

PASADENA
URBAN DESIGN CONCEPT

PASADENA RUIDAT

REGIONAL/URBAN DESIGN ASSISTANCE TEAM



PASADENA, TEXAS OCT. 1993

INTRODUCTION

Over the past twenty years, the American Institute of Architects (AIA) has provided, as a public service, regional/urban design assistance teams (R/UDAT) to offer guidance to more than 200 communities in the United States and Canada. Team members are specialists in areas concerning each community. The members serve without compensation, and agree not to receive commissions from the communities they serve for a three-year period. The AIA and R/UDAT task group have maintained this policy so that the objectivity of team members is assured.

Pasadena was selected as a community by AIA to have a R/UDAT team visit during the weekend of October 8-11, 1993. Concerns expressed in their application, as well as broad support from throughout the leadership of the community, provided assurance that a R/UDAT team's recommendations could assist in the vision and action agenda for Pasadena citizens.

The team members take this opportunity to express our appreciation for the welcome we received, and the hospitality, support and assistance given to us by the people of Pasadena. We believe that with this energy and dedication, you are well on the way to making the changes you want. We wish you all well on your journey.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Pasadena R/UDAT will serve to give the City's citizens and leadership direction and momentum. To be sure, much remains to carry out the thoughts and concepts contained here. Good community management is an ongoing process.

The R/UDAT team digested hundreds of pages of documents and listened to several hundred citizens

express their views, opinions and ideas. In some cases there was much agreement on issues, such as about Pasadena's image, and in the case of others, like the threat of crime, much disagreement. The R/UDAT team eventually distilled its own list of key issues.

- **Local and Regional Planning**
- **New and different services**
- **Public Safety**
- **Finding sources of money**
- **Community attitude**
- **Economic dependency**

The R/UDAT report primarily addresses these issues in the following sections. The recommendations are provided in several areas ranging from urban design to the environment and to finance.

In the case of **Urban Design**, the R/UDAT plan suggests steps to reinforce recent revitalization efforts in North Pasadena, reinforcement of the Town Square area as a major commercial activity center, better utilization of the city's Bayous and natural areas in the layout of streets, trails and other development, and also that Pasadena undertakes a major planning process to develop a long range comprehensive plan which embodies these ideas and concepts.

The **transportation** recommendations include voter adoption of the public transit authority and funding, and various other changes and improvements to the street systems to reflect current traffic conditions and opportunities that may enhance the broader revitalization efforts.

Improved housing and community services programs are discussed in detail. Given the City's present heavy investments in improved infrastructure, these programs are essential to capitalize on the opportunity to further improve Pasadena's quality.

The R/UDAT team recommends a number of steps to

address needed preservation, conservation, and enhancement of the City's valuable environmental assets, with its bayous and wetlands, its air and water. The care of these is closely linked to Pasadena's image and economy.

Joint ventures are suggested for the Petrochemical Industry, IBM, NASA, the University of Houston at Clear Lake and Pasadena City to diversify in the long term towards a post-industrial and sustainable economy.

More effective partnerships are needed among the **business community and local government**.

Large businesses have special needs and resources, and can do much more to benefit the community than to provide jobs and pay taxes. But the partnership must be a two-way street, also benefiting industry. The R/UDAT team suggests new support programs for small businesses.

Tourism is an opportunity. It can help diversify the economy, generate an infusion of out-of-town visitor spending and create new jobs. Specific recommendations are made to get the most out of Pasadena's valuable tourist-related assets.

New funds will be needed. **Finances** always play a key role. The team recommends that Pasadena ask voter approval of the transit sales tax and new uses of the community development block grant funds. These steps would make available more than \$1 million annually for the most pressing priorities. For tourism development, public-private partnerships are recommended.

Lastly, the R/UDAT team report discusses making changes happen for Pasadena. This will require a vision and plan, effective partnerships, ongoing commitment, and last, but not least, acceptance of the responsibility of leadership by the key elected officials, the mayor and council.

With substantive quality of life improvements, Pasadena's image problem will take care of itself.

WHAT WE HEARD YOU SAY

The R/UDAT team was impressed with and appreciative of the citizens who shared their comments with us at our Saturday hearing. We valued the officials who briefed us and shared their experience and data. In addition enjoyed the willingness with which people of Pasadena shared their knowledge as we met them informally.

