

## CONTEXTUAL INFLUENCES



*2nd St District, Austin*

This section looks at challenges to the Park's success that are significantly informed by the area outside of Republic Square. Each challenge is briefly defined and is followed by a series of recommendations for addressing the challenge. These recommendations are divided into three categories: Policies, Programs and Projects, as defined on the following page.

## Context

### Contextual Challenges

Republic Square is only one piece of larger Downtown Austin and cannot be understood without considering the Park's context. This section looks at challenges to the Park's success that are significantly informed by the area outside of Republic Square. Depending on the contextual issue, the study area for this section varies between a one and two block offset from the Park as shown by the white squares in the drawing to the right.

### Policies, Programs, Projects, and Partners

After outlining the primary challenges for each contextual issue, this section provides a series of recommendations for addressing the issues. These recommendations are divided into Policies, Programs, Projects and Partners.

#### Policies:

- Policies define requirements and incentive programs to control and influence future changes.

#### Programs:

- Programs are actions taken to control and influence elements of the Park but do not require permanent physical changes.

#### Projects:

- Projects are undertakings that result in permanent physical changes.

#### Partners:

- Partners are entities that can help in the implementation of ideas with collaboration, direct funding, new policy, new programs general operations or work approvals.

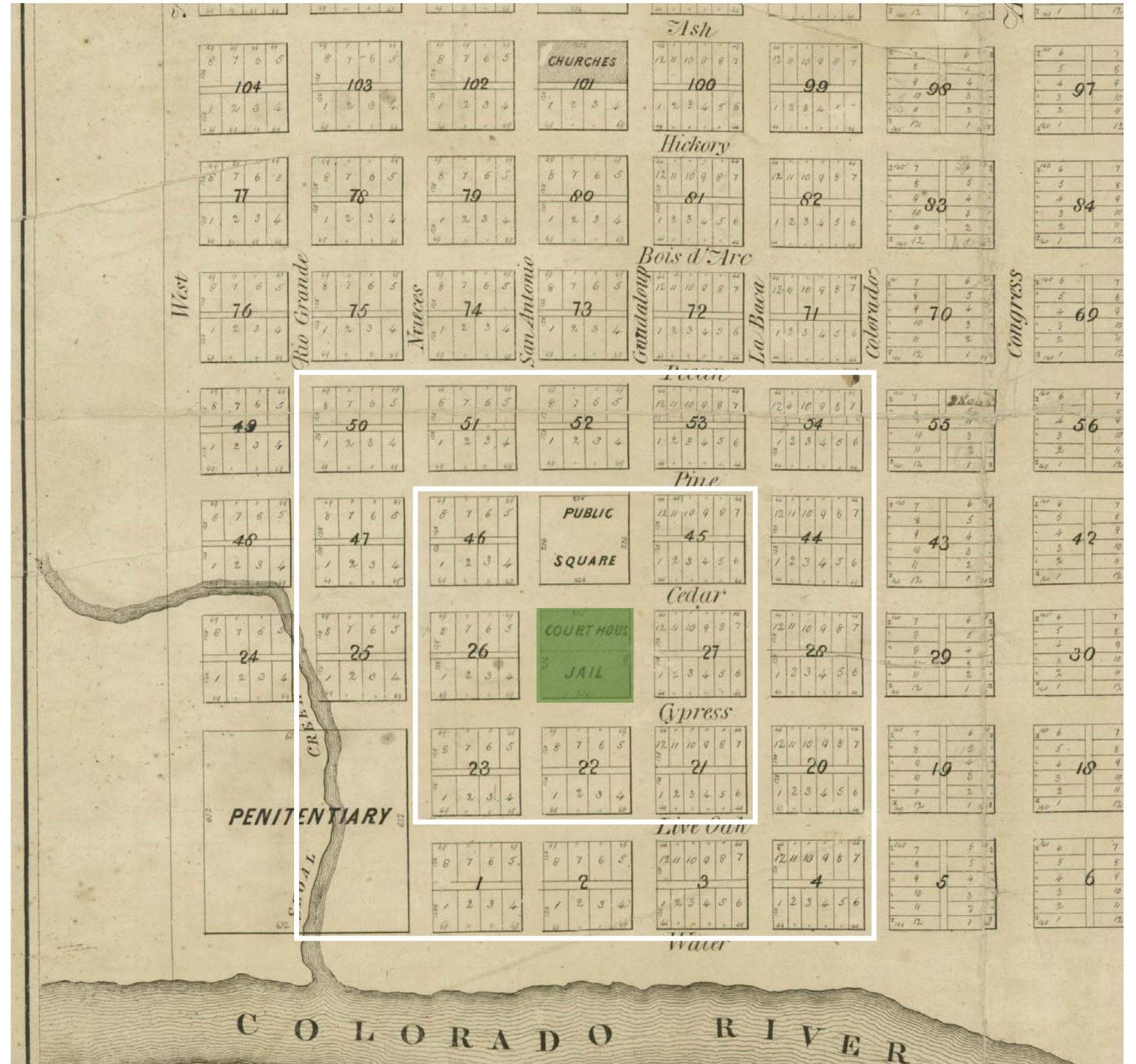


Figure 1: The 1839 City plan shows original block numbers with contextual study areas overlaid in white.

