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Sent: Tuesday, April 23, 2019 12:11 PM

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Cc: Ann Howard <[REDACTED]@austintexas.gov>; 'Awais Azhar' <[REDACTED]@austintexas.gov>; Nicole Joslin <nicole.joslin@cityofaustin.org>

Subject: Affordability Unlocked - Comments for PC

City Leadership, Staff and PC Commission Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on the draft Affordability Unlocked ordinance ahead of tonight's PC meeting. I offer my unwavering support for the ordinance and am so excited for this next step in our City's future! Please feel free to reach out with any questions.

My best,
Jenn Hicks

Jennifer Hicks, Founder

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April 23, 2019

TO: City Leadership, City Staff and Commission Members

RE: Support of *Affordability Unlocked*

Dear Austin Community Leadership:

I want to share the appreciation, hope and pride that characterizes my steadfast support of the *Affordability Unlocked* draft ordinance that will be considered by Planning Commission this evening. As an Austinite that has dedicated my entire professional career to the development of affordable housing in our great city, I can vouch for the profound impact this ordinance will have in unlocking a substantial amount of additional affordable housing units throughout Austin.

I am grateful to be working on two high-impact projects that are in due diligence stage that would greatly benefit from the *Affordability Unlocked* ordinance as currently drafted in the following ways:

- Site A would be able to fit an additional 25 units of high-quality affordable housing for a total of 75 units along a transit corridor.
- Site B would be able to fit the desired number of high-quality affordable units (40 units) without sacrificing unit size or critical supportive service space that would otherwise be surrendered to fit within zoning constraints.
- Both Site A and Site B would be able to develop the affordable housing by the high-quality and neighborhood-supported non-profit without asking for a zoning change, compatibility setback waiver, or a Conditional Use Permit.
- Almost as important as the number of units generated, this ordinance takes a great burden off of Neighborhoods that must choose between the merits of a good project and the zoning or use precedence that they must approve to allow the project to move forward. For a Neighborhood who is supportive of integrated affordable housing throughout the City, they can get affordable housing units without sacrificing development precedence on nearby sites.
- It is estimated this ordinance will save 6-12 months in the timeline of an affordable housing development and easily save \$50,000 to \$100,000 in costs from the costly site planning and design process required of zoning and use cases. We get more units faster and for less money.

I want to state that I fully support comments made by the Austin Housing Coalition for which I am a member. I have one small comment that I believe made it into the Codes and Ordinance Sub-Committee suggested comments, but also one clarification that I wanted to reiterate for this imbedded audience.

- 1) “Continuum of care” is a very specific term utilized by ECHO for their system of prioritizing the most vulnerable homeless. It is actually a HUD term that describes the funding for homeless services and programs. The issue with “continuum of care” is that we want these units INTEGRATED into the community in both affordable and market rate apartments. A 100% continuum of care property is not a model that our even our lead non-profit supportive service providers want. It is also a very challenging model to make work financially as it is 100% dependent on rental subsidies. When you look at affordable housing projects that are solely one-bedrooms and efficiencies (and would otherwise qualify for Affordability Unlocked), they are already “supportive housing” serving a mix of populations who benefit from services but aren’t

100% dedicated to the chronic homeless. In order to incentivize these projects, I encourage us to go back to the original language, but strike the word “permanent” as “permanent supportive housing” has a multitude of definitions and could get confusing. Let me be clear that the overwhelming majority of affordable housing projects will easily meet the 25% threshold for multi-bedroom units, this is just for those projects that are designed with efficiencies or 1-bedrooms to best serve a target population – i.e. “supportive housing or housing for older persons.” Please see edit below.

§ 25-1-722 ELIGIBILITY.

(A) A proposed development qualifies as a Type 1 development and is eligible

for this program if:

(1) it includes a minimum of three dwelling units or the proposed

development will consist only of affordable dwelling units;

(2) at least 25 percent of the affordable dwelling units include two or

more bedrooms or the proposed development qualifies as ~~supportive housing continuum~~

~~of care housing~~ or housing for older persons;

- 2) In my original comments to the Codes and Ordinance sub-committee, I had suggested a 10% threshold requirement of Continuum of Care units coordinated by ECHO for any affordable housing project that would utilize the Affordability Unlocked resolution. I have had time to rethink the implications of this comment on the successful take-off of this ordinance. I am aligned with leadership and staff that my greatest desire is for this ordinance to be successful and that is the first layer of import. I therefore strike this comment related to the draft ordinance.

However, I want to stress that, we as a Community, must be aligned on putting forth a bold measure to generate a pipeline of units that will serve our City’s chronic homeless or the need will continue to grow exponentially. I ask leadership and staff to look to the GO Bond funding as a tool to properly leverage these units and would look forward to conversations that would help build understanding and a path forward to properly disperse these units in multiple projects throughout our town.

I am so grateful to be a part of this NOW where our City begins to make such measurable impacts on affordability. Thank you to Council and Staff for this innovative step and carrying the heavy weight. I am excited for our City’s future.

Best,
Jenn Hicks, Founder
True Casa Consulting, LLC