum location for street trees.
4. The trees would provide shade to mitigate the urban heat island associated with impervious cover.
5. The existence of street trees is a significant traffic calming device.



One-hundred-year plan to cure flooding and pollution from the streets of Austin.

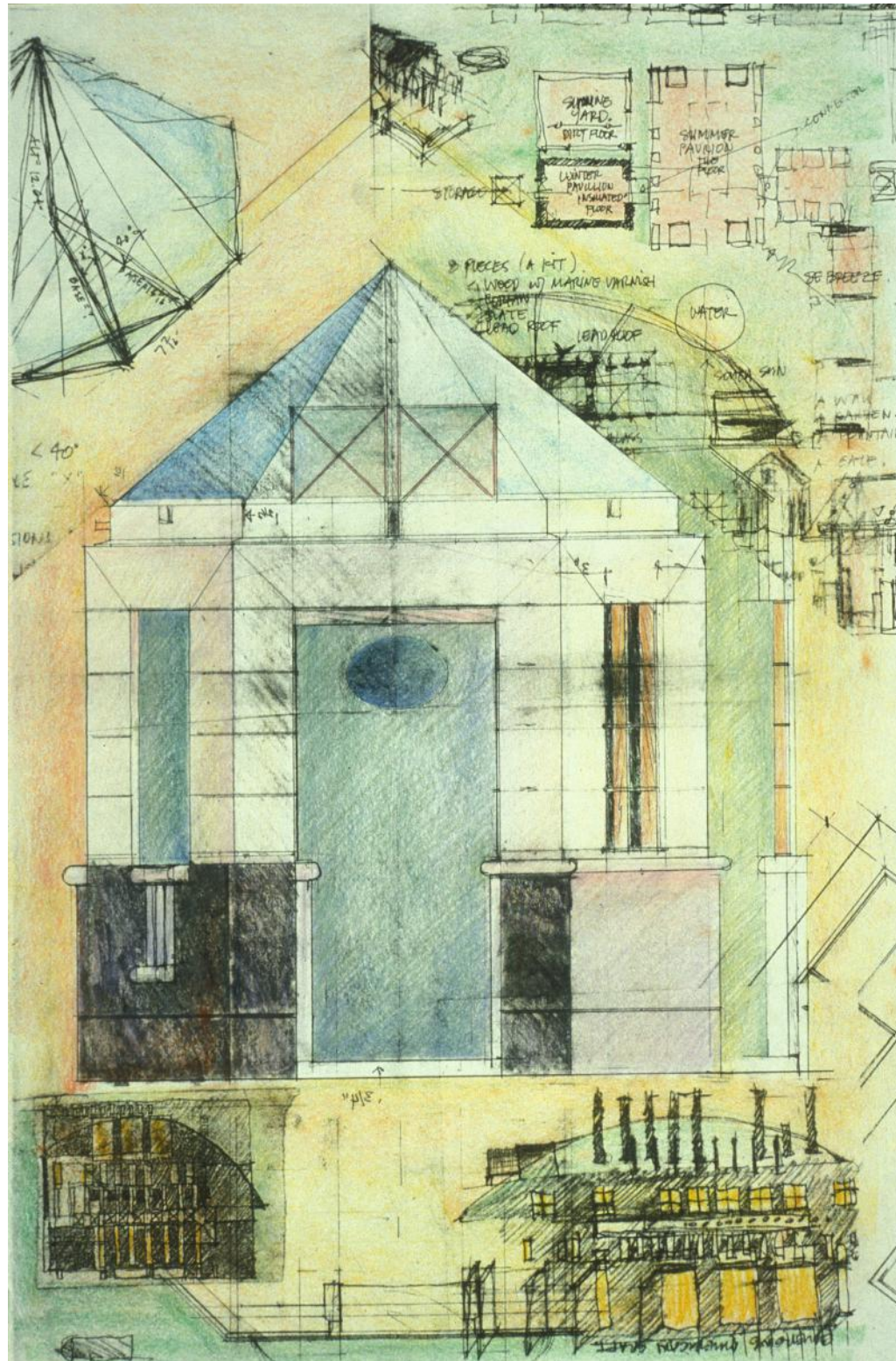
VISION 20

The Doghouse: An Analogy for any Design Process

Our office designed and built a full-sized doghouse for a fundraising auction for the San Antonio Humane Society. Designs were required to be waterproof, low-maintenance, and elegant. The primary materials were solid-surface countertop and clear acrylic for the roof. These were donated and the material budget was used to hire a skilled craftsman. One of the geniuses in my office figured out the geometry of the cuts of all the slabs of artificial marble and the pieces of acrylic. That geometry served as instructions to the builder, and it all came together perfectly.

This project served as a perfect example of the design process: the set of intentions, the limitations and opportunities, the design and drawings for construction, and ultimately, the construction and delivery of the finished product.

At the auction, it sold for \$2,500 and all the proceeds went to the San Antonio Humane Society. I found out later that it ended up being used as a house for cats.



Design for a doghouse to benefit San Antonio Humane Society.

VISION 21

River North, San Antonio

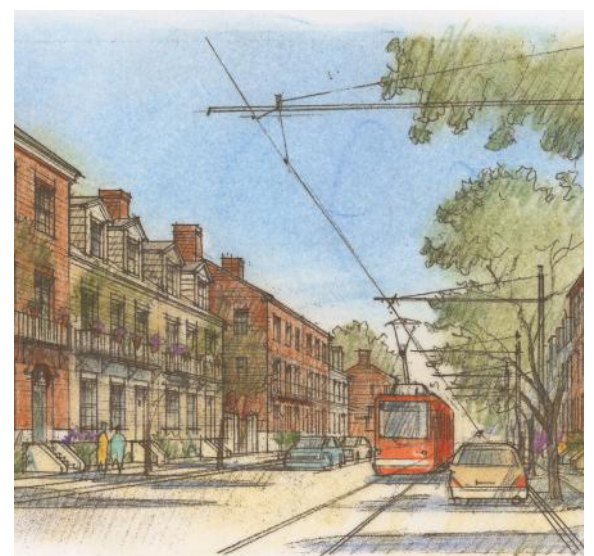
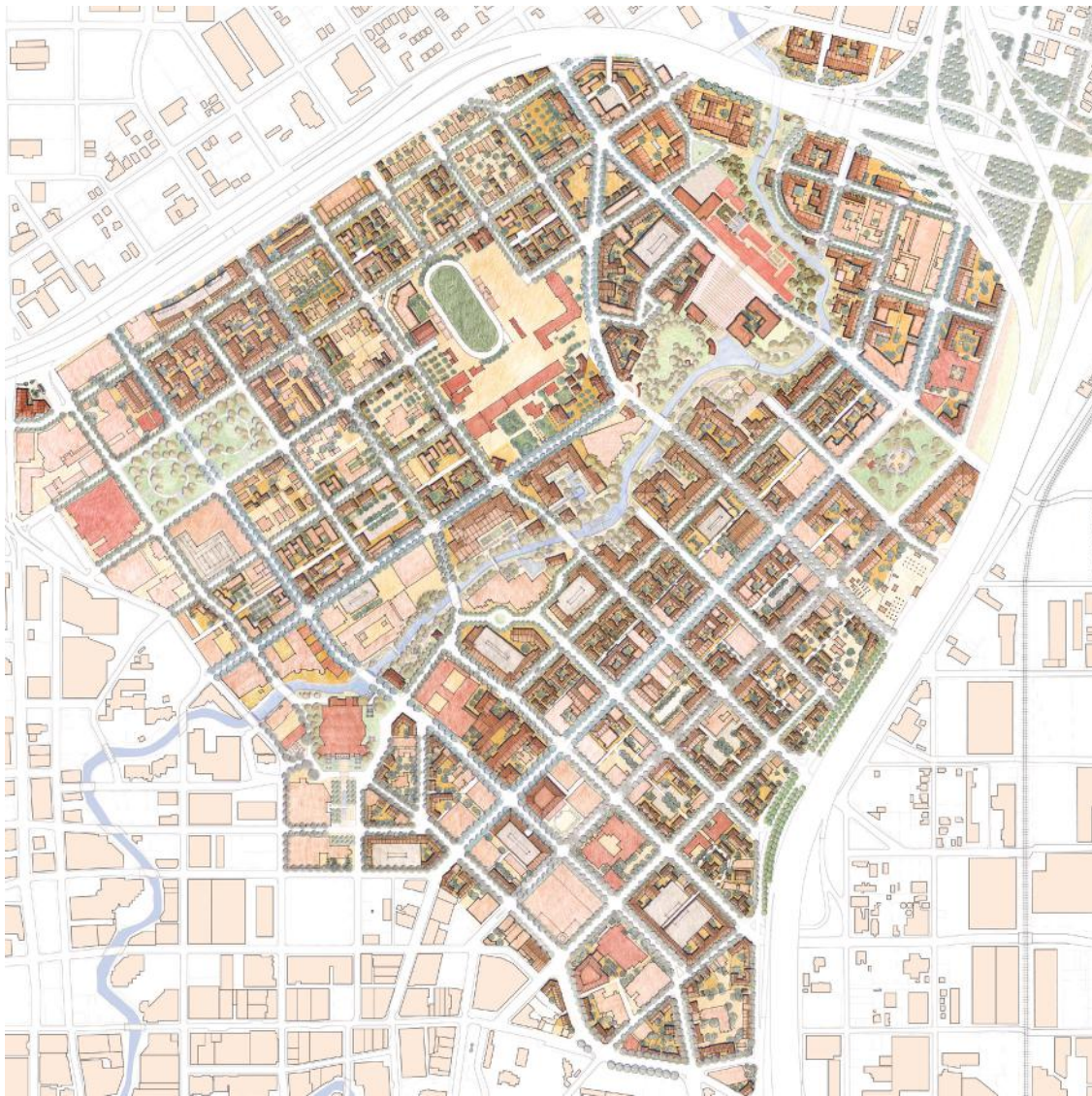
Stefanos Polyzoides is an architect, professor, and author, and was one of the principal founders of the group The Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU). We met and became friends at the annual CNU meetings.

Stefanos called me one day and said he had been put on a shortlist for a major project in San Antonio. He added that he knew I was knowledgeable about San Antonio, and that he was not. He invited me to join him in his efforts, starting by participating in the final interview to secure the project. He was selected for the project called River North and we went to work.

I told Stefanos that San Antonio had several of the best architectural firms in the country. I advised him to benefit from that community and to call the leaders of four or five of those firms and invite them to contribute their ideas for the project, which they did. I informed Stefanos that the key principals

of these firms would likely be involved in one way or another with every board, commission, and worthwhile community initiative in the region. Connecting with the community brought the River North vision into the local culture.

We worked closely in a week-long charrette, followed by a year of refinement. The city eventually adopted the plan and sometime later our River North Plan won a coveted CNU design award.



A master plan and guidelines for the segment of the San Antonio River that connects downtown to the museum district to the north

VISION 22

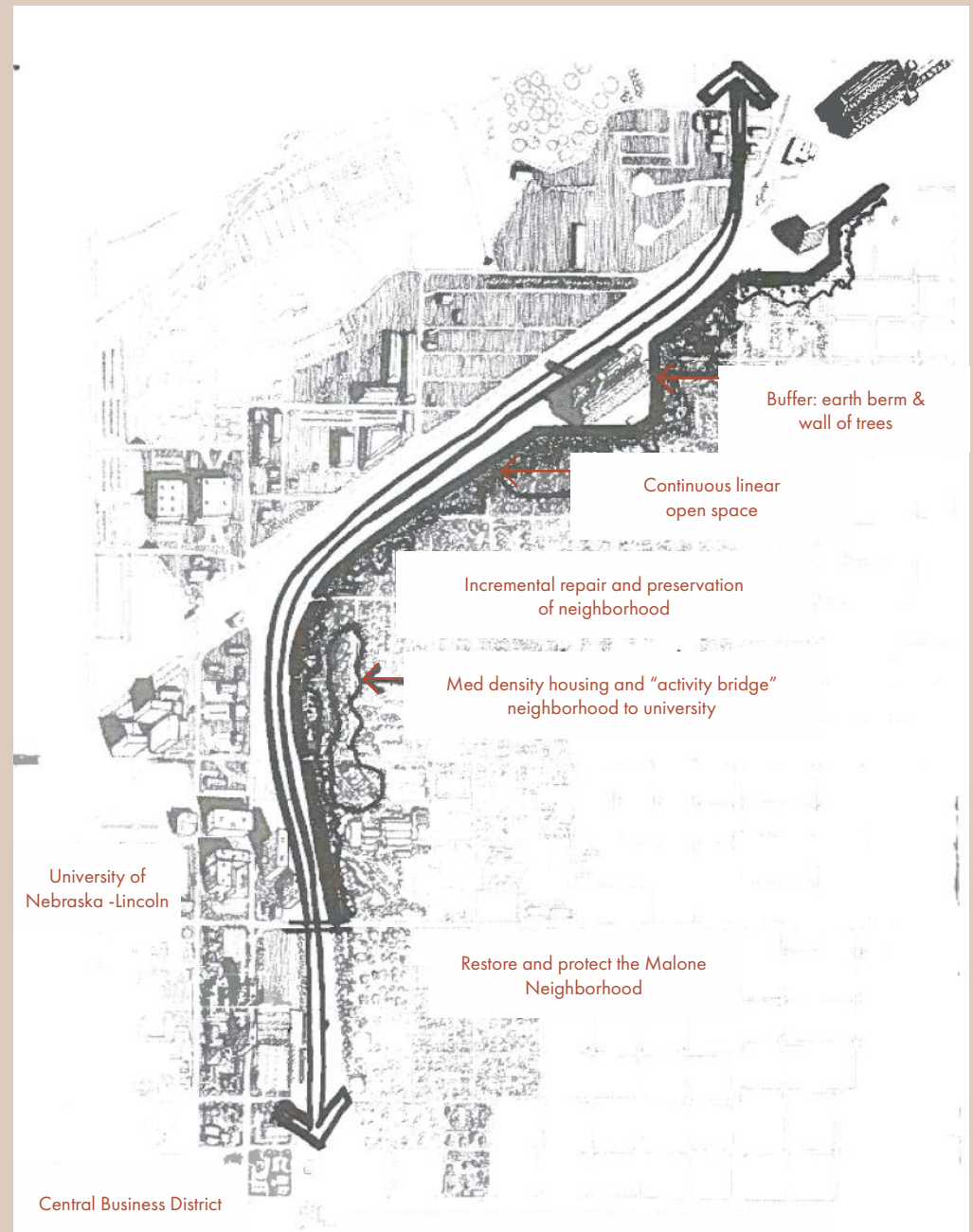
R/UDAT, Lincoln Nebraska

The Rural/Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) program was created by the American Institute of Architects as a public service to help communities solve well-defined problems they might be facing. I was asked to be a member of a R/UDAT team that was sent to Lincoln, Nebraska in 1975 to help several middle-class neighborhoods that were in the path of a proposed freeway.

