

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

DRAFT

TEMPE URBAN OPEN SPACE PLAN

Prepared for: City of Tempe, Community Development Department

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Introduction

The desirability of a city goes beyond its job offerings, retail centers, housing stock, or even its cultural and recreational offerings. A city is also judged by its sense of place, social atmosphere, and certain *quality of life* elements that are often hard to define. People want to live or work in a place that is pleasant, distinctive, stimulating, attractive and safe. The City of Tempe's unprecedented growth cycle will define the City's physical form and opportunities for recreational and social interaction for generations to come. It is imperative that thoughtful decisions be made now to create a dynamic and coherent system of public spaces that will contribute greatly to Tempe's quality of life, now and for future generations.

Tempe's Mill Avenue District, Town Lake and their environs are already largely successful places. Yet they could be even better. They could have more people strolling around at more times of the day, week and year. They could have more well-loved destinations, a beach park that is full of people even outside of event times, a Sixth Street Park that works for people, a Town Lake that invites people to spend more time along its shore, neighborhood destinations that celebrate the shared experience of life in Tempe. These areas would also benefit from a greater emphasis on "walking and biking streets", which cars can use, but almost as an invited guest. They could be more comfortable and safe for children and the elderly and include a more dense mix of varied uses for all types of people. With a stronger emphasis on creating Places that people love and visit often, Tempe has the potential of becoming a great urban experience.

Downtown Tempe is well-known for its *authenticity*, meaning it is historic, a place with real roots, with a mix of local merchants that attract the high and the low end. This differentiates it from the other hubs in the valley. The Mayor and City Council showed great foresight when they decided to initiate an **Urban Open Space Plan** in the fall of 2006 to nurture and build on that unique downtown experience. This document is the result of that decision, and of more than a year's effort, working with downtown residents and other stakeholders to explore how the city could develop a great public space environment that attracts residents, businesses, and students for decades to come.

A Seamless District of Destinations

In every city, there is a universal desire for unique, vital public places where friends run into each other and where exchanges both social and economic take place. Every district and every neighborhood needs a variety of great destinations to create a critical mass of places where this can occur. All these destinations should connect seamlessly, neighborhood to Town Lake to Mill Avenue District to ASU to Papago Park and beyond.

Authentic to Tempe

Tempe is a city with its own authentic history, characters and environment. Nobody knows these better than the people who live, work and do business in Tempe. Building on this

authenticity will secure a unique and special place for Tempe in the hearts of residents, visitors and the business community. It is important to engage local people as the experts to help ensure that the vision stays true to the place – in this case, that Tempe’s authenticity is enhanced, not compromised.

A Program of the Right Activities for the Right Audiences

It is also important to plan for different audiences so that groups of all ages and cultures can come together and overlap in enjoyable, sociable ways. This study uses demographic information and discussions with community members to build a program of uses suitable to each audience.

What If?

What if residents in downtown could easily walk to Tempe Town Lake, sit on a beach and order a cold drink, wander all along the waterfront enjoying a rich variety of experiences and places? What if Mill Avenue’s shops reached all the way to Tempe Beach Park? What if you could take a ferry across the lake to wonderful places along the north shore, and walk along inviting paths into Papago Park? What if the neighborhoods in southwest and southeast downtown had safe, inviting walking and biking routes to get to Mill Avenue? Or if North Tempe residents had an easy way to walk to the lake?

This is the basic outline of the future that the Tempe Urban Open Space plan hopes to achieve. Achieving it is not in the distant future, but a realistic medium-term goal.

