



Greening America's Capitals

# **GREENING THE SOUTH CENTRAL WATERFRONT AUSTIN, TEXAS**

## GREENING AMERICA'S CAPITALS

Greening America's Capitals is a project of the Partnership for Sustainable Communities between the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Department for Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) to help state capitals develop an implementable vision of distinctive, environmentally friendly neighborhoods that incorporate innovative green infrastructure strategies. EPA provides this design assistance to help support sustainable communities that protect the environment, economy, and public health and to inspire state leaders to expand this work elsewhere. Greening America's Capitals will help communities consider ways to incorporate sustainable design strategies into their planning and development to create and enhance interesting, distinctive neighborhoods that have multiple social, economic, and environmental benefits.

Austin, Texas, was chosen in 2014 as one of five state capital cities to receive this assistance along with Carson City, Nevada; Columbus, Ohio; Pierre, South Dakota; and Richmond, Virginia.

For more information about the program, see [www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/greening-americas-capitals](http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/greening-americas-capitals).



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Project Area Assessment</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Design Workshop</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Design Options:</b>	<b>20</b>
	<b>Focus Area 1: South Congress Avenue</b>	<b>21</b>
	<b>Focus Area 2: Statesman Waterfront Park</b>	<b>29</b>
	<b>Focus Area 3: South Central Square</b>	<b>41</b>
	<b>Focus Area 4: Barton Springs Road</b>	<b>45</b>
	<b>Focus Area 5: Bouldin Creek</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Next Steps</b>	<b>54</b>



Figure 1 Austin's South Central Waterfront, seen here, from downtown. Photo credit: City of Austin, Planning and Zoning Department, Urban Design Division.

# Executive Summary

The city of Austin, Texas, is working with local stakeholders to create a Public Realm Framework and Vision Plan to guide redevelopment of and public investments in the South Central Waterfront (SCW), a 97-acre district on the south shore of Lady Bird Lake (Figure 1). The district includes 31 private properties, one city-owned property, and public rights of way for four transit corridors. The emerging vision aspires to a lively and attractive pedestrian environment, safer bikeways, great public spaces, better connections to and along the waterfront, and development of a significant amount of affordable housing. (Housing affordability is part of the city's planning effort but was beyond the scope of work for this report.)

The Vision includes using public and private open spaces as “green infrastructure” to manage stormwater runoff to improve water quality and minimize localized flooding. The intent of the Public Realm Framework and Vision Plan is to guide physical planning of future infill development on underused private and public properties.

By beginning with a public realm vision, the city is bringing together neighbors, property owners, stakeholders, and government officials to figure out how a public-private development partnership can improve connections, provide green

infrastructure, and create new and improved public spaces.

The city requested technical assistance from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) through the Greening America's Capitals Program to develop components of this Public Realm Framework and Vision for the South Central Waterfront. EPA funded a design team to assess the redevelopment area and collaborate with city staff, residents, local business owners, property owners, and other stakeholders to develop and identify design options that could improve the public realm. The team developed design options for five individual sites that respond to the surrounding conditions and community input. The community's desire for green infrastructure and a balance of public amenities, private investment, and cultural connectivity, shaped the design options.

Two of the focus areas are on private land in the South Central Waterfront district. Design options for these sites focus on waterfront connections that combine public and private benefits and integrate required stormwater systems with publicly accessible open space.

Two focus areas are streetscapes in the public right of way. One design option strengthens the north-south connection

between downtown and the capitol to the north, and the thriving South Congress (SoCo) neighborhood to the south.

The fifth focus area integrates east-west neighborhoods through widened sidewalks, protected bikeways, shade trees, and stormwater treatment planters. Design options for the final site highlight a creek that runs along the northern edge of the Texas School for the Deaf campus. The design concept focuses on balancing public access to the creek's natural beauty with a hiking and biking trail and bridges. Stormwater treatment gardens improve water quality and prevent erosion of the creek banks.

This report identifies near- and mid-term steps the city could take if it chooses to implement any of the design options, as well as strategic public and private partners who could support and fund implementation. These next steps could catalyze public and private investment in the redevelopment area; test traffic configurations for improved safety; and demonstrate how the public realm could be more vibrant, beautiful, and ecologically beneficial.



# 1 Introduction

The project area is in Austin’s South Central Waterfront District—a 97-acre area on the south side of Lady Bird Lake and east of South First Street. Currently, the South Central Waterfront has several physical challenges, including inadequate public access and limited public green space along the shoreline, excessively large parking lots and aging auto-oriented development, large expanses of impervious surfaces, lack of tree canopy except along the Bouladin Creek corridor, and outdated and inadequate stormwater infrastructure.

While the SCW has many challenges, it also has assets to build on, including Lady Bird Lake, waterfront access, and a famous urban bat population. Every year, a colony of Mexican free-tailed bats take up residence under the Ann W. Richards Congress Avenue Bridge, drawing thousands of spectators to view their twilight hunts over Lady Bird Lake.

The South Central Waterfront sits between two vibrant, commercial districts, downtown to the north and South Congress (SoCo) to the south (Figure 2). Two beloved residential neighborhoods are adjacent to the district, Bouladin Creek neighborhood to the southwest and historic Travis Heights (in South River City) to the southeast (Figure 3).

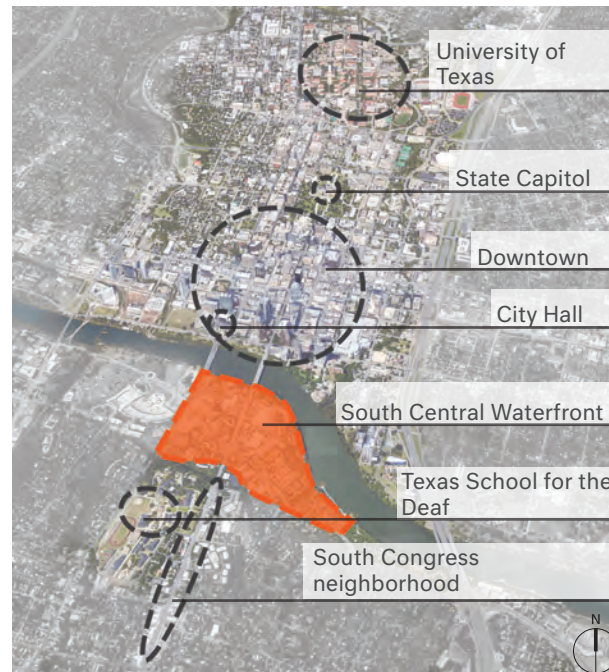


Figure 2 The above diagram situates the South Central Waterfront study area within the context of the city.

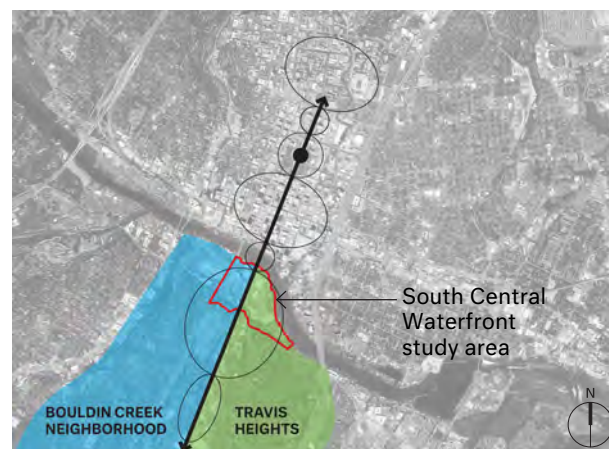


Figure 3 South Central Waterfront straddles two neighborhoods across South Congress Avenue.

Over the past 30 years, the city of Austin has written and commissioned a variety of planning studies for the South Central Waterfront. Consistently, these studies call for a harmonious development that respects the tremendous asset of the lake and shoreline. The most recent planning studies agree that a prime obstacle to harmonious development is the lack of a good network of streets and blocks.

The city’s Planning and Zoning Department delivered the SCW Interim Draft Vision Framework (2014 Vision Report) to the city council in August 2014. City staff developed the 2014 Vision Report with input from hundreds of residents, building on previous studies and incorporating international best practices. The Vision is to transform the SCW by building an attractive pedestrian environment, expanding open spaces, enhancing connections to and along the waterfront, and building more affordable housing.

The city’s 2014 Vision Report formed the foundation of the EPA technical assistance, and the design team worked iteratively with city staff, stakeholders, and the city’s urban design consultants to refine the SCW Public Realm Framework and to advance the design, character, and technical performance of the open spaces and streets that the 2014 Vision Report proposed.



From the 2014 Vision Report, EPA and city staff selected five areas of focus (Figure 4):

- **Focus Area 1:** South Congress Avenue between Riverside Drive and Ann W. Richards Congress Avenue Bridge
- **Focus Area 2:** Statesman Waterfront Park from Ann W. Richards Congress Avenue Bridge southeast to the right-of-way preservation for the potential future transportation corridor
- **Focus Area 3:** South Central Square, a potential civic space that bridges two private parcels and a proposed extension of Barton Springs Road
- **Focus Area 4:** Barton Springs Road between South Congress Avenue and Riverside Drive
- **Focus Area 5:** East Branch of Bouldin Creek between South First Street and South Congress Avenue



Figure 4 The diagram above illustrates the five South Central Waterfront focus areas.

Focus Areas 2 and 3 are on private land that will likely be redeveloped in the coming years. The design team and city staff worked closely with the owners of these parcels to demonstrate the potential benefits of dedicating portions of their property for green infrastructure and open space that could simultaneously meet local water quality requirements and provide other public benefits like gathering spaces, shade trees, and landscaping that integrates with the natural setting. One of the privately owned parcels is bounded to the north by Lady Bird Lake, and existing regulations from the Waterfront Overlay Ordinance place restrictions on development within key setback areas on this parcel. Working with these lakeshore setbacks, carefully designed stormwater management features could add public benefit while helping the property owner meet treatment requirements for the developable portion of their property.

The second privately owned parcel does not have waterfront setbacks. The design team, with community input, suggested meeting water-quality requirements for this entire site by aggregating treatment in a new neighborhood square that could bring community benefit while treating the stormwater runoff generated by the surrounding impervious surfaces, adding public and private value.

Called the “Main Street of Texas,” Congress Avenue is Austin’s most prominent street, a major arterial that passes through the SCW and downtown Austin, terminating at the Texas State Capitol. Existing conditions of South Congress Avenue in the SCW undermine the grandeur of its physical position and its civic intent. The design team developed a range of options that could improve pedestrian and bicycle safety and comfort, and enhance the quality and identity of each street. By reapportioning the right of way, the streets could accommodate vehicle traffic and incorporate wider sidewalks, protected bikeways, shade trees, and high-performance planting areas that absorb and treat stormwater runoff.

Focus Area 5 parallels the east branch of Bouldin Creek and passes through the northern edge of the Texas School for the Deaf (TSD) campus. Currently, the walled campus interrupts five city blocks, breaking east-west connections between South First Street and South Congress Avenue. The TSD staff and board are cooperating with the city to explore a potential hiking and biking trail to connect from east to west along the creek on the campus. Working with the TSD, surrounding neighbors, and city staff, the design team proposed creating a linear park that makes this east-west connection

(South First Street to South Congress Avenue) and adds a north-south bridge across the creek. Currently, large concrete channels discharge surface stormwater runoff from the campus directly into the creek, exacerbating erosion and water pollution. To protect the creek, the design team incorporated rain gardens into the linear park design on the TSD campus that intercept, treat, and attenuate the discharge of peak flows. The designs, if implemented, could allow public access to a beautiful natural feature in the middle of the city while improving water quality and habitat and helping to better connect the TSD to the rest of the city.





## 2 Project Area Assessment

### Ecological Patterns

The South Central Waterfront has two watersheds: the Town Lake watershed, which drains into Lady Bird Lake, and the East Bouldin Creek watershed, which drains into Bouldin Creek (Figure 5). Both watersheds are dotted with large, centralized stormwater infrastructure designed for efficiency and not for watershed health or beautification. Many of the stormwater infrastructures are privately owned, resulting in disconnected systems with varying degrees of management.

The SCW streetscapes lack tree canopy (Figure 7), often due to narrow sidewalks and lack of underground space for root growth. Insufficient canopy cover results in a lack of shade and uncomfortably hot temperatures for walking, especially during the summer.

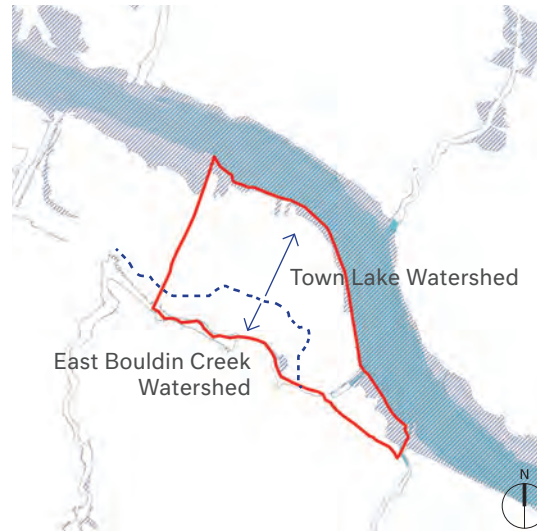


Figure 5 The above diagram illustrates the site's watersheds and, in gray, the potential flooding areas on the shores of Lady Bird Lake and the surrounding creeks.



Figure 6 The above diagram illustrates ten foot contour lines over the site, demonstrating its relative flatness.



Figure 7 The above diagram illustrates in green the areas of tree canopy coverage on the site.



Figure 8 The above diagram illustrates in green the riparian corridors that abut the site.



## Built Pattern

The 97 acres of the South Central Waterfront cover the equivalent of 33 downtown blocks but are divided into only a handful of superblocks. The SCW lacks a street grid to organize the development pattern and in effect features a patchwork of private parcels (Figure 9). Seventy-one percent of the area is covered by impervious surfaces, which include buildings and pavement. Half of the site is covered by parking lots and roadways (Figure 10).

These hard surfaces heat up the air, making walking and biking unpleasant, and create stormwater runoff that harms water quality in Lady Bird Lake.



Figure 9 The above diagram illustrates in gray the existing building footprints that cover the study area. Buildings occupy 21% of the site.



Figure 10 The above diagram illustrates in gray the roadways and parking lots that cover 50% of the site.



Figure 11 The above diagram illustrates in green the few green spaces on the site, which edge the lake and creeks.

## Circulation

The lack of a street grid in some parts of the district and lack of connected sidewalks and bike lanes make it difficult to get around the South Central Waterfront, particularly for people who want to walk, bike, or take transit (Figures 12-15). The resulting disorderly positioning of buildings and acres of surface parking lots on these superblocks also limit visual and physical access to the waterfront. The four arterial roads—South Congress Avenue, Barton Springs Road, Riverside Drive, and South First Street (Figure 13)—define the district’s superblocks and generally have fast-moving traffic, frequent curb cuts, limited tree canopy, few pedestrian amenities, and little visual cohesion, all of which make them unwelcoming to pedestrians and bicyclists.



Figure 12 The above diagram illustrates in green the existing sidewalks and trails within the study area.



