



Late Backup

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council

FROM: Greg Guernsey, Director *GG*  
Planning and Development Review Department

DATE: April 26, 2012

SUBJECT: Draft Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan

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On April 26, 2012, Council is scheduled for a briefing on the final draft of the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan. Pending Council approval, a public hearing and possible action will be scheduled for May 24, 2012. In preparation for that discussion, the final draft of the Plan, along with a binder of Background Reports, were delivered to your offices. Detailed below is a brief summary of the process for Plan development, a summary of the draft Plan, and the staff recommendation.

**Planning Process**

The process to develop the *Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan* was divided into four phases—Plan Kickoff, Vision and Plan Framework, Creating the Comprehensive Plan, and Draft Plan Review.

**Phase One—Plan Kickoff**

This phase of the process involved designing and beginning the process to create the comprehensive plan. The significant elements of this phase involved the consultants getting to know Austin and meeting with the community. It also included both staff and consultants reviewing existing plans and finalizing the Community Inventory (a document with different types of information and data about Austin and its extraterritorial jurisdiction [ETJ]). See the following URL for a link to the Community Inventory: <http://www.imagineaustin.net/community-inventory>).

It was during this phase that the process to create the comprehensive plan was designed. This included assigning roles and responsibilities for City of Austin staff, the consultant team, and the public. The phase culminated in a Kick-Off Party held at the Austin Convention Center on October 12, 2009 which was attended by more than 230 members of the public, plus an additional 40 children from Austin recreation centers.

**Phase Two—Vision and Plan Framework**

This phase of the process revolved around a series of public meetings (Community Forum Series [CFS] #1, #2, and #3.) During each of these series of meetings, the public was asked to consider different aspects of Austin and its future.

During CFS #1, the community was asked what they valued most about Austin, what needs to change to make it a better place, and what type of city could it be if the issues facing the community were addressed. This input was synthesized into elements of the Vision Statement.

During CFS #2, participants were asked to comment on the elements of the Vision Statement and engaged in a chip exercise to assign future population and job growth, identified areas to be preserved from development, and indicated the types and locations of future transportation improvements. The results from this exercise were synthesized into four different future growth scenarios:

- **Scenario A**—A widely dispersed development pattern spreading future growth all over Austin and its ETJ.
- **Scenario B**—Directed growth in a crescent shape along US 183 in the north arching to the south and directed most development east of Mopac with a significant amount development located between IH-35 and SH 130.
- **Scenario C**—A more compact growth pattern directing a significant amount of redevelopment to the central city with dense concentrations of people and jobs located in centers mostly located to the north, east, and south.
- **Scenario D**—The most compact development pattern and directed most of the jobs and people into the central city.

In addition, Comprehensive Planning staff developed a fifth scenario that reflected current regulations, development patterns, and growth trends. These scenarios were analyzed using a number of sustainability indicators such as land consumed, amount of CO2 emitted, development over the Edwards Aquifer, and the relative infrastructure costs associated with each scenario.

During CFS #3, the community was asked to indicate their preferred scenario and was provided the indicator results to assist in the task. The public's preferences resulted in a map capturing significant elements of Scenarios C and D. This Preferred Growth Scenario map later evolved in the Growth Concept Map.

The significant work products of Phase Two were the Plan Framework and Preferred Growth Scenario which served as the basis for the next phase of the process.

#### Phase Three—Creating the Comprehensive Plan

During this phase of the process, staff reached out to people and groups with interest and expertise in the plan's elements to join topic-specific working groups. Their assignment was to create actions to implement the policy directions created in Phase Two. Over the course of 20 meetings the working groups generated and honed the actions from a beginning number of over 3,000 to a little more than 200. During this phase, with input from the working groups, the Preferred Growth Scenario evolved into the Growth Concept Map.

#### Phase Four—Draft Plan Review

This phase began with a Plan Release Party held at the Carver Museum and Cultural Center on October 1, 2011. More than 600 people attended the event to review the draft plan, rank plan elements, eat from food trailers, and listen to live music.

This phase asked the community to read the plan and comment on what they like and what they did not like. During this comment period, staff received almost 2,000 comments. Each of these were reviewed and commented upon by staff and the Council-appointed task force. Many of these comments resulted in changes to the draft plan.

