



**DOWN
AUSTIN TOWN
ALLIANCE
FOUNDATION**

301 Congress Porch
Impact Report
2024

FROM VACANT TO VIBRANT

A loading dock is transformed into a welcoming oasis for all.

When urban public spaces incorporate art, landscaping, seating, music and events, they become highly valuable to their city—both emotionally and financially. They serve as an inclusive front porch for everyone who works, lives or visits downtown. Porches invite people to linger, enjoy their time and create positive memories so they want to return.

The [301 Congress Porch](#) project in Downtown Austin has demonstrated the value of public spaces. Before 2022, the area behind the 301 Congress office tower was an unremarkable, utilitarian space. It primarily served as a loading dock and a walkway between buildings. But its expansive concrete plaza area and prime location on 4th Street made it a perfect blank canvas for a more creative usage.

In 2021, the [Downtown Austin Alliance Foundation](#) (The Foundation), [HPI](#) and PGIM Real Estate partnered to radically transform this nook through experiential design. The new 301 Congress Porch features outdoor seating along with a beautiful 5-story mural of “Where the Wildflowers Grow” by [DAAS](#). The space welcomes nearby office workers and other passersby to eat lunch, hold outdoor meetings or just enjoy a restful break from the day. The Foundation continues to activate the space through themed and holiday events, concerts and food trucks.

The 301 Congress Porch transformation has had an impact on downtown’s vibrancy, bringing increased foot traffic, leasing activity and property value to the 301 Congress building during a challenging economic time.

Urban Land Institute Recognition

*The 301 Congress Porch
has been nominated for a
2024 Impact Award from
[ULI Austin](#).*



MURAL ENGAGEMENT

Stakeholder-Driven Design

The project's engagement began with 'Placemaking Worksheets' that invited people to walk the space and rate its existing activities, access and linkage, comfort and image, and sociability. This input was crucial in identifying the community's needs and desires for the future of the porch. During the pandemic, the project team pivoted to interactive virtual workshops and surveys to engage building management, tenants and adjacent neighbors. These sessions generated valuable insights into how the space operated pre- and post-pandemic and sparked new ideas for reimagining 301 Congress Porch through improved design, art and activations.

Envisioned Outcomes

The transformation of 301 Congress Porch resulted in six positive public space outcomes for the community:

1. Flexibility: Versatile spaces for various uses.
2. Activity: A mix of uses, markets, food, music and programs.
3. Attractiveness: Unique, artistic elements that nod to nature and history.
4. Livability: Noise management and creating a welcoming space for everyone.
5. Safety: Improved lighting, security and defined areas.
6. All-Weather Design: Features like fans, heaters and durable furniture.

The Foundation enhanced the plaza with a large-scale mural, while HPI and ORO Design Group added greenery, lighting and seating to create an enhanced outdoor work and social experience. The property management also added fans, misters and Wi-Fi. The installation has been a tremendous success, becoming an amenity that workers and passersby use daily and that management offers to prospective tenants as a selling point.



Existing conditions of 301 Congress Porch prior to its reimagining.



Illustrative rendering showing future amenities desired by stakeholders.



© John T. Patterson // ORO Design Group
Post-construction aerial view showing added public art and plaza amenities.

MURAL DESIGN

Making of a Mural: Where the Wildflowers Grow

Public art has the greatest impact when it has a connection to the local community and its history. The 301 Congress Porch features a 5-story mural by renowned Austin artist DAAS called “Where the Wildflowers Grow.” DAAS, inspired by a passage from “The Maiden Ship” by Micheline Ryckman, used wildflowers in his work as a symbol of Austinites’ strength, resiliency and rooting together through community.

The Foundation selected DAAS from a pool of 60 artists who responded to the open call as part of its [Writing on the Walls](#) initiative, which brings spaces to life through public art while giving artists both a platform and a living wage.

