

Late Backup

CONSOLIDATED PLAN

July 23, 2009

My name is Stuart Hersh, and I am a retired City employee. Like most Austinites, I rent. Like most of you I care about housing affordability and access for people with disabilities.

I recommend that you adopt the Consolidated Plan with the amendments recommended by the Community Development Commission. I express my gratitude to the City Manager for recommending use of the City's Sustainability Fund to help poor people.

But approving a budget is only one part of the process. Like the film and book of the same name, those of us who care about or need housing that is affordable and accessible are about to be pummeled by a Perfect Storm:

1. S.M.A.R.T. Housing has been the major source of affordable/accessible/visitable housing in Austin in the 21st century. It has been like one of our favorite restaurants: a good menu, great cooks, and a hardworking wait staff that is responsive.
2. But most of the cooks and wait staff have left, and their positions have been vacant for months. The value of the good menu has been lost because of lousy service. Long term customers have left and are not returning.
3. The vacant S.M.A.R.T. Housing Manager and one vacant project coordinator positions will be eliminated. One vacant project coordinator position will be funded.
4. The budget for the S.M.A.R.T. Housing fast-track review team is scheduled for elimination. Fast track team performance for plan review and permitting is no longer posted on the City website.
5. Affordability Impact Statements on proposed ordinances have not been available since last November. A keyword search of the City Clerk's link showed that 252 assessments of impact on housing affordability had been presented previously.
6. S.M.A.R.T. Housing production is expected to drop from 3,473 completed units last year (2007-2008) to 750 units next year (2009-2010). This would be a 78% decrease in S.M.A.R.T. Housing production.
7. There will no longer be third party accessibility plan review and inspection for city funded housing development.
8. Eleven (11) inspection positions are scheduled for elimination, reducing resources available to verify accessibility and visitability compliance.
9. While the amount of Tenant Based Rental Assistance will be increasing, local guidelines still need to be modified if deserving renters will have the opportunity to access these resources.
10. Let's not go back to 20th Century housing policies that provided little affordability and accessibility. Let's take a 21st Century approach.
11. Please consider filling the one (1) vacant S.M.A.R.T. Housing staff person included in the City Manager's proposed budget.