Placemaking Principles

Several fundamental "Placemaking" principles were used to try to plan for the vision described above:

- **Design for use.** If the goal is to create a great public space, it is essential to start with a clear understanding of the activities that are going to occur there – what architects refer to as the *program*; this is to ensure that both the design and management are done in a way that supports these activities. Design responds to uses, not the other way around. Successful public spaces are lively, secure and distinctive places because they function well and offer many reasons for people to use them in different ways.
- **Create a critical mass – the Power of Ten.** It is important to have more than one of these spaces – ten, in fact, at least, to create a critical mass of spaces that attracts people to come back again and again and spend time visiting each one. Within each space there should be many (ten) things to do – sitting, watching people, eating, playing games, etc. It’s the Power of Ten!
- **Cluster activities – Triangulation.** Activities within a space should be clustered together to create a busy, dynamic place for many different types of people at

different times of day. A library next to a reading garden and a laundromat will be a far busier place than any one of those uses by itself. This is the principle of “triangulation”. By triangulating, more types of people will be encouraged to spend more time in a public space throughout the day.

- **Streets are places too.** Tempe streets can become destinations worth visiting, not conduits for through traffic. In successful districts, the streets are servants to the larger vision for the place and how it should be experienced by all people, but especially those on foot. We think a compelling vision for downtown is to create a network of places, connected by streets that are “right-sized” to help fulfill that vision. This boils down to a simple fact: *If you plan for cars and traffic, you get more cars and traffic; if you plan for people and places, you get more people and places.*

Methodology

A community- and place-based approach was used to bring together stakeholders to elicit ideas and build support for improvements. This approach includes the following:

- **Approach the community in the beginning of the project.** The community’s ideas and concerns should come in the beginning of the project, so that their ideas can be used in the development of the vision.
- **The community’s strengths should be tapped,** including its knowledge of local issues and how an area functions. Local people can provide an historical perspective and can help create a sense of community ownership in the project.
- **Think long term but implement short term.** Short-term improvements are important for quickly adding value to a place, while demonstrating future potential. They encourage community support and can encourage more partners to become involved.
- **Develop strong communication between stakeholders.** Different city agencies, local institutions, residents and associations can find ways to collaborate around a Placemaking process. These partnerships strengthen as visible improvements begin.

Issues Opportunities and Planning Objectives

This section summarizes some of the general issues and opportunities the team identified that needed to be addressed in the plan and led to definition of objectives.

Issues

- **The role of streets.** Streets should be desirable connectors for all users, and as public spaces in and of themselves. Throughout downtown, many streets are wide, vacant and uninviting to pedestrians and bicyclists.
- **Private development should make a greater contribution to the public realm.**
 - o Large developments may threaten to close historic street and alley linkages or privatize areas that should be public
 - o Generic, “slippery,” building ground floors – those without details, character, and strong retail that spills out – can discourage strolling and window shopping.
 - o Blank walls and vacant spaces, including along the lakeshore and parking lots along the north end of Mill, degrade the experience of downtown
 - o Many areas in downtown simply lack any destinations at all that would attract either residents or employees
- **Events and programs should be spread around.** Tempe Beach Park is the focus of most events, to the point where the park is often overwhelmed and inaccessible for general public use, yet other spaces suffer from a lack of programs and activity.
- How can **city policies** encourage the creation and use of public spaces? Several ordinances were identified that deter the active use of spaces.
- How will Tempe retain its **sense of authenticity**, especially in the current development climate?
- **How can the city incorporate a Placemaking process into future efforts** – in effect, how to build a campaign of partners to achieve the vision?

On the other hand, there are many existing **strengths** of the downtown which can be leveraged, including:

- A strong retail base, organized and concerned Downtown business
- A surge of new development, investment

- A captive ASU population which is inclined to walk, bike, and ride transit
- New transit improvements, especially the soon-to-open light rail transit (LRT) line connecting Tempe to Phoenix
- A history of public investment in downtown, including the creation of Tempe Town Lake
- The historic fabric of the Mill Avenue District, which gives it a unique identity well worth preserving
- Strong natural features, such as Hayden Butte, Papago Park, and Rio Salado
- An increasing arts presence
- Viable close-in neighborhoods, in walking distance of downtown
- A good network for bicycling, with plans for a more comprehensive system underway
- A strong public art program
- Numerous and reoccurring special events throughout the year