Figure 14 The above diagram illustrates in green the existing bus routes and stops within the study area.



Figure 13 The above diagram illustrates in gray the existing street grid. From the center of the site, it is only a five minute walk to cross the bridge to downtown.



Figure 15 The above diagram illustrates in orange the existing bike routes throughout the study area.



## Evolution of a New Street Grid

The city’s 2014 Vision Report proposed a network of new roadways and building parcels on the two largest private parcels within the SCW (Figure 16). Building on these planning recommendations, the new network would create better connections to the waterfront, encourage walking within the neighborhood, and create a more orderly development pattern. A key element to the 2014 Vision Report physical framework is adding another north-south boulevard running parallel to South Congress Avenue. Taking inspiration from “La Rambla,” the tree-lined pedestrian mall in Barcelona, the 2014 Vision Report describes it as a “Green Street” that organizes the new neighborhood.



The EPA design team proposed reorienting the “Green Street” to run east-west and connect to Barton Springs Road on the west side of South Congress Avenue (Figure 17). This option would unify the new neighborhood from east to west and stitch together the SCW. It would also reinforce South Congress Avenue’s role as a gateway that strengthens connections between South Congress (SoCo) and the downtown and Capitol.



Figure 16 The city of Austin prepared the plan to the left to illustrate a new street grid for the study area as part of their 2014 Vision Report.



Figure 17 The plan to the left illustrates the revisions proposed to the 2014 street grid. The proposal reorients the “Green Street” feature from its north-south orientation in the 2014 plan to an east-west orientation. The goal of this change is to link the SCW neighborhood from east to west across South Congress Avenue and to reinforce South Congress Avenue as the primary north-south street in the SCW neighborhood and the city.

	Future development parcels on land owned by the Austin-American Statesman
	Future development parcels on land owned by the Crockett family



# Focus Areas

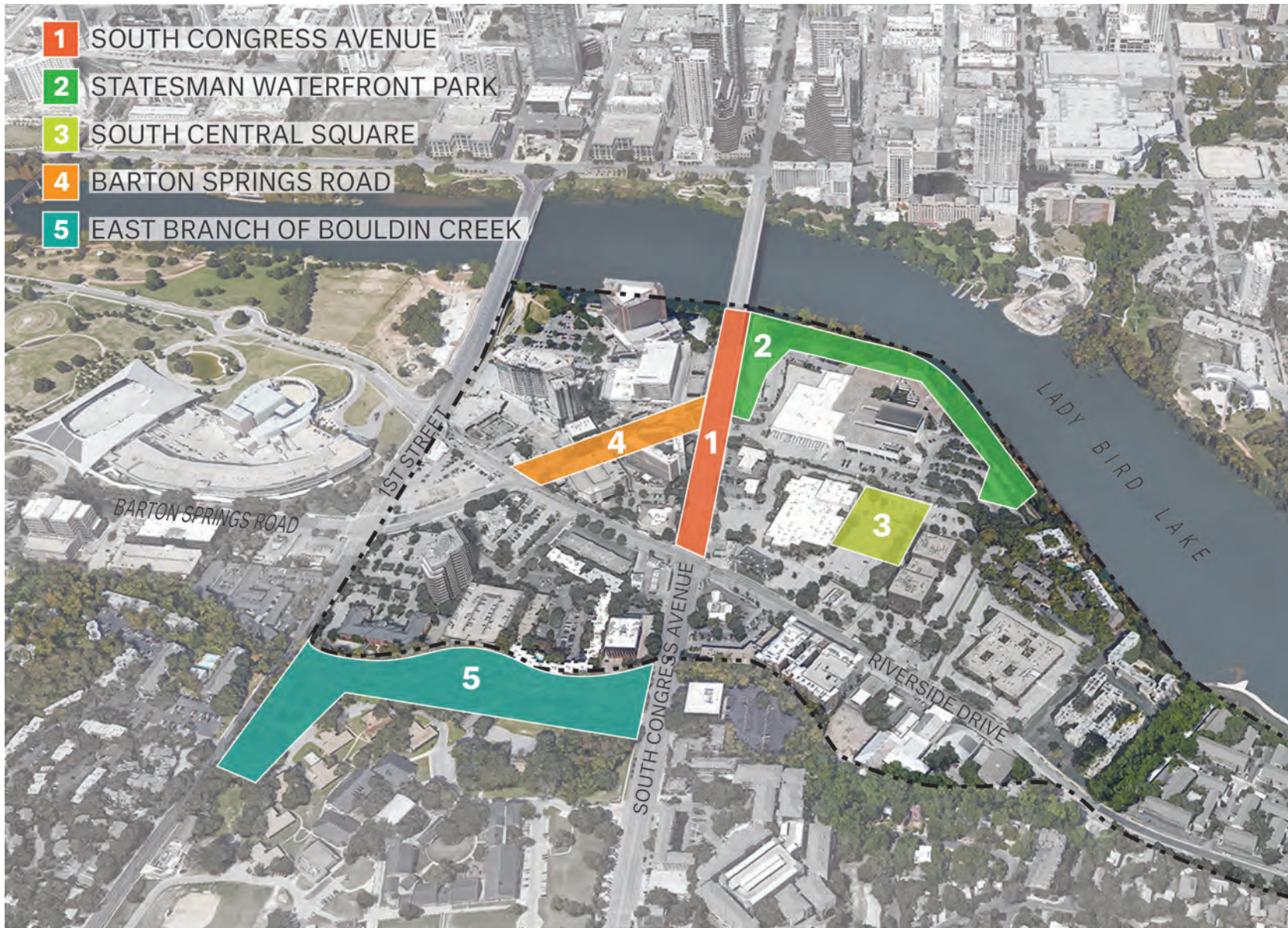


Figure 18 Five Focus Areas



# 1 South Congress Avenue (between Ann W. Richards Congress Avenue Bridge and Riverside Drive)

South Congress Avenue is the southern gateway to Austin’s downtown and the Texas State Capitol campus. The street is heavily used by cars, bikes, and pedestrians (Figure 21). It has sidewalks on both sides but no bicycle lanes from the major intersection at Riverside Drive to the bridge. South of Riverside Drive, Congress Avenue has bicycle lanes, but they do not connect through the study area to downtown. The sidewalk on the eastern side has a landscape buffer, but otherwise, plantings are minimal and inconsistent.

Walking along South Congress Avenue from downtown to Riverside Drive takes only about five minutes, but the exposed conditions, automobile-dominant character, and minimal pedestrian space make the journey an unpleasant experience that feels much longer.



Figure 19 South Congress Avenue Key Plan



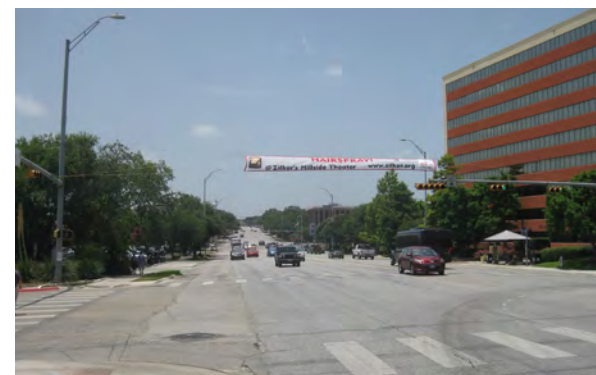
Figure 20 Stairs connect the 20 foot grade change from Statesman Waterfront Park to Congress Avenue at the abutment of the Ann W. Richards Congress Avenue Bridge.



1 Figure 21 South Congress Avenue looking south



2 Figure 22 South Congress Avenue looking north toward downtown



3 Figure 23 South Congress Avenue at the intersection of Barton Springs Road looking south

## 2 Statesman Waterfront Park

The Statesman focus area is a privately owned land parcel on the south shore of Lady Bird Lake. The owner generously makes portions of it available to the public as a small linear park. The Statesman's current green space, commonly known as the Statesman Bat Observation Center, is a popular location for people to watch the bats emerge on summer evenings from under the Congress Avenue Bridge. The Ann and Roy Butler Hike-and-Bike Trail also runs along the lake underneath the bridge through the green space, connecting to the new boardwalk trail to the east. However, pedestrian and bicycle access to the trail and green space is very constricted. Although trails run along the waterfront, people can get to the shore in only a few places. The green space has a well-developed tree canopy, providing a comfortable environment and supporting the bat migration along the lake and river.



Figure 24 Austin-American Statesman property Key Plan



1 Figure 25 Austin-American Statesman property looking north toward downtown



2 Figure 26 Austin-American Statesman property looking west toward the Congress Avenue Bridge



3 Figure 27 Typical stormwater infrastructure treating runoff from the Austin-American Statesman parking lots. The area is fenced with no public access.



4 Figure 28 Ann and Ray Butler Hike-and-Bike Trail with a glimpse of Lady Bird Lake on the right



### 3 South Central Square

The city's 2014 Vision Report for the South Central Waterfront envisions a new pedestrian-oriented street that runs through the superblocks and connects to Barton Springs Road. This street would run through South Central Square. The site straddles two, privately owned parcels: the Austin-American Statesman property to the north and the Crockett property to the south. Surface parking lots and a service access route occupy the site with little to no tree canopy (Figures 30-32). Proposed infill development will surround the site.



Figure 29 South Central Square Key Plan



1 Figure 30 Driveway entrance to the Austin American-Statesman property at South Congress Avenue



2 Figure 31 Austin American-Statesman's distribution facilities and adjacent parking lots



3 Figure 32 Parking lots within the study area



## 4 Barton Springs Road

Barton Springs Road forms the “gateway” into the South Central Waterfront neighborhood where it crosses South Congress Avenue. The focus area is the block between South Congress Avenue and West Riverside Drive. This block has several very large driveway curb cuts, which interrupt sidewalks and make the road a very car dominant environment.

Barton Springs Road is difficult to navigate as a pedestrian, due to an oversized intersection at South Congress Avenue that isolates pedestrians on a small median as they attempt to cross (Figures 35-36).

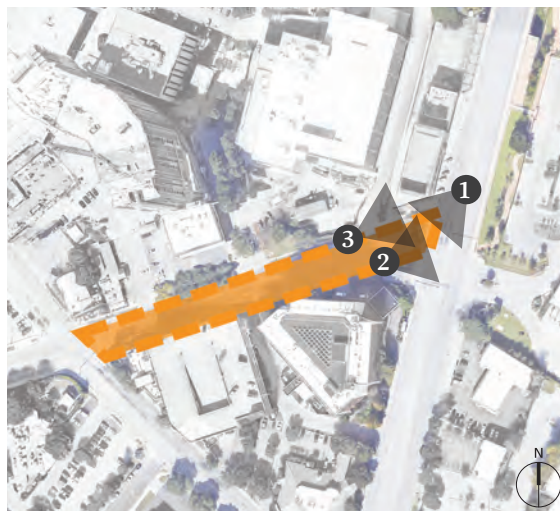


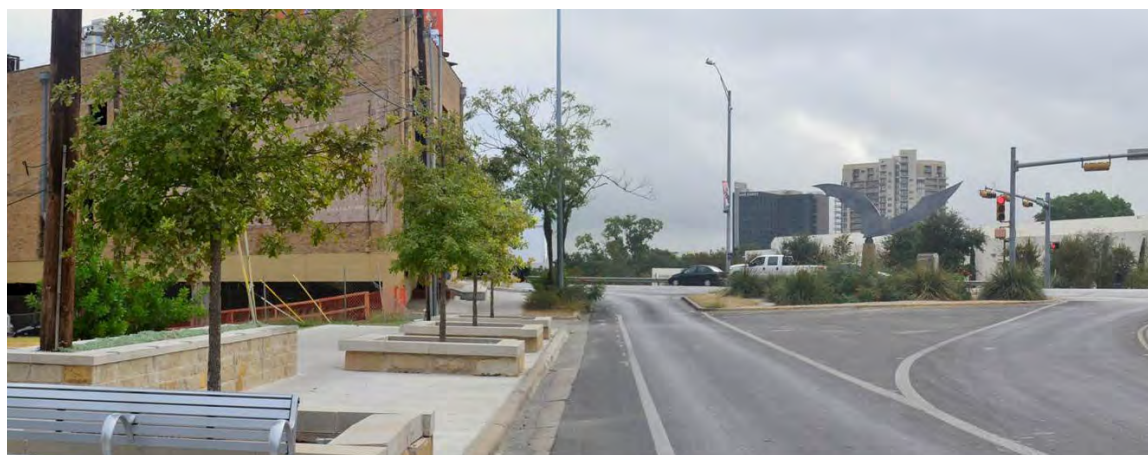
Figure 33 Barton Springs Road Key Plan



1 Figure 34 Barton Springs Road looking southwest from the intersection with South Congress Avenue



2 Figure 35 Pedestrian island at Barton Springs Road and South Congress Avenue, looking east



3 Figure 36 Barton Springs Road looking east. The right-turn lane is on the left. The traffic island with the bat sculpture, titled Nightwing, is in the center.



## 5 East Branch of Bouldin Creek

Bouldin Creek approximately defines the southern boundary of the South Central Waterfront study area. The focus area is between South First Street and South Congress Avenue. Many people in the neighborhood forget the creek is there because of the poor access. The primary visitors to the creek are transient communities who gather there.

The culvert and stormwater infrastructure is undersized and poorly maintained. Large portions of the north edge of the creek have constructed embankments to provide erosion control for the nearby development. The creek currently hosts a mature gallery forest with many old trees and large, exposed rim rock (Figure 40).

The 2014 Vision Report proposes a recreation trail along the creek to connect South First Street and South Congress Avenue and a bridge approximately midblock, connecting the Texas School for the Deaf campus northward to Haywood Street and the city administrative offices at One Texas Center to the south of the creek.



Figure 37 Bouldin Creek Key Plan



1 Figure 38 The Texas School for the Deaf campus's northern boundary. The fence also marks the top bank of Bouldin Creek.



2 Figure 39 A concrete channel discharges stormwater runoff from the Texas School for the Deaf into the creek.



3 Figure 40 View from within the creek bed with the rim rock on the right.

### 3 Design Workshop

As part of the Greening America’s Capitals Program, the design team, EPA, and city staff organized a three-day design workshop from August 31st to September 3rd, 2015. The Texas School for the Deaf generously provided meeting spaces for all three days. Austin city staff hosted two public open houses, one at the beginning of the workshop and one at the end, to gather community input and share ideas. Approximately 150 residents attended. City staff augmented the open house with interactive public art, an ice cream social, and a miniature petting zoo for children (Figures 44-46).

During the workshop, the design team hosted design sessions with city staff and facilitated focus group meetings involving approximately 100 people, including technical experts; the SCW Stakeholder Outreach Committee; advocates and nonprofits that support open space, trails, and affordable housing; and other stakeholders.



Figure 41 City staff, stakeholders, and local designers posted comments on the design options for each focus area.



Figure 42 Members of the public were invited to comment on various design concepts for the study area.



Figure 43 The design team prepared various sketch overlays testing ideas for conversation with the community.



## FOCUS GROUP COMMON THEMES

Attendees provided input that coalesced around the common themes listed below.

