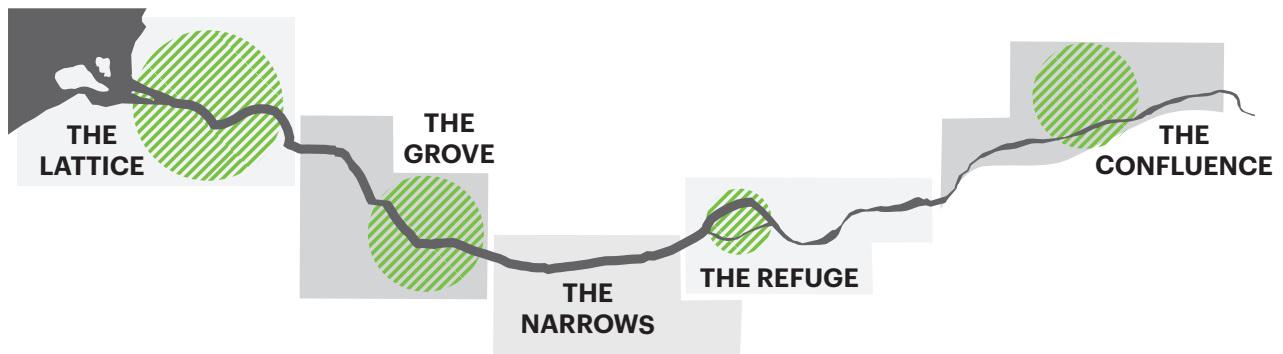


# DESIGN CONCEPT SUMMARY - MVVA TEAM



The Waller Creek project presents designers with an urbanist's dream: a diverse and complex city fabric is the starting point for a process of discovering how to reach the peak of this city's potential for fostering a high quality of life. We begin with what is given to us by Waller Creek now – all its messy and difficult constraints. Utilizing no cookie cutter ideas, we simply let the city, the citizens, and the creek itself implicitly suggest each intricate and site-specific design move while we designers listen closely.

What does the hidden, enclosed, unsafe channel of Waller Creek say it needs? What does the Brackenridge/ Waterloo Park area, with its hulking Waller Creek Tunnel infrastructure, cry out for? What does the Red River club scene ask of the new park? What would animate and make most pleasurable the Convention Center and nearby hotels? What does the beloved Lady Bird Lake wish the creek to become? What kinds of park places best meet the needs and wants of the unique people who reside in this hot, humid, funky, outdoor-living, multi-cultural, football- and party-loving town?

We believe that there are four basic answers to these questions: open up, connect, energize, and honor.

**Open Up:** Open up the creek to the city. Widen its path and shoreline wherever possible. Make entry easy. Create gradual slopes down to it often. Make its waters, structures, and trees a spectacle in the city and wonderful to occupy. Make the whole park a seamlessly felt, seen, and alluring central destination.

**Connect:** Assemble the complex mosaic of contiguous city areas from UT all the way to Lady Bird Lake and from East to West Austin, not only with the central Waller walkway and Parks but also with ten beautiful new bridges. Build up urbanity itself—the coming together of diverse and stimulating activities and people in a thick, condensed geography. Make concert-goers aware that a shady grove is just downstream; inform parents that just upstream of their child's school is a great place to kick a soccer ball; and so on.

**Energize:** Use every opportunity to create larger singular landscape places, each with its distinctive, city-site-specific pleasurable activities: the five parks of Waller Creek. These areas—for activities such as concerts, public events, resting in the shade, and learning about the creek's flora and fauna—will be places where people linger before being lured along to the next destination. Each will have its own spectacular quality — its “wow” — complementing the otherwise understated beauty of Waller Creek as we reimagine it. In each, that archetypal urban experience — people-watching — will stimulate civic participation and unity.

**Honor:** Honor the past of Austin, of Waller Creek, and of the many generations of engineers and builders who erected a stone wall here and an elegant bridge there. Preserve and renovate these marks of the past so that history is present, not erased and forgotten. Similarly, honor and expand the previously established social spaces along the creek, for example the concert lawn of Waterloo Park.

The design concept expands a renewed Waller Creek into a Chain of Parks embedded in five connected districts: The Lattice, The Grove, The Narrows, The Refuge, and The Confluence.

