

1.1 Plan Purpose

Introduction

The 1980 San Antonio Master Plan and the 1997 comprehensive Master Plan Policies organize the City into geographic planning sub-areas, and define policies to guide urban growth and change within each area. The central planning area of the City is the Downtown, the historic heart of San Antonio. As mapped in the 1997 Master Plan, the Downtown includes not only the original civic and mixed-use core, but also the first ring of pre-1900 neighborhoods that surround it. Thus, the Downtown Planning Area is further divided into five “neighborhoods”, as shown in the diagram on the right.

The Central Neighborhood is commonly, and typologically, known as the Downtown District, and for clarity will be referred to as such throughout this document, and in some cases simply “Downtown”. It is the North Neighborhood – the area between the Downtown District and the I35 and I37 expressways to the north and east – that is the subject of this master plan. Because the San Antonio River flows through this area into Downtown, and because that reach of the River – the Museum Reach – is currently being improved as an impetus for change in this area, the new name River North has been coined for this 377 acre planning area.

While the Downtown District and the South Neighborhood have significant populations of businesses, residents and historic buildings, River North is substantially under utilized.

The impetus and inspiration for this urban transformation comes largely from two sources. First, thanks to the relentless efforts of key civic leaders and the support of the City, County, and River Authority and others, the long-discussed extension of San Antonio River Improvements into the Museum Reach north of Downtown is now coming to fruition. Second, local engineer Andres Andujar saw the potential for those River Improvements to catalyze private reinvestment in the Downtown’s North Neighborhood, and recognized that the pattern, type and quality of such development would be critical to maximizing the value of the significant public investment in the River Improvements.

Mr. Andujar volunteered his time and that of his staff to produce graphic presentations of the development potential of River North, and pitched this idea to anyone who would listen for the next two years. His enthusiasm and clear view of the possibilities were contagious, and with the help of the Downtown Alliance and the City of San Antonio he led the formation of the Downtown San Antonio Community Development Corporation (CDC) to act as a partner with the City in preparing and implementing the River North Master Plan, as well as the formation of the River North Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone to help finance the planning work and infrastructure improvements for River North. This River North Master Plan has been prepared as a “neighborhood plan”, to inspire and guide the transformation of River North.

This Master Plan shall not constitute the basis for, or the authorization of, the use of eminent domain. It is not the intent of this Plan to utilize eminent domain for the following purposes:
a) public park land and/or open space;
b) public parking structures; and
c) private use.

Purpose

The purpose of this Master Plan is to define a clear vision and policy direction for the future of River North and to define a clear path to achieving that vision. A Master Plan is conceptual in nature and is utilized by stakeholders as a guide to inform the decision-making process. The strategy for fulfilling this the Plan purpose consists of four main elements, which the three chapters of this Master Plan describe in detail.

