**Resolution No. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

*The Palm District Plan*

**WHEREAS**, bound on the west by Waller Creek, the south by Lady Bird Lake, the east by IH-35, and the north by Cesar Chavez Street, the Rainey Street neighborhood was once home to working-class Mexican American households; and

**WHEREAS**, the children of these families, along with other families from the Central East Austin neighborhoods, attended Austin Independent School District’s Palm Elementary School, located on the corner of Cesar Chavez and IH-35, until its closure in 1976; and

**WHEREAS**, the site was later acquired by Travis County; and

**WHEREAS,** the 2016 Historic Resources Survey Final Report prepared by Hardy-Heck-Moore, Inc. for the City of Austin states that when East Avenue transformed into IH-35 as a racially motivated barrier, it “severed connections to neighborhoods and institutions that connected Austin’s east side to downtown, including the Rainey Street neighborhood, Palm School, 6th Street, and the Waller Creek/Red River area”; and

**WHEREAS**, in response to the loss of important Mexican American cultural institutions in the eastern Downtown area in the 1970s and 1980s due to gentrification and displacement, community members began proposing the establishment of a cultural facility; and

**WHEREAS**, in 1985, the Rainey Street Historic District was added to the National Register of Historic Places; and

**WHEREAS**, in 1998, the voters approved bonds to construct the Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center (ESB-MACC) in the southwest portion of the Rainey Street National Register Historic District due to the neighborhood’s strong connection to the Mexican American community; and

**WHEREAS**, in June of 1999, Council directed the City Manager to work with residents, business owners, and property owners in the Rainey Street area to develop “land use objectives and priorities for the area”; and

**WHEREAS**, Resolution No. 20000601-063 directed the creation of a comprehensive master plan for the Rainey Street area and a consultant was identified for this purpose, however, this planning effort was subsumed by the forthcoming Downtown Austin Plan; and

**WHEREAS**, in 2003, the Downtown Commission convened stakeholders to develop recommendations regarding the future planning of the Rainey Street area; and

**WHEREAS**, Resolution No. 20040212-035 initiated the Rainey Street area rezoning and the review of regulations for the Rainey Street Subdistrict of the Waterfront Overlay Combining District with consideration of the recommendations from the Rainey Street Redevelopment Strategy, the Downtown Commission, and the ESB-MACC development plans; and

**WHEREAS**, Resolution No. 20040212-035 also directed the City Manager to analyze the infrastructure within the Rainey Street area and requested that various boards and commissions suggest strategies to catalyze mixed-use redevelopment while preserving the historic integrity of the area; and

**WHEREAS**, in June of 2010, the Council approved the Waller Creek District Master Plan, which called for, among other things, “the improvement of pedestrian and bicycle linkages to, across and along the creek corridor to connect Lady Bird Lake with UT and East Austin and Rainey Street with Downtown” to help diminish the barrier effect of IH-35; and

**WHEREAS**, the Waller Creek District Master Plan also states that improvements to Palm Park could “establish a stronger and more complementary relationship to the creek, the Convention Center and the District as a whole” and that the adjacent Palm School “presents an opportunity to engage and reinforce the park, particularly if County services were to relocate or reconfigure, and be replaced or augmented with complementary community, cultural and educational activities”; and

**WHEREAS,** in response to increased congestion and a desire for greater pedestrian safety in the Rainey Street area, Resolution No. 20110127-035 directed the City Manager to develop short- and long-term recommendations for addressing pedestrian safety, congestion, and parking issues for residents and patrons of the Rainey Street Historic District; and

**WHEREAS**, Council amended the Austin Tomorrow Comprehensive Plan in 2011 by adopting the Downtown Austin Plan, which called for the transformation of Waller Creek as a “linear park between Lady Bird Lake and UT, along with Palm and Waterloo parks to provide a green ‘necklace’ that can support the revitalization of Downtown’s east side”; and

**WHEREAS,** the Downtown Austin Plan also identified specific goals for the Rainey Street Historic District, which included stronger pedestrian and bicycle linkages to the Central Business District, Town Lake, Waller Creek, and East Austin, as well as improved roadway connectivity between IH-35 and Cesar Chavez; and

