

Cooper, Robertson & Partners *Architecture, Urban Design*

CONCEPTUAL MASTER PLANS FOR THE BRACKENRIDGE TRACT



PROJECT REPORT **VOLUME 3**

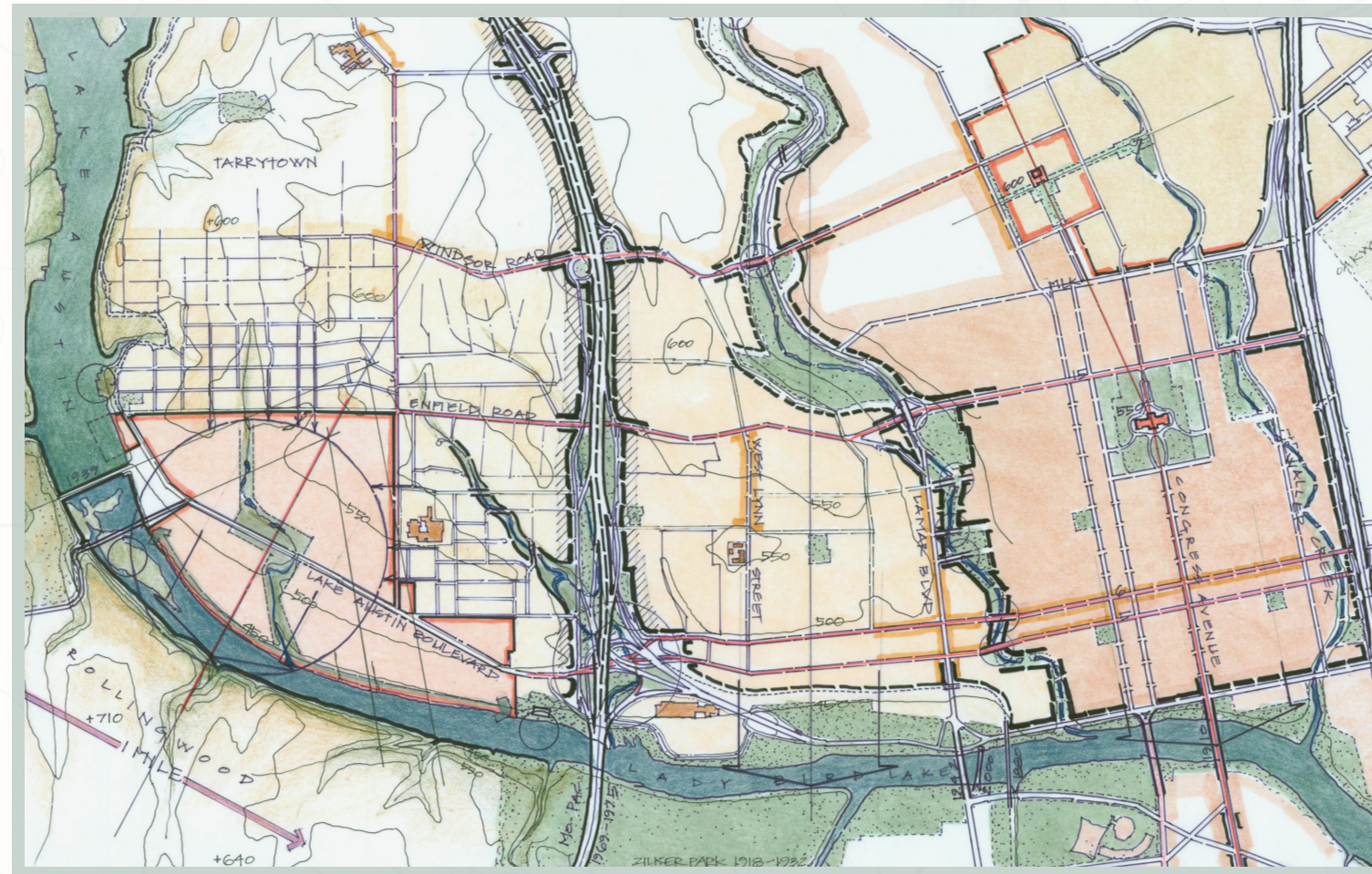
June 2009



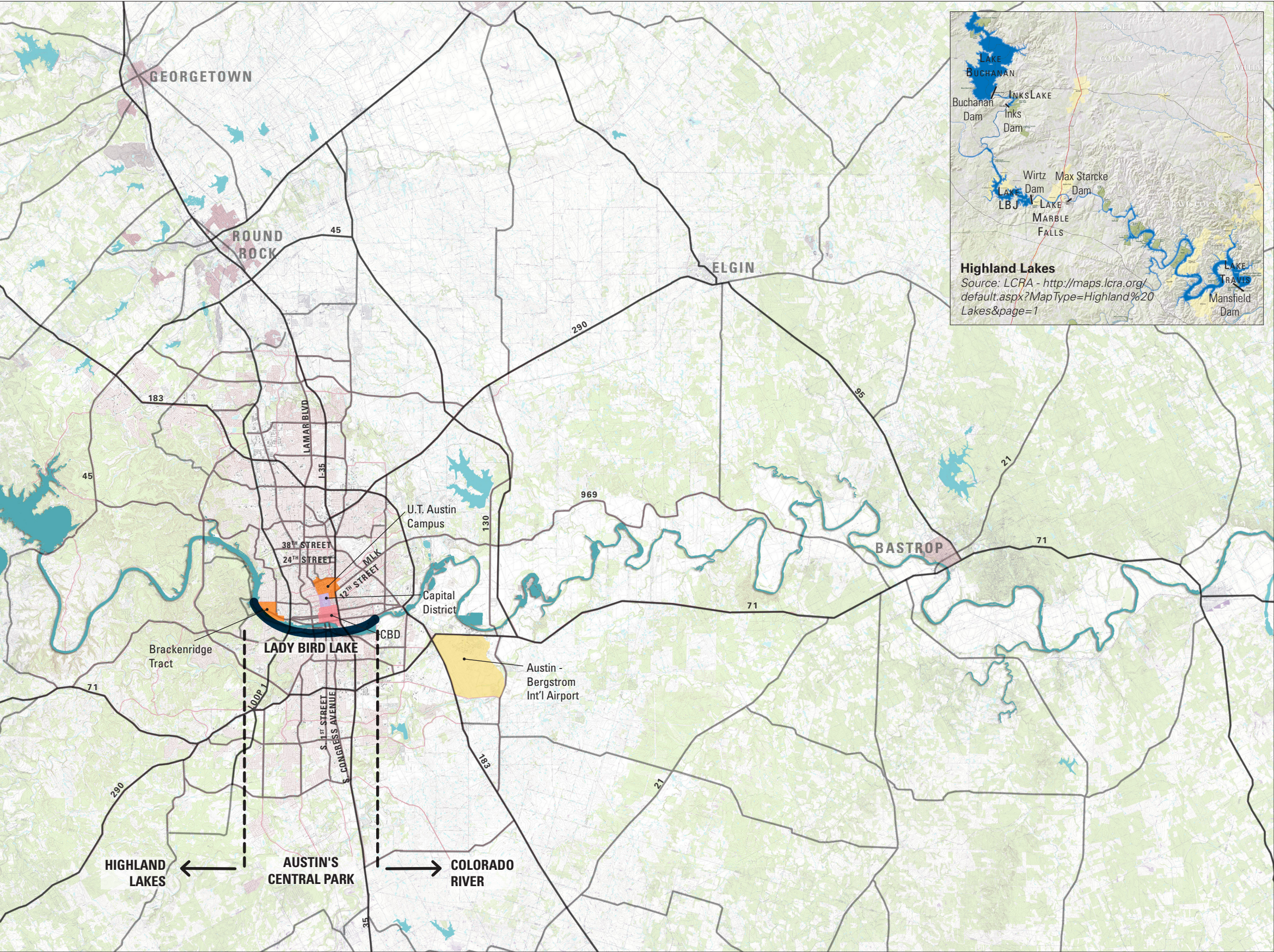
prepared for the
BOARD OF REGENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS SYSTEM

CHAPTER IX

SITE ANALYSIS



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Regional context map

9.1.1. STRUCTURE OF THE RIVER

The Colorado River meanders through this part of the region in a generally easterly direction on its way to the Gulf of Mexico. The City of Austin is sited within a large arc of the river with the Capitol situated on a highpoint roughly in the center of the arc. This location within the arc is also where the geological transition from the Blackland Prairie to the Edwards Plateau and the ecological transition from grassland to live oak, ash, and juniper woodlands occur. Here the river is relatively level extending along the entire edge of modern downtown Austin and providing the focal point for the City's central waterfront park system and urban trail, Lady Bird Lake.

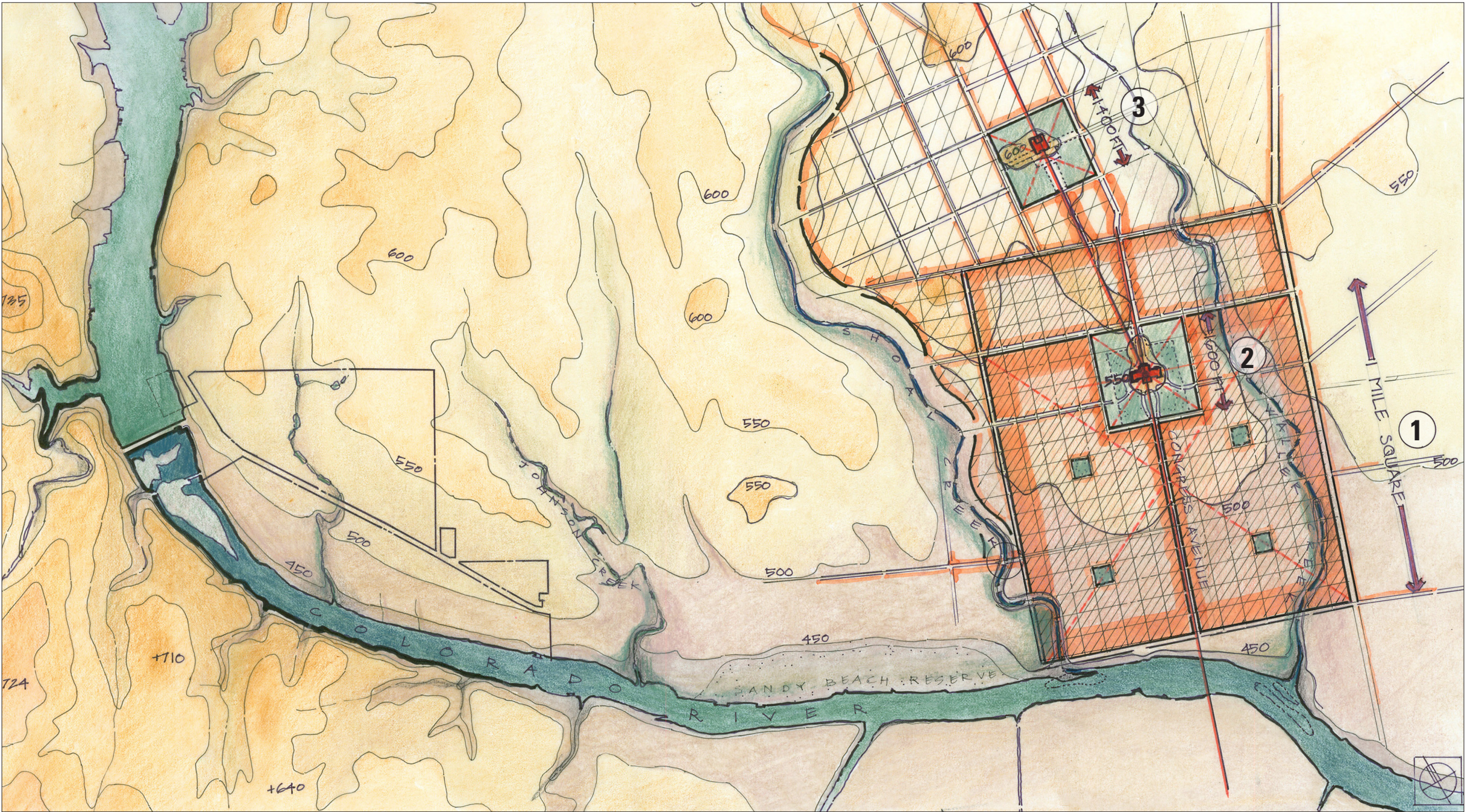
To the west of the City the topography becomes hillier and the river bends become sharper and more frequent. As the elevation rises, the river is managed by a system of six dams forming a series of highland lakes. At the point of transition from urban edge to hill country is the lowest of the dams, the Tom Miller Dam, adjacent to the northwest corner of the Brackenridge Tract.

The location of the site is also at the point where the urban zone meets the drinking water protection zone. The protection of the watershed area and aquifer is a critical concern and calls for embracing a sustainable approach to water management and water quality.

All of the above have contributed to the forces that have caused the City's growth, historically, to be primarily in a north-south direction and to a reduced pressure for westward expansion. The Brackenridge Tract is the remaining westerly piece of the riverfront arc. It provides the potential for completing the riverfront park and trail system and the City's westerly urban edge. Its location at this critical edge and transition point is unique in the City. The role of the site in completing the overall urban framework of the City and establishing a direction for the evolution of the entire area west of downtown and its urban lakefront is significant.

