Guadalupe River Park

San José, California

Master Plan 2002

City of San José
San Jose Redevelopment Agency
Santa Clara Valley Water District
United States Army Corps of Engineers
“All great cities have at least one great park. The Guadalupe will be that great park”

Frank Fiscalini
Former Vice Mayor & Council Member
Chair of the Guadalupe River Park Task Force
This is a story about the renaissance of a river. Not a river in the wild, but a river that meanders through the heart of a very large city. A river that attracted Native American and European settlers to its edge because it teemed with fish and other food sources, but drove them back with the force of its floods. A river that, in the 1930s and 40s, children swam in after school. A river that, by the 1950s and 60s, was edged by both quaint residences and by industrial buildings crowded up against its banks, draining their waste into its waters. A river that, by the late 1960s, was all but forgotten, strewn with shopping carts and anything but attractive.

That river, the Guadalupe, today looks quite different again. Much of its banks are filled with vegetation that provides habitat for wildlife and forms a verdant buffer between the downtown and the water. From Highway 880 to Highway 280 it has become a park where commuters walk and ride their bicycles; where children squeal as they run and climb and swing in playgrounds; where people sit under beautiful old trees and watch the river wander by or learn something new about its history and the history of the city.

Today the Guadalupe River is truly the heart of San José, linking various corners of the downtown and connecting the city to the region through a network of trails. The Guadalupe River Park hosts myriad activities and open spaces, from the Children’s Discovery Museum to Sister City Gardens to the River Walk. Fish have returned, breeding, migrating and spawning in the channel. Birds, mammals and amphibians find habitat in the vegetation along the river’s edge. And humans who enjoy the stimulation of urban life can also find moments for quiet reflection in the parks’ plazas and gardens.

Underneath all these physical improvements is something much more mundane but equally critical to the downtown—facilities that protect the city from the river’s floods have been incorporated into the design of the Guadalupe River Park. Hidden underground or masked as open space, these measures represent an entirely unique approach to maintaining a natural river in a highly urban area.

The renaissance of the Guadalupe River has taken place over 30 years, a blink in the life of a river but almost half the life of a human. It represents a fundamental change in thinking about the role of the river in downtown, tremendous efforts on the part of the city and its residents, and the persistent pursuit of a vision. A vision not only of a better river, but of a better San José.
The vision that brought the Guadalupe River from neglected afterthought to the heart of downtown recognized that most great cities in the world sit next to a body of water and celebrate it in some way. And while many of the rivers that flow through cities have concrete or stone-lined banks, the people behind this vision saw an opportunity to preserve and celebrate the natural character of the Guadalupe River as it meanders through San José. Early planners realized that such an amenity would be an integral part of a beautiful downtown that attracts people and business.

Yet protection from the Guadalupe’s sometimes devastating floods has never been far from people’s minds. The river’s repeated bank-topping over the centuries has shown that implementing measures that would minimize or eliminate damage from flood events was critical to the continued growth of the city.

In contrast to the metal-and-concrete nature of flood-control measures, a serene, natural environment in the midst of urban bustle was the core vision for the Guadalupe River Park. Layered onto that vision was the creation of a focal point for the city, a center of activity full of amenities, a place for education. Testament to the strength of the vision for the Guadalupe River Park is the fact that major flood-control facilities and a beautiful regional park could be combined so successfully and subtly.

Rather than serving particular neighborhoods or special interests, the Guadalupe River Park was envisioned as a regional resource. It is a place for people of all ages to enjoy a variety of activities in different open spaces along the river, from the smallest plaza to the largest meadow. Recognizing that open space is in short supply in cities and generally has fewer advocates than development does, the vision for the park focused on providing open space that would be maintained for passive uses—walking, bicycling, playing, contemplating nature, educational pursuits, and similar activities.

This vision has now become a reality. The Guadalupe River Park draws young and old to the river’s banks, offering a respite from the hectic life of the city. Educational elements exist throughout the park, and commuters use it as a pleasant alternative to cars and traffic. Everyone has their favorite spot. The park will continue to grow and change, but the vision that brought it to this point will remain: it will continue to be a natural heart for San José, providing a range of passive activities and offering habitat for wildlife. And it will be an integral component to the making of a great city.
The heart of downtown San José is not a single monument or plaza, but a soft green ribbon winding among the buildings and streets of a dense urban center. That ribbon, the Guadalupe River, gives San José a character unique among the largest cities in the United States. Next to corporate headquarters, commercial and office space, civic buildings, busy intersections and freeways, the river calmly passes through town, its green banks providing a natural setting that allows wildlife to co-exist with city life.

Between Highways 880 and 280, the Guadalupe River also hums with human activity. Following the flow of the river, pathways and plazas host strolling families, commuters on foot or on bicycle, playing children, and individuals seeking a few quiet moments near the water. Yet the Guadalupe River Park is more than a downtown open space. It is a unique combination of a tranquil, beautiful park and flood-control measures that effectively mollify the river’s devastating flood potential in check.

The Guadalupe has not always been a peaceful neighbor to the downtown. Tremendous floods have caused damage to both property and the public’s opinion of the river. As a result, flood-control projects have been implemented over the past several decades that feature varying levels of concrete and piping, sometimes blending into the natural surroundings, sometimes standing in sharp contrast.

With insight and persistence, citizens of San José, the City, the San José Redevelopment Agency, the Santa Clara Valley Water District (SCVWD) and the United States Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) have slowly reconciled traditional flood-control planning with the dream of a nature-filled park downtown. The Guadalupe River Park Master Plan is unique in the way it carefully weaves the river’s natural and cultural amenities together with the flood protection needed to keep its frequent high flows from causing damage to the city. It represents a balance of flood control measures and river restoration, human recreation and wildlife habitat, park development and aesthetics.

This document reflects all the work done since the 1960s to bring the Guadalupe River Park to fruition, outlining the numerous public spaces and flood control facilities along the 2.6 miles of river that run through downtown. Most of the open spaces discussed here have been built at the time of publication; the remainder will be completed in the following few years.
Urban Setting, Natural Environment
Located in the heart of the San Francisco Bay Area’s largest city, the Guadalupe River can rightly be called an oasis to its highly urbanized surroundings. Almost completely surrounded by urbanization, it still offers habitat for a variety of plants and animals. Tissues, shrubs and ground cover lining the banks of the river form a broad band of green along its length. This riparian vegetation thrives in the moist soils next to the river, even with San José’s relatively dry climate. Mammals, birds and amphibians settle in this welcoming atmosphere, and the waters of the river are home and highway to a variety of resident and migrating fish.

Monitoring the Water’s Flow
Between Highway 880 and Grant Street (see map on page 13) just south of Highway 280, a number of flood-control measures and streambed improvements have been implemented. The streambed improvements, which are primarily focused on providing passage for fish in times of low river levels and maintaining cool water temperatures are comprised of small dams and low-flow channels. Protection from a 100-year flood event is achieved through a variety of flood-control measures and streambed improvements, which are primarily focused on providing passage for fish in times of low river levels and maintaining cool water temperatures are comprised of small dams and low-flow channels. Between Highway 880 and Grant Street, a secondary channel accommodates high flows. From Coleman Avenue to Santa Clara Street, a 17 feet deep by 64 feet wide bypass diverts waters away from the main channel during normal flow and high-flow events. Viewing areas at Woz Way, Park Avenue, Santa Clara Street, St. John Street and Coleman Avenue combine viewing prospects with educational information about floods and local culture.

