

QUALITY of LIFE

The North Lamar Combined Neighborhood Planning Area shall be a safe, healthy, and well-maintained neighborhood that promotes and preserves the quality of life for both residents and business owners.

The North Lamar Combined Neighborhood Planning Area (NLCNPA) possesses several valuable assets that enhance the quality of life for area residents and property- and business owners. The NLCNPA is one of the few relatively affordable neighborhoods remaining in Austin's central city, attracting new homeowners and homeownership opportunities to the area. Recently, the area has also become more diverse, making the neighborhood a unique and interesting one in which to live, visit, or cultivate a business. Bounded by several major thoroughfares, the NLCNPA affords its residents and businesses great access to various points throughout the City of Austin and beyond.

Despite the assets mentioned above, several issues have compromised the quality of life of the NLCNPA in recent years. Through the planning process, neighborhood stakeholders expressed intent to address the general well-being of the NLCNPA and its citizens. Their concerns focused upon crime and public safety, code violations and enforcement, as well as health-related matters and sustainability.

Crime and Public Safety

The NLCNPA has been greatly affected by crime in recent years. Nearly two percent of the City of Austin's criminal activity has taken place within the NLCNPA between 2004 and 2008.¹¹ The rate of criminal activity has varied from year to year here; yet, the NLCNPA has become a hotbed of prostitution, drugs, and violent crimes for the City of Austin. Throughout the planning process, stakeholders strongly expressed the desire to improve the safety of their neighborhood while combating the crime that has affected the area for years.

Please note that several safety measures are related to specific topics and have been explicitly addressed in the respective, topical chapters within this plan.

❖ The NLCNPA should become a safe neighborhood.

The NLCNPA has steadfastly become a less desirable neighborhood due, in part, to the high volume of recent criminal activity. Rather than attracting quality, long-term residents and businesses, the NLCNPA has become an attractive area to an array of criminals (and to businesses that harbor them), making this once safe neighborhood into a high-crime area.

Since 2006, the north Austin community, including the NLCNPA, has been working closely with the Austin Police Department to deter crime and enhance public safety in

¹¹ Refer to the "Neighborhood in Context" chapter for a more detailed summary of crime statistics for the NLCNPA.

the area. Strong community organization and leadership are needed in an area of such high needs as the NLCNPA and the foundations of both have become present in recent years. Small successes have been made en route to becoming a safer neighborhood, yet much is left to be done to ensure safety throughout the NLCNPA.



Citizens and APD officers prepare for the December 1, 2007, March on Rundberg.
Photo courtesy of the Austin Police Department

Objective Q.1: Promote public safety through community organization.

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| Recommendation 1 | Encourage membership to and participation in area neighborhood associations. |
| Recommendation 2 | Ensure continued communication between area neighborhood associations and the Austin Police Department. |
| Recommendation 3 | Continue the community partnership with the North Austin Coalition of Neighborhoods (NACN). |
| Recommendation 4 | Create neighborhood watch and/or crime watch groups. |

Objective Q.2: Ensure public safety throughout the NLCNPA.

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| Recommendation 5 | Increase Austin Police Department patrols throughout the NLCNPA. |
| Recommendation 6 | Study the feasibility of reinstating the Austin Police Department's Violent Crimes Task Force in north Austin, including the NLCNPA. |
| Recommendation 7 | Encourage area residents to report all criminal activities that occur in their neighborhood. |
| Recommendation 8 | Adopt and apply those principles set forth by the Crime Prevention through Environmental Design |

(CPTED) tool. Refer to the box below for information regarding CPTED.

Recommendation 9

Encourage the use of a CPTED Neighborhood Safety Audit similar to the one used in Phoenix, Arizona. See Appendix B for a sample audit form.

What is Crime Prevention through Environmental Design?

Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) is an urban planning tool used to design a safe community. The designs incorporate the built environment and land use characteristics to deter criminal activities and behaviors while providing the ability to have “eyes on the street.”