Detailed Planning Objectives

While the overall vision is to create a seamless system of destinations, this can be broken down into a list of more specific planning objectives:

- Enhance the sense of place for residents, workers, students and visitors, including Tempe's sense of heritage and authenticity
- Maximize the potential of existing attractions in the Mill Avenue District, on the lake shore, in the Papago region and on the ASU campus
- Create new attractions/destinations for residents as well as visitors and workers
- Promote higher levels of "productivity" of public spaces.
- Connect the city to its destinations by making it easier to get around without driving
- Expand and create features that appeal to all ages
- Match the level of maintenance to the program of each space
- Sustain economic growth and investment in the city
- Instill a culture that makes Placemaking a routine consideration in Tempe's governing activities.
- Partner with ASU and private developers to expand the public realm and public objectives.

Overall Vision and Program Plan

Plan Overview

To develop a vision for downtown's public spaces, the team broke the area down into planning elements:

- **Anchors** are regional amenities that will serve the community for decades to come and have potential to frame the way the valley develops. In effect, they can be the engines for a system of great places, if there is the leadership to implement them. The anchors are **Papago Park, Town Lake, Mill Ave District, and the ASU community**
- **Building Blocks** are elements that work on a less regional scale but are vital to a neighborhood or district. They reinforce the identity of and access to the anchors, and in many cases are right under our noses – part of the daily experience
- **Neighborhood places** are also discussed, to look at the Placemaking and recreation opportunities from the point of view of the people who live downtown

Select Recommendations

The following is a small sampling of the recommendations contained in the full-text report. The full report can be downloaded at www.tempe.gov/comdev/urbanopenspace.htm.

ANCHOR: PAPAGO PARK

- Provide greater emphasis on interpretation of and orientation to the park, especially entering from Tempe: an interpretive trail that connects the visitor center, LoPiano Bosque, Lomas del Rio Archaeological Site, Arizona State Historical Society Museum, Green Line, Eisendrath House and (via Canal Park) the Crosscut Canal.
- Upgrade Tempe Papago Park as an oasis within the desert setting.

ANCHOR: TEMPE TOWN LAKE

The big opportunity in front of the city now is to create an inspiring master vision for lakefront destinations that attract people to the water and that guides development. The city cannot afford to rely on private sector developers to build the entire lakefront without a Master Plan. This approach will create a piecemeal experience without any strong public spaces.

- The existing program for the new boathouse needs to be greatly expanded from the planned boat storage, fitness center, concession, and community space.

- Develop the boat launch as a beach with palapas (thatch beach shelters), splash pads, and a beach or zero-depth pool (beach-type gradual entrance)
- More activities and small destinations are needed to help Tempe Center for the Arts realize its full potential as an arts anchor, especially for families and children.
 - o Passive spaces, like outdoor meeting rooms and classrooms, gardens with fountains that can be used by small groups and outdoor yoga classes seeking a quiet green environment.
 - o Kids activities: an art-themed playground, especially for kids involved in the center's programs, but also for nearby residents and kids.
 - o A downtown skate park would be a great attraction for young people and parents who would not have to drive them to facilities farther away.
- A “great lawn” should be developed at the lakeside opposite Sun Devil Stadium as a flexible space for everything from Frisbee®-playing to sunbathing to pre-game events, whether formal or informal, with a dog park, a lake pavilion for shade and seating, a waterfront café or bar, and a boat launch, among other ideas.
- ASU Beach would create an area for students on the lakefront just north of Karsten Golf Course, with very good access to ASU students. It could offer a sand beach, volleyball, basketball half-courts, and an age-appropriate skate park.

