




MEMORANDUM

To: City Council
Planning Commission

From: Gregory I. Guernsey, AICP, Director 
Planning and Zoning Department

Date: May 11, 2018

Subject: Future of Small Area Planning Recommendations

Background

The Planning and Zoning Department is working to develop new types of small area plans and a new way to select future planning areas based on a number of inputs including: the “Zucker Report,” the 2016 *Audit of Neighborhood Planning*, discussion at the Commission and Council level related to CodeNEXT, and City Council Resolution [#20170928-101](#).

Since approval of the Council Resolution in September Planning and Zoning staff have:

- Conducted research and analysis
- Formed an interdepartmental and interdisciplinary team to collaboratively develop ideas for future small area planning services
- Facilitated small group discussions with staff around the topic of our existing planning legacy
- Conducted a survey of external stakeholders
- Held a series of dialogue meetings with our partner departments
- Solicited the input and creative ideas of Planning and Zoning staff regarding future small area plan ideas through a “Design Challenge,” and
- Solicited input from the Planning Commission and Small Area Plan Joint Committee.

This memo reflects our preliminary recommendations based on this input and analysis. Over the next several months, staff will work to refine the recommendations, and may bring several related items back to Planning Commission or City Council for action, including: necessary amendments to the Land Development Code, budget proposals, and the initiation of one or more small area plans.

Recommendations

- 1) **Provide a Spectrum of Future Planning Services.** We recommend introducing several product lines related to small area planning:

- **Imagine Austin Corridor/Centers Plans** within *Imagine Austin*-identified Centers and Corridors. These plans would be prioritized based on the area’s susceptibility to change, the potential to leverage mobility investments and other cross-departmental city-initiatives, and other factors.
- **Complete Communities Plans** would improve access and opportunity to residents’ basic daily needs. These plans would be prioritized based on citywide complete communities analysis. They would focus on implementation-type interventions to move the needle on the area’s most pressing issues. By fulfilling the identified needs, the community would move closer to completion.
- **Special Studies and Plans** would include Council and CMO-requested studies, citywide planning initiatives, exclusively urban design-focused plans, and other specialized departmental planning products.

(See **Attachment A** for more information about the scope and selection process for *Imagine Austin Centers and Corridors Plans* and *Complete Communities Plans*.)

- 2) **Focus on Mobility Corridors initially.** City Council Resolution [#20170928-101](#) specifically directed the Planning and Zoning Department to identify potential geographic areas along corridors identified for transportation investments under the 2016 Mobility Bond, Capital Metro Project Connect, and the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan. Based on this direction, as well as discussions with the Corridor Program Office, Austin Transportation Department, Capital Metro and others, staff have conducted a preliminary technical analysis of *Imagine Austin* Centers and Corridors. Based on this analysis, staff has identified two corridors that we feel should be analyzed further for consideration for Small Area Planning as part of our Year 1 Work Program. The intention would be to pilot test the new approach to small area planning in these corridors, and to incorporate lessons learned into future small area planning activities in other corridors and centers.

(See **Attachment B** Corridor Prioritization Map for the location of *Imagine Austin* Centers and Corridors, 2016 Mobility Bond Corridors, and Draft Project Connect High Capacity Corridors, and recommended “Year 1” pilot corridors for *Imagine Austin* Corridors Planning.)

- 3) **Apply CodeNEXT Regulatory Tools.** Depending on the characteristics of the area being planned, future small area plans would be accompanied by customized modifications to the land development code that support the vision of the plan. These modifications could include:
 - a. Amendments to the zoning map; and/or
 - b. Development of specialized overlays and/or regulating plans for particular geographic areas.
- 4) **Clarify and require adherence to a citywide policy framework.** Future small area plans would be developed to fit within and to be consistent with the overall citywide policy framework.¹ In order to ensure that small area plans support our citywide vision and that they provide clear policy guidance, there may be a need to develop new tools to guide development and

¹ Previously adopted small area plans including, Neighborhood Plans, Station Area Plans, Master Plans, and Corridor Plans would continue to exist as attachments to the *Imagine Austin* Comprehensive Plan unless repealed or replaced through future action by the Austin City Council.

implementation of small area plans (e.g. numerical targets and other decision support systems, revised LDC procedures, revised Comprehensive Plan policies, etc.)