Gardens give visitors the chance to sit quietly in a beautiful environment. The San José City Gardens along the river feature plants, pavers and monuments from other countries. At the north end of the park, the Guadalupe Gardens are being developed as acres of public gardens and passive open space. Memorials and monuments along the river recall those who have lived on this land in the past, elements of the city’s history, the river’s flooding activity, or those who have made some contribution to the greater culture. The Veterans’ Memorial, an AIDS grove, tributes to Native Americans and to the area’s agricultural past, and markers symbolic of the power and fascination of water appear throughout the park.

People Flow
The Guadalupe River Park and its trail system are oriented north-south. Access to and across the Guadalupe River is critical to bringing the east and west sides of the river together, and, for pedestrians and cyclists, it is an important component of the non-motorized vehicles alternative available by the Guadalupe River Park. Pedestrians have access to the river via public sidewalks and pathways through private development, and have several options for crossing the river using the many pedestrian and vehicular bridges.

Once at the river, the network of paths called the River Walk takes pedestrians and cyclists along the river and out to other local and regional trail systems. The River Walk’s convenience and serenity attract commuters who walk or bicycle to downtown instead of using other forms of transportation. The Guadalupe River Park is also easily accessed by public transit, including buses and light rail, as well as by car, with public and private parking options readily available.

Park Open Spaces
While the length and beauty of the river is the framework for the park, myriad open spaces along its banks offer park users a variety of experiences. Several overlooks provide the opportunity to watch the river’s waters during normal flow and high-flow events. Viewing areas at Woz Way, Park Avenue, Santa Clara Street, St. John Street and Coleman Avenue combine viewing prospects with educational information about floods and local culture.

The Way Forward
Bringing a significant amenity like the Guadalupe River Park to fruition requires extensive vision and planning, but it also needs ongoing support of that vision to remain the unique attraction that it is. Rigorous scrutiny of future design proposals has to be met with continued high-quality maintenance. Public participation in the planning and development processes will help determine the route that the park takes, but there are a couple of elements of the vision that will carry through: the park is a regional resource primarily for passive recreation, and its natural qualities and wildlife habitat will be protected. Ultimately, the beauty of the park and the activities that it generates will create a center for the community that will be an integral element of San José’s identity and image.

“Everyone really participated in the process of creating this park, and as a result it created common ownership.”
Antonia Extremera, Santa Clara Valley Water District Board Member

“We use the River Walk when we go downtown for city life, theater, restaurants, to listen to band music, and then we have a nice quiet ride home without having to drive anywhere.”
Izzy Arias, Task Force Member

“One of the things we’re doing is saving some urban wilderness for everyone to enjoy.”
Joan Corsiglia, Task Force Member
The Guadalupe River basin is a wonderful place to ride my bike. I can avoid all the traffic and stop lights and it’s great to ride through the diverse river environments. I ride along the open grass flood plains to the shaded tree lined paths along the river. Having the bike path available is the main reason I commute to work via bicycle. Traffic and stop lights are stressful and the river path is quite relaxing and peaceful. It’s a nice way to start and end each work day. I became aware of the other amenities the Guadalupe River Park offers and now I find myself using the park on the weekends and evenings. I can’t wait for more of the path ways to open and I hope more people find this relaxing alternative transportation route.

Laura Jump

Bringing a significant amenity like the Guadalupe River Park to fruition requires extensive vision and planning, but the vision also needs ongoing support so that the park can remain the unique attraction that it is. Rigorous screening of future design proposals has to be met with continued high-quality maintenance. Public participation in the planning and development processes will help determine the future of the park, but there are elements of the vision that are basic to the design and should be upheld: the park is a regional resource primarily for passive recreation, and its natural qualities and wildlife habitat will be protected. Ultimately, the beauty of the park and the activities that it generates will create a center for the community that will be an integral element of San José’s identity and image.

The Region
The city of San José sits south of the San Francisco Bay, in the Santa Clara Valley. Surrounded by hills and mountains, it lies at the end of numerous creeks and rivers fed by tributaries originating in the foothills. Most of these waterways have been modified in some way or another to accommodate urban development.

Downtown San José is highly urbanized around the Guadalupe River, with a mix of uses including commercial and office, light industrial, public facilities such as cultural centers and a sports arena, and residential areas ranging from single-family neighborhoods to high-density apartment and condominium developments.

The Guadalupe River Park lies in the downtown San José area, an oasis in the midst of the urban bustle. It has a variety of designed and natural spaces, from plazas to park-like strolling paths to natural riparian habitat, so visitors can choose between a kaleidoscope of river experiences or return to a favorite spot and the particular setting that it offers.

Project Site
The Guadalupe River flows generally south to north, from the confluence of its tributaries in the Santa Cruz Mountains to the waters of the San Francisco Bay. The Guadalupe River Park lies in the downtown San José area, an oasis in the midst of the urban bustle.

River Environment
Climate
As with much of California, the Santa Clara Valley has a mediterranean climate that features warm, dry summers and mild winters with moderate rainfall. In San José average rainfall is 14 inches, though the Guadalupe River’s headwaters are in the Santa Cruz Mountains, where rainfall averages 50 inches per year.
Wildlife

The Guadalupe River supports a narrow array of wildlife that is tolerant of small home ranges, human activity, and urbanization. Mammals include raccoons, squirrels, opossums, feral cats, shrews, moles, and gophers. While few amphibians or reptiles survive along urban streams, species of frogs and salamanders can be found within the GRP boundaries. None of these species is listed as sensitive, threatened or endangered.

Because of their habitat needs and mode of travel, birds have been fairly successful in finding places to nest along the Guadalupe River, despite urbanization. Many species that have been sighted in the Guadalupe area are protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Both native and non-native fish species populate the Guadalupe River. Anadromous fish (those that are born in freshwater, migrate to the ocean to mature, and return to freshwater to spawn) include Chinook salmon, steelhead/rainbow trout, and Pacific lamprey. These fish live primarily in the main reaches of the river, as dams and various channel structures block or restrict access to tributaries. The Santa Clara Valley Water District (SCVWD) continues to work on removing or modifying many of these fish barriers to enhance fish migration and habitat.

Protected fish species in the Guadalupe River, those that are not on the endangered species list but that do require protection so as not to make it onto the list, include Chinook salmon and steelhead. Chinook salmon migrate up the river and spawn in the fall. They spawn in and around the downtown San José area between October and December, with the eggs hatching after about two months and the young remaining in the gravel of the riverbed for several weeks before emerging as fry. Most juveniles migrate to the bay after a month or two.

Steelhead migrate up the Guadalupe River from November through April and spawn between January and May. River temperatures keep the majority of spawning to the months before April, and eggs hatch between March and early June. Juvenile steelhead stay in the river for at least a year, migrating to the ocean between November and May.

"It integrates people with their environment, watching fish migrating upstream. One person saw a turtle swimming. It connects us to nature, and that’s a vibrant place for people to be."

Virginia Holtz, Task Force Member

"It’s wild in the middle and tame at the edges."

Larry Ames, Task Force Member

"One of the greatest characteristics of the park is the suble discoveries that are provided in such a large space. It’s a place to wander and wonder."

Dennis Hickey, Task Force Member

"The Guadalupe River Park provides an amazing opportunity to bring the community to the heart of San Jose and enjoy a variety of activities or simply the solitude and quiet of nature in the midst of a dense urban environment."

Cindy Chavez, Council Member and Task Force Chair

Vegetation

The vegetation along the Guadalupe River consists of a narrow band of riparian forest, whose width generally ranges from 100’ to 200’ in the Guadalupe River Park. This forest provides critical feeding and nesting habitat for wildlife, and is characterized by a tall tree canopy and lower layers of small trees, shrubs and ground covers.

