

Late Backup

Other Voices -
Karen McGraw

KAREN MCGRAW AIA
4315 AVENUE C
AUSTIN, TEXAS 78751
512-917-1761
[REDACTED]

***Comments on Austin's Neighborhood Planning Program
August 20, 2013***

Austin's current land development codes says this:

§ 25-2-176 NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN (NP) COMBINING DISTRICT PURPOSE.

The purpose of a neighborhood plan (NP) combining district is to allow infill development by implementing a neighborhood plan that has been adopted by the council as an amendment to the comprehensive plan.

But IMAGINE AUSTIN says this about current neighborhood planning:

In 1997, the City initiated the neighborhood planning program to protect, enhance, and ensure the stability of neighborhoods—mostly located in the urban core. Currently, 48 neighborhood planning areas have completed the planning process and have adopted neighborhood plans (see Appendix G). Challenges and opportunities unique to individual neighborhoods are met through the neighborhood planning process. (p. 135)

So why does the LDC provision enabling Neighborhood Planning only support infill?

Does Austin really want to CONSERVE natural resources, but not it's neighborhoods or housing stock?

How can the LDC rewrite remedy this contradiction?

How can Austin retool it's Neighborhood Planning Program to foster protection of Austin's valuable neighborhoods?

After months of neighborhood planning work under the current process, it's no wonder that residents may feel at a loss that their neighborhood is not more stable or protected than when neighborhood planning began. In fact, often tools with pretty pictures result in new development that discredits the promises of charming new infill and disrupts neighborhood patterns, scale, viability and value.

1) Redefine the Purpose of Neighborhood Planning in the rewrite as claimed in Imagine Austin:

The Purpose of Neighborhood Planning is to protect, enhance, and ensure the stability of neighborhoods by protecting and enhancing existing viable buildings and infrastructure and by identifying opportunities for infill and redevelopment compatible with the established character of the neighborhood.

Austin does not identify neighborhood resources and areas eligible for conservation, preservation and redevelopment. Preservation professionals trained in survey practices should assess the resources of the neighborhood via a windshield survey.

2) Begin every Neighborhood Plan with a property survey performed by planning professionals to identify neighborhood character and resources as well as areas appropriate for:

Historic Preservation - Landmarks and Local Historic Districts

Neighborhood Conservation – Stable areas with consistent development patterns, sound housing stock and public and private investment that have resulted in successful and valuable neighborhoods.

Infill and Redevelopment – Areas that are in need of new housing and possibly new infrastructure and that are not eligible for Preservation and Conservation.

This should form the basis for proceeding with a Neighborhood Plan.

Austin discourages using tools that foster CONSERVATION and PRESERVATION of Austin's neighborhoods, opting rather for INFILL only! Neighborhoods continue to be jeopardized by demolition of housing stock, inappropriate new development and inconsistent infrastructure changes that fail to maintain the character that makes the neighborhoods unique and charming!

3) Embrace and apply appropriate tools to areas identified for conservation, preservation and appropriate infill and redevelopment.

These are Austin's (rarely used) existing tools for Conservation and Preservation of Neighborhoods and housing stock:

§ 25-2-171 HISTORIC LANDMARK (H) COMBINING DISTRICT AND HISTORIC AREA (HD) COMBINING DISTRICT PURPOSES.

(A) The purpose of a historic landmark (H) combining district is to protect, enhance, and preserve individual structures or sites that are of architectural, historical,

archaeological, or cultural significance.

(B) The purpose of a historic area (HD) combining district is to protect, enhance, and preserve areas that include structures or sites that are of architectural, historical, archaeological, or cultural significance.

§ 25-2-173 NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION (NC) COMBINING DISTRICT PURPOSE.

The purpose of a neighborhood conservation (NC) combining district is to preserve neighborhoods with distinctive architectural styles that were substantially built out at least 30 years before the date an application for an NC combining district classification is filed.

These are Austin's current Infill Tools:

§ 25-2-1403 SPECIAL USES.

(A) This section describes special uses for a NP combining district

(B) In this subchapter:

(1) NEIGHBORHOOD URBAN CENTER special use is the use of a designated area within a neighborhood for commercial uses and townhouse, condominium, and multifamily residential uses.

(2) CORNER STORE special use is the use of a site to provide goods or services to local residents.

(3) COTTAGE special use is the use of a site of limited size for a single-family residential dwellings on lots at least 2,500 square feet in size.

(4) NEIGHBORHOOD MIXED USE BUILDING special use is the use of a building for both commercial and residential uses.

(5) RESIDENTIAL INFILL special use is the use of a designated area within a neighborhood for predominately residential uses and limited commercial uses.

(6) SECONDARY APARTMENT special use is the use of a developed single-family residential lot for a second dwelling.

(7) URBAN HOME special use is the use of a site for a single-family residential dwelling on a lot at least 3,500 square feet in size.

These are Austin's current Design Tools:

§ 25-2-1406 ORDINANCE REQUIREMENTS.

An ordinance zoning or rezoning property as a NP combining district:

(6) may apply the requirements of Section 25-2-1602 (*Front Porch Setback*), Section 25-2-1603 (*Impervious Cover and Parking Placement Requirements*), or Section 25-2-1604 (*Garage Placement*) to the district or a designated portion of the district.