

# SECOND TO NONE

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FINDING ALAMO PLAZA'S PLACE IN THE CITY



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introduction

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# PROJECT HISTORY

The final report is the culmination of the previous two phases of exploratory research, site visits, community meetings, stakeholder interviews, data collection and presentations in which Project for Public Spaces has worked with the residents of San Antonio, city leaders and staff, and a wide variety of stakeholders and partners to develop a Placemaking plan for the Alamo Plaza.

Project for Public Spaces, Inc. (PPS) is a nonprofit, educational and technical assistance organization recognized internationally for its success in helping communities enhance their unique sense of place, promote active, healthy lifestyles, foster contact between diverse populations, and work towards environmental sustainability. Public and private organizations, federal, state and municipal agencies; business improvement districts; the private sector; neighborhood associations, chambers of commerce, charitable foundations and other civic groups have all worked with PPS to transform their downtowns and neighborhoods.

In the process of conducting this study, PPS led interviews with groups and individuals with broad representation, including preservation groups, merchants and hotel managers, downtown advocates, tourism officials, history buffs, and many others with a tie to the Alamo, its past, present and future. PPS led two community Placemaking Workshops using the Place Performance Evaluation "Game." Small breakout groups were assigned to a specific portion of the study area to evaluate using a set of criteria. Ideas for short term and long term improvements were developed by each group. This format allowed participants to observe onsite conditions for themselves and understand the dynamics and needs of specific areas within the site. Within this structured context, highly trained professionals and lay persons could equally contribute their ideas for the future of the plaza and surroundings, while learning about each others' particular concerns and needs.

These meetings and workshops were primarily to learn from local experts - not only people who know the history of the Alamo site, but also residents who, as users of the space on a regular basis, are experts in how the site works on a day-to-day basis as an important place in downtown. Guiding this process was a Steering Committee and a Technical Advisory Committee who were instrumental in identifying key perspectives, stakeholders, and opportunities. We thank all of these participants for their passionate involvement.

Other data collection included three days of time lapse studies of the plaza from different locations and elevations, as well as onsite observations by PPS staff. Historical sources were provided by city staff and members of the Steering Committee.

# APPROACH AND PURPOSE

The findings and recommendations in the report focus on the visitor experience at Alamo Plaza, from the perspective of usability and creating a successful, human-scaled destination. This layer of planning will be flexible enough to allow for future layers of planning to deal with questions of restoration, interpretation, expansion of the shrine, and the like.

The approach taken seeks to ensure that major concerns of various stakeholders can be addressed in the development of the vision and design, as well as in the management and programming of the site. But, this report is not a master plan for the Alamo, and will not address what the future of the historic site and shrine should be.

- Can The Alamo become a more magnetic attraction for residents, especially?
- Can The Alamo be more usable and successful as a public space?  
With the benefits a great civic space can bring to a downtown?
- One layer of planning that can complement other layers (restoration, interpretation, and public works projects)

## What Makes A Great Place?



# PROCESS

A vision is the act of anticipating what the future holds. Prophetic and powerful, the community's vision is a valuable resource for guiding planning and design processes. To encapsulate the communities vision or visions, PPS utilized an in depth process to gather information and develop recommendations.

## Stakeholder Interviews + Meetings

- Collecting local expertise and finding common areas of concern and opportunity

## Steering Committee + Technical Advisory Committee

- Working team to consider findings and recommendations and help guide the process in general

## Two Placemaking Workshops (January 2012)

- Small breakout groups were assigned to a specific portion of the study area to evaluate using a set of criteria. Ideas for short term and long term improvements were developed by each group and presented to the full forum.

## Observations of User Behavior

- Time lapse film study over 3 consecutive days
- Informal on-site observations

## Review of Draft Recommendations + Revisions

- Presentation of draft recommendations to City Council, B Session (March 2012)
- Presentation of draft recommendations to the public, followed by a workshop in which the public gave feedback and suggestions

## Final Report

# summary of findings

# ISSUES IDENTIFIED: PUBLIC WORKSHOP



## ISSUE: It's well maintained although....

- Paving is in disrepair/uneven
- Need general beautification and landscaping
- Waste baskets
- Some of the lighting

## ISSUE: Orientation and Wayfinding

- Confusing – where are the Alamo boundaries?
- No gateway or sense of you are here
- Poor wayfinding signage
- Invisible from afar, no perspective of the site
- Streets do not support any “sense of arrival”
- Curbs and planters are challenging to pedestrian flow
- Transit access

## ISSUE: Interpretation

- Insufficient interpretive signage
- Insufficient Education - Need more guides in plaza helping people understand the Alamo
- No intuitive way to “read” the space
- Need reconstruction of some elements to assist understanding
  - low barrack and palisade, plaza

## ISSUE: Physical Elements / Reconstruction

- Make the plaza level – there are too many planters and curbs
- Create a sense of arrival to The Alamo – a visible gateway
- Close street for cars (keep access for bikes, Segways, pedi-cabs, horse carriages, streetcar)
- Narrow the lanes, widen side walks
- Add greenery, shade trees and lawn



## ISSUE: Comfort

- Need places to stop and linger
- Comfortable and moveable seating, café-style tables and chairs
- Public rest rooms
- More landscaping, green, shade
- Bike parking

## ISSUE: Things to Do!

- More food options
  - Casual food
  - Temporary vendors, food and art market
  - Chili Queens
  - Places where locals might go
  - Cafes to sit at a table and enjoy the ambiance, "Places to linger and enjoy"
- More retail
  - More high quality options for locals
  - Greater mix of businesses
  - Merchants should keep longer hours



"more places to eat, area was a bit sterile, liked the view of the Alamo"

## ISSUE: Things to Do!

- More activities and programs
- Kids places, activities
  - make the Alamo interactive to kids
  - Historic art/sculpture for hands-on interaction, a family experience
  - A place for kids to stay entertained while parents see the museum

## ISSUE: Things to Do!

- Entertainment options for locals
- Ballet folkloric
- Music
- Fiesta
- Luminaria
- Local artist and musicians
- Local chefs



"the space is neutral neither good or bad – sterile, no activity, ambiance"

# ISSUES IDENTIFIED: OBSERVATIONS



PPS staff observed user activity to better understand how the Alamo site functions. In addition to interviews and meetings detailed previously, informal observation techniques and time lapse video analysis contributed to our understanding of the site and recommendations.