A particular type of vegetative cover known as shaded riparian aquatic (SRA) habitat exists between a river and its adjacent riparian habitat. SRA consists of both overhead and in-stream cover, and plays a critical role in the health of waterways and the fish that inhabit them. It creates a place for fish to hide from predators, increases bank stability and habitat complexity, provides habitat for the insects on which stream fish feed, and provides shade to keep water temperatures down, a critical element in preserving the native fish habitat. Because the Guadalupe River is so narrow, overhead and in-stream cover extend across the entire river in many places.
I grew up two blocks from the Guadalupe River. The river was our playground, because our elementary school (Abraham Lincoln) had a gravel and dirt playground. In the summer time we always had a couple of great swimming holes, and in the winter the river was a source of diversion that I could use for my fishing hole. Each winter my grandmother would remind me to tie my spear rope to a tree and not my leg. Later when I was elected mayor of San José I naturally supported the creation of a beautiful urban river park for future generations. Ron James, Former Mayor of San José

The Guadalupe River Park represents a completely new way of thinking about how flood-control measures can be integrated into a beautiful park setting, but the city’s vision of a revitalized downtown led to the development of an underground flood water bypass channel being overlaid with colorful open space in the form of parks, plazas, pathways and gardens. The result is a design that accommodates the waters of a 100-year flood event while providing the citizens of San José with a serene location for recreation, social events, and even commuting.

The design of the flood-control, recreational, and habitat elements of this unique space reflects the following seven objectives:

• The provision of open space along the river for passive and active recreation in the urban environment
• The enhancement of the Guadalupe River as both a valuable riparian habitat and a natural resource to be enjoyed by the greater San José community and visitors alike
• The construction of a linear urban park that provides opportunities for park-enhanced development of private and public facilities
• Protection from 100-year flood events
• The creation of a safe, connected trail system that offers an alternative to motorized transportation
• A balance between human access to the river and maximum protection of the riparian habitat
• Citizen education about hydrology, flood control, and the natural habitat and cultural resources of the river

To maintain the native genetic pool in the Guadalupe River Park, special attention has been given to the plant materials used. The riparian vegetation of the river corridor is replaced or augmented only with genetic natives, while outside the river corridor, ornamentals have been chosen that are non-intrusive to genetic natives. This planting philosophy will continue with future expansion of the park.

An understanding of the uniqueness and scope of this project is impossible without examining the extensive infrastructure of the flood-control facilities, the urban framework around the river, and the individual open spaces that line the river and act as gems in the park necklace. Most of these open spaces have been built as of the publication of this document; the remainder will be constructed in the following few years.
Flood-Control Measures
The entire length of the Guadalupe River Park, from Highway 880 to just south of Highway 280, has a variety of flood control measures, some out-of- ground, some below. The river’s edge between Highway 880 and High Street is open and natural and includes gently sloped areas that accommodate high water flows. This overflow space includes a secondary river channel, riparian migration areas, and recreational trails. It also features reinforcement on the riverbanks and bottom. Small dams and a low-flow channel have been constructed to provide passage for fish when the river’s water level is low.

Between High Street and Coleman Avenue, reinforcement in the river is consummated with new groins, riprap, and the area’s bottom includes a low-flow channel. This stretch has extensive gently sloped banks and a secondary river channel. A rock dam across the upstream end of the secondary channel helps to concentrate flows into the main river channel, thus maintaining the normal movement of sediment. The concentration of small flows also reduces solar heating of the stream water, which, if not controlled, can be lethal to fish.

The flood-control solutions in the area between Coleman Avenue and Santa Clara Street allowed the retention of as much existing SRA cover as possible, as well as preservation of the natural river channel. They feature the installation of two undeground bypasses that redirect high flows around the existing riparian habitat. The first directs water just north of the Santa Clara Street bridge. The second intercepts water south of St. John Street and parallels the Santa Clara bypass until both bypasses release the flood waters back into the main river channel south of Coleman Avenue. In addition to these bypasses, the West Way Bypass was constructed between Park Avenue and West Way.

Improvements along the east bank of the area between Santa Clara Street and Park Avenue include bank reinforcement and the addition of a series of concrete stairs planned with riparian vegetation. The west bank treatment consists of a vertical retaining wall, which has a graphic that diagrammatically represents the entire Guadalupe River project.

Finally, on the canyon bank of the West Way/West 880 stretch of river, improvements include bank reinforcement from under the West Way Bridge to 50 feet downstream from the Highway 280/SR 87 interchange.

The Low-Flow Channel
The Guadalupe River supports migratory salmon runs that occur each year in river and streams throughout the West Coast. Migratory species in the Santa Clara area historically used both the Guadalupe and Coyote creeks; however, the river was regulated under the Federal Endangered Species Act. In order to allow these fish easy movement through the downtown flood-protection project, a low-flow channel exists within the reinforced sections of the river bottom.

The low-flow channel promotes adequate water flows for fish to pass through this area, especially during the river’s low periods. Layers of boulders and cobbles placed in the low-flow channel provide resting areas for fish while they migrate. The low-flow channel, fish have an opportunity to move up and down the river and flows are concentrated at a depth that helps maintain water temperatures.

The Urban Framework
An inviting park in the heart of the city needs adequate access and connections to the downtown over the past few decades has brought the river in, making it an integral part of the city’s identity and a highlight of the region. The Guadalupe River Park, in turn, provides a trail system that links various parts of downtown and surrounding communities, tying into a larger system of trails in the city, county, and Bay Area.

The river and its trail system are oriented north-south, while the principal access to the Guadalupe River Park is from the east and west. These east-west connections via streets, vehicular bridges, and pathways, guide people through the downtown flood-protection system.

Access and Circulation
East-West Connections
The Guadalupe River is the spine holding together a mix of uses on its east and west sides. These types of east-west connections bring pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists to and across it: pedestrian bridges, streets/vehicular bridges, and pathways through private development. In addition to leading people to the park, streets and river crossings give pedestrians easy movement between commercial, recreational, and residential activities, and offer motorists several opportunities to enjoy views of the park and open space as they cross the city. These east-west connections across the river also support the expansion of downtown on either side, and strengthen the river as the heart of San José.

One of the unique features of the stretch of river featured in the master plan is the number of bridges. In addition to the eight vehicular bridges between Coleman Avenue and Grant Street, there are three bicycle/ pedestrian bridges. One is at the Center for Performing Arts, the second is the Children’s Bridge at Discovery Meadow, and the third is at Confluence Point over Los Gatos Creek. An additional bicycle/pedestrian bridge over the river is planned from Confluence Point to Confluence East.

As outlined in the “Design Guidelines” for development adjacent to the Guadalupe River, the city will encourage private developers to provide additional pedestrian connections to the river and to their places to Guadalupe River Park opens spaces as new private development occurs. Current major east-west pedestrian connections include Taylor Street, Coleman Avenue, Julian Street, St. John Street, Clark Street, San Fernando Street, Park Avenue, and San Carlos Street to the west.

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Point to Confluence East.

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Point to Confluence East.
**Parking and Transit**

Park users have several options for parking in the vicinity of the Guadalupe River. Parking opportunities can be found near the tennis courts at Confluence East, and numerous public and private lots and structures exist in close proximity to the park. Several of the private garages are required, under an agreement with the San José Redevelopment Agency, to provide parking for park users on weekends.

Multiple bus routes serve the Guadalupe River Park. In addition, the Guadalupe and Vaquita light rail lines currently run near the site and another line, Downtown-East Valley, is in the planning stages.