- Improve pedestrian and bicycle connections, safety, and comfort.
- “Right-size” vehicle lane widths to improve pedestrian and bicycle facilities.
- Maximize public waterfront access.
- Enhance the bat viewing experience for locals and visitors without compromising bat habitat.
- Preserve the natural character of the shoreline while providing pedestrian-active uses and creating a distinctive experience next to the waterfront setback zone.
- Mitigate the exposed and disconnected streetscape experience of South Congress Avenue and create a stronger link between downtown and SoCo.
- Preserve Austin’s eclectic character by providing affordable retail space for local artisans and merchants.
- Facilitate better utility coordination to ensure room for a thriving urban forest that can shade the public realm

and reduce the heat island effect, which describes built up areas that are hotter than nearby rural areas.

One of the focus group meetings was attended by an economic development consultant; private property owners; nonprofit advocacy groups; and city, state, and federal agency staff, to discuss implementation strategies and opportunities for public-private partnerships. Section 5 of this report summarizes that discussion and lists potential next steps for implementing design options from this report.

The community’s desires for green infrastructure, a balance of creating public amenities and private investment opportunities, and cultural connectivity drove the design options. The following pages highlight the resulting design goals that address community concerns within the design parameters.



Figure 44 An Austin artist led a “Walk and Draw” workshop where the public drew existing conditions of the study area.



Figure 45 “Austin-style” community workshops included refreshments for participants from a local ice cream shop.



Figure 46 “Austin-style” community workshops included a petting zoo for kids.

# 3 Design Workshop

## RESULTING DESIGN GOALS



### Humanize 1

Balance automobile, pedestrian, and bicycle facilities on South Congress Avenue and Barton Springs Road, and add street trees and green infrastructure.

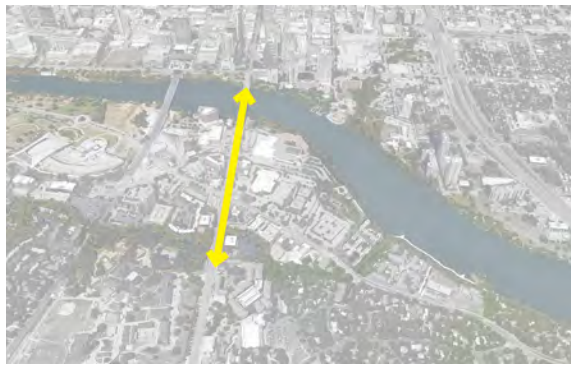
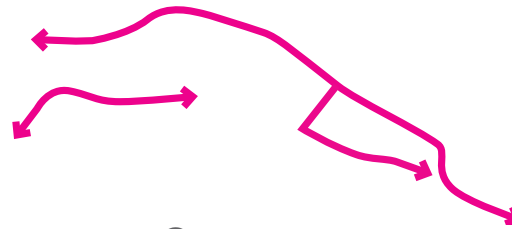


Figure 47 Design Goal #1: Humanize South Congress Avenue.



### Connect 2

Provide greater east-west pedestrian and bicycle connectivity across (and under) South Congress Avenue, through the Texas School for the Deaf campus, along Barton Springs Road, and along the lakefront.

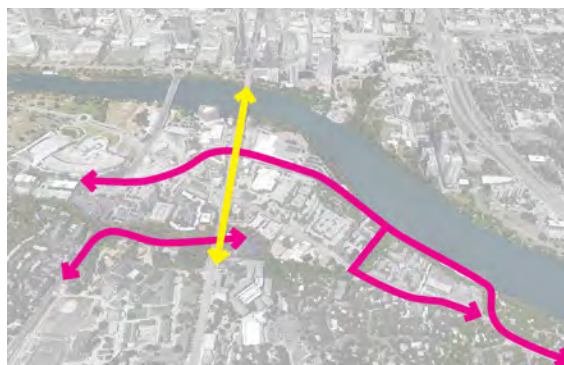


Figure 48 Design Goal #2: Connect adjacent neighborhoods.



### Gateway 3

Integrate the Statesman open space with South Congress Avenue by addressing the vertical separation between the two, and create more comfortable and worthy spaces to better experience the bat phenomenon and enjoy the lakefront. Remove the “free right” turn off South Congress Avenue onto Barton Springs Road, and transform this portion of the right of way into a public space and gateway into the SCW.

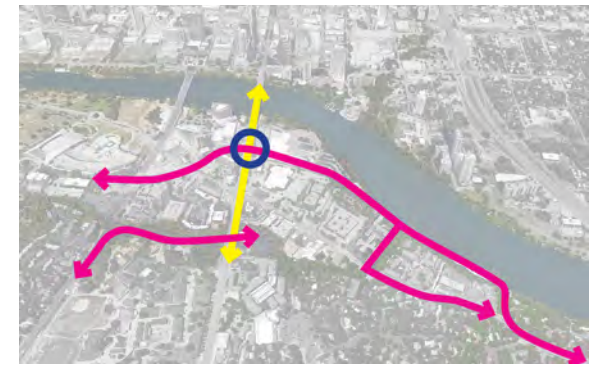
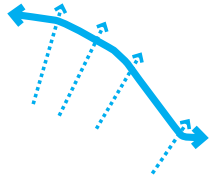


Figure 49 Design Goal #3: Create a gateway to South Congress.





## Waterfront

4

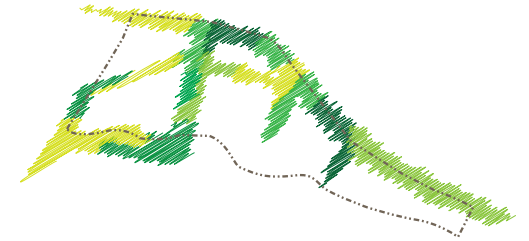
Create a unique waterfront experience that distinguishes the South Central Waterfront from other lakeshore open spaces. Design a topographic and programmatic gradient from a commercial esplanade at the top of the bank that transitions down to an immersive, natural park experience at the shore.



## Water Quality

5

Design the water quality infrastructure in such a way that it adds ecological, experiential, and aesthetic value, and strategically locate the treatment facilities to maximize developable land within private parcels.



## Character

6

Nurture Austin's eclectic character in the SCW by promoting idiosyncratic growth over uniform standardization. Design approaches could emphasize site specificity and spatial armatures that prioritize flexibility and enable evolution through time.

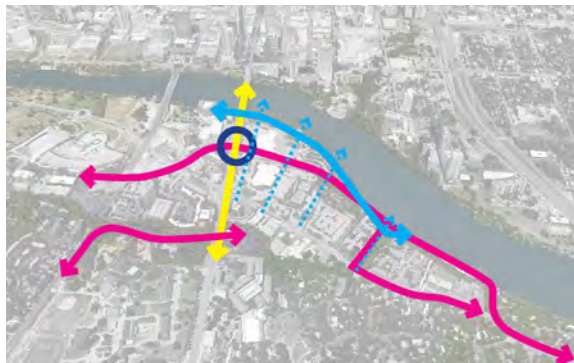


Figure 50 Design Goal #4: Enhance waterfront access.

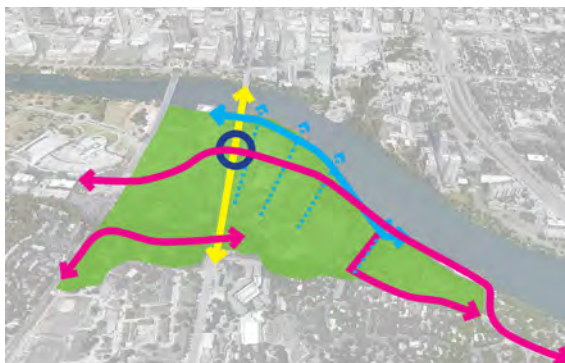


Figure 51 Design Goal #5: Improve water quality and the public realm.



Figure 52 Design Goal #6: Maintain the unique and eclectic character of Austin.





# 4 Design Options

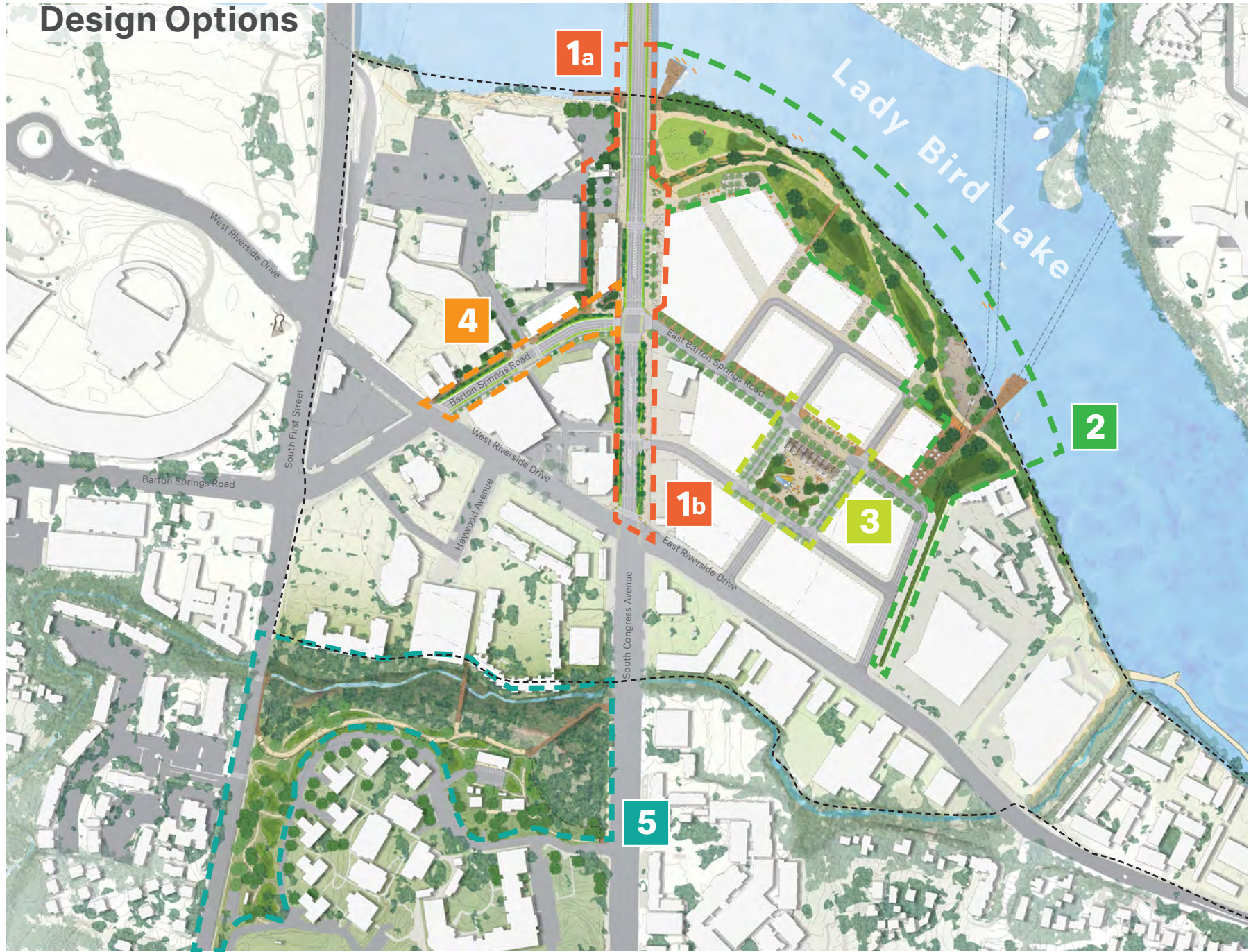
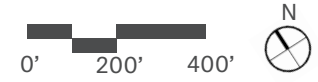


Figure 53 South Central Waterfront plan view of design concept with focus areas





# 1a South Congress Avenue (between Barton Springs Road and Ann W. Richards Congress Avenue Bridge)

The block of South Congress Avenue between Barton Springs Road and the bridge could be redesigned to mark the threshold between downtown and the SCW district. With the potential for mixed-use, infill development in the district, the design options for the South Congress Avenue streetscape could encourage pedestrian and bike commuting to downtown and make it safe and appealing for people to be more active.

- The city could transition the street from six travel lanes to four, using the gained right of way to create wider sidewalks and grade-separated bikeways. Austin's Transportation Department will continue to study traffic volume to determine

appropriate options for South Congress Avenue.

- Adding street trees and a shade trellis on the bridge could cool ambient temperatures and reduce the heat-island effect.
- Adding a mid-block pedestrian crossing could reduce traffic speeds and encourage walking, connecting the potential infill development with the western side of the district.
- Improving stair and ramp connections down to the proposed Statesman Waterfront Park on both sides of the bridge could increase access to the park for visitors who come to see the bats and improve circulation for Austinites who run, bike, and walk there daily.

- A key challenge to the site is the 20-foot grade change between the deck of the bridge and the park below. This vertical separation extends the perception of crossing the bridge, further disconnecting SCW from downtown. To improve this connection and activate the street frontage, the ground floor of the infill development could be set at the grade of South Congress Avenue, and partially underground parking could fit within this grade separation, keeping parked cars out of view and avoiding construction conflicts with the high water table in this area (see Figure 63).