After several days of interviews and analysis it was clear, at least to me, that the only good outcome for the neighborhoods was not to build the freeway at all. The team members were not pleased by my opinion but agreed, at least in principle. The chair of the team said, "Well, that isn't why we invited you here, but you can meet with the mayor in the morning and explain your position." At the young age of 35, I was intimidated by the mayor, an elderly woman named Mrs. Helen Boosalis.

I explained my position carefully, fearing her response. After a few minutes, she said: "We invited your team here to get your opinion. You take the position, and I will fade the heat." She did that for the next year or so, despite an enormous uproar from the traffic engineers of the region.

Some years later, I got a small booklet from the Federal Government describing Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Awards, one of which was an award to the town of Lincoln for not allowing the building of the freeway and for preserving the neighborhoods that would have been bulldozed had the freeway been constructed.



View of new medium density housing development on totally vacant block. Housing designed to be compatible with existing housing through use of similar materials, forms, colors, and scale.



Medium density new housing adjacent to open space.



View depicting integration of new and existing housing on partially decimated block (example view at 28th and Hitchcock).



Development concepts delete plans for a useless freeway and restore and renew several neighborhoods in Lincoln, Nebraska.

VISION 23

5619 Lakeshore Drive, Lago Vista

Several years after the failure of Marshall Ranch, I was able to purchase a 5-acre waterfront site out of bankruptcy. We designed a 70-unit condo with various types and sizes of units and slowly worked it through the city approval process. Stephi Motil, my business partner, worked with the City of Lago Vista to achieve approval of our annexation and entitlement request. In retrospect, Stephi worked an absolute miracle.

We designed a project with a mix of building types, sizes, and prices organized around the views, the trees, and central amenities. Views of the lake were maximized at the rim of the site. The design called for a common space at the center, duplexes away from the view edge, and a grouping of smaller units to fit on steeper grades, all nestled in amongst great trees.

The project was on a high cliff making access to the water difficult. As we work through the best ways to access the lake and the boat dock, the project is on hold. Eventually this vision for Lago Vista will generate significant tax base for the city, in addition to providing a great place for people to live.



A proposal for a mix of building types, sizes, and prices organized around views of Lake Travis, on-site trees, and central amenities.

VISION 24

Saving Cedar Street, An Unlikely Office

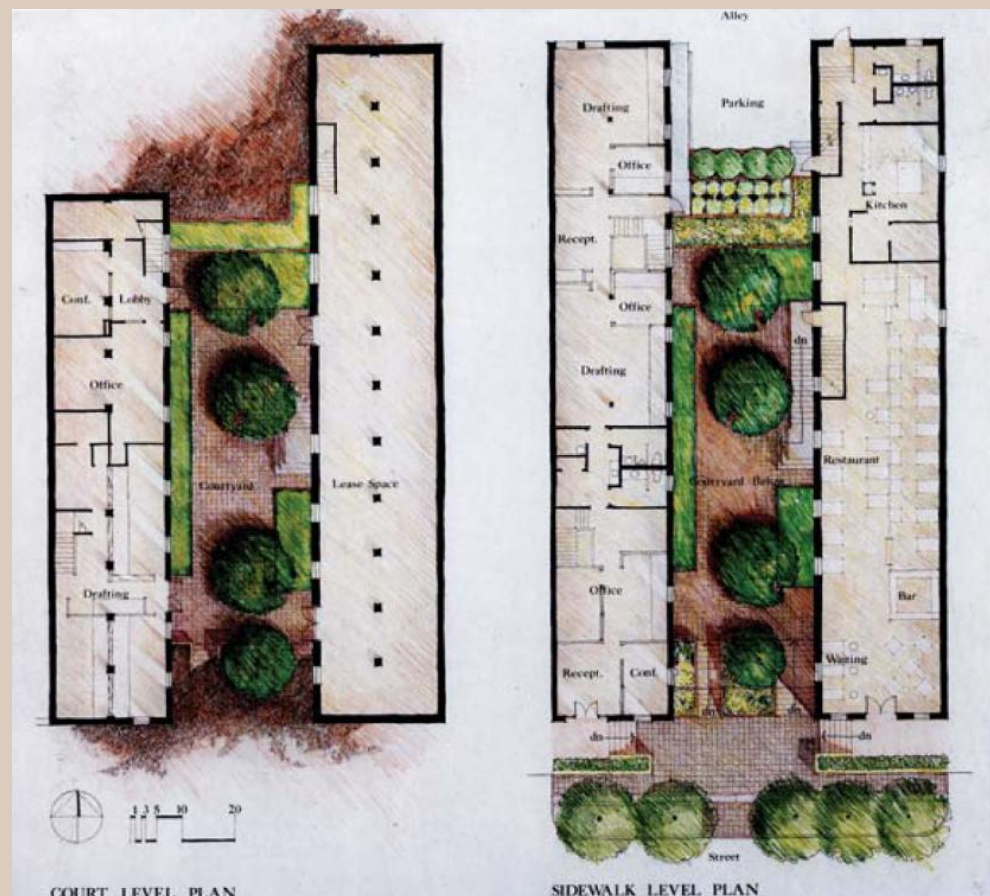
In 1967, an architect friend, Chartier Newton, and I agreed to share an office on West 23rd Street near the UT campus, on the ground floor of Tri Towers, a girl's dorm. Here we happily practiced architecture and at times collaborated on projects. We negotiated a very favorable lease for what was not a likely retail space.

With a turn of events, a very wealthy developer bought the building and had his real estate agents first engage in lease extension talks but then suddenly sent us an eviction notice, with a very short deadline to vacate. I sued this developer for \$5,000. My lawyer thought I was crazy and worried about finding me in Town Lake with a concrete necklace. In the end, I won the case, which helped with our moving expenses.

I went downtown looking for a new office for myself and Chartier. I found two small warehouse buildings on 4th Street for sale. The owners were two of my friends, which made for a relatively easy sale. Chartier and I recruited a large engineering firm to join us on this venture. Jose Guerra was a very successful engineer with great credibility which allowed us to borrow enough money to purchase the property and completely renovate the two buildings and the courtyard between them.

We named the venture Cedar Street, for the original name of 4th Street. All of Austin's original east/west streets were named for trees and later changed to numbers, for example 6th Street was Pecan Street. Austin's original north/south streets are still named for rivers in Texas. Our warehouses are between Colorado and Lavaca Street.

As we leased the various spaces, "Cedar Street Courtyard" became a beehive of creative activity at all hours, combining professional offices in the warehouses during the day and an extremely popular music venue in the courtyard every night. Our occupancy rate and rents remained higher than the so-called first-class office space downtown, as we struggled through the economic crises of the 1980s. Over the years the cedar elms we planted have grown up and "Cedar Street Courtyard" has become a local landmark.





The offices of Black + Vernoooy occupied the 3rd floor of one of the warehouses for about 30 years. "What a wonderful place to work", Sinclair Black.



An outdoor music venue in the center of Downtown Austin is active 24/7 365 days a year.

VISION 25

Seaholm Intake Structure

Seaholm Power Plant required huge amounts of water to generate electrical power. The storage structure used is located directly across the street from the main plant at the edge of Town Lake. Since the power plant was decommissioned, the city has been trying in vain to find a suitable use for this left-over industrial artifact.

In response to one city request for ideas, our firm in conjunction with BGK Architects, submitted an idea to transform it into a lively activity center which included an outdoor music venue, a small restaurant/bar, and the Office of Environmental Innovations on the roof. This idea would create an anchor

for the north side of the lake, along the hike and bike trail, as well as an activity destination where Shoal Creek reaches the lake. Its physical location is in the heart of the city at the southwest corner of downtown and across the street from the Seaholm Redevelopment and Austin's fabulous new central public library.



The water intake structure is an interesting industrial artifact on the north shore of Town Lake. We proposed to convert it into a music venue, restaurant, and environmental office on the roof.

VISION 26

Seaholm Power Plant

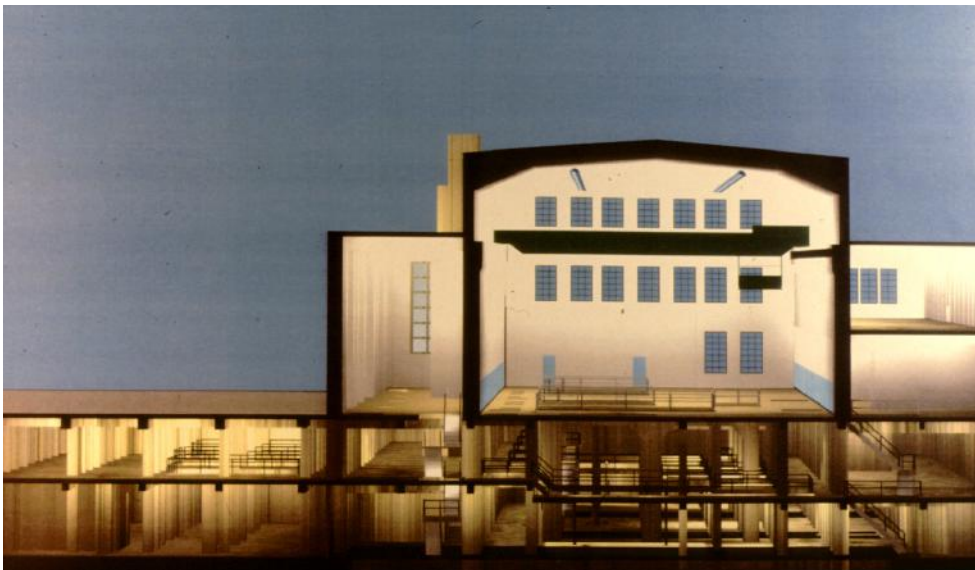
Seaholm Power Plant is a magnificent industrial building located at the southwest corner of downtown Austin, on Town Lake (now Lady Bird Lake) at the intersection of Shoal Creek. Austin Energy deactivated the plant in the 1980s and planned to demolish it for reasons no one in their right mind would even imagine.

I realized that the power plant could become a major asset to the region, and I also knew that it would not be easy to demolish the building because of its size and volume of concrete. The first job was to imagine its future use. A small group was asked for recommendations to advise the city council, and that group wrote a resolution for future civic and cultural purposes for the site.

We took small groups of interested people on tours of the building dozens of times over the next year. I always thought that the local arts community would step up to this fabulous opportunity, as we have always envisioned the building as similar to the Tate Modern in London, but that never happened. The city took the easy way out and rented the building to an insurance company instead.

The remainder of the site developed into one of Austin's brightest spots with several uses: housing, restaurants, shopping, office space, and a courtyard. The opportunities to utilize this landmark and incredible interior space have yet to be realized.





A citizen's efforts to save Seaholm Power Plant succeeded, but the city failed to achieve the civic and cultural center proposed by the citizen's committee. It remains rented and inaccessible to the public.