We feel that each person was sincere in giving us an expression of their visions and concerns about Pasadena. One overriding sense for the team was the variety of comments. We felt it is proper to make the hearing remarks a part of our report as an attachment, and suggest that the reader take time to share our awareness of the genuine contribution made to Pasadena by these citizens.

R/UDAT MISSION STATEMENT

To develop a plan that will provide acceptable solutions to revitalize the northern area of the city, enhance transportation and mobility and improve drainage throughout the city, beautify the city and provide for improved green space, parks and playgrounds that result in reduction of crime, improved communication among citizens that will instill the personal pride necessary for creating a collective community wide positive self-image and the desire and enthusiasm to continue working to make the city of Pasadena the best we can be.

In addition to comments in the attachment, the team offers its own list of issues which were discovered in the input we received over the weekend.

ISSUES

After reviewing hundreds of pages of documents, and listening to the many interested citizens who took the time to give us their views, the R/UDAT team highlighted six issues that should be given the most serious attention by the citizens of Pasadena. Each of these has a variety of components. Some are listed to elaborate or to illustrate the view of the team. Issues are not listed in order of priority. In this R/UDAT report, the team has attempted to give its thoughts on all of them.

Pasadena needs effective local and regional planning, and implementation

- How can communication and public involvement in public decision making be improved?
- Should priority for local government funding be to maintain existing assets?
- How can leadership, partnerships and accountability be used for results?
- What should be the role of environmental and conservation programs?
- How can Pasadena best satisfy Clean Air Act amendments?

New/different services are needed for north Pasadena

- Should public transit be provided?
- How can support for housing rehabilitation and small businesses best be supplied?
- What is the role of community centers for youth and seniors?
- How can maintenance of public and private property, especially in north Pasadena be assured?
- What about promoting new restaurants/lodging to support tourism/recreation and the convention center?

Public Safety and Crime

- Should the safety focus be on preventative measures to improve public safety and reduce crime, including natural disaster planning?

Pasadena must find money now for new and different services and programs outlined here

- How can funds be made available while keeping taxes low?

Community attitude

- Can citizens develop an appreciation for the city and acknowledge its weaknesses?
- Is it possible to focus on the future: count achievements?

Reduce dependency on single resource economy

- What about a marketing strategy for business recruitment, including small business?
- What should be the role of tourism?
- How can Pasadena be sure it is not overly dependent on the petro-chemical industry or NASA?

URBAN DESIGN ISSUES

In order for Pasadena to improve its appearance, reinforce the healthy and valuable buildings, dwellings and open space, and in order to give efficiency to both new development and redevelopment of older areas, the team sees a strong need for a long-range, comprehensive plan.

A professional team of housing, redevelopment and municipal finance specialists should be retained to assist Pasadena with understanding its options for action over the next several years. Inventories, market analyses, needs assessments and recommendations must be generated to form the basis of all redevelopment decisions.

Pasadena has an opportunity to make meaningful changes in neighborhoods and along streets, but should give serious consideration to the money available, and long-term benefits to the city for doing each project. A comprehensive plan is the best tool for this effort.

In the near term, insisting on strict code enforcement will set the stage for embracing the comprehensive plan process. Further consideration of land use management, incentives and pro-development zoning should be analyzed as part of the planning process.

Many Pasadena streets and utilities are aging and will require attention over the next decade. **As street repairs and improvements are made, Pasadena leaders will have an opportunity to create gateways, lessen the impact of the roadway corridors that divide parts of the city and address the beautification and adaptive reuse of vacant buildings.**

We recommend a concentration of effort around the Town Square area and in support of a Shaw Avenue petrochemical museum and interpretive

center development as a catalyst for redevelopment as shown in examples in this section.

The suggested commercial and community facility developments, if made as a component of a comprehensive plan, can also help to define and reinforce existing residential areas which surround these developments.

Landscaped buffering, trees along roadways, sign improvements and pedestrian circulation paths can be done as an immediate, short-term program. This will have a significant impact visually, and citizens of Pasadena will be able to see the visual image of these areas changing quickly.

