



AIA
Austin

July 8, 2019

The Honorable Steve Adler, Mayor
Honorable City Council Members
City Manager Spencer Cronk

RE: Austin Convention Center Next Steps

Dear Mayor, City Council Members, and City Manager,

AIA Austin has been following the recent actions related to the Austin Convention Center expansion with great interest. We understand that, as part of Resolution 20190523-029, the City Council unanimously voted in support of expanding the convention center, and this plan includes other important downtown initiatives such as the creation of Palm District and Waller Creek District Master Plans, the designation of the Fifth Street Mexican American Heritage Corridor, exploring options for historic Palm School, providing for the Rainey Street District Fund, and creating a Tourism Public Improvement District. This initiative is an important piece of the 2017 “Downtown Puzzle”, providing funding for downtown projects and homelessness programs through an increase in hotel taxes.

AIA Austin is encouraged that the selected plan for the convention center (Scenario 5) is the option that is the most forward-thinking and community-benefitting, and includes new and enhanced public space, increased connectivity, and a mix of uses. The next steps in this process will be key to taking advantage of this opportunity to transform the southeast quadrant of downtown. We respectfully offer the following recommendations on the initial phases of the initiatives included in this process:

- Fold the Palm District Master Plan and Waller District Master Plan processes into an overall southeast quadrant planning process. This process should synthesize all relevant planning processes to date and address this piece of downtown comprehensively.
- Hire an experienced consultant team to bring fresh and independent perspectives to the projects mentioned above. Hiring independent consultants for this process will ensure the best strategic options for the southeast quadrant are explored and national best practices utilized. This team should include a leading local firm with proven experience in downtown urban design concept development, implementation, and funding strategies.

AIA Austin is encouraged by the direction of the convention center expansion process, and we hope Council will consider the above recommendations when deliberating the planning and design of these initiatives. These factors will have great influence in achieving the desired activity and quality urban form in downtown’s southeast quadrant. AIA Austin looks forward to continuing to help provide expertise and support towards this effort, and we appreciate the opportunity to provide input to that end.

Sincerely,

Michael Hsu
President, AIA Austin