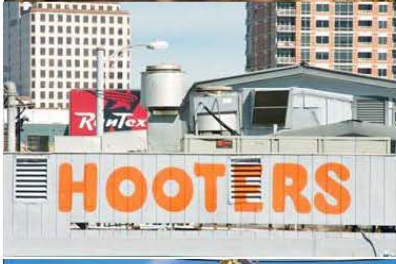




## 2012 AIA Sustainable Design Assessment Team Proposal: Austin, Texas

### A Sustainable Assessment of the Codes and Plans for South Shore Central of Austin's Lady Bird Lake





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PROJECT INFORMATION: *SUMMARY*

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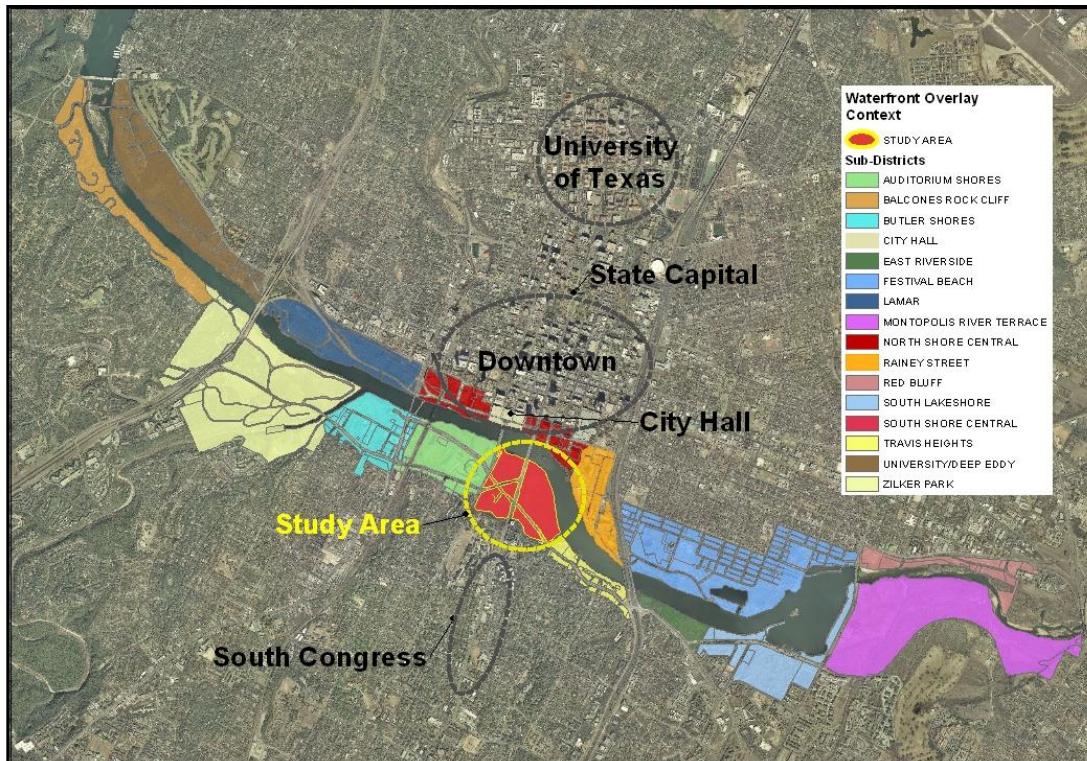
**TITLE:** A Sustainability Assessment of the Codes and Plans for South Shore Central of Austin's Lady Bird Lake

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**ABSTRACT**

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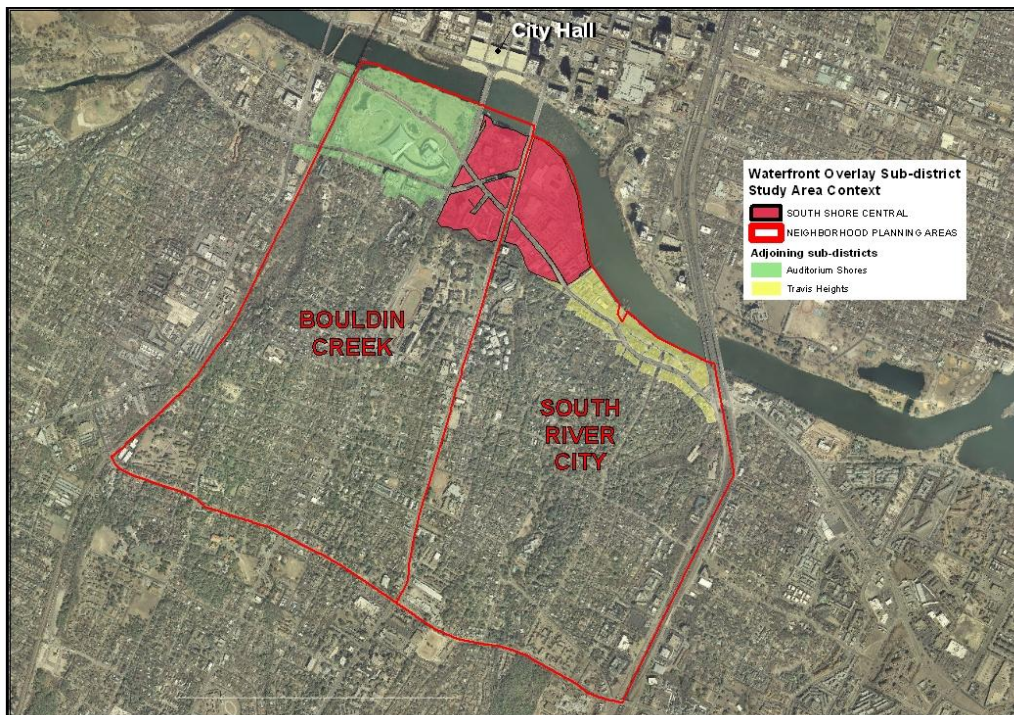
The City of Austin has recognized that Lady Bird Lake (formerly named Town Lake) is a precious recreational resource in the heart of the urban core, which could be quickly overwhelmed if development along its shores is not carefully planned and regulated to provide a balance between accommodating growth in the urban core and preserving the character of the lakefront. The adoption of the 1985 Town Lake Corridor Study established foundational policies which were codified with the 1986 Waterfront Overlay Combining District (WOCD) ordinance. The ordinance established fifteen sub-districts (now sixteen sub-districts) within the overlay in order to calibrate the code to various locations along the 5.4 mile -long town lake corridor. The overall purpose of the ordinance was established “. . . to provide a more harmonious interaction and transition between urban development and the parkland and shoreline . . .”