9.2. CITY STRUCTURE:
URBAN FORM AND
GROWTH

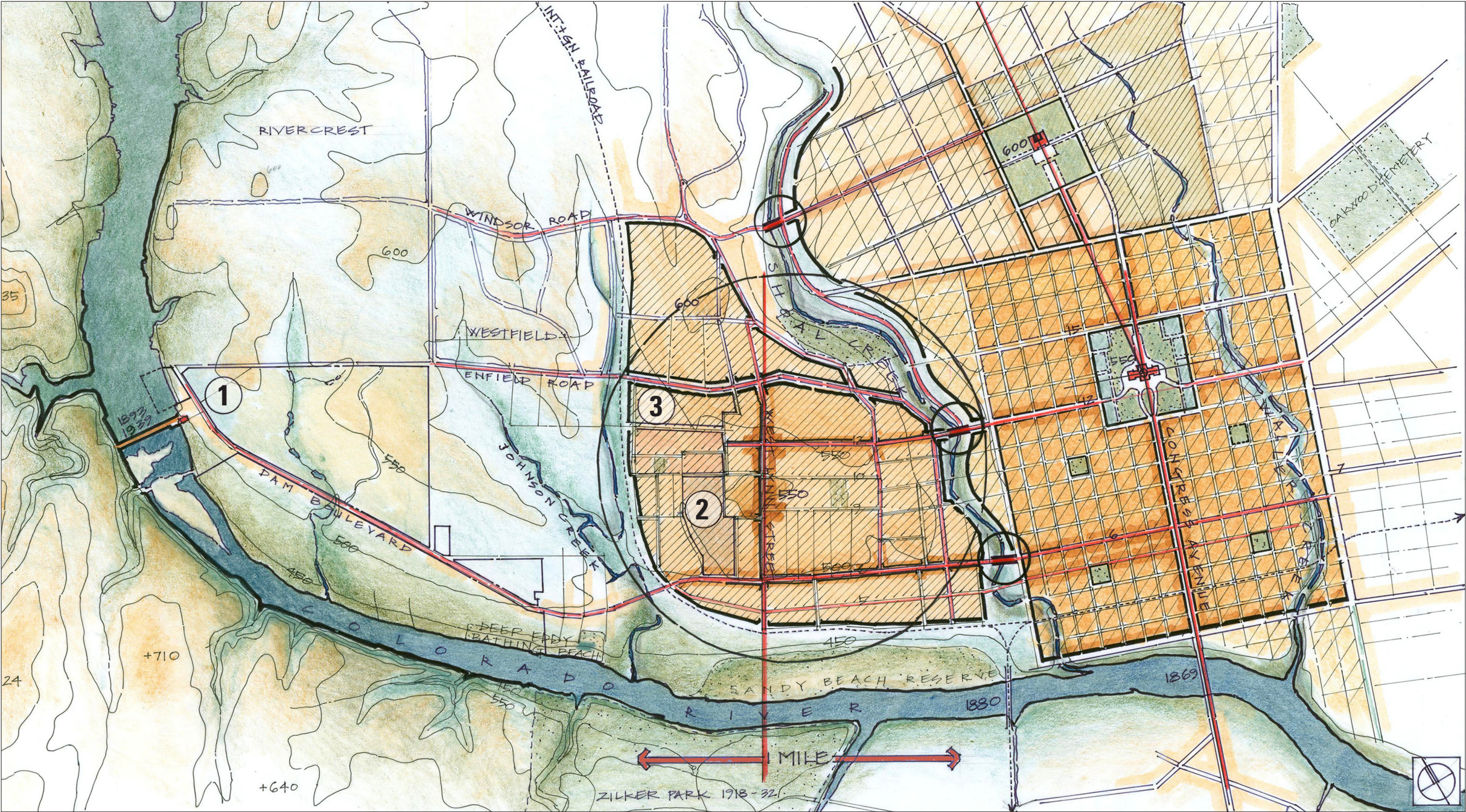
The plan of the Capital was established in 1838 as a formal one mile square grid of square and rectangular blocks located between two creeks and oriented with the slope down to the river. There was a central main axis to the river with the Capitol located on this axis at the highest point. The plan for College Hill to the north of downtown was also based on a formal grid, rotated to align with the direction of the creeks bounding it. College Square and the focal building of The University of Texas at Austin were located on a primary axis street which aligned with the Capitol building dome. Congress Avenue acts as a central spine and primary street axis between the creeks connecting the Capitol to the river to the south, and to the U.T. Austin campus to the north.



Downtown/Capitol/University of Texas Campus 1838-1880

- 1 1840 City of Austin Plan
- 2 Capitol Square
- 3 College Hill

CITY STRUCTURE



Old West Austin/Clarksville/Old Enfield 1880-1940

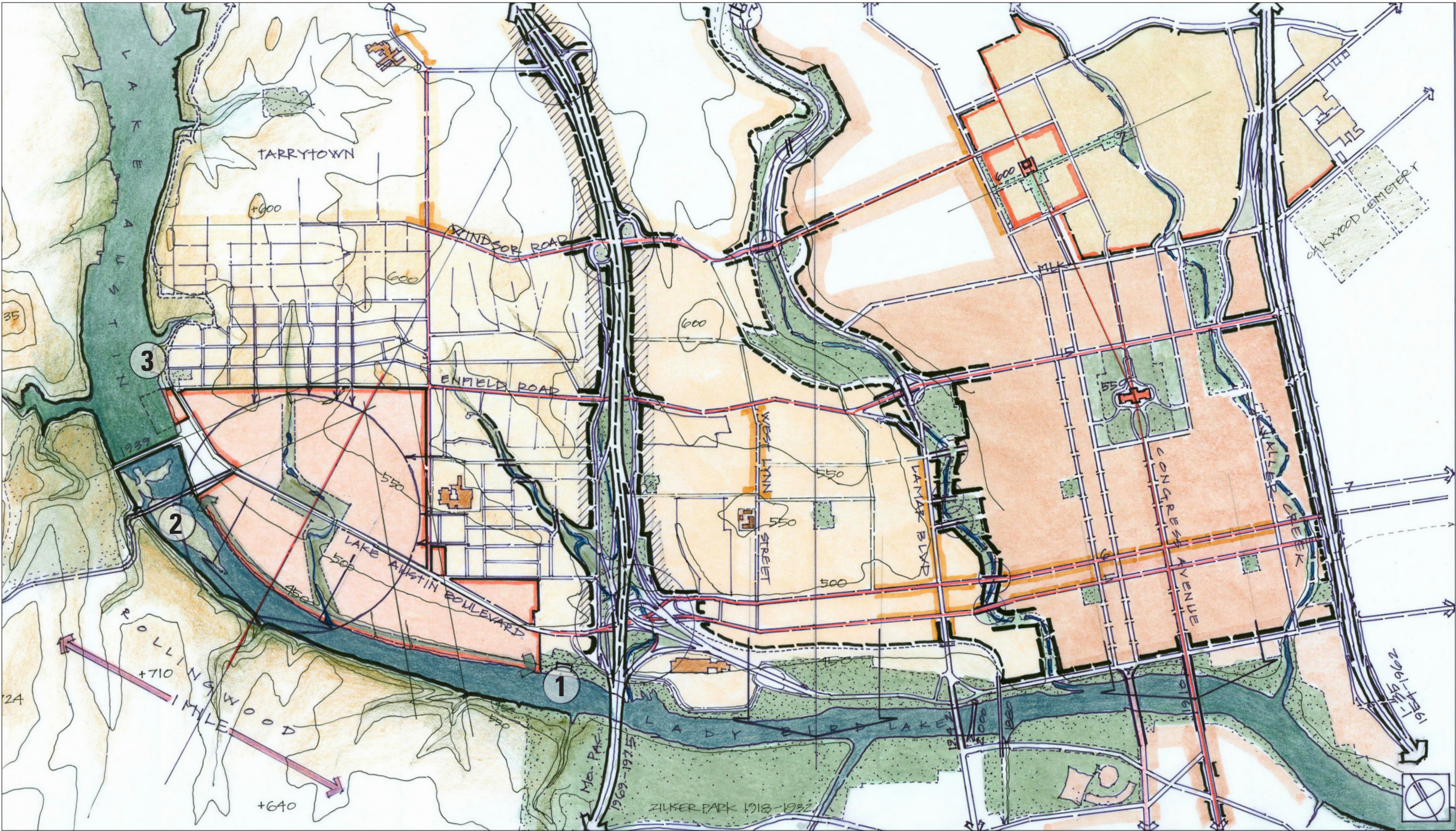
- 1 Great Granite Dam
- 2 Clarksville
- 3 Texas Confederate Home

As the City grew to the west in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in the area between Shoal and Johnson Creeks, an irregular grid evolved incrementally, rather than being established ahead of development. Nonetheless, east-west streets of downtown and the campus extended into the Old West Austin, Clarksville, and Old Enfield area and provided the basis for the grid, which is reoriented again to align with the slope of the land down to the river. West Lynn Street has emerged as a central spine street between the creeks, with neighborhood commercial and institutional development along it.

Initially, the area to the west of Johnson Creek and the railroad remained rural with scattered subdivisions beginning to occur in the twentieth century. However, the subdivisions grew into one another, a pattern similar to the one east of the creek emerged – except on the Brackenridge Tract which remained as large, undivided tracts.

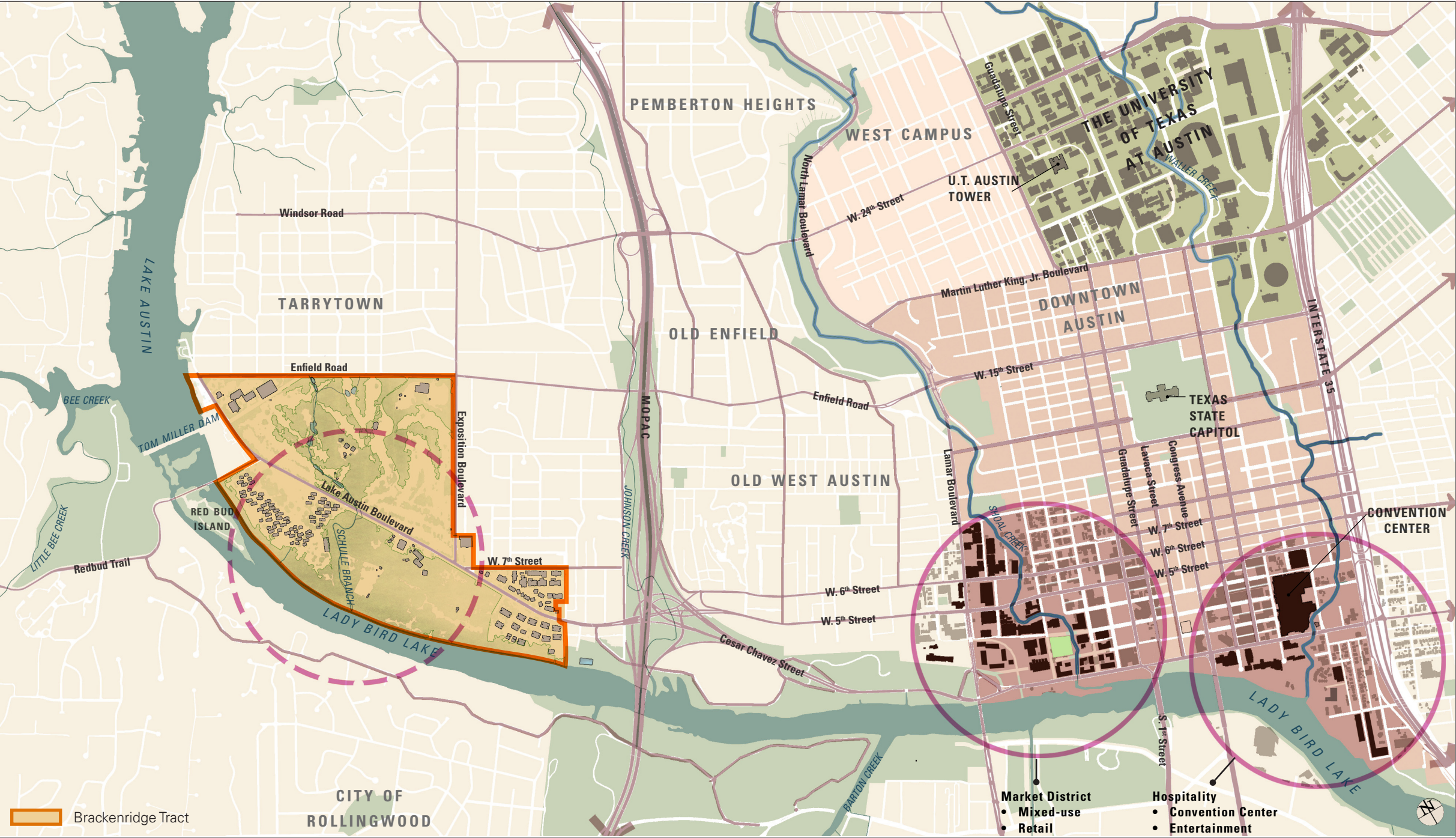
Exposition Boulevard could be viewed, not as the edge of the West Austin neighborhood to the east, but as the center axis of a neighborhood extending from Johnson Creek to Schulle Branch, similar to some aspects of the growth pattern of earlier areas of the City (Congress Avenue, West Lynn Street as examples), were it not for the historical uncertainty of the future of the Brackenridge Tract. Alternatively, the orientation could shift to align with the slope of the land down to the river at this location and coincide with the orientation of Lake Austin Boulevard, as with some of the other aspects of earlier growth. The uncertainty in the past has given us a rare opportunity in the present to establish an overall framework in advance of development and to have choices as to how to best utilize the assets of the site and express its role within the City.

Two important assets also to be considered are Deep Eddy adjacent to the easterly end of the site on Lady Bird Lake, and Boat Town at the westerly end of the site adjoining the Tom Miller Dam and near Walsh Boat Landing on Lake Austin, the last of the high-land lakes. This spot had historically been used for entertainment and recreational activities of various types and is the only location in the Center City where the water is at the level of the adjoining land and development can directly engage the water.