## Primary Activities Observed

Walking through the Plazas  
Taking pictures, looking at the church  
Reading signs, gathering around plaques  
Wandering around looking for what to do  
Sitting

Click below for videos (PPS):  
Alamo Chapel  
Alamo Plaza - Busy



## Key Sitting Areas in Use

Seat walls facing the church were well used by school groups  
Benches in Plaza Valero, north end, were well used  
-Limited views of the main edifice (church)  
-Few reasons to stay long – not engaging  
-Distracting music from retail on Alamo St.  
-Noise from Preacher  
"Ruins" near the Paseo del Alamo are popular seating  
-Prime vantage point of the church and for people-watching  
-Seating walls are not comfortable for long  
Benches in Valero, south end, were not observed to be used as much  
Gazebo was used rarely – mainly by groups of teens



## Conclusions from Time Lapse

People get their impression of "the Alamo" in front of the church  
A high proportion of people never stop for more than a minute or two  
Highest foot-traffic areas are along Alamo Street and directly in front of the church,  
Pedestrians walk along Alamo Street as along any other major street; they do not behave as if they are in a plaza

implications &  
recommendations

Recommendations in the following section are grouped into four categories:

- Orientation, Spatial Organization, and Interpretation
- Places to Linger
- Activity Zones
- A Walkable District



# ORIENTATION, SPATIAL ORGANIZATION, AND INTERPRETATION

## Where is The Alamo?

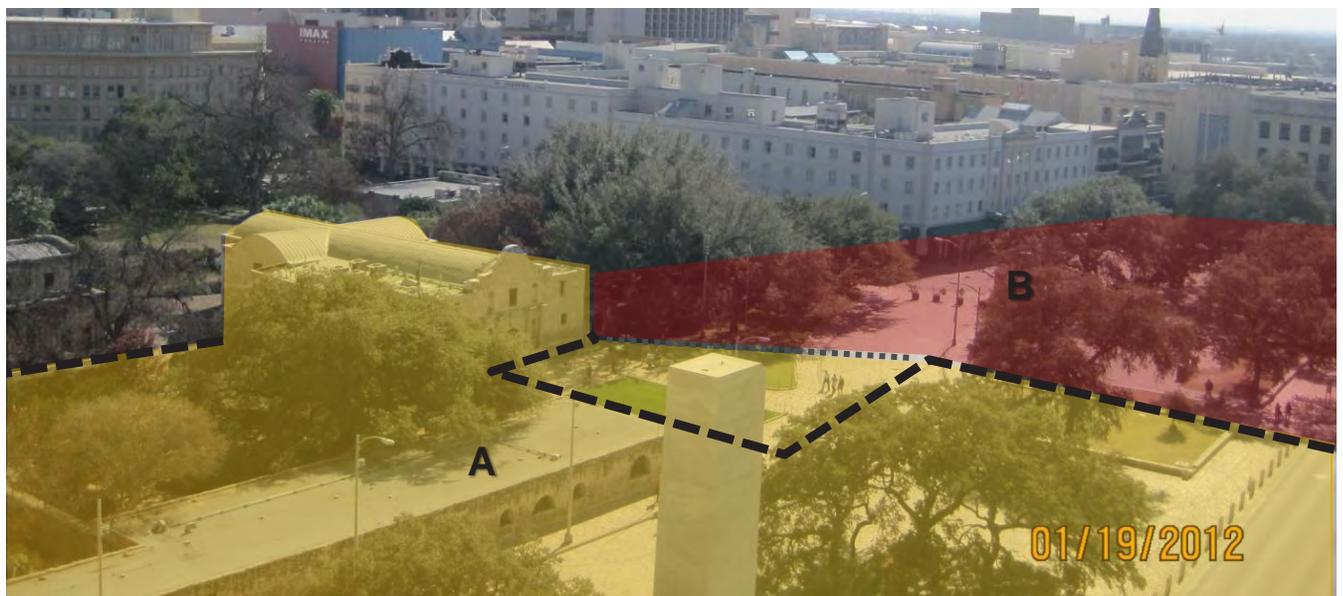
Our study showed very clearly the level of confusion there is when people visit the Alamo. Many basic facts remain cloudy for the public, including the actual boundaries of the Mission San Antonio de Valero, the fact that the plaza in front of the church is the mission grounds, or that the southern part of the plaza was not part of the mission grounds at all. There are subtle elements, such as pavement inlays and planter beds, that are meant to help understand where the original walls were, but without a tour guide to point them out, the public has little chance of finding or interpreting them. Signage only improves the understanding slightly, but often the location of the signs, such as in front of the church, only reinforces the misconception that the church (and grounds behind it) constitute the Alamo site.

Delineating the south wall, where the entrance into the mission was, is critical to helping the visitor understand "where's The Alamo." The area outside the Alamo mission (area B in the diagram), needs to be better defined as a separate area, as it originally was the Plaza de Valero, outside the mission walls.



MISSION SAN ANTONIO DE BEXAR (1836)

- A** The Alamo - Site of original mission surrounded by buildings and walls
- B** Plaza de Valero - open plaza outside of Alamo entrance
- C** Approximation of El Camino Real

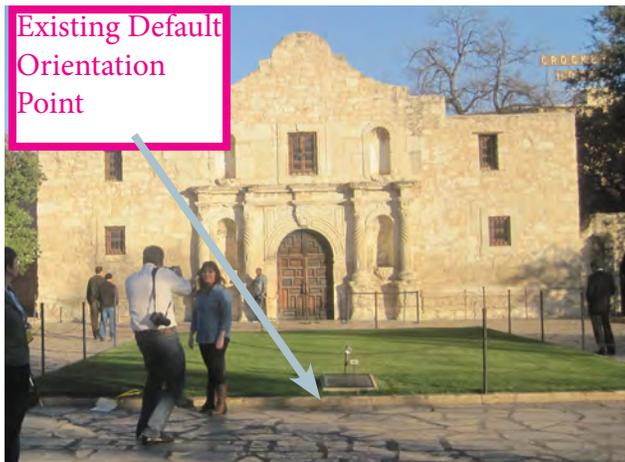


# ORIENTATION, SPATIAL ORGANIZATION, AND INTERPRETATION

The existing 'default orientation point' reinforces misconceptions that The Church = The Alamo.

## OBSERVATIONS

Time lapse and site observations showed that most people walking through the Alamo stop at the bronze plaque and signs in front of the church lawn and take a picture of the facade. Thus, this 27'x50' grass lawn has become the default orientation point, always busy with people and a beacon from far away. This reinforces the misconception that the church is the Alamo, and clouds any understanding that the plaza itself is the Alamo.