Waterfront Overlay Combining District. Study Area, South Shore Central sub-district, at the hub of Lady Bird Lake and the urban core.

In 2007 the City Council appointed a Waterfront Overlay Taskforce to review the adequacy of the current waterfront ordinance in light of changes that had been made to the original ordinance over the years and to increasing development pressure along the shoreline. The Waterfront Task Force Report, 2008, made several recommendations, including the re-establishment of a Waterfront Planning Advisory Board (WPAB) with responsibilities that include recommending potential changes to the Waterfront Overlay Combining District ordinance, with particular instructions to develop bonus provisions that create clear, predictable methods for increasing development entitlements in exchange for clear, predictable community benefits, and to develop improved design standards. The WPAB has conducted this work since its appointment two years ago, but has had to carry out this task with limited support resources and without the benefit of consultant assistance.

The SDAT will provide an outside, professional review and assessment of the WPAB's work to date and assist with recommendations for moving forward. Additionally, the SDAT process will help convene local resources and engage stakeholders to inform and assist with the work. In order to sharply focus the review and assessment process, the SDAT study will concentrate on one of the sub-districts of the Waterfront Overlay – South Shore Central – which is arguably the area along the waterfront most likely to face potential redevelopment prospects, and the adjacent sub-districts to the west and east which, respectively, introduce a major park land (Auditorium Shores) and an area with commercial transitioning to residential uses (Travis Heights). The South Shore Central sub-district is also adjacent to established neighborhoods. This area concentrates the issues of how to promote urban excellence while maintaining, enhancing, and connecting to parkland and neighborhoods.



*Study Area and Neighborhood Planning Areas.*



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**PROJECT INFORMATION: *COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION***

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**HISTORY OF TOWN LAKE**

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1873 illustration of Austin

In 1838, President of the Republic of Texas Mirabeau Lamar instructed Edwin Waller to create a new city in central Texas, and Austin was born. By 1839 Mr. Waller had completed a plan illustrating a regular grid of streets stretching from the banks of the Colorado River northward and including commercial areas, residential areas, four symmetrically placed city squares, the capital building, a block dedicated for a university, and other amenities. The original layout between East Avenue (now IH-35) near Waller Creek and West Avenue near Shoal Creek, and between the Colorado River and the Capitol Building remains the core of our downtown and the geographical and social center of Austin.

During the 1880s, Austin gained new prominence as the state capitol building was completed in 1888, and claimed as the seventh largest building in the world. And through the closing decades of the 19th century, Austin expanded its city limits to more than three times its former area. As part of this expansion, the first granite dam was built on the Colorado River to power a new street car line and the new "moon towers" street lighting fixtures.

In 1900, a great storm caused Colorado River waters to crest 11 feet above the granite dam. The dam broke, sending a wall of water into downtown Austin, leveling homes, and killing 47 persons. Two more failed attempts would be made to rebuild the dam.

In the 1930s, the Public Works Administration made federal funds available for large infrastructure projects to public agencies. The state legislature established the Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA), and with the persistence of a young Texas congressman, Lyndon Baines Johnson helped secure more WPA funds for Austin than any other city in Texas. Construction of dams along the Colorado River began right away, and Austin launched a series of civic development and beautification projects that created much of the city's infrastructure and parks. This building campaign replaced the Great Granite Dam by building a series of seven dams and reservoirs that now define the Colorado River's course through Austin.

In preparations for the nation's bicentennial celebrations in 1976, the Town Lake Beautification Project, spearheaded by Lady Bird Johnson (wife of President Lyndon B. Johnson), was begun in the 1971's, and by the end of 1975, the Town Lake Beautification Project had received two awards of statewide and

national significance. Through a combination of public and private funding this campaign created new fishing points, trail development, roads, parking facilities and rest areas, irrigation, picnic facilities, special landscaping work, a pedestrian bridge at Waller Creek as well as numerous improvements at Fiesta Gardens. Tree varieties planted along Town Lake included: Spanish Oak, Live Oak, Redbud, Crepe Myrtle, Weeping Willow, Bald Cypress, Yaupon Holly, Pecan, Chinese Tallow and Golden Rain Trees.

Rapid growth in the 1970s & 1980's contributed to more political activity, this time at the local level. Strong neighborhood, environmental, and historic preservation communities sprang up, and remain an integral part of Austin's civic life today. In particular, some projects along the lakefront raised concerns about how to protect the river corridor of Town Lake from intrusive development and how best to encourage compatible and responsible use of the land adjoining the lake. That era marked the beginning of a planning effort for Town Lake, leading to the enactment of the WOCD ordinance in 1986. This ordinance and what has flowed from it in the ensuing years has set the framework for current planning and forms the immediate background for the SDAT proposal.

Much has happened in the twenty-five years since the 1986 ordinance, not the least of which is the doubling in Austin's population – a boom that continues more than ever – bringing with it all the opportunity and growing pains associated with becoming one of the development hotspots in America. In 2007 Town Lake was renamed Lady Bird Lake to honor long-time Austin resident Lady Bird Johnson and her contributions to preserving and promoting Austin's natural beauty.

Now in 2011, lined with parkland and a nearly continuous hike-and-bike trail, Lady Bird Lake is highly accessible and used by a complete spectrum of Austin citizenry. In addition to providing fantastic scenic vistas, wonderful recreational opportunities, and serene open spaces, the lake is a major economic asset drawing people to downtown Austin, both to work and play. It is safe to say that there is a city-wide consensus across the variety of city constituencies that Lady Bird Lake is Austin's most distinctive natural feature, indeed its urban crowning glory, providing a dramatic recreational and visual resource situated right at the Downtown District and the heart of the city.

## **POPULATION & DEMOGRAPHICS**

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With a population of 790,390, Austin is the fourth largest city in Texas and the center of a metropolitan area of 1.7 million. Doubling in size every twenty-five years since 1925, Austin is one of the fastest growing cities in the U.S. The city is ranked the 14<sup>th</sup> largest city in the U.S., but had the 6<sup>th</sup> highest increase of population of U.S. cities in the last decade.

Diverse cultural groups have been attracted to Austin throughout its history, including immigrants from Europe, Africa, Mexico, and, most recently, Asia. All of these groups have enriched Austin's civic and cultural life, including its recent development as a mecca for music fans.