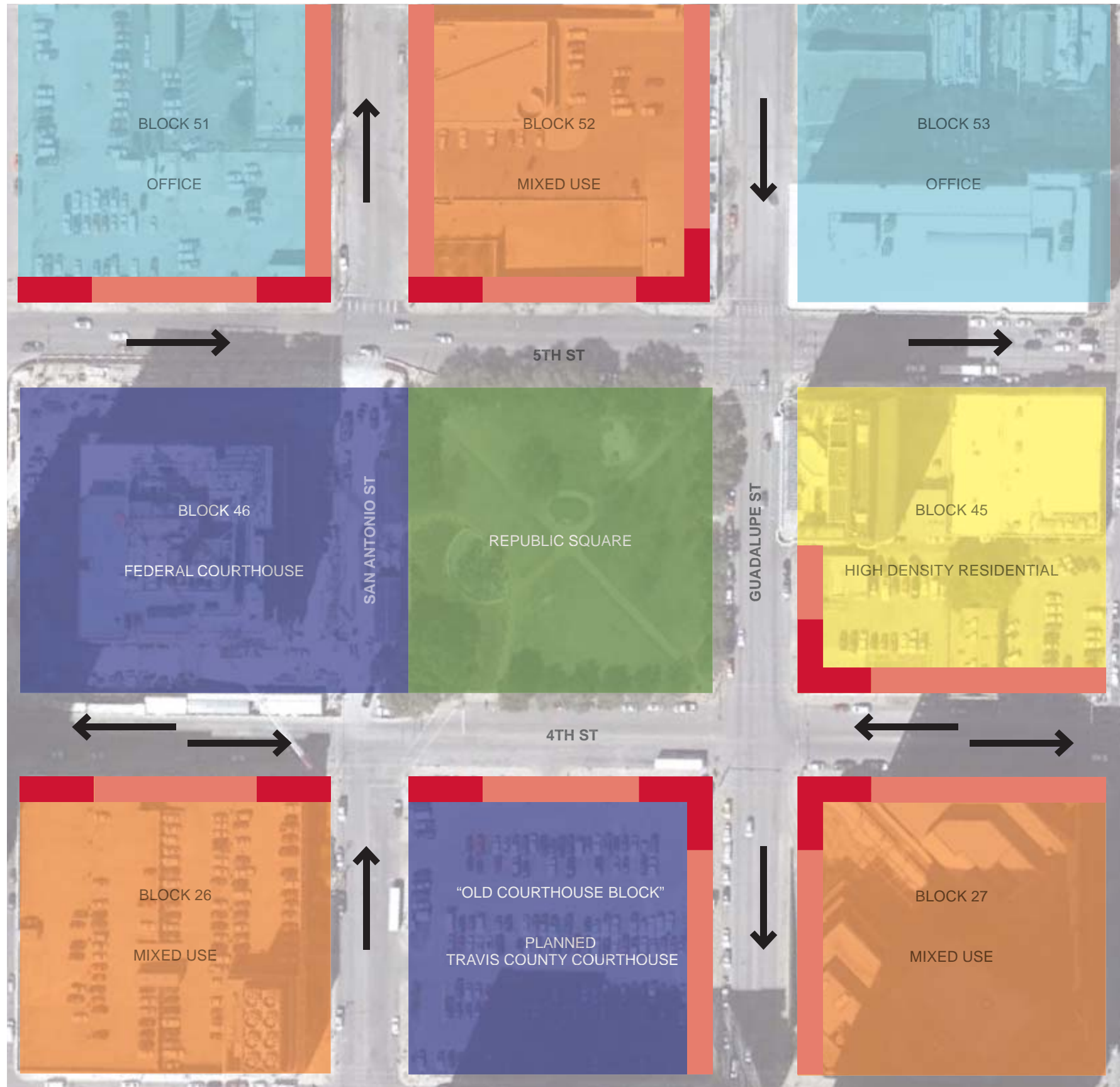


Figure 2: Recommended Future Land Uses around Republic Square

## Land Use

### Contextual Challenges

Republic Square is surrounded by diverse land uses, including civic, office, high-density residential and commercial/retail, with parcels quickly changing uses and becoming increasingly dense.

Existing and planned civic land uses consist of the new Federal courthouse to the Park's west and the future Travis County Courthouse planned for the parcel to the south.

Government offices are located in the Hobby State Office Building to the Park's southeast, and a privately-owned office building is located to the northeast.

Currently, there are about 1,500 residences within 500 feet of the park, including a high-density residential tower directly across Guadalupe St from the Park. However, over the next decade planned and projected projects will more than double the amount of residential use around the Park, and it will be critical to understand how the noise, crowds and increased traffic associated with the Park will impact these adjacent residences.

Republic Square also neighbors several rapidly growing mixed-use districts, including 2nd St, the 4th St Warehouse district, and West 5th St, with additional mixed use development planned for the sites of the Seaholm Power Plant and the Green Water Treatment Plant.

### Recommendations

The following lists include policies and projects, as defined above, that are recommendations for future land uses near the Park.

#### Policies

- Offer incentives to encourage clusters of active land uses such as restaurants, outdoor patios and retail at major intersections such as Guadalupe St and 5th St and Guadalupe St and 4th St;
- Offer additional incentives to encourage ground-level floors of buildings around the Park to include interactive retail space or restaurants with elements like outdoor patio seating to activate the public realm bordering the Park;
- Offer incentives like density bonuses to encourage new development on Park edges to provide space for public use;
- Bolster the Core/Waterfront District's status as a premier employment center by including office land uses at the Park's northeast and northwest corners;
- Promote safety in Republic Square by encouraging retail/commercial uses that incorporate day and night-time activities that increase "eyes-on-the street" along 5th St, Guadalupe St and 4th St.