**Recreation, Trails, and Open Space**

The Guadalupe River Park's trails are more than just paved pedestrian areas. They are easily reached, accessible to all, suitable for commuting and for strolling, and they form critical links to trail systems that connect Bay Area communities, jobs, entertainment, recreation, the shoreline, and the mountains.

The trails along the Guadalupe River Park, collectively called the River Walk, are a part of the Guadalupe River Trail Corridor and one of the most distinctive features of the park. They will eventually form a continuous system of circulation, are designed to provide access to the river at various points, and generally pass under bridges to avoid at-grade street crossings. Some sections meander in close proximity to the river, while others are held to the top of the bank to avoid too much damage to the river's ecology. There are a few locations where breaks in the trail system occur at properties developed long ago. When these properties are redeveloped, the city will seek dedication in order to provide linkages to park circulation.

Connections to other paths, such as the Los Gatos Creek Trail, and to transportation hubs, such as the Diridon Multi-modal Station (CalTrain, bus, light rail, and in the future, BART), encourage use of the River Walk by commuters. As a visual bonus, the trails allow nature-viewing opportunities along much of the river.

The River Walk also ties into the Countywide Trails Master Plan system and is a link in a larger regional trail system that includes the Bay Area Ridge Trail and the San Francisco Bay Trail, a half-completed system that will eventually encircle the bay and stretch to the mountains.

**Proposed Pedestrian Enhancements**

The experience of walking along the river will be enhanced by several design elements, including stairways on the east side of the river at Woz Way and San Carlos Street, a pedestrian bridge from Confluence Point to Confluence East, and an interpretive program to illustrate the cultural history, hydrology, and ecology of the river. Sister City Gardens and numerous benches for resting and observing the life of the river will also be installed along the walkways.

“Already in its unfinished state I enjoy the trails, the solitude and the natural beauty of the park. You can almost forget you’re in the middle of a teeming urban area.”

Jim Towery, Task Force Member

"We were able to take a deep breath and focus on a collaborative process and come to a design that was acceptable to everyone. It would have been easier to just throw up our hands and fight, but that’s always more experience than collaboration.”

Larry Wilson, SCVWD Board Member

**Visual Resources**

The vegetated state and natural look of much of the Guadalupe River stand in sharp contrast to the highly urban surroundings through which the river meanders. Although visible in its full length only from high buildings or the air, the river is an important visual amenity for downtown San José. Even in the small stretches one can experience in any given moment when on foot or bicycle.

Other Features

Restrooms are provided throughout the park at major activity areas, and will be included in adjacent public/private development. Lighting is designed to facilitate safe and convenient circulation of cyclists and pedestrians, providing sufficient levels for safety while minimizing glare. Site furnishings have already been used along the river, creating a standard that will be followed in future development.
One of my favorite places in San Jose to spend family time with my kids is the Guadalupe River Park. The walking trail is so nice and quiet, the park is so clean and relaxing and so conveniently connected with the Children’s Discovery Museum and the Light Rail system. My family has enjoyed so many fun events at this park, from the Spring in Guadalupe Gardens to Pumpkins in the Park in fall, organized by the Friends of Guadalupe River Park & Gardens. The Vietnamese Autumn Festival has held so many successful annual celebrations here. In 1994, the Vietnamese-American Chamber of Commerce of Santa Clara Valley held its First Annual Asian American Heritage Festival with other Asian Chambers in the Guadalupe River Park, these events introduced thousands of families in the Bay Area to this friendly park and making it a familiar place for family and community gatherings as well as a perfect place to celebrate cultural diversity.

H.G. Nguyen

The plazas, monuments and gardens along the river give life to the park and create a series of destinations, whether someone is following the entire river downtown or just joining it for a short distance. These open spaces, each with its own character and each offering something unique, allow visitors to relax and watch the river, interact with friends or passersby, be entertained at a larger gathering, and reflect on the myriad elements that make up the city and park.

Woz Way Overlook
Located at the beginning of the flood-control system, this overlook is an interactive place for people to view floodwaters as they are intercepted by the channel, as well as providing space for reflection, respite and education. The plaza’s form is taken from the flow of the water through the box culvert, creating a series of platforms at different levels. Each platform features soft paving and tree groves with seating areas.

Discovery Meadow
Discovery Meadow sits at the southern end of the park and includes the Children’s Discovery Museum, a major cultural attraction designed by world-renowned Mexican architect Ricardo Legorreta. The largest open space in the Guadalupe River Park after the Guadalupe Natural Reserve and Flood Plain (described at the end of the master plan), the meadow is capable of holding 20,000 people during regional festivals and other events. It features an enormous lawn and is transformed frequently into a site of celebration during the summer months. Along Discovery Meadow, the River Walk follows the river closely and is lined with comfortable park benches.

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Antonio Estremera, SCVWD Board Member

Antonio Estremera, SCVWD Board Member

“It's a true open-access, family-oriented public park and entertainment center.”

AIDS Grove

AIDS Memorial Grove was conceived as a special place for friends and families wanting to honor those who have HIV or have died from AIDS. The Chinese pistache trees were selected for the grove because they thrive in the climate here, and their leaves turn fiery orange and red in the fall. The AIDS Memorial Grove was established in 1993.

Ridder Plaza

Named after Tony Ridder, publisher of The San Jose Mercury News, this plaza honors his philanthropic efforts within the city. Oversized bronze running shoes symbolize the long run that he made to support and improve San José, and they further serve to give children something to aspire to, filling his shoes with their own strength, community focus, and dedication.

Parade of Animals

Artist Michael Boris created these six bronze animals dedicated to the children of San José and representing creatures that might be found along the Guadalupe River. The animals are arranged so that the owl, hawk, and fox are eyeing the rabbit and frog as food sources. The raccoon is placed as an observer, watching all the other animals.

Monopoly in the Park

Monopoly in the Park features the largest Monopoly game board in the world at 930 square feet. It is designed to be an interactive element of the park, with groups able to rent large tokens and actually play a game of Monopoly in an outdoor public setting.

Sister Cities San José

Sister City Gardens commemorate San José's special relationship with particular cities throughout the world and give residents a tiny glimpse into those cultures. Several Sister City Gardens are already in place at the south end of the park. Each is similar in scale, proportion and purpose, using plant and paving materials native to each country to express some of the country's identity and culture. Partially enclosed, the gardens are designed to give visitors a remove from the pressures of daily life and a window onto the river and its natural environment.

San José has sister-city relationships with seven cities: Veracruz, Mexico; Okayama, Costa Rica; Okayama, Japan; Dublin, Ireland; Tainan, Taiwan; Puné, India; and Ekaterinberg, Russia.

Veracruz Sister City Garden

On the east bank, under a very old California pepper tree and overlooking the river, the Sister City Garden, a memorable exhibition of Mexican culture, has been established, in 1975.

San José Sister City Garden

This garden is in the shadow of a heritage Casuarina tree and features a specimen multi-trunked Jacaranda tree and Adoquin stone from Mexico. Tiled by the people of San José, Costa Rica, it is used on the roof was the San José, Costa Rica: relationship was established in 1962.

Okayama Sister City Garden

Okayama was the first of San José’s sister-city relationships to be established, in 1961. The Okazama Garden features a 60-foot tall illuminated flag pole flying the Dublin flag. A pool, rock, engraved by Irish poet Arthur O’Shaughnessy, has an umbrella of Irish clover that appears around St. Patrick’s Day. The ground is covered with masonry-style cream flueri limestone paving, and a donated historic lamp post sits in the area, a gift from the city of Tainan.

