

Pedestrian Advisory Council (PAC) Recommendation:

Land Development Code: Communicating the Vision

WHEREAS, significant progress was made under CodeNEXT in engaging with the public and shaping a new Land Development Code (LDC), progress which should be built upon in the next LDC conversation;

WHEREAS, rather than proponents simply restating existing perspectives, the new LDC conversation should rethink public engagement and better accommodate how people generally relate to the built environment and how perspectives are affected by previous development;

WHEREAS, people generally best understand built environment concepts through visual images, photos, and physical models;

WHEREAS, the nature of Austin's development and expansion in recent decades has caused the public to rationally equate change with auto-centric, suburban style, large-scale development that is often in conflict with Austin's historic character; leading to a widespread fear of change in the built environment;

WHEREAS, the prospect of a new LDC has the potential to inspire and excite the public with visions of vibrant, beautiful neighborhoods;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the PAC recommends that, while recognizing the need for a tight timeframe moving forward and building upon what has been accomplished in the CodeNEXT process to date, the City Council and the City Manager consider that any future public engagement in the process to update the LDC rely heavily on visual images and physical models, and that such resources be employed to identify and illustrate concepts that might include the following:

The kinds of places, in Austin and in other places around the US and the world, that people like and want to see more of (Figures A & B)

The kinds of human needs, experiences, and interactions, the public would like the built environment to better foster (figure C)

Visual examples of publicly-identified existing problems and harmful practices in new development, which are common and possible under the current LDC, along with matching examples of improvements, which could be achieved, under a new LDC (figure D)

Using real-world examples, that show how a new LDC could be primarily an agent not of sudden, large-scale change but of graceful, steady, incremental change across all of Austin to foster more walkable, human-centric environments (figure E)

Date of Approval: April 1, 2019

Vote: a 7-0 vote with Mulcahy and Walker absent and alternate members Meyer and Wald voting in place of Bauereis and Wochner, respectively.

Attest:



Jay Blazek Crossley, Pedestrian Advisory Council Chair

Illustrative materials

Figure A. Using models to build an ideal neighborhood



By engaging with the intuitive, spatially-oriented, non-verbal part of the brain, working with models enable people to more easily communicate what kind of built environment they most want.

By starting from scratch and building their “dream neighborhood”, the above exercise frees people from the challenge of reimagining the existing environment and instead allows them to point toward ideal qualities. Unlike more technical conversations, this exercise is inclusive for all ages, ethnicities, and literacy levels. Repeated many times, common elements can be identified in results and used to produce a “values document” that identifies a shared community vision for a future built environment.

Figure B. Examples of photos illustrating possible favorite places in Austin and beyond



Barton Creek Greenbelt, Austin. A quiet, natural place to walk, rest, think.



6th Street, Austin. A historic street with a sense of place and a well-defined pedestrian environment.



Las Ramblas, Barcelona, Spain. A bustling citywide focal point, an iconic pedestrian-only public space.



Stockholm, Sweden. A quiet, shaded neighborhood square, surrounded by shops and houses.

Figure C. Photos illustrating examples of human needs, experiences, and interactions



Needs: Neighborly interactions, places to garden
Features: Small setbacks, front yards, porches



Needs: Aging in place, preserve neighborhood character, walkability, cost of living
Features: Context-sensitive ADUs, relaxed lot coverage requirements

Figure D. Contrasting the current LDC versus a better LDC

Example: Grocery store



Current LDC: Detached building erodes on-street pedestrian realm, parking creates ugly environment
Code features: Setbacks, front parking, parking minimum requirements



Possible LDC: Store close to other businesses; creates inviting, walkable environment
Code features: No setbacks, no parking minimum requirements, mixed-use neighborhoods

Figure E. Depictions of gradual, steady change

Example 1: Wide arterial street



Old code: Setbacks, wide roads, large-scale development



New code: Zero setbacks, mixed-use zoning, trees, wider sidewalks, bike lanes

Example 2: Neighborhood street



Old code: Lot sizes, coverage limitations, setbacks



New code: Context-sensitive infill, ADUs (invisible to street), trees