Orchestrating and implementing these improvements will inspire other residents and property owners to upgrade their properties, thereby broadening the base of support calling for near-term improvement in code enforcement. Again, all of these examples must be based upon the action agendas in the comprehensive plan.

One other development we feel is important as an example is an activity center. This is illustrated in the recreational and entertainment complex around the existing convention facility. We show the potential for a golf and tennis complex, a motel, and complimentary rodeo support facilities along with a major expansion to the existing convention facility.

Market studies will determine the scope of this facility, but the team has a sense that a demand already exists for this regional tourist attraction.

Other opportunities, which we illustrated for their character and scale, are the elements of a recreation and open space plan - part of the comprehensive plan previously recommended.

The R/UDAT team feels strongly that there are tremendous opportunities to develop a parkway from Taylor Lake and El Jardin, along Armand Bayou, to Vince Bayou and through Pasadena to Buffalo Bayou. Such a parkway could provide open space, land and water conservation, wetlands preservation, parks, walk and bike trails and neighborhood linkages for the full length of Pasadena.

We have illustrated such a concept in a later section to indicate the impact it would have on Pasadena.

TRANSPORTATION

Pasadena has a well developed system of local and regional thoroughfares. Regional connections are provided by State Highway 225 and Beltway 8. Together with Interstate 45 just west of town, these three regional facilities form a convenient loop of the central developed area of the community. Major improvements either underway or scheduled along SH 225 and Beltway 8 will bring these facilities up to full grade separated, limited access status, thereby attracting greater volumes of long distance, regional traffic. A network of two and four-lane collector and major thoroughfare streets provide a high level of access and distribution within the community. As the regional roadway system reaches full capability, Pasadena's major thoroughfares continue to carry less regional traffic. This means more capacity should be available for shorter, intra-city trips.

Examination of traffic volume changes in the north tip of the city (north of SH 225) shows that volumes in 1990 on West Richey and on Red Bluff are comparable to those of sixteen years ago. In a period of 20 percent growth in population, volumes on the Shaver/Main one-way couplet have actually declined compared to 1974. Volume on SH 225 doubled during the same period. Clearly, much of the traffic growth has gone to the grade separated regional facilities aided by completion of the Beltway 8 Toll Bridge crossing of the Ship Canal. **This shift in traffic growth suggests that selected city streets could be adapted for north Pasadena reuse if such reuse would support community revitalization objectives.** For example, Main Street and Shaver Street north of SH 225 could revert to two-way operation to facilitate local circulation. Sidewalk widenings would allow tree plantings and bench placements to improve the pedestrian experience.

Mobility for some segments of the population is a problem in this auto-dominated region. Students, teenagers, older citizens and those not having access to or interest in driving a car have little choice for traveling to stores, recreation sites, workplaces and medical facilities. **Public transit can provide this improved mobility.**

A recent act of the State Legislature enables Pasadena residents to agree to impose up to a one percent sales tax to operate and maintain a public transit system within the community. Similar to Houston's Metro Transit Authority funds, these local funds could be used to match federal operating and capital assistance grants available through the Federal Transit Administration. The level of funding generated by the sales tax could readily support operation of a small (10 to 15 bus) transit system. North Pasadena, with its concentration of older citizens, zero and one-car households, and lower income families is a prime candidate for public transit coverage.

In addition to providing convenient transit coverage to this portion of the community, associated street and pedestrian access capital improvements will be needed along transit streets to make bus stop locations safe and accessible to pedestrians and to facilitate bus maneuvering through neighborhood streets.

Although not a mobility problem, employers in the industrial district north of town are faced with meeting vehicle trip reduction mandates by 1995. This will require higher use of multi-occupancy vehicles by employees. Under the new mandates, employers will be required to set up and maintain car pool, van pool and bus programs that will enable specific trip reduction levels to be achieved by 1995.

Some of the 60,000 petrochemical workers reside in Pasadena. There may be a market for extending bus service to the industrial district and to large employers within the city, but outside the regular service area,

during work shift periods to help achieve the required trip reductions. Employers could be committed to purchase a prescribed number of monthly or annual bus passes for their employees before service is provided. The East Harris Manufacturers Association could be an appropriate employers' representative for designing transit service arrangements to meet the unique petrochemical industry needs and to complement their car pool and van pool programs.

