

Zoning and Platting Commissioners asked that the following transcript summary be included in backup when the referenced item is placed on the City Council agenda:

[Begin minute 21:53 of 03/03/2015 Zoning and Platting Commission meeting re: Item 4 Cameron Apts.]

Goodman:

Discussed vision for this particular development: lofts proposed, non-gated, sense of place, destination, price mid-range, "workforce housing." Creative population is always drawn at some point to warehouse and industrial districts. These are places to create from.

Former view would have been to agree with staff -- to never put residential next to industrial. But in this day of ImagineAustin these are workplaces, so you do want residential opportunities near workplaces so that a car is not necessary.

Compton:

Echoed Goodman on creative class, and on this matching up with ImagineAustin. This area is designated as a job center. "Can't imagine a more appropriate use" than people being able to walk to work. Employment and residential compatible is appropriate use. Also an advocate for a finer grain, so rather than having seas of the same color [on the maps] it is better to have more pockets of residential. Points out that there are pockets on both sides of Dessau and Cameron Road for this particular tract.

McDaniel:

Agreed with Compton. There is no point in waiting for a PUD to let mixed use show up. In reviewing this case, two things came to mind: (1) It is well understood that AISD is losing students and therefore losing funding, which imperils our ability to educate the kids we have. This is especially true when coupled with the fact that recent construction bond elections have failed, which means that many of our schools in existing residential neighborhoods that are growing quickly are overpopulated. Combine that with the fact also that Austin is quickly losing middle class families because there is not enough housing for median income people in Austin. That is the core issue. (2) We must find a way to accommodate middle class people who live and work in the city, otherwise all of their children will be reared in the suburbs and they will drive into town to do the work for those affluent enough to still live in the city.

This proposal seems very much in the spirit of Imagine Austin and, more to the point, it addresses a pressing area of need not only for this immediate area but also for the city as a whole.

McDaniel:

Staff pointed out that much more intensive industrial uses can go on these properties that are already zoned LI, and that might make it even more problematic to put residential next to them. Cited health, safety, welfare concern. Acknowledged that concern, but said we continue to be in a chicken and egg question for these compatibility issues where we look at undeveloped and largely unmarketable industrial and light industrial properties where housing could be developed that we desperately need on two major roads [Cameron and Rundberg], yet there is a large amount of risk. Default position is that the developer is choosing to take on that risk which kind of lets the city off the hook. The city is placing a bet and hoping that someone will bail us out of it on the property next door.

Staff pointed out that there is a FLUM [Future Land Use Map] that indicates the area across Cameron “is what that neighborhood intends the area to be – light industrial.” Nikelle Meade offered counter viewpoint.

Compton:

As commissioners we know that the Land Development Code is in the process of being re-evaluated and brought back to Council and there’s been great debate in the city and among citizens regarding the Euclidean code versus form based code. Think a lot of these assumptions and the basis of rationale are predicated on the Euclidean approach to industrial versus residential. Worked on projects that have integrated industrial/light industrial with residential and lofts by prohibiting obnoxious uses – it’s more about the form than about the land use.

Compton:

Addressed “another elephant in the room,” which is public safety. This is an item of concern. His belief is that adding another 8-hour use (which is industrial use) rather than a 24-hour use (which is residential use) is putting more eyes on the street. This is not an easy answer, but more residential helps not just in perception but in actuality in creating community. This sector of the city aspires towards that.

Goodman:

Asked question of whether a Traffic Impact Analysis or warrant study was needed to put a blinking pedestrian/cyclist traffic device at Cameron (from proposed urban trail along Little Walnut Creek). Proposed this be on the front-end “to create a culture of compliance before anything else starts building out.” Said it would be especially important for schools, and children crossing.

Made reference to the Green Infrastructure Working Group. Said they craft options for proactive and remediating actions that we can take in any development for the eastern creeks to make sure we don’t commit the sins of the past. This piece of land would be good to interact with them on.

Compton:

He is on this working group, and it lends itself towards infill situations like this particularly where there are heavily erosive soils on the east side of town where conventional practices have channelized and funnelled water. Light impact development is very conducive to this plan. This is a transit route – Cameron and Dessau. We have congestion and no solutions because rail didn’t pass. Likes the notion that we have residential near employment and less than a quarter mile from a public park and middle school. Said the choice between industrial or residential near a middle school is an easy choice.

Compton:

“I still have to make a point.” Euclidean zoning is predicated on separation. What we’re really talking about here is changing the development pattern. He’s driven Dessau and Cameron. Currently there are some excellent examples of light industrial that are retail uses. Those are development patterns and forms. “We can hide behind the CS – I would vote for that – but I would just put a stake in the ground and call it what it is, and that is MF5.”

McDaniel:

As a compatibility issue, I would have to say that a CSMU as a compromise that gets us to residential is attractive. It helps us avoid a potentially precedential vote of putting MF in the middle of LI areas. He wants to vote for whatever gets us housing in this area where the public schools are underenrolled.

Goodman:

Again addressed the blinking light road crossings /safety crossings. Staff informed that warrants are needed when on city streets. These are from grants. Goodman suggested perhaps the city could pay for it itself and get cost participation. Nikelle Meade said they would agree to cost participate. Goodman suggested putting in the current motion (to approve zoning) a mandate to initiate the process for applying for a blinking light and getting a cost participation agreement negotiated with Nikelle Meade. Staff opined that those issues should not to be included with this zoning request because the VPD [vehicular trips per day] were far too low at 2,000 for traffic signalling devices to fall within the scope of this project. Staff additionally said there would need to be coordination with the city's traffic department and with the budget department for the city participation discussion.

Goodman:

Expressed that "we're told we cannot whenever we try to solve a problem in advance on roadway issues." She wants to do some problem solving up-front when the answer is so obvious.

Goodman (to Legal):

What are our options for how these types of things can be recommended so that it doesn't happen so piecemeal, so that we aren't reliant on somebody else to get a process started, or to ask permission? How can we propose or recommend things like road crossings or trails for this area, or address things for the area, so that all of this starts at one time and comes to Council concurrently?

Legal:

With the new Council, and changed structure, there is a larger discussion going on about these issues. I can check on who would be in the best position to present [the Commission's discussion] and advocate for that.

Goodman:

Also wants ZAP's discussion on the issue to go to Council as part of support materials for this motion/vote at issue. Looking at what Council currently gets, she believes it is minimal. They get the motion and minutes, but they don't get our points of discussion, issues that are discussed, etc.

This is a lengthy and quite informative discussion – there are layers of discussion that should go with the motion, in addition to minutes.

Staff:

The department staff will update the staff reports if there has been change to the information.

General Commission Discussion:

If Council wants additional information, they ask for it. Concern expressed by some commissioners that this Council is new and may not know that they have to request more information.

Legal:

We will take a proactive stance in getting this information out this time, rather than waiting to be responsive to a request from a council member.

Commission:

New council may not be familiar with having to ask for additional material so they will have benefit of what we're saying here.

This really is a chance to turn a page, but we can't do that if the details of our discussion don't go to Council with the recommendation.