Land Use Changes in Austin: 1885 to Present

Block Group 1 lies between the State Capital and the University of Texas at Austin. The four blocks identified as Group 1 lie between Colorado and Guadalupe streets, and are located between 15th and 18th streets. The four blocks form the shape of a “7”. In 1885, Group 1 was dominated by vacant lots, residential homes, and a few non-specialized services. By 1935, Group 1 was transformed into an area dominated by residential homes and services, both specialized and non-specialized. However, by 2017, all but one residential building disappeared, making Group 1 predominantly a space for multi level parking, retail services, offices, and a combination of government and specialized services.

It is clearly noticeable that open space dominates more than half the land in Block 36, the block at the Northwest corner of Lavaca and 17th, Block 39, the block at the Northeast corner of Lavaca and 15th, and Block 40, the block at the Northeast corner of Lavaca and 16th in the 1885 map. Even though Block 41, the block at the Northeast corner of Lavaca and 17th, didn’t contain open space, half of the land on the other three blocks was nothing but open space.

Residential areas were the second most common usage of land on the blocks in 1885. This is seen on Block 39 where the entire lot of developed land consisted of homes. Half of the land on block 41 was composed of residential space. Other blocks featured residential lots, but alongside them were a variety of services.
A variety of services are seen on multiple blocks in Group 1’s 1885 map. Block 41 boasted a non-specialized service which was primarily a saloon/roller skating hall. Block 36 also contained a saloon, a manufacturing building, a storage facility, and retail commerce while the remaining blocks had no services present at the time.

Residential land use became even more prominent in this area in 1935. All blocks were composed of mainly residential spaces. The homes are closely concentrated in each block. Block 41 had comparatively less space devoted to residences, yet still contained both single and multi-family residences in its land. On the northeast corner of block 40, the Swedish Evangelical Free Church was surrounded by single family residential homes.

Specialized services began to appear in the area in 1935. Block 36 contained two dry cleaners. Block 41 hosted a private club and the Scottish Rite Cathedral. However, non-specialized services still reigned supreme. Block 40 had an non-specialized auto repair shop that also served as a gas station, as did block 41. Block 39 contained a filling station right outside of a parking garage that had the capacity for forty cars.

Today in 2017, the increase in land being used as parking is clearly visible in Group 1. The most prominent example is block 40, the entire lot was transformed into a multi-level parking garage. Also, Block 39 devoted half of its land to uncovered parking for public use. Blocks 36 and 41 also gained a significant amount of space dedicated to parking specifically for the patrons visiting that service. Parking spaces have replaced
much of the land that was previously being used as residential space, leaving just one multi-family apartment complex on Block 36.

Services continue to be an important use of land of blocks 36 and 41 in 2017. Block 36 is mainly comprised of small restaurants, like the Lavaca Teppan and non-specialized services including a bank, bar, and a tattoo shop. Just across Lavaca St, Block 41 hosts a variety of specialized services. The Scottish Rite Temple still stands, and currently serves as a venue for musicians. This same block now has a Hampton Inn & Suites hotel. Blocks 40 and 39 had no services buildings.

Block 40 is different from the rest of the lots in that it has state-owned property on it. Half of the land is occupied by the The University of Texas at Austin Child Development Center as well as the Capitol Complex Child Care Center. It provides renowned child care services to university students, faculty, and staff, as well as Capitol employees year round. This can be seen as an extension of both the State Capitol and the University into downtown.

One of the most important developmental changes in 2017 is the prevalence of office buildings where there had not been any before. Block 41 is home to the office for Spectrum News Austin. Across Lavaca street, Block 36 contains the 1705 Guadalupe office, home to Favor, Kaplan Inc., and UT Health, as well as several other smaller offices.

Group 1’s main transition was from blocks dominated by vacant lots, residential homes, and a few non-specialized services in 1885 to an area containing homes and
non-specialized services in 1935. A variety of specialized services increased by 1935. By 2017, the only residential land space that remained was an apartment complex in contrast to the abundance of residential homes that took up space in the years 1885 and 1935. This made present day Group 1 predominantly a space for multi level parking, retail services, restaurants, offices, and a combination of government and specialized services.