Tainan Sister City Garden

The plantings and colors in this garden reflect Taiwan's tropical climate. Tree of heaven and bamboo greet the visitor at the entrance, with red granite paving and varieties of tropical grasses setting the mood. This site commemorating the sister-city relationship with Tainan, Taiwan, established in 1975, also features a marble table and benches, donated by the city of Tainan.

Puné Sister City Garden

The sites for these gardens are located north of Coleman Avenue, but have not been developed as of publication of this document.

Dublin Sister City Garden

Looking south from the steps banks of the Guadalupe River across Discovery Meadow, this garden features a 60-foot tall illuminated flag pole flying the Dublin flag. A pool, rock, engraved by Irish poet Arthur O’Shaughnessy, has an umbrella of Irish clover that appears around St. Patrick’s Day. The ground is covered with masonry-style cream flueri limestone paving, and a donated historic lamp post sits in the area, a gift from the city of Tainan.

Puné, India and Ekaterinberg, Russia

The sites for these gardens are located north of Coleman Avenue, but have not been developed as of publication of this document.

It is easy to throw anything into the river, but difficult to take it out again.
Kashmir Proverb

In addition to its lawn area, Discovery Meadow has several structures and spaces that are of interest in their own right.

Children's Bridge

The Children's Bridge, designed by Thomas Aulaha and Mark Mannen, is a suspension bridge that provides a pedestrian crossing over the Guadalupe River approximately halfway between San Carlos Street and Woz Way. It links Discovery Meadow to major buildings—including the San José McEnery Convention Center—along Almaden Boulevard to the east. A colorful depiction of children at play anchors the west side of the bridge, and its unique cable-stayed suspension was used to give children a clear illustration of the principles of basic engineering.

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The Veterans Memorial

The Veterans Memorial, located on Park Avenue at the Guadalupe River, is a tribute to all who served and respect to the past. Within this park, the commemoration is the San José’s Public Arts Commission.

The Muwekma Ohlone Tribute

The Muwekma Ohlone people, Native Americans who once lived along the Guadalupe River, are honored on the Park Avenue Bridge with animal sculptures important to their tradition. These include coyotes, hummingbirds, and an eagle. The four flags that fly above the bridge represent the past and present governments of the area: Spain, Mexico, California, and the United States. The coyotes were created by artist Peter Schiffrin; the eagle and hummingbirds by Tom Andrews.

Center for Performing Arts Pedestrian Bridge

In order to maintain a maximum amount of the existing vegetation, this bridge was made as narrow as possible. The innovative arch post-tension design minimizes the bulk of the structure, and the use of green concrete helps to reflect the river’s environment. A special flowing paving design and softly contoured turf is an outdoor space for resting and for viewing the dramatic flood events when they occur.

The plaza has a special flowing pond design and softly contoured turf and trees that are attractive to the riverbank. Indigenous animals of the Guadalupe River are sand-blasted into the paving. The plaza also serves as an inviting space for viewing the dramatic flood events when they occur.

McEnery Park

Named after John P. McEnery, prominent in local politics and community life in San José from the 1940s to the 1960s, this park is located on the south side of San Fernando Street, just east of the river. The park features a miniature re-creation of the Guadalupe River forms the central spine of the park. Scenery of mountains with mist and boulders, it flows through sandy foothills and meanders along a broad plain before disappearing into irrigated fields.

Playful dragonfly sculptures hover above the river, calling out the need for all rivers to be free of pollution. Long arcing benches follow the sinuous flow of the water, with patterned diagonal paths inviting children to count and read and measure. Picnic tables, restrooms, and lawn areas for relaxation and play offer options for everyone.

Entry Mosaic

The entry signs provide pedestrians at all bridge entries to the river a welcome mat into the River Walk. Each mat has the street names on the river and its signs, as well as the fishing and fishing, of the river. The mosaic compasses are the first phase of the directional signage in the Guadalupe River Park, signage to become familiar with the palette of surrounding vegetation. No vertical sign poles are used that could detract from the beauty of the river.

Remembering Agriculture

Remembering Agriculture, by artist Tony May, recalls the rich agricultural history that was the driving force behind San José’s economy for more than 150 years. The project recreates the distinctive shapes of those once-familiar clusters of farm buildings that are now seen less and less frequently in the Santa Clara Valley. The structures include a water tower, a windmill, a barn and a small shed, all of which function as abodes for birds and other climbing plants.

Mosaic Signage Features

The rich colors and textures of the mosaic features reflect the natural forms, as well as the flora and fauna, of the river. The mosaic compasses are the first phase of the directional signage in the Guadalupe River Park, signage to become familiar with the palette of surrounding vegetation. No vertical sign poles are used that could detract from the beauty of the river.

Directional Mosaic Compass

The compass provides directional cues to major destinations and give visitors a larger perspective of the river and its relationships to points north, south, east and west.

The entry signs provide pedestrians at all bridge entries to the river a welcome mat into the River Walk. Each mat has the street names on the side street of the museum, orienting visitors to the city grid.

Rivers have what man most respects and longs for in his own life and thought—a capacity for renewal and replenishment, continual energy, creativity, and cleansing. Rivers are living mysteries. They link that past to the future. They inspire adventure and peace. They take us home even as they take us to new frontiers. People stare into the moving water, captivated, as they dream, thrive, and fears. People are where rivers encounter us, as they are when gazing into a fire.

We let a river shower its banks with a spirit that invades the people living there, and we protect that river, knowing that without its blessings the people have no source of soul. Rivers are magnets for the imagination, for conscious pondering and subconscious dreams, earth, and fears.

EPA Journal, John H. Kaufmann

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We let a river shower its banks with a spirit that invades the people living there, and we protect that river, knowing that without its blessings the people have no source of soul.
Arena Green is a wonderful place where my family can enjoy the sunshine and spend an afternoon right downtown. To have a beautiful playground, comfortable park, and spectacular carousel in the heart of this urban setting is a treasure. Our young daughter is fascinated with the brightly painted, hand-crafted creatures. The contrast between the large structure of the HP Pavilion at San José and the open space of the park is striking. The five-skaters art piece pays tribute to some of the greatest athletes to come from the Bay Area.

Arena Green is the section of the park bordered by Santa Clara Street on the south and St. John Street on the north. Features of Arena Green include the Carousel and Tot Lots, the Five Skaters Art Piece, and the Donor Walkway.

Carousel and Tot Lots
The Children’s Carousel at Arena Green includes 33 intricately painted fiberglass animals, six of which were custom-made for San José. The hummingbird, coyote, salmon, and eagle represent species indigenous to the area, and two sharks celebrate the San José Sharks National Hockey League ice hockey team. Adjacent to the carousel on the west side is a brightly colored playground for young children featuring swings, slides, a play fort, and a pyramid for climbing. To the south of the carousel, a play area for older children is composed almost entirely of nets, providing opportunities for climbing and swinging. Comfortable park benches, a refreshment kiosk and restrooms are nearby.

Five Skaters Art Piece
The Five Skaters Art Piece at Arena Green honors five Olympic champion ice skaters from the Bay Area: Peggy Fleming, Debbi Thomas, Brian Boitano, Kristy Yamaguchi, and Rudy Galindo. The piece includes five mosaic-tiled pillars, a symbolic ice rink featuring quotations from each of the skaters, time capsules displaying memorabilia from their careers, medal platforms, and a plaque listing each skater’s national and international awards.

Donor Walkway
The Donor Walkway in Arena Green, sponsored by the Friends of Guadalupe River Park Gardens, provides an opportunity for citizens to support the Guadalupe River Park by purchasing a granite paver and inscribing it with their family or company name, message or logo. The walk is lined by a double row of poplars.