#### Projects

- Locate public facilities such as restrooms, transit stops and information kiosks near major intersections to bridge between the Park and neighboring land uses.

#### Partners:

- Adjacent land owners/developers
- County Court leadership
- COA Urban Design
- Downtown Commission
- Design Commission

- PRIMARY RETAIL
- SECONDARY RETAIL

## Urban Design

### Contextual Challenges

Currently, surrounding streets and building facades do little to support the Park and do not acknowledge its historical significance. As the city continues to change, there is an opportunity for these key urban elements to reciprocally enhance the overall experience of the city.

Plans for 5th St, 4th St, and Guadalupe St are based on regional transportation needs, and with the exception of the 4th St Warehouse District, the streets around Republic Square lack varied streetscapes and ground-level building frontages that encourage people to use the space.

Pedestrian safety at crossings is also a significant issue, especially at 5th St and Guadalupe St, as these are significant one-way transit corridors.

The design of new buildings along the Republic Square's perimeter will also have an impact on the Park's quality. These buildings will almost certainly increase the amount of shaded area within the Park, while at the same time reflective material on the facades could create problematic glares.

### Recommendations

The following lists include policies and projects, as defined above, that are recommendations for urban design near the Park.

#### Policies

- “Require ground-level treatments that reinforce the pedestrian realm, including active, pedestrian-oriented uses” along streets adjacent to the Park (Downtown Austin Plan, p.71);
- Establish design standards for new development to create visual interest and support a district character surrounding the Park while also allowing for ADA accessibility;
- Offer incentives for architecture that creates visual interest in new development surrounding the Park;
- Require new building facades facing the Park to be comprised of non-reflective material to prevent glare;
- Restrict the number and length of curb cuts per block for new development to limit the number of interruptions to the pedestrian experience;
- Restrict loading and unloading activities to areas that do not disturb public right of way, queuing and parking areas and drive aisles on adjacent streets;

