

Statement from Senator Kirk Watson on the filing of SB 786 -

Throughout my time in public office, I've attempted to protect our quality of life by proactively managing the area's growth and helping to guide it into the Desired Development Zone. A key part of that zone is the area around State Highway 130.

As part of my Senate work, I've tried to create and utilize tools to help plan the development of land around SH 130. While close to Austin, SH 130 is far enough out that there's not much out there yet – not much but potential.

On the one hand, it's sort of a blank slate. It's a big opportunity for this region to grow where – and in the way – we say we want to grow. But at the same time, there's a huge risk that without some land-use protections, and without money for roads, sewers, and water lines that will support healthy growth, this golden opportunity could be tarnished quickly with development that almost none of us really want to see.

I filed Senate Bill 768 allowing the creation of the Rio De Vida Municipal Utility District No. 1. The legislation would enable the reclamation of 2,130 acres of land located along SH 130 and the Colorado River that is owned by Texas Industries and that has been used as a site for sand and gravel mining. The proposed development is a mixed use community, that seeks to be walkable and sustainable. The conceptual master plan includes 50 percent open space and envisions a continuation of the trail along Lady Bird Lake through the preservation of 500 acres of scenic riverfront property.

Many hours of discussion and negotiation between city staff and Texas Industries have gotten us to this point. I hope that the good work will continue, and the City Council will take official action to support this legislation and express willingness to commit the resources necessary to ensure its superiority and success.

Additionally, and importantly, I've also filed Senate Bill 1574 authorizing the use of increment funds to fund public efforts specifically related to a broad array of social services and programs within a reinvestment zone. I firmly believe that the passage of this legislation, along with the passage of special districts to enable quality, planned, new development in Eastern Travis County, could give the City of Austin new tools designed to dramatically improve the quality of life for many of our constituents who live in East Austin and in eastern Travis County.