

June 14, 2012

#51

Late Backup

Mayor Lee Leffingwell
Mayor Pro Tem Sheryl Cole,
Council Members Chris Riley, Mike Martinez, Kathy Tovo, Laura Morrison, and Bill Spelman

Re: Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan:

"I see no reason why I should sit down with housewives and blue color workers to discuss the future of the City of Austin; that should be left to the business community."

That was the comment made by an attorney when submitting his resignation from the 1973 Goals Assemble, a guiding force in the citizen run Austin Tomorrow Goals Program, initiated in 1972 and completed in 1975 without involvement of consultants or bureaucrats.

Regrettably, nothing appears to have changed in the past forty years.

Today, as revealed in the current Imagine Austin Plan, those officials, bureaucrats, and special interest citizens who lay claim to privileged status and perceived power to craft a new thirty year plan for the City of Austin are, by their actions and their words, reiterating the elitist statement expressed in 1975.

In the current vernacular, this has been identified as the Plantation Attitude, a tool by which citizens of Austin are kept in their places while their masters decide **what** they should be provided, **when** it will be provided, at **what cost** it will be provided, **why** they are not allowed privileges provided to those considered of higher status, and **who** will be allowed to maintain their multi-generational homes as opposed to gentrification favoring the newbies whom the masters have determined, as reflected in the Plan, are the future saviors of Austin.

The 1972/75 plan, the original Austin Tomorrow Plan based its work on the involvement of citizens from all walks of life including gender, sex, age, occupation, location, and ethnicity. Subjects addressed in this plan included housing, land use, neighborhoods, health, social services, transportation, economics, population, core area, and environment.

All opinions were accepted, without discrimination; everyone involved in the process was considered equal to all others. In soliciting input for the 1972/75 Austin Tomorrow Plan, citizens were treated as intelligent adults, able to comprehend and work within multi-layered plan requirements. All this was accomplished without consultants or bureaucrats.

In contrast, the Imagine Austin Plan has resorted to childish games such as magic boxes, sticky notes, dot placement on and on and on, while playing hide-and-seek with data necessary for intelligent decisions to be made by citizens working their way through this bureaucratic hall (hell) of mirrors.

Citizens have been subjected to pre-ordained work session results, biased panel discussions where, in one instance, the presumed moderator segued into being a panelist proselytizing for the Imagine Austin rubrics. Additionally, almost beyond comprehension, citizens were subjected to criticisms of their questions and suggestions by bureaucratic personnel when such citizen data apparently did not conform to the "company line."

The ultimate insult to the intelligence of Austin citizens is the so-called Growth Concept Map which indicates a complete disregard for the concerns of the citizens/taxpayers/voters who have maintained the viability of Austin from inception to the present day.

This map is nothing more than paeon to the overall intent of the Plan, the complete disassembling of Austin as desired and maintained by its long-time citizens while creating a hybrid of concrete canyons replacing both residential communities and a more genteel, generational way of life which will disappear completely with the inception of this egregious plan.

That disappearance also will be the result of your insistence to change Austin into a duplicate of Portland, Seattle, Spokane, East Coast locals, and cities in Korea, Japan, China. We are not, and do not want to be, like those localities. The newbies moving to Austin from such locations do not have the right, and should not have your assistance, to over-ride the wishes of long-time residents of Austin to **Keep Austin AUSTIN!**

The plan's Citizens Advisory Task Force was blighted from the start. What was intended to be a means of constant communication between planning and design of the Plan and Austin's citizens almost immediately segued into just being a mouthpiece for whatever the consultant and the bureaucracy decided should be promulgated.

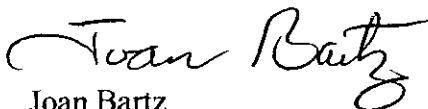
Those few members of the CATF who tried to address the stated mission of this group were overwhelmed by members whose agendas were set from the start and, in some cases, bordered on conflicts of interest. Lack of adequate support from our elected leaders was an obvious problem from the beginning. It could be argued that such a lack is a strong indication that it is the bureaucracy determining policy for the City of Austin with elected officials playing a reactive, rather than a proactive role in determining what is best for Austin's future.

When the decision on selection of a consultant for this planning process was imminent, I wrote to the then Mayor Wynn and council members expressing concerns about the ultimate result of a new long-range plan for Austin. Not surprisingly, the courtesy of a reply to this letter was never received from any member of the council.

