

Brandy Maggio  
810 W St Johns Ave  
Unit 1159  
Austin, TX 78752

May 9th, 2022

I'm writing to oppose 2022-036792 ZC, which would permanently open the gate between Easy Wind and Morrow St and which they have been recently testing out.

I have serious concerns around how this will impact the safety of the residents using the street.

In particular, I'm worried about how it would disproportionately affect: 1) those with visual impairments and other disabilities who live in this area to be closer to transit and 2) the many children who live in the neighborhood and their families who chose this area to raise them.

The neighborhood off of Easy Wind is extremely walkable and there are always people enjoying the day, strolling with their children, people walking dogs, and frequent bicycle riders on the road. The way the area is developed, it encourages people to cross Easy Wind frequently, as well as many side roads.

For years, this has never been a problem; people driving around were not driving *thru* the neighborhood; they lived in the neighborhood and were respectful of their neighbors. They took a care for their safety.

Since the gate was removed, I've noticed an increase in traffic going thru the neighborhood. Additionally, those who are driving out towards Morrow are driving at higher speeds.

I, personally, have had one very close call with a car who was driving out of Easy Wind towards Morrow street and did not stop as I attempted to cross at an intersection. There have been other situations that were avoided primarily because I chose not to attempt to cross, even when I had the right of way.

And I have full vision; I worry about the impact for my neighbors who are more limited. That easily could have been a tragedy. Children are also not always so wise, no matter how many times we tell them to look both ways.

I'm assuming that part of the reason this is being opened is to allow for easier access of emergency vehicles. Or perhaps it was to allow an alternative route out of the area for the first responders who live in our neighborhood.

I was also concerned when I saw the way the gate was closed off, with the lock and everything. I had hoped that the reason it was removed was to upgrade the barrier into something that first responders can lower when they need and otherwise would be raised to prevent thru traffic.

Since that is not the case, here are the measures that I would need to see in place in order to feel that opening this road to thru traffic is being done responsibly:

- 1) All cross streets have stop signs on Easy Wind that are extremely visible.
- 2) All have bold crosswalks that are clearly marked for drivers to know to look for pedestrian crossings.
- 3) An evaluation by a group who is knowledgeable about how to create public areas that are safer for the visually impaired be completed and any recommendations considered.

To be frank, as a tax paying citizen, I'm not certain that all these measures are a good use of my tax money. I think it would be far more prudent to simply keep the road gated off, and invest instead in something that allows emergency responders an alternative entrance if it is needful.

However, if you are going to open the street to thru traffic, it is imperative that the safety of the neighborhood be maintained as much as we can. It is incredibly irresponsible to open it up without a serious effort to reduce the negative impact to the neighborhood.

Sincerely,

*Brandy Maggio*

Brandy Maggio

FROM THE DESK OF

## Andrew Crawford

May 9, 2022

I'm writing to oppose 2022-036792 ZC, a proposal by the city to allow vehicle access between Easy Wind & Morrow St. I understand a small intersection is not the largest item on Council's desk, but I think the concerns in my letter may reflect more broadly on the quality of planning applications you may receive.

For the past five years, I've lived 0.4 miles from the gate in question. I've accessed it as a pedestrian and bicyclist almost every day. I was therefore surprised to recently learn that the gate's inconsistency over the past few months has not been vandalism, or the aftermath of an emergency use, but an intentional pilot program that has been ongoing since 2021.

This gate sees frequent pedestrian use. It is 400 feet from a soccer field, and a 10-minute walk from commuter rail and MetroExpress. It's a popular bypass for Lamar, an uncomfortable roadway for pedestrians and bicyclists alike. As I will discuss, this street is a so-called "Pedestrian Priority Street" in the relevant Regulating Plan. During peak hours, it's not uncommon to have 4 pedestrians and 3 animals approach some nearby intersection simultaneously, prompting some combination of us to use the roadway as an extended sidewalk to give each others enough distance to pass without conflict.

