



**CITY OF AUSTIN**  
**LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE REWRITE**  
MESSAGING  
AUGUST 29, 2013

**CULTURAL  
STRATEGIES**

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# 1 | EXECUTIVE REPORT:

## LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE REWRITE PROCESS MESSAGING RESEARCH

The following report draws on qualitative research with Austin residents. Through 24 one-on-one interviews conducted between August 19 - 27, 2013, we have identified key perceptions and opinions that will help guide messaging in future outreach efforts for the land development code rewrite process.

### PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

We interviewed a heterogeneous group of 24 Austin residents:

- Fourteen males and 10 females ranging in age from their late 20s to early 60s agreed to be interviewed.
- Of those interviewed, 12 were non-Hispanic white, six were Hispanic, five were African-American and one was Asian.
- They lived all over Austin – five lived in Central Austin, four in the North and East parts of Austin, three in Northwest Austin, two each in Southwest and West Austin, and one each in Northeast Austin, South Austin, Southeast Austin, and the Extraterritorial Jurisdiction of Austin.

Their time living in Austin ranged from 1.5 years to all their lives. Four were relatively new to Austin (1-10 years), five have lived here between 11 and 20 years, four have lived in Austin from 21 to 30 years, five have been in Austin from 31 to 40 years, two have lived in Austin from 41 to 50 years, and four have lived in Austin for 50 years or more.

The majority of the interviewees owned a home or condominium; three were renters.

### KEY FINDINGS

#### WORD ASSOCIATION EXERCISES

- Code: Regulations, rules, guidelines, restrictions.
- Development: Growth, expansion, progress, land use, opportunity.
- Regulations: Bureaucracy, complex, necessary, rules, code.

#### KNOWLEDGE AND PERCEPTION OF “IMAGINE AUSTIN”

- Only 3 out of the 24 interviewees had not heard of Imagine Austin
- Of those who knew about it, 2 individuals have a negative perception of it; 3 don't have an opinion about it, and 19 feel it is positive for the city.
- Only 6 of the 21 interviewees who knew about Imagine Austin did not participate in its planning process.



The land development code is so complicated that it makes it so very hard to make any improvements in your home. Most people make improvements to their quality of life by making improvements to their homes. This city makes it impossible to make such improvements for those with little means.



## **WHAT DOES A “COMPACT AND CONNECTED CITY” MEANS TO YOU?**

- High population density, with good public transportation
- One that prevents urban sprawl
- Centralizing everything into the downtown area and providing quality services to all members of the community
- A sustainable and livable city
- A walkable and accessible city
- One with mixed use development and sustainable housing
- Smart density with better transit connectivity
- Building up, instead of out

## **MOST MENTIONED THEIR PERSONAL VALUES**

- Family
- Fitness
- Integrity
- Sustainability
- Faith
- Diversity
- Fairness
- Community
- Education

## **WHAT PEOPLE WOULD LIKE TO HAVE MORE OF IN THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD?**

- Restaurants/cafes
- Retail options
- A Health Clinic
- Safe Parks
- Cultural Diversity
- Affordable Housing
- Parking
- Walking Trails
- Street trees
- Increased attention to aesthetics
- Community meeting facilities
- Sidewalks
- Public transportation
- Bike Lanes

### **WHAT PEOPLE WOULD LIKE TO SEE LESS OF IN THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD?**

- Road bumps
- Parking restrictions
- Traffic
- Utility Poles
- Expensive housing
- Pawn shops
- Crime
- Chain restaurants

### **DOES YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD HAVE A DISTINCT CHARACTER?**

- 19 of the interviewed individuals stated that their neighborhood has a distinct character.

### **HOW DOES COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT FIT IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD?**

- 21 of the 24 interviewees believe that commercial development fits in one way or another in their neighborhood. It went from recognizing and appreciating the existent one, to mentioning the need for more, especially smaller retail stores.