According to the 2010 Census the racial composition of Austin is:

- Anglo: (Non-Hispanic Whites): 48.7%
- Hispanic or Latino: 35.1% (29.1% Mexican, 0.5% Puerto Rican, 0.4% Cuban, 5.1% Other)
- African American: 7.7%

- Asian: 6.3% (1.9% Indian, 1.5% Chinese, 1.0% Vietnamese, 0.7% Korean, 0.3% Filipino, 0.2% Japanese, 0.8% Other)
- Other: 2.2%

The latest census data (2010) has signaled several trends:

- **Increased ethnic diversity overall.** No single ethnic or demographic group is now an absolute majority. Within that demographic shift though, the African American share has been decreasing while Hispanic and Asian households have an increased share of Austin's population and there is an increased socio-economic diversity within those two groups.
- **Decrease of families with children in the urban core.** Even though the absolute number of families with children which live in the urban core is increasing, the percentage of families with children compared with households without children in the urban core is decreasing. This creates funding challenges for those providing services to children in the urban core.
- **Increasing geographical and economic divide.** The spatial separation between the affluent and less-than-affluent is increasing, with the more affluent slowly migrating outside of Austin city limits.

## ECONOMICS

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Austin is the largest component of the Austin Round Rock MSA, which had a Gross Domestic Product of \$86 billion in 2010.

Austin is a major center for high tech. Thousands of graduates each year from the engineering and computer science programs at The University of Texas at Austin provide a steady source of employees that help to fuel Austin's technology and defense industry sectors. The metro Austin area has much lower housing costs than Silicon Valley, but much higher housing costs than many parts of rural Texas. As a result of the high concentration of high-tech companies in the region, Austin was strongly affected by the dot-com boom in the late 1990s and subsequent bust. Austin's largest employers include in alphabetical order:

Austin Independent School District	Seton Family of Hospitals
City of Austin	State of Texas
Dell	Texas State University–San Marcos
Freescale Semiconductor (spun off from Motorola in 2004)	University of Texas
IBM, St. David's Healthcare Partnership	U.S. Federal Government

Other high-tech companies with operations in Austin include in alphabetical order:

3M	Cisco Systems	Nvidia
Apple Inc.	eBay/PayPal	Oracle Corporation
AMD	Google	Samsung Group
Applied Materials	Hewlett-Packard	Silicon Laboratories
Bioware	Hoover's	United Devices
Blizzard Entertainment	Hostgator	
Buffalo Technology	Intel Corporation	
Cirrus Logic	National Instruments	

In 2010, Facebook accepted a grant to build a downtown office that could bring as many as 200 jobs to the city. The proliferation of technology companies has led to the region's nickname "the Silicon Hills" and spurred development that greatly expanded the city.

Austin is also emerging as a hub for pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies; the city is home to about 85 of them. The city was ranked by the Milken Institute as the No.12 biotech and life science center in the United States.

In the 2000's then-Mayor Will Wynn set out a goal for having up to 25,000 people living Downtown by 2015, and the city provided incentives for building residential units in the urban core. Because of this, the city has been driven to increase density in Austin's urban core. The skyline has drastically changed in recent years, and the residential real estate market has remained relatively strong. Today the central business district of the city is home to some of the tallest condo towers in the state, with the Austonian Condos topping out at 56 floors and the 360 Condos at 44 floors. The 360 Tower and the Four Seasons Condos are condo towers in Austin, opened in early 2008. Downtown growth has been aided by the presence of a popular live music and nightlife scene, museums, restaurants, and Lady Bird Lake, considered one of the city's best recreational spots.

The music scene in Austin which provides much of the "buzz" that the city is known for is also a major economic engine. Most prominently, South by Southwest (SXSW) is one of the largest music festivals in the United States, with more than 2,000 performers playing in more than 90 venues around Downtown Austin over four days, in March. Though it is an industry-based event, SXSW Music links locally with events such as the annual Austin Music Awards show. SXSW is the highest revenue-producing special event for the Austin economy, with an estimated economic impact of at least \$167 million in 2010.

In addition to national and global corporations, Austin features a strong network of independent, unique, locally-owned firms and organizations.

## **FORM OF GOVERNMENT**

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Austin is administered by a city council of seven members, each of them elected at large. The council is composed of six council members, and by an elected mayor, accompanied by a hired city manager under the manager-council system of municipal governance. Council and mayoral elections are non-partisan, with a runoff in case there is no majority winner. Austin is the largest city in the U.S. that elects all council members on an at-large basis by all voters, as opposed to elections by districts.

Law enforcement in Austin is provided by the Austin Police Department, except for state government buildings, which are patrolled by the Texas Department of Public Safety. Austin was ranked the fifth-safest city in part because there are fewer than five murders per 100,000 people annually. Fire protection is provided by the Austin Fire Department, and emergency medical services are provided by Austin-Travis County Emergency Medical Services.

## **GEOGRAPHY/TOPOGRAPHY**

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Austin is located in Central Texas, along the Balcones Escarpment and Interstate 35, northwest of Houston. Its elevation varies from 425 feet to approximately 1,000 feet above sea level. As of 2010, the city occupies a total area of 271.8 square miles. Approximately 6.9 square miles of this area is water.

Austin is situated on the Colorado River, with three man-made (artificial) lakes within the city limits: Lady Bird Lake (formerly known as Town Lake), Lake Austin (both created by dams along the Colorado River), and Lake Walter E. Long. Additionally, the foot of Lake Travis, including Mansfield Dam, is located within the city's limits. Lady Bird Lake, Lake Austin, and Lake Travis are each on the Colorado River.

As a result of its straddling the Balcones Fault, the eastern part of the city is flat, with heavy clay and loam soils, whereas, the western part and western suburbs consist of rolling hills on the edge of the Texas Hill Country. Because the hills to the west are primarily limestone rock with a thin covering of topsoil, portions of the city are frequently subjected to flash floods from the runoff caused by thunderstorms. To help control this runoff and to generate hydroelectric power, the Lower Colorado River Authority operates a series of dams that form the Texas Highland Lakes. The lakes also provide venues for boating, swimming, and other forms of recreation within several parks on the lake shores.

Austin is located at the intersection of four major ecological regions, and is consequently a temperate-to-hot green oasis with a highly variable climate having some characteristics of the desert, the tropics, and a wetter climate. The area is very diverse ecologically and biologically, and is home to a variety of animals and plants. Notably, the area is home to many types of wildflowers that blossom throughout the year but especially in the spring, including the popular bluebonnets, some planted in an effort by "Lady Bird" Johnson, wife of former President Lyndon Johnson.

## CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

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The SDAT study will focus on the South Shore Central sub-district (see study area for further description). South Shore Central is primarily privately held and commercially zoned. The area is bordered on the west by South First Street, a major arterial and bridge to the downtown, and on axis directly across from Austin City Hall. East Bouldin Creek forms the southern, and, as it curves toward the lake, eastern boundary.