Scott Thornton, San Jose Sharks
Confluence East

One of the larger open spaces within the Guadalupe River Park, Confluence East is comprised of multiple sites capable of hosting events of all sizes. These areas are isolated from one another geographically, allowing them to have different characters and provide different amenities. They include places of shade, refuge, and reflection, as well as large open meadows for active play such as frisbee and kite flying. The park promotes visual access to the river, and creates areas for picnics and group activities.

The Plaza areas in Confluence East celebrate the various meanings of confluence and establishes an identity for the area within the framework of the rest of Guadalupe River Park. Above all, Confluence East is designed to integrate various fractured elements, connecting the city to the river, the park to the river, and the river to the flood-control culvert.

A number of spaces and monuments comprise Confluence East:

Tributaries Monument

Adjoins the Santa Clara Street Overlook Plaza, this monument celebrates the confluence of the Guadalupe River and Los Gatos Creek. Designed as a circular, site-specific art piece, the monument consists of two spiraling pairs of basalt columns inlaid in the black granite that forms the central focus. The spirals are made from basalt columns, one black and one gray, representing the two streams and their corresponding culverts, converging into one. The spirals' dynamic movement evokes the confluence of the river's flow. Confluence Point is the location of the Ranger Station and Visitor Center, and of an art installment honoring the Costanoan-Ohlone tribe.

The Weavers' Gifts

The sculpture The Weavers' Gifts celebrates the Costanoan-Ohlone Indian peoples who lived within the area of Confluence Point. It is composed of three main elements: a large granite carving of a morter in two halves, suggestive of a broken tradition; a large limestone carving of a unfinished spiraling storage basket inlaid in the artifacts generally given to the first colonists; and a limestone carving of the birds, snakes, fish, and plants native to the Guadalupe River, as well as interpretive programs for park visitors. The Center contains exhibits on the history of the Costanoan-Ohlone people.

St. John Street Overlook Plaza

Located adjacent to the secondary inlet for the flood-controlled culvert, this plaza highlights the civil engineering system that has been constructed to protect people and property in downtown San José. It also seeks to illustrate the integration of the natural river system with the flood-control system by showing how water from one is carried through the other in times of floods.

The design of the plaza consists of a narrow, trapezoid-shaped space where two sidewalks, representing the two streams and their corresponding culverts, converge into one. Gates in the paving or on separate signage illustrate how much water it carries in each culvert. The central feature of the plaza is a triangular wedge of granite, sandwiched between the two walls, that points directly to the confluence point of the Guadalupe River and Los Gatos Creek.

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Guadalupe Gardens

In a separate master plan, Guadalupe Gardens is being developed as a large area of diverse public gardens for the enjoyment and education of visitors, in keeping with San José’s historical image as the Garden City. The gardens sit on a 120-acre site adjacent to the Guadalupe River Park, in the area referred to as the Coleman Loop. The proposal to develop the area as public gardens grew from an opportunity to beautify a former residential area in the immediate approach zone to the Norm Y. Mineta San José International Airport.

Several elements of the Gardens are already in place, including a Heritage Rose Garden, Historic Orchard, a rock garden streetscape, and the Courtyard Garden, a demonstration recycled water garden. When fully developed, trails from the Guadalupe River Park will connect to the Gardens at several points, providing seamless access to and from the park for visitors.

"The park is part of a maturing city."  
Larry Wilson, Task force member & SCWWD Board Member

"The park completes the whole picture of San José."

Joan Corsiglia

Guadalupe Natural Reserve and Flood Plain

Along the river, between Highway 880 and Coleman Avenue, there is a series of terraces with flowing mounds and planting that not only create a pastoral environment, but also function as a floodplain for the river and a site for riparian habitat mitigation. This highly natural area encompasses one-third of the length of Guadalupe River Park and features gently winding paths that take pedestrians away from the pace and noise of the urban environment for a time and allow them to enjoy the peacefulness of a riverside environment with activities such as strolling and people- or wildlife-watching.

The floodplain allows water to flow through box culverts and, in high-flow events, onto the terraces, providing a natural place for the river to run without causing damage to property. The layout and planting of the terraces accommodate flood waters when needed and provide a passive recreation setting otherwise. Steps will be taken to pursue ongoing restoration activities in this area.

"We all long to be in nature, and it’s hard to do that in San José, but this project allows us to enjoy nature, get away, and contemplate."

Councilmember Ken Yeager, Task Force Member

Getting to know a river is one of life’s great joys.

Paul Quarrington

"Watching the birds and observing the riverside plants is a peaceful moment.

As an educational complement to the St. John Street Overlook Plaza, Coleman Avenue Overlook Plaza features four bands in the paving. Each band represents a different flood level event, with the years of the floods engraved into the paving.

Future Park Expansion

The northwest quadrant of the intersection of the Guadalupe River and St. John Street will be the site of future park expansion. Specific uses have not yet been determined, and will be subject to future planning studies.
The Guadalupe River Park is a great escape for me as a student at San José State. I live close to school and as an art major, the river area gives me a diverse subject pool to draw from, no pun intended. The close proximity to the University gives me the opportunity to jump on my bicycle with my sketchbook and between classes ride down to the river edge in five minutes. I can sketch a myriad of subjects, from business people at break or lunch, to children in the playgrounds, to sport activities in the grass field locations. Drawing the architecture with the river vegetation in the background is a nice contrast from hard edge or soft edge. There is also a great opportunity to draw from a large variety of birds and other animals that live along the river.

Because of its size and nature, the Guadalupe River Park is a regional resource. It provides some of the amenities of neighborhood parks, but its primary purpose is to be a draw for residents of the entire region and visitors from other corners of the world. New activities and spaces should be appropriate to the natural setting, preserving and enhancing it where possible.

The open spaces along the river, the gems in the necklace, are unique features that deserve special treatment and maintenance. They represent the ongoing development of beautiful and vibrant public spaces along the river, and, as such, will be maintained and improved or upgraded when necessary.

The above ideals are expressed in the following policies for future development in the park.

Facility and Open-space Development

To preserve the open-space character of the Guadalupe River Park, new buildings in the park are discouraged. Any new facilities in the park should be designed to promote a variety of recreational, cultural, educational and entertainment activities that are appropriate for the regional park system and the Guadalupe River Park.

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New specific-use facilities such as museums or recreation centers are not part of the vision or mission of the Guadalupe River Park and should be sited elsewhere.

Construction of new amenities, commission stands, and kiosks will follow the architectural vernacular established in Avaya Green and McIntyre Park.

Renovation

Existing buildings in the park that are upgraded must meet relevant accessibility codes in a manner that is consistent with the current design of the building.

Any renovations, modifications, or replacement of existing buildings for any reason should not increase the size of the building footprint, the building’s height, or its bulk. In keeping with the park’s pedestrian orientation a traffic calming plan will be implemented on St. John Street between Autumn Street and the River Street Historic District to slow down traffic through the park.

Environmental Preservation

The riparian areas of the park are vital to the preservation of aquatic habitat and no proposals that alter those areas will be considered unless they result in habitat enhancement or expansion.

Proposals for modifications to or maintenance of the park may require review by the Adaptive Management Team to ensure that they are consistent with the requirements of the approvals for the Guadalupe River Park and Flood Control Project.

Public Art

All public art should be designed to complement the vision of the park, its history, its environment, and the role they play in the city.

Any public art should be designed to complement the vision of the park. Any further parking facilities should be limited to on-street parking lots, and garages in the vicinity of the park.