Therefore, I have attached a copy of that 2009 letter to this presentation as it appears the concerns from 2009 are still imminent some three years later. Again, I expect no reply to be received. However, both the letter and my presentation today are now a matter of record for official documentation available to the citizens of Austin.

Approving the Imagine Austin Plan, as presently constructed, would be insulting to Austin citizens as just another example of the Plantation Attitude dividing Austin citizens into the entitled and those whose job is to serve this perceived special group of citizens.

With that in mind, as a citizen/taxpayer/voter of Austin, you are urged to NOT vote approval of the Imagine Austin Plan as presently constructed.



Joan Bartz
Citizen/Taxpayer/Voter

February 17, 2009

Mayor and City Council
P.O. Box 1088
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Re: Comprehensive Plan Update

Dear Mayor Wynn and Council Members:

The recent presentations by the three finalists for guiding the update of the 1979 Comprehensive Plan gave me a sense of de ja vu. In particular, the discussion on what role citizen involvement (other than the business community) would contribute to this process gave me pause. There seemed to be an already established premise that such action had never produced a comprehensive plan that worked. Being a fan of documentation, I went to the best source on this subject, The AUSTIN TOMORROW GOALS PROGRAM, begun in 1972 as a guide in updating the Austin Development Plan of 1961.

This program was an innovation in the city planning process, involving the citizens in the beginning stages of the project before the involvement of consultants. This procedure allowed the citizens, not consultants, to identify the city's problems and goals before any new plan was developed (Goals 10). The AUSTIN TOMORROW program was funded by the city and a HUD 701 Comprehensive Planning Grant involving specific requirements.

One of the most important requirements was the formation of a 250 member Goals Assembly composed of citizens based on gender, sex, age, occupation, location, and ethnicity, thus insuring planning results based on the knowledge and concerns of citizens throughout the Austin community. After one aborted specific interest attempt, the Austin city council appointed the Goals Assembly in November 1973.

The Assembly, aided by a citizen Executive Committee, proceeded to inform the citizens of the program and the meetings scheduled to obtain data for the project. In 1974, 56 community meetings were held in neighborhoods throughout the city at which citizens documented the future needs of the city based on what was actually on the ground at the time of the meetings. Subjects of discussion included housing, land use, neighborhoods, health and social services, transportation, economics, population, core area, and environment. 3500 citizens participated in this effort for a total of over 20,000 volunteer hours.

When all data from the neighborhood meetings were compiled, the Goals Assembly convened in weekly sessions over eight months in 1974 to translate these data into a document to be presented to the city government. The result: In May 1975, The AUSTIN TOMORROW GOALS document was presented to a combined sitting city council and the incoming city council in a three screen presentation, past, present, and future scenarios, at the former Palmer Center. This document and the presentation identified the city's problems and

advocated a series of goals to serve as guideposts for the people who design and execute plans for the city's future (Goals 10). A copy of the GOALS document should be archived in the city's planning department.

It was the clearly stated intent of the AUSTIN TOMORROW GOALS program that, through ordinance power, these goals would be utilized in the formation of subsequent Austin comprehensive plans. If such has not been the case, the fault lies with city government, staff, and special interests but in no way indicates that these planning goals, crafted through citizen involvement, could not work. Nor does it indicate that involvement of all citizens in the planning process does not work. Rather the lack of usage of the AUSTIN TOMORROW GOALS program, if indeed such has been and will be the case, would appear to further indicate an attitude towards the ordinary citizen/taxpayer/voter to please just go away and let those who know how to rule do so.

It is time that the City of Austin, its elected officials, its staff, some commissions, and all who presume to the role of privilege, should realize that this is not the time of Cicero where the *optimates* (those who act so as to win by their policy the approval of the best people) view the needs, the intelligence, and the contributions of the *populares* (the masses) as less important than their own.

I sensed an indication of just such an attitude in the consultant presentations when the question was raised about how to reconcile the attitude of one part of Austin versus another part of Austin – how does the equity issue play out in the planning process. Let's face it. We're talking about ethnicity and economic advantage of location. The answers by the consultants left much to be desired. In fact, only one indicated a modicum of knowledge about how to address the problem. The others just did a verbal dance around the Maypole, you know, lots of movement – little accomplishment. And one of these firms will be entrusted with the future of this city?

A recommendation: drop the consultants at this time, let the citizens identify the needs and go from there. It worked before. Involvement of citizens in the initial planning process can be a valuable tool and sure beats leaving citizens with the feeling that they must be told, by outsiders, what Austin needs as well as pay for their services at this time of economic free fall. That is not good government.

Respectfully,

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