## **Draft Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan Summary**

As part of establishing the scope of the contract with the lead consultant, Wallace, Roberts, and Todd (WRT), the City Council established three priorities for the plan—public engagement, sustainability, and implementation—which are central to how the plan was developed as well as its content and organization. The comprehensive plan is organized into five chapters:

*Chapter One: The Roadmap and the Road Ahead* describes the need for a comprehensive plan as a roadmap for Austin to navigate the challenges of the 21st century; core principles for action to achieve a sustainable future; and how to use those principles to turn the plan into reality. It is useful for those who may not wish to read the plan “cover to cover.”

*Chapter Two: Experiencing Austin: Who Are We Today?* contains information on the current state of Austin and implications for the future, such as how affordable it is to live here, how people are getting around, and how our parks and city services are performing.

*Chapter Three: Imagining Austin: Our Vision of a Complete Community* presents the Imagine Austin vision statement. It describes the Austin we aspire to be in 2039, the two hundredth anniversary of the city’s founding. Our city will be a city of complete communities that is natural and sustainable, prosperous, livable, mobile and interconnected, educated, creative, and that values and respects all Austinites. The vision statement defines the destination that the plan’s Policies, Actions, and Priority Programs are designed to achieve.

*Chapter Four: Shaping Austin: Building the Complete Community* sets a two-part framework for action to realize our vision of a city of complete communities. The growth concept map shows, in general terms, the type and location of new development. The building blocks define specific policies to guide decisions on topics ranging from land use and transportation to economy to creativity. The core concepts of Imagine Austin – complete communities and compact, connected activity centers and corridors – are two sides of the same coin. These policies are the foundation of the action ideas and programs contained in Chapter Five.

*Chapter Five: Implementation and Measuring Success* addresses how Imagine Austin’s vision and framework will be implemented. It identifies eight priority action programs based on hundreds of ideas developed by the working groups, provides guidance for decision-making, and defines the ongoing process that will be used to monitor implementation progress.

### **Remaining Issues**

Although the process to develop the *Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan* has been inclusive and captured the aspirations of a broad cross-section of the community, several outstanding issues remain:

- Differing perspectives among segments of the community as to the scope and purpose of a comprehensive plan. The plan anticipates Austin will continue to grow and it intends to guide this growth in alignment with the public values expressed during the plan’s development.
- Some have expressed concerns that the levels of outreach and participation have not been adequate.
- Uncertainty among segments of the community as to the role of the *Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan* relative to small area plans such as neighborhood plans.
- The specific designation of centers located on existing developed areas in recharge and contributing zones of the Edwards Aquifer such as the designation of the center located at the “Y” in Oak Hill as a neighborhood center. In addition some in the community would like to see all the centers located in these areas removed.

### **Staff Recommendation**

On April 11, 2012, the Planning Commission recommended the draft Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan with several amendments, all of which have been incorporated into the final draft distributed for your review. Staff recommends adoption of the final draft as recommended by the Planning Commission with several changes detailed in a table attached for your review.

The Planning Commission on a 5 to 2 vote (Commissioners Sullivan and Hatfield voting no and Commissioners Anderson and Hernandez absent) added language to Chapter 5 regarding existing Land Development Code (LDC) and its ability to implement the vision of Imagine Austin. The text added on pages 189 (2<sup>nd</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> paragraphs) and beginning with the last paragraph at the bottom of page 197 under the subsection "PLANNING," and continuing with the remainder of the subsection on page 200 is problematic for several reasons:

- The added language concludes that that the current LDC can achieve Imagine Austin's vision. This conclusion is premature. As outlined in the draft plan in Priority Program #8, *Revise Austin's development regulations and processes to promote a compact and connected city*, on pages 189-191, the first steps in any code revision would entail a broad-based community dialogue and a thorough review and diagnosis of the code to identify code provisions and internal processes impeding implementation of the plan. The need to change the LDC to achieve the plan's vision was also a major theme repeated during the working group process that resulted in Imagine Austin's Actions and Priority Programs.
- As recognized by the text added by the Planning Commission, Austin's LDC is a complex and constantly evolving set of regulations. Because of its constantly changing nature there is no single, static set of regulations under which all neighborhood plans were developed. Since the adoption of the Dawson Neighborhood Plan in 1998 and adoption process of the St. John/Coronado Hills Combined Neighborhood Plan in 2012 there have been a number of major LDC amendments and policy directions.
  - Smart Growth and establishment of the Drinking Water Protection and Desired Development Zones (1998)
  - Council-directed shift from a voluntary, competitive process to be included in the neighborhood planning process to one where all neighborhoods in the urban core would have eventually have a neighborhood plan (2000)
  - Neighborhood Plan Combining District (2001)
  - SMART Housing (2001)
  - Duplex Ordinance (2003)
  - Two-Family/Secondary Apartment (2004)
  - University Neighborhood Overlay (2004)
  - Subchapter E, Design Standards and Mixed-Use (Adopted 8-31-06/ Effective 1-13-07)
  - Transit-Oriented Development Ordinance (2005)
  - Residential Design and Compatibility Standards (2006 and 2008 [significant revisions])
  - Station Area Planning (2007)
  - Large-Scale Retail "Big Box" Development Ordinance (2007)
  - Vertical Mixed-Use Opt-In/Opt-Out Process (Begun 2007)
  - Affordable Housing Tools for Neighborhood Planning Areas (2008)
  - Occupancy Limits (2010)
  - Non-Complying Residential Remodel (2010)
  - Heritage Tree Ordinance (2010).