No additional parking should be developed in the park. Any further parking facilities should be limited to on-street parking lots, and garages in the vicinity of the park.

Circulation

Traffic in the Guadalupe River Park are designed for shared use by pedestrians and bicycles. Vehicles are prohibited on the trails unless they result in habitat enhancement or expansion.

Existing light levels should be maintained, and adequate lighting should be provided to ensure visitor safety. Trails should be lighted at night to allow for use by users, but lighting, of the riparian areas should be kept to a minimum.

Lighting

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Operations and Maintenance

The Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services Department of the City of San José will provide the operations and maintenance of the Guadalupe River Park, working in partnership with the Santa Clara Valley Water District.

The process of designing and implementing the new elements of the Guadalupe River Park will continue to offer critical opportunities to be involved in helping to shape the future of the river, the park, and the downtown. Over time, use patterns will develop, changing the park’s public spaces in ways that can’t be foreseen. In spite of that, the vision for the park is that it continue to develop its regional importance to recreation and alternative transportation, and that in its natural beauty, which is a special place to be. As the river evolves and future capital improvements are implemented, consideration should always be given to ensuring that these future improvements are maintained at the existing high standards of City Park facilities—with the appropriate operation and maintenance strategy and the necessary budget support.

Future consideration should be given to developing a central maintenance facility for the Guadalupe River Park and Guadalupe Gardens.

Programming needs should be constantly reevaluated as use of the Guadalupe River Park increases. Event support, infrastructure improvements, and other resources must keep pace with the growth of park use and customers.

Park Expansion

The city will pursue the acquisition of properties identified in the master plan that are now under private ownership, and will develop them for park uses.

In addition to those properties, the city will pursue other opportunities for park expansion as they arise.

Development of those newly acquired areas will conform to the park master plan’s emphasis on open space, and will provide a variety of recreational, cultural, educational, and entertainment activities that are appropriate for the regional park system and the Guadalupe River Park.

General

Visitors to the park should have access to educational information through literature, programs, tours, and exhibits.

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APPENDIX A

Project History

Re-establishing the river as the center of community life in San José has been the primary guiding principle of the past several decades of work on the Guadalupe River Park Master Plan. The river is a regional resource, an open space for the convergence of recreation, events, and wildlife habitat.

Native Americans had settlements along its banks as early as 2,500 years ago, and the earliest European immigrants to the area were clearly drawn to it, choosing the Guadalupe River as the location for the settlement that would become the city of San José.

The Guadalupe has also been altered at times, for different purposes. Lake Monahan, created by damming the river 100 yards north of the confluence of Los Gatos Creek and the Guadalupe River. Unfortunately, those two bodies of water could not be relied upon for enough volume to feed the lake in mid-summer, so it was abandoned in 1974.

200 Years of Flooding

The Guadalupe River both attracted and repelled early residents, bringing them to its edges and then pushing them away when its waters raced into their communities. El Pueblo San José de Guadalupe, the first civil settlement established by Spain in Alta California, was founded by the Spaniards on November 29, 1777. The original pueblo site was on the east side of the river, between present-day Hedding and Holsten Streets. The location on Santa Clara Valley was chosen for its temperate climate, rich soil and geographic location midway between the presidios at Monterey and San Francisco. Farmers and the families they brought along from Mexico were the pueblo’s first settlers. Their purpose was to establish a civilian community and grow food to supply the two presidios. But floods from the Guadalupe River eroded the settlement during numerous winters, forcing the pueblo to relocate to higher ground, about a mile to the south, in 1779.

On September 26, 1849, the First Constitutional Convention, meeting in...
Flows occurred periodically over the next century. Since the 1960s alone, the Guadalupe River has topped in banks with 14 major floods. The flood in 1955 inundated 8,300 acres, making it the largest on record, but the one in 1980, one of the 14 major floods, produced a peak flow of 7,150 cfs (which is the highest recorded). In 1995 and 1997, President Clinton’s administration supported the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in a billion-dollar effort to somehow contain the river’s highest flows, passed a $12.75 million Santa Clara Valley Water District bond in 1963 to fund flood protection in the downtown San José area. The improvements constructed with that money included channel modifications, bank stabilization, river-bottom stabilization, and the construction of levees on certain portions of the river not covered by this current project. The agreement among the City of San José, County of Santa Clara and the Santa Clara Valley Water District extended what was called the Guadalupe River Park Project from Highway 280 to Highway 17 (later renamed Highway 880). The park plans developed in 1985 and 1989 reflected all the practical solutions and dreams pursued up to today. The design ideas have followed the progression in urban development from a vision of a vibrant downtown with the river as its heart, eventually to an understanding of the river’s potential as an urban amenity that drew people to its banks. Between the 1960s and 1980s, four master plans were developed that gradually expanded their scope from urban design and flood control to park design within a flood-control project. The two plans prepared in the 1960s and 70s dealt only with urban design elements along the river between Highway 280 and Julian Street. With the formation of a tri-party agreement in early 1983, the idea of combining flood-control measures and park design began in earnest, if not officially. Meanwhile, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers had been studying the potential impacts of the project on migrating fish, assessing hazardous materials and their disposal, and studying the impact of project area construction on all elements of the project. At the same time, the City of San José was advocating the public use of and access to the river, an element not largely missing from the Corps’ plan. The two processes finally merged at this point. The project authorized by Congress in 1986 and developed by the Corps included fencing portions of the river and restricting public use. However, in response to the 1989 Guadalupe River Flood Control Project, the Corps made further modifications to its plan, changing the design of the flood protection to be more compatible with the public use. The General Design Memorandum of 1991, incorporating the design changes, the results of water quality and fish studies, litigation, and a successful decision by the U.S. District Court in 1992, became the basis for preparation of final construction plans and specifications for the Guadalupe River Project. Completion of the Guadalupe River Project began in 1992. It was halted in 1996 in response to concerns about the adequacy of the mitigation measures, the listing of threatened and endangered species in the project area, and concerns raised by environmental organizations about fish runs in the concrete-lined channels and inadequacy of SRA cover. Construction on the Guadalupe River Project began in 1992. It was halted in 1996 in response to concerns about the adequacy of the mitigation measures, the listing of threatened and endangered species in the project area, and concerns raised by environmental organizations about fish runs in the concrete-lined channels and inadequacy of SRA cover.