CPTED consists of four principles to help reduce the incidence of crime in an area. These principles are:

- 1) Territoriality:** defining the ownership of a particular space (e.g., public vs. private space). Territorial control prevents the use of a space by unauthorized users.
- 2) Access Control:** denial of access to specific crime targets by minimizing uncontrolled movement within a specific area.
- 3) Natural Surveillance:** the ability to easily observe all users of a defined space, including potential criminals.
- 4) Maintenance and Management:** effective upkeep of those items that support the intended purpose and use of specific spaces (e.g., lighting, landscaping).

The adoption of these principles does not necessarily guarantee a reduction in criminal activity; however, CPTED has been successful in many communities including Phoenix, Arizona; Sarasota, Florida; and, Toronto.

For more information regarding CPTED, read the National Crime Prevention Council’s *Designing Safer Communities: A Crime Prevention through Environmental Design Handbook* (1997) or consult these websites:

- http://www.cptedsecurity.com/cpted_design_guidelines.htm
- <http://www.cpted-watch.com>
- <http://www.phoenix.gov/POLICE/cpted1.html>

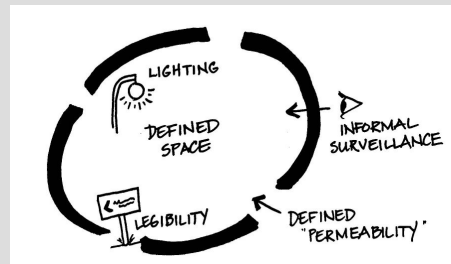


Diagram of CPTED

Source: <http://www.cityofvancouver.us/calendar.asp?submenuid=51950>

Code Enforcement

The City Code is a body of law that regulates certain activities within the City of Austin; its provisions are meant to provide all citizens with a safe, healthy city in which to live and work. In recent years, though, code violations have become increasingly prevalent within the NLCNPA. Issues related to poor property maintenance, improper parking of vehicles,

illegal businesses, overcrowded housing, and illegal dumping have been identified throughout the planning process.

❖ **The amount of code violations occurring within the NLCNPA should be reduced.**

Like the NLCNPA, areas with high amounts of code violations are often in some state of socioeconomic or demographic transition, with many residents seemingly unaware of the health and safety laws set forth in the City Code. A lack of awareness regarding these regulations oftentimes leads to unsafe or unsanitary conditions within which these residents may live. Education regarding the City Code should be provided to these citizens; however, adherence to and enforcement of its regulations will definitely improve the current conditions found within the NLCNPA neighborhoods.

Objective Q.3: Promote increased communication between NLCNPA neighbors and the City of Austin's Code Compliance Department.

Recommendation 10 Continue the distribution of the *Code Enforcement* and *Aplicación del Código* pamphlets throughout the NLCNPA.

Recommendation 11 Develop and distribute additional educational materials regarding code enforcement in several Asian languages.

Properly Reporting Code Enforcement Issues to 311

1. Call 311 and then push prompt 2. You will be directed to City of Austin information.
 - Give the dispatcher the address and tell them you are reporting a code violation.
 - Ask the dispatcher to repeat back anything that might be unclear or confusing.
 - Write down the complaint number.
2. Seven business days later, call the Code Enforcement North District Program Specialist at 974-9036.
 - Give the Code Enforcement Program Specialist the address you reported. (Do not reference the complaint number given to you by the 311 operator; that number is for your personal records and the 311 database.)
 - Ask the North District Program Specialist for the case number, the investigator's name, and the investigator's contact information.
 - Call the investigator and ask for the status of the investigation. If you are unable to reach the assigned investigator, or if you are not satisfied with the status of the case, contact the North District Area District Manager.
 - Give any additional information that may help Code Enforcement's case (such as the day and time when the violation typically occurs, etc.).
 - Remember that a Code Enforcement completion may take up to 45 days.
 - If a problem recurs after having been corrected, please report it to 311 again.

Objective Q.4: Guarantee the correct and timely reporting of code violations within the NLCNPA.