**Comprehensive Plan:** The South Shore Central sub-district is identified in the draft Austin Comprehensive Plan (currently in the final phases of review before consideration of adoption by the City Council) as a Regional Growth area, indicating a vision that would accommodate a more urban, mixed-used development pattern. The draft Comprehensive Plan, called *Imagine Austin*, describes Regional Centers as “the most urban places in the region and are where the greatest density of people and jobs will be located. These centers will become shopping, cultural, recreational, and entertainment destinations for Central Texas. Their character will depend on where they are located. In addition, the tallest buildings in the region will likely be located in these centers. Some, like Downtown, will be urban. ... Housing in regional centers will mostly consist of low-rise to high-rise apartments, mixed-use buildings, rowhouses, and townhouses; other housing types may be included depending on the location and character of the center.”

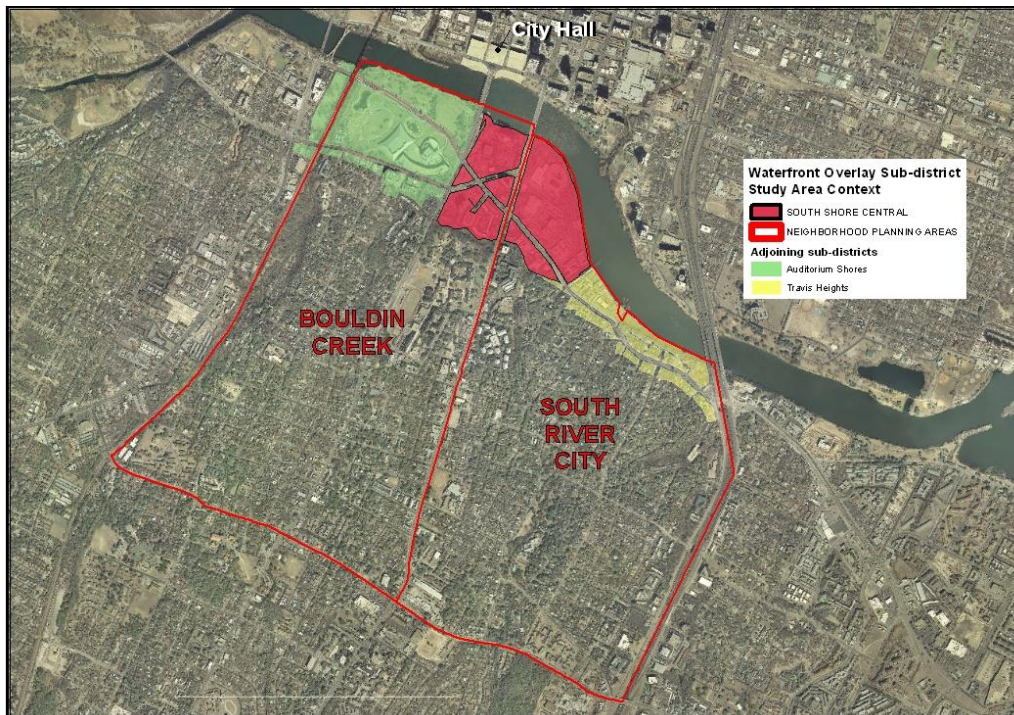
**Urban Rail:** The City is currently completing an alternative routes study to propose how an urban rail system, which would originate in the downtown, would branch out from the central city. This study is evaluating two alternative routes/bridges for bringing the urban rail system across the lake. One of the alternatives comes across on the Congress Street Bridge and the other on a new dedicated bridge to the east of Congress Street. Both of these alternatives land either in the South Shore Central study area or just adjacent in the Travis Heights sub-district. Either way, both bridges envision that the first leg of the



urban rail system will extend on Riverside Drive to the east and a portion of Barton Springs Road to the west – both of which also are within the SDAT study area.

**Auditorium Shore improvements:** A planned \$2 million makeover of Auditorium Shores will shift the hike-and-bike trail away from the river, restore the eroding shoreline and add parking to the heavily used area. Plans call for moving the hike-and-bike trail away from the shoreline and closer to Riverside Drive to avoid conflicts between dogs playing at the off-leash area and cyclists and pedestrians using the trail. This is located in the Auditorium Shores sub-district, directly to the west of South Shore Central. The SDAT will coordinate with the Park and Recreation Department to ensure pedestrian connectivity to the park from South Shore Central.

**Boardwalk:** One of the most attractive features of Lady Bird Lake is the nearly continuous recreational trail that loops both shores. The largest “missing link” in this system will soon be in place with the construction of the Boardwalk Trail, slated to break ground (or in this case, water) in 2012 with an expected completion in 2013. The boardwalk will begin at the southern boundary of the South Shore Central sub-district and follow the southern shoreline east for several miles, meandering in and out of densely wooded areas and open water views of the Austin skyline, to eventually join up with the Lady Bird Lake Trail. Barges will be used to sink concrete piers that will support galvanized steel and concrete decks, typically five to seven feet about the water and fourteen feet wide. A major objective of density and height bonuses in the sub-district is to provide public pedestrian access to the boardwalk and the Lady Bird Lake Trail overall.



**Adjacent Neighborhood Plans:** Austin’s last comprehensive plan, Austin Tomorrow, dates to 1979. While a new comprehensive plan, Imagine Austin, is now being reviewed for adoption, neighborhood plans have been a key planning tool in the intervening years and were developed with significant public participation. The neighborhood planning areas that include the South Shore Central sub-district are Bouldin Creek and South River City. Plans have been adopted for both areas, the Bouldin Creek

Neighborhood Plan and the Greater South River City Combined Neighborhood Plan, and each have recommendations that relate to the South Shore Central sub-district. They relate primarily to height restrictions, water quality, pedestrian and bicycle connectivity, and park improvements, including the following:

- **Bouldin Creek:** Barton Springs Road should serve as a gateway boulevard that serves as a transition between Downtown Austin and the neighborhood, achieved in part through maximum height restrictions. The height bonuses set out in the 2000 South Shore Central/Travis Heights Development Standards Study (aka: ROMA study) can be permitted within the requirements set out by the study and in consultation with the neighborhood planning team.
- **South River City:** A natural buffer, as outlined in the 2000 South Shore Central/Travis Heights Development Standards Study (aka: ROMA study), should be provided along East Bouldin Creek, and greater water quality protections for urban watersheds should be adopted. Increased pedestrian and bicycle connectivity are also cited in the plan, specifically from the Blunn Creek Greenbelt and the Norwood Park area to and along Lady Bird Lake. Norwood Park improvements, such as water fountains, restrooms, and a leash-free area for dogs, are also recommended.