Tarrytown/West Austin 1940-Present

- 1 Deep Eddy Pool
- 2 Red Bud Island
- 3 Walsh Boat Landing



Comprised of superblocks, the Brackenridge Tract is difficult to experience the way other cherished Austin neighborhoods are. As the City reinforces the urbanization of its core, the Brackenridge Tract is uniquely positioned to become a western anchor to Austin's waterfront and a gateway to the Highland Lakes.

Emerging Districts

The Brackenridge Tract at 350 acres is more than half the size of Downtown, which has over 200 blocks, yet it is comprised of essentially only 2 large super-blocks accommodating its two largest users, U.T. Austin (BFL and graduate student housing) and the Lions Municipal Golf Course, along with WAYA and a portion of the LCRA facilities. Three additional smaller blocks contain all of the other uses on the site and comprise only about 5% of the site area.

These superblocks, having no scale-giving elements, are difficult to experience, and have no relationship to the scale of the surrounding areas. They disrupt the continuity of the city's street system, forcing all of the through traffic onto a few streets, making large areas inaccessible, isolating neighborhoods, and limiting connections of upland areas to the assets of the City's waterfront areas.

The Brackenridge Tract is potentially an infill district comparable to, and complementary of the major districts being shaped as catalysts Downtown: the Market District and the Convention Center. Together these areas are newly activating and reconnecting the City to the Lakefront.



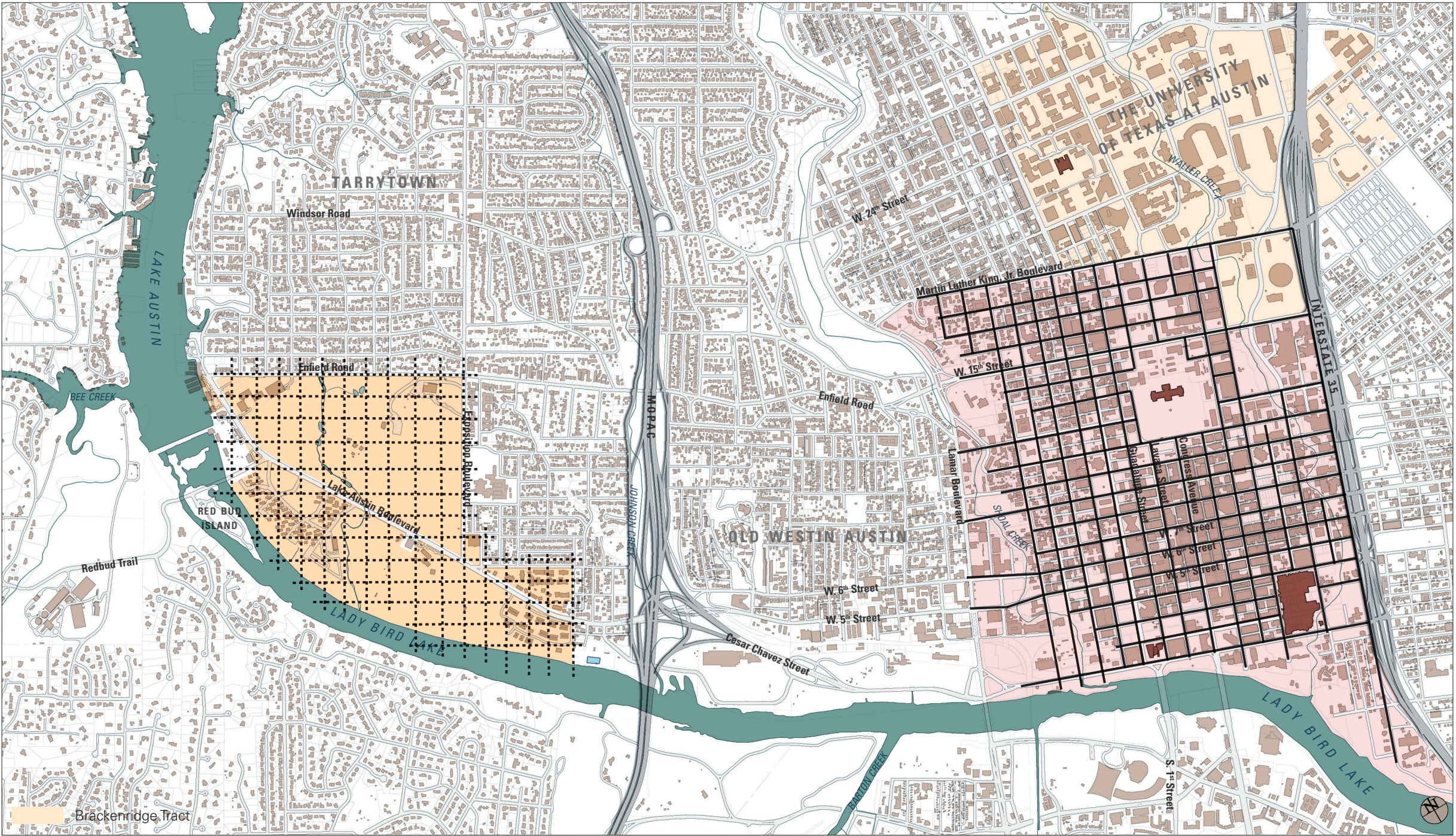
9.3. CITY SCALE AND GRAIN

9.3.1. BLOCK SIZE AND STREET PATTERN



Block size 270' by 270' (1.67 acres) Block size 340' by 270' (2.1 acres)

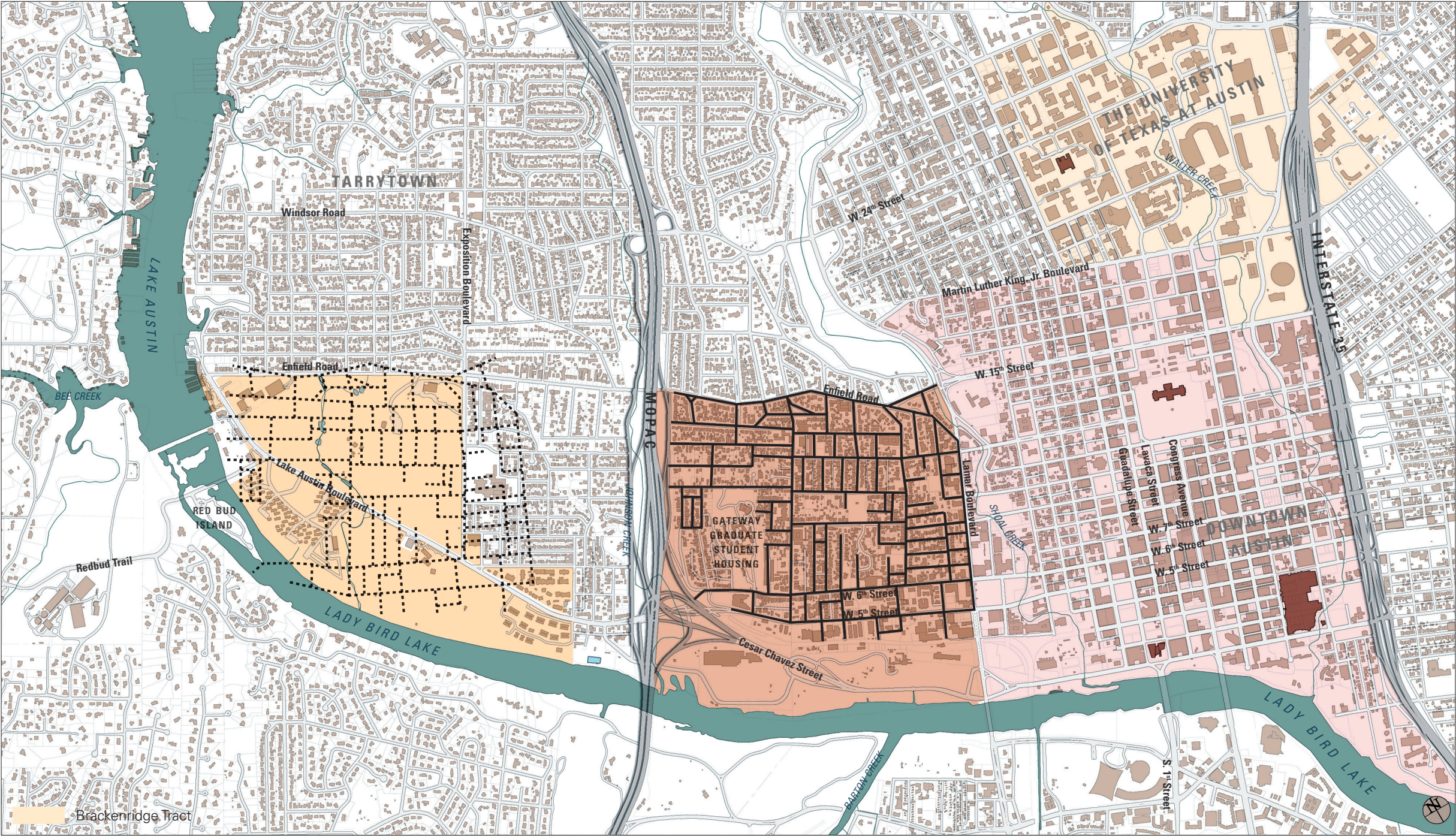
Downtown Austin has a fine grain of relatively small, regular blocks (generally 1.67 and 2.1 acres) and a high proportion of the land area dedicated to streets. This approach supports commercial activity, high density, and compact building footprints. Uses accommodate to the block structure, which may be varied, generally by combining small blocks for special or large users, such as the Capitol or Convention Center, or modifying their shape to address natural features, such as the creeks and the river. It is an approach appropriate for a downtown location and is the one traditionally and historically used in American cities' central business districts. Modern requirements of the automobile for parking in cities not having adequate transit make the small block sizes an issue and impact the design of buildings and their frontages on the streets.



The downtown Austin grid superimposed upon the Brackenridge Tract would equal over 130 city blocks.

CITY SCALE & GRAIN

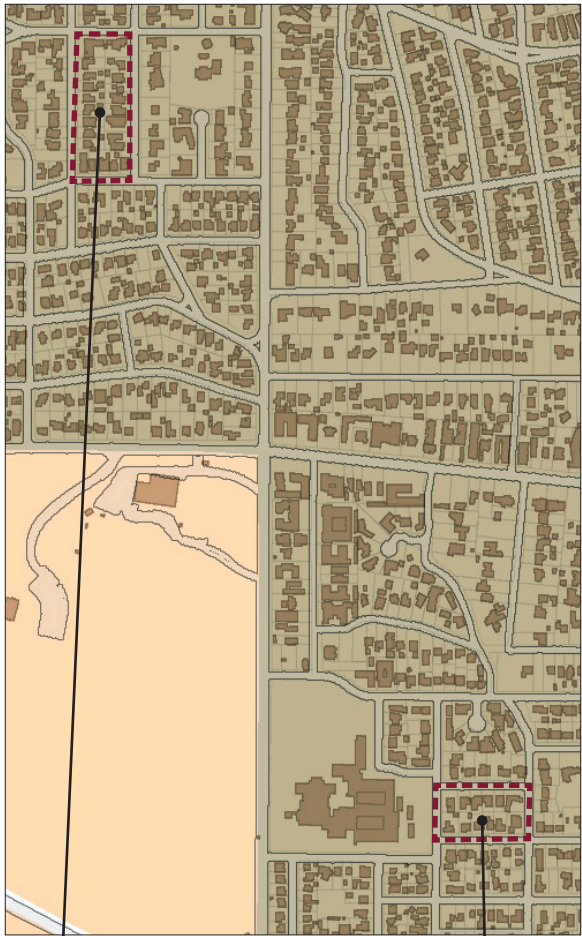




The irregular grid of Old West Austin superimposed upon the Brackenridge Tract demonstrates the site's capacity for a wide variety of uses and experiences.



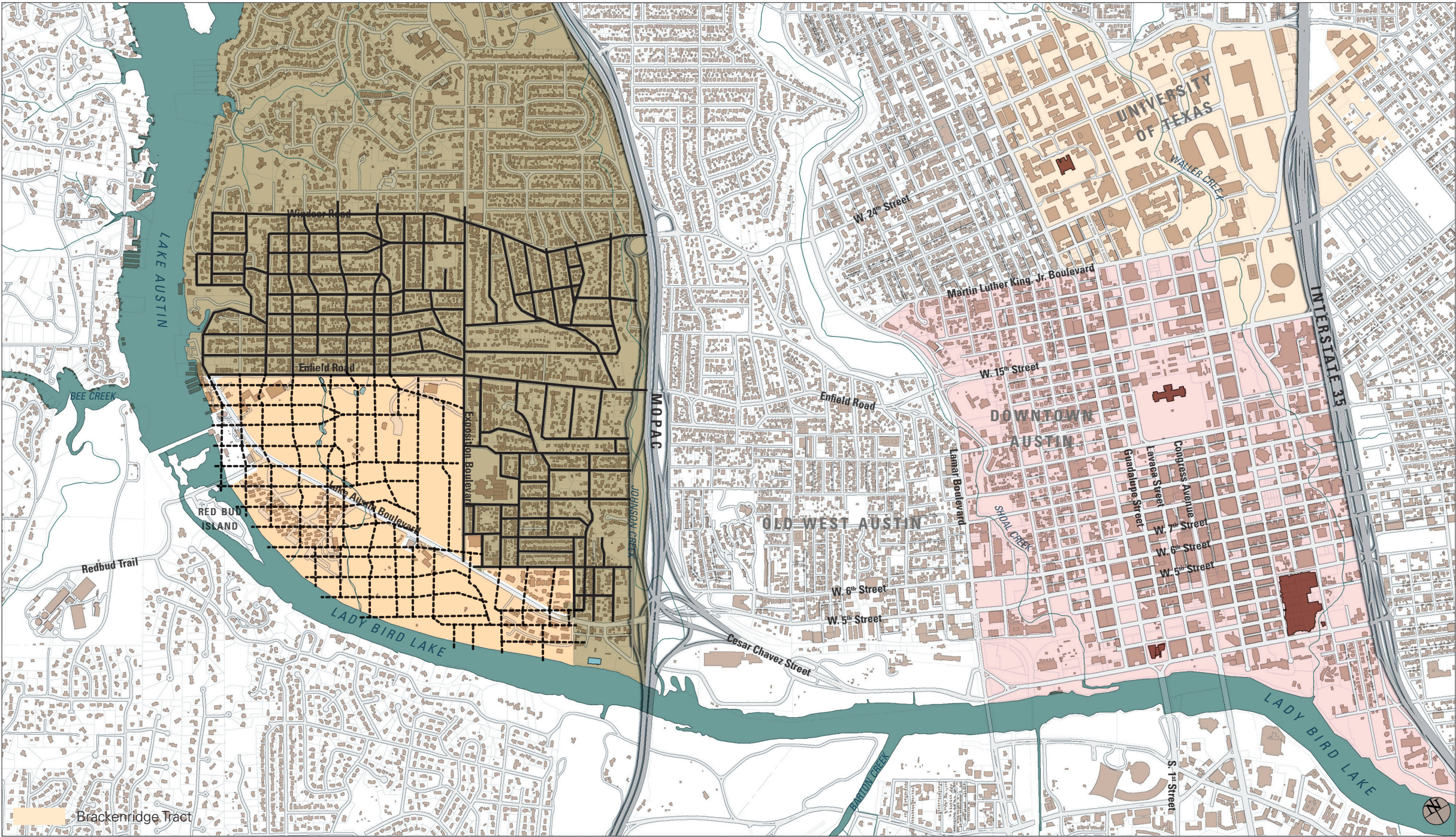
By contrast the block pattern in the Old West Austin neighborhoods to the west of downtown evolved over time to accommodate generally lower density development and to respond to the needs of a variety of specific uses or users, primarily residential. The pattern is an irregular grid with block sizes generally ranging from 1.32 to 7.8 acres, but including several larger tracts, such as the Gateway graduate student housing imbedded in the grid and the public uses along the river.