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF OTHER NEIGHBORHOODS THEY LIKED**

- Anything with density
- Closer to downtown, with an urban feeling
- The ones that welcome low-income families
- Walkable, organic neighborhoods, with sidewalks
- The ones with diverse populations, for both age and ethnicity
- Ones with a mix of new and old
- Where there are more businesses
- Accessibility
- Those with enough/easy parking

## WHICH ARE THE GREATEST GROWTH CHALLENGES FOR AUSTIN?

- Infrastructure
- Gentrification / affordable housing
- Maintaining the quality of life
- Poor land use
- Transportation / Traffic
- People's fear of growth / Managing growth
- Taxes
- Cost of living

## WHAT TYPES OF PROJECTS WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE MORE OF?

- Vertical mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly projects
- Subway, light rail, and other transit options
- Safe parks
- Libraries, recreation areas/centers, and senior centers, that encourage community
- Bicycle infrastructure
- Traditional neighborhood design (like Mueller)
- Public art
- Affordable housing
- Businesses that people need on a daily basis
- Town centers with connectivity
- 2 or 4 story tall human-scale projects
- Different types of housing for different types of families
- Current neighborhood preservation, more adaptive re-use
- Maintaining current building character so that it fits the surrounding community
- More townhomes, two- and four-plexes
- Parks and dedicated trails
- More public restrooms

## DO YOU THINK YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT THE LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE IS?

- Nine of the 24 persons who participated in the interview process understand what the LDC is.
- Among these, here are some of the words/ideas they used to describe it:
  - A nightmare
  - Cumbersome
  - Leaves room for interpretation
  - A maze

- A byzantine exercise
- Rules and regulations
- Legislation by exception
- Continuously adding Band-Aids when we need an organ transplant
- Unnecessarily difficult
- Guidance and parameters for development

### HAVE YOU EVER USED THE LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE?

- 7 of the 24 interviewees had not used it; 2 did not answer.
- Of the 15 who had used it, 4 had used it only for personal reasons, 7 for business reasons, 2 for both personal and business reasons, and 2 for “other” reasons.
- Some of the expressions used to describe their experience with the code:
  - Confusing
  - Painful
  - Adds cost
  - Frustrating
  - Convoluted
  - Takes longer than it should
  - Unnecessarily complex
  - Inconsistently applied
  - It needs to be more forthright
  - It allows for misinterpretations



We need to develop land, business and transportation projects; making sure the least off among us have a fair shake in the process.

### SUGGESTIONS TO MAKE THE CODE EASIER TO UNDERSTAND:

- Use pictures/images/graphics
- Categorize it by user
- Use flowcharts
- Rewrite it starting broad and then have subsets fall within different categories
- Use simpler terminology and clear statements
- Explain its importance to all the community
- Provide an FAQ section
- Provide tools to help people understand when they are not in compliance, such as a toll-free number
- Make it predictable in terms of how long it takes and how it is applied
- Make sure that the interpretation remains consistent through time and different city personnel and departments
- Put the information online, have all information in one place
- Provide checklists, step-by-step processes



### **WHAT INFORMATION WOULD HELP PEOPLE UNDERSTAND WHAT THE LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE IS?**

- Explaining its impact, designated by neighborhood, or use type (homeowners, developers, small business)
- Explaining its purpose
- Distributing basic information to the community; a summary of the code
- Simplifying it, showing examples, pictures, video tutorials
- Providing a synopsis sheet with bullet points with basic information and an Internet link where people could learn more
- Letting people know what would happen if there wasn't a code
- Provide new home and business owners and with information about what the land development code means, how it affects what they can do to their property, and how it is used in the neighborhood
- Speaking to the right stakeholders about it in their language and in context

### **WHICH DO YOU FEEL ARE THE "HOT TOPICS" WITH THE LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE?**

- Compatibility
- Transportation
- Affordability
- Gentrification
- Balancing neighborhood and regional planning
- Suburbanization of poverty
- Sustainability/Environmental requirements
- Water
- Historic preservation
- Food trailers
- East vs. West
- Density bonuses
- Mixed-use development
- Accessibility

### **WHAT WOULD MAKE YOU WANT TO GET INVOLVED IN THE CONVERSATION?**

- Knowing I could have an impact on the process
- Getting someone I respect involved in the process
- A belief that something might actually change
- Addressing it by topics, according to what is important for different groups of people.
- Understanding why this is relevant to me, how it will impact my life
- Knowing that people with disabilities are being considered