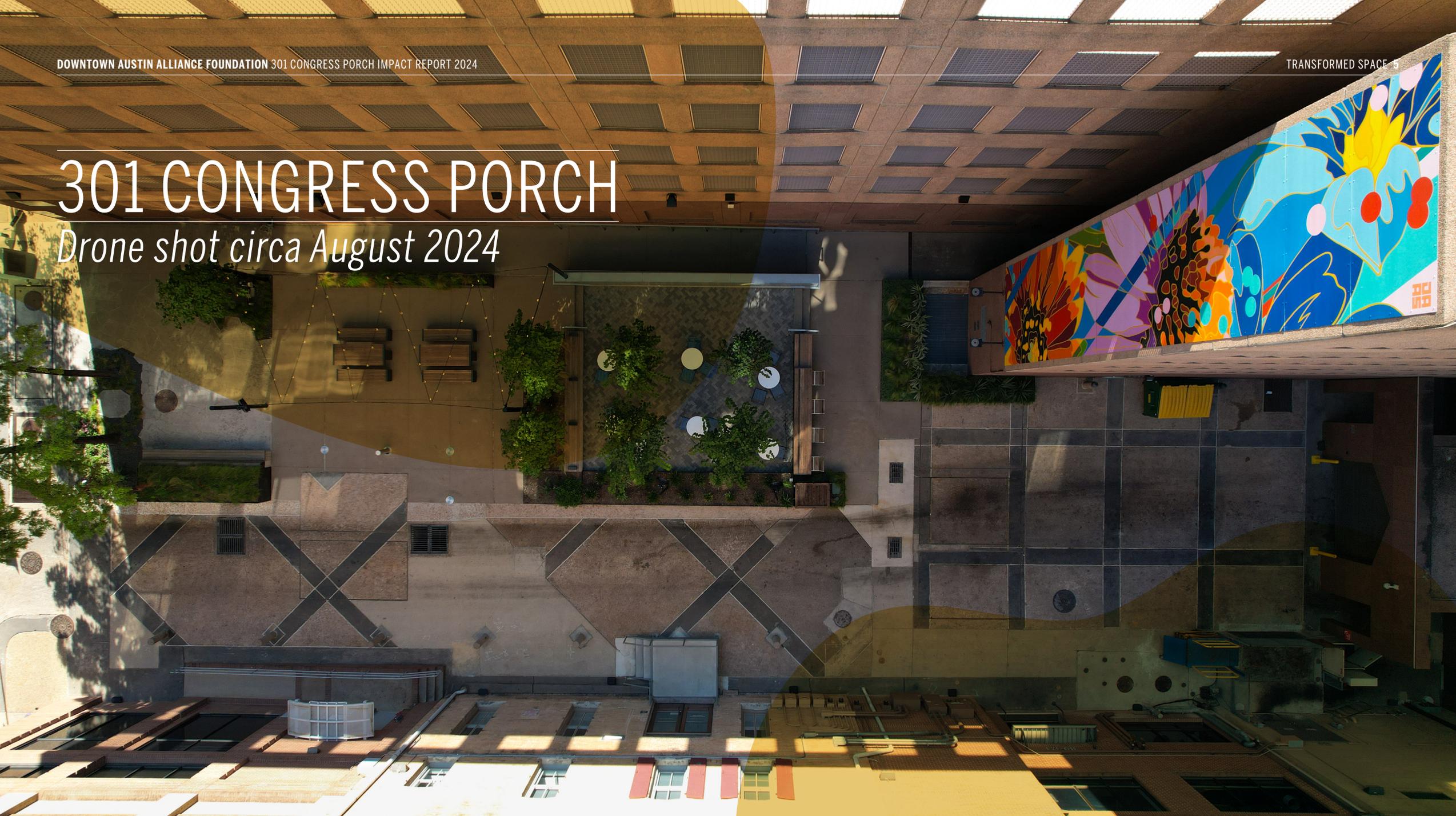


(left) DAAS mural in progress.

(right) © Steve Mull // Through the Downtown Austin Alliance Foundation's Musicians Activating Spaces program, The Foxtones made 301 Congress Porch their outdoor stage for a spring residency.

301 CONGRESS PORCH

Drone shot circa August 2024



IMPACT SUMMARY

With the installation of the mural in 2022, followed by the creation of the outdoor seating area in 2023, the once sleepy plaza of the 301 Congress property was transformed into an energetic space that is enjoyed each day by workers and neighbors of the building.

- **Foot traffic increased 7%** from 2022 to 2023.
- Leasing activity at the property rebounded in 2022 and 2023, **averaging more than 80,000 sq. ft. leased per year**, with asking rates surpassing pre-pandemic levels. (Source: CoStar, Q2 2024)

This project has delivered an **incredible return on investment**. Furthering its impact, the exterior renovation spurred an interior renovation of the 301 Congress building. The entire lobby is being reimagined through a hospitality-focused design, featuring high-quality materials and comfortable furniture to create an inviting, engaging visitor experience.

