

# Community Update WALLER CREEK PROJECT

## VISIT TO DISCOVERY GREEN PROMPTS WALLER CREEK DISTRICT IDEAS



**Austin City Council Member Sheryl Cole**

I recently joined members of the Waller Creek tunnel project team and a remarkable group of community visionaries on a field trip to Houston's Discovery Green. Located amidst the towers of Downtown Houston, Discovery Green is a fine example of thoughtful urban planning.

The park's 12 acres include passive and active features, including a one-acre lake, a children's playground, interactive water features, a multi-use amphitheater stage, small and large dog runs, and two restaurants. This visit helped us explore the possibilities for urban park revitalization along Waller Creek and glean important lessons from Guy Hagstette, President of the Discovery Green Conservancy.

We were treated to lectures by Larry Speck, the park's principal architect, and renowned artist Margo Sawyer, whose colorful, three dimensional art pieces grace the property. Daniel Woodroffe of TBG Partners and Charlie McCabe from the Austin Parks Foundation discussed the history of urban parks and characteristics of great public spaces.

If you haven't been, I highly recommend visiting Discovery Green. Adjacent to the George R. Brown Convention Center, the park has changed acres of bleak surface parking lots into a vibrant community amenity that attracts people from all walks of life. It's a vision that I hope we can replicate in the Waller Creek District. I appreciate

everyone who took the time to come to Houston with me and I look forward to everyone's ideas as we embark on a plan for the Waller Creek District.

Sheryl Cole  
Austin City Council



**This fountain offers a visual gateway to Discovery Green park in Houston for visitors and is an extension of the playground area. The site used to be a parking lot.**

## Waller Creek Tunnel Project Moves Into Final Design

Early tunnel activities, which included survey work, geotechnical studies, physical modeling, and public outreach, have drawn to a close. The project has entered into the final design.

The design phase is expected to continue through January 2010 and will be followed by a bid and award phase, when the City seeks contractors to do the construction work. Actual construction is expected to begin in 2010 and be completed in 2014.

Design of this large project is separated into distinct sections, including:

- A Parks and Recreation Department boat house adjacent to Lady Bird Lake
- The tunnel
- The inlet
- The outlet
- Two creekside inlets located between 4th and 5th and 8th and 9th Streets.

# Tunnel Project Brings Improvements to Parks

Although the main purpose of the Waller Creek tunnel is to protect lives and property from devastating floods, it will also significantly enhance parkland in the Waller Creek District. Waterloo Park will be rejuvenated with many new amenities. There are opportunities for more green spaces at the two creekside inlets, and Lady Bird Lake will get an enhanced boat house along with other improvements. All this is possible because several of the tunnel's key components happen to be located on City parkland or adjacent to greenbelts.

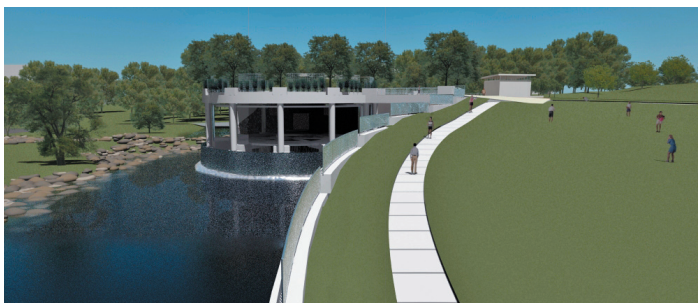
## Waterloo Park

Waterloo Park is the site of the tunnel inlet, a structure where pumps and other equipment will be housed, and the beginning of the tunnel. However, the inlet is being made into so much more! In coordination with the Austin Parks and Recreation Department, the Parks Foundation and stakeholders, the tunnel design team is planning the following amenities:

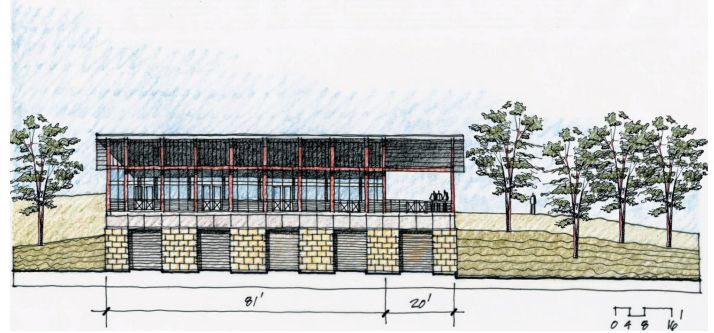
- Rooftop pavilion over the inlet structure, accessible to pedestrians
- Scenic inlet waterfall
- Outdoor concert space
- New bike paths including a bike throughway that will make it possible to go between Trinity Street and Red River Road without contending with heavy traffic or sizeable hills
- Public restrooms, accessible from Trinity Street and close to a bus stop
- Trails
- Green spaces
- Irrigation systems
- Scenic overlooks
- Park benches
- Improved lighting to extend the number of hours the park can be enjoyed