- The text added by the Planning Commission assumes that only negative impacts result from increased density and infill. In order to develop a fuller understanding, both the positive and negative impacts of development choices that increase density, such as infill and mixed-use, must be carefully examined.

The goal of Priority Program #8, *Revise Austin's development regulations and processes to promote a compact and connected city*, is to look at all of Austin development regulations to see what presently works well and what should be considered for changes to encourage development as envisioned by Imagine Austin's Vision, Policies and Actions. Austin's LDC is the accumulation of initiatives covering many decades to address specific problems. Priority Program #8 provides an opportunity to look at the entire code to identify areas of conflict, duplication, or unnecessary complexity as well as content changes to promote development more consistent with the community's goals. To presumptuously determine that any particular codes provision needs to be made or that other code provisions should not even be considered are both premature. Those decisions should be made after the education and public outreach and code review and diagnosis as recommended in Priority Program #8 have occurred.

Attached for your information you will find a table detailing the text included by the Planning Commission and the staff recommended changes.

**Draft Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan  
Staff Recommendation**

**Planning Commission Recommendation/ Current Text**

**Page 189, 2 – 6 paragraphs**

Since its adoption in 1987, the Land Development Code has been a continually modified and updated document reflecting countless hours of community participation and input. Elements of the Land Development Code and the broader City Code incorporate carefully crafted compromises and significant community decisions that have been reached through long-lasting committees, task forces, and citizen referenda.

The existing neighborhood and area plans were crafted within context of this code and decisions were reached based upon the assumptions of the continued utilization of its provisions. This includes elements of the Land Development Code that are not specifically addressed in neighborhood and area plans but on which decisions were based (e.g., compatibility standards). The vision of the comprehensive plan can be achieved by retaining these protections and the approaches taken in the neighborhood and area plans.

Any suggested rewrite of the City Code, while striving to achieve the broad goals of the comprehensive plan, must recognize, respect, and reflect these carefully crafted compromises, balances, and the assumptions upon which the existing neighborhood and area plans were based and depend.

Continued protection and preservation of existing neighborhoods and the natural environment must be considered top priorities of comprehensive revisions to the City Code. The consequences and impact of additional density and infill in existing neighborhoods must be carefully identified and analyzed to avoid endangering the existing character of neighborhoods and exacerbating community health and safety issues, such as flooding.

Impacts on sustainability and livability by increased infill and density of units, including associated infrastructure costs and impacts on affordability, should be identified prior to adoption of a new city code. Modifications to the city code and building code should be measured with regard to their ability to preserve neighborhood character, consistency with adopted neighborhood and area plans, impact on affordability, and the ability of existing families to continue to reside in their homes.

**Staff Recommended Changes**

Since its adoption in 1987, the Land Development Code has been modified on an ongoing basis. The Land Development Code is the result of City Council actions (informed by public input) and citizen referenda. However, as the code has become increasingly complicated, the need for code amendments has increased as well, particularly over the last decade, to address issues generated by its progressively complex nature and to address the needs of a growing and changing city.

Existing neighborhood plans and other small-area plans were shaped within the context of the code provisions in place at the time of their development and adoption. Although serving different purposes and operating at different scales, the visions of the many small-area plans and that of Imagine Austin are largely consistent. The code diagnosis and revision process should use the comprehensive plan and take into account the concepts and goals contained in neighborhood and other small-area plans. Updating the Land Development Code should also build upon the small-area plans' approaches utilized to implement their land use elements.