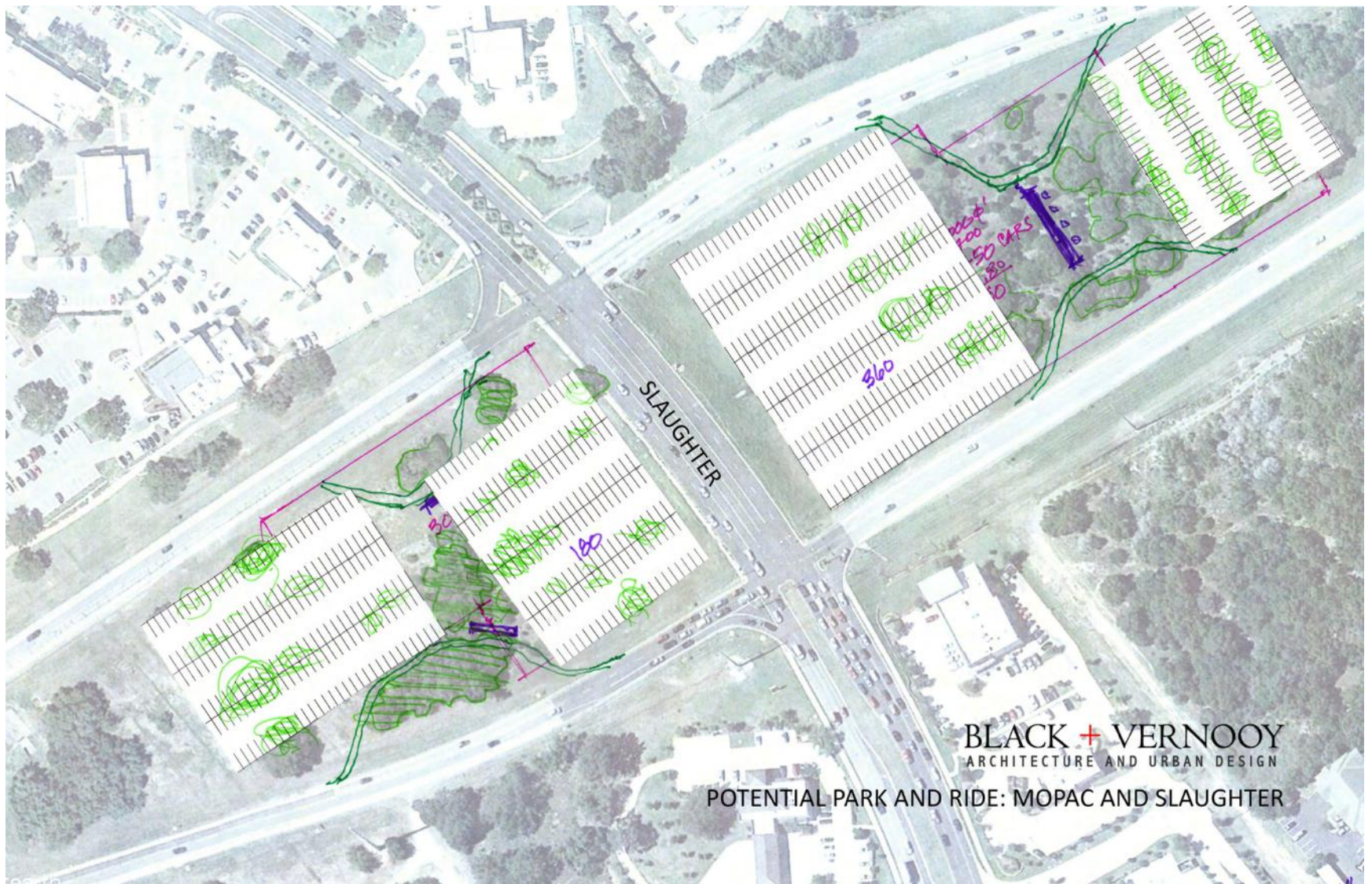
VISION 27

South Mopac as a Park and Ride System

Mopac Freeway (Loop 1) was built as the west side complement to I-35, which sits east of downtown. It was planned to occupy the Missouri and Pacific Rail Corridor that traveled north and southbound through residential neighborhoods. Promises were made that the freeway would serve downtown, but it would never cross the river and promote sprawl in the relatively undeveloped southwest quadrant of Austin.

As soon as the northern segments were built that promise not to extend to the southwest was promptly broken. TxDOT used limited funding to build only the future access roads. This resulted in a somewhat scenic road with thousands of trees in the center until the main lanes were built. Over time, the trees were lost and the freeway was “filled in,” one segment after another, until the planned freeway was completed and all the trees were gone.

We proposed a long-term solution that could have changed the paradigm for access to the central city and eliminated the need for, and thus the cost of, the main lanes. The plan was to provide a “park and ride” concept with parking among the trees, along with access to a bus stop and snack bar. The number of people using public transit to get to downtown Austin, the University campus, and the state offices would significantly increase. This would have eliminated the huge cost of additional parking in central Austin as well. The benefits this would have on the air quality of our city by maintaining those trees and limiting car emissions in the densest part of the city would also have been very significant. When will the city of Austin wake up to the obvious challenges of climate change?



The comprehensive park n' ride system would have changed Central Austin in significant ways. Buses would have picked up and delivered people who drive from home and park in the shade of the Oak trees in the median.

VISION 28

South Shore Central

The intersection of Congress Avenue and Town Lake (now Lady Bird Lake) is a central and symbolic location in Austin, Texas. Over time, the downtown area filled in along the north shore, but the south shore developed haphazardly west of Congress Avenue. The lake edge east of Congress Avenue became the site for the offices and printing press buildings of the Austin-American Statesman, the local newspaper.

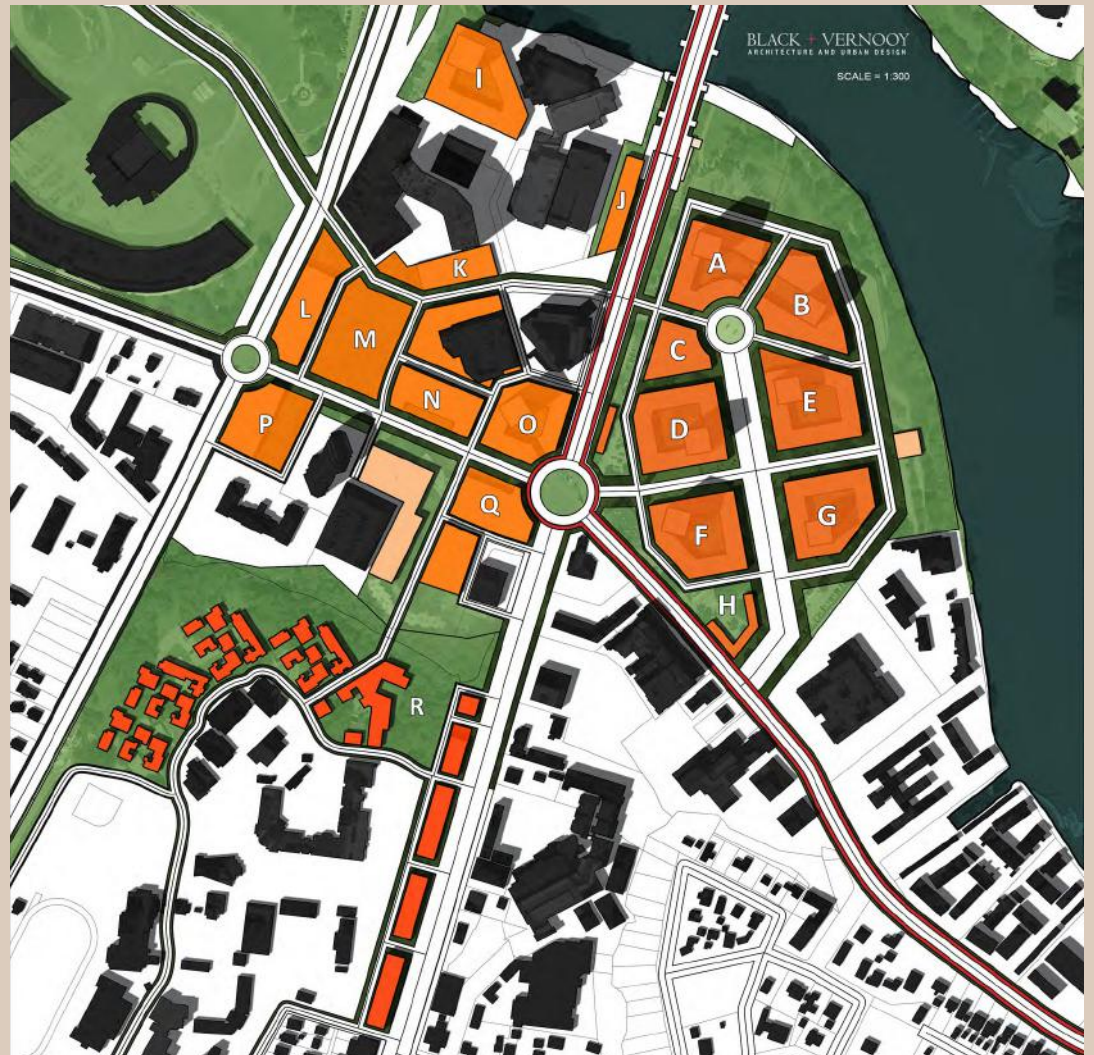
This was prominent real estate used as an industrial site at the heart of the capital city. It became increasingly clear that this was an inappropriate use of a large site, and we decided to rectify that. We developed a plan that first set aside more land along the shore and studied the need for a large complex of urban life that blended mixed-use development and was very walkable.

A community rarely gets the opportunity to acquire a “clean” site to build a well-planned expansion of the downtown at such a significant location. Alan Holt, an architect and high-ranking member of the city staff, undertook this project. With little or no help from the city staff, he organized several public events to explore the possibilities for future development. Eventually, a request for qualification (RFQ) was put out by the city for an urban design plan. A request for proposal (RFP) for the eventual development followed.

We could see the potential of the site if a tight urban grid was imposed, the lakeside was protected, the parking was central and publicly operated, and a group of mid-rise, quite dense buildings of mixed-

use made their home in the grid, much like most mature cities.

The city hired an out-of-town firm to produce the final plan. Although the developer was identified, the site remains one of Austin’s greatest unrealized possibilities.





Vision for mixed-use buildings organized around a central park with parking below. More open space around the lake and a path for future rail at Congress and Riverside.

VISION 29

State Capitol Complex

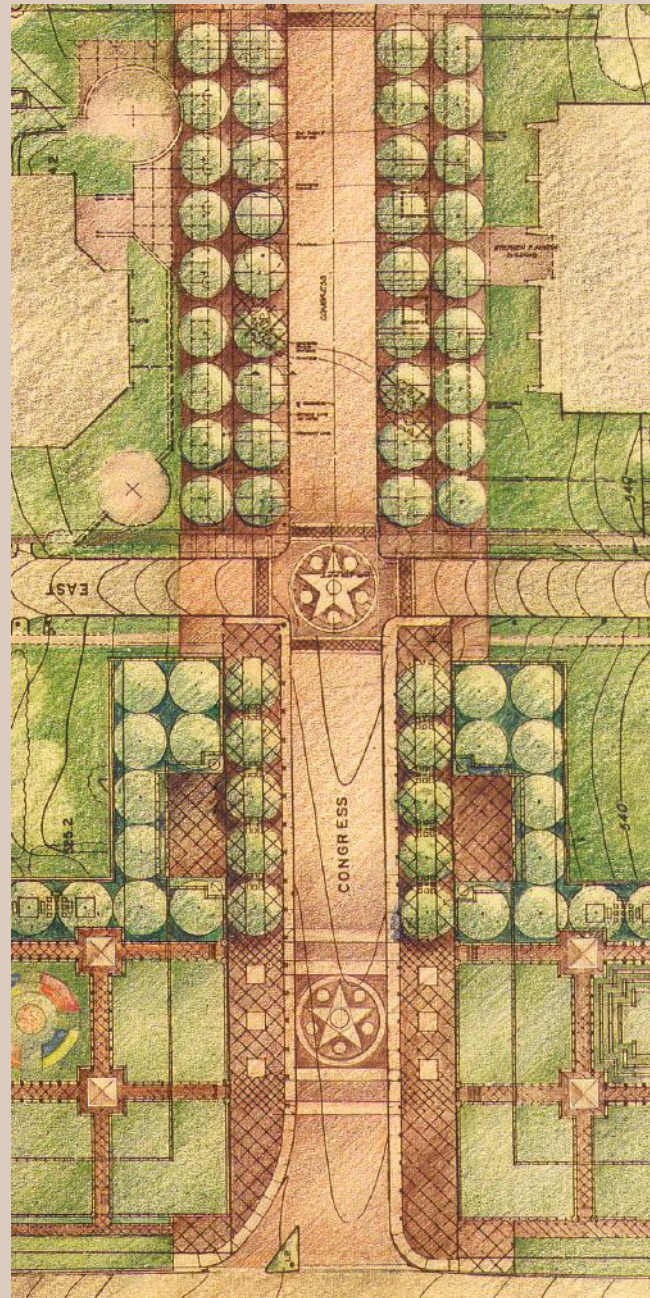
The Capitol Building and state office buildings form a complex of disconnected blocks that relate to each other primarily by the pink granite construction. Parking had been exported to the east, eliminating any trace of the pre-existing neighborhood.