**WHEREAS**, the Downtown Austin Plan included responses from a 2009 survey in which the most popular public improvement priorities for the Rainey Street area were the incorporation of “Great Streets” standards and new parks, pocket parks, or plazas; and

**WHEREAS**, The Downtown Austin Plan acknowledged that the Rainey Street Historic District was not “well connected to the surrounding Downtown, limiting pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular access and making the area feel isolated”; and

**WHEREAS**, the Downtown Austin Plan established urban design priorities for the Rainey Street Historic District including the promotion of “streetscape, creekscape, bridges, trails, promenade and other open space improvements that establish a more direct relationship with Lady Bird Lake (Town Lake) and Waller Creek,” as well as better connections between the ESB-MACC and Downtown/East Austin; and

**WHEREAS**, as redevelopment interest increased, Resolution No. 20131017-032 initiated amendments to City Code Chapter 25-2 to make the Rainey Street Subdistrict eligible to participate in the Downtown Density Bonus Program with the intent to capture additional community benefits as development continued; and

**WHEREAS**, in response to the relocation of several historic homes from the Rainey Street Historic District, Resolution No. 20130509-035 directed the City Manager to explore mechanisms such as using right-of-way fees within the Rainey Street Subdistrict to Palm Park between Red River and IH-35 to support relocating Rainey Street houses, creating a Rainey Street History Center, and improving infrastructure; and

**WHEREAS**, Ordinance No. 20131024-010 amended the Fiscal Year 2013-2014 Capital Budget (Ordinance No. 20130909-002) to create the Rainey Street District Fund to receive right-of-way fees, alley vacation sales, and license agreements from within the Rainey Street Historic District and Subdistrict; and

**WHEREAS**, money from the fund was used to rehabilitate single family structures transferred out of the district so that they could be maintained as affordable housing; and

**WHEREAS**, transcripts suggest the Council intent was for the Rainey Street District Fund to continue to accrue fees to support reinvestment within the Rainey Street Historic District, but this intent was never realized; and

**WHEREAS**, in March of 2014, the Austin Convention Center Department consulted with Gensler to craft a Long-Range Master Plan to address the Convention Center’s future needs; and

**WHEREAS,** the Council next passed Resolution No. 20141211-128, directing the City Manager to work with the Urban Land Institute (ULI) so that a Technical Assistance Panel could review options for both increasing beyond and maintaining the Convention Center’s current footprint; and

**WHEREAS**, the resulting ULI report recommended that the City expand the Convention Center to create a “visionary” District that would include funds for projects such as Brush Square, the Red Line Station, and Waller Creek; and

**WHEREAS,** in November of 2015, the Council approved Resolution 20151112-033 which adopted the Austin Convention Center’s Long-Range Master Plan with the additional direction that the Economic Opportunity Committee provide recommendations on several proposals and considerations, including the enhancement of Brush Square, Palm Park, Palm School (in coordination with Travis County), and green space initiatives (in coordination with the Waller Creek Conservancy); and

**WHEREAS,** on the same day of the passage of Resolution No. 20151112-033, per the request of Commissioner Gómez, the Travis County Historical Commission accepted the charge of examining the current and previous uses of Palm School, obtaining a current appraisal, hosting community meetings with interested groups and individuals, determining possible future uses within the framework of community value, and engaging staff and experts in determining the financial implications of repurposing the facility; and

**WHEREAS,** later that year Cap Metro announced it had received funds to complete the MetroRail Downtown Station, near the Austin Convention Center, Waller Creek, and historic Brush Square; and

**WHEREAS**, Resolution No. 20160225-045 stated that “the new Downtown Station presents an opportunity to collaborate with stakeholders and multiple agencies to shape a long-term vision and identity for the area that includes the Downtown Station, Brush Square, the Convention Center, Waller Creek, and other important public spaces and cultural amenities” and directed the City Manager to work with relevant city departments and stakeholders toward that end; and