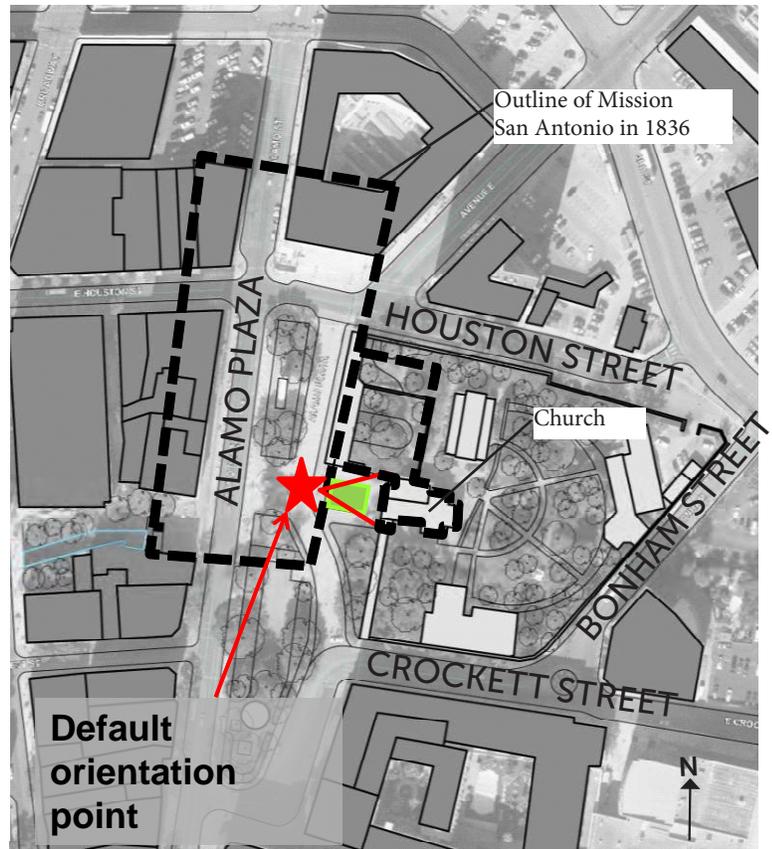


## RECOMMENDATIONS

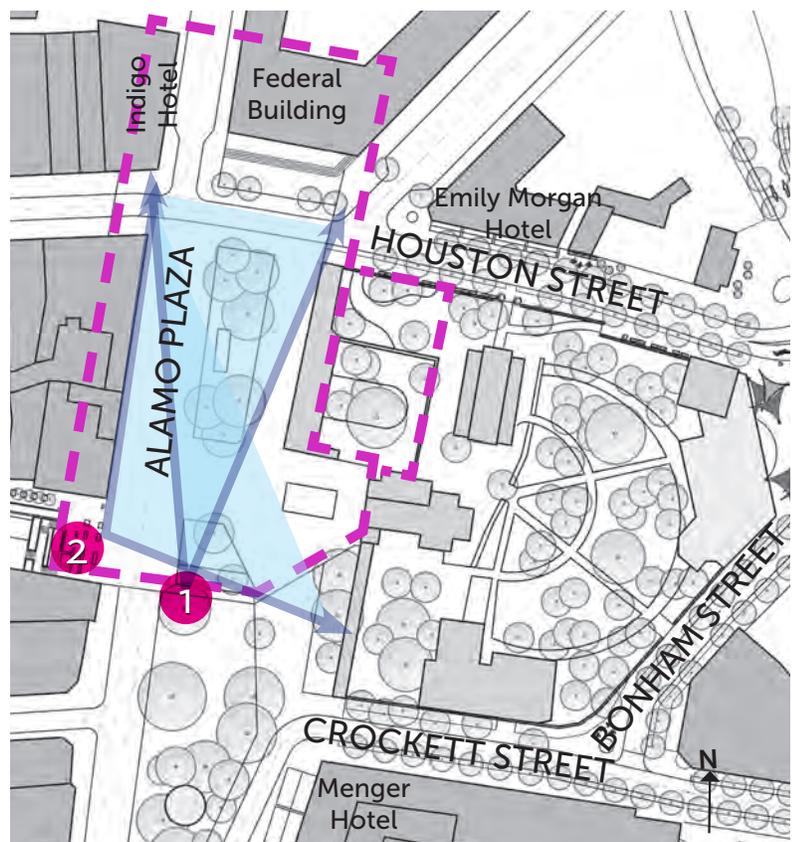
An easy way to help visitors identify the extents of the Alamo would be to locate an orientation point farther back from the church, in a location that brings the larger plaza into the field of vision.

Suggested locations are: 1- the original entry to the 1836 Mission (Main Gate) or 2- close to the entrance to the Paseo del Alamo (at the original West wall). Benefits of the Main gate location: this point will orient visitors the same way that 1836 visitors entered the Mission grounds. Benefits of locating at the West Wall: the facade of the church is a centerpiece and could help orienting visitors.

The orientation point could consist of an interpretation sign with seating and/or a kiosk where visitors could get a tour guide or rent an audio guide, and get extensive information, such as maps of the whole mission network.



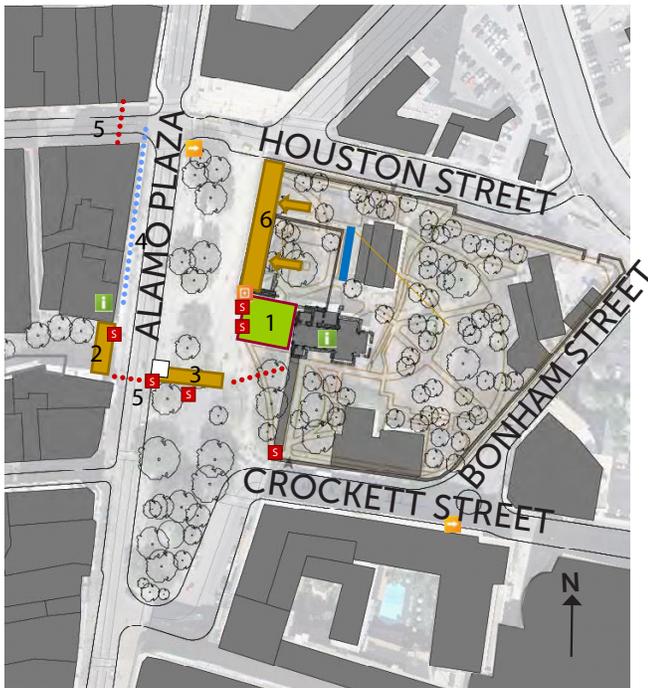
Plan showing the Existing Default Orientation Point



Plan showing recommended orientation points

# ORIENTATION, SPATIAL ORGANIZATION, AND INTERPRETATION OBSERVATIONS

## OBSERVATIONS



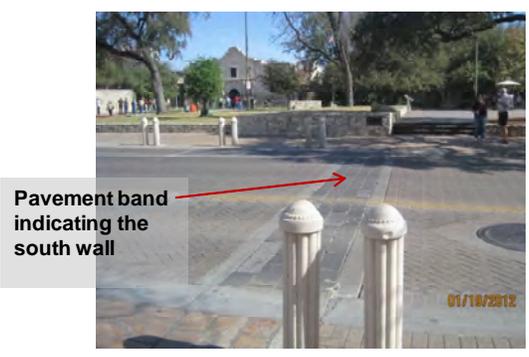
### The existing interpretation

- 1- Church lawn and museum entrance
  - 2- "Ruins" outlining south west fortifications
  - 3- Planter marking south west wall (Main Gate)
  - 4- "Acequia" paving
  - 5- Decorative bands marking the compound walls
  - 6- Convento (Long Barracks) not marked and openings toward the walled area, not the Alamo
- i** Information point
  - p** Bronze plaque showing the Alamo in 1836
  - Directional sign
  - s** Interpretation signs or historic plaques
  - Museum informational boards with Texas history and Alamo changes during the years

Examples of interpretive signage



Examples of surface material interpretation



Pavement band indicating the south wall

Reconstruction of south west fortification foundations



Examples of 3D interpretation elements



Raised planting bed outlining the south west wall foundations

# ORIENTATION, SPATIAL ORGANIZATION, AND INTERPRETATION

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Interpretive Approach

The story of the Alamo is much deeper than that of a single siege, a single year, or a single storyline. A complete telling of its history should be inclusive of the people of all backgrounds, including the Coahuiltecan Indians, who lived in the area before, during, and after the mission era, and their role in key moments of history. Likewise, the story continues long after the battle of 1836, with key events during the Civil War, the Spanish American War, the development of downtown, preservation efforts led by advocacy groups, and of course history will continue to be made.