#### Projects

- Implement the “Great Streets” program for surrounding streets to improve the pedestrian environment;
- Incorporate signage and wayfinding elements into streetscapes to direct people to the Park;
- Design the future Travis County Courthouse entryway to physically address Republic Square;
- Install bulb-outs at intersections to reduce pedestrian crossing distances, especially at 4th St and Guadalupe St;
- Build future bus stops into surrounding redevelopment sites to prevent damage to Park trees and reduce loitering;

- Incorporate elements of the Mexican-American Cultural Trail into the Park to support the creation of a distinct character along 5th St;
- Hire a team of environmental analysts and arborists to study the effects of sun reduction on the Park's trees and recommend solutions;
- Use the above team's recommendations to establish urban design standards for new development south of the Park to ensure that the Auction Oaks are not harmed by reduced hours of available sunlight.

#### Partners:

- Adjacent land owners/developers
- County Court leadership
- COA Urban Design
- Downtown Commission
- Design Commission
- Downtown Wayfinding and Signage Plan
- PARD Forestry



The above examples from Downtown Austin illustrate how outdoor seating can activate the street edge. Top: An outdoor dining area incorporated into the building's footprint bridges the space between indoors and outdoors. Above: This outdoor seating area occupies the street right of way without hindering pedestrian traffic.



Figure 3: Critical Future Parking Opportunity Locations near Republic Square

## Parking

### Contextual Challenges

Weekday parking demands are relatively low and can be met with on-street parking, but parking demands spike during special events and are currently met in part by garages in surrounding office buildings. With many of the adjacent parcels likely to be redeveloped, however, it is uncertain how much garage parking will be available within walking distance of the Park in the future.

The primary parking lot serving Republic Square during events is located one block south of the Park, but this parcel is also the future site of the Travis County Courthouse. According to a report prepared by ETM Associates for the Downtown Austin Alliance, the planned courthouse will have 538 parking spaces available to the public after courthouse hours, but the loss of surface parking will create new logistical problems for loading and unloading materials during events.

Additional redevelopment around the Park will likely eliminate any lots fully dedicated to surface parking, and parcels that become high density residential are unlikely to provide much, if any, public parking without development incentives from the City to do so.

On-street parking serving Republic Square will also be reduced in the future. Current plans will eliminate on-street parking on the Park's perimeter at Guadalupe St and on all of 4th St to accommodate a rapid transit bus stop and urban rail, respectively. The "Great Streets" program will further reduce the available on-street parking due to street tree requirements. It is critical that some immediate on-street parking be retained for the food and beverage kiosks and retail within the Park to be successful.

Bicycles, a popular alternative to car transportation in Austin, are currently underserved by the available amount of convenient parking spaces in and around the Park.

### Recommendations

The following lists include policies and projects, as defined above, that are recommendations for parking near the Park.

#### Policies

- Require new development to preserve existing on-street parking along Park-adjacent streets when possible;
- Offer incentives, e.g. density bonuses, for public parking provided by new development;
- Amend the "Great Streets" requirements to allow continuous (not "duck-in" as described in the "Great Streets" design guidelines) on-street parking on the Park side of 5th St to maximize the immediate parking serving Republic Square;
- Offer incentives for new and existing development to include publicly available parking for bicycles, motorcycles and scooters.

#### Projects

- Create ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliant parking within 50-feet of the Park's food kiosk, restroom facilities and main entry ways;
- Install signage and wayfinding elements at corner entrances of the Park to be visible from the street indicating locations of nearby public parking;
- Construct key areas in the Park to handle limited vehicular use for before and after events to accommodate loading and unloading materials;
- Develop urban rail on 5th St to allow on-street parking on one side of the street.

#### Partners

- Downtown Austin Wayfinding
- Adjacent land owners/developers
- State/Hobby Building owners
- COA Urban Design
- Downtown Commission
- Design Commission
- COA Public Works

## Dog Management

### Contextual Challenges

In many respects dog owners have a positive impact on local parks, using them consistently and activating these spaces during non-peak early morning or evening hours.

However, heavy dog use in parks also poses serious health hazards for Park users (especially children); and places heavy burdens on Park staff and maintenance crews responsible for the setting up and hosting of special events.

Initial stakeholder interviews for the Park Master Plan confirmed a “significant percentage of residents in the immediate area own dog(s)”, and this number is growing.<sup>1</sup> Laws requiring owners to keep dogs on leashes and clean up their waste are already in existence; however, these laws are currently not well enforced.

