

Browning Hangar Public Access Principles

A framework for free public civic space and compatible adaptive reuse

Community-proposed public access principles

Revised September 28, 2026

The Browning Hangar is a civic gathering place associated with Mueller Lake Park. Compatible commercial uses, historic rehabilitation, amenities, and programming can support its future. These principles preserve its public character through both physical design and the agreements and day-to-day decisions that govern its use.

1. Fundamentally public space. The covered space beneath the historic Browning Hangar should remain fundamentally free public civic space. The overwhelming majority of the existing covered Hangar floor should continue to be available for ordinary public use rather than being permanently converted into tenant patios, beer gardens, dining areas, ticketed venues, fenced areas, or other exclusive commercial territory. The protected area should be shown on a map in the controlling documents, and those documents should state whether and how the protections extend to the surrounding grounds. The map must implement this public-space requirement and state the protected square footage and its percentage of the existing covered historic floor, identifying permanent commercial allocations separately.

2. No purchase required. No purchase, membership, reservation, or commercial relationship should be required for ordinary public use. A person should be able to enter the Hangar, sit, meet friends, play, exercise, recreate, or simply spend time there without buying food or beverages, patronizing a tenant, attending an event, or obtaining permission.

3. Tenants coexist with public space rather than control it. Tenant premises may appropriately border or adjoin the Hangar, and tenants may benefit from its activity and attractiveness. Their leases or operating agreements should not convey general control over the public Hangar floor, and any tenant use of common space should remain subordinate to its primary civic function. No owner, lessee, operator, or tenant should be able to regulate, exclude, or displace ordinary public use of the common Hangar area except under published rules consistent with the recorded protections and subject to City enforcement. This matters most where a single commercial operator owns or master-leases the entire property. No commercial tenant should receive unilateral authority to set common-area policy or determine ordinary public access. Authorized personnel may enforce established rules consistent with these protections.

4. Temporary programmed uses compatible with permanent access. Community events, performances, markets, celebrations, private reservations, and tenant-sponsored activities can enrich the Hangar, and reasonable temporary use of portions of the space should remain possible. Private, ticketed, or exclusive events should not become a mechanism for routinely excluding the public or effectively privatizing the Hangar for extended periods. Recurring events that remain free and open to the public, such as a weekly market, differ from private closures and may be treated differently. All programmed uses, including free recurring events, should be evaluated for their cumulative effect on the space and time available for ordinary informal public use.

5. Permanent encroachment tightly limited. Tables, chairs, planters, barriers, service stations, queueing areas, stages, fencing, or other tenant-related installations should not gradually transform substantial areas of the Hangar into de facto commercial premises. Licensed alcohol-service areas and other tenant areas should be mapped and counted within the limited commercial area. Where furnishings are permitted in common areas, they should ordinarily remain publicly usable and should not imply that a purchase is required. Floor surfaces, fixed installations, and other design choices should preserve the range of activities the Hangar supports today.

6. Protected legally, not merely promised. Public-access rights should be secured in durable, enforceable legal instruments, including recorded easements or restrictive covenants where appropriate, and carried through any disposition, sale, lease, master lease, operating agreement, management agreement, tenant lease, or other controlling document. Covenant changes should be used where applicable, together with any additional property and contractual instruments needed to secure the protections. These protections should bind successors and survive changes in ownership, tenants, operators, and management. Council approval after public notice should be required for any amendment, release, or waiver that reduces the protected area, guaranteed public hours, permitted ordinary public uses, or enforceability of the protections. Routine administration within those protections should remain possible. All amendments, releases, and waivers should be posted publicly. Enforcement should include clear responsibility, cure periods and remedies, periodic compliance reporting, and a public complaint process.

7. Meaningful hours and usable space. An access guarantee should not be satisfied merely by allowing pedestrians to pass through a narrow corridor or by providing access only during limited commercial hours. The protected area should be large enough, and available for sufficient hours, to preserve the kinds of informal recreational and community activities that occur there today. Controlling documents should guarantee minimum public hours; access should not depend solely on tenant business hours.

8. Amenities serve the public as well as tenants. Restrooms, drinking water, bicycle access, lighting, shade, seating, accessibility improvements, and similar facilities created through redevelopment should wherever feasible be available to Hangar and park users without requiring them to patronize a business.

9. Public character survives ownership and management changes. Whether the property is ultimately sold, leased, managed by a commercial operator, managed through a conservancy, or governed through another structure, the public-access protections should remain substantially the same. Ownership structure is secondary to preservation of the public right.

10. Both a civic asset and an economic asset. Commercial activity, historic preservation, maintenance, public programming, and free informal use do not have to be mutually exclusive. A successful long-term arrangement should use commercial activity to help support and enliven the Hangar without displacing the community activity that already gives the place much of its value. A sustainable maintenance and operating plan should clearly assign funding responsibilities. These protections should not impose new financial obligations on the Mueller Property Owners Association or its members without their agreement.

11. Governance and management. Management authority over the common Hangar floor must remain subordinate to its primary status as free public civic space. Governance documents should identify who controls hours, temporary closures, events, security, furniture, patios, alcohol-service zones, barriers, and removal of users, and define the limits of each power. Safety, maintenance, event, and operating rules should be reasonable, narrowly tailored, transparent, and consistent with protected public use. Restrictions on individual users should be based on conduct and applied consistently regardless of whether they are customers. Owners, master lessees, operators, property managers, tenants, and security personnel must follow the same public-use protections. Posted rules, a published event calendar, and a clearly identified management contact should make these protections understandable and accountable in practice.

12. Rehabilitation and transition. The Hangar will need repair and improvement. Temporary closures for construction and maintenance are reasonable, but they should have defined durations, maintain partial public access where feasible, and end with full public use restored.

Core concept

The Hangar remains public space into which limited compatible commercial and programmed uses may be introduced—not commercial space from which a small portion is set aside for the public.