We recommend as a next step that a group form to identify and develop the stories that should be told in and around the Alamo that become the central to visitor interpretation and even to final decisions about the physical changes recommended here and in the future. Many layers of storytelling are known to local people and to historians, but remain untold to the public, including sites where historic figures lost their lives, existence of burial areas, key battle sites, such as at north wall, the longstanding relationship between Texas and Mexico, and the peoples that predated Spanish exploration of the area. Some of the more obvious opportunities for storytelling and organizing the space are included here, but more work remains in order to bring richness and a sense of satisfaction, to San Antonians and to the broader public that is moved by the Alamo, that the stories are well told.

surface material interpretation

### Horizontal definition: Repave the plaza as an level surface and remove curbs

Mark the original mission grounds with new pavement and remove curbs to create an even plaza surface. Pavement used within The Alamo should be different from pavements used outside where the walls stood. Using a permeable pavement material, such as the stabilized crushed gravel used in Main Plaza, will create an environment similar to the original one.

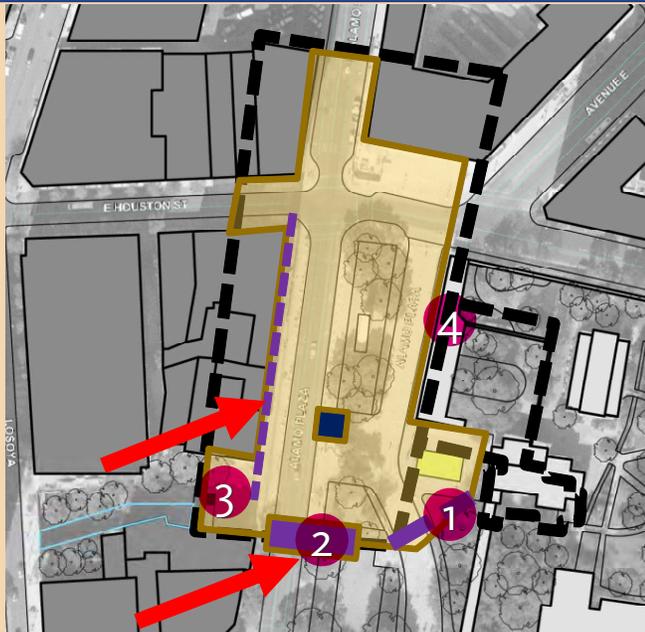
Eliminate raised planters wherever possible so the Alamo grounds stand out clearly and are more usable for events. In reconstructing Alamo Street, avoid hard curbs and use a more subtle bollard treatment to define the traveled way.



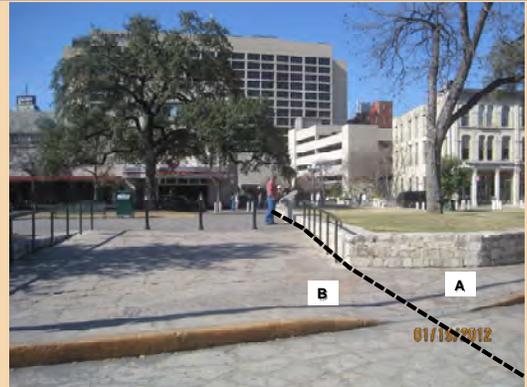
# ORIENTATION, SPATIAL ORGANIZATION, AND INTERPRETATION

## INTERPRETATION RECOMMENDATIONS

### Vertical definition - Low Barracks - Main Gate - Campo Santo & Palisade



*"If people - especially children - can actually see the door through which some noble man or woman passed, they'll be impressed, they'll remember, they'll be inspired to read"*



Adding few vertical elements in the Alamo Plaza will give visitors a sense of where the Alamo begins and ends, with some sense of the height and extent of the fortifications and Mission walls. Possible vertical elements to mark and interpret include:

- 1-Campo Santo and Palisade, the wooden battle fortification
- 2-South wall and Main Gate
- 3-Southwest corner
- 4-The Long Barracks roof could be opened to the public, with a freestanding platform not touching the structure, so people can stand in the position of one of the defenders or one of the missionaries.

interpretational wayfinding and signage

### Interpretive wayfinding

A coordinated wayfinding system should be studied for the Alamo and surrounding destinations in walking and biking distance.

Alamo interpretation signs should be clear and visible from afar, because of the size of the Alamo Plaza; the beautiful bronze plaques and models of the mission should be incorporated in a larger and easier to locate wayfinding system. Additional interpretative tools should be added to the visit experience, including Wi-fi and interactive smartphone apps.

Locate orientation signs and maps at each entrance to the Plaza. Visitors might be encouraged to start their tour from the original Mission entrance, placing interpretative signs and elements at the original Gate.



Coordinate interpretative and directional sign with City wide signs or Riverwalk



# ORIENTATION, SPATIAL ORGANIZATION, AND INTERPRETATION

## Active interpretation in the Plaza



Install an interpretive station/kiosk in the Plaza with tour guides and SA Ambassadors who could provide additional orientation to destinations in the area.

Provide interpretative elements to engage children.

Add cannons in original locations, where possible: such as the west fortification and facing the main gate. Cannon emplacements will help visitors "read" the battleground and also provide photo opportunities.

If a research partner can be found, ongoing archeological digs are one more way to engage people, children included, in the history of the site.

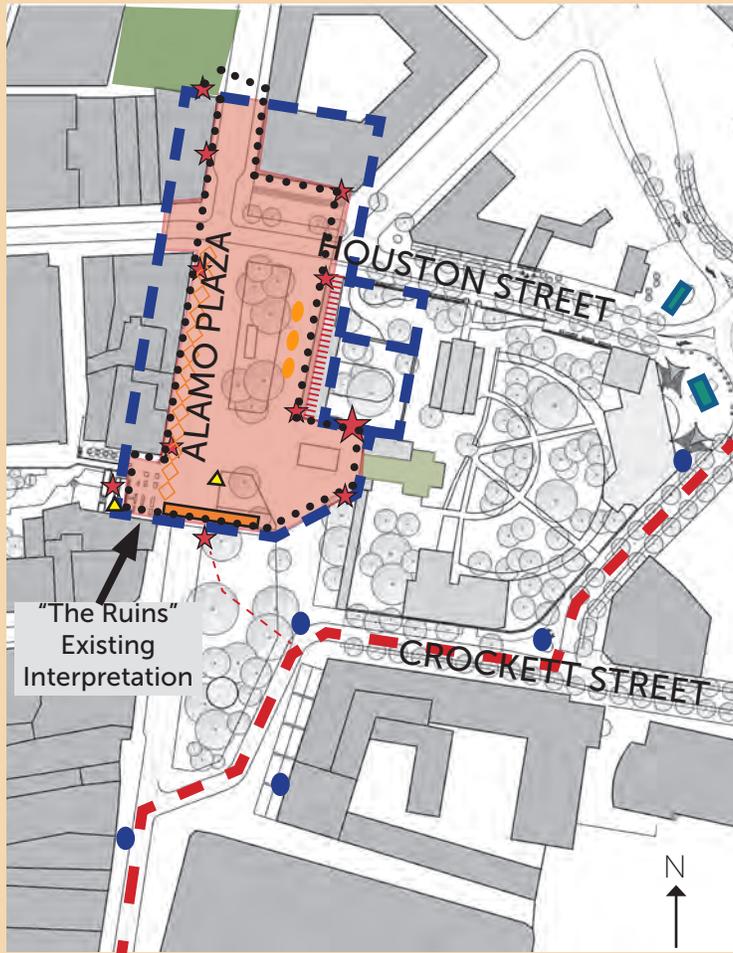
## Develop a more pronounced interpretation of the Acequia

