

DESIGN CONCEPT SUMMARY

SUMMARY STATEMENT

A vibrant, green future for Austin requires that we protect and enhance the natural assets that sustain healthy urban living. Our design proposal is structured around two intertwined efforts, the transformation of Waller Creek into an OASIS in every sense of the word, and the cultivation of creekshed communities that express an authentic and symbiotic relationship with the Creek.

Our approach to creating the Oasis is to apply minimal interventions that “speed up or slow down the process of nature” to maximize ecosystem services that benefit the people of Austin. In this way we, like farmers, take on the role of time as we reshape the land, cleanse the water and harness the creekshed’s sustainable resources to grow an unforgettable Oasis experience along Waller Creek.

The transformation of Waller Creek will be a dynamic process, guided by the concepts laid out in this proposal, but flexible to respond to emergent opportunities. Our designs are built from a simple collection of practices that constitute the “farmer’s toolbox.”

- **Earthwork:** Terraces, Living Walls and Bioengineering
- **Irrigation:** Smart Stormwater, Reclaimed Waters and Water Towers
- **Shade:** Big Trees, Solar Canopies and Darkness
- **Growth:** Adaptation Palettes, Designed Experiments and Urban Agriculture
- **Celebrations:** Walkway, Platforms and Playscapes

This competition will yield many exciting ideas, but in the end the Conservancy and the City will have to move forward on a more modest course of action and an important question will be, ‘what should we do first?’ Our thinking is that the core creek cleanup and reforestation is the highest priority and the best use of initial funds to have the most catalytic impact toward implementing the vision. This first step will be key to changing public perception about Waller Creek. Until the public can see a vision, it will be difficult to muster political and financial support. Our proposal begins with the Cypress Walk, an unforgettable journey on an elevated walkway along the bottom of the Creek. As its first project, the Cypress Walk forms the very heart of the Oasis.

DESIGN CONCEPT SUMMARY (CONT.)

After The Cypress Walk is implemented, many open spaces and redevelopment possibilities will emerge. Our proposal includes four major park improvements starting at the north with Waterloo Park and working our way south through Music Bend, Palm Park and Lady Bird Park. These could come online independently and in any order as resources and community interest take hold. Our proposal also describes four redevelopment scenarios that could be catalyzed by investing in Waller Creek.

Waterloo Park is where the impact of the Waller Creek Tunnel is most apparent. The park is centered on the inlet structure and pool, but we will use a large new landform to tame the structure and shift the focus to an outdoor theater under the trees. A great Waterloo Park will be even better for festivals and will stimulate redevelopment of the “Waterloo West” blocks on the other side of Trinity Street.

Music Bend becomes an extension of the Red River music scene. We propose that it be located on the public lands bound on the west by Waller Creek, north and south by 9th and 7th Streets and the east by an extended and narrowed Sabine Street. This park, dedicated to the dissemination of music knowledge and appreciation, would be most readily implemented in conjunction with redevelopment of the “Music Lofts” blocks to the east once the police station and other city functions are relocated. Music Bend is also the terminus of the Sabine Market Street and is punctuated by a water tower overlook and pavilion.

Palm Park is arguably the most critically needed open space along Waller Creek. Once a haven for East Austin families, it was a casualty of the expansion of East Avenue into I-35. Palm Park should be a public water playscape, which will make it an attractive destination for families. Palm Park is the southern terminus of the Sabine Market Street and is punctuated by a water tower overlook integrated into the Hydro Center, a proposed adaptive reuse of the Palm School as an outdoor education basecamp. Redevelopment of the hotel site and lands to the north of the park will create active edges for the park and residents of the near East Side. The new “Zona Saltillo” development would be particularly well situated to enjoy this new swimming hole.

Lady Bird Park at the confluence of Waller Creek and Lady Bird Lake. Here, the Waller Creek Tunnel again has a significant impact. We will reorient attention on the delta where the landscape opens up, to allow a diversity of immersive experiences, from bird watching and nature walks to urban farming and large family gatherings. As Lady Bird Park comes to life, a new mixed-use neighborhood, “Chavez South,” building on the diversity of the Rainey Street district, could grow along Cesar Chavez Street.