## THE LATTICE

A lattice of six lightweight and easily deployable trail bridges spans the mouth of Waller Creek and forms the southernmost link of the Chain. Pedestrians traversing the Lattice are treated to views extending both across and below the network of bridges, fostering a sense of public connectivity among visitors and inviting exploration of the Creek mouth “terrarium” beneath their feet. A floating pontoon bridge connects the mouth of Waller Creek to a proposed extension of the south shore Lady Bird Lake boardwalk, opening to span the lake twice a day. Situated at the liminal space between Lake and Creek, the Lattice becomes a vital green link between downtown, East Austin, and the Hike and Bike Trail, and inspires an entirely new set of rituals for walking, running, biking, socializing and commuting.

## THE GROVE

While the linearly connected pieces of the Lattice encourage movement forwards, backwards and above, the Grove offers a place for pause in the form of an open-air “room”. A new grove of live oaks fills a broad slope descending from street level to the creek. Locally quarried block is used as the formwork for the concrete walls lining the cut, offering shaded pedestrian coves. The Grove hosts a tremendous variety of community programs, both planned and spontaneous, including movie nights, open-air markets and outdoor exhibitions. The concurrent renewal of the Palm School, which will serve as the new home of the Waller Creek Conservancy, ensures that the area becomes an essential destination for East Austin’s kids and for the growing residential community downtown. A new cluster of play spaces that appeal to different age groups is added along the north side of the building, and the existing pool is renovated for use by young children. A new pavilion flanked by palm trees marks a family-friendly procession through the Grove to Waller Creek. Immediately adjacent to Palm Park, a spectacular, curving, many-branched aerial pedestrian connection links the park and trails to Lady Bird Lake. As a counterpart to the shady recesses of the oak-filled Grove, this accessible open-air bridge weaves through the Waller Creek tree canopy.

## THE NARROWS

At the center of the chain lies the Narrows, an area of new development along the banks of Waller Creek, enabled by the tunnel project’s elimination of the threat of flood. Following the cues of the Boiling Pot balcony and Easy Tiger patio, creek-facing properties may make use of new opportunities for outdoor seating, retail and art spaces within the existing architecture lining the creek. The spatial configuration of the Narrows incentivizes new development while maintaining the character of the Austin patio lifestyle. The IH-35 embankment between 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Streets will be replaced in-situ by an open viaduct, greatly improving east-west connectivity and doubling parking capacity between 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Streets. All four lots are enclosed by a programmable LED “media mesh”, which can display festival events, announce the night’s concerts, and present time, weather, and local attractions while reinforcing vital connections between East Austin and downtown.

## THE REFUGE

Presenting a unique opportunity for discovery and exploration, the Habitat Refuge - an extended 8<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge - offers a distinctive model for the way in which new urban infrastructure can sustain rather than weaken the natural environment in which it sits. The bridge pier is engineered as an “ecological machine” that treats

stormwater from the roadway and adjacent development before discharging it into a wetland habitat, alluringly housed in a sculptural structure that hosts explorations of creek habitat led by local educational programs. Complementing the refuge is an island park in the creek, created by seizing the opportunity offered by the imminent relocation of the Austin Police Headquarters. A flat, commodious island created by splitting Waller Creek north of 8<sup>th</sup> Street offers year-round park activities and accommodates small planned events.

## THE CONFLUENCE

Also responding to and engaging the introduction of the Waller Creek Tunnel into the landscape, but in a wholly different way, is the final link in the chain, the Confluence. The concrete vane for the tunnel approach channel is used as a structural support for a new lawn that floats out over the water, reclaiming parkland that would be otherwise lost to the tunnel project. A rebuilt 12<sup>th</sup> Street bridge creates space for a bicycle trail and pedestrian walks embedded within a cypress wetland that includes a constructed spring out of which Waller Creek flows. Seemingly floating atop the tunnel inlet structure is the Poppy, a lightweight and luminous bandshell pavilion that creates a new icon for Austin and diversifies music programming in the park. The Poppy is itself the site of confluence: a coming together of water, landscape, music and people, staking its claim as a premier center of public life of Austin.

Connecting each link of the chain are the banks of Waller Creek itself, which have inscribed upon them the physical history of city-building in Austin. To both preserve the historical character of the creek and better sustain the regional ecologies, durable bioengineering techniques and a native plant palette are employed along the banks of the creek, which is now entirely accessible from north to south. At places where the old creek masonry walls have dignity and durability, they are conserved as embodiments of local history. Invigorating the life of the creek and anchoring it firmly in the present are artist Oscar Tuazon’s *Water Wheels*. Kinetic installations near the 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Streets tunnel inlets, the wheels rotate on bearings just below the creek surface. The wheels indicate the fluctuation of water levels, translate the creek flow into animation and sound at street level, and soften the tone of the tunnel inlet structures, all the while reminding visitors of the ceaseless energy and forward movement of the creek itself.