Block size 280' by 720'
(4.62 acres)

Block size 430' by 230'
(2.27 acres)

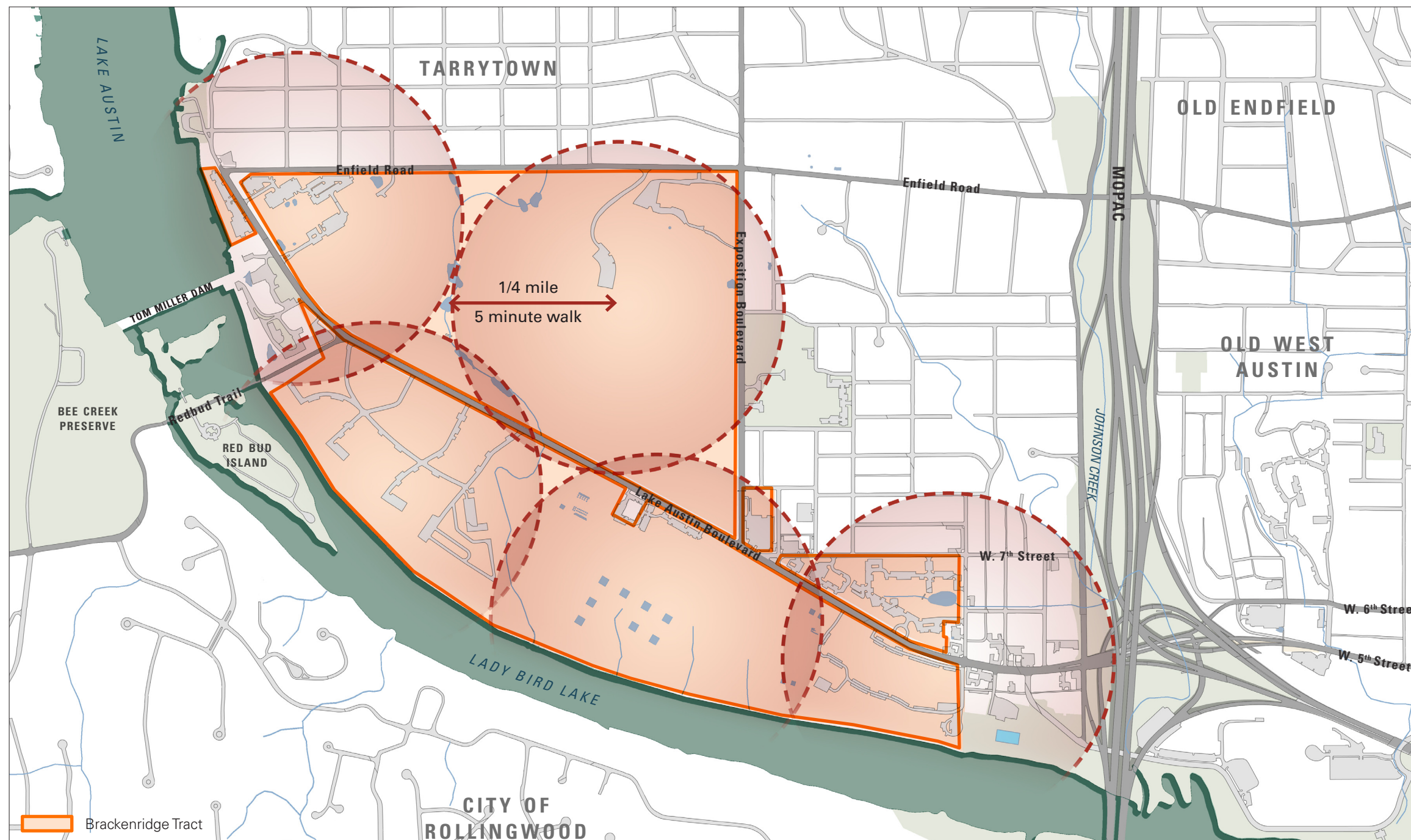
This pattern continues across MoPac into the area adjoining the easterly portions of the Brackenridge site which were, prior to the construction of the highway, part of the same neighborhood. The areas of Tarrytown to the north of the Brackenridge site, however, are almost exclusively residential, predominantly single-family, and the blocks are consistently in the middle range of sizes (2.27 to 4.62 acres). The grid, while generally planned, is irregular in response to creeks and other natural features.



The grid of Tarrytown superimposed upon the Brackenridge Tract

CITY SCALE & GRAIN





The Brackenridge Tract comprises up to five pedestrian sheds or neighborhood units.

9.4. SITE SIZE AND SCALE

Most Austinites have only experienced the Brackenridge Tract in automobiles from Lake Austin Boulevard and the streets surrounding the golf course and would be surprised to realize how much land there is and how many assets are hidden from view. Dimensions and distances tell only part of the story unless related to other more basic human activities, such as walking, or to the knowledge and experience of other places that are comparable in some way.

The dimensions of the site have been expressed in terms of walking distances in Section 2.1. Another way of understanding the site from the pedestrian's point of view is by overlaying the plan of the site with circles representing the area that can be walked easily within five minutes from their centers or ten minutes from edge to edge, known as pedestrian sheds. Each of these pedestrian sheds compares in size to an area adequate to contain an entire neighborhood with an activity and even employment center, depending on the location and density. When overlaid on the Brackenridge site, acknowledging existing centers and assuming connections to adjoining areas, there is the potential for five such neighborhoods and centers.

Another way of understanding size and scale of a site is the use of scale comparisons which overlay the site with the plans of other projects or locations. These help with visualizing how much space it takes for certain activities to take place or for a type of environment to be achieved and inform the expectations for the site. Local Austin and other Texas examples have been used as these are most familiar and represent current trends.

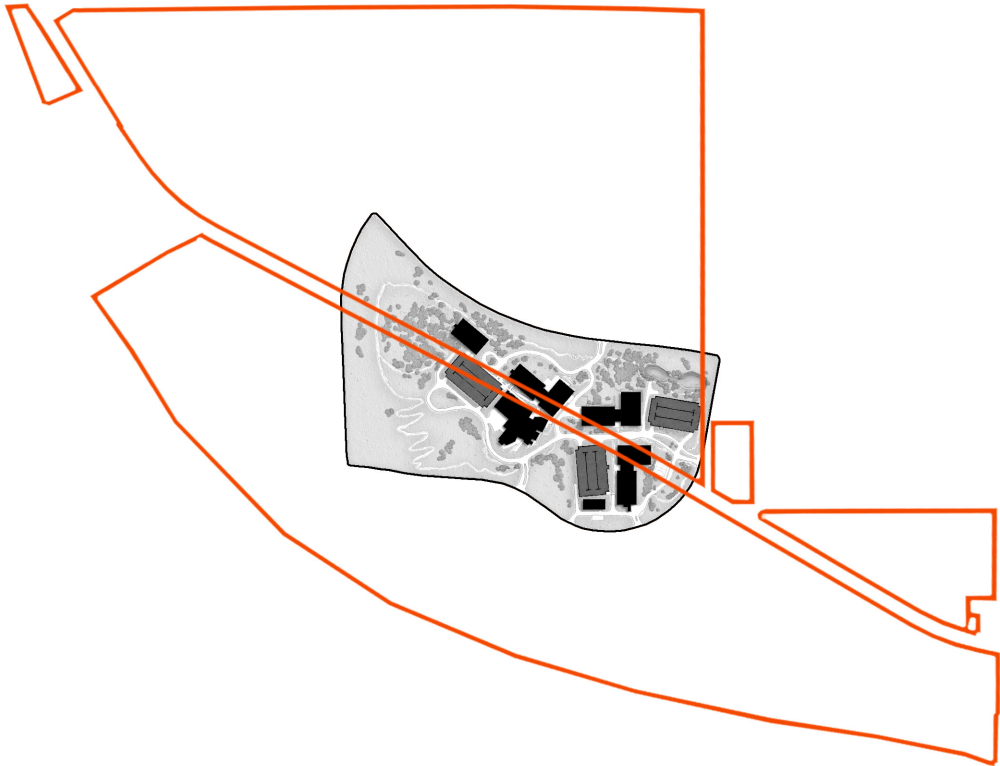
Examples include the Triangle, which is a mixed use, infill project. It shows, at only 22 acres, how little land it can take to establish a character and an identity when a higher density (approximately 1 FAR) is used. Mueller, on the other hand shows how much land - at 711 acres, twice the area of the Brackenridge Tract - is required at single-family densities to generate a population adequate to support urban amenities and transit.