The Downtown Austin Alliance sponsored Mexic-Arte Museum's 40th Annual Viva La Vida Festival and Parade, which attracted 20,000 people to the 301 Congress Porch.

The 301 Congress Porch transformed into a community ofrenda during Mexic-Arte's Viva La Vida Parade celebrations.



FOOT TRAFFIC DATA

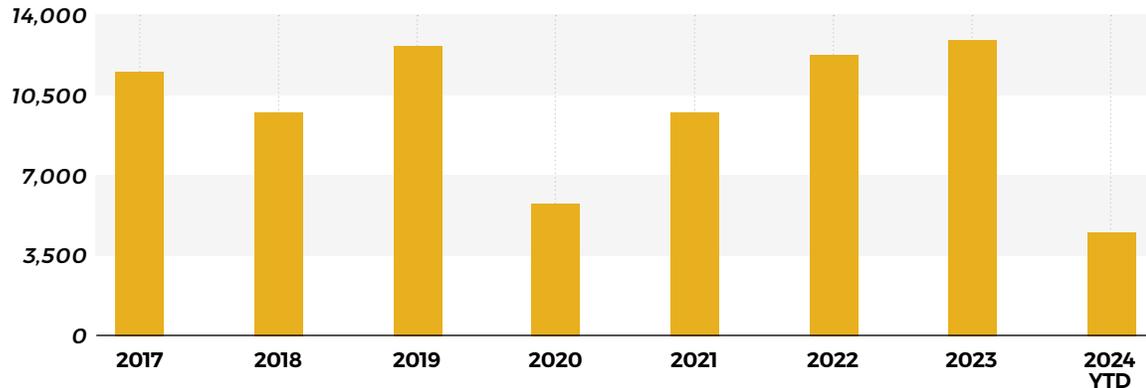
Increased Foot Traffic

Since the project was built, pedestrian activity and foot traffic have increased.

- **122% total increase** in foot traffic from 2020 to 2023
- **24% increase** in foot traffic from 2021 to 2022 (*mural unveiled in 2022*)
- **7% increase** in foot traffic from 2022 to 2023 (*outdoor space opened in 2023*)

Annual foot traffic at the 301 Congress Porch has increased substantially since bottoming out in 2020, especially in 2022 and 2023 after the introduction of the mural and further activation of the space.

301 PLAZA: ANNUAL FOOT TRAFFIC TRENDS



Source: Placer.ai, May 2024



301 Congress employees enjoy the 301 Congress Porch as they enter the building.

LEASING DATA

Leasing activity at 301 Congress Porch has rebounded significantly since hitting its lowest point in 2020. While there is not any available lease data for 2024 (as of June 2024), the years 2022 and 2023 saw strong activity and a rebound in rates.

Although we cannot definitively pinpoint the cause of this rebound, reasons may include recent property renovations and aggressive marketing, which prominently featured photos of the transformed plaza.

- 301 Congress was **built in 1985** and has **437,000 square feet**.
- The average rent in 2023 represents a **9.4% increase from 2021** and a **3.9% increase from the pre-pandemic high of \$40 per sq. ft. in 2019**.
- Compared to comparable properties, **leasing activity at 301 Congress is higher than Frost Bank Tower but lower than 515 Congress**.

LEASING ACTIVITY AT 301 CONGRESS AVENUE

YEAR	TOTAL SQUARE FEET LEASED	AVERAGE RENT (per sq. ft.)	NUMBER OF SIGNED LEASES
2014	31,439	\$27.00	3
2015	195,851	\$30.45	10
2016	57,402	\$34.67	5
2017	133,668	\$32.25	11
2018	22,576	\$39.50	4

YEAR	TOTAL SQUARE FEET LEASED	AVERAGE RENT (per sq. ft.)	NUMBER OF SIGNED LEASES
2019	52,137	\$40.00	6
2020	15,826	-	2
2021	42,361	\$38.00	8
2022	84,327	\$39.75	4
2023	80,546	\$41.57	11

Source: CoStar, June 2024

Thank you to all who have brought the 301 Congress Porch to life.

PGIM Real Estate

HPI Real Estate Services & Investments project partners:

Richard Paddock

Ruth St. James

ORO Design Group, LLC

DAAS Mural Artist

Strata Landscape

Keystone Hardscapes

Landscape Forms, Inc.

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Learn more at:

DowntownAustin.com