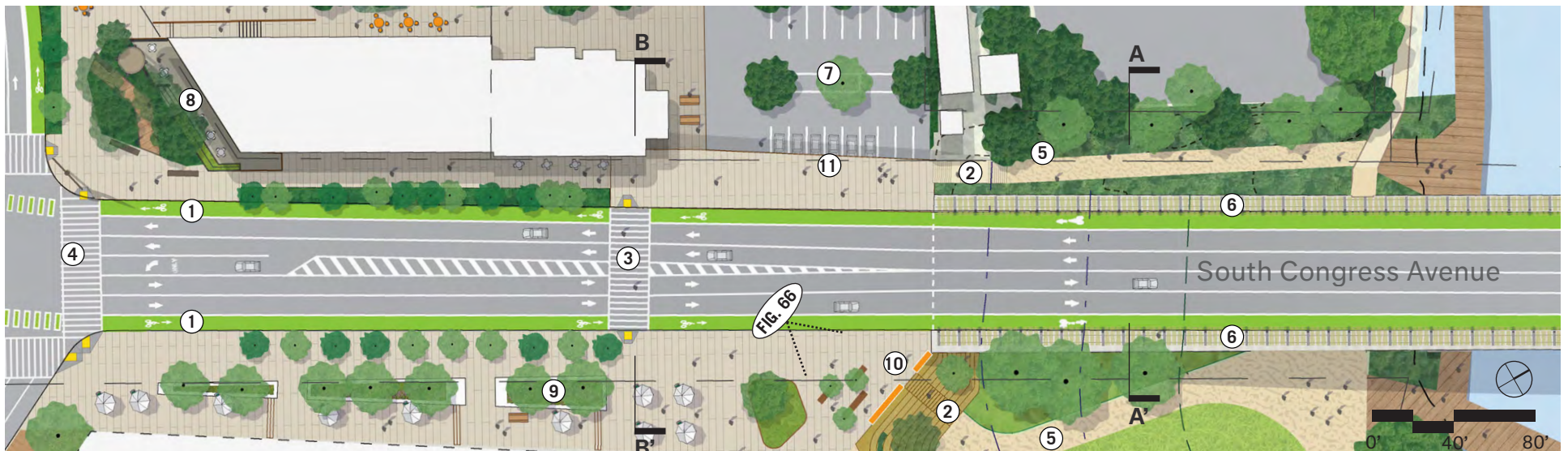


Figure 54 South Congress Avenue plan view of design concept

# 1a South Congress Avenue (between Barton Springs Road and Ann W. Richards Congress Avenue Bridge)

## LEGEND

- ① Elevated bike lanes
- ② Stair connections down from South Congress Avenue to waterfront park
- ③ Signalized mid-block crossing
- ④ High-visibility crosswalks
- ⑤ Increased pedestrian connections to the Ann and Roy Butler Hike-and-Bike Trail
- ⑥ Shade trellis
- ⑦ Existing parking lot with potential to host temporary vendors, art, and markets
- ⑧ Cafe terrace adjacent to new ground floor retail
- ⑨ “Flow-through” stormwater treatment planters could collect and treat runoff from adjacent pavement and roofs
- ⑩ Waterfront park overlook could be a gateway to the park and include interpretive information about the Mexican free-tailed bat and their migration through Austin
- ⑪ Walkway could extend over the bridge abutment to expand the width of the sidewalk

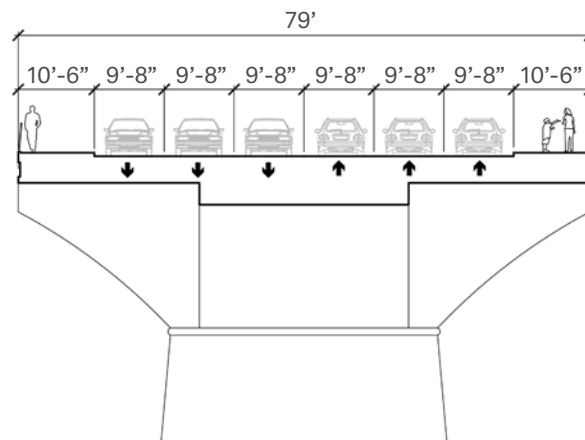


Figure 55 Section A-A': Existing conditions of Ann W. Richards Congress Avenue Bridge

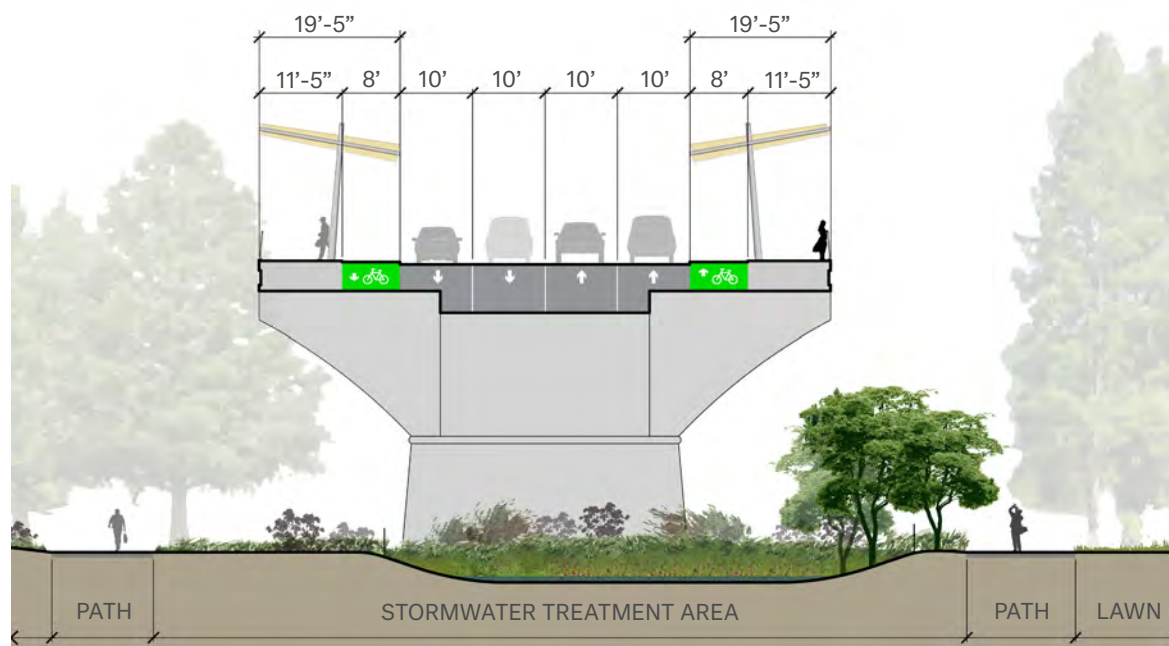


Figure 56 Section A-A': Design concept for Ann W. Richards Congress Avenue Bridge



# 1a South Congress Avenue

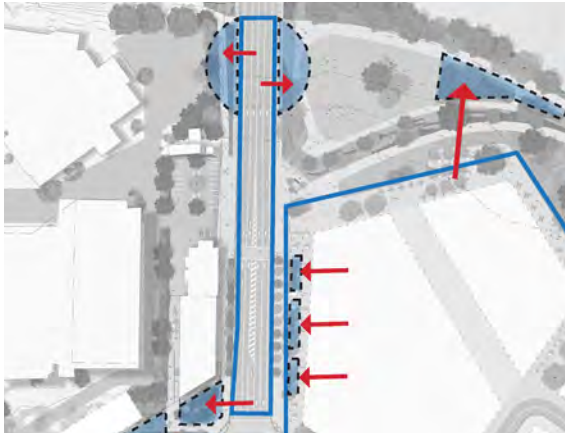


Figure 57 South Congress Avenue stormwater concept showing how runoff from rooftops and roadways could be treated in green infrastructure features.

## Stormwater Strategy

With the completion of Longhorn Dam in 1960, the last in a series of dam projects to address flood control and the resulting impoundment of the Colorado River, created what was then called Town Lake. Later renamed and now known as Lady Bird Lake, the lake is a critical stormwater management feature, providing detention for peak flows, as well as being central Austin’s iconic recreational feature. Due to the site’s close proximity to Lady Bird Lake,

stormwater detention is not required; however, “first flush” treatment of the initial runoff from a rain storm is required for stormwater quality, helping to protect the lake from nonpoint source pollution.

For this segment of South Congress Avenue, green infrastructure systems could effectively treat flows off impervious surfaces (see Figure 57).



Figure 58 Stormwater treatment pond



Figure 59 Flow-through planter for treating stormwater, with seating combines green infrastructure with streetscape furnishings



Figure 60 Bioretention area with native plants

# 1a South Congress Avenue (between Barton Springs Road and Ann W. Richards Congress Avenue Bridge)

The city could take advantage of the underused area below the southern abutment of the bridge to install a water quality pond to treat surface roadway flows (Figure 56). In addition, small rain gardens could enhance the quality of the streetscape while treating the runoff of adjacent impervious surfaces. These required treatment systems could be designed with appropriate materials and plants to add aesthetic value and cooling to the streetscape.



Figure 61 This streetscape precedent shows a wide sidewalk with refined paving, a landscape buffer with trees, and public seating.

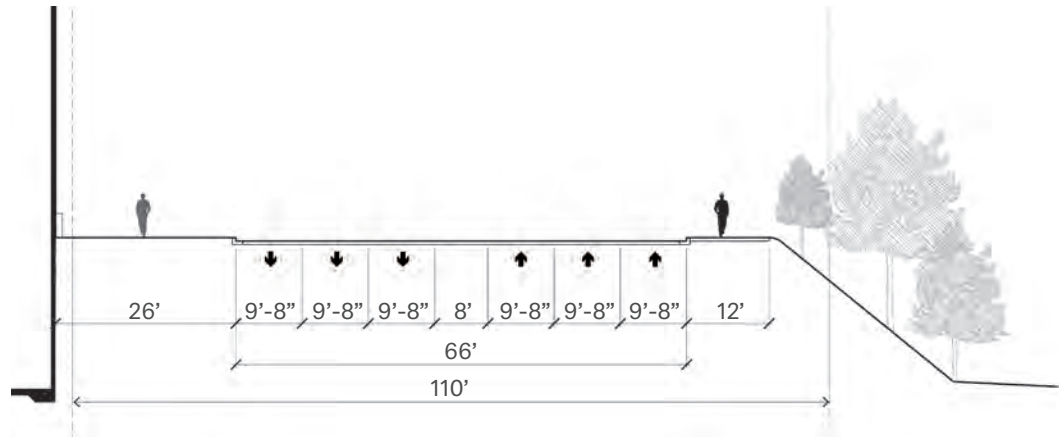


Figure 62 Section B-B': Existing conditions of South Congress Avenue

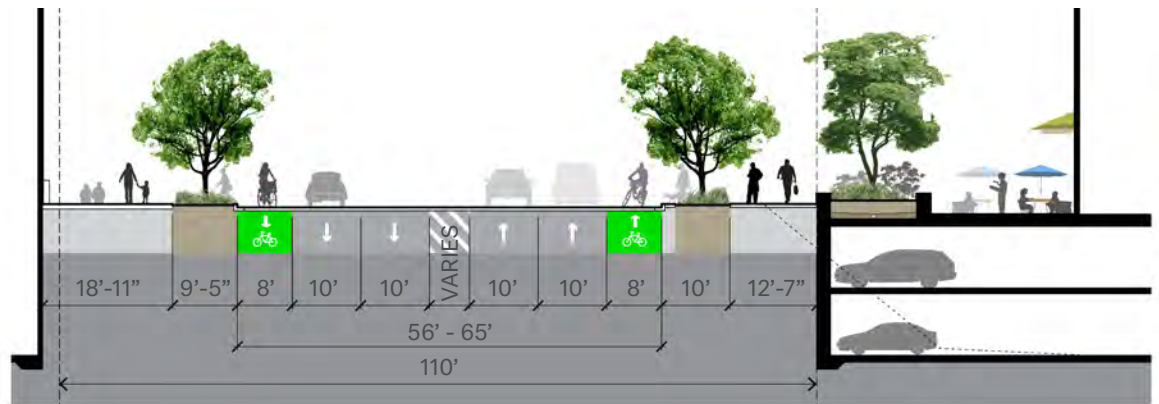


Figure 63 Section B-B': Design option for South Congress Avenue



# 1a South Congress Avenue (between Barton Springs Road and Ann W. Richards Congress Avenue Bridge)



Figure 64 South Congress Avenue looking northeast toward Lady Bird Lake over the Austin-American Statesman parking lot and open space. Photo credit: City of Austin, Planning and Zoning Department, Urban Design Division.

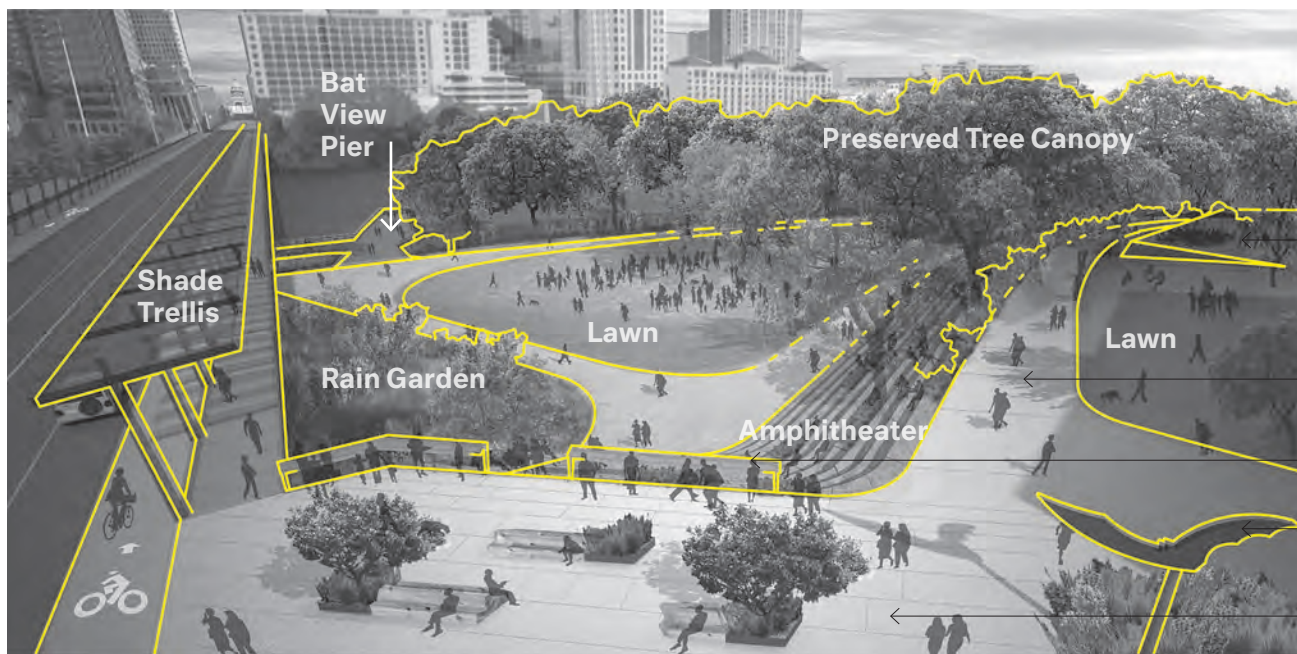


Figure 65 Design option

- ← Cafe terrace
- ← Connector to the Ann and Roy Butler Hike-and-Bike Trail
- ← Interpretive overlook
- ← Potential relocation of Nightwing
- ← Entry plaza over parking podium



# 1a South Congress Avenue (between Barton Springs Road and Ann W. Richards Congress Avenue Bridge)



Figure 66 Design option for South Congress Avenue and the Statesman Waterfront Park. Filling the grade next to the bridge with underground parking would better connect the park to South Congress Avenue. An amphitheater tucks into the grade change, providing a better space for watching the bats and other events. A trellis along South Congress Avenue shades the sidewalk and separates the pedestrian and bicycle routes.



## 1b South Congress Avenue (between Riverside Drive and Barton Springs Road)

The block of South Congress Avenue between Barton Springs Road and Riverside Drive could extend the improvements of block 1a with some changes to take advantage of the wider right of way. During the workshop, community members said that a unified, homogenous streetscape along South Congress Avenue did not accurately reflect the varying conditions along this important route or represent the city's eclectic character. Consequently, the design options vary from block 1a to block 1b, responding to their individual conditions and creating a more diverse streetscape.

The existing superblock is more than 600 feet long, which is a long, uninterrupted distance for pedestrians. By coordinating with the potential infill development site to the east, the city could include a new intersection, dividing the superblock into smaller, more walkable blocks (Figure 67). A new intersection would also provide the opportunity for a new east-west pedestrian crossing that could encourage workers, visitors, and residents from the west to access the amenities of the new development to the east.

