

December 8, 2008



AIA San Antonio

## **POSITION** **Redevelopment of HemisFair**

AIA San Antonio recognizes the extraordinary opportunity that is available to the city if the former HemisFair grounds were to be redeveloped as a truly unique San Antonio district.

The American Institute of Architects has developed Ten Principals for Livable Cities which are highly useful when considering what HemisFair should become. Seven of these principals are extremely pertinent:

- The plan for HemisFair should be developed in a **human scale**. The historic structures provide the springboard for the design of a human-scaled urban district that would relate not only to San Antonio's past but to its bright future.
- The plan should **encourage mixed-use development**. Too long HemisFair has remained an area separate from the lively play of uses integral to urban districts. The area needs a 24 hour a day life with residents, shops, and restaurants to compliment the employment opportunities, museum, and park uses that now exist. Such varied types of development would unleash the economic potential of the site.
- The plan should work to **preserve and enhance the surrounding urban center**. The new HemisFair must create ties to La Villita, the Lavaca neighborhood, Southtown, the Convention Center, and the Alamodome that will allow the new HemisFair to flourish and become a place for all of San Antonio.
- The plans should **include various transportation options**. Much of HemisFair has been divided amongst several users, but all of them find it difficult to access their facilities. It is time that the area is opened to vehicular traffic as well as pedestrians, and to allow public transit (such as the downtown trolleys or a new transportation mode) to quickly bring people into the heart of the new HemisFair district. The potential for barge traffic access into HemisFair should be studied.
- The plan should **create vibrant urban spaces**. Several impressive public spaces already exist, but they lack the surrounding uses and activity to make them vibrant urban spaces.
- The plan should **create a neighborhood identity** special to HemisFair. A truly great neighborhood has an identity that is unique to itself. They have special restaurants found nowhere else in the world. They have shops that are the original version of the ubiquitous copies found around the country. They have streets with historic structures that speak to the past lives of the city in which they are found.
- And finally, the plan should incorporate the philosophy that **design matters**. Design is that special quality that reinvents the mundane. Each component of the district design, from buildings to landscape to street furniture should speak to the special qualities and location of this specific urban district. In addition, the project offers new opportunities to incorporate sustainable development principals for the convention center as well as the other new buildings.

Additionally, the visioning and planning process for this important publicly-held property should be open for public input. A transparent decision-making process that includes the public's input should be the initial step. Endorsement by the public and area stakeholders is critical to both the long-term success of the project and initial funding needs.

Following these principals, the redevelopment process can create an urban district that is dynamic, economically sustainable, and one we can all enjoy.