SITE SIZE AND SCALE

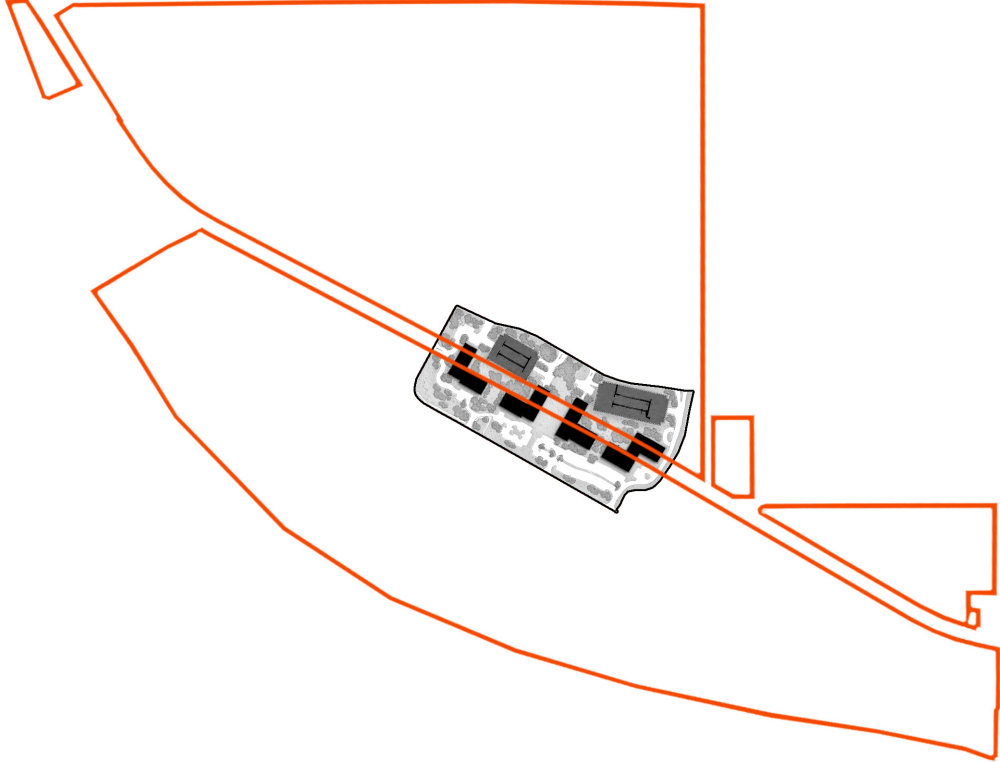


SCALE COMPARISON - PRECEDENTS: Office Development

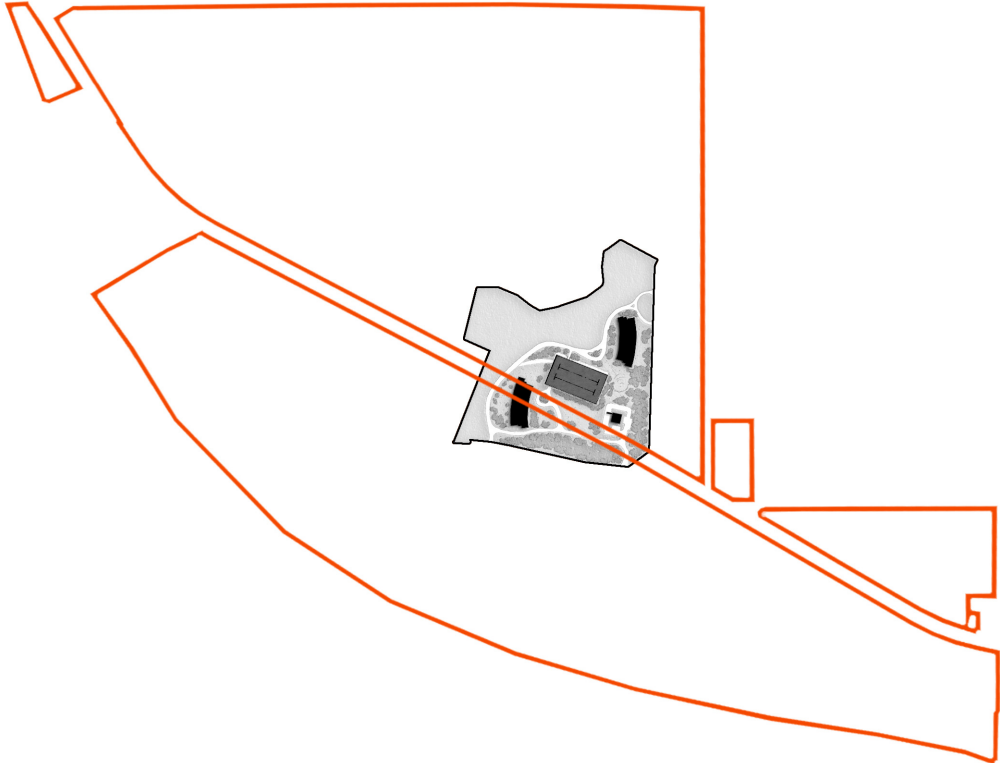
AMD Lone Star Campus,
Austin, TX



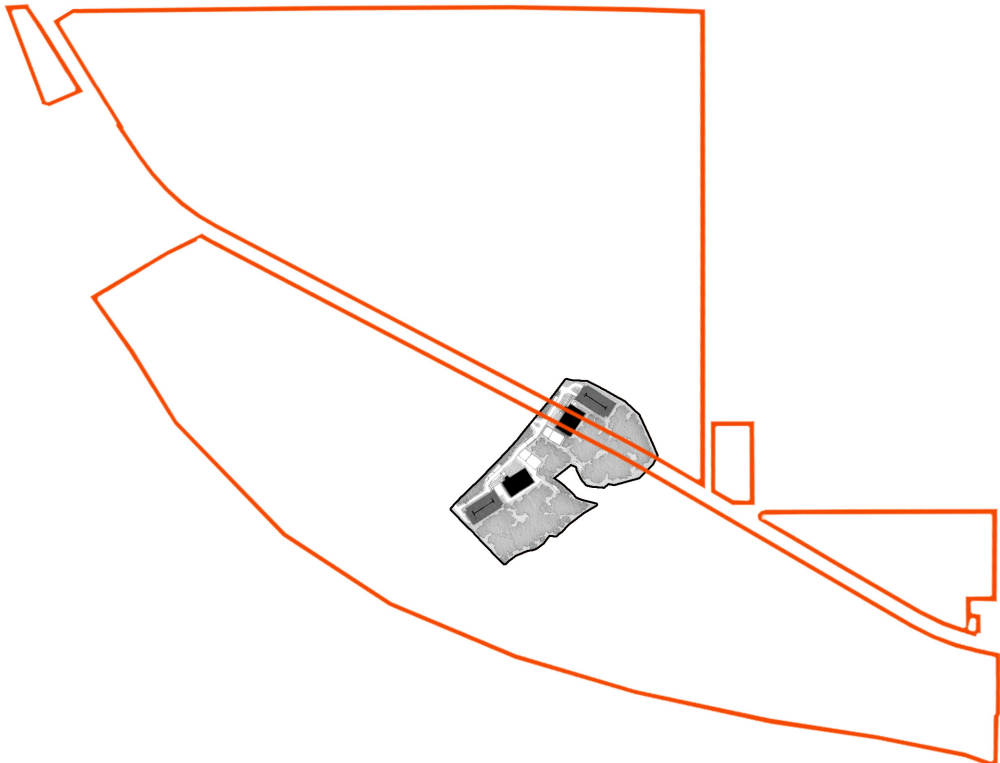
Research Park Plaza
Austin, TX



Palisades West I & II
Austin, TX



The Park on Barton Creek
Austin, TX

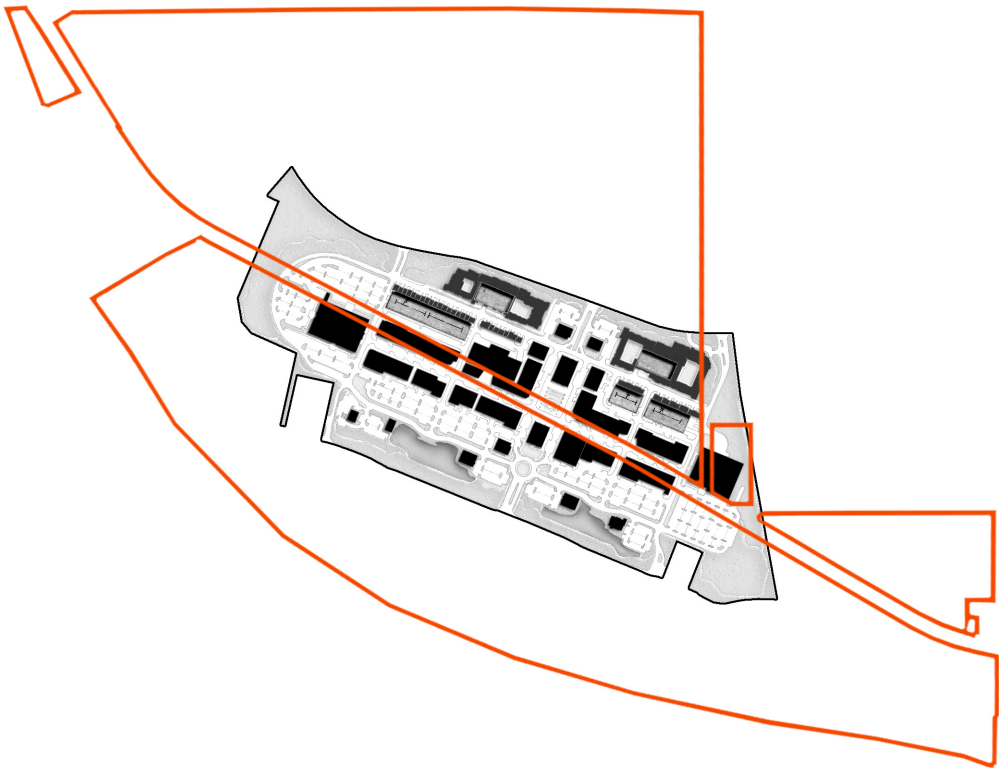


SITE SIZE AND SCALE

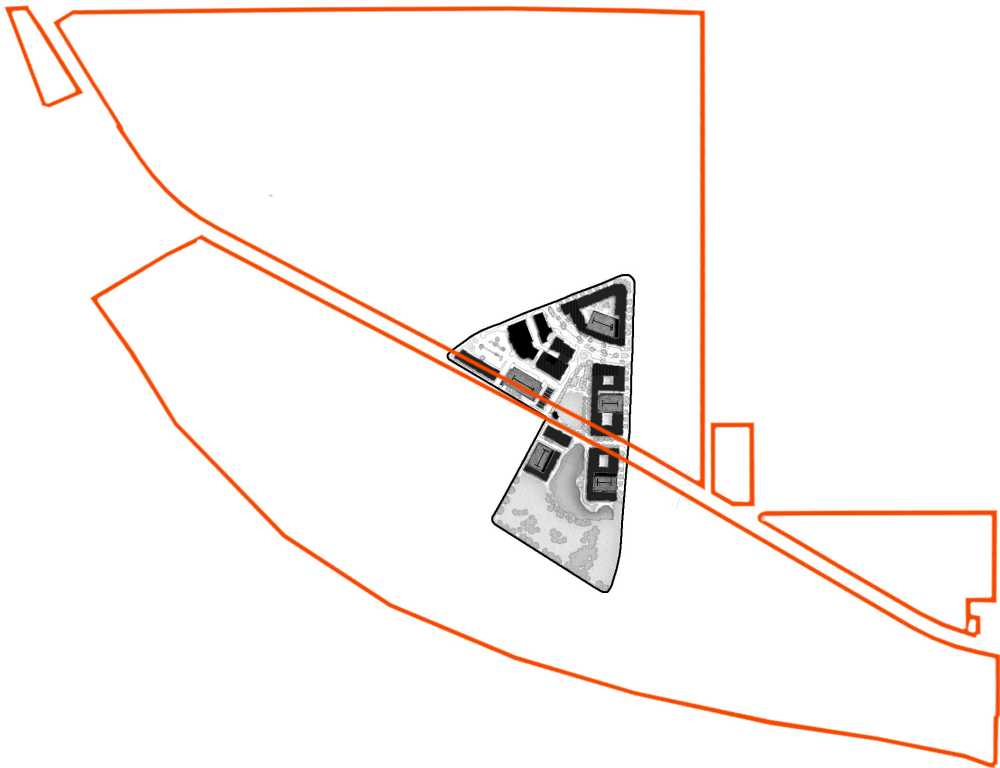


SCALE COMPARISON - PRECEDENTS: Mixed-Use Development

Hill Country Galleria
Bee Cave, TX



The Triangle
Austin, TX



Mueller
Austin, TX

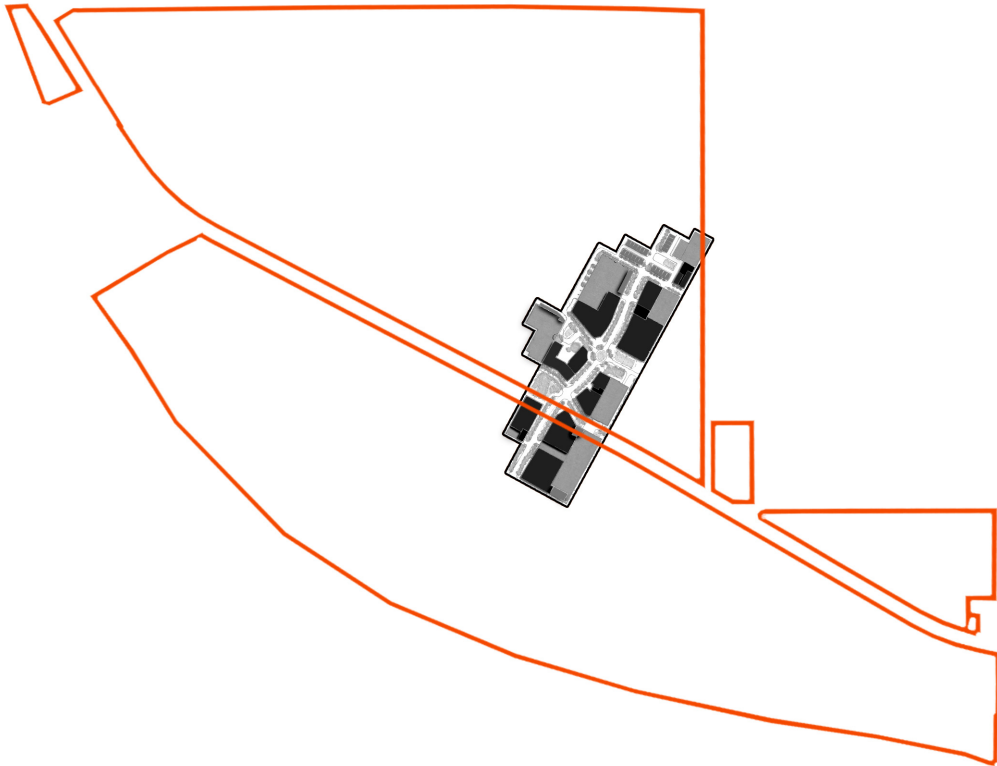


Domain
Austin, TX

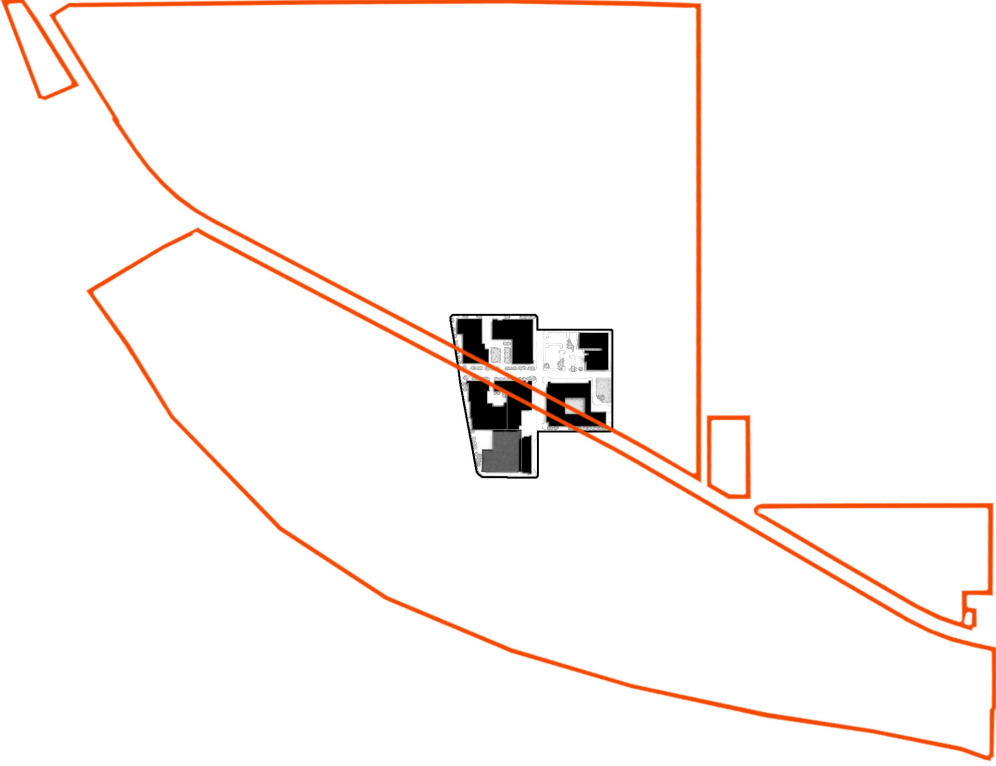


SCALE COMPARISON - PRECEDENTS: Mixed-Use Development

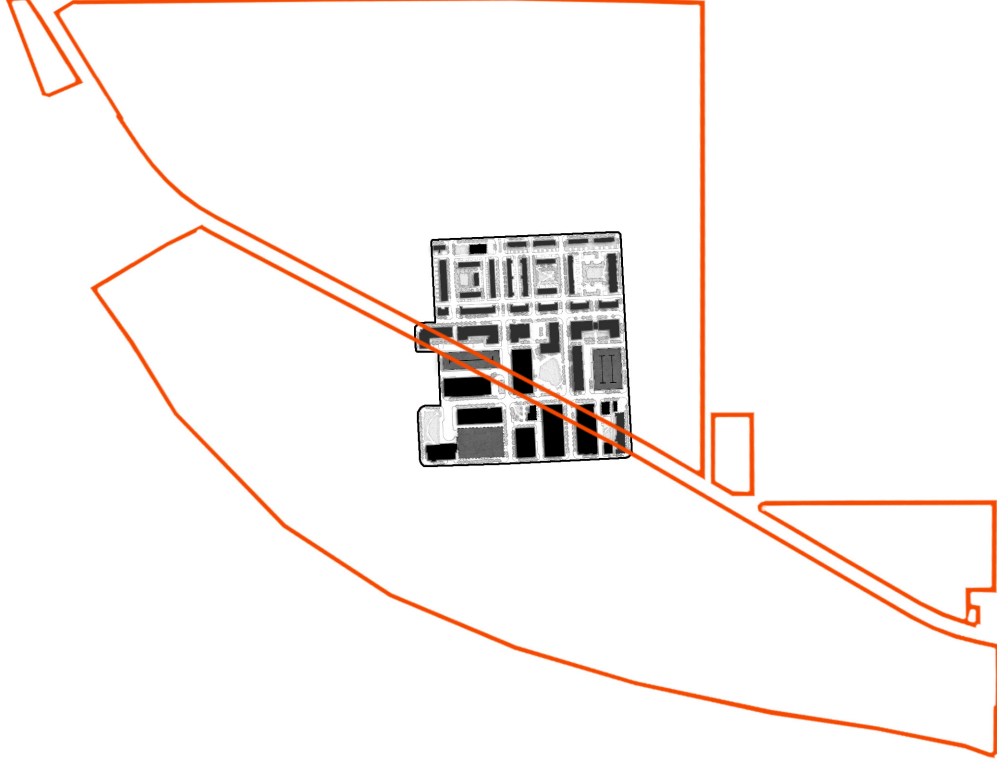
East Avenue
Austin, TX



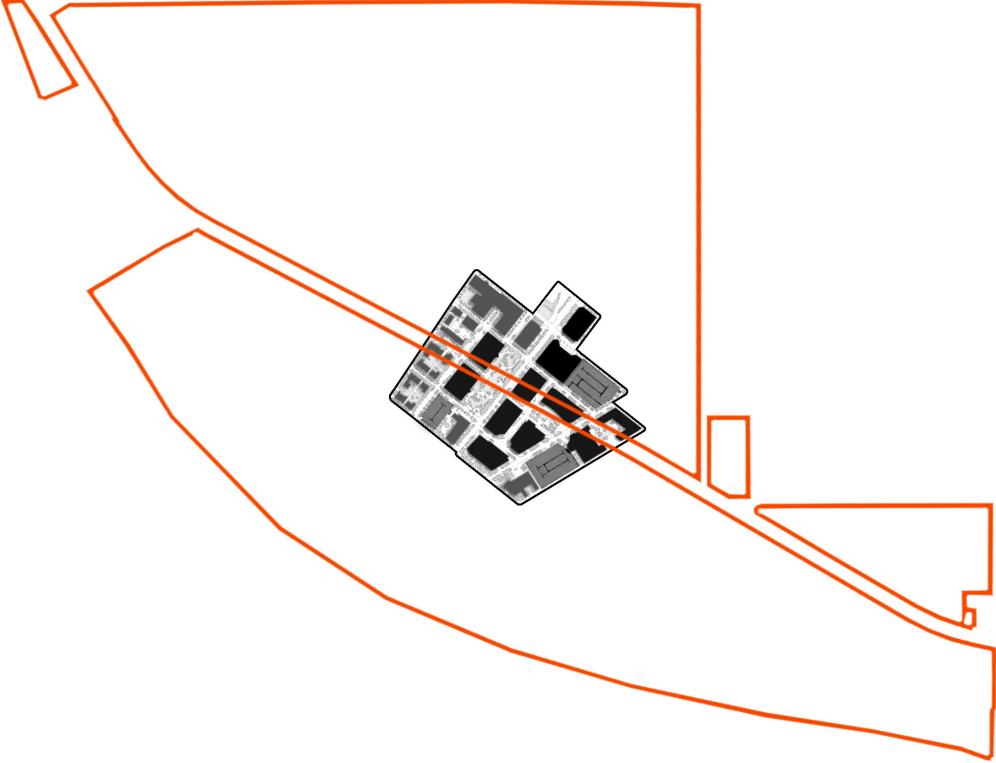
Technology Square
Atlanta, GA



Science + Technology Park
Baltimore, MD