Recommendation 12 Provide all NLCNPA residents with information regarding the proper way to report code violations. Refer to the informational box above for this information.

Objective Q.5: Encourage neighbors to report code violations to the Code Compliance Department.

Recommendation 13 Guarantee the anonymity and safety of those neighbors reporting code violations.

Recommendation 14 Encourage area neighborhood associations to adopt a “volunteer policing” policy to notify those citizens violating any code regulations.

❖ **Properties within the NLCNPA should be properly maintained.**

Many code violations in the NLCNPA are oftentimes a result of a sheer lack of oversight to property maintenance; residents or owners may also not effectively maintain their property because they have no necessary means to do so. Whichever the case may be, poorly maintained properties (both residential and commercial) oftentimes misrepresent the neighborhood in which they are located: the absence of proper maintenance translates into a lack of pride in one’s property and overall neighborhood. Severely dilapidated areas also fail to attract visitors and future residents. Thus, proper maintenance is needed to provide a sense of place and pride for all citizens within the NLCNPA.



There are varying degrees of property maintenance throughout the NLCNPA. The home on the left is an example of poor property maintenance, while the home on the right exhibits excellent maintenance.

According to neighborhood stakeholders, much of the property maintenance issues occur on properties owned by absentee landlords. Absentee landlords own and rent out their property to tenants in a particular area but do not live in that same area. Because they cannot efficiently or effectively oversee their properties, absentee landlords

oftentimes allow them to fall into disrepair, creating a nuisance or blight within the neighborhood. Similar situations have risen in the NLCNPA in recent years; absentee landlords have failed to ensure proper maintenance on several properties throughout the neighborhood. Effective oversight and maintenance of absentee landlord-owned properties will certainly improve the overall appearance of the NLCNPA.



Property maintenance is lacking at the absentee landlord-owned 4-plexes on Brownie Drive.

Objective Q.6: Improve property maintenance within the NLCNPA.

- Recommendation 15** Support the idea of monthly “best landscaping” competitions for both residential and commercial properties within the NLCNPA.
- Recommendation 16** Sponsor regular recognition of attractive and well-maintained properties throughout the NLCNPA.
- Recommendation 17** Sponsor periodic neighborhood-wide cleanups.
- Recommendation 18** Report all substandard living conditions to the City’s Code Compliance Department via 311.
- Recommendation 19** Access various resources that support property maintenance. These resources include:
- City of Austin’s Neighborhood Support Program
 - Habitat for Humanity’s Habitat ReStore
 - Hands On Housing

Objective Q.7: Ensure proper maintenance on absentee landlord-owned properties throughout the NLCNPA.

- Recommendation 20** Encourage greater investment in those properties owned by absentee landlords.

Affordable Housing

The goal of many citizens is to achieve the proverbial “American Dream” of homeownership. Yet, cities are currently facing a crucial need to provide quality housing at an affordable rate to those citizens earning median or substandard incomes. Affordable neighborhoods are a vital part of any community, housing the workforce that sustains particular portions of that community’s economy.

❖ The NLCNPA should remain an affordable neighborhood.

Housing costs have risen considerably in recent years, especially throughout the City of Austin. However, the NLCNPA remains one of only a few affordable neighborhoods within the City. The affordable and quality entry-level housing found throughout the neighborhood is a key factor in attracting new residents (i.e., potential homeowners) to the area while retaining those residents already living within the NLCNPA. However, new housing developments could potentially threaten the affordability of the NLCNPA. Thus, stakeholders expressed the need to preserve the affordability of their neighborhood, especially within any new developments.¹²

What is “Affordable”?

According to the City of Austin’s Neighborhood Housing and Community Development Department’s *City of Austin Fiscal Years 2009-14 Consolidated Plan* (p. 3-10), housing affordability is generally defined:

“... in terms of the proportion of household income that is used to pay housing costs. Housing is ‘affordable’ if no more than 30 percent of a household’s monthly income is needed for rent, mortgage payments and utilities. When the proportion of household income needed to pay housing costs exceeds 30 percent, a household is considered ‘cost burdened.’