By reducing travel lanes and adding dedicated left-turn pockets, the right of way could accommodate features that make cycling and walking safer and more pleasant. To make walking safer and more pleasant, the sidewalk could be protected from vehicle traffic by a raised cycle track and planted buffers. The planted buffers could also provide space for additional street trees and water-quality treatment gardens (Figure 69).

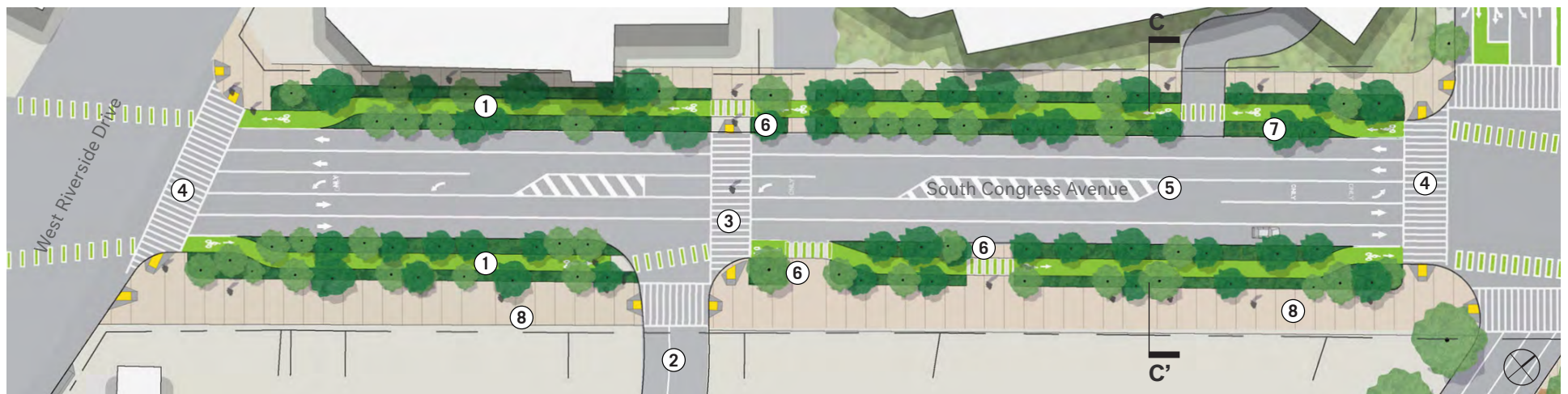


Figure 67 South Congress Avenue plan view of design concept

0' 40' 80'

# 1b South Congress Avenue (between Riverside Drive and Barton Springs Road)

## LEGEND

- ① Protected bike lanes
- ② New public street connects South Congress Avenue to the future redevelopment of adjacent private property
- ③ Signalized mid-block crossing
- ④ High-visibility crosswalks
- ⑤ Resizing the lanes enables more right of way space for greening and bike and pedestrian safety features
- ⑥ Consolidate existing curb cuts and change to driveways
- ⑦ Mixed shade tree canopy
- ⑧ Cafe terrace adjacent to new ground floor retail

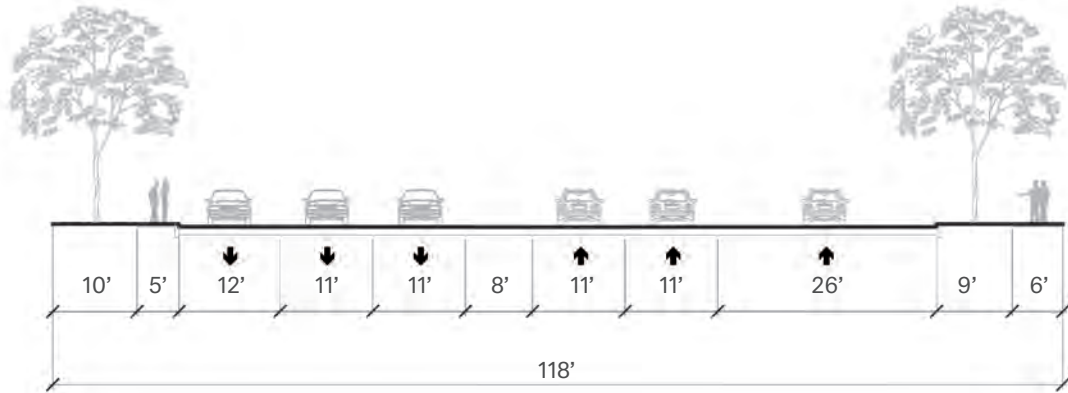


Figure 68 Section C-C': Existing conditions of South Congress Avenue

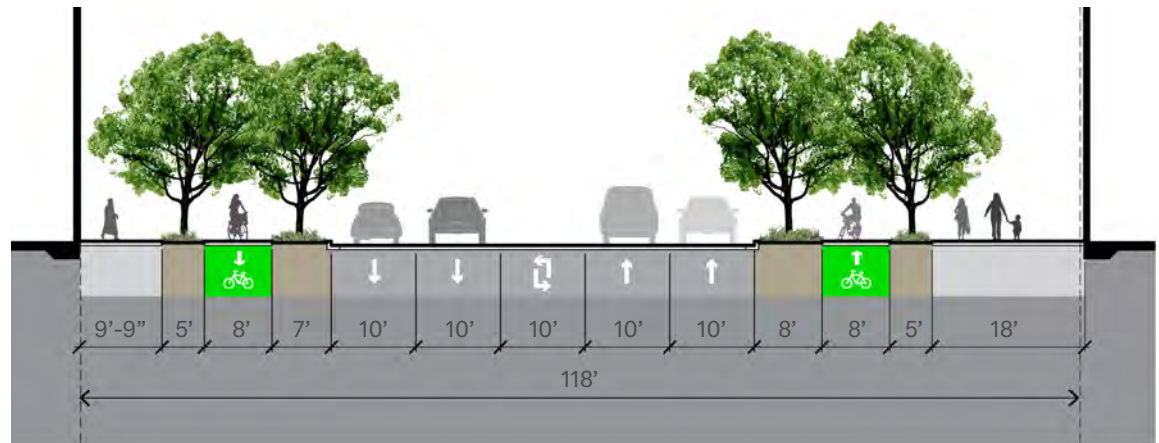


Figure 69 Section C-C': Design concept for South Congress Avenue



## 2 Statesman Waterfront Park: Key Plan

The Statesman Waterfront Park design option transforms a linear shoreline space into three distinct zones framed by a lively esplanade and overlook along the base of potential infill development to the south, and a wider hike-and-bike trail along the natural lake edge to the north.

The park's central section, the Rain Garden Esplanade (2a), provides a narrower connective center framed by two larger, more actively programmed spaces, the Bat Theater (2b) and the Pontoon Landing (2c). The Rain Garden Esplanade could be the most passive area of the park. Here, gardens could treat runoff from the impervious surfaces of the proposed development area to the south (Figure 71).



Figure 70 Statesman Waterfront Park design concept with call outs for plan enlargements

## 2 Statesman Waterfront Park: Stormwater Treatment Strategy

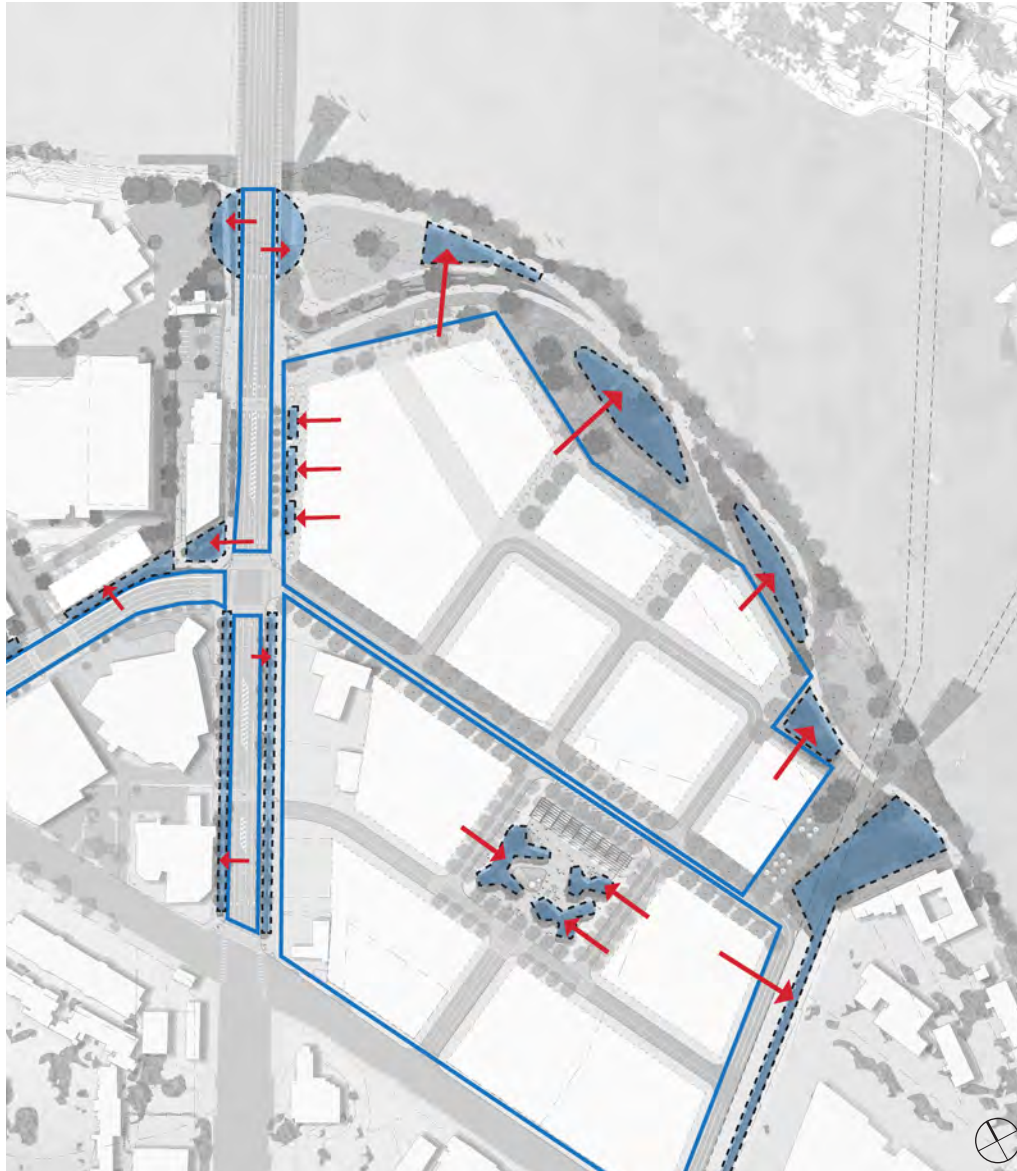


Figure 71 Statesman Waterfront Park stormwater treatment diagram. Areas outlined in blue represent the sub-watersheds within the site; shaded blue zones represent treatment areas; and red arrows indicate the flow direction from sub-watershed to treatment area.



Figure 72 Potential water quality treatment strategies include stormwater gardens with boardwalks for access and viewing



## 2a Statesman Waterfront Park: Rain Garden Esplanade

Native and adaptive plantings could create immersive garden spaces while treating runoff and expanding the lakeshore habitats of birds, insects, and small mammals. Paths could connect the hike-and-bike trail along the lake up the embankment to the esplanade, making it easier for neighborhood residents to get to the park.

The grade separation between the esplanade on the upper bank and the hike-and-bike trail on the shore helps to distinguish these two locations. At the top of the bank, cafes and residential stoops could create an active waterfront condition, while enhancing the natural and immersive qualities of the more passive shoreline park (Figure 74).

### LEGEND

- ① Ann and Ray Butler Hike-and-Bike Trail
- ② Esplanade terrace
- ③ 200 foot secondary setback
- ④ 150 foot primary setback
- ⑤ 100 foot critical water quality setback
- ⑥ Property line, typical
- ⑦ Bridge
- ⑧ Stair
- ⑨ Sloped walk
- ⑩ Stormwater quality pond
- ⑪ Pedestrian neighborhood connector plazas



Figure 73 Statesman Waterfront Park: Rain Garden Esplanade

## 2a Statesman Waterfront Park: Rain Garden Esplanade

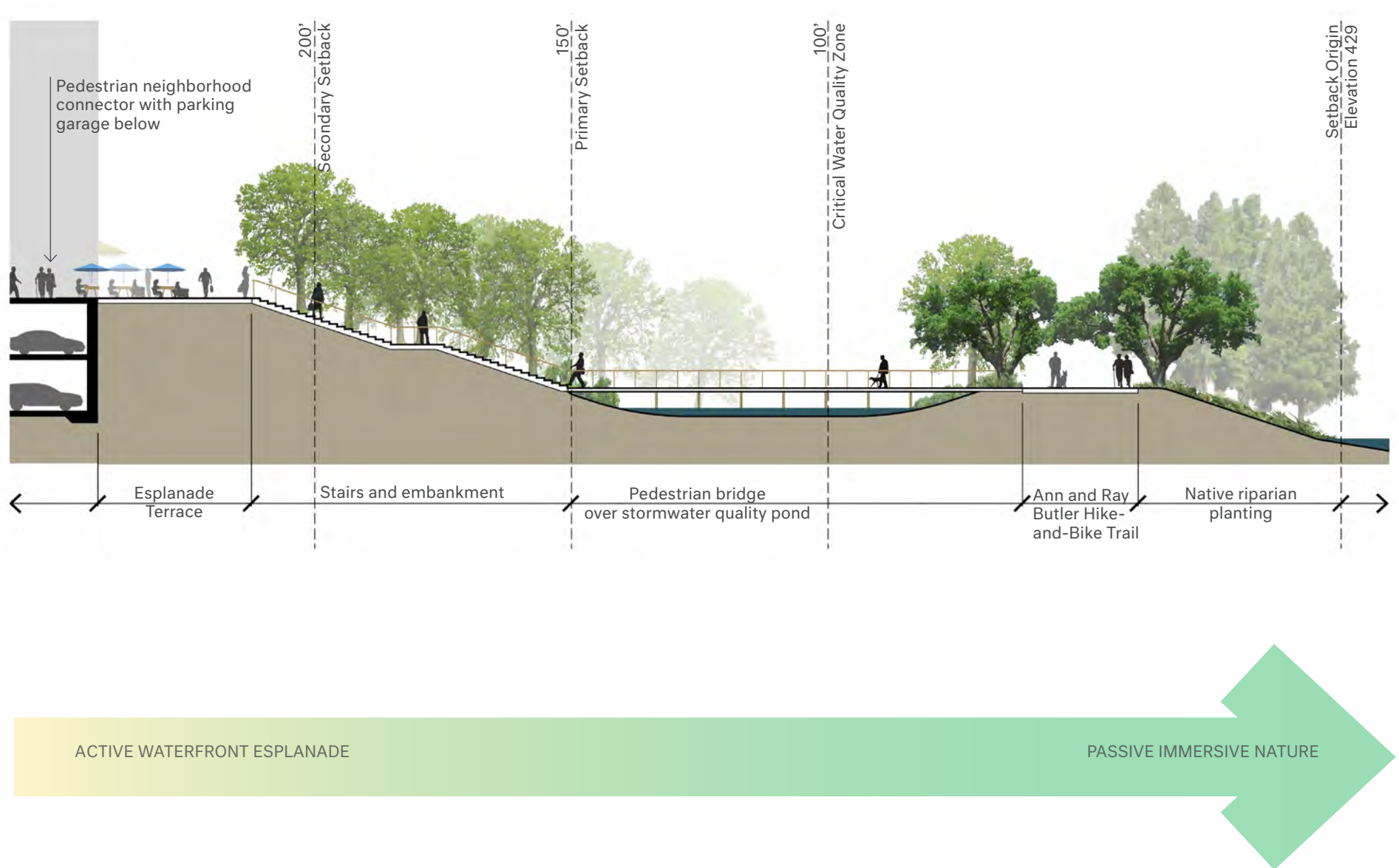


Figure 74 Section D-D' of Statesman Waterfront Park design concept





## 2b Statesman Waterfront Park: Bat Theater

Listed below are proposed changes that could improve the bat viewing experience along the western edge of the park and better relate to the grade change at South Congress Avenue:

- An interpretive overlook on South Congress Avenue could introduce visitors to the experience and habitat of the Mexican free-tailed bat.
- A café terrace adjacent to the new infill development could provide a place to dine outdoors and enjoy the view.
- A viewing pier could extend the viewing experience out into the lake below the bridge.
- An amphitheater could be built into the vertical space formed between the infill development and the grade of the lakeshore.
- A small event lawn could accommodate more people and diverse programs.