In addition, the project calls for improving the grounds of the park to minimize erosion problems and to increase the amount of available venue space.

Unfortunately, construction of the tunnel and the new amenities will make it necessary to close the park for two years, currently scheduled from 2012 to 2014. During this time, the park will be a busy construction zone, filled with heavy equipment and work crews. But it will be worth the wait, as returning park visitors will be delighted by Waterloo Park's new amenities. The tunnel project strives to provide as much accessibility and enjoyment for the public as possible.



Rendering of Inlet in Waterloo Park.



Sketch of new boat house on Lady Bird Lake.

## Opportunities for New Green Spaces

Two creek side tunnel inlets may be an opportunity for some green spaces or landscaped areas. These inlets will be located south of Waterloo Park on Waller Creek. One will be between 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Streets and the other between 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Streets. They will capture and carry floodwaters to the tunnel and help keep the creek from rising more than four to five feet even in a 100-year flood. The creek side inlets will also screen and collect storm debris to reduce trash in the creek.

The designs for the creek side inlets strive to maintain Waller Creek's natural character and use native vegetation and natural materials. In fact, the average passerby may not even realize they are looking at a high tech flood control device. Instead, the creek side inlets will resemble natural looking ponds fringed with native plants and materials. The Waller Creek District Master Plan will collect citizen and business input to determine the types of amenities desirable at these locations, such as trails, benches, a pond or a connection to the Lance Armstrong Bikeway.

## Lady Bird Lake

The outlet area, located close to where Waller Creek empties into Lady Bird Lake, will remain a tranquil natural area. The tunnel outlet structure is under water and will appear to be a cove in the lake with a wetlands area for local wildlife. The aging bridge crossing Waller Creek will be restored and widened to 12 feet and will include a new hand rail. Visitors to the outlet area will notice artistic-looking educational markers that identify environmental features and explain the purpose of the outlet.

Portions of the hike and bike trail impacted by the project will be upgraded to Americans with Disabilities Act standards where possible. The project will also remove the two existing rowing club facilities behind the Four Seasons Hotel and replace them with a new boat house. Current plans call for boat storage, locker rooms, office space, new boat docks, public restrooms, a cool-off shower, and a large covered public veranda with a view of the lake and cove.

The tunnel design team sees the Waller Creek tunnel project as much more than a flood control project. They see it as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to protect lives and property while improving the physical and aesthetic quality of the Waller Creek District. It is a chance to transform an underperforming part of downtown into one that is more lively, secure, and distinct in character.



# City Gives Green Light to Begin Master Planning Efforts



**Shown is a view of Waller Creek's riparian habitat looking north toward the 8th Street bridge. The Master Plan will map and study such areas.**

In February 2009, the City authorized the ROMA Design Group to begin the Waller Creek District Master Plan. Over the next 10 months, ROMA will work with the community to answer the questions on everyone's mind – what will the area look like when the project is complete? What kind of character will it have? Where should hike and bike trails and other public amenities be located?

The Waller Creek Tunnel and the Waller Creek District Master Plan are distinct yet interrelated projects. City staff and consultants from both teams closely coordinate their efforts while working toward the common goal of a safer, more vibrant Waller Creek District. However, while the tunnel team is largely concerned with safely constructing a mile-long storm bypass tunnel 70 feet underground, the Master Plan team is interested in amenities most Austinites would like to enjoy.

Currently in the first phase of the planning process, ROMA representatives and City planners are visiting the area, mapping it, and performing topographical surveys. Once they have analyzed and inventoried the area, ROMA will present its findings at a May 13th public workshop sponsored by the Waller Creek Citizen Advisory Committee.

The master plan process will occur in rounds with many opportunities for public input. Following the public workshop, two rounds of stakeholder focus groups, along with a Town Hall meeting, are planned.