## WHAT WOULD THE RIGHT CODE MEAN FOR AUSTIN?

- Austin would be a better place to live.
- It would help residents and homeowners, hold builders accountable and provide enforcement.
- More growth that is better planned, more efficient, less disruption...a quicker process; it would benefit everyone and allow for viable projects.
- A compact and connected code that promotes complete streets, physical activity, preserves the natural beauty of Austin and keeps it for people to enjoy.
- Make it relatively easy to have the kind of stuff we want in the place we want it.
- The land code should be developed to make recreational and entertainment for people that want to enjoy that here, particularly if we want to be a global city.
- Using a compass analogy, it will take the “due north” out of Imagine Austin and represent those values in this process.
- It would be fair, simple and understandable with clear-cut priorities and improve the quality of life.
- It has to respond to the needs of the community, including the aging community.
- It would create a more diverse city. We are currently driving down diversity because of affordability issues.
- Sustainable, livable community where the integrity of neighborhoods is protected and businesses are allowed to thrive.
- It would show that we care about the entire community and preserve the existing culture. Austin will city up!

## BRANDING CONCEPTS

We tested some initial branding ideas on people. Of the possible names, the top choices (in no particular order) were:

- Realize Imagine Austin – Reactions: The only one that is decent, I like it because it ties it to the comprehensive plan
- CodeNext – Reactions: Cute, Better
- However, some of the people who didn’t like Realize Imagine Austin said that it sounds like a mistake, it is complicated and that Imagine Austin has a bad rap.
- The people that didn’t like CodeNext said that it was too technical or sounded like a security company.
- Most people didn’t like the names with LDC in them (such as LDC Rewrite) because it is development speak, jargon, and that it may be the most direct, but people won’t know what it means.

## 2 | CREATIVE BRIEF

### WHAT IS THE BUSINESS CHALLENGE?

Develop a branding program that speaks about the citywide process to build a conversation around the Land Development Code rewrite under the umbrella of the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan.

### WHAT IS THE CREATIVE CHALLENGE?

Educate, inform, and motivate Austin residents to participate in the process to rewrite the Land Development Code by sharing their ideas and insights.

### WHO ARE WE TALKING TO?

Multigenerational Austin families, long-time residents, and newcomers from all walks of life.

### WHAT IS THEIR CURRENT MINDSET?

Austin residents know the city's secret is out and that their beloved city is growing and changing fast. Many express frustration with the city's growing pains and want to see significant improvements in affordability, mobility and other issues that are affecting their quality of life.

### WHAT IS THEIR DESIRED MINDSET?

Austinites feel we need to address this growth while still maintaining the city's "secret sauce" that makes it so unique. They desire to live in a compact and connected city that is affordable, open for business, preserves the existing character of neighborhoods and the city as a whole, and protects out natural resources.

### WHAT'S THE SINGLE MOST PERSUASIVE THING WE CAN TELL THEM TO CHANGE THEIR MINDS?

Paraphrasing one of the interviewees, this is a unique opportunity for Austin to "city up." What this means is that the city is taking action to revise the Land Development Code so that future growth will be well thought out and reflect the vision of Imagine Austin.

### WHY SHOULD THEY BELIEVE IT?

- The City of Austin has been working diligently to lay out the community's 30-year vision for the city through the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan.
- City officials, city leaders, business owners, educators, professionals, and ordinary residents agree that Austin has to undertake this bold move in order to better the quality of life of all its residents so that the city will continue to thrive and prosper.



Getting the code right would mean...a compact and connected code that promotes complete streets, physical activity, preserves the beauty of Austin and keeps it for people to enjoy.



