

#46/47

Late Backup

To Austin City Council - 3/20/08

File Number. C14-2008-0002
NPA-2008-0011 01

Dear Council,

As a member of the North Loop Neighborhood Planning Team I am writing to emphasize the importance of a recent letter sent to the Council from our Chair, Patrick Goetz

When concerns for increased traffic resulting from the proposed zoning change in tracts along Koenig Ln. were raised by the neighborhood, the NLNPT considered these concerns and voted **8 to 1** to write a letter appealing to the Council for help in this matter

Having read the transcript of the first reading, I was disappointed to see no mention of this letter or this request. I am therefore including the most relevant excerpt here (below) and urge the Council to give this request its most serious consideration

"It should be clear that we are open-minded/enthusiastic about mixed-use and added density. However, a recently very contentious development proposal for a mixed-use project on Koenig Lane raised an issue which is of concern to the neighborhood, and we ask city council to work with us to address this concern. Recall that the #1 goal of the North Loop plan is to create a walkable, pedestrian-friendly environment. With virtually no sidewalks in the interior of the neighborhood and no hope of getting sidewalks in the next 10-20 years, it's important that we do our best to reduce motor vehicle traffic in the interior of the neighborhood. With cars parked on both sides of the street on most streets, there is simply no place for pedestrians to go when there is any substantial volume of traffic.

To this end, and using as a model a recent council decision about a VMU development planned at 5350 Burnet Rd., we make the following request.

The NLNPT requests that city council act to restrict motor vehicle ingress/egress onto the residential streets behind or parallel to core transit corridors and/or arterial roadways for all properties in the North Loop planning area designated commercial with VMU.

The primary idea is that parking garage ingress/egress should be restricted to arterial streets in order to discourage additional motor vehicle traffic directly through the middle of the neighborhoods in the North Loop planning area."

Referring to properties opted in by the NLNPT, it is my opinion that this request is most relevant for tracts 104A, 104B and 105. As a nearby resident/homeowner I urge the Council to ensure that the implementation of VMU works for the overall goal of creating safe, livable, walking environments, not against it. Without restricted access to 56th St I believe the proposed zoning will do just that.

Sincerely,

Clay Crenshaw

5405 Link Ave

Austin, TX 78751

Holubeck, Andrew

From: Patrick Goetz [pgoetz@mail.utexas.edu]
Sent: Friday, March 14, 2008 1:30 PM
To: Holubeck, Andrew
Subject: Copy of NLNPT VMU application letter sent to city council

----- Original Message -----

Subject: North Loop Planning Area and VMU a letter of request from the Planning Team
Date: Thu, 14 Feb 2008 10:24:56 -0600
From: Patrick Goetz <pgoetz@mail.utexas.edu>
To: Wynn, Will <Will.Wynn@ci.austin.tx.us>, Dunkerley, Betty <Betty.Dunkerley@ci.austin.tx.us>, Leffingwell, Lee <Lee.Leffingwell@ci.austin.tx.us>, Kim, Jennifer <Jennifer.Kim@ci.austin.tx.us>, McCracken, Brewster <Brewster.McCracken@ci.austin.tx.us>, Martinez, Mike [Council Member] <Mike.Martinez@ci.austin.tx.us>, Cole, Sheryl <Sheryl.Cole@ci.austin.tx.us>

Council members

I'm sending this note as the current chair of the North Loop Neighborhood Planning Team. The request enclosed herein is made on behalf of the planning team, a majority of whom voted to support this request.

To set the context, allow me to point out neighborhood planning in Austin (as a mechanism for managing increased density) has largely been a failure, in no small part because it has legitimized the efforts of the city's most recalcitrant anti-development activists with no requirements, goals, objectives, or I dare say even direction provided by the city. I assume that everyone involved in city government already knows this, I only mention it in order to point out with some pride that the North Loop Plan is the exception to the rule. To quote directly from the plan itself (http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/zoning/downloads/nloop_np1.pdf)

"The North Loop Neighborhood Planning Area of the future is envisioned as a place where the needs of everyday life are available within walking distance from where most people live. The neighborhood summed this up by saying 'all functions of daily life within walking distance'. Linked to the desire for a variety of activities, services and destinations within walking distance, is the neighborhood's commitment to creating a lively mix of uses within the North Loop Neighborhood Planning Area. The mix of uses in the neighborhood and the enhanced walkability will help to reduce the need for auto trips in the future, and will also build personal and community relationships."

From the beginning, we added an MU overlay to all commercially zoned parcels in the neighborhood planning area and up-zoned appropriately located parcels from SF to MF. When VMU was introduced as an optional overlay, we opted in all commercial parcels on arterial/core transit corridors with future plans to opt in even more properties following some more comprehensive planning efforts in these areas.

It should be clear that we are open-minded/enthusiastic about mixed-use and added density. However, a recently very contentious development proposal for a mixed-use project on Koenig Lane raised an issue which is of concern to the neighborhood, and we ask city council to work with us to address this concern. Recall that the #1 goal of the North Loop plan is to create a walkable, pedestrian-friendly environment. With virtually no sidewalks in the interior of the neighborhood and no hope of getting sidewalks in the next 10-20 years, it's important that we do our best to reduce motor vehicle traffic in the interior of the neighborhood. With cars parked on both sides of the street on most streets, there is simply no place for pedestrians to go when there is any substantial volume of traffic.

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The primary idea is that parking garage ingress/egress should be restricted to arterial streets in order to discourage additional motor vehicle traffic directly through the middle of the neighborhoods in the North Loop planning area. I understand that many neighborhoods suffer from an irrational fear of taller buildings. My discussions with neighbors opposed to the Koenig Ln. project indicate that they would have been OK with a much taller building if it meant preserving more green space while keeping all the motor vehicle traffic on Koenig Ln and largely out of the interior of the neighborhood.

Please note that this is a developer-friendly request. Developers crave certainty, and by spelling out what the neighborhood's "line in the sand is" with respect to added density, we provide some of this certainty. A lot of the acrimonious negotiation is removed from the process, shortening the path to approval and short circuiting efforts which are doomed to failure anyway. The proposed project on Koenig ultimately failed to gain neighborhood approval by one vote(!), but only after the developer had spent a lot of time and money.

Finally, having the amenity of quiet, walkable neighborhood streets available ultimately makes the VMU project more valuable to the developer, since it creates an important attraction for prospective VMU residents. By forcing the developer to exercise a little design discipline, we get a better neighborhood and he/she gets a better, more profitable project. Isn't this what planning is all about?