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Sent: Wednesday, September 01, 2010 10:32 AM
To: Saenz, Kathleen
Subject: Fwd: "City...to revitalize your neighboring Plaza Saltillo District into an artist colony..."

Begin forwarded message:

From: GNDC <gndc@sbcglobal.net>
Date: September 1, 2010 10:10:37 AM CDT
Subject: "City...to revitalize your neighboring Plaza Saltillo District into an artist colony..."

Dear Mayor, Council Members and City Manager:

Yesterday I received a letter from the EGRSO which began with the statement, **"The City of Austin has an opportunity to apply for federal grant funds to revitalize your neighboring Plaza Saltillo District into an artist colony benefiting businesses like yours and the creative talent settling in East Austin."** I find the letter disturbing.

I had the honor of serving on the Plaza Saltillo Redevelopment Community Advisory Group for approximately 5 years. This Saltillo CAG, as it was called, brought together people with diverse interests-- business owners, a State representative, a bicycling advocate, a neighborhood planning team representative, an affordable housing developer (me), an environmental and social justice advocate, and a long-time East Austin community volunteer-- to work with City and CapMetro staff and planners with ROMA to develop a plan for CapMetro's 11-acre site. Those 5 years of discussion and planning resulted in the "Saltillo District Redevelopment Master Plan" (SDRMP, March 2006) and the "CAG Report on the SDRMP" dated April 25, 2006. I believe the City of Austin and Cap Metro paid either \$500,000 or \$1,000,000 for the SDRMP.

Nowhere in either the SDRMP or the CAG Report is there mention of an "artist colony" or assisting the "creative talent settling in East Austin". Although the SDRMP and CAG Report do not specifically say so, I think it is safe for me to say that the discussions we had generally would have viewed the "creative talent settling in East Austin" as part of the gentrification "problem" of East Austin. In short, the character of the area has been changing as younger, White, single people or couples with no children replace/displace predominantly Hispanic and African American families. The minority households who no longer can afford to live here had a disproportionate number of seniors and children when compared with Austin as a whole. Homes that used to rent to relatively large families are now being occupied increasingly by the 20 to 30-something Anglo household, often made up of unrelated individuals or related couples without children or any senior members. Some of these clearly fit the target population of the EGRDO letter, namely, "...creative talent settling in East Austin".

The CAG Report made a point of filling gaps or deficiencies in the ROMA SDRMP and began by specifically recommending goals for percentages of rental and ownership housing at a variety of income levels and a mix of units types-- one, two, three and even four-bedroom-- that addressed the need for housing families. This was in the face of a number of loft and condo projects in the Saltillo area with only 1 and 2-bedroom units.

As I read over the EGRSO letter in our office in GNDC's La Vista de Guadalupe apartments, which is the home to 22 families who pay rents between \$285 (the least expensive one-bedroom) and \$750 (the most expensive 3-bedroom, 2-bath) I feel a deep sense of sadness and frustration that the City's first real efforts to spur redevelopment in the Saltillo District appear to have a vision that will increase the gentrification while failing to address the profound need to create housing opportunities for the families that come from this area, but who can no longer afford to live here. And, even though EGRSO is aimed at commercial and mixed-use redevelopment, it seems to avoid addressing the need to assist small, minority-owned businesses that struggle to survive or start-up in this area that "used to be theirs". GNDC

has over 500 applications on hand from households who come from East Austin longing to have an affordable home in "their neighborhood." How does will this "artist colony" address that need?

I cannot help but wonder with suspicion and distrust, where did this idea originate? Is this the City's way to expand and entrench the downtown entertainment district into East Austin? Why is it that the City continues to establish stakeholder processes and advisory groups and then completely ignores their recommendations?

I urge you to consider an opening statement from ROMA's plan for the CapMetro property and a statement borrowed for the opening of the CAG Report because of its saliency:

"The overarching goal... is to develop a plan that preserves, protects and enhances the unique qualities and socio-economic fabric of the surrounding neighborhood, and that realistically can be implemented through a balanced program of public and private investment with meaningful involvement by the community."

I'm sorry to say that I do not believe EGRSO has this directive in mind.

I have attached the Saltillo's CAG Report.

Thank you for your time and the fine work you do.

Mark C. Rogers

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