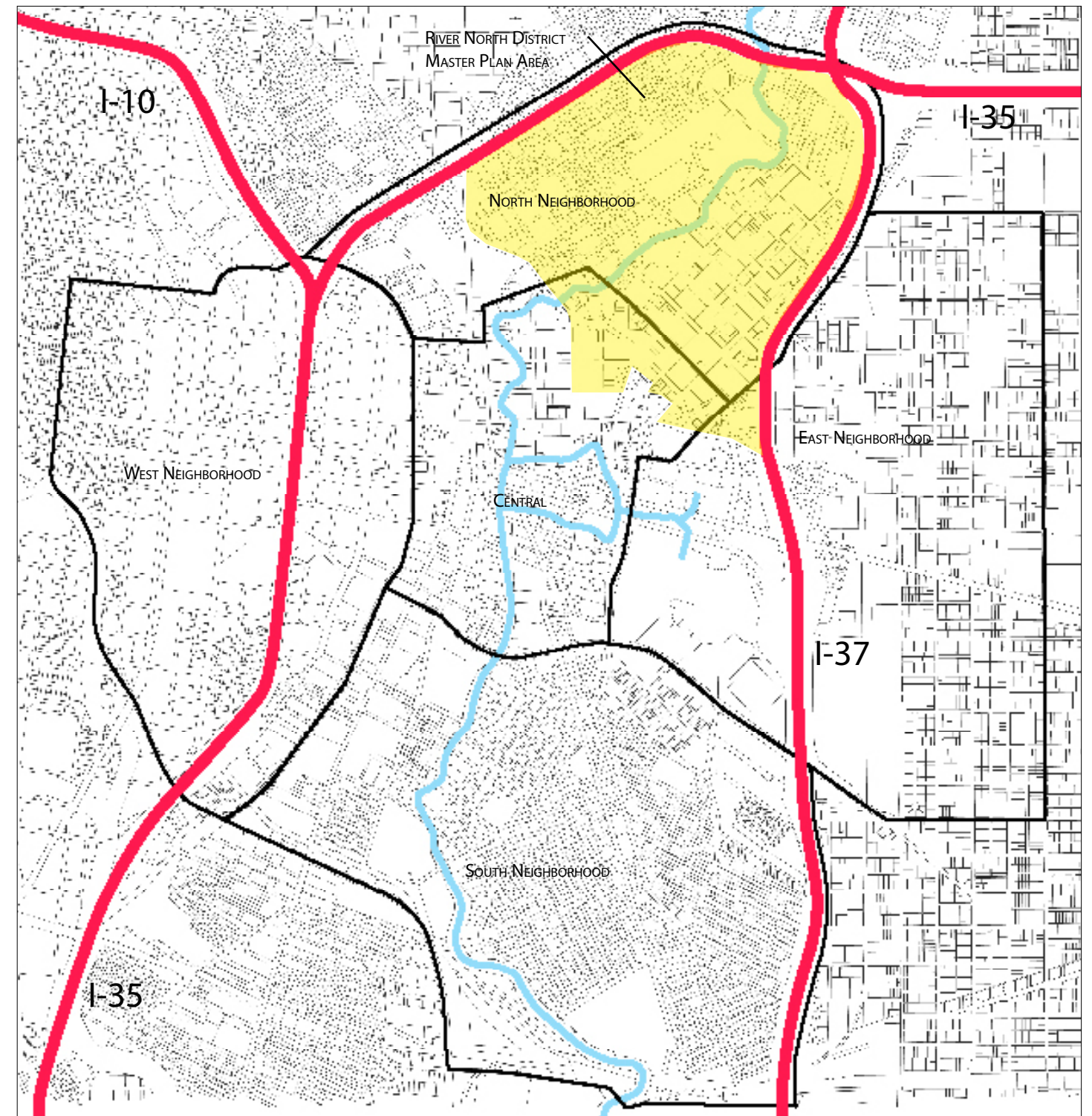
Chapter 1 describes the planning process, including research and analysis of the existing place, interviews, workshops and design Charrette whereby the people of San Antonio and of River North were engaged in developing a vision for River North. From that process 10 big ideas emerged:

1. Leverage the River Improvements;
2. Create mixed-income mixed-use urban residential neighborhoods;
3. Invest in great streets and public spaces;
4. Implement the plan through public/private cooperation;
5. Create lively arts districts;
6. Establish effective transit, including the River Bus and Street Trolley;
7. Form a ‘Park-Once’ utility;
8. Plan for a full range of neighborhood-serving uses;
9. Guide incremental development through a form-based code;
10. Deliver sustainable projects and places

Chapter 2 presents the future vision for River North in terms of a series of catalytic transformations of specific places throughout River North. Each of these envisioned transformations integrates improvements to the public realm – the streets, parks and other public spaces of River North – with improvements to the private properties and buildings, such that the value of public and private investments support and leverage one another.

Chapter 3 focuses on the implementation strategy for the proposed transformation, and organizes that extensive work into feasible increments of action and investment by a host of public and private entities. Strategies for financing and coordinating those activities are outlined in some detail, forming a foundation for the on-going management of the complex urban regeneration process.

The fourth component of the overall strategy is aimed at achieving private investment through the preparation and adoption of a form-based code and the corresponding zoning. This code is to be a separate document from the Master Plan and, along with good design is expected to clearly and efficiently enable the vision expressed for River North.



The River North Area in the context of downtown San Antonio