Figure 75 Statesman Waterfront Park enlarged plan of the Bat Theater

### LEGEND

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| ① Ann and Ray Butler Hike-and-Bike Trail  | ⑦ Bat viewing pier                       | ⑬ Lawn   |
| ② Esplanade terrace                       | ⑧ Amphitheater                           | ⑭ Native riparian embankment                           |
| ③ 200 foot secondary setback              | ⑨ Sloped walk to Hike-and-Bike Trail     | ⑮ Potential development site on the Statesman property |
| ④ 150 foot primary setback                | ⑩ Stormwater quality pond                |  |
| ⑤ 100 foot critical water quality setback | ⑪ Entry plaza with interpretive features |  |
| ⑥ Property line, typical                  | ⑫ Overlook cafe terrace                  |  |



## 2b Statesman Waterfront Park: Bat Theater



Figure 76 Approximate location of existing conditions with the Hyatt Regency Austin in the background. To advance the design concept, it will be necessary to carefully evaluate existing trees with the goal of preserving or relocating healthy specimens.

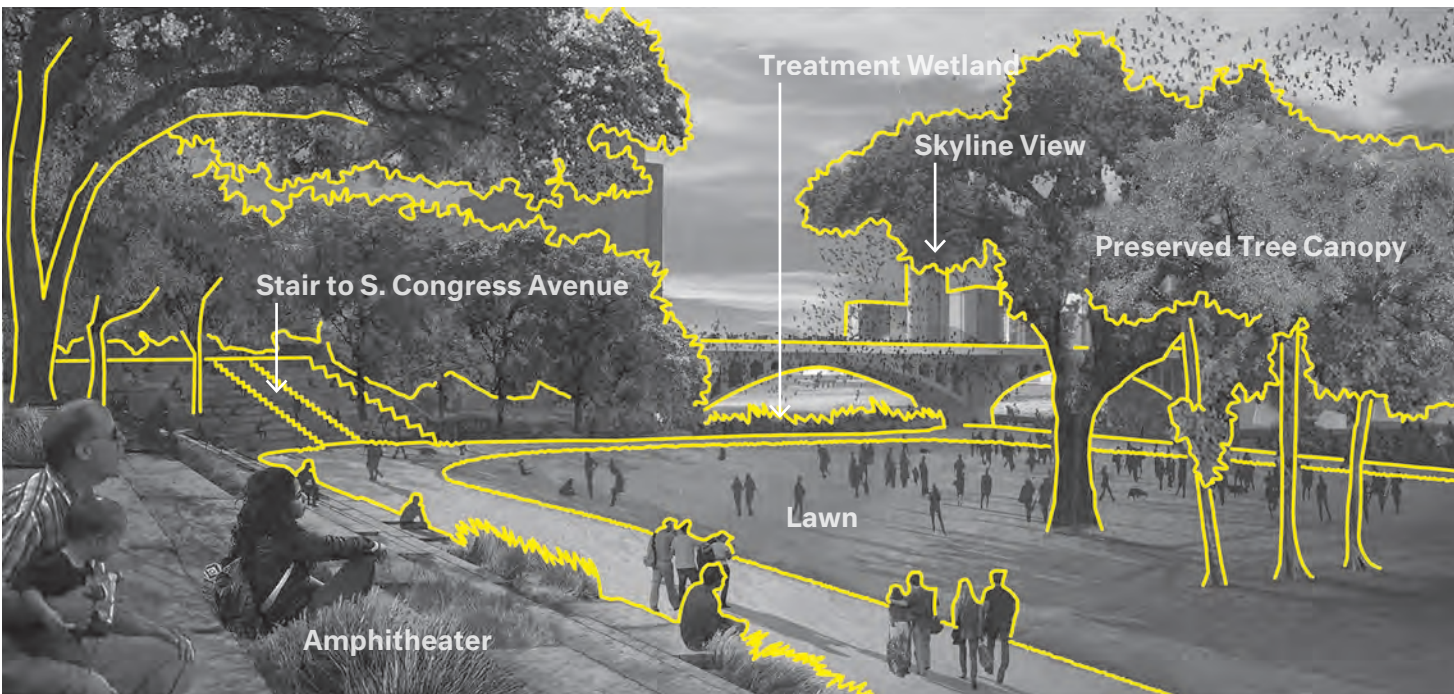


Figure 77 Design option



## 2b Statesman Waterfront Park: Bat Theater



Figure 78 The design option for the Bat Theater (2b) along the northwestern length of Statesman Waterfront Park expands park space and incorporates an amphitheater at the base of the Ann W. Richards Congress Avenue Bridge. Better integrating the stormwater ponds into the park design creates more space for viewing Lady Bird Lake, the city skyline, and the annual migration of the Mexican free-tailed bats.



## 2c Statesman Waterfront Park: Pontoon Landing

The eastern edge of the park could become a recreation and transportation hub. Two proposed downtown connectors land at this end of the Statesman Waterfront Park: the proposed Waller Creek pontoon bridge (Figure 80) and a right-of-way preservation for a potential future transit corridor.

A pavilion could take advantage of this important city nexus and serve the neighborhood with park amenities that workshop attendees requested, such as public restrooms, refreshments, and bike and kayak rentals. Next to the pavilion and connecting to the pontoon landing, a pier could improve water access and frame a small natural beach, providing a kayak launch on the south shore (Figure 81).



Figure 79 Statesman Waterfront Park enlarged plan of the pontoon bridge landing and naturalized beach

## LEGEND

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- ① Ann and Ray Butler Hike-and-Bike Trail
- ② Esplanade terrace
- ③ 200 foot secondary setback
- ④ 150 foot primary setback
- ⑤ 100 foot critical water quality setback
- ⑥ Property line, typical
- ⑦ Bat viewing pier
- ⑧ Amphitheater
- ⑨ Sloped walk to Hike and Bike Trail
- ⑩ Stormwater quality pond
- ⑪ Entry plaza with interpretive features
- ⑫ Overlook cafe terrace
- ⑬ Lawn
- ⑭ Native riparian embankment
- ⑮ Potential development site on the Statesman property
- ⑯ Potential future transportation corridor
- ⑰ Proposed Waller Creek pontoon bridge alignment
- ⑱ Ground floor park pavilion amenity space
- ⑲ Natural beach and kayak launch
- ⑳ Kayak and bike rentals
- ㉑ Park pavilion deck and beer garden
- ㉒ Pontoon bridge landing pier
- ㉓ Bio-swale connector to water quality pond



Figure 80 Rendering of the Waller Creek Conservancy's proposed pontoon bridge across Lady Bird Lake. Design and rendering by Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, Inc. and Thomas Phifer and Partners



Figure 81 Natural beach allows for kayak launch. Woody debris provides space for habitat.



## 2c Statesman Waterfront Park: Pontoon Landing



Figure 82 A sedimentation-filtration water quality pond occupies the site. Its built edges and fenced enclosure form a barrier to the park. A water quality pond that was more aesthetically and ecologically designed could be a park amenity rather than a barrier.



Figure 83 Design option

Beach  
Boardwalk pier to the proposed  
Waller Creek pontoon bridge  
landing



## 2c Statesman Waterfront Park: Pontoon Landing



Figure 84 The design option for the Pontoon Landing (2c) includes a pier where the proposed Waller Creek pontoon bridge could land on the south shore of Lady Bird Lake. A naturalized beach area could provide recreational water access. Woody debris along the shore could help to support lake edge habitat.



### 3 South Central Square

To contrast the natural park setting, workshop attendees asked for a civic space at the heart of the potential infill development. The design option for South Central Square creates a space for community events, markets, and recreation.

Attendees also wanted a place that could foster Austin's thriving maker economy. The South Central Square design option includes an outdoor market hall, housing the infrastructure and amenities to support rotating programming for artisanal, flea, and farmer markets as well as small performances and recreation.

The square receives stormwater from adjacent properties and treats runoff in flow-through planters and rain gardens.

#### LEGEND

- ① Stormwater rain garden
- ② Market canopy space for local food, craft, and maker stalls
- ③ Festival street flush with plaza
- ④ Splash pad and informal play area
- ⑤ Ground floor retail with outdoor seating
- ⑥ Property line
- ⑦ Potential development site



Figure 85 Enlarged plan of concept design for South Central Square



3

# South Central Square



Figure 86 Mint Plaza in San Francisco, California is an example of how green infrastructure (seen on the left) can frame a flexible plaza.



Figure 87 Ankeny Plaza and Waterfront Park in Portland, Oregon is a successful precedent that includes a market pavilion and splash pad. Photo credit: Steve Morgan, Wikimedia Commons.



Figure 88 The Wakefield Market Hall in West Yorkshire, United Kingdom is an example of a covered, open-air market. Photo credit: Shi-chang-da-ting, archdaily.cn.



### 3 South Central Square



Figure 89 The site of the proposed South Central Square is currently a parking lot.

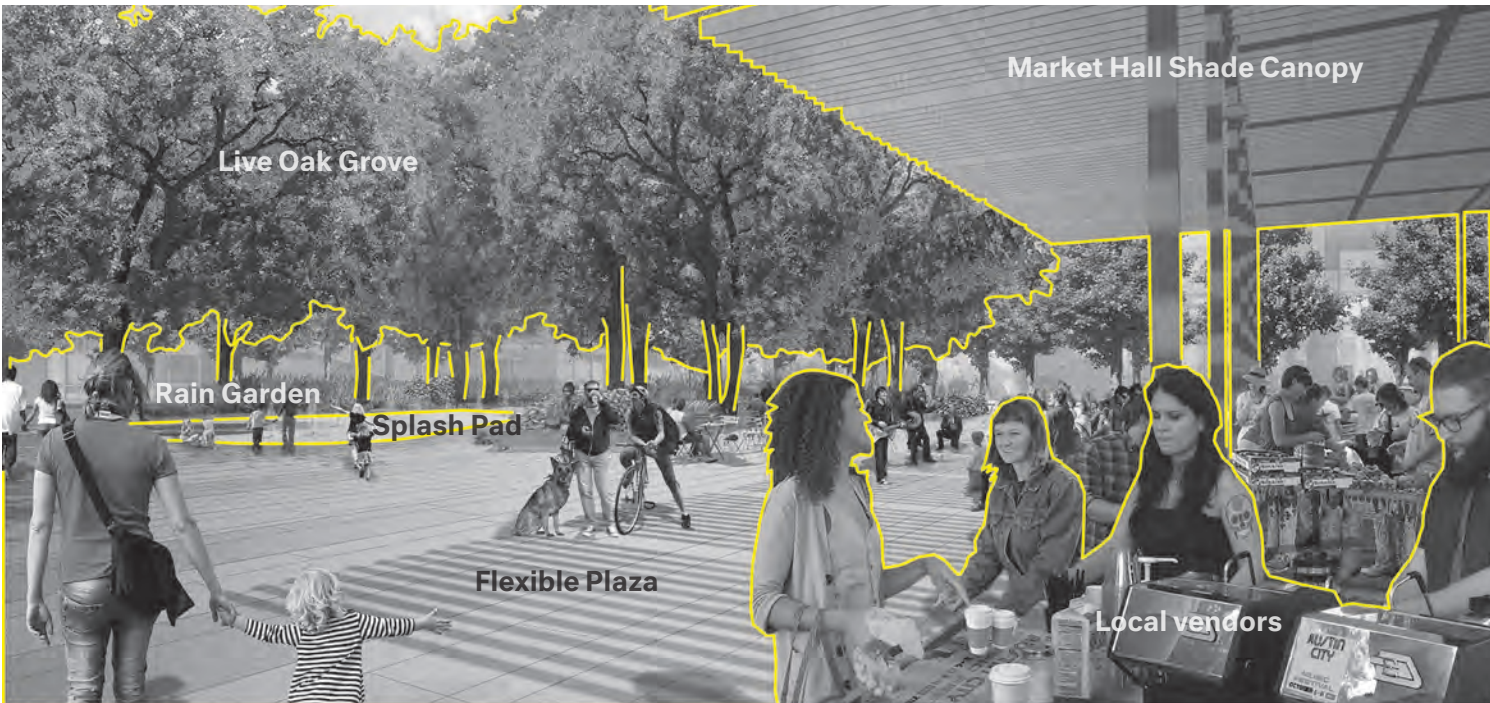


Figure 90 Design option



### 3 South Central Square



Figure 91 The design option for South Central Square includes an open-air market, splash pad, and rain gardens with shade trees.



## 4 Barton Springs Road

A key goal of the 2014 Vision Report is to connect the SCW district from east to west across South Congress Avenue. Barton Springs Road could become an important link, extending across South Congress Avenue into the potential new development. The city could reduce travel lanes, using the gained right of way to create wider sidewalks and grade-separated bikeways.

Currently, a free right turn lane allows southbound traffic from South Congress Avenue to turn right before reaching the signalized intersection, creating a large island in the center of the intersection. This design lets cars drive quickly along

South Congress Avenue and turn quickly onto Barton Springs Road. However, it also divides the pedestrian crossing into multiple segments and creates an unsafe crossing because cars are not expected to stop at all as they turn.

The city could remove the right turn lane and gain additional public space that could be used to treat stormwater and create a distinctive gateway into the SCW district. The city's Art in Public Places program could work with artist Dale Whistler to remount his Nightwing bat sculpture onto a taller post for greater visibility and pedestrian clearance of its rotating wing span.