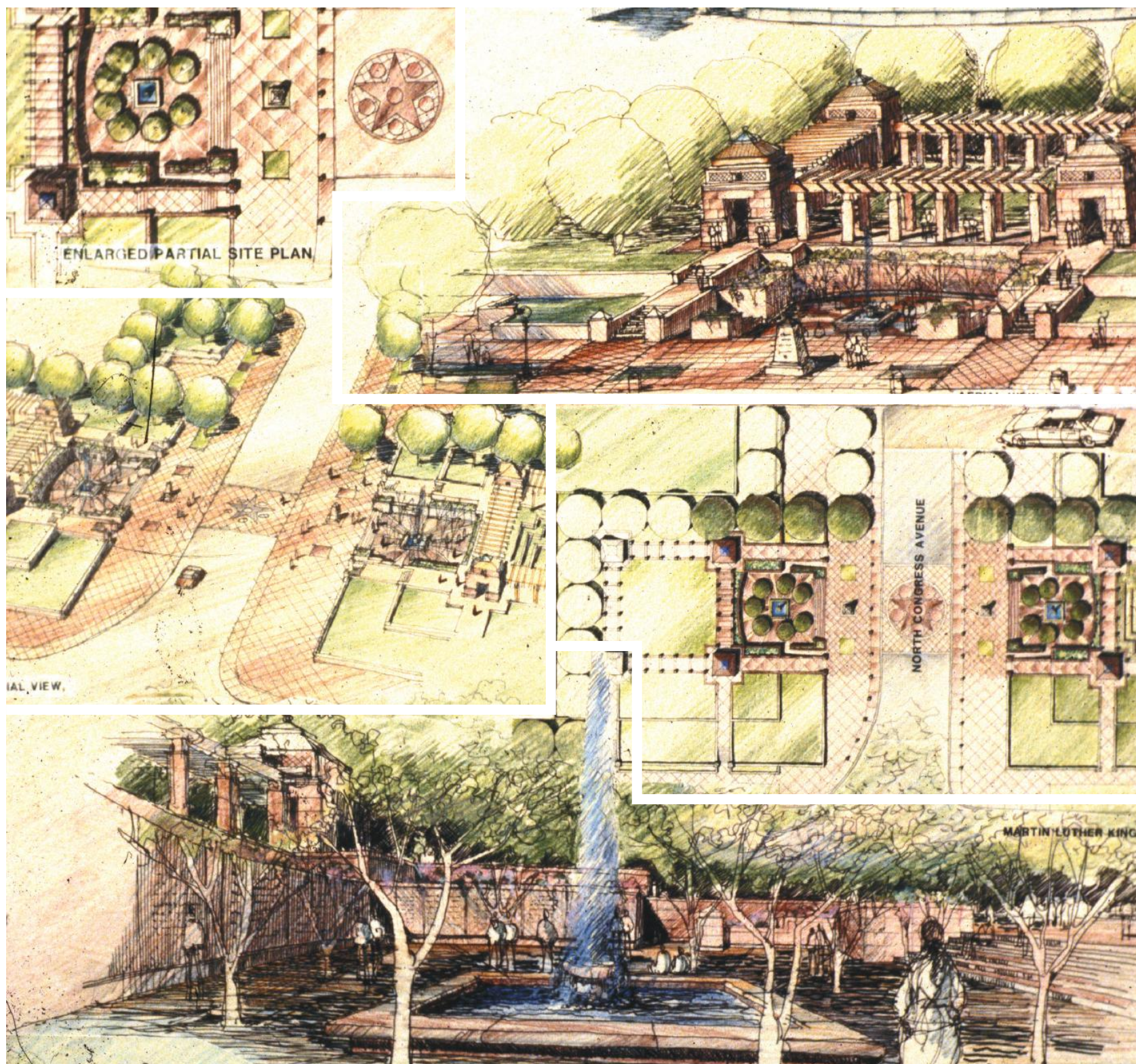
Over the years, we have suggested several ideas to transform this vacuous district into a walkable "campus." After all, one of the best campuses ever created sits just across the street to the north.

The University of Texas campus' qualities were achieved by ignoring the issue of parking altogether, but that strategy was not viable for the state, where workers mostly lived far from central Austin in places like Hays County to the south and Williamson County to the north.

The Texas State Land Office asked our firm for solutions to their parking problem. They ignored our suggestion to create a fleet of red, white, and blue buses to shuttle workers into the state complex. This would create the opportunity to recapture three of the four blocks along the eastern edge of the complex for urban housing near the then-emerging and now all-important Waller Creek Greenway.

Our next proposal was to put underground parking garages on Congress Avenue, between 15th and 19th streets, which was also ignored at the time. Twenty years later that idea has been accomplished, and the state complex is beginning to look more like a campus.





Early images of the all-important connection between the University of Texas and the state Capitol Complex.

VISION 30

Spring Studios in Mexico

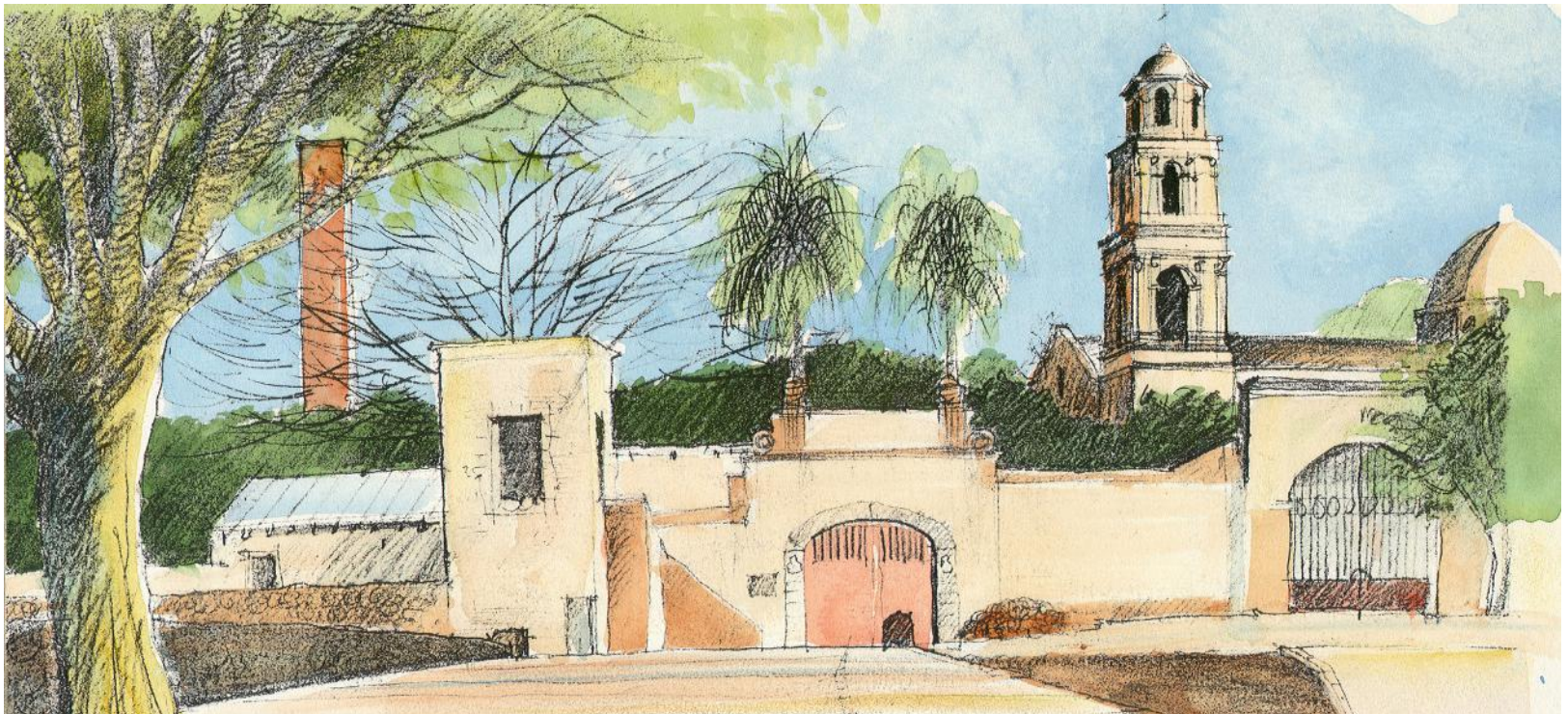
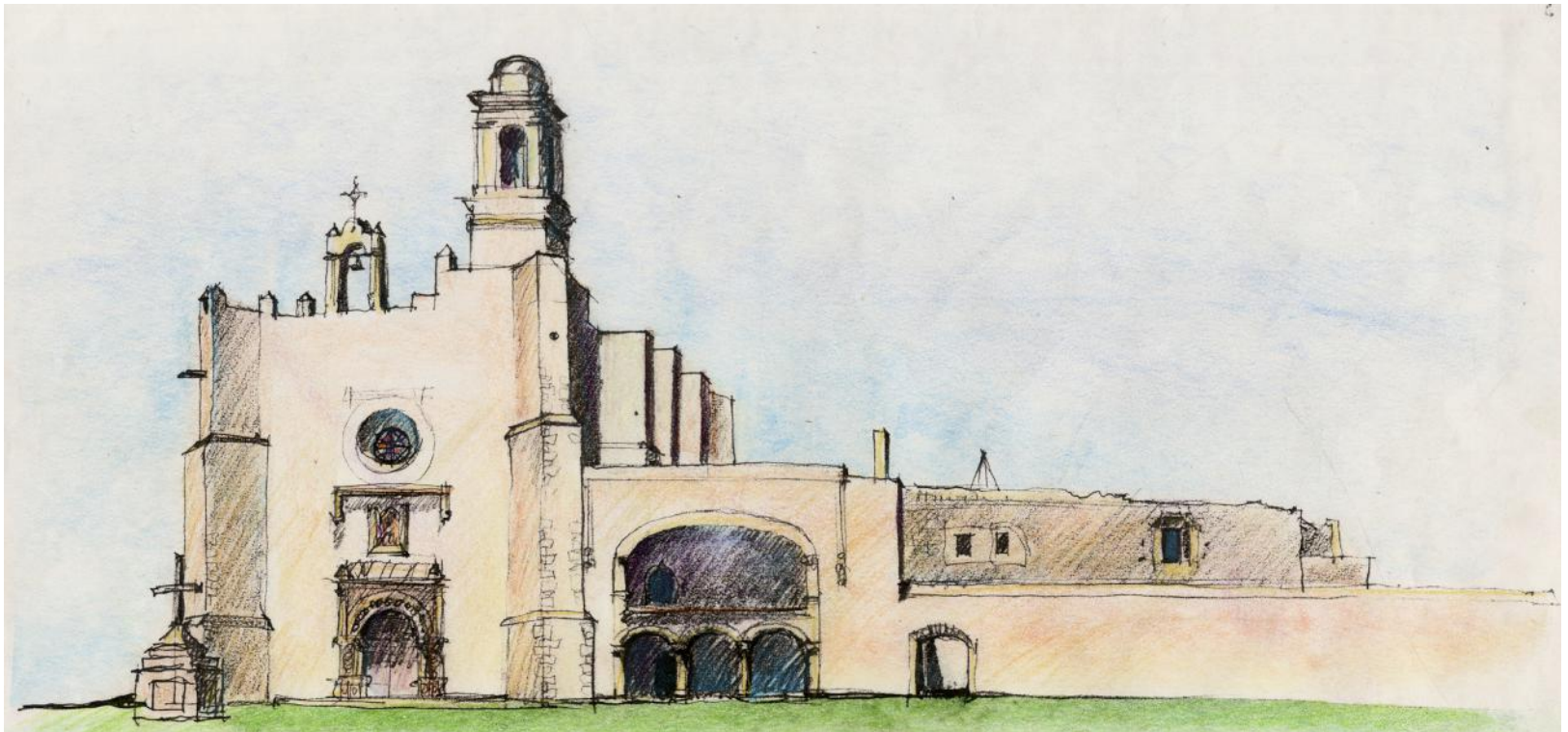
I grew up in San Antonio, which was greatly influenced by its Latino population. My parents had taken driving trips to Mexico when they were younger, and they took me to Mexico on trips as soon as I was old enough. I learned to love the exotic qualities of our neighbor to the south, even though I got “Montezuma’s revenge” every time.

As a young faculty member, I went to the Dean of the School of Architecture at the University of Texas, Hal Box, and suggested that because of our proximity to Mexico, the School of Architecture should have a program there. The University did have a Latin American Institute, but I felt the School of Architecture was missing a great opportunity.

Hal was a leader of leaders, so when he agreed and suggested I start such a program, that’s exactly what I did. First, I recruited Logan Wagner, a native of Mexico and a PhD candidate at UT, to help me organize Studio Mexico as a 5-week study tour during the spring semester. We were able to host the program that way for 7 years.