“Housing costs are also examined in the context of the Median Family Income or MFI. [The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development] divides low- and moderate-income households into categories, based on their relationship to the [MFI]: extremely low-income (earning 30 percent or less of the MFI), very low-income (earning between 31 and 50 percent of the MFI), low-income (earning between 51 and 80 percent of the MFI) and moderate-income (earning between 81 and 95 percent of the MFI). The current [2009] MFI for the Austin area is \$73,300.”

Objective Q.9: Preserve housing affordability throughout the NLCNPA.

Recommendation 21

Encourage coordination between NLCNPA stakeholders and Neighborhood Housing and Community Development Department staff to determine the best policies and practices for providing and preserving affordable housing in the neighborhood.

¹² Specific types of new development are discussed in the Land Use chapter.

Cultural Diversity

Since 1990, the NLCNPA has become a neighborhood rich in cultural diversity.¹³ The demographic changes can be seen and heard throughout the area: the NLCNPA has become a modern example of the proverbial melting pot, becoming an “immigrant gateway” to people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. As immigrants have made the NLCNPA home in recent years so have businesses that cater to them, with the Chinatown Center being the greatest example. Thus, the NLCNPA has become an interesting and unique place to live, work, or visit with an ever-greater presence of an international community.

❖ Cultural diversity within the NLCNPA should be acknowledged and welcomed.

Many concerns addressed in this plan are shared by all NLCNPA residents, which necessitate community-wide cooperation. However, as the neighborhood becomes more diverse, this diversity poses difficult and interesting challenges throughout the area. Stakeholders cited language barriers and a difference of societal norms or traditions as potential threats to the area’s quality of life. The inability to communicate with one another and the lack of knowledge of cultural norms can oftentimes disrupt the characteristics, traditions, and daily operations within the NLCNPA.

Throughout the planning process, stakeholders acknowledged the fact that the NLCNPA has become a diverse neighborhood. There is also a need for long-time residents and businesses to welcome or embrace the area’s somewhat new cultural diversity. Engaging *all* stakeholders within their own neighborhood is a crucial step in creating a quality living environment for all.



The December 1, 2007, March on Rundberg attracted NLCNPA residents of diverse backgrounds (left). The store (at right) on Gessner Drive offers a variety of products and services to the neighborhood’s diverse population.
Photo at left courtesy of the Austin Police Department

Objective Q.10: Acknowledge the cultural diversity of the NLCNPA.

Recommendation 22

Organize and promote neighborhood events with an emphasis on the cultural diversity found throughout the NLCNPA. These events could include:

- A music, arts, or other festival focused upon the area’s cultural influences

¹³ See the Neighborhood in Context Chapter for a broader explanation of the changes the neighborhood has seen in recent decades.

- Cultural awareness workshops

Recommendation 23 Encourage the location of minority-owned and -run businesses within the NLCNPA.

Objective Q.11: Foster greater communication among all area stakeholders.

Recommendation 24 Consider the continuation or expansion of AISD-related language-based adult educational classes in or near the NLCNPA.

Community Health

The health of a neighborhood's residents is of utmost importance to its vitality and integrity. Several variables can factor into the overall health of a neighborhood: the availability of and access to healthy, nutritional food choices; the promotion of healthy behavior; and, the healthy offerings of the neighborhood's environment, including parks and gardens. Once these options are available, however, the responsibility lies in the hands of all citizens to make healthful-minded decisions that will enhance their health and the health of their community. The health of a neighborhood is only as good as that of its citizens. Thus, a healthy population creates a vibrant, lively community.

❖ **The NLCNPA should be a neighborhood of healthy residents.**

Chronic illnesses such as diabetes and obesity have become prevalent in much of eastern and northeastern Travis County (including the NLCNPA) in recent years. See Appendix C for the map provided by the Health and Human Services Department for the affected areas. The adoption of healthier lifestyles could potentially eradicate these illnesses and create a healthier neighborhood. Throughout the planning process, stakeholders expressed great interest in a variety of activities that could reduce the occurrence of chronic disease and enhance the health of the NLCNPA, including recreational activities and healthier eating habits.

