

Hancock Neighborhood Association

Minutes for HNA meeting held on Wednesday, March 18, 2015

Along with HNA members, representatives from the Hyde Park Neighborhood Ass, Heritage NA and Cherrywood NA attended the HNA meeting to hear Jeff Jack's presentation on Code Next--the process for revising Austin's land code. Highlights of that discussion follow:

Jeff Jack's abbreviated and edited presentation:

The Code Next process is the first attempt in over 30 years to rewrite Austin's land use code. The City Charter requires the land development code to be consistent with the adopted Comprehensive Plan therefore the code rewrite is intended to reflect the goals, objectives described in The Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan (IACP) as well as the Growth Concept Map contained in the plan. Imagine Austin was a \$3 million dollar process to produce a comprehensive plan for the City, the plan was adopted by the City Council in 2012.

While the IACP contains many wonderful ideas about making Austin better, Jeff Jack considers one of the major flaws of Imagine Austin's growth concept mapping --where and what should be built--was the lack of consideration of infrastructure needs and capacity, water consumption and supply and the overall economic impacts of growth. Rather than delve into these factors, Imagine Austin participants were provided a map on which they put Sticky backs representing added population to indicate where growth should occur, where "activity centers" should be, where job centers should be. To the point, Jeff gave an example of Imagine Austin's prescribed South Lamar Corridor, which is targeted for dense housing developments. Because an analysis of that area's infrastructure (sewer and roadway capacity) did not take place, the South Lamar neighborhood currently is experiencing flooding due to increase residential development in an area with limited stormwater or non existing stormwater infrastructure. Jeff k also questioned whether, with current population rates and the continuing drought, there will be sufficient water supply to meet the future population's needs.

The rewriting of Austin's land code --Code Next--was one of the prescribed outcomes of Imagine Austin. A Citizens Advisory Group, 7 members appointed by the former City Council And 4 members appointed by the d City Manager, was formed to give direction to the rewriting process and to engage in outreach to the community. CAG formed recently three working groups to look at the land code in relation to often contentious issues: 1)household affordability, 2) infill, compatibility and "missing middle housing" and 3) obstacles to small businesses.

(Jeff noted other issues which were taken up by the CAG working groups such as the land code and its relation to the environment and water are being addressed by the Code Next consultants as they take the first crack at reorganizing and rewriting the land code. (City Council gave the go ahead for the consultants to reorganize, simplify and make revisions to the code which the Council will consider this year) Each CAG working group was asked to look at best practices. For example, what and where are the best practices found for addressing the issue of household affordability and or missing middle housing. As the working groups identified possible best practices, they often found that one city's idea was not always replicable to Austin due to state legislation or regulations and/ or economics. (writer's insertion: see Austin Chronicle's December 15, 1995 "Why Portland Doesn't Look Like Austin?" Portland, Oregon is the city often touted for its best housing and transit practices)

A major concern for Jeff is how we will transition from our current traditional code where different land uses are separated into different zoning districts, called a Euclidian Code, into a Form Based Code that is based on transitioning the massing of building forms from very dense urban to sparse rural densities where uses are a secondary concern

(see www.austintexas.gov/codenext)

Another concern is how will neighborhood plans and the neighborhood planning process to be incorporated during the CodeNext process. While the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan explicitly states that Neighborhood Plans should be "respected" it is not clear how you translate current neighborhood plans and individual zoning cases that have multiple layers of conditions ranging from limited uses to modifications of site development standards, (impervious cover, building height, etc.) into a simplified "Form Based" code?

While the rewrite of the code is important, eventually the application of the new code will determine if the new code has the ability to meet the communities expectations. The process of applying the new code, essentially "mapping" where the new code specific new districts will be located will not occur until 2017, at the end of Code revision process At this point, Jeff points out, we do not know if we will have all the correct zoning infill tools to map these zoning districts to truly reflect what is in our adopted neighborhood plans. Nor is it clear just how and who will do the mapping—since the mapping of the new zoning districts is not part of the contract with the Code revision consultants, Opticos. Who will guide this process will it be the neighborhoods or will City staff "map" these new zoning districts?

.The underlying question in this process is Where should we accommodate the project population growth? Will the IACP growth concept map really work? And just how much dense development needs to occur in already developed areas of our city like our urban

core neighborhoods. Though some have called for greater density in all of our urban neighborhoods, should all the projected population growth be accommodated by increasing housing density in the urban core yet continue to allow new developments further out to remain less compact and less dense?

Jeff noted that while there are those that assert densification in Austin's core will prevent sprawl, the continued and projected population growth in surrounding areas shows that many people moving into central Texas do not want to live in "compact and Congested" and would rather have a yard for their kids instead of a highrise view. The projected demographics of surrounding communities and counties suggest that that growth will continue all around Austin no matter how compact and connected we become.

Moreover, under current zoning regulations, the City of Austin could accommodate approximately at least 500,000 more people without any more up zoning if the current zoning was fully utilized. He also noted, there are those who believe that by simply increasing the supply of new housing stock (adding density to existing neighborhoods) will allow the market to provide more affordable housing, yet there is no data to show that increased density in the urban core will create affordable housing. So analysis suggests just the opposite will happen, that as a city becomes more dense the number of cost burdened households actually increases.

Jeff noted his concern that neighborhood concerns are not being fully considered in the CodeNEXT process and that at this point it is not clear whether the push by some for a more dense "compact and Connected" city will result in a wholesale change to Austin's urban core neighborhoods into far more dense development that diminishes our quality of life, increases property taxes and displaces many long term neighborhood residents.

To ensure that our neighborhoods are truly "respected" in this process Jeff asked those present to remain vigilant, engaged and optimistic. Jeff noted that the next opportunity of community input into the Code Next process will be a public comment meeting on April 6th. at the Pleasant Hill Branch Library, room 2 at 211 East William Cannon Drive, Austin Texas 78745 from 6:00 to 8:00 PM. Jeff urged everyone to attend this meeting to let the city staff know of your desires and concerns about the CodeNEXT process.

After Jeff Jack's presentation, the Association heard reports from its treasurer, Bruce Fairchild who reported the Association had \$8,353.01 in the checking account, and \$2,505.41 in the money market account. Linda Guerrero reported on a resolution, which was adopted by the City Council in 2014, asking the City Manager to convene a stakeholders group to discuss lowering the noise ordinance for private parties, particularly in West Campus. For more information, please email Linda who is following this issue.

Meeting adjourned at 8:30pm.

The next meeting of the Hancock Neighborhood Association is May 20, 2015.
The HNA Executive Committee is tentatively scheduled for April 23, 2015.

CodeNEXT JJ presentation to HNA MS comments Mar 18 2015