**WHEREAS**, in June of 2016, the Hispanic/Latino Quality of Life Resource Advisory Commission suggested the City conduct a feasibility study to explore repurposing Palm School into a museum that celebrates Mexican heritage, folk art, and indigenous culture and recounts the gentrification and displacement that has occurred in the Rainey neighborhood and East Austin; and

**WHEREAS,** in February of 2017, several City and County elected officials sponsored a public meeting to receive comments about the future of Palm School, Palm Park, and the Convention Center; and

**WHEREAS**, Resolution No. 20170209-033 directed the City Manager to provide additional information about the financial needs of several issues and landmarks affecting the eastern portion of Downtown, including Palm School and the associated parkland; and

**WHEREAS**, a July 6, 2017, staff memo stated that several financing concepts for a Convention Center expansion could include additional funding for nearby historic sites such as Palm School; and

**WHEREAS**, in a presentation made to the Austin City Council on August 15, 2017, the Visitor Impact Task Force presented the recommendations from their final report, which included support for the Austin Convention Center, but only in accordance with several parameters, one of which being that the expansion “include additional allowable area improvements that are important to the community, such as Palm School, Waller Creek, the MACC, the Red River Cultural District, and nearby historic landmarks;” and

**WHEREAS,** Resolution No. 20170831-060 directed the City Manager to allocate 15% of the hotel occupancy taxes to fund restoration of both city and non-city facilities and specifically identified Palm School as one such possibility; and

**WHEREAS**, on September 13, 2017, Council approved a budget rider related to the historic preservation hotel occupancy tax fund and identified Palm School as a potentially eligible expenditure; and

**WHEREAS**, Resolution No. 20170928-052 directed the City Manager to, among other things, negotiate the acquisition of the Palm School for use as a public and civic space and to analyze funding options; and

**WHEREAS**, on April 12, 2018, Antenora Architects LLP, Limbacher & Godfrey Architects, and McCann Adams Studio presented Travis County with a historic structure report on Palm School to help inform decisions about the property’s future when the Health & Human Services Department is relocated; and

**WHEREAS**, the Travis County Commissioners Court next convened an advisory board to develop the provisions of a deed restriction that would govern the sale or long-term lease of Palm School in a “manner that balances and leverages its cultural, historic, and real estate value”; and

**WHEREAS**, on April 3, 2019, Travis County hosted a community meeting to receive feedback on the parameters of a potential restrictive covenant, which is not presently publicly available; and

**WHEREAS**, most speakers encouraged Travis County to use Palm School and the surrounding property for public rather than private use, and several spoke in favor of creating a museum; and

**WHEREAS**, in May 2018, Council approved the Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center Master Plan, which will guide expansion of the existing facility and addresses mobility, access, and circulation with particular attention to the “Gran Entrada,” or entrance to the complex from Rainey Street, the relationship to the waterfront at Lady Bird Lake and Waller Creek, and to the neighboring commercial and residential properties; and

**WHEREAS**, in November of 2018, voters approved $27 million in bond funds for the second phase of the ESB-MACC as part of the cultural arts facility bond package; and

**WHEREAS**, Council approved an extension of the Waller Creek Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone term in February 2018 and committed to issue up to $110 million of debt to be reinvested into parks funding;

**WHEREAS**, on March 28, 2019, Council approved the Brush Square Master Plan, a multi-year planning effort that acknowledges the increasingly important role Brush Square will play as investments increase in the Downtown Station, the Convention Center, the new residential and office developments in the Central Business District, and the Rainey Street Historic District; and

**WHEREAS**, in approving the Brush Square Master Plan, the Council also directed the City Manager to develop a plan, determine a location, and identify funding to relocate Fire Station Number 1’s operations as part of the Brush Square Master Plan; and

**WHEREAS**, Rainey Street area residents have repeatedly requested that the City develop a master plan of the area to develop and implement strategies for managing mobility challenges for the thousands of current residents and the several thousand more on the way; and

**WHEREAS**, the Rainey Neighborhood Mobility Study and Plan prepared by Big Red Dog Engineering and Consulting in May of 2017 provided comprehensive recommendation for mobility improvements in the Rainey area; and