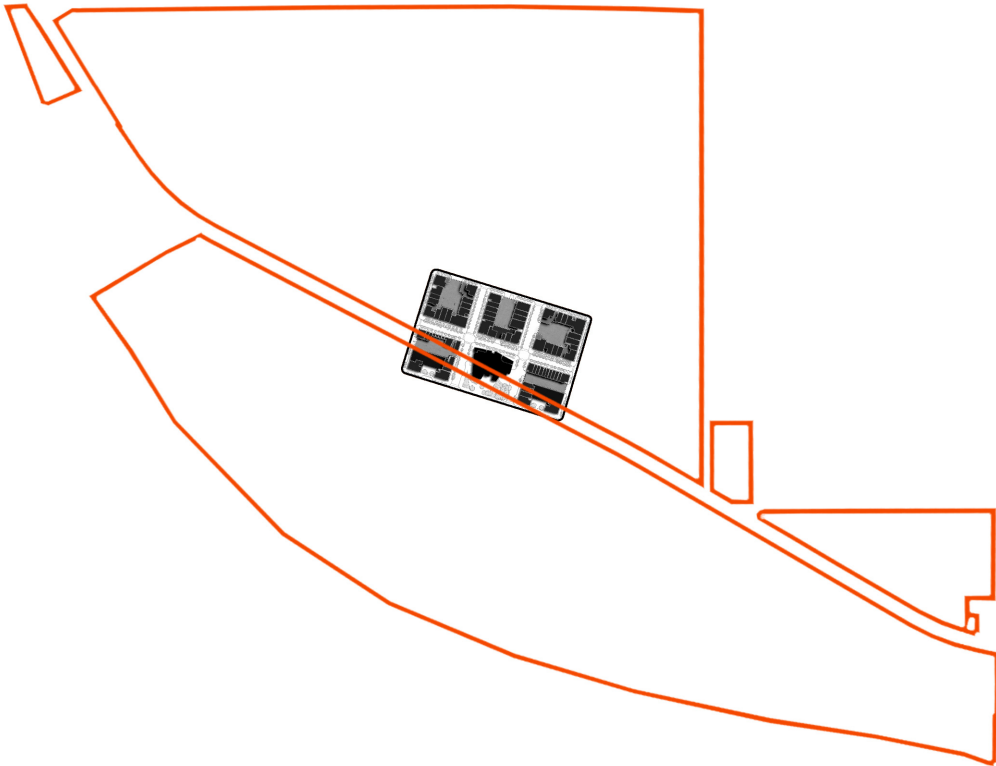
University Park
Cambridge, MA



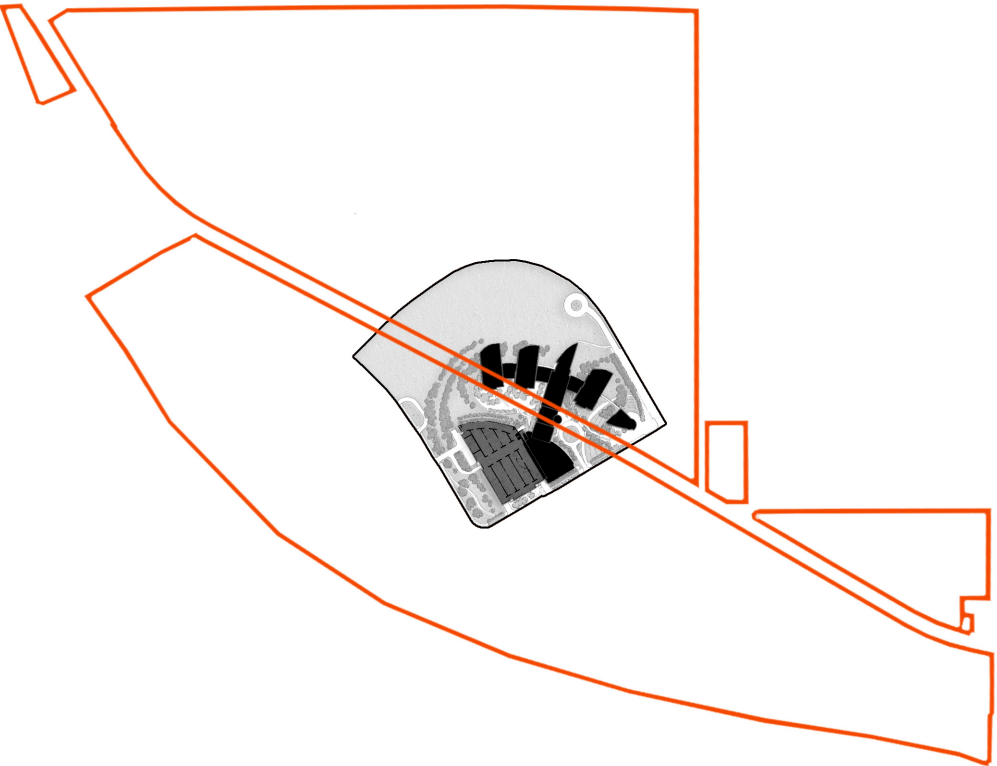
SITE SIZE AND SCALE

SCALE COMPARISON - PRECEDENTS: Mixed-Use Development

Second Street District
Austin, TX



Radioshack Headquarters
Fort Worth, TX

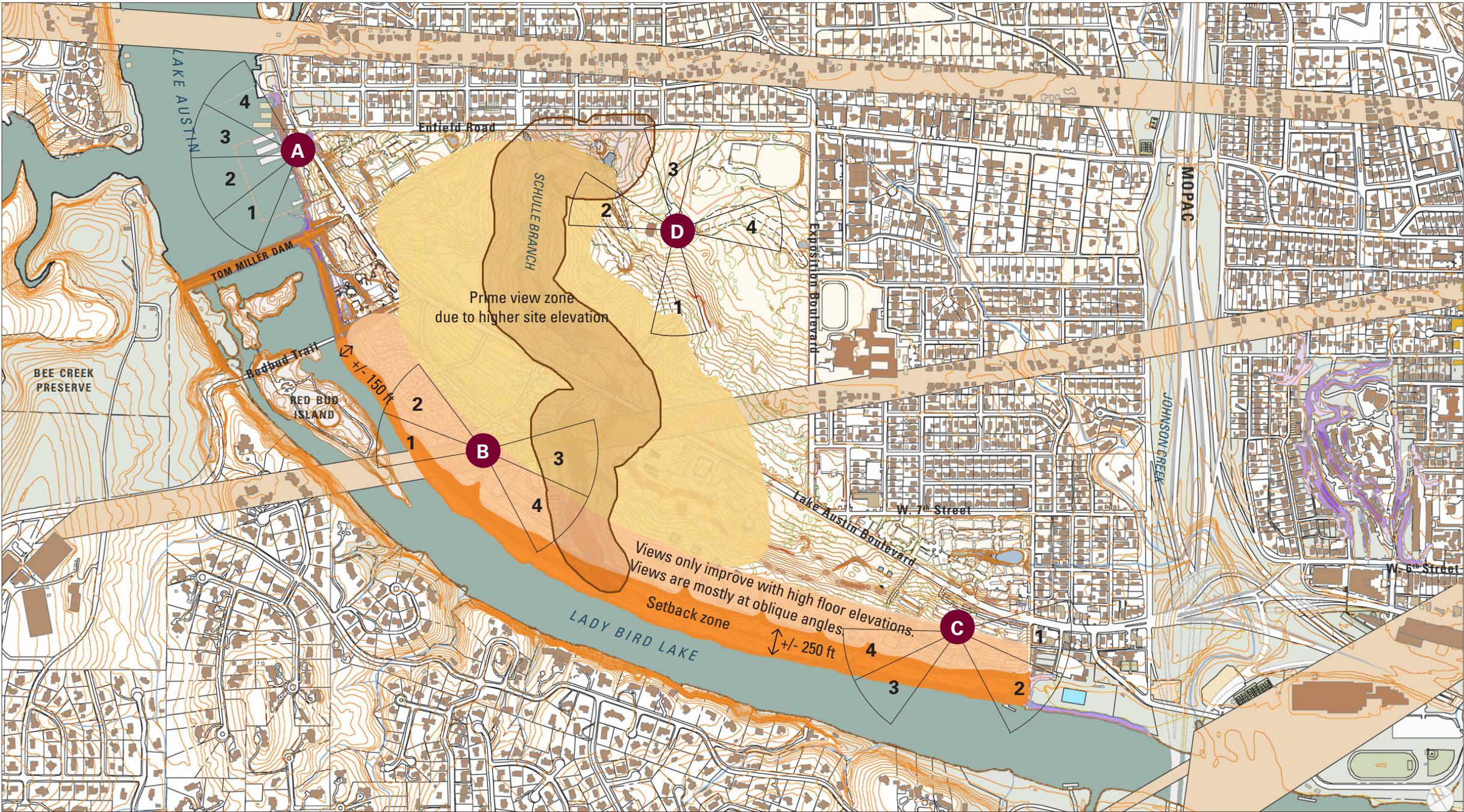


9.5. VIEWS AND VISIBILITY

The Brackenridge Tract , particularly the eastern end adjoining Deep Eddy Pool, is highly visible from MoPac and is recognizable by the extent of non-development with the lone and unremarkable Lake Austin Center rising in the middle. Any development on the site that rises above tree level will not only be seen from this vantage point, but, likely, impart the impression that most people will carry of this new district in the city. The development, or portions of it, will also be visible from Redbud Trail and the cliffs of Rollingwood, but, while important, the views are limited or private.