I gathered the students, collected the program fees, and set up the banking while Logan arranged all the logistics for the trip. Logan had traveled extensively in his native Mexico and knew every region, historic site, and most of the bars. We stayed in haciendas and convents usually for free or in exchange for measured drawings. We explored the country from a different site each spring, always in a different region. You simply haven’t lived until you have traveled to Mexico with Logan.

When Logan graduated with his PhD, the program was taken over by my fellow faculty member Juan Miro. Juan had become fascinated with Mexico. He took the students to Mexico as Logan and I had done for the past 7 years. A few years later the UT administration told him that travel in Mexico had become too dangerous. At that point, he seamlessly transitioned the trips to his native Spain. The program has of course evolved but continues on today, many years later.



A watercolor sketch of San Gabriel de Las Palmas, a former sugar plantation owned by Cortez, and the site of our first student trip to Mexico of the Studio Mexico program.

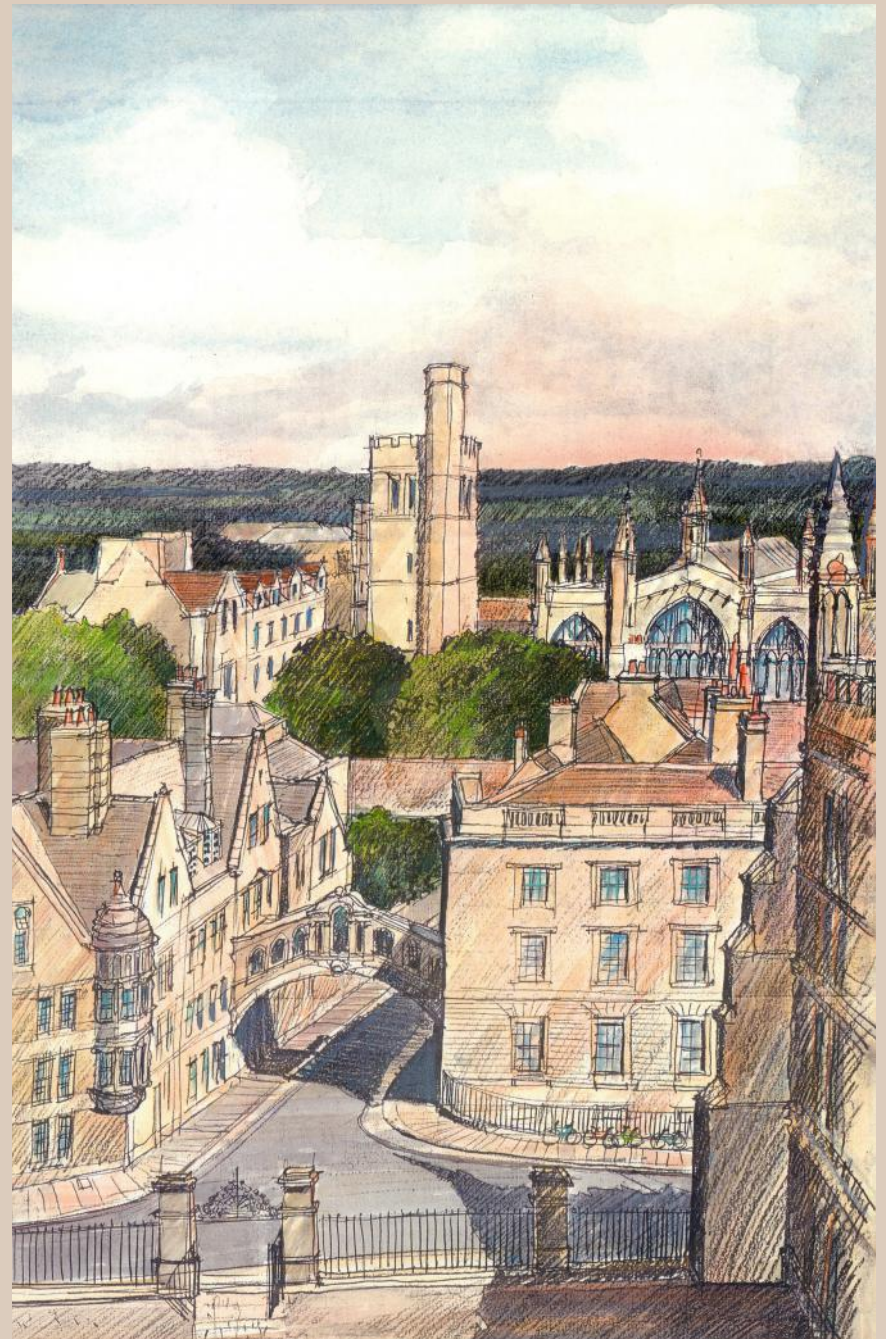
VISION 31

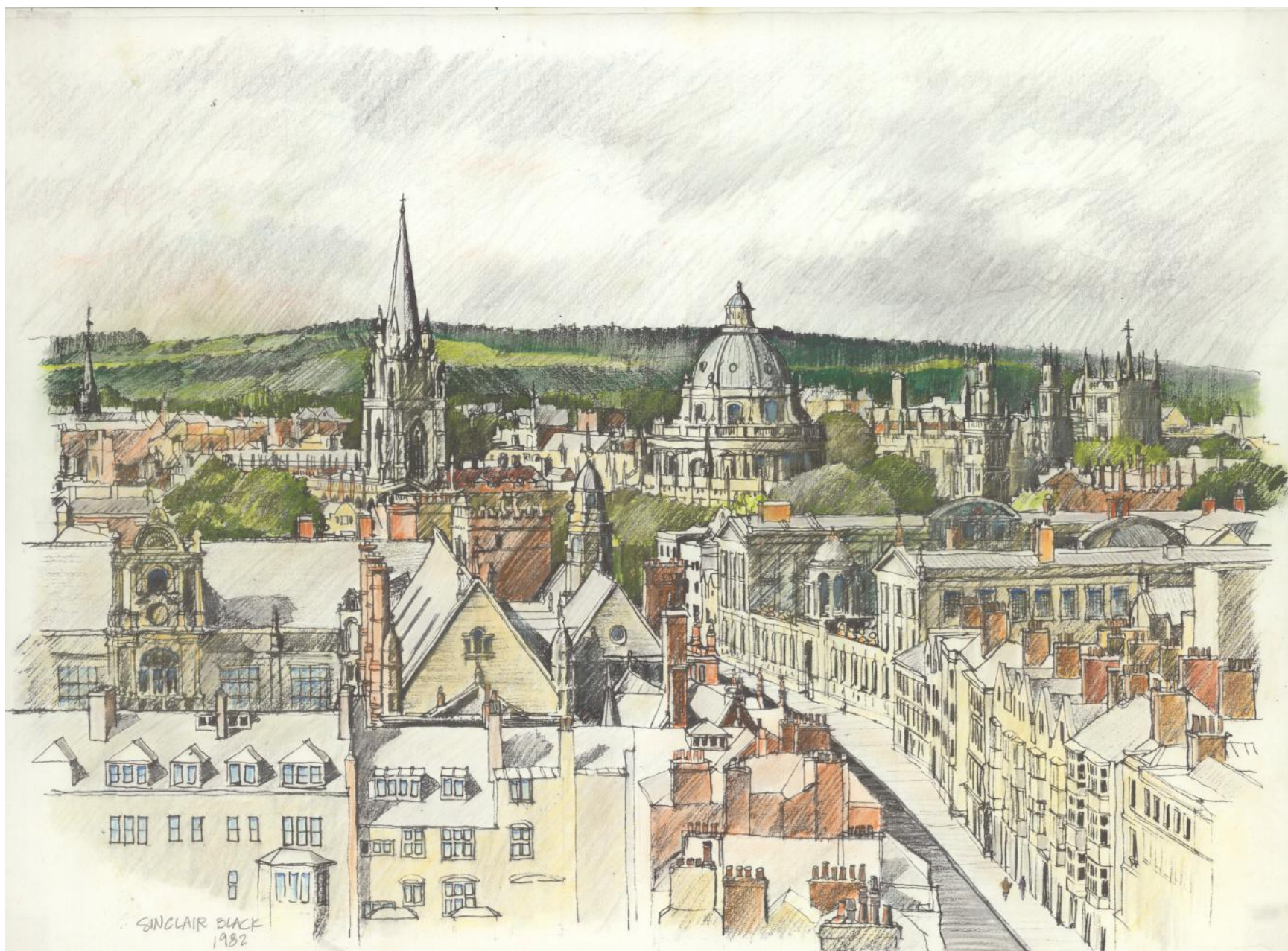
Summer Studios in Oxford, England

Simon Atkinson moved from England to Austin to teach at the University of Texas at Austin School of Architecture. He owned several houses in Oxford and suggested that I join him for an English study abroad program over two consecutive summers.

We would stay in one of Simon's houses and travel all over England in a convoy of Citroen 2CVs (small French cars). We were treated to rare access because Simon acted as our guide and took us to various regions of England where we visited hundreds of historic towns and important buildings. Both summers, we would invite several of our firm employees to join us on the trip to continue working on our office projects and enter a competition or two.

The program was an official university offering, so students received credit for design studio, history, and graphic communications. Small design projects of 2 to 5 days were undertaken to support robust discussions in the evenings. Time was set aside as we traveled to allow everyone to sketch an interesting place of their choosing.





A view of Oxford from the library.
Sketches of Oxford, Sinclair Black, FAIA

VISION 32

The Drag: Guadalupe Street for Rail Transit

The western edge of the University of Texas, the only mixed-use area near the campus, is known as “The Drag.” It is the location of bookstores, retail shops, restaurants, bars, churches, and a few student dorms as well as serving as a major north-south corridor.

When the city and our municipal transit agency CapMetro were considering a local streetcar transit system, the north-south route would inevitably be Guadalupe along “The Drag.” CapMetro hired our small firm to figure out how that could happen. The project was labeled “Guadalupe Street Beautification.”

The street exists in a tight right of way and is perhaps the most active pedestrian zone in the state. We proposed that the northbound traffic be nested up against the UT edge and that the southbound rail line be located one block west on San Antonio Street. This concept would serve UT well without disrupting the retail edge.

At some point, Cap Metro assigned our contract to the city and stepped aside. Many of the sticky issues had to do with utility relocation. Unfortunately, once the bids were in the city advised us that they had supplied the wrong location of the utilities. They asked us to revise the whole plan, which we did. The city then abruptly canceled the project entirely and announced that they needed the budget to fix potholes on Lamar Blvd.

The future of rail along “The Drag” remains in limbo. The basic rule of public transit by rail is to put it where the people are and where they want to go, which in this instance remains an elusive goal.



Various sketches of the proposed Guadalupe beautification project. The ultimate solution for the Drag remains in question, 30 years later.

VISION 33

Congress Avenue: The Main Street of Texas

The Downtown Austin Alliance (DAA) has long sought ways to reinforce the image of Congress Avenue as “The Main Street of Texas.” Congress Avenue is the symbolic approach to the iconic State Capitol Building and is also the north/south axis of Central Austin. The DAA asked our architectural firm to explore the feasibility of streetcars on Congress Avenue and to produce images of what that would look like.

The study revealed that the sidewalks could be widened to 32 feet (similar to those on the north side of 2nd street), with a double row of trees along the sidewalks and no net loss of parking if it were converted back to parallel parking. Additionally, the streetcars could be side running while the center of the street is preserved for the classic view of the Capitol Building. The long-term benefit is that downtown Austin, the state complex, and the University of Texas campus would prosper with streetcar access, more people, and fewer cars.

When thinking about “The Main Street of Texas” one must include the Congress Avenue bridge over Town Lake, one of the most dramatic urban spaces in Texas. The City of Austin objected to street cars on the bridge based on assumptions about the structural integrity. The original huge arches are inherently strong, but the bridge has been compromised by a change to the structure that substituted weaker long-span beams instead of utilizing the stronger arches. In my opinion, the arches can be reengaged by the simple use of 3-inch-thick rubber pads.



A study of light rail on Congress Avenue, commissioned by the Downtown Austin Alliance, shows streetcars, parallel parking, wider sidewalks, and the important street life of Congress Avenue, the Main Street of Texas.

VISION 34

La Jara: A Perfect Residential Street

La Jara Street in Alamo Heights (north of San Antonio) is a unique and beautiful street.

I've always been an observer of streets and urban scale. Because of my extensive travel, I have experienced the grand boulevards of Europe as well as beautiful tight lanes and pathways in Greece, Mexico, and the small towns of Italy. However, in all that time, I have never seen a more attractive neighborhood street. This street is just about perfect: it carries slow-moving traffic, is safe, has plenty of opportunities for walking, and of course, there is shade.

La Jara is perfect in so many ways. It was laid out appropriately with regard to the grade and the path of the drainage. Many of the street trees were saved and there is no evidence of inappropriate planting.