Continued protection and preservation of existing neighborhoods and the natural environment, increased household affordability, and creating a compact and connected city are among the top priorities of comprehensive revisions to the Land Development Code. New regulations should preserve neighborhood character by allowing infill development to gracefully integrate into existing neighborhoods. These protections should also include transitions between more and less intense uses such as between houses and new, denser housing or mixed-use developments. These regulations should also improve the transitions and interfaces between the built and natural environments to achieve goals such as preserving open space, maintaining the health of waterways, reducing threats associated with flooding and fire, and protecting environmentally significant areas or features. Modifications to Austin's development regulations should be assessed in the context of how well they achieve the vision of Imagine Austin.

**Draft Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan  
Staff Recommendation**

<b>Planning Commission Recommendation/ Current Text</b> <b>Page 197, last paragraph under "PLANNING" subsection through page 200.</b>	<b>Staff Recommended Changes</b>
<p>The Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan recognizes and embraces all previous master and small area plans. As depicted on pages 198 and 199, the comprehensive plan is an "umbrella" plan that serves as a guide on city-wide, cross-department issues to achieve the vision statement. Imagine Austin is not a plan that supersedes previous plans, but acts as a chaperon to the future projected growth of Austin over the next 30 years. Dur-ing this growth period, inconsistencies between Imagine Austin and other plans may be discovered. Changes to the master plans will be addressed through a public amendment process by the City Council. Changes to the small area plans (e.g., Neighborhood Plans) will continue to include public input from affected parties and will follow the adopted neighborhood plan amendment process. Changes to Imagine Austin should be ad-dressed through the annual review.</p> <p>As the City of Austin develops new master and small area plans, Imagine Austin will serve as a guide to policy direction. In areas not covered by small area plans, Imagine Austin will serve as an instrument for developing plans and providing planning parameters. As with the Imagine Austin planning process, public involvement will be included that could potentially generate ideas and themes for these plans.</p>	<p>Over time, inconsistencies between Imagine Austin and other plans may be discovered. Changes to master plans will be addressed by the City Council. Changes to neighborhood and other small-area plans will include public input and will follow the neighborhood plan amendment process. Changes to Imagine Austin should be addressed through the annual review process.</p> <p>Imagine Austin will provide direction for new planning efforts and well as for revisions of existing plans. As the City of Austin develops new master and small-area plans for areas not covered by a plan, Imagine Austin will provide direction and establish planning parameters. When small-area plans are revisited, Imagine Austin will serve as a guide. As with all planning processes, public input will be integral to shaping these plans.</p>

**Draft Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan  
Staff Recommendation**

<b>Planning Commission Recommendation/ Current Text</b>	<b>Staff Recommended Changes</b>
<p><b>State Highway 45 SW (SH-45 SW)</b></p> <p>State Highway 45 is not currently included in Growth Concept Map.</p> <p><b><u>Background</u></b></p> <p>City staff and the consultant team initially recommended that the route for State Highway 45 Southwest (SH 45 SW) be included as a dotted line on the Growth Concept Map in addition to descriptive text in the Plan. The Comprehensive Plan Citizens Advisory Task Force voted to remove these items from the draft of the Plan they endorsed and forwarded to the Planning Commission. The Planning Commission endorsed that recommendation.</p>	<p>On the Growth Concept Map, include the alignment of SH-45 SW linking the Mopac Expressway to Interstate 35 as a dotted line. Include the following text into the plan:</p> <p><b>SH-45 Southwest: A source of continuing discussion</b></p> <p>SH-45 Southwest (a.k.a., Manchaca Expressway) has been and continues to be a subject of great interest and dialogue in Austin, both with respect to mobility issues and concerns about potential impacts to sensitive environmental resources. The segment of the project from South Loop 1 to FM1626 will soon be evaluated through National Environmental Policy Act, which by federal law requires an examination of all alternatives, including not constructing the project ("no-build"). Including SH-45 Southwest on this map is not intended to represent a position on which alternative is selected. If an alternative other than no-build is selected, this plan recommends designing the roadway to be attractive and to meet the City's objectives of non-degradation of water quality in the Barton Springs Zone of the Edwards Aquifer. In particular, if the project is built, it should be a roadway design identified as the locally preferred alternative in the results of the Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority Environmental Assessment/ Environmental Impact Statement, should avoid impacts to critical environmental features, and should incorporate advanced stormwater quality and spill containment controls to achieve a nondegradation level of environmental protection.</p>