## REGIONAL SETTING/CONSIDERATIONS

**Watershed:** Flow through Lady Bird Lake is controlled by Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA), and falls into two basic seasons:

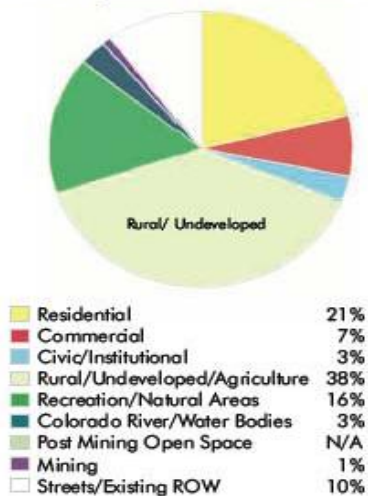


- Release season, mid-March through mid-October, when water is released for downstream irrigation uses. During this period, the system behaves more like a river than a reservoir.
- Non-release season, mid-October through mid-March, when irrigation needs diminish and releases are geared primarily toward requirements of instream flow for the Colorado River, and freshwater inflow to Matagorda Bay.

While water release may vary, the water level is generally maintained at a constant level, apart from infrequent rises due to storm events.

**Colorado River Corridor Plan:** A portion of the Lady Bird Lake Watershed, east of the SDAT study area, is also the subject of a regional planning effort between Travis County, the City of Austin, and LCRA. The draft of the Colorado River Corridor Plan focuses on a 32-mile stretch of the Colorado River, a small part of which is within the full jurisdiction of the City of Austin while two-thirds is within its Extra-territorial Jurisdiction. The plan addresses protection of local bio-diversity, floodplain preservation and restoration, greenway planning, mining site reclamation, and enhanced mobility through capital project development and new design alternatives.

### Austin City-Wide 2008 Land Use\*



\* Source: Imagine Austin

**Austin Land Use:** After rural areas, the dominant land uses in Austin are residential, recreation and natural areas, and commercial. The SDAT study area and its adjoining sub-districts also demonstrate a similar land use pattern.



## PLANNING EFFORTS & REPORTS

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### 1985 - Town Lake Corridor Study

- Environmental Goals
  - Environmental Protection
  - Treating urban runoff
  - Protecting city creeks
  - Requiring better maintenance of shoreline
  - Environmental impact studies for new development
- Preserve and Improve Parkland
  - Acquiring more parkland
  - Securing more shoreline public access
- Complimentary Development
  - Encouraging appropriate mixed-use and residential development
  - Promoting cooperation between neighbors and private landowners

### 1986 - Waterfront Overlay Combining District (WOCD) ordinance

- Defined development regulations appropriate for maintaining the quality of the lakefront from Tom Miller dam to beyond Longhorn dam.
- Established 15 sub-districts within the Overlay

### 1999 – Plain Language Re-write of WOCD

- In the years since its adoption, the 1986 WOCD has been modified on several occasions. Most of these were minor modifications but in 1999 a new Waterfront Overlay Ordinance to be consistent with the citywide changes in the Land Development code format. The 1999 rewrite included changes that eliminated key provisions from the original code:
  - Removed bonus provisions in the original 1986 ordinance that traded community benefits for increased entitlements
  - Removed maximum height overlay

### 2000 – South Shore Central/Travis Heights Development Standards Study (aka: 2000 ROMA Study)

- The 1999 proposed Gotham project triggered a strong community reaction which led the City Council to commission the South Shore Central/Travis Heights Development Standards Study to assess the appropriate “building development standards to be incorporated into the Land Development Code.” The intent of study was to “supporting the community goals provided in the Town Lake Corridor Study.” The development project was eventually scaled-back, and then abandoned, and the study was completed but not adopted.

### 2008 – Waterfront Task Force Report

- Increased development through the 2000's once again raised the community's concern about to how best to protect the river corridor from intrusive projects and what needs to be done to ensure appropriate development along the shoreline. As a result the City Council appointed the 2008 Waterfront Overlay Task Force “to evaluate the current ordinance for inconsistencies and ambiguities” and to review other issues related to the current code and make recommendations

on whatever issues need to be resolved with the current waterfront overlay ordinance. The Report made key recommendations, including:

- Re-establish the Waterfront Planning Advisory Board (WPAB)
- Re-instate sub-district maximum building heights for the overlay that supersede any other provisions of the code
- Create development bonus provisions that create clear, predictable methods for increasing development entitlements in exchange for clear, predictable community benefits

**2009 – Establishment of the Waterfront Planning Advisory Board (WPAB)**

- The WPAB is charged with providing recommendations to City Council and city boards on development and other issues affecting the waterfront
- The WPAB is charged with developing the bonus provisions, consistent with the recommendations from the 2008 Task Force Report.

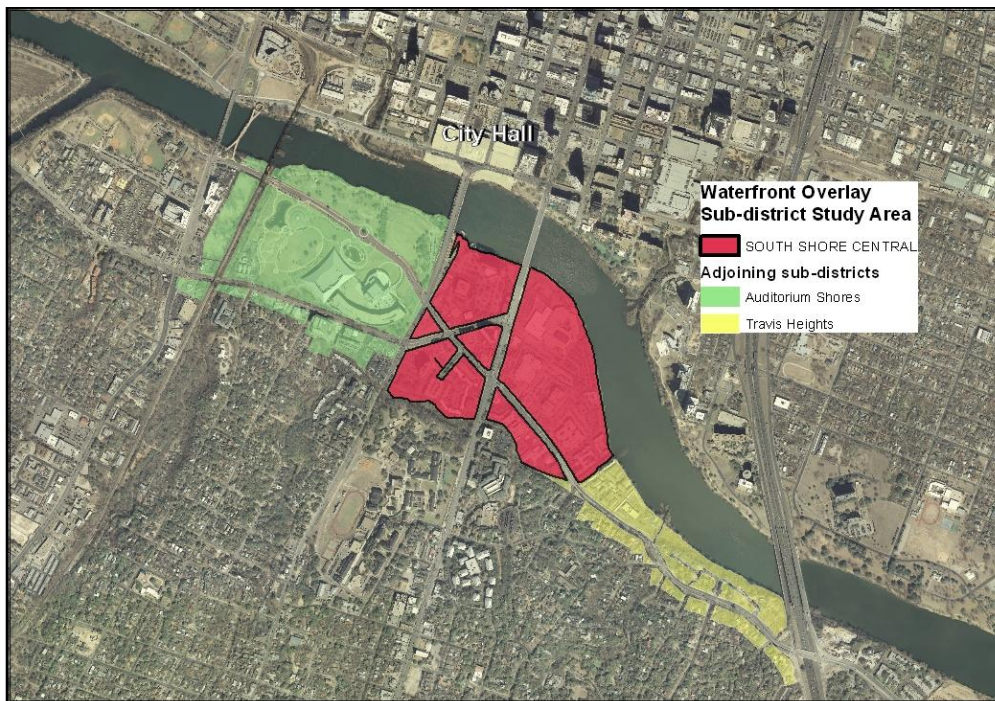
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PROBLEM STATEMENT & ISSUES ANALYSIS

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**STUDY AREA: WATERFRONT OVERLAY SUB-DISTRICTS**

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Lady Bird Lake: Waterfront Overlay Study Area

The Auditorium Shores (green), South Shore Central (red) and Travis Heights (yellow) sub-districts of the Lady Bird Lake Waterfront Overlay District are roughly bounded by South Lamar Boulevard on the west, I-35 on the east, Town Lake on the north, and East Riverside Drive, East Bouldin Creek, and Barton Springs Road on the south.

