

Plan for Sixth St. bar east of I-35 riles neighbors

Owner may team with chef
to offer more than cocktails

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One neighborhood planning team hopes that by opposing any new cocktail lounges, it will prevent the portion of Sixth Street east of I-35 from becoming an extension of the bars, clubs and music venues found west of the highway.

Brandon Testa, an East Austin resident, agrees with such a vision for the neighborhood, but thinks a ban on all new cocktail lounges is short-sighted. This bartender and artist bought the dirt parking lot at 907 East Sixth St. that has been vacant for more than 30 years hoping to make his dream of owning a classy bar on the East Side a reality.

Testa, who has received almost 160 signatures of support from area businesses and residents for his project called The

Dram Shop, believes there is a disconnect between the neighborhood association and the community. He has been attempting to work with neighbors and the East Cesar Chavez Neighborhood Planning Team for more than a year and believes he has accommodated their requests.

After the second neighborhood meeting he attended, Testa received an email suggesting he include "food sales, ticket sales or some other enterprise," so he changed the building layout to include a kitchen and grease trap into the design plans.

Testa, who said he doesn't have the skill to make food, is planning to partner with an award-winning chef who will make farm-to-table fare.

Susan Benz, as a representative of the East Cesar Chavez Neighborhood group, wrote to city officials opposing a conditional use permit that would allow Testa to build his project.

"We feel that building a cocktail lounge and minikitchen on this existing parking lot is not the highest and best use of the property in that location," said Benz, who



Brandon Testa wanted to live out his dream of owning a cocktail lounge on East Sixth Street but neighbors don't want the traditional Sixth Street bar scene to jump I-35.

lives and works on Sixth Street.

In a separate email, Benz said the neighborhood planning team would support Testa's application if he wishes to open a

restaurant serving cocktails.

The concept Testa is proposing, however,

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