

Pedestrian Advisory Council Recommendation:

The People of Austin Deserve a Sustainable, Equitable, Healthy Land Development Code

WHEREAS, the Pedestrian Advisory Council (PAC) advises the City of Austin and other government entities on pedestrian planning, policy, design, funding, education, and enforcement regarding creating, maintaining, and operating pedestrian infrastructure;

WHEREAS, according to the City of Austin Mobility Talks Public Engagement Report, most Austin residents would prefer to travel by public transit, walking, and bicycling, but cannot for many reasons related to Austin's current automobile-oriented land development code (LDC);

WHEREAS, all people who live, work, or visit the City of Austin deserve safe, convenient, and comfortable options to access all areas elements of the city by foot or wheelchair;

WHEREAS, land use and transportation policy largely dictate the amount of vehicle miles traveled, carbon emissions, and victims of traffic violence in our region;

WHEREAS, a piecemeal approach to land development has failed the people of Austin for several decades;

WHEREAS, all Austinites should be able to access basic needs, such as groceries, healthcare, parks, and transit, within a 10-minute walk (roughly 0.5 miles), which is considered to be a reasonable pedestrian trip;

WHEREAS, current Floor-to-Area-Ratio (FAR) rules for high-rise buildings do not include automobile storage, encouraging above-ground parking, negatively impacting the pedestrian scale experience of the built environment;

WHEREAS, one of the stated goals of the draft LDC is to increase housing stock and increase affordable housing, especially in transition areas and the urban core;

WHEREAS, many businesses are only safely accessible for customers who drive;

WHEREAS, multiple studies suggest the trip generation methodologies currently used by the City of Austin in the Traffic Impact Analysis system may be inaccurate, especially in ignoring access via various modes of transportation;

WHEREAS, the design and build of dwellings and neighborhoods can greatly impact social connection, which is a fundamental human need;

WHEREAS, connectivity between private, semi-private and public spaces plays a vital role in supporting community cohesion, reducing socio-economic barriers to jobs and amenities and providing healthy options for people to move about Austin;

WHEREAS, private streets often interrupt the street grid and block safe pedestrian and public transit access, impacting pedestrian mobility and community cohesion;

WHEREAS, setback distances between buildings and streets strongly influence the presence of community between neighbors; the success of businesses; and the degree to which a street is well-defined, protected from the elements, and engaging enough to encourage walking;

WHEREAS, ubiquitous, safe pedestrian access is often compromised by rules that force homebuilders and developers to provide on-site parking;

WHEREAS, the world is in a climate crisis and transportation comprises America's single largest source of carbon emissions, so Austin must transition away from car dependency and toward widespread affordable access to low-carbon mobility choices as quickly as possible;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the PAC recommends the Austin City Council adopt a sustainable, equitable LDC as soon as possible that allows for the majority of regional population and job growth to occur in walkable transit-oriented locations inside of the City of Austin;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the PAC recommends the following:

- The LDC should ensure that all residents have easy, safe access to basic needs, such as by minimizing the practice of segregating uses, ensuring that all such uses can be built, density-permitting, within a 10-minute walk of every resident;
- The city should do everything that it can in the LDC and related regulatory practices to minimize the creation of private streets that do not meet city standards of safe, multimodal access and a connected grid, and find ways to fix existing private streets that have subpar pedestrian access or that block multimodal connections for nearby areas;
- Businesses with drive-through windows or otherwise automobile-oriented access points provide a walk-up window also accessible by wheelchair;
- Eliminate all elements of Traffic Impact Analysis systems that rely upon car trip generation measures and Level of Service for private motorized vehicles, and replace these with a transportation demand management system intended to reduce Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) that includes imposing fees for safe, multimodal improvements and ensures that new developments improve access for all;
- Include above-ground parking structures in a building's FAR calculation and impose parking maximums downtown;
- Allow and encourage socially-oriented housing, such as row housing, housing cooperatives and co-living spaces, apartments with shallow front yards and with as many front entrances per capita as possible, and/or homes oriented around common courtyards and paseos;
- Pedestrian paseos, similar to the paseo in the Mueller Neighborhood adjacent to the Children's Museum, be designed for all projects and neighborhoods where a street or road may not be appropriate and that staff recommend changes to this code to allow and encourage such uses, recognizing that human access, beyond car connectivity, is paramount to a healthy city;
- The placement of surface parking lots along street frontages be kept to a minimum and the LDC encourage alternatives such as locating parking areas behind or alongside existing buildings that comply with existing ADA accessibility standards, above- and below-ground in-structure parking, shared parking areas, and access to parking from secondary streets as opposed to major thoroughfares;
- Mixed-Use Zones within transition zones and the urban core prioritize and incentivize residential use, and especially affordable housing use, with the intent that "mixed-use" zoning almost always results in the inclusion of some housing;

- Minimum setback requirements between buildings and streets in both Residential Zones and Main Street Zones be eliminated and possible setback requirements be considered on a case by case basis, allowing for important issues, such as installing missing pedestrian infrastructure, to be addressed;
- Keep the proposed removal of parking minimum requirements in the current draft, eliminate all parking minimum requirements citywide as soon as is practical, and use market pricing to ensure access to parking in all areas, as was outlined in the PAC's previous recommendation on this subject;
- Unbundle parking for all buildings so that the cost of renting/buying a parking space is separated from the cost of renting/buying a unit in a building and that occupants cannot be forced to rent/buy parking;
- Establish a system for allowing property owners to convert underutilized parking to better uses anywhere that parking minimums continue to exist;
- Rather than being forced to provide parking, developments on streets with insufficient pedestrian infrastructure should, where appropriate, integrate pedestrian safety improvements in the development review process;
- Establish equitable transit-oriented development (ETOD) strategies that maximize the amount of people allowed to live within walking distance of high-quality transit and includes meaningfully-affordable housing for various income levels.

Date of Approval: November 4, 2019

Vote: 7-0 with Anna Bauereis and Justin Henderson absent

Attest:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jay Blazek Crossley', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Jay Blazek Crossley, PAC Chair