The 2000 South Shore Central/Travis Heights Developments Standards Study noted that these sub-districts “are experiencing increased development pressure, and there is concern that the provisions of the City of Austin Land Development Code and Waterfront Overlay District are not adequate to guide development in a way that will fully achieve the goals of the Town Lake Corridor Study prepared in the mid-1980s.” That is as likely as true today, if not more so, than it was in 2000. For instance, the press reported on November 12, 2011 that a key 1.4 acre parcel in the heart of South Shore Central is being advertised for sale in the Wall Street Journal and beyond.

## BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

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### ▪ PHYSICAL/ENVIRONMENTAL

#### □ **Disrupted Street Patterns & Pedestrian Disconnections:**

- The area is characterized by a random assembly of land uses, building types that are generally one or two stories, and parking lots. Significantly scaled buildings (One Texas Center, Hyatt Hotel, TexDot office building) are separated and disconnected from the street. Generally, sidewalks are narrow, on the curb line, and contain few plantings or streetscape amenities.
- The east-west cross-streets (Riverside Drive and Barton Springs Road) and the north-south streets (Congress Street and South First Street) are used as major arterials, making for traffic conflicts and a generally pedestrian hostile atmosphere. Moreover, the large “X” pattern that is created by the crossing of the east-west streets exacerbates traffic conflicts and a general sense of disorientation. The area is composed of superblocks, adding to the overall lack of place and lack of human scale.
- Because much of the development in the area pre-dated the implementation of the Town Lake Corridor Study and resulting code, a significant length of the shoreline is inaccessible to the public, creating a missing link in the nearly continuous loop of lakeside trails. This missing link is being addressed by the development of the Boardwalk (see Contextual Information and attachments). It is anticipated that the construction of the Boardwalk will encourage more pedestrian use of the existing shoreline trail through the area. As usage along the shore increases, however, making better connections to the shore from upland areas of the sub-district will become even more important.

#### □ **Lack of infrastructure:**

- Because of its historic location in the flood plain the South Shore Central area did not develop the same level of infrastructure as the downtown and surrounding neighborhoods. With improvements to the lake, flooding became less of an issue, spurring the development in the 1970's of the hotels and state office building. However, the level of public infrastructure is generally lacking to serve as a strong framework for more intensive development.



▪ **SOCIAL**

□ **Housing & Affordability:**

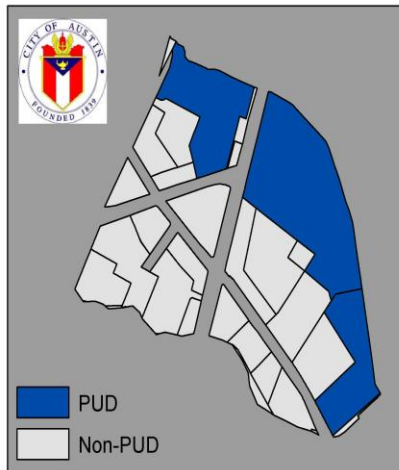
- The South Shore Central area is identified in *Imagine Austin* (the new comprehensive plan, pending adoption) as a part of the Regional Growth Center, implying, among other things, that residential uses should be encouraged. As Austin continues to grow at robust rates, more housing options in the central city will become increasingly in demand and important for maintaining economic vitality and reducing traffic. The lack of affordable housing in the central city is already a critical issue, and will become ever more challenging in the future. The Waterfront Planning Advisory Board is charged with crafting recommendations for providing development bonus provisions for the Waterfront Overlay that will provide community benefits. All other development bonus provisions currently in effect or under study in Austin include provisions for affordable housing as part of the community benefits. At the same time, the development bonus provisions, so far, have had mixed results in creating affordable housing, and there is a growing appreciation that there is no “one size fits all” approach that will work, economically, in all areas in Austin. As Austin considers crafting a development bonus provision for this area, it will likely need to consider how to address affordable housing as a community benefit, and the calibration for how that might work will have to be customized for market realities and development challenges specific to South Shore Central.

□ **Managing urban development & maintaining compatibility with neighborhoods:**

- As Austin grows, there are the inevitable growing pains of finding the proper balance between accommodating change and development, and maintain the integrity of existing neighborhoods. These tensions are especially pronounced with development along the waterfront as the desirability of a lakefront location for new projects is sometimes seen as competing with preserving scenic beauty and public access. The scale of a 1999 development proposal in South Shore Central, the Gotham project, especially triggered a strong community reaction. The project ultimately failed to materialize, but not before rousing a sense of alarm and, perhaps, leaving behind a lingering sense of caution about development in this area in particular. In addition, Austin has a strong tradition of neighborhood planning, and Austin values its neighborhood organizations. Adopted neighborhood plans sometimes encompass and overlay adjacent planning areas, as is the case with South Shore Central and the adjacent neighborhoods of Bouldin Creek and South River City, which can pose additional challenges in considering regulations for South Shore Central.

▪ **ECONOMIC**

**Existing/Approved Site Plans & PUD's:**



Three significant parcels locked in entitlements through a Planned Unit Development (PUD) process before the creation of the Waterfront Overlay. The existing PUD agreements leave little room to negotiate future development options on these parcels. Additionally, the PUD option is still an available option, leaving both the community and land owners with uncertainty as to how future development might actually be realized. One challenge that's inherent in the assignment to the WPAB to create development bonus provisions is to craft bonus entitlements that are attractive enough and predictable for developers in order to steer them away from using existing PUD entitlements, or from seeking the PUD option, while making the bonus community benefits significant enough to address community needs and aspirations.