When approaching the site from the city side, awareness of having arrived is marked by the dissolution of street-oriented urban development or the absence of buildings altogether. There are neither gateways nor continuity. Transitions would usually refer to a change from something to something else; in this case they are from something to inaccessible voids rather than to publicly useable positive spaces. The approach by way of Redbud Trail is an interesting and visually pleasant one and is the basis for one of the Capitol View Corridors; the arrival is clearly at the bridge, which has both visual and capacity issues. A Capitol View Corridor extends across the site, but because of the low site elevation and high View Corridor, there is no likely impact on the anticipated building heights.

Views from the site, once above the trees, are open in all directions, except those toward the cliffs, which are themselves an interesting visual feature. The views have been documented photographically from several locations on the site at various elevations. Easterly-facing building exposures could have views of the Austin skyline from as low as three or four stories, depending on the location in the plan. Ironically, the



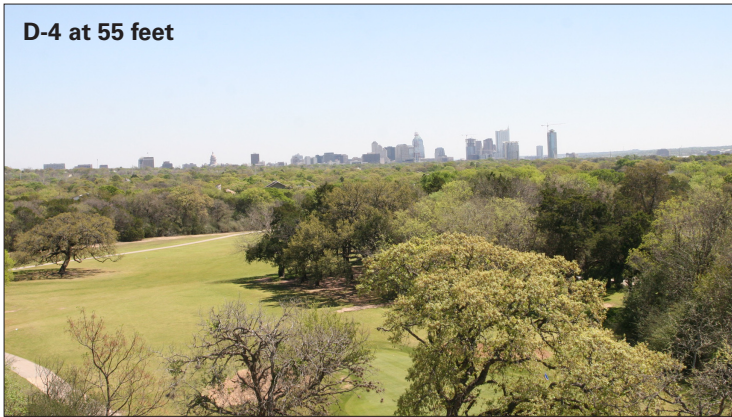
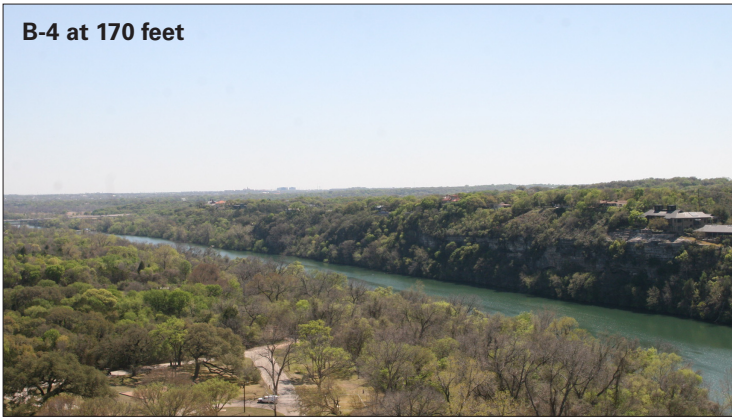
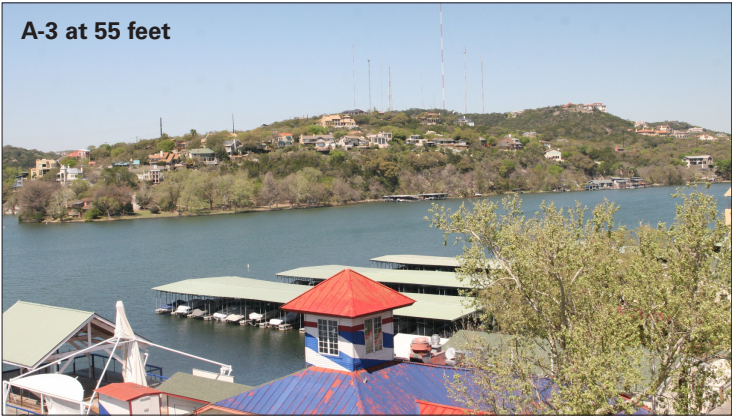
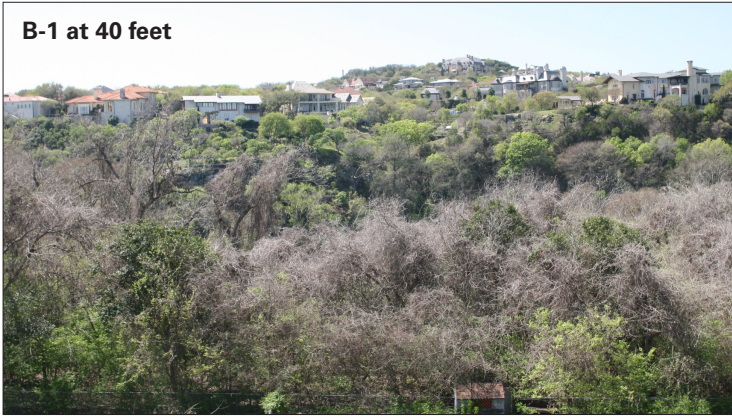
View opportunities

best views of the water are not directly from locations closest to it, but, because of slopes, trees, and setbacks, are oblique and from upland areas. Conversely, in views from the water into the site, buildings will be obscured by the trees.

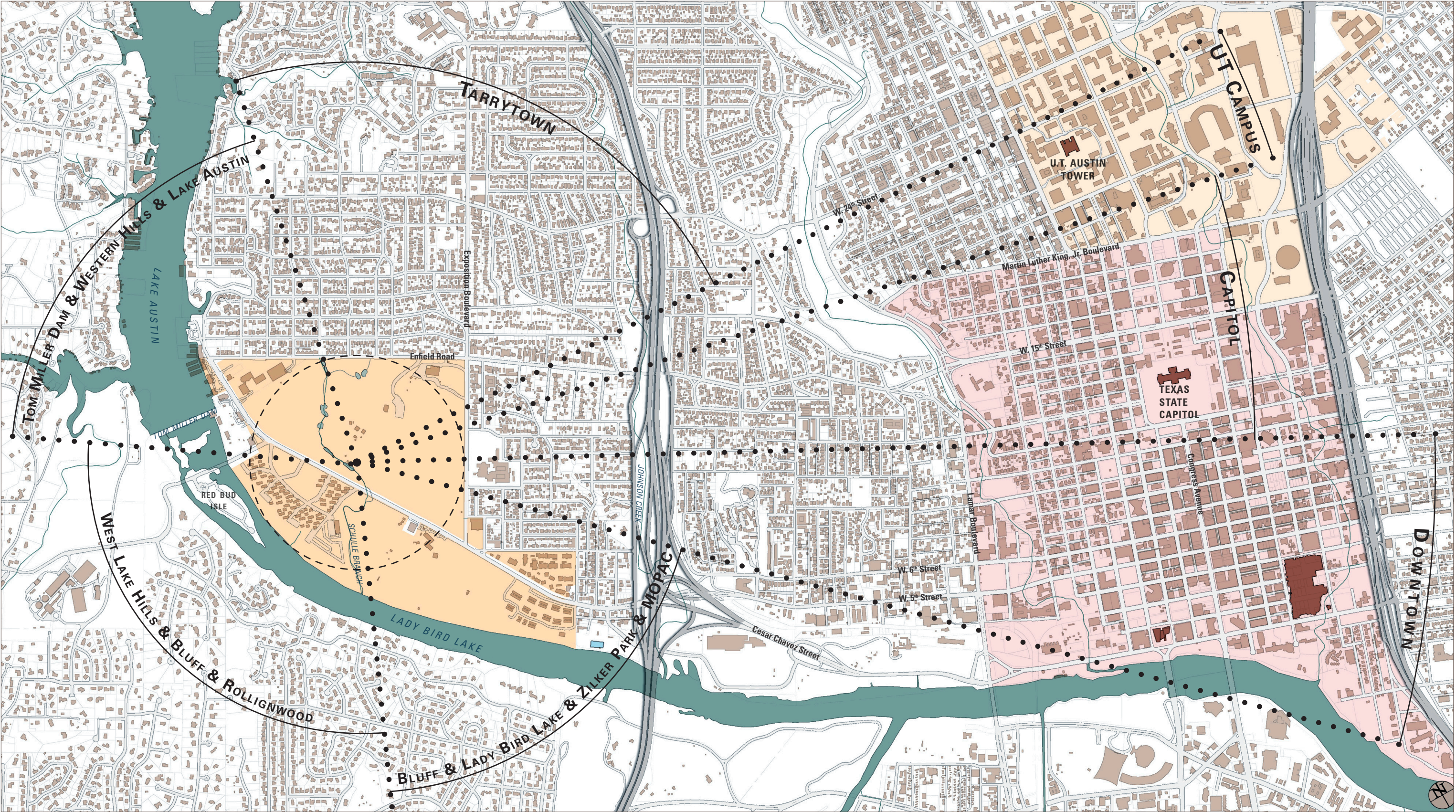
An interesting observation was made at one of the public sessions concerning sight-lines on the river, from, say, a kayak. There is a

point in the bend of the river east of which one is aware of the urban setting with views of highway bridges and downtown buildings. To the west of this point it is only trees, cliffs, and the water with no sense of the city surrounding you.

VIEWS AND VISIBILITY



Blimp (Low Altitude Aerial) Photos

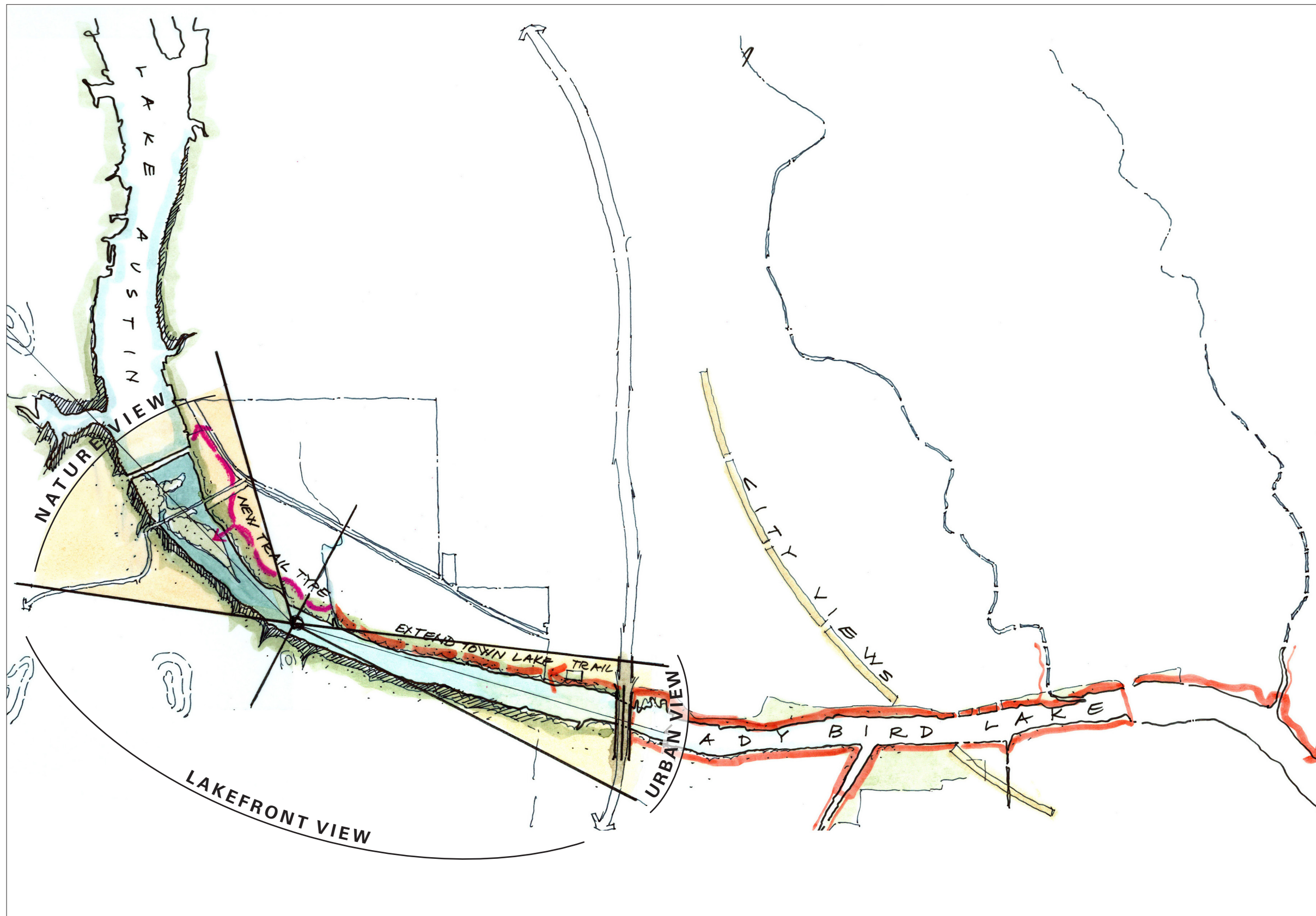


View from the site

VIEWS AND VISIBILITY



THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS SYSTEM: Brackenridge Tract
AUSTIN, TEXAS



Lakefront View Character

Lakefront view character changes at mid-point of shoreline from urban in the east to natural in the west. Character change suggests a shift from more urban lakefront to a more nature one in the design of the lakefront.