The Acequia used to be a vital part of the Mission and a stone inlay currently marks its location. Some evidence suggests it was originally flanked by a row of fruit trees on each side; if this evidence bears out, restoring trees would accentuate the acequia, soften this edge of the plaza, and provide welcome shade.



# ORIENTATION, SPATIAL ORGANIZATION, AND INTERPRETATION

## Summary of opportunities for interpreting the site



-  Surface Material Interpretation: Distinctive and uniform paving treatment
-  Potential location for a commemorative garden at the site of the main battle, north of the Indigo Hotel (private property)
-  Exhibits along the perimeter of the Mission to tell the story and bring people to the edges of the Mission (Interpretive Walk)
-  Relocate existing shrine informational boards in the Alamo Plaza to become a part of the Interpretive Walk
-  Vertical definition - Main Gate - Low Barrack or cemetery breastwork
-  Access to roof of the long barracks/ Convento
-  Cannon emplacement for interpretation, photo opportunity, meeting point
-  Cenotaph: relocate the monument in a more prominent and visible location, not competing with the Alamo
-  Camino Real- Create awareness of this historic route, with interpretive stops along the Alamo walls. Link to the Mission trail
-  More pronounced interpretation of the Acequia
-  Outline of Mission San Antonio in 1836

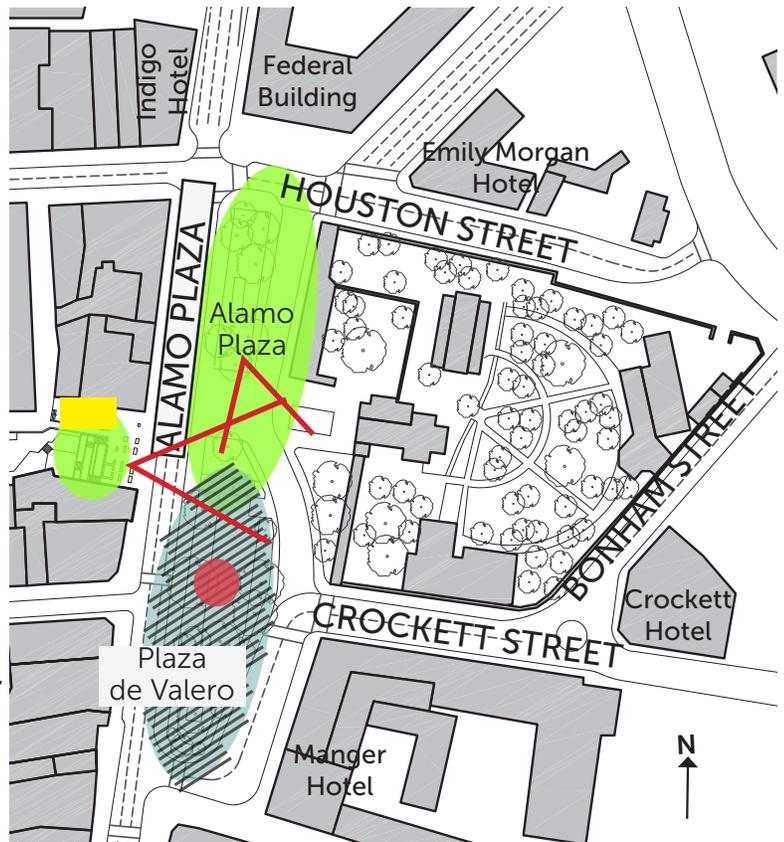


# PLACES TO LINGER

## OBSERVATIONS

**Existing seating zones**

-  Areas with Benches and few seating walls
-  Areas mostly with low seating walls
-  Sitting areas with significant
-  Viewsheds
-  Gazebo
-  B-Station bike racks
-  Bus stop



One of the most common complaints about Alamo Plaza is that there are “no places to linger”. Visitors, whether they are visiting to learn about history or just to explore downtown, have very few places to sit, reflect, view the site, or feel comfortable.

The greatest amount of seating, often in shade, is provided south of the Alamo, in Plaza de Valero. A few planters act as seat walls in The Alamo (around the Cenotaph and facing the church), and people can sit on the “ruins” that mark the southwest corner of the walls. All sitting areas share a common problem - they are not interesting for long. Without being offered some interpretive elements or entertainment or refreshment or lovely surrounding, many people leave after a few minutes. There are no places to linger and learn.

Beyond the fact that there are no places that are really inviting and engaging, there are other reasons people leave, including loud music coming from retail on Alamo Street, loud sermonizing, and the fact that none of the seating in the Plaza is comfortable (most is stone or cement walls).

The most compelling place to linger is the reconstructed foundation walls, which have a dramatic view of the church, with the Paseo del Alamo to the rear.



The reconstructed foundations of the Mission west wall provide a popular seating area: the perfect location to admire the church and the Alamo Plaza