**WHEREAS**, the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan (ASMP), adopted on April 11, 2019, references the need to improve mobility in the Central Business District, South Central Waterfront, and Rainey Street neighborhood; and

**WHEREAS**, several local organizations and officials have supported the proposal to “cut and cap” IH-35, which would transform the eastern side of Downtown and create the cohesive connections between East Austin and Downtown that the City of Austin’s planning documents have recommended for years; and

**WHEREAS**, Capital Metro’s Project Connect Plan envisions high capacity transit providing an additional crossing over Lady Bird Lake from the South Central Waterfront into the lower southeast quadrant of Downtown; and

**WHEREAS**, the Center for Sustainable Development at the University of Texas’s April 2019 report analyzed various possible scenarios for a Convention Center expansion, taking into consideration emerging projects, national trends and best practices, restoration of the Waller grid, public access, economic impacts, and Downtown development patterns; and

**WHEREAS**, the report recommends the City should “move away from ad-hoc planning, and instead think holistically and strategically about the future of the entire area surrounding the convention center”; and

**WHEREAS,** the Waller Creek Conservancy is developing a Regulating Plan which will ensure projects along the creek redevelop with a thoughtful, context-sensitive approach that enhances both the accessibility and aesthetic benefit to the community; and

**WHEREAS**, as this dynamic quadrant of Downtown grows, evolves, and expands, the City must plan comprehensively and strategically; and

**WHEREAS**, a District Plan could help identify next steps on important projects such as the Convention Center while also leveraging the City’s investments and helping create a Downtown that is more inclusive, equitable, accessible, prosperous, multi-modal, and aesthetically pleasing; **NOW, THEREFORE:**

**BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY OF AUSTIN CITY COUNCIL:**

That the City Council aims to bring the disparate planning efforts described above into conversation with one another to achieve a more comprehensive and broader vision and blueprint for this area.

The City Manager is thus directed to convene stakeholders in a comprehensive, focused small-area district planning effort to bring forward the Palm District Master Plan, comprised of Palm School and Palm Park, Brush Square, the ESB-MACC, the Convention Center, Waller Creek, and the Rainey Street Historic District.

Stakeholders will include representatives from the Raza Roundtable, the Rainey Neighbors Association, the East Cesar Chavez Neighborhood Contact Team, the Rainey Business Coalition, the Town Lake Neighborhood Association, the Downtown Austin Neighborhood Association, the Four Seasons Residences and 5 Fifty-Five Condos, Visit Austin, the ESB-MACC board, and other relevant boards and commissions and community groups.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:**

That the Manager will support this effort with the personnel necessary to promote a robust planning process, including staff from the Urban Design Division of the Planning and Zoning Department, Parks and Recreation, Austin Transportation Department, the Cultural Arts Division and Heritage Tourism Division of the Economic Development Department, and the Austin Convention Center. Additional stakeholders will include Capital Metro and Travis County.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:**

The Manager shall invite partners including the Waller Creek Conservancy, the Downtown Austin Alliance, the Trail Foundation, and Preservation Austin to participate in this planning effort.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**:

In the event that external groups have financial resources or expertise to contribute to plan development, the Council authorizes the City Manager to accept appropriate and reasonable assistance.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:**

In addition to those articulated elsewhere and stated earlier in this resolution, the goals of the Palm District Plan should also include identifying options for improving mobility and resolving the barrier created by Cesar Chavez between the northern and southern areas of the district. These options should be both achievable and aspirational.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**:

That for the purposes of the Palm District Plan, the Council expresses its interest in exploring Scenario 5 (as outlined in the UT Center for Sustainable Development Study) with the understanding that the City Council, the staff, and the public will need to be afforded ample opportunities within this process or in another forum for in-depth explorations of different aspects of this scenario, including the financial rationale, estimated costs, and potential funding options.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**:

That nothing in this resolution precludes the City Manager from exploring land or facility acquisitions or public and private partnerships that might arise during the small district planning period and presenting those opportunities to City Council.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:**

The Palm District planning process shall be presented to the City Council no later than September 1, 2019 for potential inclusion in the 2020 budget.