### LEGEND

- ① Stormwater rain garden
- ② Boardwalk
- ③ High-visibility crosswalks
- ④ Signalized mid-block crossing
- ⑤ Ground floor retail with outdoor seating
- ⑥ Potential infill development site
- ⑦ Potential relocated Nightwing sculpture
- ⑧ Bike box: Enables cyclists to position in front of cars to make safer turns
- ⑨ At grade bike lane
- ⑩ Grade separated bike lane

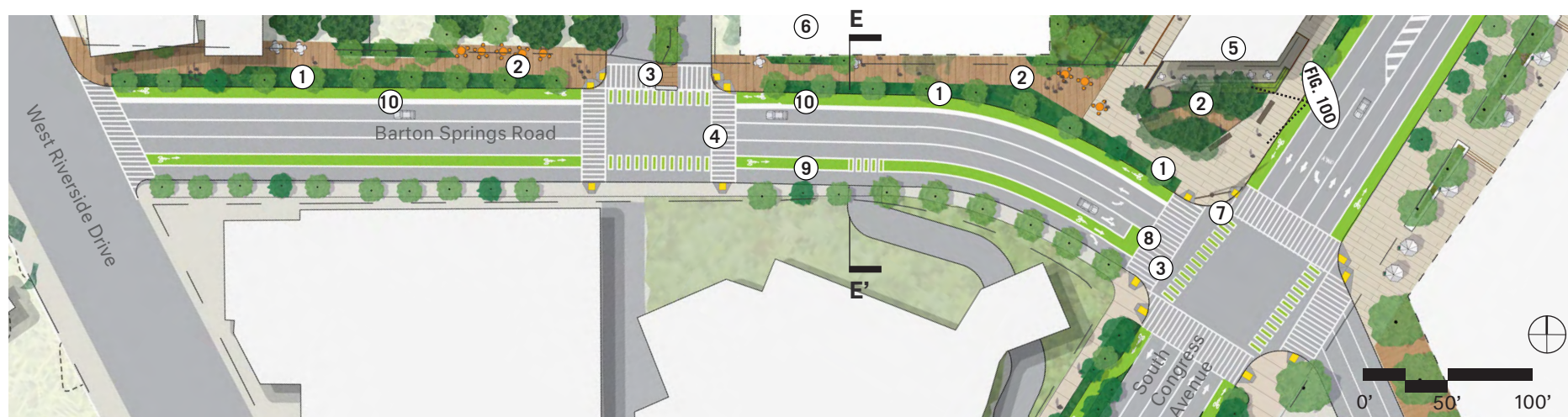


Figure 92 Enlarged plan of the concept design for Barton Springs Road streetscape.

## 4 Barton Springs Road

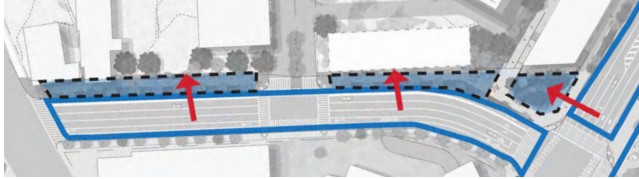


Figure 93 Diagram of the sub-watershed and treatment areas along Barton Springs Road. Areas outlined in blue represent the sub-watersheds within the site; shaded blue zones represent treatment areas; and red arrows indicate the flow direction from sub-watershed to treatment area.



Figure 94 Pedestrian boardwalk over stormwater treatment gardens.



Figure 95 Pedestrian boardwalk over stormwater treatment gardens.

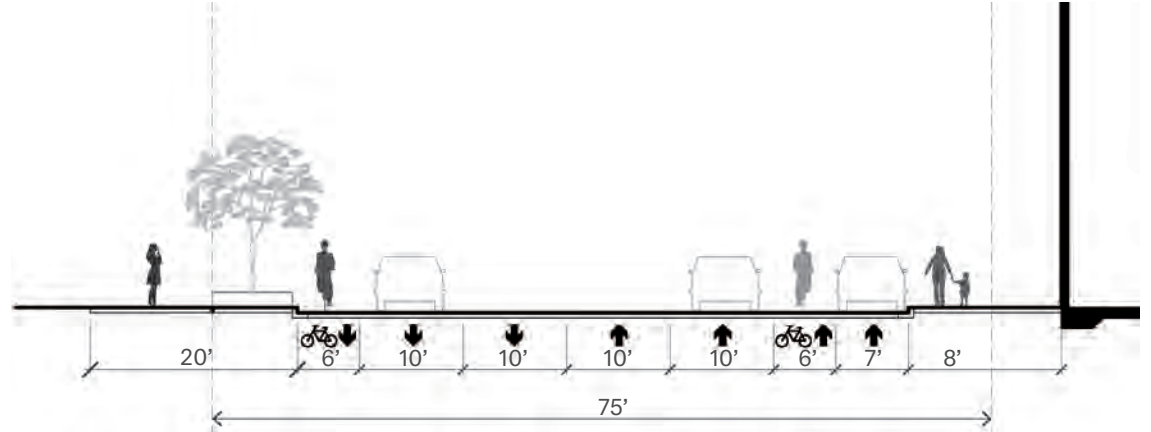


Figure 96 Section E-E' of existing conditions on Barton Springs Road

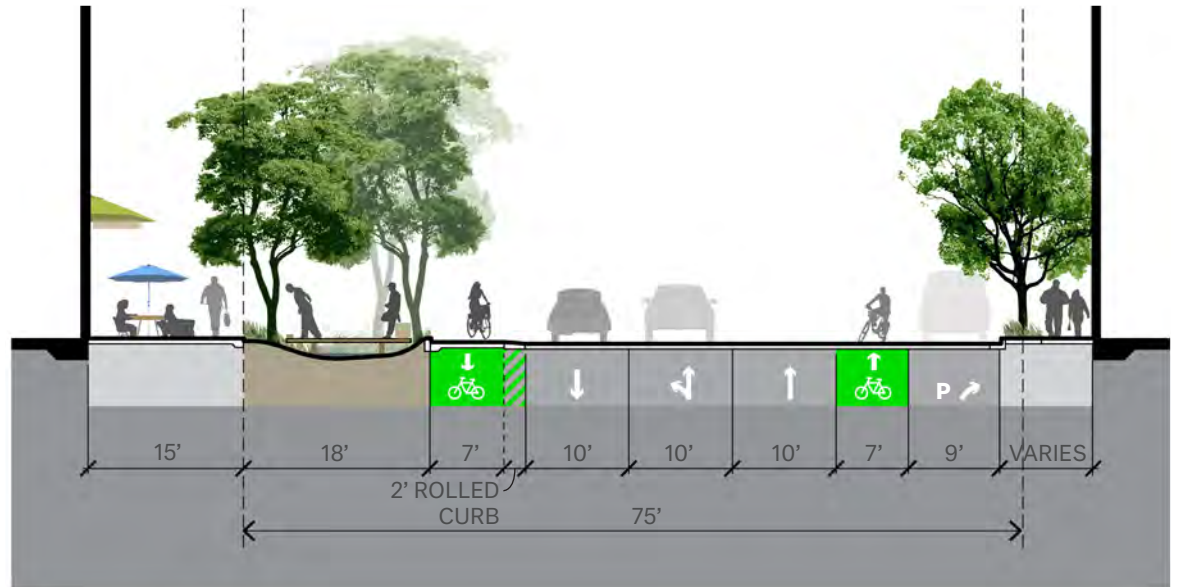


Figure 97 Section E-E' of concept design for Barton Springs Road



## 4 Barton Springs Road: Free Right Rain Garden

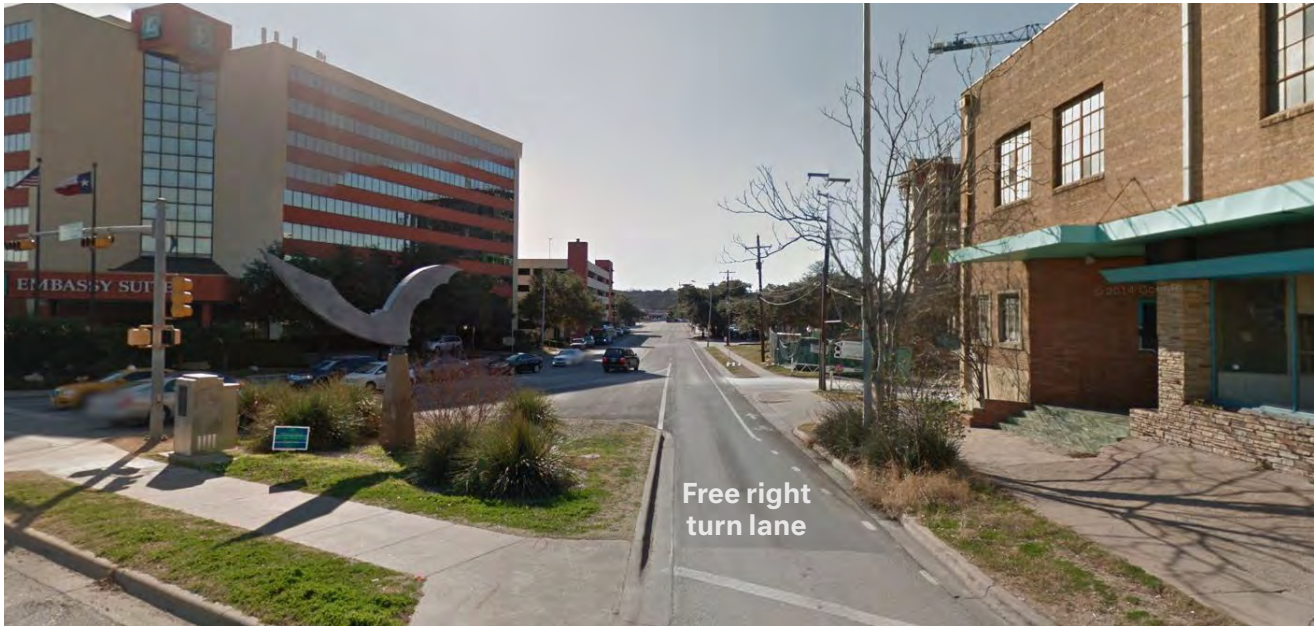


Figure 98 Looking south down Barton Springs Road from South Congress Avenue

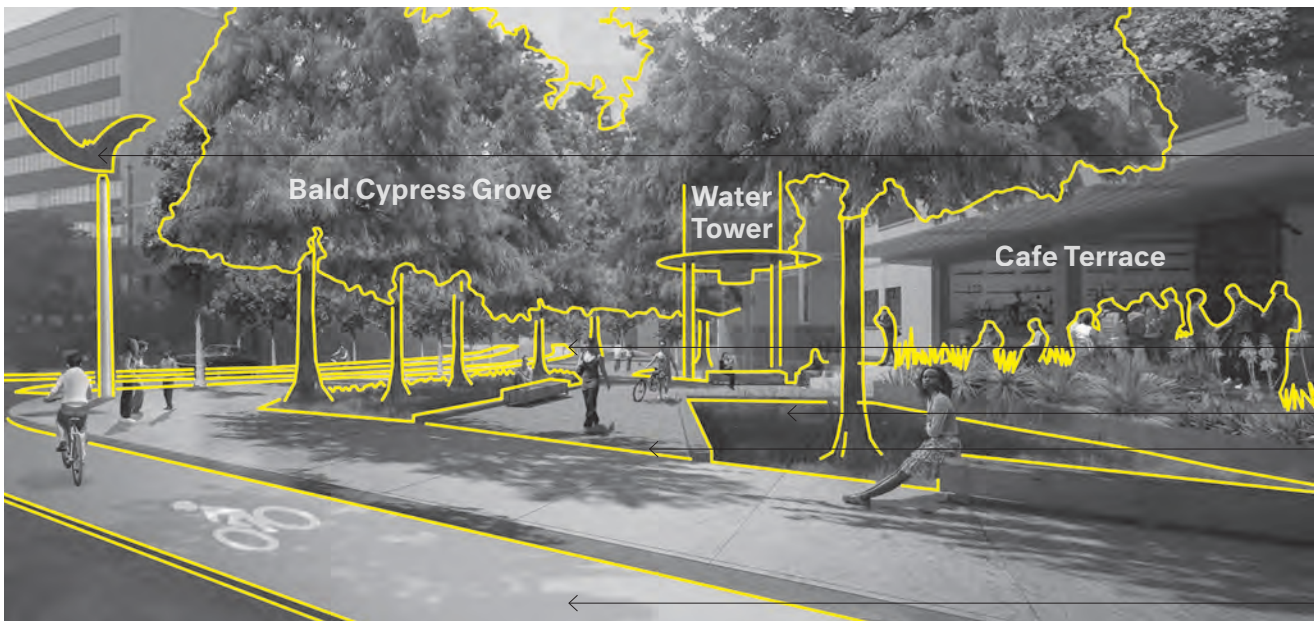


Figure 99 Design option

— Nightwing sculpture potentially raised for greater visibility and to provide pedestrian access below

— Barton Springs Road cycle track

— Rain garden  
— Boardwalk

— South Congress Avenue cycle track



## 4 Barton Springs Road: Free Right Rain Garden



Figure 100 The design option for Barton Springs Road Free Right Rain Garden



## 5 East Branch of Bouldin Creek

The East Branch of Bouldin Creek offers an opportunity to provide an immersive nature experience in the creek corridor and another chance to connect the neighborhood from east to west. The northern boundary of the Texas School for the Deaf (TSD) campus is the upper bank of Bouldin Creek. The TSD staff and board are cooperating with the city's planning effort to explore a potential trail connector from South First Street to South Congress Avenue, along the creek, next to the TSD property. Some of the space in the focus area is currently dedicated to temporary mobile classrooms and a disc golf course.

By reconfiguring these existing uses, the campus could provide a linear park and multi-use trail along the creek. The campus could add stormwater treatment features to the linear park to treat campus runoff and reduce peak flows into the creek, protecting the water quality and stability of its banks. Workshop attendees also suggested having two bridges over the creek to improve connections from north to south. These canopy walks, where the pedestrian is on a pathway above the ground and up in the canopy of the trees, could offer a glimpse into the mature gallery forest while protecting sensitive ecological and geological features like the banks' rim rocks.



Figure 101 Enlarged plan of the concept design for the East Branch of Bouldin Creek.