Since the 2021 pilot, vehicles have entered this mix and have created new road conflicts. More than once I've participated in games of chicken with impatient vehicles at a stop sign in front of this gate. Perhaps once a week I must decide whether to risk conflict with an animal on the sidewalk or a vehicle on the road.

Quite frankly none of this is necessary. There is no pressing need to send car traffic down this road, there is no advantage in doing so, and there is a significant impact to vulnerable road users.

### ***The Applicant's arguments***

While that is perhaps all that needs to be said, I would like to briefly address the stated reasons the Applicant (e.g., a City agency) filed to make this change. Beyond the question of this particular gate, I am concerned that this application is representative of quality of information that reaches you and upon which you are expected to make planning decisions.

ATD's January 13th memorandum is the only document I can find articulating a rationale for this change.<sup>1</sup> I'd encourage you to read it in full, but I think it's a fair summary that it advances three arguments supporting the change:

1. The results of the pilot program
2. ATD "generally does not support restricting or closing public streets".
3. ATD recently installed a sidewalk.

I think these arguments are deficient; I will discuss each briefly.

#### *The pilot program*

The pilot program conducted by ATD is, in point of fact, **a traffic study**. That is, it studied the impact of the zoning change **to vehicular traffic**. (As it turned out, this impact was mixed-to-inconclusive.) What it did **not** measure is any effect on pedestrians, bicyclists, transit, or other road users. No interviews, datapoints, or measurements on these road users were reported.

It did make some indirect attempt at understanding pedestrian safety through the proxy of vehicle speeds, observing that "recorded speeds... do not present a notable safety concern." In fact, according to the widely-cited study on pedestrian safety<sup>2</sup>, a pedestrian impacted at the speeds ATD measured on Morrow St would sustain a severe injury roughly half of the time.

This raises some questions:

1. If the study shows mixed or insignificant effects, why make any change at all?
2. What is ATD's threshold for vehicle speeds, and why isn't that threshold those speeds which are likely to cause severe injury?
3. If the traffic study omitted any real examination of the impact to pedestrians or bicyclists, how can you rely on it as the basis for this petition?

While this study might in passing seem to support to this petition, it actually says very little that is of interest.

#### *Generally restricting streets*

The reason this is a zoning issue is because the area is part of a transit-oriented development (TOD). TODs are distinct from other city areas; they have their own separate city plans which prioritize differently than broader Austin, and they express these preferences through zoning features like this gate.

The purpose of a TOD is to "Create compact development with sufficient density to support transit ridership located within easy walking distance of transit stops." I

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<sup>1</sup> For whatever reason, this document is missing from the Austin Build + Connect page for this change. Interested parties may obtain a copy at <https://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=382629>

<sup>2</sup> <https://nacto.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/2011PedestrianRiskVsSpeed.pdf>

specifically chose to live in one because it prioritized walkability more aggressively than the city more generally.

Easy Wind Drive, on which this gate is located, is a designated “TOD Pedestrian Priority Street”. According to the Regulating Plan<sup>3</sup>, these designated streets are “essential for providing appropriate pedestrian circulation within the Station Area. [They] typically lead directly to the transit stop or form a key part of the pedestrian network that leads to it.”

With that context, I submit that whether ATD supports restricting streets in Austin ‘generally’ has no relevance to this issue, which involves a specially-designated street intended to prioritize pedestrian traffic, in a specially-designated zone intended to prioritize transit users. The Applicant omits any discussion of these circumstances in its memorandum. On the contrary, it concludes that no “unique situations” exist here.

This raises some questions:

1. Is the Applicant aware that the gate in question controls access to a TOD and a Pedestrian Priority Street?
2. What steps, if any, has the Applicant taken to assess the impact of the change against the relevant planning standards for TODs or Pedestrian Priority Streets?
3. Do City agencies have an appropriate process to make recommendations that appropriately engage with the unique planning issues arising in TODs and similar districts?