Isolated benches at De Valero Plaza

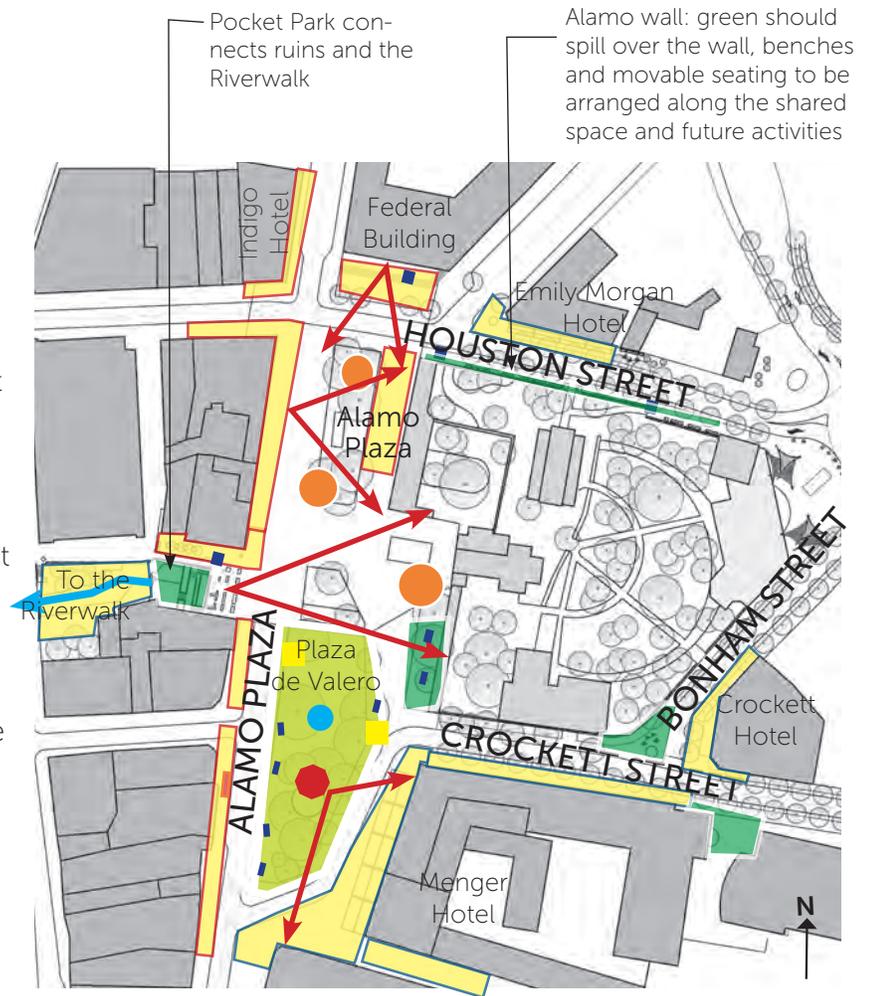
# PLACES TO LINGER

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Certain key places with views, shade, and adjacent points of interest, can get special treatment to become wonderful places to linger, learn, reflect, and socialize. Alamo plaza and Plaza de Valero should be distinguished from each other in terms of the level of daily activity and type of activity. In the Plaza there should be cool sitting areas, combined with interpretive elements and signs, and occasional refreshment. Calming the traffic on Alamo street will aid this enjoyment.

Reducing the noise levels coming from commercial establishments along Alamo Street is important to creating an atmosphere of respect and enjoyment in the Plaza. Improving the ambient lighting will also encourage people to linger in a safer and inviting area.

Plaza de Valero can accommodate many more amenities such as seating, plantings, a water feature, or even a small play area. Crockett, Bonham, and Houston Streets can become strolling streets with dining and retail, with a series of garden walls and pocket parks. Encouraging evening and night uses through programming, and extending stores, restaurants and cafes' hours of operation will attract residents to use these area into the evening.



## Potential opportunities for seating and amenities

-  Movable tables, chairs and shade
-  Cafe' seating associated to retail/restaurant or business
-  Viewheds to be enhanced-Provide adequate seating for people to enjoy the views and linger
-  Group seating for tours, lectures, re-enactments (Alamo Plaza)
-  Plaza de Valero: Re-arrange existing benches, add picnic/lunch tables, seating should be in a lush garden setting; Kid's play area and seating for parents/caregivers
-  Food vendors
-  Fountain focal point and for summer cooling
-  Restore existing Gazebo: could have a storage area and open on more sides, with seating; should be used as a stage on a regular basis
-  B-Cycle Station bike racks-Relocate in a more visible area; connect to the Camino Real and the Mission Trail
-  Pocket Park with seating, lush plantings and horticultural displays, a place to have lunch and gather with friends

# PLACES TO LINGER

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Make Alamo Plaza a Comfortable Place

Alamo Plaza should have several kind of sitting areas to accommodate visitors, allow for small gatherings, encourage residents and visitors alike to use the plaza. Seating should support the programming and interpretation. All amenities and activities in the Plaza should be tasteful and respectful of the historic grounds.

#### Amenities:

- Lighting - The church is well lit, but the surroundings should also have a pedestrian level lighting.
- Additional food vendors should be allowed in combination with some sitting areas. The current vending ordinance should be revisited.
- Amenity and seating areas are also places to target shade trees, umbrellas and even mechanical means of cooling small areas during hot months.



### Central Cenotaph Amenity Zone

The Cenotaph monument is currently the centerpiece of Alamo Plaza, taking up a large part of the plaza and making it even harder to “read” the plaza, or use it for events and reenactments.

However, it does include many large trees that can become a shady place with much more seating, along with interpretation.

By moving the “history talks” areas from inside the walls to the Plaza, a more comfortable area for gathering can be created.



# PLACES TO LINGER

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Build up “The Ruins” and River Walk connection

- The ruins could be a much stronger node for visitors, linking to the existing Visitor Center.
- By capitalizing on the finest view of the church, the ruins can become a place for people to stop and sit.
- A refreshment kiosk and canopied seating will create a comfortable environment for people to stay a little longer.
- Improving the masonry walls (“ruins”) and adding plantings will create a visually stimulating connection from the Alamo Plaza to the lower level of the Riverwalk.
- This is an excellent location to also have an information kiosk.



### Plaza de Valero: Community activities plaza

Plaza de Valero, as a separate space from the Alamo can accommodate more activity and amenities - at a level that some may feel is inappropriate for The Alamo.

- A historic location with higher quality shade, this space can be ideal for events and musical performances.
- An active, signature plaza here complements the attractive facades of the Menger Hotel and former Joske’s department store.
- As the original entrance to the Alamo on El Camino Real it is a natural point of orientation.
- A “shared street” treatment of Crocket Street and Plaza de Valero will allow activities to spill onto the street and Plaza de Valero



# ACTIVITY ZONES

Alamo Plaza and Valero should be distinguished from each other in terms of the level of daily activity. If the Plaza is the place to linger, learn and enjoy, or attend special events, Plaza de Valero, can become a busy public space that helps activate and reinforce existing retail and restaurants.

Triangulation is the concept of clustering activities together to create a busy, dynamic place for many different types of people at different times of day. For example, movable seating “triangulates” with a pond, toy sailboats, and a cafe to create a very full experience in one area of Central Park. In Luxembourg Gardens, the combination of a puppet theatre, carousel, café, bocce court, and basketball court around a children’s play area makes a busy but tasteful destination for all ages. One test of how well a place triangulates is to evaluate how long the typical person stays there. If most people stay in a public place for 20 minutes, then what more could be layered on to lengthen that visit to one, two or three hours? Another indicator is how many different age groups use a place. If it is only people between 18 and 30, then what other activities could attract those younger and older?



Aker Brygge Waterfront in Oslo, Norway: Any of these elements in isolation would fail to create a strong draw, but when grouped for triangulation, as at the Aker Brygge waterfront, a sum much greater than the parts is created and a bustling destination results.

# ACTIVITY ZONES

## OBSERVATIONS

### Edge Assessment

Edge businesses most suited to have an exterior orientation are inhibited. In other words, there is no “plaza effect” for retail and restaurants. High-potential businesses that could provide plaza activation include Menger Block retail, the Emily Morgan and Crockett Hotels, and the bistro at the Indigo Hotel. In addition, with the right street treatment to lend a better atmosphere, Crockett Street could become a strong business location.