Lakefront view character diagram



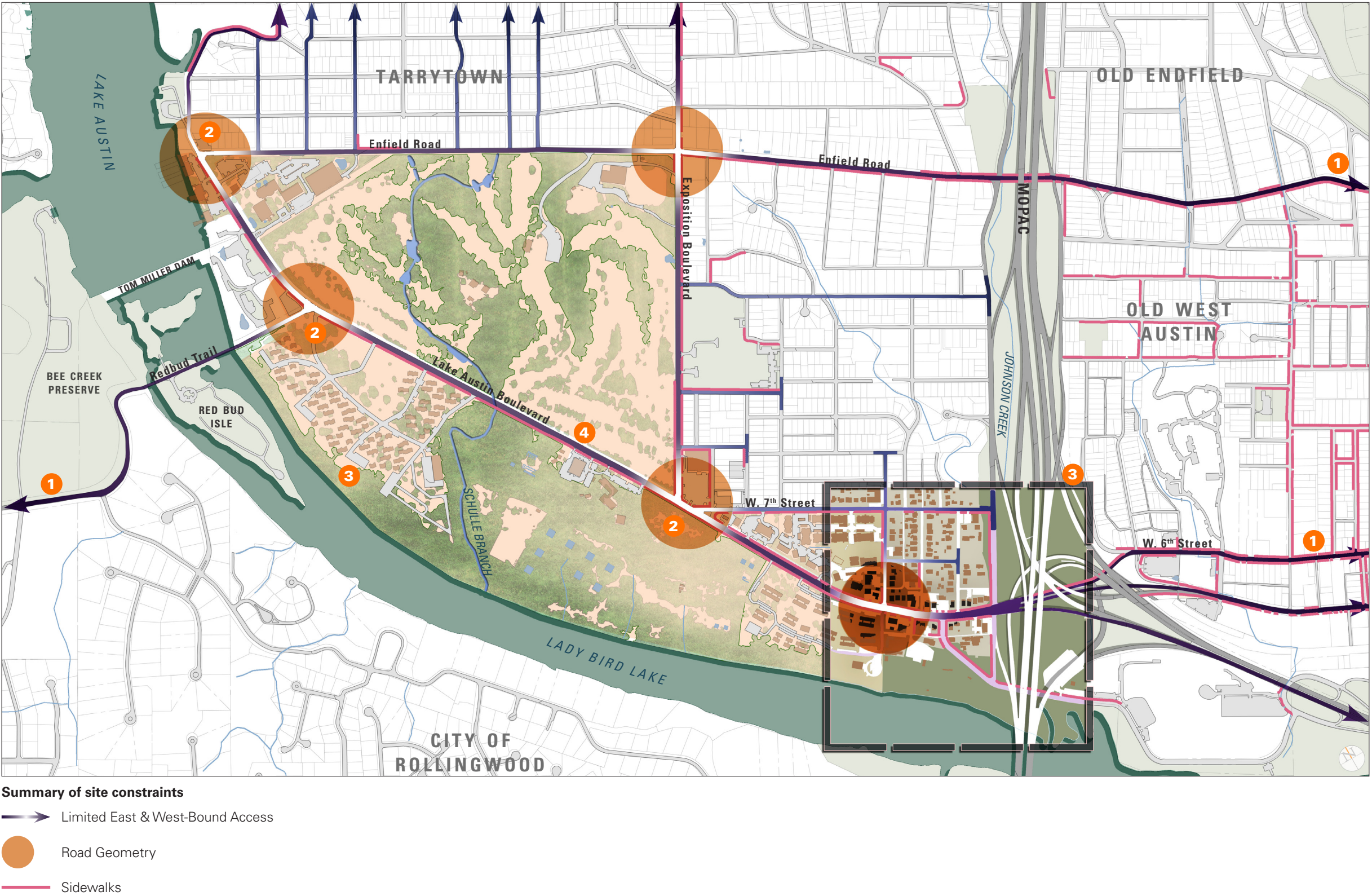
9.6 . S U M M A R Y

Site Constraints and Site Assets describe existing conditions and circumstances, which taken together, distinguish a site from other locations. As a basis for design principles, they give direction to a design, making it unique to this location and community.

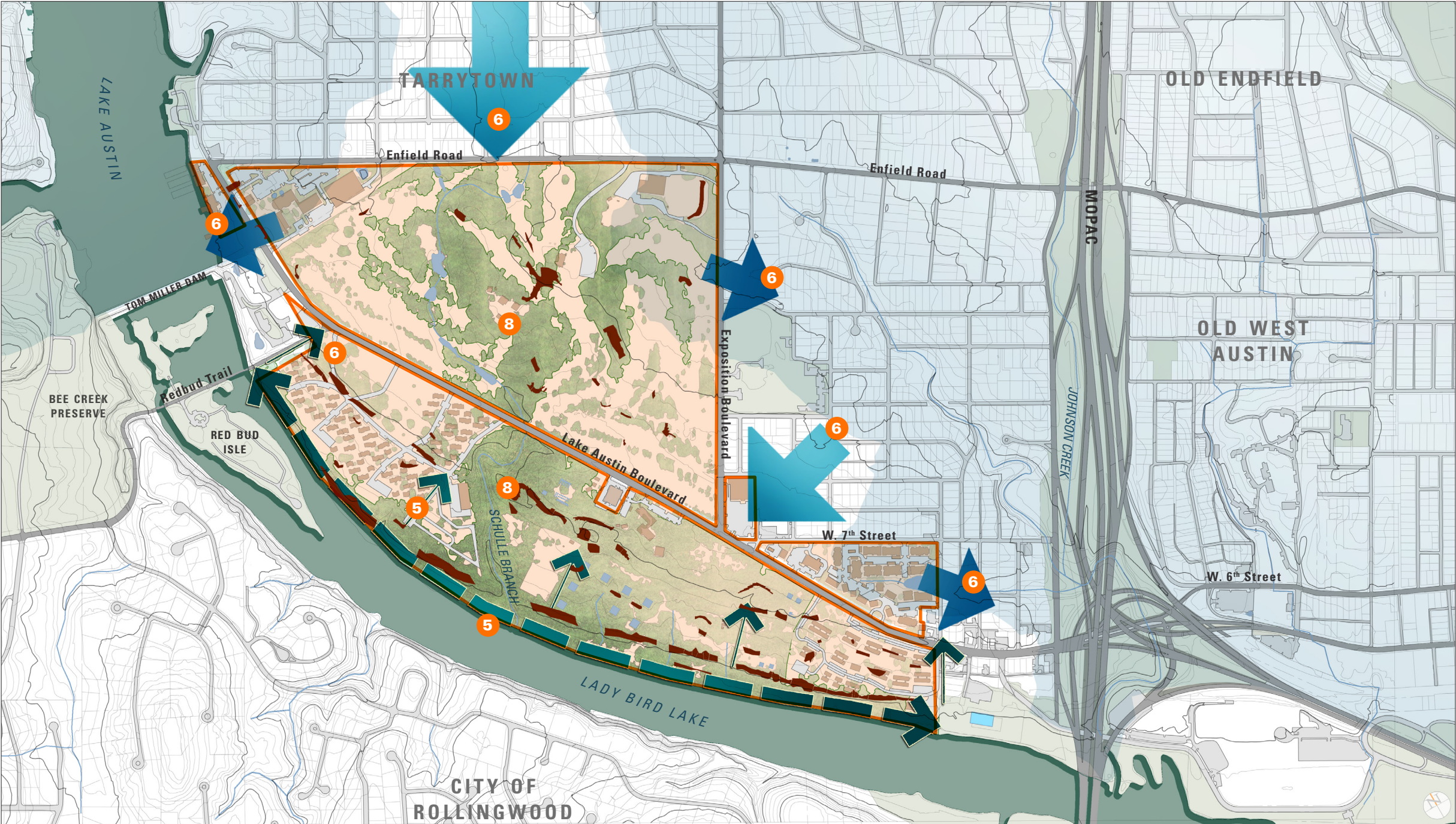
Site constraints identify situations that have not been addressed previously in a manner that takes advantage of inherent features or opportunities of the site, or may have been adequate in the past but will not support future needs. Site Assets are features or opportunities that exist and to which any future design should preserve, maintain, and/or enhance relationships.

9.6.1. SITE CONSTRAINTS

- 1 Limited east & west-bound access
- 2 Ackward street and intersection geometry
- 3 Constrained access to Lake Austin Boulevard frontage along deep eddy
- 4 Lack of sidewalks



S U M M A R Y

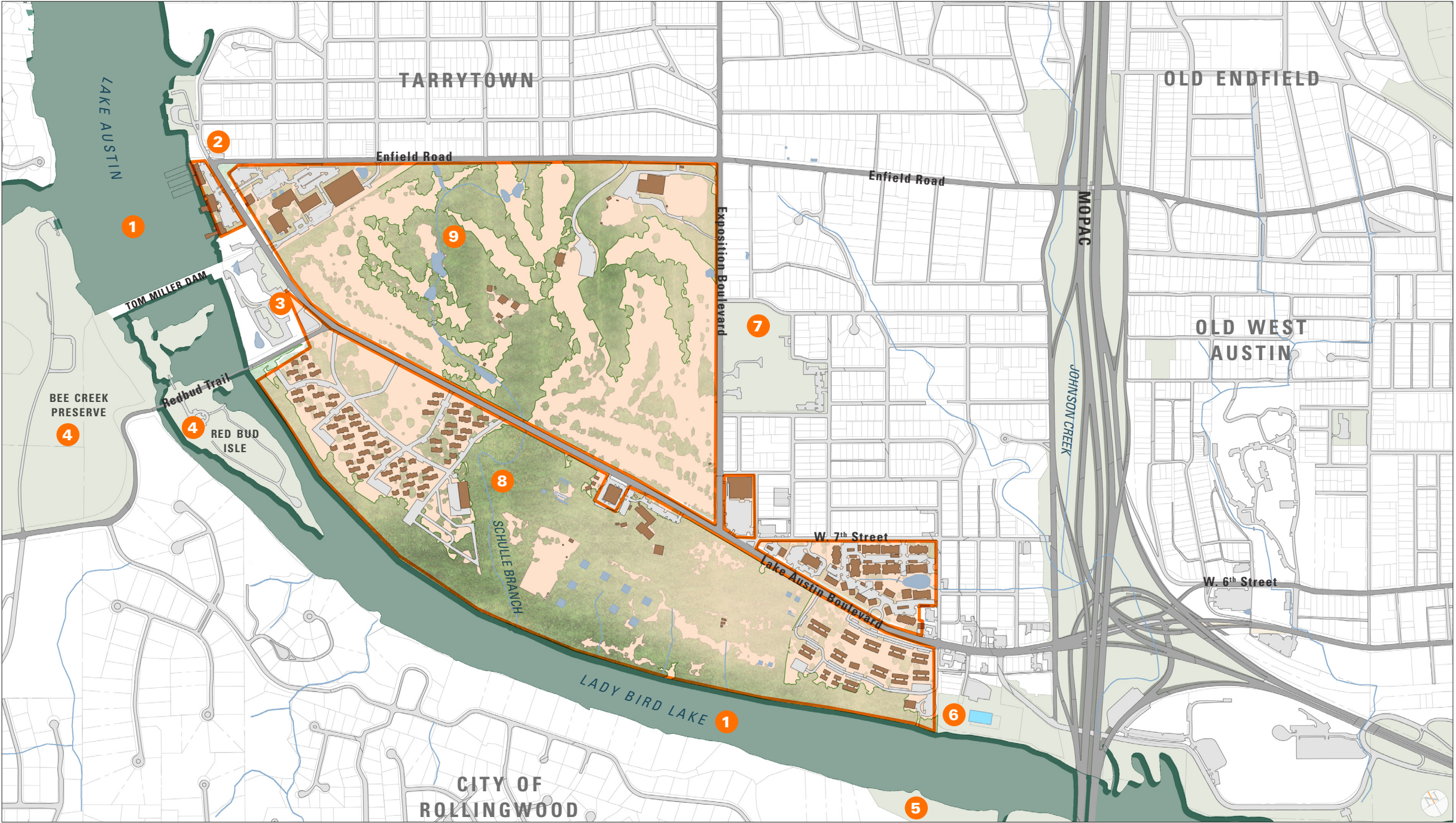


SITE CONSTRAINTS, CONT.

- 5 Lack of waterfront accessibility
- 6 Lack of coordinated stormwater management
- 7 Critical slopes
- 8 Preservation of the creek and woods

9.6.2. SITE ASSETS

- 1 Frontage on Two Lakes
- 2 Walsh Boat Landing
- 3 LCRA Red Bud Interpretive Center
- 4 Red Bud Isle & Bee Cave Preserve
- 5 Zilker Metropolitan Park
- 6 Eiler’s Park
- 7 O’Henry Middle School
- 8 Schulle Branch
- 9 Remnant Woods



Summary of site assets

SUMMARY