## 3 | MESSAGING PLATFORM

This document proposes a messaging structure to introduce the Land Development Code (LDC) rewrite process to Austin's residents. The subject matter is intentionally high-level and structured to provide a general overview of how the LDC influences five distinct themes:

- Neighborhoods
- Affordability
- A Healthy Environment
- Business & Development
- Compact & Connected (Mobility)

Each of the above referenced content areas will allow for a much deeper explanation and body of copy to further educate a reader on the specifics of the LDC's impact. We anticipate inclusion of real stories and experiences in each section to better convey the context and relevance of the subject. This approach increases the effectiveness of the outreach message and effort by segmenting issues and matching them with interests represented by varied stakeholder groups.

### GENERAL STATEMENT

[PROJECT NAME] is a collaboration between Austin's residents, our business community, and civic institutions to realign our land use standards and regulations with our community's vision for the future and better respond to the needs of current and future residents.

### MESSAGING STRUCTURE

Austin has long been recognized for its appeal, creativity, culture, and the vitality of its residents. We treasure the uniqueness of our neighborhoods and small businesses, celebrate the diversity of ideas and backgrounds of our neighbors, and strive to live in an increasingly sustainable environment. Our city's distinctive character and lifestyle have made our city a great place to live, work and play, and we aspire to be a community that is affordable and accessible to all.

The Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan, adopted by the City Council in 2012, is a document that lays out our citizens' vision for a complete community and responds to the pressures and opportunities of our growing modern city. To realize the vision and goals of Imagine Austin, we must ensure that the city's Land Development Code, which is made up of the rules and processes that regulate where and what type of development may occur, is helping us achieve our goals, rather than getting in the way. The Land Development Code has a significant impact on our daily life, from shaping the kinds of places where we live, work, and shop, as well as influencing the design of our streets and public spaces. Our existing code, written nearly 30 years ago, is no longer effective in helping us create the kinds of places we want, or in addressing critical issues like diminishing natural resources, lack of household affordability, access to healthy lifestyles, and the development of public spaces.

The opportunity to update our Land Development Code means more than making it simpler to use and understand; it will create a framework to help improve our quality of life.

#### **MAINTAINING AND CREATING NEIGHBORHOODS WE LOVE:**

Every neighborhood in Austin has a distinct character worth preserving. The diversity of lifestyles and uniqueness of our living environments has given our city its personality and feel. The new Code will put a framework in place to better protect, enhance and ensure the long-term stability and appeal of our neighborhoods.

#### **KEEPING AUSTIN AFFORDABLE FOR ALL:**

Austin is a great place to live, and preserving housing choices and affordability will ensure that future generations, as well as existing residents, enjoy the benefits our city has to offer. A responsive Code will allow us to strengthen neighborhood character, enhance walkability, and create conditions that increase the availability of housing options to match a variety of needs and household incomes.

#### **PROTECTING OUR PRECIOUS NATURAL RESOURCES:**

Part of Austin's appeal is its natural beauty: from swimming in Barton Springs to walking along Lady Bird Lake Trail, or running on the Greenbelt, Austinites love the outdoors. We must protect our water supply, air quality and green spaces for future generations by managing the pressures of development and responding to the demands on our natural resources brought on by Austin's population growth and increase in drought conditions.

Updating the Land Development Code will help create new open spaces, both as parks, green streets and as part of public and private developments, contributing to the city's efforts to protect and enhance our natural resources.

#### **HELPING BUSINESSES THRIVE:**

Austin's entrepreneurial spirit has produced successful local businesses making our city attractive to outside investment, creating new jobs and business opportunities. Revising the Land Development Code will create a framework to enhance small business opportunities throughout our city by providing equitable and predictable regulations and processes, giving employers assurance that Austin will continue to be a thriving community for the workforce of the future.

#### **MAKING SURE WE CAN GET AROUND:**

It is no secret that it is becoming harder and harder to get around Austin. We are now living in one of the most congested cities in the nation. Many of us find it difficult to get to work or even a grocery store without an automobile. A revised Land Development Code will help create the kinds of development in appropriate locations that make walking, biking, and public transportation real options and help to make our neighborhoods more connected.