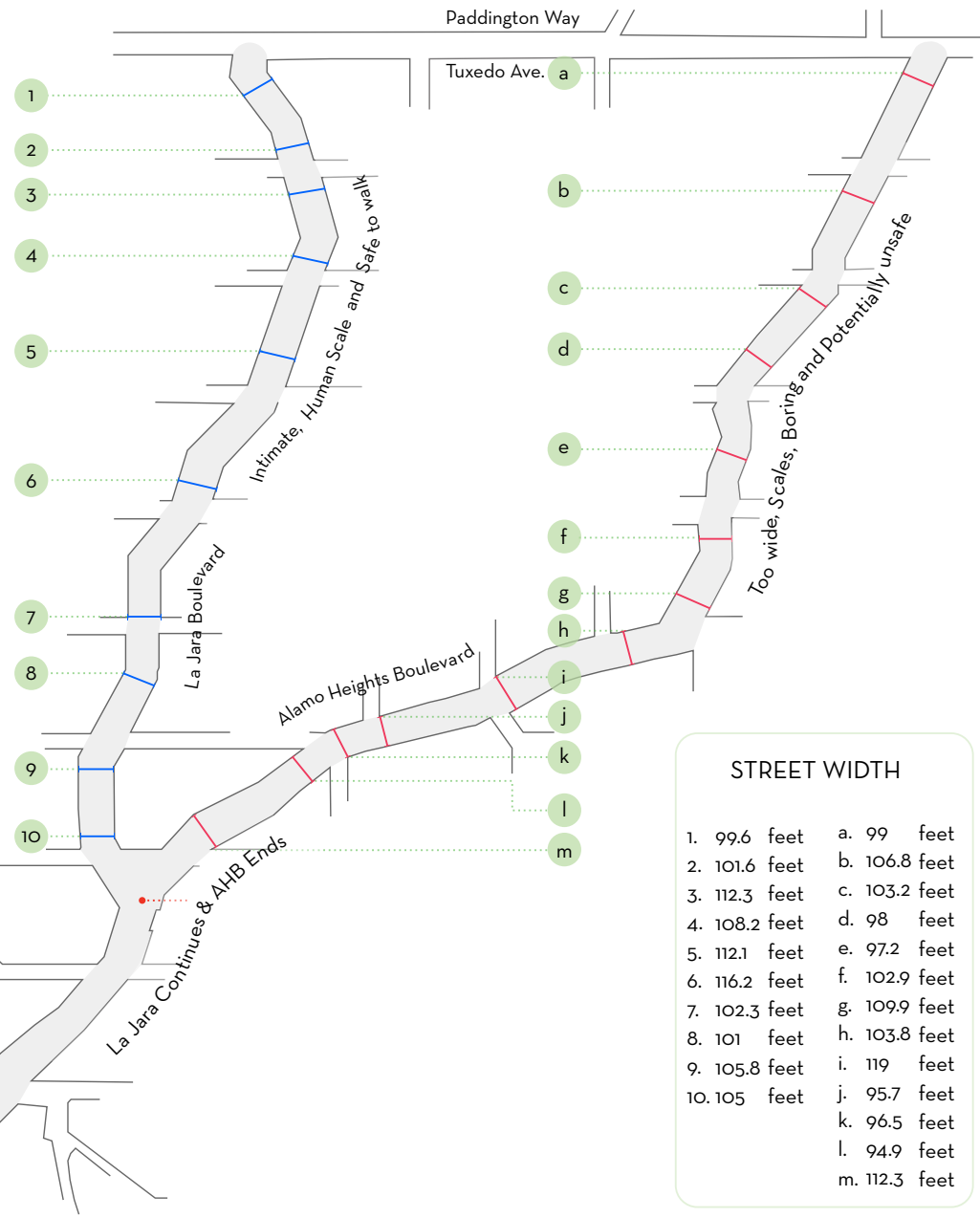
Whoever laid out this wonderful street clearly understood the principle of natural drainage. By employing no curbs on the downslope there is no need for expensive storm sewer systems. Currently large-scale landscape designers and environmental engineers are trying to solve existing drainage problems with "bioswales", a simple natural planted drainage way to slow down and absorb stormwater, e.g. La Jara.

I have contrasted La Jara with Alamo Heights Boulevard. The street widths and location are almost identical, but Alamo Heights Boulevard does not employ natural drainage, carries fast-moving traffic, has no trees in a center median, and has very little shade. My vision is for the City of Alamo Heights to rebuild the boulevard so that it is a beautiful street, like La Jara.

La Jara Street



Alamo Heights Boulevard



Twin streets, one preserved and the other one destroyed.

VISION 35

The Triangle

"The Triangle" is the nickname given to the state-owned land where Guadalupe Street and North Lamar Blvd converge after crossing 45th Street. The state land office decided to organize the site through long-term leases for private development and started the process by leasing a portion of the land to a retail developer without public input. Occupants of nearby neighborhoods organized against the idea, spearheaded by five community leaders who asked me to help them defeat the private developer. The community had other plans for the land. They envisioned a community garden on that parcel of land. I offered to help them, but only if they accepted the idea of a dense, mixed-use, walkable community, which would include retail, and for which I would write the guidelines.

The group met several times, and we were able to craft the guidelines for the development of that site. The state land commissioner, realizing he was getting into political hot water and appointed a small group of his cronies to say yes to his plans for the site. Realizing what was happening, Lee Walker, a community leader, resident of Hyde Park, and one of the neighborhoods most affected by the fate of the site, convinced the appointed group to accept the guidelines that we had developed with community involvement.

Realizing his inevitable loss, the land commissioner called the community leaders to a meeting and conceded defeat. His deal was that they could find anybody in the country to carry out the plan as long as it wasn't Sinclair Black, and he would pay for it. The group settled on a California firm that used the guidelines we established.



Image Courtesy: W2 Real Estate Partners

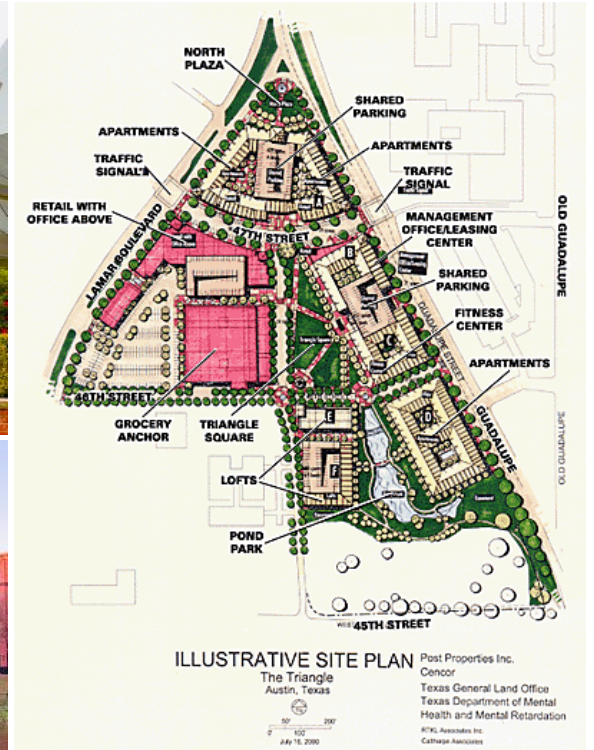


Image Courtesy: The Austin Chronicle

Conceptual diagram of The Triangle by Doug Potter, Year 2000



Image Courtesy: www.triangleaustin.com



Image Courtesy: www.triangleaustin.com

The Triangle refers to the intersection of North Lamar and Guadalupe Street just north of 45th Street. The emerging development follows the guidelines fairly well with 600 residential units, an urban grid, and a dense concentration of shops, restaurants, and walkable streets.

VISION 36

Underground Power

Many years ago, I wrote to Austin Energy and asked why Austin didn't put the power and telephone lines underground. Even though they were already doing that for the newest suburbs, their terse response was that it would cost a million dollars, which was a lot of money thirty years ago. It was clear that Austin Energy had no interest in that question.

Thirty years later, Austin Energy is spending that much every week or at least every month when storms bring down trees that wipe out the overhead lines. Austin Energy doesn't have to account for all of the direct and indirect costs, they simply pass the cost along to the ratepayers. Direct costs include the year-round costs of tree trimming in your backyard, the cost of removing fallen limbs and trees that have fallen onto the overhead lines, and the repair of the lines cut that can impact a whole region for weeks. Imagine the total cost to Houston residents during the summer of 2024.

Indirect costs include the incredible financial strain and inconvenience of being without power for anything between a couple of hours and a couple of weeks in this year's heat. The cheapest solution now is an expensive solution for years to come. Most people never understand how the policies of AE cost them every time they pay their bills.

Citizens remain concerned about the sheer ugliness of the overhead wires in the public realm. If the overhead wires were removed and buried and trees lined the street, a trip down Burnet Road could become a pleasure rather than a civic embarrassment.

In the very recent past, southeastern states like Florida and the Carolinas have been hit by two successive storms. Reports vary about power loss in those regions, but we know that it has affected up to 4 million residents and some reports suggest that even more people may have been without power for the following 30 days. Those blackouts, caused by infrastructure vulnerabilities, simply would not exist if the power were distributed underground.

'Chasing our tails': Why it's taking so long to get the power back on in Austin



Image Courtesy: KUT-90.5

Why has power in Austin-area gone out in past winter storms and will it happen again?

Ella McCarthy
Austin American-Statesman



Image Courtesy: Austin American-Statesman

Kurtis Johnson, Jr. walks pass downed power lines on Airport blvd on Wednesday Feb. 1, 2023. Road conditions worsen and power line are down in central Texas due an ice storm on Wednesday Feb. 1, 2023. Ricardo B. Brazziell/American-Statesman

Ice Downs Tree Limbs and Power Lines, Tens of Thousands Without Power

Austin bears the brunt of localized winter storm

BY LINA FISHER, 12:07PM, WED, FEB. 1, 2023



Image Courtesy: The Austin Chronicle

Ice-snapped limbs bury cars and power lines in South Austin on Wednesday. [See more images in our photo gallery.](#) (photo by Jana Birchum)

Various articles written by KUT, the Austin American Statesman, and the Austin Chronicle detailing the problems of overhead power lines.

VISION 37

The Red Line Parkway: Another Corridor of Opportunity

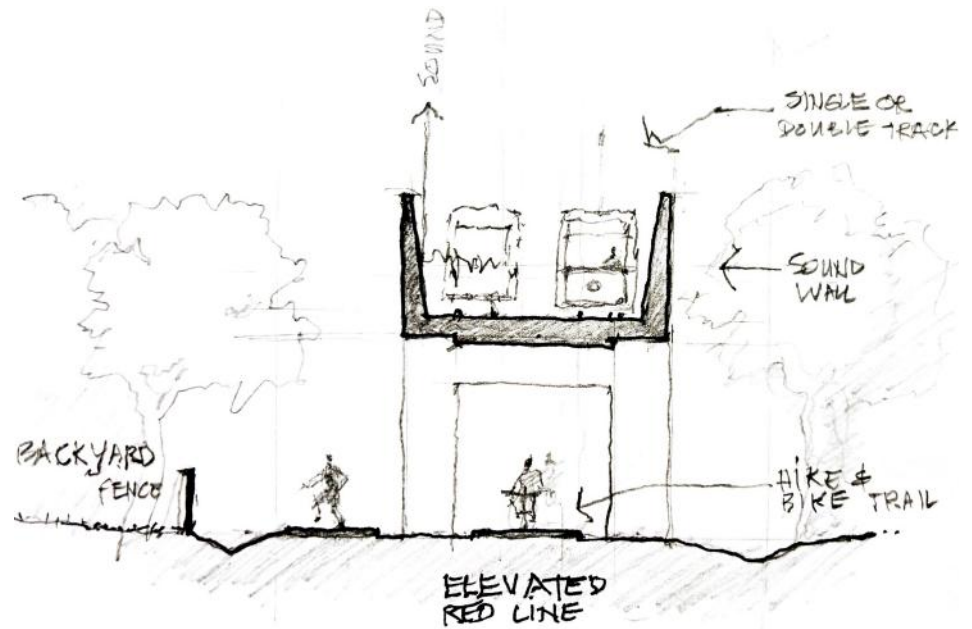
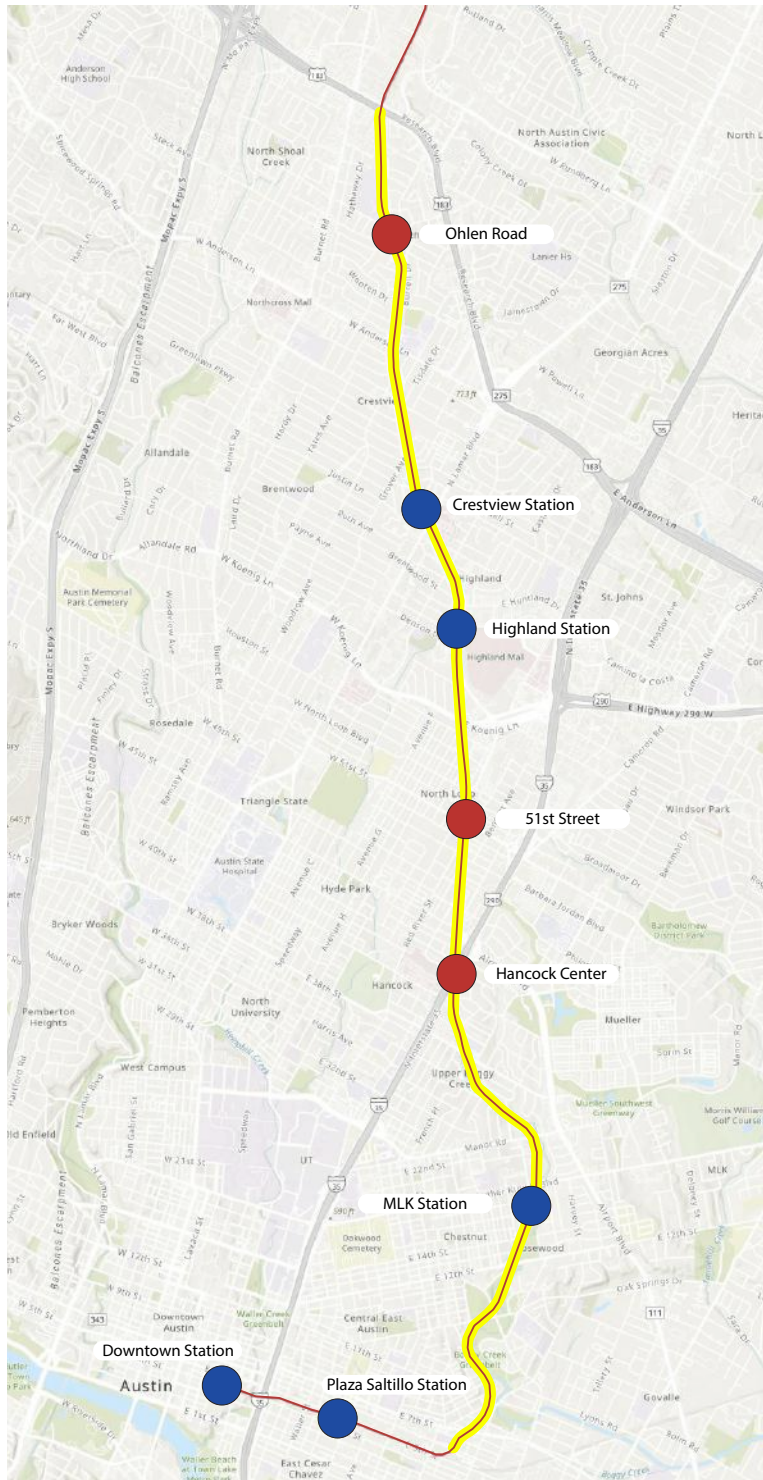
The city has spent the last 20 years, and billions of dollars, to cure the dangerous at-grade rail crossings in West Austin. East Austin, Northeast, and North Austin are less fortunate and have been outfitted with much cheaper crossing controls that stop traffic at the expense of the rail system. The majority of east/west streets have become dead ends, disrupting the possibility of a complete grid system of streets. Elevating the rail line would create the following benefits:

1. Eliminating the basic and dangerous conditions existing on 20 crossings along the length of the Redline Corridor south of Hwy 183 to south of 7th Street.
2. Enhancing the smooth, logical flow of traffic, and reconnecting the smaller streets, thus reducing congestion throughout.
3. Allowing train movements to be smoother and more predictable over the whole length, saving time while increasing safety.
4. Creating more double-tracking opportunities to facilitate future capacity growth.
5. All properties within a 5-minute walk or a short bike ride of a station would enjoy an increase in value. Train noise could be controlled, and late-night horns eliminated.
6. The existing bus system could be modified to shuttle people to and from the various stations that could contain coffee shops and/or neighborhood pubs.

7. The value of homes that back up to the Redline Parkway would be increased substantially. Instead of having a train at grade in your backyard, that footprint would become a linear park that links hike and bike trails, extending throughout the city and region.

The most interesting result would be to create numerous small and large transit-oriented developments all along the line. The new tax base generated could easily pay for the transformation of the corridor. Tens of thousands of good examples exist around the world, even a few in the United States.

The transformation could start with the re-envisioning of Hancock Center & Fiesta Market. With the elevated rail solution connected diagonally linking the two sites and the sunken main lanes proposed by the Reconnect vision, the nearly impossible at-grade intersection of Airport Boulevard at I-35 and the rail line would be solved. The result would create a redevelopment opportunity not unlike Mueller, just smaller. Other redevelopment opportunities could also be created at numerous locations along the eight-mile route.



Sketch of elevated Redline, eliminating dozens of unsafe crossings as well as danger in people's backyards while reducing noise pollution.

- Capital Metro Red Line
- Elevated RedLine Corridor
- Existing Stations
- Potential Station Locations



Existing and future stations could serve the many neighborhoods between 183 on the north to the downtown station on the south.

VISION 38

Transit by Rail: Start with Land Use Put it between where people are, and where they want to go.

Transportation by rail is by far the most efficient and cost-effective way to move large numbers of commuters between point A and point B. Point A is where a commuter lives, and point B is a destination, often where that commuter works or goes to school. On a large scale, this involves movement from regionally distributed residences into a dense urban area. In Austin that's downtown, the state complex, or the University of Texas.

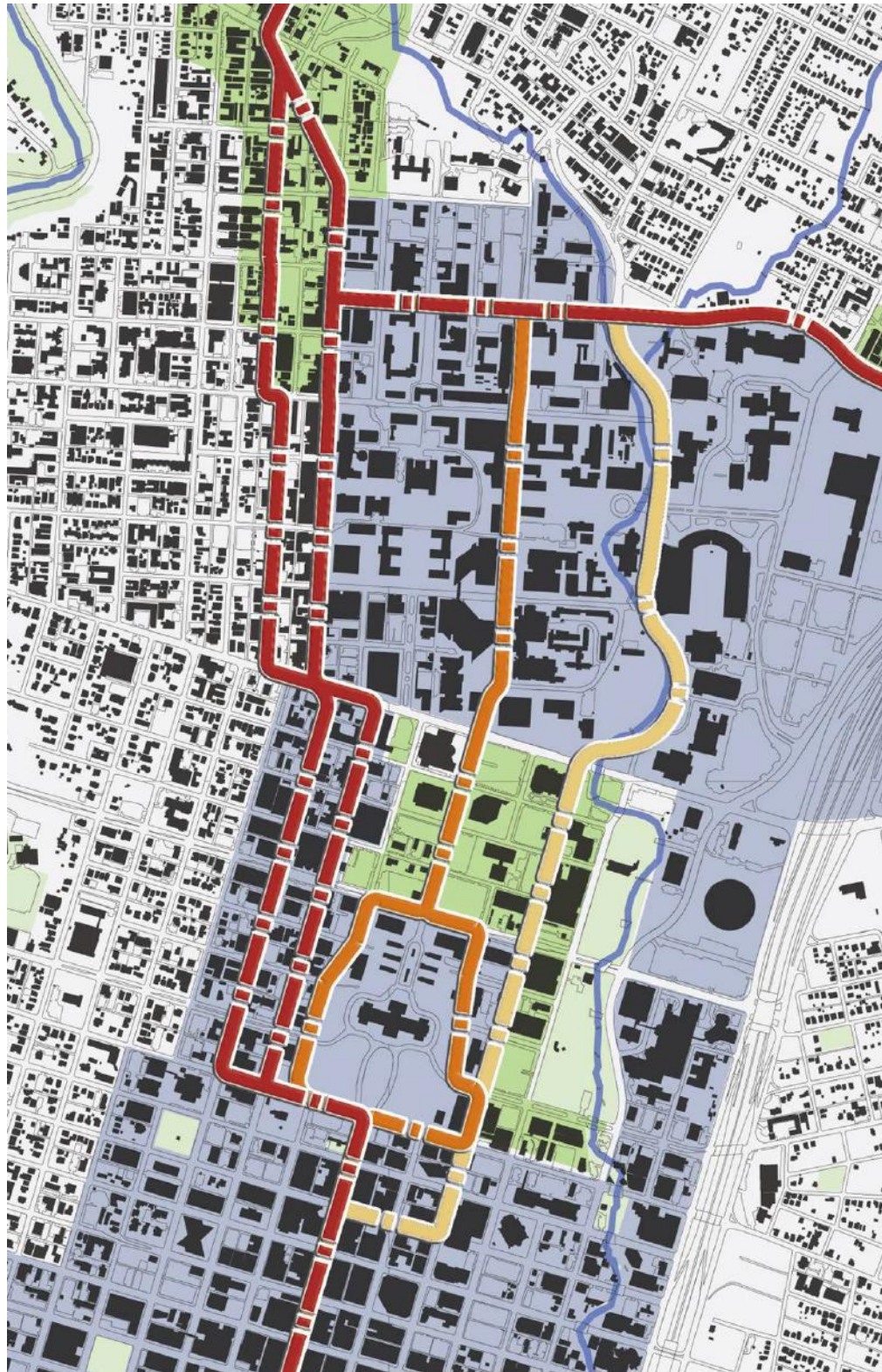
Land use in Austin is a function of time. It was a small city before the dominance of the automobile (assumed to be the 1930's) and has been one of the fastest-growing cities in the US since then. That history has led us to a highly ordered, efficient, and even symbolic original structure of the center, surrounded by a chaotic, inefficient, seemingly endless nonpattern of sprawl.

Austin is indeed lucky to have such a large concentration of destinations at the center, and very unlucky to have such a large portion of its residential development spread out over the region. The question is: how do we move people from their residences to their destinations? Any system of transit starts by creating a direct link between the destinations while finding a way to give the highly distributed individuals access to those destinations. This is accomplished presently by a very necessary but very inefficient bus system and by highly wasteful and expensive parking at the destinations.

A frequent shuttle bus to a rail station is an efficient link to light rail and would create a much more functional system. This would eliminate large portions of congestion, reduce the cost of parking, and increase the amount of productive land at the destinations. The lesson is to put rail between where the people are and where they need to go which connects the origins to the destinations.



Image Courtesy: Austin History Center, Austin Public Library



Analysis of connection from center to
development corridors

The planners of the original streetcar system knew exactly where the rail should be. The rail system should serve the University, the state Capital Complex, the downtown area, and South Congress, and branch off from there as needed.

VISION 39

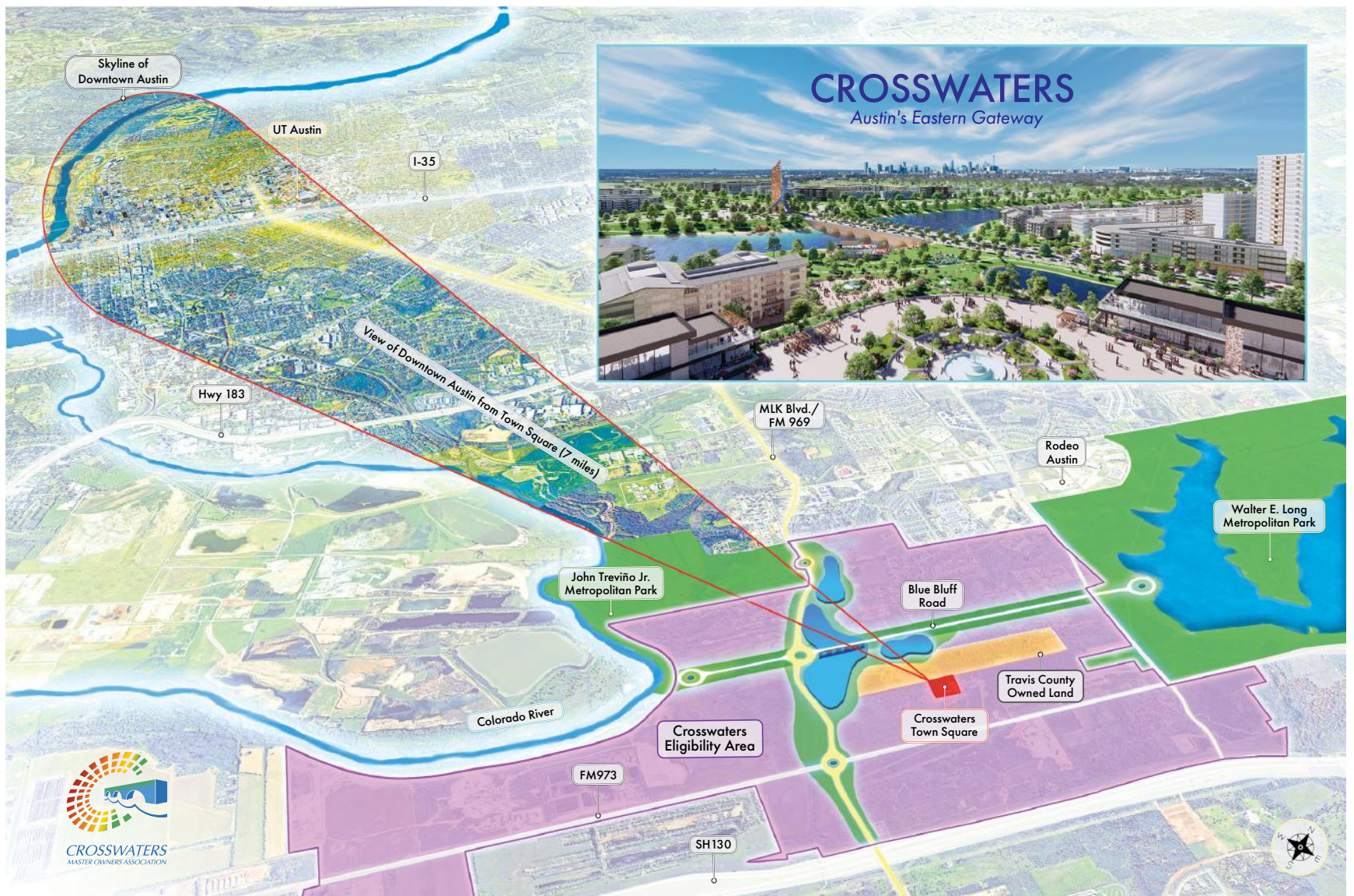
Crosswaters, The Eastern Gateway to Austin

Austin's Comprehensive Plan identifies the eastern third of the city and its extraterritorial jurisdiction as the future Desired Development Zone. At the epicenter of this zone lies the intersection of State Highway 130 (SH130) and Farm to Market Road 969 (FM969), just seven miles from downtown. Landowners led by former Planning Commissioner Cid Galindo have created the Crosswaters Master Property Association with a 2,700-acre eligibility area bordered on the north by Walter E. Long Park, on the east by SH130, on the south by the Colorado River, and on the west by John Treviño Park. In the heart of this eligibility zone lies a 120-acre hilltop land parcel owned by Travis County.