Building Block: Tempe Beach Park / Plaza Between the Bridges / Hayden Ferry Lakeside

- The waterfront and important public amenities, such as the playground and picnic areas, should always be kept open to anyone, i.e. an event should never interrupt a walk along the lake or a parent from getting access to its playground.
- Many smaller events should be relocated to other places downtown to reduce the pressure of too many events on this one location. These alternative places, including 6th Street Park, Hayden Square, and the marina and boathouse, will benefit from hosting these events, and so will all of downtown.
- The playground needs more shade, which could include trees, umbrellas, and shaded ramadas for large groups (depending on their placement, these could be useful structures for certain types of events).

Building Block: Southeast Quadrant

The Southeast Quadrant is a neighborhood of small discoveries, even though its numerous parking lots are evidence that it has eroded over time. While it is not in the scope of this project to define a vision for the neighborhood, we do see many, many elements that can be

connected into a great walking neighborhood, if – and only if – the right decisions are made with regard to future development and street design. The Southeast Quadrant and the lakefront are the two biggest development opportunities in downtown and both should be master planned with great care.

The real opportunity may be in the master planning of future developments and narrower streets that would result in wider sidewalks and a network of great public spaces and retail streets.

- **Hayden Butte** should be a far more significant identifier for downtown. Its desert landscape should be restored and set the standard for any street that passes along its base so that the mountain actually sweeps down and across the streets that surround it. We recommend a Hayden Butte Zone be established that prescribes a desert butte streetscape for the streets and landscapes within that zone.
- **6th Street Park** has the potential to be a more active park, but it will depend on redeveloping the surrounding ground floors with more retail, games, such as a giant puzzle for kids and adults, and a small beach with umbrellas and hammocks would be another possibility – something that surprises and delights and becomes a conversation piece.

Neighborhood Places

North Tempe Neighborhoods

- Evaluate options for a community swimming pool at Papago Park, Multi-Gen Center, Indian Bend Park or other locations.
- Consider creating a North Tempe Community Center at Tempe Papago Park that would also serve as the park's visitor center. Also evaluate alternative locations such as the Eisendrath House.

Sunset / Riverside Neighborhood

- Explore options for a community swimming pool.
- Improve University Drive for walking and bicycling, including landscaping, shade, wider sidewalks separated from the curb where possible, enhanced pedestrian crossings and Roosevelt, Farmer and other measures.

Southwest Neighborhoods

- Develop concept plans and design guidelines for extending Mill Avenue's pedestrian-oriented character south to the Apache Boulevard Curve. As part of this, plan enhanced pedestrian crossings at key access points (10th Street, others).

- Implement plans to redesign University Drive as a more pedestrian-oriented street, with enhanced crossings at Hardy, Roosevelt, Ash, Farmer and Mill.

Southeast Neighborhoods

- Develop strategies for securing public open space within the Southeast Neighborhood area. High priority sites include: Lemon/Terrace (heart of the neighborhoods gathering place, public market); Terrace/Apache (Healing Arts park, plaza); Apache/Dorsey LRT plaza; Apache/Rural (gateway feature); Rural/University.
- Build a shared-use trail within the rail right-of-way along Old Eighth Street. Incorporate park/open space features and pedestrian amenities.

Getting Around – Arterials, Transit, & Connecting Places

- Improvements for pedestrians described under the Southeast Quadrant section for 5th, 6th, and 7th Streets, including improvements to 5th Street all the way to Roosevelt
- Realign Cedar to match signalized intersection at Dorsey + Apache Boulevard
- Improvements for pedestrians and cyclists to major arterials: Ash Avenue, Rio Salado Parkway, University Drive and Rural Road
- Enhanced shaded walking routes that would have seamless tree cover or other shade and high quality streetscape to promote walking
- Multi-use paths east-west along Rio Salado Parkway and completing a loop system along Tempe Town Lake (complementing the routes proposed in the 2030 plan)
- Paths to the lake from the Southeast Quadrant (around Sun Devil Stadium) and from the Southeast Neighborhoods
- Paths connecting North Tempe to Indian Bend Wash and Papago Park
- The completion of the Crosscut Canal path
- An enhanced walking/biking route along the LRT route
- Mixed-use requirement for development at all LRT Park-n-Ride locations utilizing structured parking

- Establishment of Alley parks [see map]

Sustainability – A Key Part of the Vision

Part of the challenge of planning in today's world is to identify specific ways in which cities can plan for bigger picture outcomes, especially around sustainability. No longer can we responsibly create an ambitious plan or vision that will be the focus of considerable investment, without outlining with some specificity how that investment will also improve our lives and the life of the planet.

