

The “New” Downtown Austin

Downtown Austin is the heart of the great city, and it’s changing with the growth that Austin is experiencing. We have seen an extreme makeover, with the addition of new housing, retail, and new opportunities to its existing employment.

Some of the questions that have been proposed are how will this change be sustainable over the next 25 years? What is the vision of the community for tomorrow’s Downtown? How can Downtown help create new opportunities for quality of life and growth locally?

The Downtown Austin Plan is planned to capture and develop new and better way of life locally and throughout the region. This period of transition will bring class and convenience to its citizens for years to come.

While the market for Downtown housing is rocketing upward, the area continues to struggle to compete with remote areas to maintain its share of the commercial (office and retail) market. A Downtown too dominated by office space was hard hit by prior downturns in the local economic cycle; a new Downtown, dominated by upscale housing, would likewise suffer in a future burst. A combination of the two will create a base of community support, changes that are still needed, and points the way for how Downtown should develop in the years to come.

The following issues are highlights of this project:

- Modernizing the city’s development codes governing height and density
- Developing new funding mechanisms to support Downtown infrastructure
- Planning for rail and bus transit routes and stations and integrating Downtown planning with the Transit-Oriented Development planning area established around the Convention Center
- Establishing programs and procedures for making government-owned land available for private or joint development
- Identifying strategies to increase the viability of affordable/workforce housing the Downtown residential mix
- Working with a broad range of stakeholders, including public- and private-sector landowners and employers, neighborhood associations, parks and environmental advocates, historic preservations, and affordable housing advocates and providers

The Downtown Austin Retail Market Strategy, provides framework for the development of a strong retail component in downtown Austin, strengthening the existing retail base and adding complementary new development. The City of Austin partnered with the Downtown Austin Alliance to develop the Downtown Austin Retail Market Strategy, a nearly yearlong study employing nationally recognized retail consultants, in association with local firms and local steering committee.