The Association called on Black + Motal, Architecture and Urban Design to assist in elaborating a vision for an eastern gateway to Austin that would incorporate the area's natural assets and existing infrastructure such as the County's hilltop view of the downtown skyline, the Colorado River and Walter E. Long Lake, two city parks encompassing over 3,000 acres, and FM969, the only roadway that directly connects SH130 to downtown.

The gateway vision that we helped to articulate includes a north to south 2.5-mile boulevard and promenade connecting Walter E. Long Lake and the Colorado River, an east to west reimagining of FM 969 as a parkway with green edges and roundabouts to maintain steady traffic flows, and a string of recreational lakes that also serve as a regional water detention facility. The centerpiece of the vision is a town square with an uninterrupted view of the downtown's growing skyline, served by a transit-friendly connected street grid designed for efficient traffic flow throughout the eligibility area.

Led by the private sector, execution of this vision will require collaboration from the city, the county, and the state highway department. This is an opportunity to create a world-class eastern gateway for the city, but the window of opportunity will not last long, as sprawl and industrial development pressures accelerate in this area that currently has no zoning regulations.



A compilation of the many ideas related to the concept of creating an Eastern Gateway to Austin.

VISION 40

Austin Creeks: The Bicentennial Gift to the Nation

When I was acting dean of the University of Texas at Austin School of Architecture in 1972 and 1973, I received a notice from the National Endowment for the Humanities describing a grant opportunity. The grant was entitled "City Edges." Previous examples of city edges had been growing suburban sprawl or views of nearby mountains and landscapes. I thought about that for a few minutes realizing that the concept of edges could mean many things.

I had been involved in the protection of creeks in the Austin area. I looked down at my hand and recognized the pattern of the 18 major creeks that flow into Town Lake. Why wouldn't that be a perfect concept of a city edge? A little bit of research indicated that there were about 120 miles of linear creeks in the region or 240 miles of creek-defined city edge.

I filled out the grant application, submitted it, and we were selected for a grant that would be managed through the University of Texas at Austin. We used that grant to employ six students to research the various creeks, as well as photograph and draw several of those creeks in anticipation of a future publication. With the students, we studied the flooding problems, the adjacent land uses, and drew maps like the 5-minute walking distance to many of the creeks in the region.

During this time, we were busy making presentations to neighborhood groups about the potential of an extensive open space system of creek corridors. One presentation to a West Austin group motivated them to create Wild Basin Park.

A walking tour of Waller Creek motivated a council member, Lowell Lebermann, to propose a further use of our study. Lowell, who had become a friend, called me with his idea of using our Austin Creeks work to create a booklet that would become Austin's "Bicentennial gift to the Nation" in 1976. It took me mere moments to say, "Not only yes, but hell yes!" He appointed a group of citizens and asked me to become the advisor for the committee's work.

We spent a year in public meetings and lobbying for the idea, including a small budget to publish the booklet "Austin Creeks." The booklet was distributed to the public and as classroom sets of 35 to schools across Austin.

One positive result of the committee's work was the appropriation of several million dollars allocated to the urban creeks. Much of the work to stabilize and enhance our creek system continues today. Many open space, parks, and trail advocates, as well as watershed protection professionals, still have a copy of that booklet and often refer to it for planning, implementing, and allocating funding.



Hayden Black receiving an award from First Lady, Lady Bird Johnson

TOWN LAKE

Town Lake is the heart and soul of the open space concept for Austin. It has become the most important public space in Austin and with the completion of work on the landscape development, it should become the center of outdoor activity, sporting events, cultural events, festivals, boat races, art shows, trade shows, etc. The major events celebrating the American Bicentennial in Austin will take place on Town Lake, a fitting tribute to the completion of one of the most unique and beautiful linear parks anywhere. As each creek greenbelt is completed to Town Lake more and more people will have easier access to Town Lake by walking or by bicycling.

BULL CREEK

The 17,000 acre watershed of Bull Creek contains the most beautiful of all the landscapes around Austin. With the completion of the cross-town sewer and Loop 360 the area will be subject to very rapid development. 25% of the entire area is made up of slopes of 15% or greater, many of which are considered to be unstable. Problems with natural factors are compounded by the prospects of increased erosion, and flooding that will inevitably follow development. Acquisition of a greenbelt along Bull Creek has begun with the creation of Bull Creek Park, just off Spicewood Springs Road. Hopefully the Greenbelt will be extended to include the most beautiful portions of the creek.

TAYLOR'S SLOUGH

West Austin neighborhood groups are anxious to link Taylor's Slough, an old lime quarry just off Lake Austin, to Reed Park and to Cassi School to the East. Presently the creek that follows this path is undeveloped but in private ownership. Hopefully a way will be found to create the greenbelt even though some form of development of the land seems inevitable. A mutually satisfactory solution that would benefit the development as well as the entire neighborhood could serve as a positive example for future growth along creeks.

BEE CREEK & LITTLE BEE CREEK

These relatively wild creeks run through undeveloped areas of Southwest Austin, primarily through West Lake Hills. People in these areas have proposed a major wilderness preserve of about 400 acres to be known as "Wild Basin Park." The proposed park would include the very beautiful areas of Bee Creek as well as most of the land on both sides that is too steep for building. A great deal of care must be exercised by the Highway Department where Loop 360 is scheduled to cross Bee Creek. A less than sensitive bridge could destroy one of the most unique natural areas in Travis County.

JOHNSON CREEK

A small, completely developed watershed in residential West Austin, Johnson Creek roughly parallels the right-of-way of MoPac Expressway, even though the road construction has obliterated the creek in several areas, a greenbelt is planned from Town Lake north to Westfield Park. The proposed trail will emerge from under MoPac at the new Austin High School on Town Lake, giving the West Austin neighborhoods access to the school and the lake.

DRY CREEK

Many people are familiar with Dry Creek already because it is the location of a nature trail and the site for "Satan" each spring. Properly developed as a greenbelt, Dry Creek could provide access to Zilker Park and Town Lake for the rapidly developing southwest areas as well as become a scenic easement along portions of Bee Caves Road, similar to the area along Lamar Blvd. at Poase Park.

BARTON CREEK

Barton Creek is not only the largest of all the creeks that flow into Town Lake but it is the creek with the greatest potential to provide access to the open countryside. A greenbelt has been acquired as far south as Loop 360. The construction of both Loop 360 and MoPac will precipitate considerable new development in the southwest quadrant of the city. The runoff, erosion and pollution that result from poorly planned development could destroy Barton Creek and with it Barton Springs Pool. Hopefully new and higher standards of planning and design will be expected from anyone building in the watershed, and hopefully that will insure that there will always be a Barton Springs.

EAST & WEST BOULDIN CREEKS

These two very small watersheds in South Austin have similar problems, i.e., they are both completely developed and there has never been any concerted effort to care for them, nor do they flow through any significant amount of open public land. As Town Lake is finished and becomes more and more a major focus of activity, the older neighborhoods to the South will want to develop greenbelts to link them to the lake.

WILLIAMSON, SLAUGHTER, & ONION CREEKS

These three major creeks run east-west, roughly paralleling Town Lake, through a relatively undeveloped portion of South Austin. Some of the newer subdivisions in sharp contrast to most of the older ones, have respected the creeks. Several have even created hike and bike trails. All three creeks lead to McKinney Falls State Park several miles east of IH 35. If trails can be developed along these three creeks, tremendous numbers of people would have access to the park.

Onion Creek with a 60 mile long watershed is easily the largest creek in Travis County. Fortunately for Austin the huge floods that can come down Onion Creek reach the Colorado River downstream from Austin.

SHOAL CREEK

Shoal Creek, the largest of the creeks within the city limits, has a watershed that is almost completely developed. As the northern end of the watershed has experienced rapid development in recent years Shoal Creek has become a significant flood problem. If the increased runoff from development is not retained at the northern end by holding ponds, the problem will continue to increase until complete channelization of the creek will become inevitable. The lessons of not planning for the ultimate development of Shoal Creek will hopefully teach us how to avoid similar problems on other creeks in the future.

WALLER CREEK

More than any other creek in Austin, Waller Creek offers tremendous economic potential. Public investment in solving the flooding problems and building a pedestrian environment similar to the San Antonio River Walk will be the catalyst for a great deal of private investment. Preservation of the fine old stone bridges, the huge oak trees, and the historic buildings along the creek, combined with sensitive design of new buildings, will create a new center for commercial and residential development. The renaissance of East 6th Street as an historic area will contribute significantly to the redevelopment of Waller Creek.

WALNUT CREEK

Walnut Creek has a very large and very dangerous flood plain in addition to erosion prone soils and unstable slopes. A map of the flood plain and the slopes would indicate that very little land adjacent to the creek is really suitable for development. A greenbelt along Walnut Creek would link a golf course and at least two major parks all the way from Northeast neighborhoods to the Colorado River.

LITTLE WALNUT CREEK

Development of subdivisions along Little Walnut Creek during the 1960's has virtually destroyed the natural creek leaving very little opportunity to create a greenbelt. There are, however, several good possibilities to link schools, parks, etc. along portions of the creek.

FORT & TANNEHILL BRANCHES

The two large branches of Boggy Creek both run through areas that are almost completely developed. Although chances of a continuous greenbelt seem slim, there are a number of small creative development possibilities that could enhance the creeks and the neighborhood through which they flow.

BOGGY CREEK

In addition to the fifty-five acre linear park being developed along Boggy Creek, a major extension of that greenbelt is proposed toward the east, ultimately to link with the Colorado River east of Austin. Historically a large portion of the Boggy Creek watershed is regularly flooded. New flood plain insurance regulations and new funding for innovative solutions to flooding problems may someday help solve these age old problems.

COLORADO RIVER

Several proposals have been put forward to create canoe trails along the Colorado from Longhorn Dam eastward, at least to Webberville. This would provide a unique and unusual recreational opportunity for adventuresome Austinites. A trail down the river would eventually link up with Walnut Creek and Onion Creek.

COUNTRY CLUB CREEK

Country Club Creek offers a significant opportunity to link the new and rapidly developing southeast area of Austin to Town Lake. Approximately one-half of the length of Country Club Creek runs through land that is presently being developed as a large well-planned subdivision. Cooperation between the city and the owners would insure public access through the area along a proposed greenbelt. Proper planning south of this subdivision would complete the link to Linder School. Children could move south to the school in the morning and north to a new metropolitan park on Town Lake in the afternoon.

BLUNN CREEK

Developed in the 1930's as a linear park and greenbelt, Blunn Creek offers us the best possible demonstration of the results of good planning and sensitive design. Recreation areas, natural areas, and even a school are strung out along the greenbelt, offering relief from the suburban fabric, and giving structure and identity to a whole district of South Austin. Residents of the neighborhoods around the creek are very interested in extending the trail south to link up with Travis High School and St. Edwards University and providing access to Town Lake on the north by extending the trail a mere six blocks.

Conceptual map of 18 creeks in the Austin region.

Thank you for being part of my Visions!

Now in my 80's, it is a privilege to look back on many of my visionary ideas and share them with you. My hope is that these visions will inspire you to think outside the box about your own community and envision real change.

This book celebrates the collaborative efforts behind urban visions in and around Austin. A heartfelt thank you to all contributors, partners, and supporters who joined me on this journey. Your dedication has shaped these initiatives.

-Sinclair Black, FAIA

Contributors to this Book:

Kelsey Nunez
Heyden Black Walker
Arlen Walker
Priya Patel

For more information
www.blackmotal.com