By conservative estimates, 1,500 dwelling units are located near the Park and a quarter of these units are likely to have dogs, resulting in approximately 375 dogs in the Park daily.<sup>2</sup>

An average dog produces about 3/4 pounds of feces 1 1/2 times daily, equating to approximately 1 1/8 pounds of feces a day per dog. For 375 dogs, this means 420 pounds of dog feces is likely to be created in the Park each day and more than 150,000 pounds of feces in the Park each year!

In an effort to curb these health and safety risks, the City began a “Scoop the Poop” campaign in 2009 which established Off-Leash Dog Areas in the Downtown core.<sup>3</sup> These areas have become widely popular, as pet owners and their dogs frequent them for exercise, socialization and entertainment.

<sup>1</sup> Dukes, A., Lacy, M., & Simecek, D. (2012, April 9). Republic Square State of Texas Stakeholder Group Meeting. 31. (R. Leonard, Interviewer) Austin, Texas: Design Workshop, Inc.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Austin Parks & Recreation Department Long Range Plan for Land, Facilities and Programs, Section 6.6 Trends, pg. 179. For more information see: <http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/parks/offleashareascommittee.html>.

### Recommendations

The following lists include policies, programs and projects, as defined above, that are recommendations for dog management in the Park.

#### Policies

- Establish off-leash hours from 5-9AM and 7-9PM (unless there is a special event);
- Schedule time for Park staff to enforce the Austin leash ordinance;
- Require new residential development to provide on-site dog facilities, e.g. a roof-top green space or an interior dog run, sized to accommodate dogs in residential dwelling units;
- Offer new non-residential and existing developments incentives to create on-site dog facilities;
- Adjust the proportion of softscape in the “Great Streets” standards to allow more green space for dogs surrounding the Park;
- Allow only on-leash pets on main lawn;
- Enforce existing clean up and leash laws;
- Close lawn before special events where users are likely to sit and clean lawn before all special events;
- Schedule time during off-leash hours for Park staff or volunteers to be on site to monitor that dog owners:
  - Keep pets within sight to minimize hazards to children, park patrons and the Park itself;
  - Clean up after their dogs and properly dispose of waste; and
  - Remove aggressive dogs from the Park.

#### Programs

- Partner with local organizations to raise education and awareness of the importance of dog management in public parks;
- Establish a conservancy group or other organization to help provide consistent leadership and vision for maintaining park security and operations;

#### Projects

- Include information about off-leash locations and hours in wayfinding and signage elements;
- Place bag stations near trash bins;
- Replace damaged turf as needed.

#### Partners

- Adjacent land owners/developers
- COA Urban Design
- Downtown Commission
- Downtown Austin Alliance
- Pet walking, grooming or training service businesses
- Future park conservancy
- Dog/pet owners

## Bird Management

### Contextual Challenges

Unchecked grackle and pigeon populations are a common problem in Downtown Austin. The significant quantities of excrement produced by these birds each day damages City infrastructure and threatens the health and overall well-being of residents and visitors.

Because birds are highly mobile, deterring them from one site only relocates them to another. Accordingly, the best practice would be to apply the following recommendations to parks city-wide.

A number of tactics have been attempted to mitigate the financial and health impacts associated with large bird infestations Downtown, including tree pruning, high-pressure water guns, sound-emitting devices and laser pointers.

One of the more successful and famous forms of bird management can be experienced by visiting Washington Square Park in New York City. A pair of nesting Red Tailed Hawks have lived adjacent to the park for many years and generally reduce the presence of pigeons and other large urban birds. This approach might seem far-fetched, but it may also have tremendous resonance with the unconventional culture of Austin.

### Recommendations

The following lists include policies, programs and projects, as defined above, that are recommendations for bird management in the Park.

#### Policies

- Ban the feeding of invasive and nuisance bird species, such as grackles and pigeons in Republic Square;
- Develop and adopt a list of tree species proven to be undesirable habitats for nuisance bird populations;
- Explore additional vegetation options for landscape buffering that further deters bird nesting.

#### Programs

- Continue with Downtown Austin Alliance's practice of using special lasers to drive the birds away from the Park, particularly during hours when birds are attempting to roost;
- Synchronize the above effort throughout parks to avoid simply shuffling birds from park to another;
- Establish an anti-feeding program designed to educate citizens about the health hazards associated with problematic bird species;
- Consider using an annual or semi-annual bird relocation service.