Water Quality Goals:

- Reduce runoff from streets and parking lots that drain to Town Lake through use of green streets and pervious surfaces
- Enhance awareness of importance of water quality by creating appropriate ways for people to interact with water through recreation, along with education programs and signage
- Reduce water use by relying on desert landscapes as the primary streetscape palette
- Recycle water used in fountains and splash pads for use on plants, where possible.

Air Quality Goals:

- Reduce reliance on auto trips by connecting destinations through Green Streets, transit, hiking and bike routes
- Locate activities at transit nodes to provide convenience and attract more riders to LRT
- Increase the amount of green spaces and trees

Individual Health Goals

- Improve the overall walking experience by creating pleasant routes that connect people to strong destinations
- Promote physical activities by providing recreation facilities in convenient locations and programs that encourage physical activity
- Provide access to natural areas that restore the personal link to the environment and environmental issues

Community Health Goals:

- Strengthen the sense of community identity and connection through sociable places, places of beauty, and destinations that become points of pride and anchors for economic growth
- Create a safe public environment by creating places that attract people and foster

interaction rather than isolation

- Reduce accident rates by calming traffic and prioritizing pedestrians and bikes in downtown

Economic Goals:

- Create stronger destinations for people to spend time and money
- Create strong tourism (sports, arts, events, authentic downtown experience)
- Create regional destination with broader mix of users
- Property values enhanced
- Increase in sales tax spending

Driving the Dream – Maintenance, Operation, Resource Requirements, Revenue Options and Strategies

Maintenance

The City needs to find dedicated funding sources to help support existing maintenance requirements as they are under-funded and new maintenance operational monies required for the plan to be successful. This is very challenging for the staff today to meet these standards let alone with the additional attractions and amenities coming online. The funding options provide good alternatives for the City to consider that other municipalities have used to fund similar projects.

Funding & Financial Options for the Urban Open Space Plan

- **Benefit District.** The City of Tempe could establish the Mill Avenue District and Town Lake as a benefit district where dollars from the sales of property contribute to the quality of open space and park operational costs. The Benefit District boundaries need to be all encompassing for those homeowners and businesses that will benefit from the improvements made by the City to cover operational costs and capital costs.
- **Park Impact Fee.** Currently the City of Tempe has a park impact fee for land acquisition which was recently updated in 2007. The current fee is still below what other municipal jurisdictions charge development for parks and open space in the region and should continually be adjusted.
- **Sell the Utility Rights below trails.** Trails are a major component of the recreation opportunities surrounding Town Lake. Selling utility rights below the trail could be considered a funding option to support trail development and maintenance costs.

- **Establish partnerships with local businesses, conservation groups and land trusts to help acquire and maintain park property in the form of adopt a park programs, and supporting the conservation areas in the area outlined in the Urban Open Space Plan.** Many cities such as Chicago, Miami, Denver, Seattle, Indianapolis, and Cleveland have reached out to business owners, conservation groups and land trusts to help acquire, manage and maintain open space and park areas as a commitment to the quality life the area.
- **Establish a Park Foundation for the Papago Park, Town Lake and Mill Avenue District.** Establishing a park foundation for the Papago Park, Town Lake and Mill Avenue District would help support need park type furniture, sculpture attractions, floral and fountain displays, and needed park improvements as the area needs it to keep the park and commercial district in the best condition possible.

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