Here is what to expect as the Master Plan project gets underway:

## **Drafting the Concept – Summer 2009**

ROMA will draft two plans. The first will look at Waller Creek and the areas immediately adjacent to it. This Corridor Concept Plan will focus on activities, public access, and physical improvements as well as how

different amenities should be phased in over time. The second plan will look at the whole Waller Creek District in light of the Downtown Austin Plan. The District Concept Plan will include recommendations on land use, identification of areas of priority use, building types and other special characteristics.

## **Refining the Concept – Fall 2009**

The Corridor and District plans will be presented to the public in the fall of 2009 at a Town Hall meeting. ROMA will incorporate the public input into the plans, resulting in a Draft Master Plan.

This draft will include recommendations for pedestrian and bicycle access to and along Waller Creek as well as recommendations for other amenities such as small plazas or water features along the creek corridor. For the district as a whole, the draft master plan will include recommendations for “opportunity” sites, parks and open space, transportation, and infrastructure improvements.

## **Planning the Implementation – Fall 2009**

ROMA will produce an Implementation Strategy that will outline and prioritize the actions required to realize the overall vision of the Master Plan. This document will include both short and long-term improvement plans as well as a maintenance strategy.

## **Finalizing the Master Plan – Late Fall 2009**

ROMA will present the Draft Master Plan and Implementation Strategy these to the public in late 2009. They will be presented to the Planning, Design, and Downtown Commissions and the Austin City Council.

The final step in the process will be adoption of the plan by Austin City Council (anticipated to take place in December 2009 or January 2010).

## **SAVE THE DATE!**

**Please join the Waller Creek Citizen Advisory Committee, ROMA and City of Austin Planners to share your thoughts on the future of Waller Creek:**

- **Master Plan Workshop**
- **Wednesday, May 13, 2009, 6 to 9 p.m.**
- **Austin Convention Center, Ballroom C**
- **For more info, call 512-974-3462 or visit <http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/wallercreek/calendar.htm>**

**You will also be able to visit with the tunnel design team to learn how this engineering marvel will provide effective flood protection.**



## City of Austin

### Public Works Department

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## Watershed Protection Development Review

### Joe Bolash and Dale Glover Join the WCCAC

**Austin City Council recently appointed two new members to the Waller Creek Citizen Advisory Committee:**

**Joe Bolash** represents the Austin Hotel and Lodging Association. Joe serves as resident manager of the Hilton Austin. Under his leadership, the 800-room convention hotel has garnered accolades and recognition for innovative quality assurance, employment, and sustainability practices. Along with his day-to-day duties managing the Hilton, Mr. Bolash is active with several community organizations, including the Central Texas Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, the Downtown Austin Alliance, and Austin Community College's Hospitality School. He began his career in the hospitality industry in 1994 after earning dual Bachelor of Science degrees in English and Art History from Edinboro University of Pennsylvania.

**Dale Glover** represents the Downtown Austin Alliance. Dale's professional career encompasses land analysis, marketing, project management and most recently a leadership role in the non-profit world. He's worked on planning related projects with Capital Area Council of Governments, Trust for Public Land, Envision Central Texas, City of Austin Public Works & Transportation Department and Capital Metro. In 2008, he joined the newly formed commercial real estate firm, Tribeca Property Company, as a development associate. Dale concentrates on pulling together green, sustainable real estate developments in Central/East Austin. His past and present civic affiliations include: Austin Parks Foundation, Texas Crew Foundation, Downtown Austin Neighborhood Association Downtown Austin Alliance, Transportation Committee & Parks Committee, Hill Country Conservancy, Waterfront Overlay Task Force, and Congress for the New Urbanism.

### Public Invited to View Waller Creek Tunnel Models at Velocity Credit Union

Conceptual models of the Waller Creek Tunnel inlet in Waterloo Park, outlet in Lady Bird Lake and creek side tunnel inlets between 4th and 5th Streets are on display at the Velocity Credit Union, 610 E. 11th St. through the end of May.

### Waller Creek Factoid:

Although Waller Creek is one of Austin's most urbanized waterways, it brims with life. From the Great Blue Heron to the Roseate Skimmer Dragonfly, more than 24 species of birds and 7 species of fish can be found in or around the creek.



**Great Blue Heron**

**For more information, please contact  
Carolyn Perez, 512-974-7139 or email  
Carolyn.Perez@ci.austin.tx.us.  
The project web site is  
<http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/wallercreek/>.**