**Ordinances are confusing and unpredictable for the community and the developer:**

- The current regulatory structure in the South Shore Central presents several challenges. For one, there are overlapping regulations and plans including: the underlying base zoning, the overlaid neighborhood plans, neighborhood compatibility standards (which places building height restrictions within 540 feet of single family houses), commercial design standards, urban watershed protection standards, and the waterfront overlay ordinance itself, to name a few. The PUD remains an option which opens up the flexibility to many site development regulations in order to provide superior development than could otherwise be achieved, and for properties characterized by special circumstances that warrant this designation. However, the judgments for deciding "superior development" and "special circumstances" is unpredictable for both the community and the developer, and can often set up confrontational tensions as well.

## SCOPE OF ISSUES

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The list of issues identified below is not exhaustive, and they often overlap with other concerns not named. However, this list is useful as a beginning point for consideration:

▪ **ENVIROMENTAL**

- **Water Quality/quantity:** The 1985 Town Lake Corridor Study listed "Protect and improve the water quality of Town Lake to the highest possible standards" as its first overall goal. In relation to South Shore Central, are the current setbacks from the shoreline and urban creek, and the associated site plan standards, adequate to achieve the highest possible water quality? How can existing codes be strengthened, clarified, and enforced? How can storm water runoff be better managed with green infrastructure, reduction of impervious surface, rain garden detention, rainwater harvesting, and other strategies? What design strategies are appropriate for public right-of-way improvements, and what strategies are

- best employed on private property? How can requirements or incentives be embedded into the ordinance, and how might bonus development requirements come into play?
- **Transit and land use:** Coordinating with the latest thinking from the urban rail project, evaluate the opportunities with the proposed rail bridge and first-phase rail implementation south of the lake to assess impacts and opportunities on land use. What are the implications for land use and urban design to make the future rail stops vital hubs of pedestrian activity and connectivity? How can all modes of transportation (vehicular, urban rail, bus, bike, pedestrian, recreational trail) be balanced and accommodated? Given the superblock structure, what strategies can be employed to promote more connectivity, especially for pedestrians? How might some of the community benefit strategies above be included in a bonus development ordinance?
  - **SOCIAL**
    - **Housing and affordability:** What scale and types of housing and/or mixed-use development are appropriate for the area? How can affordable housing be promoted? How might development bonus provisions be calibrated for this area that provide incentives to developers which are based in market/development realities while maximizing the community benefit of achieving affordable housing?
    - **Public Spaces:** How can pedestrian connectivity be enhanced to the Town Lake Park on Auditorium Shores, and to the lake trails? How can the streetscape be enhanced to lend a greater sense of the streets as public spaces instead of arterial thoroughfares? What opportunities are there for creating public nodes or pocket parks within the core of South Shore Central? How might development bonus provisions be crafted to entice the development of public accessible spaces on private property?
  - **ECONOMIC**
    - **Revitalization:** The 1985 Town Lake Corridor Study listed as a major goal to “Foster a cooperative atmosphere in the corridor for the City, neighborhoods, and private landowners to work jointly to realize [the] potential of the waterfront.” How can South Shore Central serve as a model to achieve this goal? How can ongoing and planned public improvements and private reinvestment be coordinated to synergize for maximum effect to achieve community benefits? How might a development bonus regulation assist in this goal?
    - **Public policy/planning:** How can the array of planning that has been accomplished or is currently underway for South Shore Central and adjacent areas (relevant waterfront planning and neighborhood planning; urban rail; Town Lake Park) and the City’s sustainability initiatives be integrated to resolve potential conflicts and prioritize common goals? As the WPAB works with developing potential development bonus provisions, what community benefit goals, as City policy, should be addressed, prioritized or required?



## **OBJECTIVES OF THE SDAT PROCESS**

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The Objectives of the SDAT include:

- ✓ Review and assess the work of the Waterfront Planning Advisory Board's work to date
- ✓ Provide the vehicle to convene stakeholders and catalyze local resources to participate in the assessment
- ✓ Utilize the SDAT process to forge stronger relationships between the neighborhood, City, educational partners, local design community, nonprofits, businesses and other agencies
- ✓ Provide independent recommendations for creating effective development bonus provisions

The primary study area for the SDAT:

- ✓ In order to concentrate the efforts and issues, the study area for the SDAT will focus on the South Shore Central sub-district – which, arguably, has the most potential for and will likely face the most intensive redevelopment prospects. The characteristic of this sub-district is primarily commercial.
- ✓ To maintain a holistic evaluation and to foster connectivity, the adjacent waterfront overlay sub-districts to South Shore Center will be considered as well.

The goals of the SDAT are to provide ideas that:

- ✓ Build upon foundational waterfront planning, policies and ordinances
- ✓ Provide maximum visual and physical access to the waterfront
- ✓ Create superior planning, design and mixing of land uses that are waterfront dependent or waterfront related, sympathetic to the water's edge of the Lady Bird Lake Corridor and the urban creeks
- ✓ Improve zoning in the Lady Bird Lake Corridor and along the urban creeks to achieve maximum pedestrian scale and extraordinary urban design
- ✓ Require all city land uses, construction projects, programs and operations to achieve the highest degree of compatibility with Lady Bird Lake
- ✓ Improve multi-modal transit corridors within the South Shore Central planning area

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**PROJECT ORGANIZATION: LOCAL CAPACITY & RESOURCES**

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**STEERING COMMITTEE**

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Neighborhood Representative  
We have engaged to have a neighborhood representative serve on the SDAT Steering Committee, but as of the application deadline, we have not confirmed an appointment. We will fill this position as soon as possible.

Brook Bailey  
Waterfront Planning Advisory Board representative  
(512) 391-1635  
[Bbailey\\_wab@sbcglobal.com](mailto:Bbailey_wab@sbcglobal.com)

Robert Pilgrim, ASLA  
Waterfront Planning Advisory Board representative  
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[The Steering Committee may add additional members as the project unfolds to ensure wide participation and support.]

## **EDUCATIONAL PARTNER**

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Contact Information for Educational Partner:

Dean Almy, architect  
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A commitment letter of support from the Professor Almy is included in the appendix.

The area to be studied in the SDAT, South Shore Central, has already been the subject of a number of academic inquiries organized by The University of Texas at Austin School of Architecture, including an advanced design studio in the spring of 2011, in which architecture, urban design and landscape architecture students developed proposals for the urbanization of the district. In addition the school co-sponsored, along with Landscape Architecture Forum, and the Landscape Forms company, a three day charrette event in which twenty of the top young landscape architects from around the country worked with Professor Almy and two of the leading practitioners of landscape architecture in the country: Sarah Kuehl from Peter Walker and Partners, and Susannah Drake from DLand Studio in New York, to develop visions of the area. The School of Architecture provided all necessary base drawings, three-dimensional computer models and geographic information system data for the event, and will make available any necessary base information to the SDAT.