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Planning/Urban\\_Design/Lamar-Justin%20Regulating%20Plan.pdf](https://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Planning/Urban_Design/Lamar-Justin%20Regulating%20Plan.pdf)

### *Sidewalks*

In the memorandum, ATD observes that a sidewalk exists. Specifically, “the recorded speeds [of the traffic study], along with the existing pedestrian sidewalk, do not present a notable safety concern.” This fails to account for the tendency of pedestrians like myself to enter the roadway, because the sidewalks are at peak times insufficient for actual pedestrian traffic.

While sidewalks may have an impact on perceived safety and encourage walkability, in fact only **3%** of pedestrian-involved crashes in Austin occur along a roadway, including sidewalks.<sup>4</sup> But **55%** occur when crossing a roadway. For example, as pedestrians now must cross when using that sidewalk, because the gate was removed.

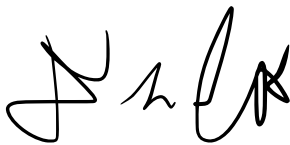
This raises some questions:

1. Is the Applicant suggesting that a sidewalk, which improves **perceived** pedestrian safety, is a substitute for the gate, which improves **actual** pedestrian safety?
2. In the Applicant’s traffic study, each measurement along Easy Wind Drive showed **more than twice** the baseline traffic. How many more **crossings** are conflicted due to the additional traffic, and how do those additional crossing conflicts impact pedestrian safety?

### *Conclusion*

I’d ask that you reject this change. On the basis of its impact on vulnerable road users, on its inconsistency with the goals and purposes of the TOD in which the gate exists, on the insubstantial arguments submitted by the Applicant, on the lack of any actual benefit to anyone, and on the inconsistency of this proposal with the goals of the City as it works to achieve its Vision Zero, transit, and environmental aims.

Sincerely yours,



Andrew Crawford

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<sup>4</sup> [https://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Transportation/Pedestrian\\_Safety\\_Action\\_Plan\\_1-11-18.pdf](https://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Transportation/Pedestrian_Safety_Action_Plan_1-11-18.pdf), p. 35

**From:** [Lubomudrov, Andrei](#)  
**To:** [Rhoades, Wendy](#)  
**Subject:** FW: C14-2022-0031 Morrow St.  
**Date:** Tuesday, May 10, 2022 12:35:19 PM

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Wendy, FYI. Let me know if I need to do anything else on this correspondence. - Andrei

-----Original Message-----

From: Helen Kelley  
Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2022 9:42 AM  
To: Lubomudrov, Andrei <[Andrei.Lubomudrov@austintexas.gov](mailto:Andrei.Lubomudrov@austintexas.gov)>; Chip Harris  
  
Subject: C14-2022-0031 Morrow St.

\*\*\* External Email - Exercise Caution \*\*\*

I am opposed to the TOD gaining access to Morrow Street as it impacts my safety on my morning runs with my dog. There is not sidewalk along both sides of Morrow and so people clump together on the south side that runs the entire length. The new sidewalk that was recently added along part of the north side goes largely under utilized. As a person undergoing cancer treatment last year, this presented a health risk for me since people were not keeping their distance and so frequently I would have to step into the street to maintain distance so that I didn't risk contracting Covid, which would have delayed my surgery and radiation treatments. On trash pick-up days, cars frequently go around trash trucks risking a collision with traffic coming from the opposite direction. Additionally, there are several cars that park on the street, especially during game days, which leads to further visibility issues. The train crossing also leads people to speed to avoid being stuck waiting for it to pass. In my opinion, the road should be a one way with bike lanes on each side of the street and sidewalks on both sides of the right of way spanning the entire length of Morrow. If ever there was a candidate for the city's healthy streets initiative this is it.

I'd like to point out the hypocrisy and poor planning that finds us considering more road access for a "transit oriented development." If anyone reading this had any common sense they would be asking themselves why do people living near a train station and bus lines need two car garages, street parking and more road access. That development and Muller should have been much more dense. Instead it was set up to maximize the developer's profits and the city council members' donations. Now existing neighborhoods are being asked to bear the brunt of committees like this and the city council's lack of foresight by accommodating denser development than what exists in the "Transit Oriented Development."

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7 year resident of Crestview

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