Several resources are identified in the objectives and recommendations below; to find their contact information, refer to Appendix D.

Objective Q.12: Promote healthy behaviors among NLCNPA residents.

Recommendation 25 Create a neighborhood walking group.

Recommendation 26 Partner with the Parks and Recreation Department to create organized sports leagues for area residents.

Recommendation 27 Explore additional opportunities for recreation in the NLCNPA.

- Recommendation 28** Encourage attendance of the Happy Kitchen/La Cocina Alegre cooking classes as provided by the Sustainable Food Center.

Objective Q.13: Promote a healthy environment within the NLCNPA.

- Recommendation 29** Create and maintain a community garden, taking into consideration the following steps:

- Identify interested citizens or neighborhood representatives.
- Locate an appropriate plat of land to place the community garden upon.
- Obtain funding from various sources.
- Consult various agencies for technical assistance regarding community gardening construction, maintenance, and education. These agencies include:
 - Sustainable Food Center
 - Keep Austin Beautiful
 - Austin Parks Foundation

A detailed list of actions needed to create a community garden on City property can be found in Appendix E.



There are examples of community gardening throughout the NLCNPA. The beginnings of a community garden are located on a vacant lot near the dead-end of East Lola Drive (left) and community gardening has become a popular activity at the Santa Maria Village apartment complex.

Photo at right courtesy of: Lisa Hinely

Objective Q.14: Improve the availability of healthy and nutritional food options throughout the NLCNPA.

- Recommendation 30** Encourage mobile food vendors throughout the NLCNPA to offer healthy food choices.

- Recommendation 31** Limit the construction of new fast food restaurants throughout the NLCNPA.

Recommendation 32 Encourage local grocery stores to offer a healthier variety of food options for their customers.

Recommendation 33 Examine the feasibility and support for a local farmers' market.

Sustainability

Sustainability refers to the ability to “[meet] the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”¹⁴ Within recent years, rising transportation costs and an increased awareness of our impact on the earth have fostered an understanding that living a more sustainable lifestyle can secure a viable environment in the future. Human actions today will have a global impact tomorrow; we must realize that our current habits will affect future generations.

❖ **The NLCNPA should become a sustainable community.**

Our current (non-sustainable) habits will have a global impact with related, localized consequences; as such, the NLCNPA will not be exempt from the incurred consequences of our current impacts on the environment. Throughout the planning process, however, stakeholders developed several sustainability-related recommendations, keeping their community's future in mind. These recommendations include a variety of programs, rebates, and subsidized items available from the City of Austin to help aid those interested in living a more sustainable lifestyle. Other sustainability-related recommendations (e.g., alternate forms of transportation, trees, etc.) can be found throughout this plan.



The residents of a home on Elliott Street have already adopted a more sustainable lifestyle with the use of solar panels.

Objective Q.15: Promote sustainability throughout the NLCNPA.

Recommendation 34 Participate in the Watershed Protection Department's Green Neighbor program.

Recommendation 35 Encourage residential and commercial participation in several energy efficiency programs sponsored by Austin Energy. These programs include:

- Green Building
- Power Saver
- Commercial Power Saver

¹⁴ As defined by the 1987 United Nations Brundtland Commission. Found in: Porter, Douglas R. “A Brief Introduction to Sustainable Development.” The Practice of Sustainable Development. Ed. Douglas R. Porter. Washington: Urban Land Institute, 2000. 1-3.

- Solar for Schools
- Energy Efficiency Rebate programs

Recommendation 36 Encourage participation in all City of Austin recycling programs.

Recommendation 37 Actively enforce watering restrictions throughout the NLCNPA.

Recommendation 38 Encourage the planting of hardy, native trees and plants that require less water.

A list of sustainability resources and programs available in the City of Austin is available in Appendix F.

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