- 5) **Enhance engagement and consider planning through an Equity Lens.** The Planning and Zoning Department is in the process of partnering with the Equity Office on an Equity Assessment of CodeNEXT as well as the department as a whole. As the process of developing new planning services moves forward we will select planning areas, develop plans, and engage the community through an equity lens. We anticipate incorporating the recommended actions that come out of the Equity Assessment later this year into all future planning programs and projects.

(See **Attachment C** for an overview of the approach to public engagement that would be used for future small area planning.)

- 6) **Partner with other departments.** Based on our meetings with partner departments, staff has identified the need to work more collaboratively, and may formally establish and utilize cross-departmental strike teams for particular planning efforts.
- 7) **Emphasize plan implementation.** Implementation of the plan will be considered during every aspect of the planning process, and this consideration will be enhanced by clearly establishing expectations with community members and actively engaging partner departments. Depending on the characteristics of the plan, innovative funding partnerships may be explored, or planning may be accompanied by implementation of tactical/demonstration projects. The Planning and Zoning Department will continue to work in cooperation with neighborhood groups and City departments to monitor plan implementation status after plan adoption. In addition, the Department's small area planning process will more directly feed into the Strategic Areas Analysis of the CIP Long Range Strategic Plan.

Resource Scenarios

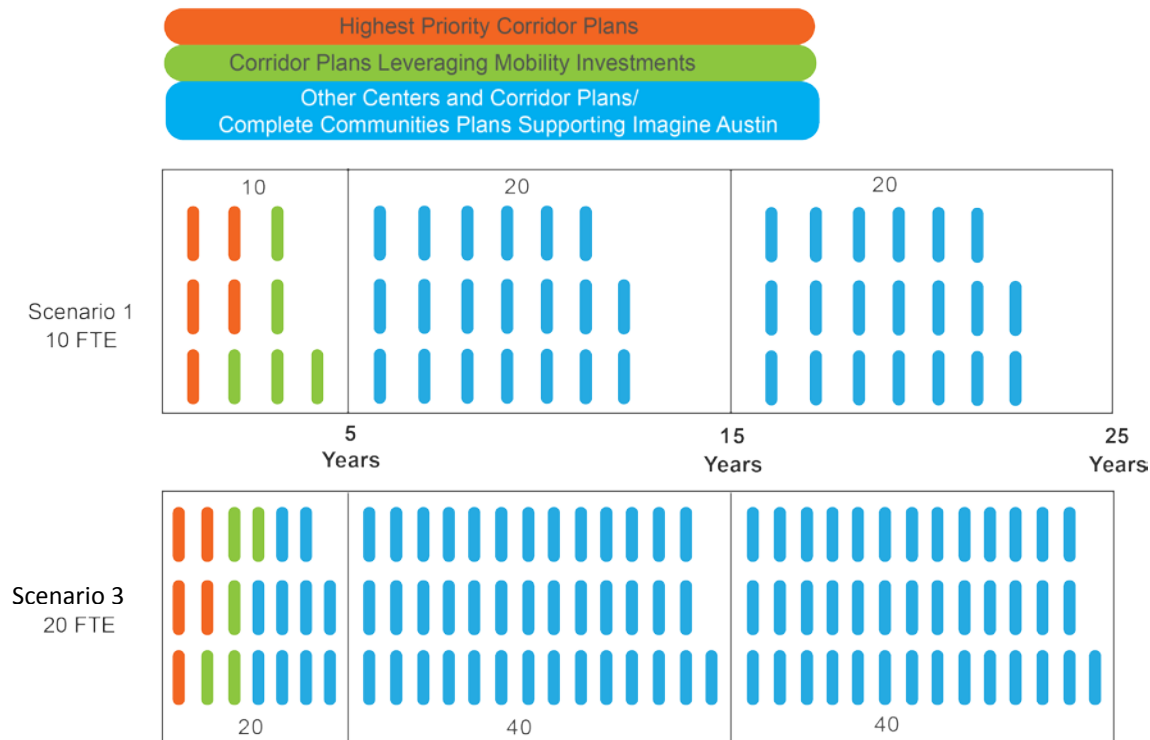
With existing resources, the Planning and Zoning Department anticipates that we would be able to complete, on average, 1 to 2 new small area plans per year, as described under **Scenario 1** below. With an additional 5 FTE, as shown under Scenario 2, PAZ would be able to complete 2-3 plans per year. With a doubling of existing resources, as shown under **Scenario 3**, PAZ would be able to complete on average 3-4 new plans per year. **Scenario 4** assumes additional one-time resources available for plans including consultant augmentation and/or demonstration projects. Scenario 4 would not increase the number of plans that could be developed over a given period of time, but would have the potential to enhance the quality and support early implementation of those plans.

