The City of Austin selected Black + Vernooy along with Kinney Associates to articulate a vision for the development of the public space downtown Austin. With the tremendous growth and change Austin has experienced, the Master Plan conceived by this joint venture presented a timely opportunity to affect the livability, safety, and aesthetics of Austin’s downtown streets by synthesizing issues of street design and transportation into an integrated and harmonious system.

One goal of the resulting Great Streets Program has been to provide a master plan as an instrument to pursue a vision of streets for people. This vision stemmed from the Downtown Austin Design Guidelines, adopted by City Council in 2000. The design guidelines established a set of values for downtown development, including authenticity, history, safety, diversity, density, and economic vitality. These values are stated as civic values in the following user hierarchy for streets: pedestrians; transit; bicycles; and automobiles.

A city’s downtown comprises the heart of the community, and its streets form the primary public arena for interchange and commerce. Downtown Austin belongs to all of the city’s residents, and its streets serve as the primary public place. Although it has always represented the community culturally, economically, and politically, downtown Austin has traditionally lacked the vibrancy engendered by numerous pedestrian-dominant and multi-functional commercial corridors that define other cities.
The Great Streets Master Plan is based upon six guiding principles:

**Streets as Places:** the Great Streets Program envisions downtown as a vital focus of city life and a primary destination. Our downtown streets are our most important and inclusive public space and common ground.

**Interactive Streets:** urban streets are the stages on which the public life of the community is acted out. Streets are urban rooms.

**Managed Congestion:** congestion is a fact of life in successful urban places. By definition, a place that supports great concentration of economic and social activities within a pedestrian-scaled environment is going to be congested.

**Balanced Usage:** downtown streets must balance the needs of pedestrians, transit, bicycles, and the automobile in creating an attractive and viable urban core.

**Pride of Place:** visible care and upkeep are critical to the vitality of urban street life.

**Public Art:** art in the public environment can help establish a stronger sense of place and continuity between the past, present and future.

The Great Streets Master Plan consists of a few simple but profound objectives:

- Recognizing the primacy of the grid in the downtown and optimizing its use.
- Changing the space and scale of the street to create a sense of place for the individual.
- Creating a safe environment, one generous enough for multiple uses sheltered from the Texas sun.
- Recognizing the inherent need for balance between automobiles and pedestrians within the finite limits of the street right-of-ways and the transportation corridors that feed traffic into downtown.
- Implementing traffic-calming elements in downtown through symbols of pedestrian dominance, traffic management in a two-way street system, and rigorous enforcement of traffic lanes to promote and protect pedestrian safety.
- Creating an equitable balance of space usage between sidewalks and streets. Currently, a typical downtown Austin street has an 80 foot right-of-way with 60 feet (75 percent) dedicated to automobiles, leaving the remaining 20 feet (25 percent) for pedestrians. The typical “Great Street” of Austin’s future envisions dedicating 44 feet to the auto (55 percent),
allowing 36 feet (45 percent) of the street to be used for the pedestrian with 18 feet dedicated to sidewalks on each side of the street. This reallocation of space results in a 75 percent increase in pedestrian territory.

• Occupying the wider sidewalk zone with an array of well designed, functional objects such as trees and canopies for shade, among other amenities, lights, benches, and waste receptacles.

• Allowing space for private sector initiatives to occupy and animate the street scene with sidewalk cafes, kiosks, and newsstands.

• Accommodating automobile traffic to downtown and discouraging traffic through downtown.

TWO-WAY STREET SYSTEMS
Throughout the 1990s and lastly in December 2000, the Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) visited Austin and gave advice regarding the improvement of its downtown. This American Institute of Architect’s team has repeatedly recommended returning the Central Business District street system to two-way in order to enhance the pedestrian experience and thus enhance economic development opportunities. And now Austin leadership is recognizing that “Great Streets” is in fact a very powerful cost-effective economic development strategy.

The very first project to implement and benefit from Great Streets was the AMLI Downtown Residential Development, located on 2nd Street.