Competition for limited public transit resources and the level of transit service within the community suggests that a strategic plan for public transit should be developed over the next two years. This public participation process would help policy makers set a course of action that will define which market segments receive service and generally, what service levels (frequency, hours of the day, days of the week) will be provided.

If a comprehensive planning process, as recommended by the R/UDAT, is undertaken in Pasadena, a number of transportation systems improvements can be planned to achieve the stated objectives. Specific issues to be considered in the transportation section are:

- Selectively reduce the number of public streets intersecting the north side of SH 225 west-bound service road to enhance Shaw Avenue importance and facilitate re-development opportunities.
- Improve pedestrian linkages to enhance inter-neighborhood foot travel and tie in with trail development projects such as Vince Bayou.
- Add pedestrian scale street lighting in areas of commercial activity.

HOUSING MAINTENANCE AND PRESERVATION

Goal: Pasadena will maintain its housing consistent with the law and prevailing community standards, and encourage increased home ownership and more responsible management of rental property.

Issues and Findings:

- Housing maintenance and adherence to deed restrictions is a problem throughout the city.
- Major housing problems are concentrated in north Pasadena where homes are older and incomes are modest.
- Rental properties are a disproportionate part of the problem.
- Abandonment concentrated in the old town area shows that limits to economic feasibility have been exceeded for the restoration of some properties.
- A growing number of home owners are older single women, some of whom are having trouble maintaining their homes.
- Section 8 Certificate and Vouchers have been preferred over public housing to serve lowest income renters and to avoid the problems of "projects" but concentration Section 8 in a few complexes have created similar problems.
- Recent public investments have begun renewal of streets and sidewalks, sewage and drainage, expanded parks and created a new community center in north Pasadena. This investment is ready to produce a return to the community.

- Reliance on complaint driven enforcement of deed restrictions produces uneven results and places individuals in a difficult position.

- City rehabilitation loan assistance is provided based on applicant and property eligibility without consideration of the relationship to other investments.

Action:

- Expand and support the Revitalization Task Force efforts to report violations of deed restrictions and building maintenance and sign standards.

- Appoint a dangerous building committee supported by the City Planning Department to be responsible for continuing the city's vacant building demolition program.

- Increase enforcement staff assigned to enforcement of Deed Restrictions buildings maintenance and signs standards.

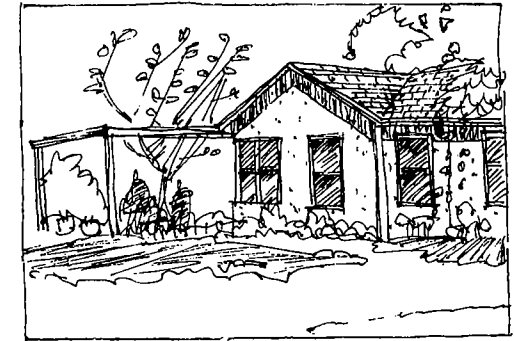
- To facilitate access to special home ownership programs of the Houston Housing Partnership, commercial banks and the federal government, the City should consider a "buy a banker program". Through this, funds would be provided to purchase all or a portion of a bank loan officers time to service Pasadena residents. An alternative would be to agree to a fee for performance whereby an agreed amount would be paid to banks for every new Pasadena homeowner who is qualified as eligible for a bank loan.

- Expand emergency housing rehabilitation program by funding materials, in conjunction with volunteer or student labor provided through local high school, college, church or civic organizations.

- Create a "job jar" program whereby very low income owners (or renters with over three years tenancy) can request limited home repair and maintenance assistance through the Emergency Housing Rehabilitation program. School, college, churches or civic organizations would contact "job jar" for referral to prequalified clients.

- Eliminate forgiveness of housing rehabilitation direct loan program to preserve potential for recovery of city investment upon sale of house.

- Target rehabilitation assistance in conjunction with other public investments in business improvement, neighborhood facilities and community policing.



- City Planning Department should encourage broader landlord participation in the Section 8 program to encourage disbursement of assisted of Section 8 clients throughout the community. The City Planning Department should establish and enforce a policy which limits percentage of Section 8 clients in any apartment complex.

- With local banks, and planning department should promote the use of 203K mortgage insurance program which allows the purchase of older homes in need of repair with mortgages sufficient to cover

