

2.1 VISION AND PLAN

River North Master Plan

Mindful of the River’s central position and role in the City, civic leaders have long intended to extend the amenity of a pedestrian-oriented River corridor to the north and to the south from the RiverWalk itself. Through the advocacy and energy of political, civic and design leaders in the community, this long-discussed notion has manifested itself as the urban segment of the Museum Reach portion of the River Improvements Project, extending through River North from Downtown to the Pearl Brewery. Those improvements are now under construction and will be complete in 2009.

This major catalytic investment in River North has awakened the community to the potential for this area to become an extension of the historic Downtown, just as the current phase of River Improvements is an extension of the historic RiverWalk. Through the leadership of the Downtown Alliance, the City of San Antonio and others, a Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone was formed within the areas of River North nearest the River, so that the new property taxes generated by new investment that might follow the River could be reinvested in additional urban infrastructure to support reconstruction and accelerate positive change in River North.

To further encourage and shape new development in River North, the Alliance and the City determined that a Master Plan should be prepared, providing a vision for the future of River North, and putting in place a coherent and integrated set of policies, standards and implementation actions to guide public and private investment in the area. Through this Plan each new increment of infrastructure investment will complement each new building, and new buildings will complement one another, and new residential uses, commercial uses and civic uses will work synergistically to produce a network of successful and alive urban places. These will be built incrementally by the coordinated actions of many contributors.

Through the River North planning process, including Discovery Workshops and a community design Charrette, San Antonians representing all backgrounds and interests came together to share their ideas, concerns, visions, and experiences. The design team responded with drawings of urban structure, public space design, architectural types, transportation systems, building types and development strategies for consideration, discussion, and debate.

The team proposed design responses for housing, for retail and employment, for civic and cultural facilities, and for public spaces of many types. These proposals were both place-specific and typological in nature: particularized designs for certain stretches of

certain sites, while a system of architectural types was assembled to provide the appropriate range of development responses: maintain, infill, or regenerate. From this work emerged a highly illustrated conceptual Master Plan, well-supported by all participants.

Placemaking

The central notion of placemaking is unified urban design that employs buildings and landscape. This defines and animates urban space such as the River, streets and parks, plazas and squares, to provide a series of unique pedestrian-oriented places, linked physically to one another and to the larger city. This pattern of organized and interconnected, yet diverse place types, creates a wide range of valuable addresses for the full spectrum of urban activities: quiet residential streets to active commercial intersections, peaceful riverfront linear parks to active urban plazas, and eclectic live-work neighborhoods to world-class performing and visual arts venues.

Over the course of the Charrette, the designs for many specific places were prepared by the design team and Charrette participants, and then stitched together as an urban quilt, each patch with its own unique character, contributing to the design, pattern, and texture of the whole. As with any complex composition, to understand the composition and the design intentions of the River North Master Plan, it is useful to view it from a number of different perspectives.

This chapter presents the plan for River North first in the way that it was developed in the Charrette – as a series of focused and catalytic actions and design interventions upon the existing situation one area, or patch of the quilt, at a time. Toward the end of this chapter the whole picture is presented – the neighborhood district/corridor structure toward which the Master Plan is intended to move River North over time. The discussion throughout this chapter is intended to convey a clear idea of the role that each part plays in the realization of the whole.

Chapter 3 presents an organized program of implementation that will move the Plan forward. It describes actions to be undertaken by the City, by property owners, by developers and other businesses, by non-profit civic organizations and others, which together can provide the impetus for change in the direction envisioned by this Plan.

Affordable Mixed Income Housing

River North – and the entire Greater Downtown area of which River North is an important part – is envisioned as San Antonio’s metropolitan center, in which residents can live, work, shop and enjoy the cultural amenities of a great City in a pedestrian-oriented and transit-oriented urban environment. The neighborhoods of River North are envisioned as vital, mixed-use, mixed-income places that provides high quality urban living environments for households spanning a wide range of types, sizes and means.

To implement and realize this vision, it is important to the economic and social health of the Greater Downtown that a diverse range of housing choices be available, for executives, for office workers, and for retail and service employees who support the businesses of the Greater Downtown.

A daily mass influx and exodus of those who make the Downtown economy function is not desirable or sustainable for the City’s transportation systems, environment or economy, nor is it sustainable from the point of view of the workers’ quality of life. Thus, a core objective of the River North Master Plan is the provision of a significant amount of housing for the diverse workforce of the Greater Downtown.

It is expected that much of the housing for this workforce will be delivered by both the private and the non-profit sector in the form of housing of many sizes, costs and types. It is equally clear, however, that some households of workers – for instance those with a single wage earner or workers in low-skill positions – may not be able to attain even the most modest housing that market forces can deliver.

It should be anticipated that in the early stages of redevelopment, public assistance would be needed for development of all types of income mixes to occur. However once critical mass is achieved, it is likely that market forces will be adequate for market rate housing and public assistance can focus on the affordable sector.

It is a priority of this Master Plan that below-market-rate housing (“affordable housing”), for a significant number of such households, be included in the mix of housing built in River North. Based on a substantial amount of discussion with non-profit affordable housing advocates and developers, developers of market rate housing, and the City of San Antonio, a target for affordable housing has been set that a minimum of 15% of the total units will be affordable.

The definitions and the strategy for reaching this target is described in the Implementation Section.



As evident in the aerial at left, uses in River North are largely industrial, and the building fabric is discontinuous

Below: This section shows illustrates the development intensity that is possible along the San Antonio River and adjacent neighborhoods of River North that ranges from single family detached dwellings to mid- and high-rise towers