The first plan for the Guadalupe River Park was prepared in 1969. It included the City of San José, the Redevelopment Agency, the Natural Heritage Institute, CONCUR (environmental facilitators and mediators), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the California Department of Fish and Game, the National Marine Fisheries Service, the State Water Resources Control Board, the Santa Clara Valley Water District, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The group was able to reach a consensus on modifications to the plan that successfully resolved agency and environmental-group concerns, allowing the project to proceed. In 1998, efforts were begun to redesign portions of the flood control to avoid impact to the existing SRA cover habitat. Some design and construction activities were resumed in 1999. The two processes finally merged at this point. The project authorized by Congress in 1986 and developed by the Corps included fencing portions of the river and restricting public access. However, in response to the 1989 Guadalupe River Flood Control Project, the Corps made further modifications to its plan, changing the design of the flood protection to be more compatible with the public use. The General Design Memorandum of 1991, incorporating the design changes, the results of water quality and fish studies, litigation, and a successful decision by the U.S. District Court in 1992, became the basis for preparation of final construction plans and specifications for the Guadalupe River Project. The two processes finally merged at this point. The project authorized by Congress in 1986 and developed by the Corps included fencing portions of the river and restricting public access. However, in response to the 1989 Guadalupe River Flood Control Project, the Corps made further modifications to its plan, changing the design of the flood protection to be more compatible with the public use. The General Design Memorandum of 1991, incorporating the design changes, the results of water quality and fish studies, litigation, and a successful decision by the U.S. District Court in 1992, became the basis for preparation of final construction plans and specifications for the Guadalupe River Project. Construction on the Guadalupe River Project began in 1992. It was halted in 1996 in response to concerns about the adequacy of the mitigation measures, the listing of threatened and endangered species in the project area, and concerns raised by environmental organizations about fish runs in the concrete-lined channels and inadequacy of SRA cover. To address those concerns, the Guadalupe River Flood Control Project Collaborative was formed in 1997. It included the City of San José, the Redevelopment Agency, the Natural Heritage Institute, CONCUR (environmental facilitators and mediators), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the California Department of Fish and Game, the National Marine Fisheries Service, the State Water Resources Control Board, the Santa Clara Valley Water District, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The group was able to reach a consensus on modifications to the plan that successfully resolved agency and environmental-group concerns, allowing the project to proceed. In 1998, efforts were begun to redesign portions of the flood control to avoid impact to the existing SRA cover habitat. Some design and construction activities were resumed in 1999. Elements of the new design for the last segments of the project included an underground bypass that conveys floodwaters around important existing riparian habitats between Santa Clara Street and Coleman Avenue, expanded onsite and offshore mitigation, and refinements to recreation features. These final improvements give the downtown flood protection from a 100-year event.

Creative Responses to a Unique Idea

Since the 1960s, the City of San José and the Redevelopment Agency have hired leading landscape architecture and planning firms to help na...
The City, County and District have established a Guadalupe River Park as a regional recreational area.

The Guadalupe River poses a significant flood threat to the city. The City is proposing general land-use plans for properties adjacent to the River.

The City, County and District recognize the need for a comprehensive Master Plan and implementation strategy for urban park development, redevelopment opportunities, and flood control on the Guadalupe River from Highway 17 to Highway 280.

Jointly participate in efforts to develop a master plan and implementation of the Guadalupe River Park from Highway 17 to Highway 280.

San José’s Redevelopment Agency, as a result of being responsible for the Stockton Redevelopment Project, which included the Guadalupe River development of a major park facility containing a Mexican-American Mercado, a cultural center, a branch library specializing in Mexican-American literature, and other commercial and recreational supporting activities. Elements included the Mercado Complex, the Arts and Crafts Complex, and the Plaza Principal. When the federal government terminated the Model Cities Program, funding for the RHBA plan disappeared.

In the mid-seventies, the state legislature initiated the California State Tax Increment Redevelopment Program, and local citizens suggested that the city restart the Guadalupe River Park project by creating the Julian-Santana Stockton Redevelopment Project, which included the Guadalupe River between Santa Clara Street and Coleman Avenue. The tri-party agreement established in 1983 and mentioned above gave the parties the ability to jointly participate in efforts to develop a master plan and implementation strategy for the Guadalupe River from Highway 17 to Highway 280.

The rentals to the tri-party agreement included the following: The Guadalupe River represents a potential aesthetic, recreational, and commercial resource.

The City, County and District have established a Guadalupe River Park as a regional recreational concept.

The Guadalupe River Park Master Plan brings the design process up to date, responding to the changes in the flood-protection design that have taken place since construction was halted in 1996 and the resulting changes in the overall master plan. It brings closure to a design and planning process that has evolved over four decades into the distinctive Guadalupe River Park.

A History of Collaboration

The planning and design process has included, from the beginning, a number of local, state and federal agencies, private consultants, environmental groups, and significant participation from the local community. While funding came from Congress and initial flood-protection design efforts were generated by the Corps of Engineers, the City of San José and the Redevelopment Agency have hired private consultants to perform various aspects of the park design and planning, and the City of Santa Clara has been an important supporter.

Several volunteer committees have been integral to the process. The precursor to the current Guadalupe River Task Force was formed in 1983, and was responsible for overseeing the master planning and implementation of the Guadalupe River Park. In 1999, it was reorganized with an expanded membership.

The Technical Committee was formed in 1983 to look at park and recreational activities, development opportunities, and flood control. It included representatives of the City of San José, the Santa Clara Valley Water District, County of Santa Clara, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, California Department of Transportation, and the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers.

In 1997, the Guadalupe River Flood Control Project Collaborative continued to forge a compromise agreement that addressed environmental and flood-control concerns. The current design of the stretch from Coleman Street to Santa Clara Street, a bypass that carries the existing channel to remain as natural as possible and limits public access to the sensitive portions of the river, is a result of the Collaborator’s work.
The following agencies provided representatives to the Collaborative:

- City of San José
- San José Redevelopment Agency
- Santa Clara Valley Water District
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- National Marine Fisheries Service
- California Water Resources Control Board
- California Department of Fish and Game
- San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board
- Guadalupe-Coyote Resource Conservation District
- Pacific Coast Federation of Fisherman’s Associations
- Trous Unlimited (represented by the Natural Heritage Institute)

Involvement by all these agencies, committees, and individuals has been instrumental in developing approaches that meet the flood control, environmental documentation (feasibility reports, Environmental Impact Reports, and Environmental Assessments) to participation on the Technical Committee and Task Force. Many community members have served 5-15 years on these committees, lending their expertise and vision to making the park a reality.

Friends of Guadalupe River Park & Gardens

The Friends of Guadalupe River Park Gardens has provided tremendous assistance in realizing the Guadalupe River Park Master Plan. Formed in 1995 as the merger of two non-profit organizations (Friends of the Guadalupe River and the Guadalupe Gardens Corporation) the Friends of Guadalupe River Park & Gardens’ mission is to provide community leadership for the development and active use of the park through education, advocacy and stewardship.

In addition to providing a citizen perspective on development issues, the organization promotes awareness and community participation through educational and outreach programs, family events, and volunteer opportunities. Working in partnership with the City of San José, it is ensuring the long-term maintenance, security and active use of the park for all citizens in the decades to come.

Adaptive Management

An Adaptive Management Team has been formed to advise the Santa Clara Valley Water District on how to maintain the river environment. The team will monitor the agreement developed by the Guadalupe River Flood Control Project Collaborative, set guidelines for evaluation, and make changes to the river design, if necessary. Issues the team will address include sedimentation, flood control, SRA evaluation, and make changes to the river design, if necessary. Issues that pass by a single point in a second.

Culvert – a drain or channel crossing under a road or sidewalk

Low-flow channel – a channel constructed at the bottom of a river to ensure water for fish passage when the river’s water level is low.

Resident species – fish that live their entire lives in freshwater. In the Guadalupe River, native resident species include the Sacramento sucker, hitch, California roach, riffle sculpin, and prickly sculpin.

Ziptop – large stones stacked to reinforce streambanks and water edges.

Shaded riparian aquatic cover (SRA) – an important component of fish habitat comprised of overhead and in-stream plant material. Overhead cover provides critical shade and contributes leaf litter and insects to the waterway with its evolving vegetation. In-stream cover includes submerged woody debris such as snags, branches, and trunks, as well as aquatic plants, gravel or cobble layers along the streambed, and banks that are carved out and provide shelter.
Contributors to the Park Master Plan

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Forest Williams District 2
Cindy Chavez District 3
Chuck Reed District 4
Nora Campos District 5
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Carlos Duran Acting Park Facility Supervisor
Jo Vafe

This project has had many contributors who have been previously involved in the project. The following list is just a small portion of the many people who worked so long to make the park a reality.

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Ron James Former Mayor
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