To continue The University of Texas at Austin's commitment to promoting excellence for the South Shore Center area, graduate students enrolled in the urban design program will be actively involved in the event as requested, helping to provide base documentation and analysis, and with design assistance during the actual SDAT visit. Professor Dean Almy, who will serve on the SDAT Steering Committee, also will coordinate with other faculty and students in urban design and in landscape architecture to explore how they might contribute to the SDAT process by using South Shore Central in class work or as participants, and to find ways to encourage students throughout the UT School of Architecture to participate in SDAT studio sessions.

## **COMMUNICATIONS & MEDIA OUTREACH PLAN**

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The City of Austin has assigned Jill Goodman, a project manager in the Corporate Communications and Public Information Office, to provide a direct link to corporate services and resources, and to guide the Communications Implementation Team:



**Communications Implementation Team:** Representatives from the Steering Committee including the Waterfront Planning Advisory Board, with support and consultation from City staff, AIA team and project partners.

**Communications Strategy & Approach:** Effective communication is critical to the success of any project, especially a project in the heart of Austin that harbors immense potential. Elements of the strategy include:

- **Research and Prepare:** Review area history and best practices for similar projects.
- **Desired Outcomes & Metrics** for overall project and communications efforts.
- **Target Audiences & Stakeholders** for public engagement and partnerships.
- **Roles & Responsibilities:** Clarify roles of the project team, Steering Committee, Waterfront Planning Advisory Board, City staff, AIA team, stakeholders, the general public and various advisory and appointed bodies. Discuss ideas and expectations about project-team communications surrounding the project.
- **Community Outreach & Engagement:** Deliver key messages in appropriate ways to target audiences and plan for public participation early on, and ongoing, to ensure the project reflects priorities and needs of the community.
- **Steering Committee engagement:** Consider presentation “Road Shows” and other methods for leaders to champion the project with stakeholders and the community.
- **Media Outreach:** Proactive and reactive strategies, talking points, and identify and prep spokespersons, such as chair of the local Steering Committee, and leadership supporters.
- **Internal Communications:** Utilize internal resources to engage key departments and employees.
- **Assess and Reflect** project progress at the end, and also along the way to quickly address shortcomings and celebrate (and communicate) successes.

### Communications Vehicles

The City of Austin's Corporate Communications and Public Information Office will provide corporate services and resources, which include:

- **Community Engagement:** In-person and Web meeting facilitation, mediation, dedicated phone, e-mail and drop-boxes for comments, and *SpeakUpAustin*, an online tool where a topic is posted for comment.
- **Media Relations Team** regularly meets with local journalists and builds relationships. Project may utilize news releases/media advisories, news conferences and targeted media outreach. The City's Comprehensive Media List is up-to-date with 100-plus media outlets.
- **Graphic Design**, including campaign visual design concepts and collateral materials.
- **Website**, including content planning, copy editing, photo galleries and blog hosting.
- **Video**, including “CityView” segments, PSAs, YouTube and Bulletin Board slides.
- **Social Media**, including Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, HootSuite, YouTube and more.
- **Internal Communications**, such as CitySource e-newsletter, Official Distribution and internal website.
- **Various Outlets:** E-blasts to project interest list, listservs, community newsletters and calendars, and neighborhood contacts.

Upon receiving the grant, the Communications Team would work with the Project Team to develop a phased approach in line with the scope of the project. A more detailed tactical plan would identify potential challenges/opportunities and outline key marketing and communications objectives, strategies and tactics.

**BUDGET & FUNDING**

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We anticipate working with AIA to cover team expenses (travel and lodging) within the \$15,000 grant allowance from the AIA. The information in Tables 1 & 2 below represents local commitments secured at the time of grant submission, and includes an estimate of how the local contribution might be used. We are confident that we can raise additional funds and in-kind support upon securing the grant.

<b>Table 1: Income Sponsors</b>	
Source	Amount
AIA SDAT Program grant	\$15,000
City of Austin	\$5,000
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$20,000</b>

<b>Table 2: In-Kind Support</b>	
Source	Type of Support
City of Austin	GIS mapping, copies, meeting space, photography, videography. Staff support from Departments of: Planning & Development, Public Works, Economic Growth & Redevelopment, Watershed Protection, Parks & Recreation, and Public Information Office.
University of Texas, School of Architecture	Base mapping & analysis, student/faculty participation and support
AIA Austin	Advocacy, meeting space, participation from membership to assist with facilitation, SDAT events

**SDAT PROJECT TIMELINE**

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Preliminary Assessment Visit: January/February 2012  
 SDAT Team Visit: April/May 2012  
 Follow-up and Final Report: September 2012

The proposed timeline provides an opportunity for our educational partner to assist with background assessment in support of the SDAT process within the spring 2012 semester. More important, the

proposed timeline will provide the Waterfront Planning Advisory Board with input at this critical juncture of their work.

Upon receiving the grant, the Steering Committee will work with the AIA/Center for Communities staff to refine the timeline and prepare for the Preliminary Assessment Visit. The Preliminary Assessment Visit would be used, in part, work in conjunction with the Steering Committee, the Waterfront Planning Advisory Board, city staff and other stakeholders to refine the scope of work and timing for the SDAT Team visit.

## **SUPPLEMENTAL DOCUMENTS & ATTACHMENTS**

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- **LETTERS OF SUPPORT**
  - Austin City Council Resolution
  - AIA Austin
  - University of Texas @ Austin, School of Architecture
  - Urban Land Institute Austin
  
- **MAPS & IMAGES**
  - Maps:
    - Waterfront Overlay Combined District
    - Study Area: South Shore Central sub-district
    - City of Austin Proposed Urban Rail System
    - Boardwalk Trail at Lady Bird Lake
    - Study Area and Neighborhood Planning Areas
    - Bouldin Creek Neighborhood Future Land Use
    - Greater South River City Neighborhood Planning Area Future Land Use
    - South Shore Central sub-district Parcel Ownership
    - Downtown Austin Public Improvement District
  - Images:
    - Photos from study area
    - SketchUp view of study area
    - Auditorium Shores: current and proposed
    - Boardwalk Trail concept image
  
- **PLANNING DOCUMENTS**
  - 1985 Town Lake Corridor Study
  - 1986 Waterfront Overlay Combining District ordinance
  - 1999 (revised) Waterfront Overlay Combining District ordinance
  - 1999 Austin Town Lake Park Master Plan
  - 2000 Austin Town Lake Corridor Study for South Shore Central/Travis Heights
  - 2007 Waterfront Overlay Task Force Report
  - 2009 Waterfront Planning Advisory Board ordinance
  - Bouldin Creek Neighborhood Plan introduction
  - Greater South River City Combined Neighborhood Plan introduction