We also recommend that The Alamo shrine grounds behind the walls should open up more entrances - the openings in the wall already exist, and using more of them would help activate Bonham and Crockett especially.



Click below for videos (PPS):

[Alamo Chapel](#)

[Alamo Plaza - Busy](#)



# ACTIVITY ZONES

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Improve the central plaza for events

Future plans for the central plaza (Cenotaph area) should build on its size, centrality, and shade to better function for special events. Improvements to corners of this area should accommodate outdoor café seating at Indigo, which will have high visibility.

Event space opportunities:

- Interpretation events, re-enactments, folklorico, authentic markets
- 'Chili Queens' fest.
- Evening/night markets
- Book markets
- Arts and crafts fairs



### Distinguish the Plaza de Valero

The historic Plaza de Valero is distinct from Alamo Plaza and can accommodate higher intensity activity and should complement the existing edge uses, like the attractive Menger Hotel/ former Joske's Department Store buildings and retail spaces.

As the historic location for events and music, the area should function as the focal point for San Antonio residents and should be fine tuned to meet their needs.

Plaza de Valero is the original entrance to the Alamo along El Camino Real, making it a natural orientation point, meriting wayfinding and interpretational signage throughout.



## A MORE WALKABLE DISTRICT



The Alamo, Plaza de Valero, and the Camino Real really only make sense when they are thought of as a whole district that is a sequence of spaces that are well defined, but also well integrated with each other. By addressing the opportunity to connect Alamo Plaza to these surrounding spaces and streets, we also magnify the impact of this most important attraction in the city. Along Crockett, Bonham, East Houston, and Alamo Street, we find great opportunities to leverage a short visit into a stay that might be several hours in length that would support a wide variety of high-quality retail and food destinations.

# A MORE WALKABLE DISTRICT

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### The Alamo District: Gateways and connections to surrounding areas

Reclaim the district for pedestrians - create a sense of arrival into the Alamo district, with visible gateways, wayfinding to the district destinations, and streets designed for people more than cars.

↔ Improve vehicular entrances to the Alamo District

↔ Enhance existing pedestrian entrances to the District

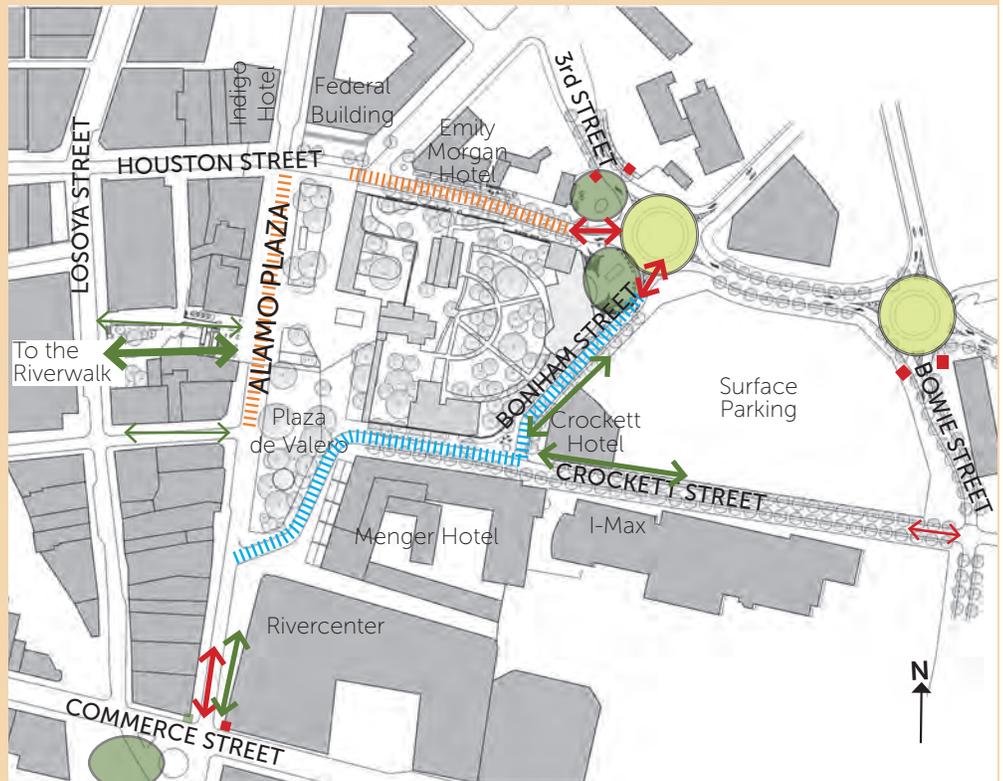
■ Gateways to the Alamo: Mark the entrances to the Alamo district with Art, distinctive crosswalks, planters, horticultural displays, special lighting and banners

○ Proposed roundabouts to slow vehicular traffic, make drivers aware they are entering the Alamo District area; create an easier access to the Alamo

○ Create opportunities for active plazas at the district entrances; should have activities along the edges

||||| Shared street treatment with managed closures for activities; limited traffic

||||| Shared street with paving to indicate the Camino Real



Develop city policies and guidelines to foster outdoor merchandising, food vendors and & restaurant/cafes sidewalk seating



## Shared Streets in the Alamo District

Creating few shared streets (or shared spaces) at key locations in the Alamo District will help the district to become a street environment that is shared equally by all users including bicyclists, pedestrians, public transit, as well as vehicles. By getting rid of curbs, treating the whole street as if it were a sidewalk, and even eliminating traffic signage, shared spaces force drivers to navigate spaces at very slow speeds, negotiating their way slowly between other users. They have proven to be much safer and much more friendly to people than traditional streets.

### Alamo Plaza between Houston and Crockett

Alamo Plaza and Alamo Street will be redefined as shared spaces once they are repaved, as recommended, to restore the plaza at one level. Without curbs, and in a narrower configuration, the street will take on an entirely different character more in keeping with the surroundings and the pedestrian volumes, and far lower speeds.

The city can then experiment with Alamo Plaza, closing it at peak times (weekends, for example) and during events. If closure of the street is overwhelmingly popular, the city may even leave it closed on a semipermanent basis. This street configuration is also friendly to transit, there being examples around the world of streetcars that cross busy, historic plazas.

Businesses should set up tables and chairs, awnings or umbrellas for shade and movable furniture close to their storefront; additional movable furniture should be scattered throughout the Plaza and managed by the Alamo.

The enhancement of the Acequia with rows of trees will provide a nice setting for seating in the afternoon shade and looking at the expanse of the Alamo Plaza.



## East Houston as a Shared Street between Alamo and 3rd

Widen sidewalks in front of the Emily Morgan Hotel and along the walls of the Alamo. A shared street treatment, with decorative pavement, pedestrian scale lighting, and wall gardens will create a beautiful space for street dining in the evening, accompanied by live music and lighting. During the day this section of Houston could be used for bus drop-off and pick-up and complete the access to the Alamo museum.