## 5 East Branch of Bouldin Creek

### LEGEND

- ① Public multi-use trail
- ② Bouldin Creek canopy walk
- ③ Pedestrian and bike bridge to One Texas Center and Haywood Street
- ④ Signalized mid-block crossing
- ⑤ Bouldin Creek overlook and South Congress Avenue bus shelter
- ⑥ Texas School for the Deaf (TSD) Campus disc golf course
- ⑦ Stormwater treatment features could function as hazards on the disc golf course
- ⑧ TSD security fence with gate access for students
- ⑨ Relocated mobile unit and adjacent parking to make space for multi-use trail at top of creek bank
- ⑩ East Branch of Bouldin Creek
- ⑪ Rim rock
- ⑫ One Texas Center parking garage
- ⑬ 50 foot setback from rim rock, a critical environmental feature
- ⑭ 150 foot setback from rim rock, a critical environmental feature
- ⑮ 80 foot primary creek setback
- ⑯ 210 foot secondary creek setback

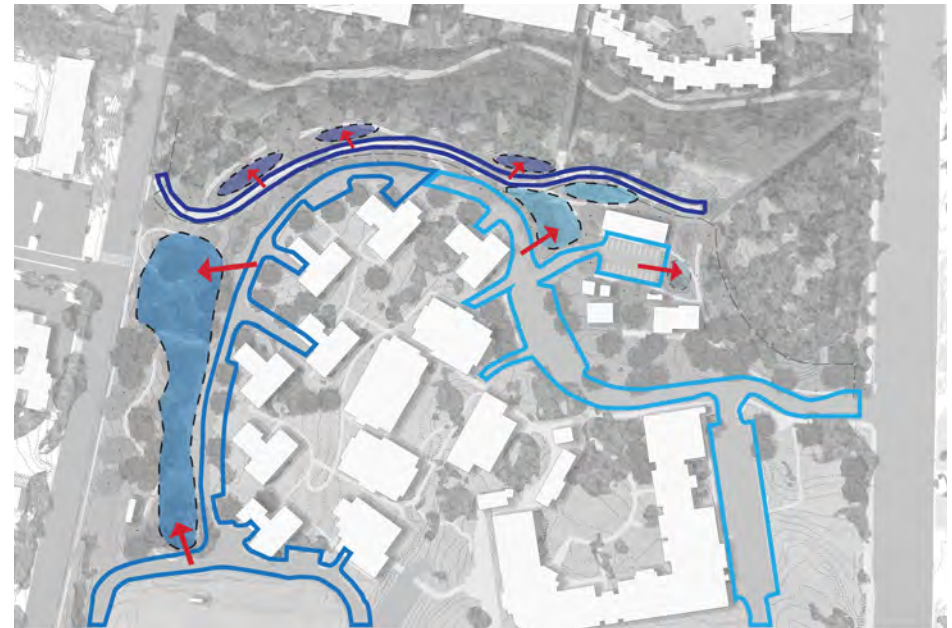


Figure 102 Diagram of the sub-watershed and treatment areas



Figure 103 The Boardwalk at Lady Bird Lake could be a good model for the pedestrian and bike bridges spanning the creek.



Figure 104 Many of Austin's creeks are channelized like Boggy Creek above. A natural Bouldin Creek is a terrific asset to the city.



## 5 East Branch of Bouldin Creek



Figure 105 Current view of East Branch of Bouldin Creek. Photo credit: City of Austin, Planning and Zoning Department, Urban Design Division.

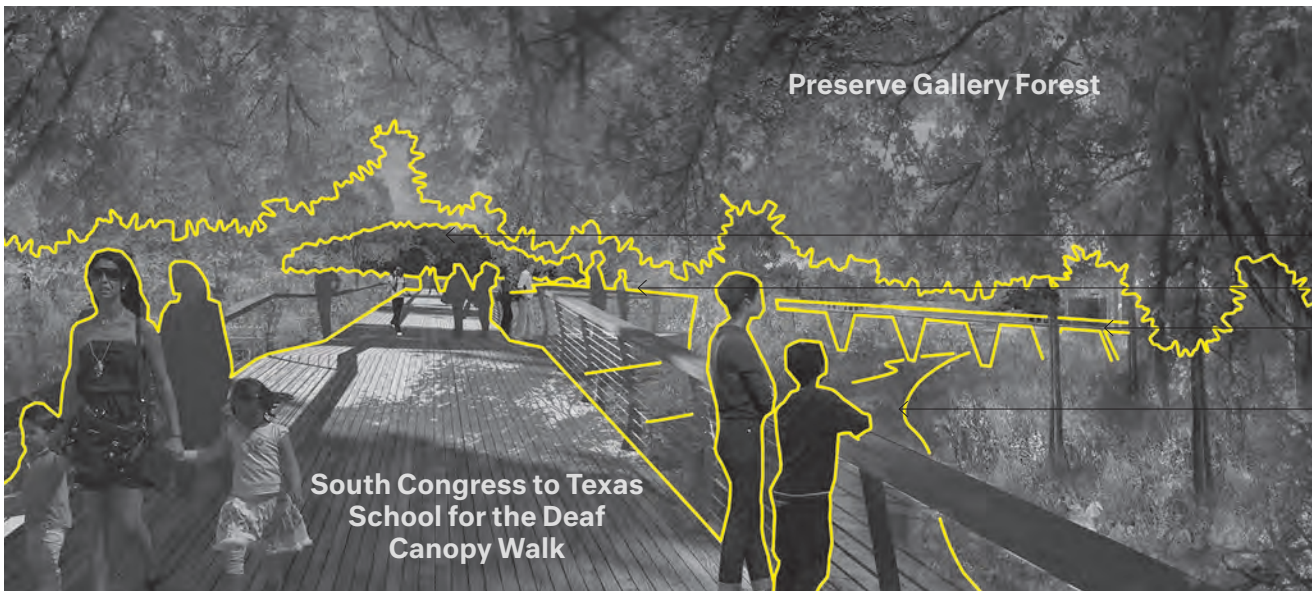


Figure 106 Design option

- Texas School for the Deaf campus beyond
- Bouldin Creek Overlook
- Bridge connecting Haywood Avenue to Texas School for the Deaf beyond
- East Branch of Bouldin Creek



## 5 East Branch of Bouldin Creek



Figure 107 Design option for the East Branch of Bouldin Creek





Figure 108 Rim rocks along the East Branch of Bouldin Creek



## 5 Next Steps

The South Central Waterfront (SCW) study area is a patchwork of many privately owned parcels, some of which are large and contiguous with limited access to public infrastructure. While this arrangement can make redevelopment challenging, it also provides opportunities for public-private partnerships to help accomplish the community's goals. The study area benefits from a vibrant economy, redevelopment momentum on key parcels, and motivated city staff championing the project.

Many initiatives, projects, and potential redevelopment sites are underway. The city will be tracking and managing many of them, and the community could stay involved by advocating for the ideas and goals established during this design process. Below is a list of key projects and initiatives that will influence the study area's future and have the potential to help realize the South Central Waterfront community vision.

### **City of Austin: South Central Waterfront Initiative**

At the initiation of the Austin City Council, the city of Austin Planning and Zoning Department is leading the South Central Waterfront Initiative, an ongoing planning effort to create a comprehensive small area plan and implementation

strategy (also known as the master plan) for the 97-acre district. The SCW Initiative and the master plan aim to establish a vision and provide a cohesive set of recommendations to guide public and private development over the next 20-plus years. City planners, staff from multiple departments, and consultants are building upon the 2014 SCW Vision Report to prepare the master plan which is on track to be completed by mid-2016. The city could incorporate elements from this Greening America's Capitals project into the Physical Framework portion of the master plan. In addition, the city is working with an economic consultant to develop a financial framework that will outline strategies to pay for the Physical Framework/Public Realm Plan. The financial framework will build on best practices from waterfront redevelopments around the country and will include recommendations for strategic capital investments, development incentives, value-capture strategies, and public-private partnerships to fund the Vision.

[www.austintexas.gov/waterfront](http://www.austintexas.gov/waterfront)

### **City of Austin: CodeNEXT**

CodeNEXT is the new city initiative to revise the Land Development Code, which determines how land can be used throughout the city. This intensive three-year process engages Austin's residents, business community, and civic institutions to align land use standards and regulations with what is important to the community. CodeNEXT is currently developing draft code standards, and the city anticipates adopting a new code in 2017. The city has not comprehensively revised its Land Development Code in nearly 30 years, when Austin's population was half its current size.

The revised code will apply best practices and Austin-specific calibrations to better address green infrastructure, density, transportation, neighborhood diversity, affordability, and protection and management of natural resources. The design options from this Greening America's Capitals project, especially with regard to public realm and green infrastructure improvements, could be incorporated into the new code for the South Central Waterfront area.

[www.austintexas.gov/department/codenext](http://www.austintexas.gov/department/codenext)



## City of Austin: Complete Streets

In June 2014, Austin City Council adopted the Complete Streets Policy. The policy applies to all development and redevelopment in the public domain within the city of Austin. It is intended to guide all private development that affects streets, the transportation system, and the public realm. In 2015, the Austin Transportation Department published “Complete Streets: A Guide to City of Austin Resources Mobility + Urban Design + Green”<sup>1</sup> to provide designers and engineers with parameters for balancing the many needs and uses of Austin’s right of ways.

As the SCW study area advances through the design and permitting process, the complete streets guidelines can inform the SCW Initiative to ensure that consultants and city staff design the public realm to progressive national standards for managing mobility safely and sustainably. Likewise, the design options from this Greening America’s Capitals project and the redesign of the SCW street network can provide demonstration projects.

[www.austintexas.gov/complete-streets](http://www.austintexas.gov/complete-streets)

## City of Austin and the Downtown Austin Alliance: Congress Avenue Urban Design Study

As of March 2016, the city of Austin, in collaboration with the Downtown Austin Alliance, is preparing a request for qualifications for streetscape design and traffic engineering services for Congress Avenue from Riverside Drive to the Texas State Capitol. This endeavor will be known as the Congress Avenue Urban Design Study (CAUDS). The SCW Initiative has been coordinating with the Downtown Austin Alliance and staff associated with the CAUDS; who also participated in the Greening America’s Capitals workshop. The request for qualifications, which is expected to be released in early 2016, references the SCW Initiative and includes a requirement to formally coordinate with the SCW process. The design options prepared for the Greening America’s Capitals project could be a jumping-off point for the CAUDS, as CAUDS applies more rigorous engineering and design analysis in exploring potential right-of-way resizing and lane configurations for the segment of Congress Avenue within the SCW.

[www.downtownaustin.com/daa/congress-avenue](http://www.downtownaustin.com/daa/congress-avenue)

## City and Regional Partners: Project Connect

Project Connect is a collaborative effort among the Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority, the city of Austin, the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, and Lone Star Rail District to bring a network of high-capacity public transit to Central Texas.

Current plans call for the preservation of right-of-way for a potential light rail corridor that crosses Lady Bird Lake and meets grade at the eastern end of the SCW study area. The design options presented in this report illustrate this potential right-of-way preservation with green spaces and respond to the potential of this feature to bring high-capacity public transit to the study area. Adding light rail to the study area would help create the walkable neighborhood that the community envisions.

[www.projectconnect.com](http://www.projectconnect.com)

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<sup>1</sup> City of Austin Transportation Department. *Austin Complete Streets: A Guide to City of Austin Resources Mobility + Urban Design + Green*, (Austin, TX, 2016), [http://austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Transportation/Complete\\_Streets/CompleteStreets\\_GuidetoCityofAustinResources\\_1-7-16.pdf](http://austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Transportation/Complete_Streets/CompleteStreets_GuidetoCityofAustinResources_1-7-16.pdf)

## **State of Texas and the Texas School for the Deaf: Campus Master Plan**

In 2014 and 2015, the city of Austin worked closely with staff and the board of directors from the Texas School for the Deaf (TSD). The TSD campus, a state property, is not in the SCW study area but is directly adjacent to the SCW. The TSD staff and board have been involved with and supported the conceptual design proposals from the 2014 Vision Report and the design options developed for Focus Area 5 of this Greening America's Capitals project, which describe a potential trail connection and green infrastructure on the campus. The Texas Facilities Commission, which oversees all state properties, is currently procuring architectural/engineering services to prepare a campus master plan and expects to begin the campus master plan in winter 2016.

The TSD, working with the Texas Facilities Commission, could introduce the Greening America's Capitals design options into the master plan considerations. Additionally, the city could further integrate the creek bridge and hike-and-bike trail into the wider SCW public realm plan, which the TSD could work to ensure that master planning decisions have the most favorable impacts on the creek

and watershed health. This potential collaboration could be a positive example in the Texas capital city of a public-public partnership between the city and state, which could enhance the TSD campus, improve connections for people walking and biking through the city, improve access to and quality of the creek, and further integrate this venerable institution into the life of the city.

## **Waller Creek Conservancy**

The Waller Creek Conservancy, a nonprofit community partner to the city of Austin, is the prime steward for implementing, maintaining, and activating the Waller Creek Vision to transform a portion of the creek into a series of parks and trails along downtown Austin's eastern natural boundary. The Waller Creek Vision Plan features a park at the mouth of the creek on Lady Bird Lake's north shore, which includes a proposed pontoon bridge that would connect the downtown to the SCW study area. The current designs call for the bridge landing to be at the northeast corner of the Statesman Waterfront Park (Focus Area 2). The city could continue to coordinate efforts with the conservancy to ensure that the park and bridge landings are designed to take full advantage of this important north-south park connection.

[www.wallercreek.org](http://www.wallercreek.org)

## **City of Austin and One Texas Center**

The city of Austin owns 5 acres of land that now holds a single city office tower, known as One Texas Center in the SCW study area along the north bank of Bouldin Creek. This parcel's proximity to the creek and the Texas School for the Deaf hike-and-bike trail could support better pedestrian and bike connections across the creek. The city is now studying how it might address the need for more office space for city workers, and one potential solution could be to build a second office tower in the parking lot of One Texas Center. An alternative approach might be for the city to partner with a private owner or developer to have the city office building constructed elsewhere under a public-private partnership arrangement. Under this partnership, the developable land on the city's parcel could be used for another community-serving use, such as development of affordable housing. One Texas Center gives the city a great opportunity to catalyze redevelopment through collaboration with neighboring private landowners, by maximizing public benefit, including expanding connectivity and green infrastructure, and potentially providing workforce housing on public land.



## **Barton Plaza at Congress Avenue and Barton Springs Road**

The 0.3 acres of land on the southwest corner of Barton Springs Road and South Congress Avenue is adjacent to Focus Area 4. The building at this location (220 S. Congress, Cielo Property Group) is currently being remodeled for retail and commercial use, and the building owner and the future tenant are interested in creating a pedestrian-friendly frontage. The city and owner are exploring the potential to provide license or easement agreements to allow a sidewalk café in the short run, and to close the free-right turn to create a public plaza as a follow-up step.

The plaza design has an impact on two additional property owners adjacent to the site. All three affected building owners are in discussions with each other and the city to formalize agreements. The city is also in discussions with potential nonprofit partners who might help manage the public space. Finally, city staff from a variety of departments (Planning, Transportation, Public Works, and Watershed Protection) are using design inspiration from the Greening America's Capitals workshop to explore interim plaza design solutions.

## **Private Properties and the City of Austin**

The SCW area is made up of 31 private properties and a single city-owned property at One Texas Center, along with the city-owned public right of ways for the four arterials. The ongoing SCW Initiative is predicated on the cooperation of private owners to ensure that, as properties choose to redevelop, they do so in accordance with the master plan vision. Through the ongoing SCW Initiative, the city has engaged with key property owners. To assist with this conversation, the city engaged economic and financial consultants to develop a financial framework for the SCW. The financial framework will include potential development bonuses, public-private partnerships opportunities, value capture strategies, and direct subsidies that could gain the cooperation of private owners.

The details of the financial framework are beyond the scope of work of this Greening America's Capitals project, but the public realm improvements envisioned on private properties will be included in the Physical Framework, which outlines the community amenities that will be required for a private owner to take advantage of financial framework incentives. The Greening America's Capitals design options and this report's

summary of community goals, could inform the development of the Physical Framework and aid in future discussions on community benefits in the public realm.







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