Assumptions: The rate of plan development assumes that staff resources are not diverted to other high-priority projects, and actual results could vary based on unanticipated delays during the approval process. The "Plans Completed by Scenario" graphic below provides a visualization of the number of small area plans that would be completed based on a best case scenario where we complete 2 new small area plans per year under Scenario 1 or 4 plans per year under Scenario 3. The on-going costs assume a rough estimate of the indirect and direct cost associated with that level of Full Time Equivalent Positions (FTE) along with related commodities costs.

Overview of Resource Scenarios

	<i>Scenario 1: Base Case</i>	<i>Scenario 2: Expedited (X1.5)</i>	<i>Scenario 3: Expedited (X2)</i>	<i>Scenario 4: Enhanced</i>
Plans per year (avg.)	1-2	2-3	3-4	3-4
Deliverables				
Background Research and Analysis	✓	✓	✓	✓
Public engagement	✓	✓	✓	✓
Plan Document Development	✓	✓	✓	✓
Code and Zoning Map	✓	✓	✓	✓
Departmental Coordination	✓	✓	✓	✓
Implementation Monitoring	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Specialized technical analysis</i>				✓
<i>Funding for demonstration or tactical investments</i>				✓
<i>Enhanced engagement activities</i>				✓
Personnel	10 FTE	15 FTE	20 FTE	20 FTE + Consulting Services
Total On-Going Costs (includes personnel and commodities)	\$1,000,000/yr	\$1,500,000/yr	\$2,000,000/yr	\$2,000,000/yr
One-Time Costs				\$500,000/plan
Additional Resources Needed	\$0	\$500,000/yr	\$1,000,000/yr	\$2,000,000/yr

Plans Completed By Scenario



Next Steps

- 1) **Briefings.** PAZ staff are available to provide briefings upon request to Planning Commission and City Council.
- 2) **Prioritization Beyond 1 Year Pilot Work Program.** PAZ staff will conduct a technical scoring analysis and prioritize Imagine Austin corridors and centers for potential future planning services based on the extent to which planning in the corridor or center would help to:
 - Leverage transportation investments
 - Preserve and create affordable housing
 - Build on past planning and development pattern
 - Focus on areas that are susceptible to change
 - Create positive community impacts

Staff will also begin to evaluate and score areas which would be candidates for future Complete Communities Plans.

- 3) **Council Request for Budget Proposal.** PAZ staff will develop a funding proposal to submit as part of the FY 2018-2019 Request for Budget Proposal Process.
- 4) **Future action items.** PAZ staff will continue to refine the recommendations, and will bring specific recommendations back for action, as appropriate. Future actions could include:
 - Budget proposals, requests, or modifications;
 - Code amendments, and/or
 - Initiation of one or more small area plans or planning studies.

Attachment(s):

- A. Future Planning Services Comparison Matrix
- B. Corridor Prioritization Map
- C. Overview of Approach to Public Engagement
- D. Prototype Complete Communities Map
- E. Previously-Adopted Small Area Plans, including Neighborhood Plans
- F. Summary of Public Survey
- G. City Council Resolution [#20170928-101](#)

cc: CMO Spencer Cronk, ACM Joe Pantalione, Jerry Rusthoven, Stevie Greathouse, Matt Dugan