#### Projects:

- Create a large, unbroken canopy of deciduous trees within the Park, as grackles tend to prefer nesting in coniferous trees with gaps between canopies;
- Include information about bird hazards and management regulations in wayfinding and signage elements, especially near the food kiosk and bird habitat areas.

#### Partners

- Adjacent land owners/developers
- COA Public Works
- Future park conservancy
- Downtown Austin Alliance

## Vagrancy and Loitering

### Contextual Challenges

The City of Austin is currently undergoing a severe shortage in affordable housing, a problem exasperated by an additional lack of emergency housing for individuals trying to transition out of homelessness.

Due to the affordable housing crisis, many homeless individuals camp in public parks overnight; leading to problems with sleep deprivation, crime and unauthorized meal services occurring on City land.

The Austin Resource Center for the Homeless (ARCH) is the City's main resource for providing shelter for homeless individuals during the day. However, the number of homeless individuals requiring services during the evening exceeds the building's current capacity.

In addition to shortages in affordable housing and funding, there is also a lack of strategically planned meal service locations to accommodate homeless populations within the city, forcing many charitable organizations to set up meal service locations within City parks.

Regular meal services are a magnet for vagrancy and loitering in the downtown core. Additionally, as these services often take place in secluded areas removed from public street view, there is an increased risk of hazardous littering and violence.

### Recommendations

The following lists include policies, programs and projects, as defined above, that are recommendations for vagrancy and loitering near the Park.

#### Policies

- Set aside funding for a city-wide homeless study to better assess regional homelessness challenges and solutions.

#### Programs

- Work with mobile food kitchens to identify meal service areas away from public parks;
- Use staff and volunteer organizations to monitor parks for loitering;
- Use CapMetro staff to monitor transit facilities and associated areas for loitering.

#### Projects

- Explore partnerships with local organizations to establish new facilities promoting entrepreneurial skills for the homeless (e.g. the Clarence 4G wi-fi hotspot initiative, art and jewelry making or wood working);
- Secure facilities, power outlets and water sources to prevent unauthorized use of parks and discourage loitering;
- Improve lighting to ensure Park safety at all hours;
- Avoid overly comfortable furnishings to discourage sleeping in the Park.

## Events

### Contextual Challenges

The Austin Downtown Farmers' Market is one of the Park's most popular events. Currently, with more than 60 vendors and an average of 3,000 attendees each week, it requires significant off-street parking and restroom facilities for shoppers and vendors.

One challenge associated with Republic Square is that the Park cannot sustain more than 40 vendor tents. Additional vendor tents could possibly be located in the Federal Courthouse Plaza and within the 4th St right-of-way, but these locations pose their own challenges.

The Federal Courthouse plaza, although large enough to accommodate up to 50 tents, does not allow for vehicular access, making it difficult for vendors to transport their tents and goods to the site. Moreover, to use the plaza would require a written agreement with the General Services Administration, which may be difficult given the plaza's tight security.

There are also no long-term agreements in place to let the farmer's market locate in the right of way of 4th St, and it is unlikely that this will remain a viable location due to the planned Metro Rail.

Without these supplemental spaces, there may be increased pressure to allow more vendors to operate within the Park itself, despite the damage caused by regularly hosting large crowds over extended periods of time.

Event parking is another significant challenge. The surface parking lot immediately south of the Park handles much of the vendor parking and houses the portable restroom facilities; however, as this parcel is slated to become the new Travis County Courthouse, new ways of accommodating these needs will have to be found. Additionally, the "Great Streets" Initiative and Downtown Austin Plan will further reduce available surface parking unless their requirements are amended.

### Recommendations

The following lists include policies and projects, as defined above, that are recommendations for events in the Park.

#### Policies

- Establish a limit to the number of events that can be held at Republic Square, especially events which cause parking demands that exceed current parking capacity;
- Create suggested size limits for events held at Republic Square;
- Amend "Great Streets" and the Downtown Austin Plan requirements to allow on street parking along the Park's perimeter.

#### Programs:

- Allow other locations (either somewhere new or the associated farmers' markets at Sunset Valley and the Triangle) to absorb some of the Downtown Farmers' Market's demand as the Park's changing context becomes less conducive to operating at the current scale.

#### Projects

- Design hardscape to accommodate vendor truck circulation before and after the market to mitigate the loss of the adjacent southern parking lot.