## Bonham, Crockett and the Caminos Reales

Bonham, Crockett and Alamo Plaza South are believed to roughly follow the path of the Caminos Reales, historically the main route to the Mission ("Texas' first interstate"). This history and significance should be highlighted with signage, special paving and wayfinding; drivers on Bonham Street may have no idea that they are following a path trod centuries before by Native Americans, Spanish

conquistadors and early Texas settlers. The Camino real interpretation should also include the Mission Trail.

## Commerce Street gateway

From Commerce Street and the Torch of Friendship there should be a gateway to the Alamo and Valero, with "processional" approach to the Plaza, made up of wayfinding stations. With plans for the Rivercenter Mall's renovation, it is crucial to make its ground floor active with shop entrances along the sidewalk as often as possible. The retail choices for the corners of the building should be carefully studied; the Rivercenter original main entrance should be open to Plaza de Valero and be a destination retail. The east sidewalk is wide enough to accommodate street vendors in the short term.

## East Houston from Alamo to Losoya

This block of Houston Street is a key link between downtown retail and the Alamo; it should also function as one of the gateways to the Plaza. The Alamo Plaza treatment should support Houston Street retail - the ground floor corner businesses at the intersection should be visible from the Plaza and attract visitors and wayfinding should direct people downtown.

One of the key businesses is the Bistro operating in the corner of the Indigo Hotel. Opening up sidewalk seating would create an immediate amenity facing the plaza.



The Indigo Bistro outdoor seating, seen from Houston and Avenue E.

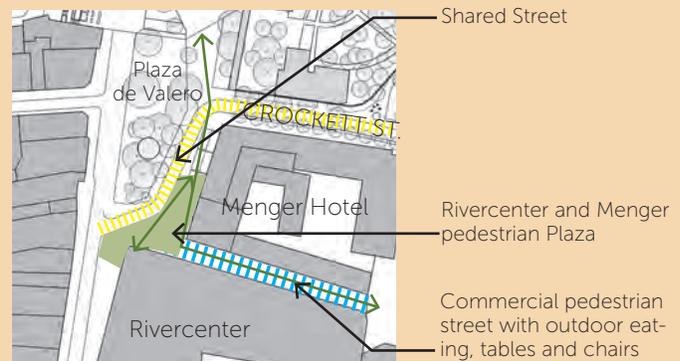
Indigo Bistro seating would also be visible from the Alamo Plaza and Avenue E.

## Bonham and Crockett as Shared Streets

With the Menger Block retail, the Crockett Hotel, and Crockett Street's high foot traffic from Rivercenter Mall, Crockett and Bonham Streets should become shared spaces, where bicycles, pedestrians and slow traffic all share the street.

Crockett Street in front of the Menger Hotel should have a plaza paving treatment that unifies Plaza de Valero with the sidewalk in front of the Hotel. This will energize the existing retail and restaurant uses and enliven the Plaza de Valero, which can provide tables and chairs for adjacent restaurants.

↔ Future heavy pedestrian traffic



# summary & implementation



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# SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

## Orientation, Spatial Organization & Interpretation

Identify the central stories that should be told through interpretation, being careful to tell a complete story that honors all the people who see it as a site of major significance

Create a centrally located active interpretation presence in Alamo Plaza

Establish “horizontal” and “vertical” definition to the Plaza

Explore additional elements for interpretation:

- Enhanced Acequia

- North Wall Commemorative Garden

- Relocate Cenotaph

- Interpretive Walk

## Activities and Amenities

Create places to linger, with more passive amenity spaces in the Alamo

Create Plaza Valero as a signature destination and active zone

Better utilize the central plaza as a significant event space

“Manage up” the experience by creating a stimulating mix of public programs, entertainment, and appropriate commercial activity

Raise the bar of materials and amenities in Alamo Plaza to be on par with other great public spaces around the world

## A Walkable District

Reclaim the district as a place that makes pedestrians a priority, using a Shared Streets approach

Enhance the district as a destination through dining, music, performance, lighting, night-time uses and management

Cultivate edge uses and streets as places to support retail

Upgrade the overall treatments of streets, plaza spaces, retail areas, and gardens

# IMPLEMENTATION PHASING

SHORT TERM and "LIGHTER, QUICKER, CHEAPER"

## Upgrade and Add New Seating

A critical component of making a great place is actively encouraging sociability on a variety of different levels. Comfortable seating, and especially moveable seating, can be a very successful tool for getting the elderly to linger, families to feel comfortable and visitors and residents alike to modify the site to their whims, supporting a sense of ownership of the Place. Inexpensive but striking seating can be a crux in shifting how a place functions from one that is uninviting to a real destination.



## Creative Activation that Attracts Locals

Street performances, entertainment, vending, and other new retail should be aimed at attracting locals, while still welcoming visitors with authentic offerings. Consider pop-up cafes with (above specified) outdoor moveable seating to activate the edges of the Plaza. Plan and organize daily performances with local musicians and arts groups - attract new partners/partnerships. Prioritize local food purveyors, like "Chili Queen," to encourage a diversity services.



## Temporary Alamo Street Closings

Special events are the impetus for experimental closures of streets to traffic and trying out the idea of a shared street. We recommend that the city enthusiastically program Alamo, East Houston, Crockett and Bonham in the short term with events, reenactments, vending, music, and the like.



# IMPLEMENTATION PHASING

## SHORT - MEDIUM TERM

### Improve Shade, Lighting and Greenery in the Entire Area

Coordinating climate control efforts, additional plantings as well as improved lighting will contribute a great deal to the overall comfort of the place, making Alamo Plaza a site that welcomes returning residents (who will come back again and again) and one-time visitors.



### Bring the History into the Plaza; Interpretative Displays and Information Kiosk

Develop a “place-based” history program, incorporating new outdoor interpretive displays, tours, information kiosks, and more. Bring the signage on the barrack walls into the plaza area. Install new interpretive displays throughout. Create an interpretive trajectory, or logical path, for visitors throughout the entire site. Develop new directional signage in accordance with interpretive displays.



### “Manage Up”

One of the most challenging, yet most important, components of a great Place is tying together all the elements, including the recommendations included in this report, new and existing stakeholders and the general management of a complicated and delicate historical site. Manage up for the highest quality experience, whether it be tourists, residents or other users of the space.



# IMPLEMENTATION PHASING

## LONG TERM

### Upgrade the Overall Treatments of Streets, Plaza spaces, Retail Areas, and Gardens

Make physical improvements to accommodate new uses and support existing ones. In particular, street and sidewalk improvements should cater to the needs of local retail and accommodate the types of businesses and activities that support a vibrant public space, like small locally-owned shops, active street life, and welcoming (and cooling) greenery.



### Repave the Plaza

Use historically and/or traditionally-influenced materials to delineate the Alamo and Plaza de Valero and to create the shared space that cars will travel through. Find a material that can accommodate a variety of uses and hold up under heavy usage.



### Study and Construct New Structures that Define South Boundary of Alamo

Develop a strategy for interpreting the vertical elements (like the south wall) in a way that supports the central stories of the interpretation. Research historical evidence to support the design and construction of appropriate new structures that honor the history, without creating a sense of faux history.



