



WEST AUSTIN NEIGHBORHOOD

GROUP

Organized 1973

June 6, 2017

"To preserve our neighborhood and protect it from deterioration."

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The Honorable Mayor Steve Adler
Mayor Pro Tem Kathie Tovo
Austin City Council
P.O. Box 1088
Austin, Texas 78701

Re: Adoption of CodeNext

Dear Mayor Adler, Mayor Pro Tem Tovo and Council:

The West Austin Neighborhood Group ("WANG") respectfully requests that the City Council dramatically slow the process for adopting CodeNext. As you know, the proposed Code was first published very recently, has continued to be revised in the intervening weeks, and remains incomplete. While City staff and its consultants, Opticos, have had over four years to develop this proposal, citizens are expected to assimilate unfamiliar and confusing terminology and concepts in order to provide a reasonable response to the proposal. It is offensive that the proposal has been generated with no direct neighborhood input, and we now have only a few weeks to respond. The City's approach is undemocratic and unreasonable.

In the extensive public process that resulted in our Central West Austin Combined Neighborhood, we actively identified areas along key core transit corridors for additional density that would promote walkability, multimodality, and a diversity of housing options while limiting adverse impacts throughout the rest of our neighborhoods. While we were assured that CodeNext would respect the neighborhood plans, this is not the case.

One intent of amending the current Land Development Code was to improve upon a cumbersome and code. In many cases, the proposed CodeNext worsens the status quo by implementing three different zoning categories in neighborhoods that formerly had only one. For example, where Bryker Woods was primarily SF3, except along 35th St., residential areas now fall under at least 4 different zoning categories, often directly across the street from one another. The same is true along Westover west of MoPac, Northwood at Jefferson, and along Exposition. These discrepancies in zoning, without any apparent rationale, will set the stage for conflict for decades.

Imagine Austin, which provided the rationale for revising the LDC, identified Regional Centers, Town Centers, and Neighborhood Centers in the growth concept map as the preferred nodes for increased density. The current mapping of Code Next goes well beyond what our citizens supported and approved with the adoption of Imagine Austin. "Compact and connected," the overarching theme of

CodeNext, is but one of the key tenets of Imagine Austin. Instead, CodeNext adopted this as its mantra, applied uniformly throughout the City. This was never the intent of Imagine Austin. Form-based code, which was to be an experiment along the Airport Boulevard corridor, has now infiltrated all of CodeNext. Under the proposal, a greater number of uses that may not be compatible with existing neighborhoods are now permitted. This is all bolstered by a deeply flawed housing study prepared by City staff who grossly overestimate future housing needs. The estimated 135,000 additional housing units needed, the number that staff trumpets to sound the alarm, applies to a five-county region and is not limited to the city limits. Staff fail to recognize that we are now a region with virtually seamless borders.

The current CodeNext map also ignores deed restrictions. We recognize that the City does not defend deed restrictions and refers enforcement of such restrictions to property owners. Unfortunately, the City has shown a propensity for approving projects that conflict with deed restrictions, thus forcing an otherwise unnecessary conflict between neighbors.

Importantly, as proposed, CodeNext fails to take into consideration the impact of increased density on our schools and fire and police departments. It does not address the added stress on our aging infrastructure. It also fails to include any assessment of the increased flood risk due to increased impervious cover and the concomitant impact on our drinking water supply. Also, CodeNext includes no mention at all of its environmental impact – not only the effect on our waterways, but also the impact of increased development on our urban canopy and wildlife.

As one architect noted during the recent AIA exercise, CodeNext is a prescription for tearing down the neighborhoods. It alters the allowable development of every single tract within the city limits. It falls far short of what we were promised. We urge Council to extend the time periods for comment, demand that Opticos deliver a complete and comprehensive revised LDC, and respect Imagine Austin, the Neighborhood Plans, and our Future Land Use Map.

Respectfully,



Catherine Kyle
President
West Austin Neighborhood Group