# CULTURAL STRATEGIES

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From: Cultural Strategies  
To: Matt Dugan, George Zapalac, Darrick Nicholas  
Re: COA - LDC List of In-Depth Interview Participants  
Date: September 16, 2013

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Cultural Strategies interviewed a heterogeneous group of 24 Austin residents between August 19 and August 27, 2013 to help guide messaging and branding for the Land Development Code Rewrite project. The list of interviewees, in alphabetical order by last name:

1. Steve Bercu, BookPeople, Owner/CEO; Austin Independent Business Alliance President
2. John-Michael Cortez, CapMetro, Community Involvement Manager
3. Laura Donnelly Gonzalez, Latinitas, Co-Founder
4. Frank Fernandez, Green Doors, Executive Director
5. Frank Fuentes, U.S. Hispanic Contractors Association, Chairman
6. Terri Givens, Take Back the Trail, UT Professor
7. August Harris, Historical Homeowner
8. Tam Hawkins, Capital City African American Chamber of Commerce
9. Dr. Phil Huang, Austin-Travis County Health and Human Services Department, Medical Director
10. Tim Jamail, Ultra Investments Inc., President
11. Carol Lee, Austin Neighborhoods Council, President
12. Nikelle Meade, Husch Blackwell, Partner/Attorney; Real Estate Council of Austin, President
13. Jeff Nebrat, Weitzman
14. Joseph Parker, Davis Chapel, Pastor
15. Robyn Pettinger, North Austin gym owner who had permit problems
16. Dan Pruett, Meals on Wheels and More, President/CEO
17. Cookie Ruiz, Ballet Austin, Executive Director
18. Mike Rypka, Torchy's Tacos, Owner
19. Vanessa Sarria, Community Action Network, Executive Director
20. Paul Scott, AIDS Services of Austin, Executive Director
21. Gregory Smith, Austin Revitalization Authority, President
22. Stephanie Thomas, ADAPT of Texas, National Organizer & Isabelle Headrick, Executive Director, Accessible Housing Austin
23. Roy Waley, Austin Sierra Club, Realtor
24. Ofelia Zapata, Austin Interfaith, Leader; Vice-Chair of the Southeast Neighborhood Contact Team

From: Cultural Strategies  
To: Matt Dugan, George Zapalac, Darrick Nicholas  
Re: COA LDC Rewrite In-Depth Interview Survey Questions  
Date: September 16, 2013

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## **Introduction**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I'm {person name} and I work for Cultural Strategies, which has been hired to help with branding for the city effort to revise the land development code. The purpose of this interview is to better understand your level of knowledge and experience with the land development code in Austin. Your personal information will not be shared, and your answers will remain confidential.

I am going to ask some general questions, for which there are no right or wrong answers. Really, we want to have a chat and give you an opportunity to share a little bit of your experiences. Before we get started do you have any questions?

## **Questions**

### **Topic 1: To start with, I'd like to do a few exercises for messaging purposes.**

1. Let's start with a couple of word association exercises.
  - a. What comes to mind when I say the word "code?"
  - b. What comes to mind when I say "development?"
  - c. What comes to mind when I say "regulations?"
2. Have you heard of Imagine Austin?
  - a. Do you feel it is positive or negative for our city and why?
  - b. Did you participate in the Imagine Austin planning process?
  - c. If so, how (attended a community event, provided feedback via the website or social media, etc.)? If not, why not?
  - d. Imagine Austin calls for a "compact and connected city?" What does that mean to you?

### **Topic 2: Now I'd like to get to know a little bit about you and your community.**

3. What are your top three values? (For example, family, fitness, fun, faith, creativity, etc.)
4. How long have you lived in Austin?
  - a. Why did you move to, or chose to stay in, Austin?
  - b. Do you rent or own?
5. Tell me about your neighborhood.
  - a. What part of town do you live in?

- b. Why did you choose to live there?
  - c. Are there things you would like to see less of in your neighborhood?
  - d. What could there be more of in your neighborhood to make your life better?
  - e. Does your neighborhood have a distinct character you feel is worth preserving? If so, how?
  - f. How do you feel commercial development fits within the neighborhood?
  - g. What other neighborhood(s) do you like and why?
6. Let's talk about Austin as a whole. The city has seen a lot of new development lately.
- a. What do you feel is the greatest growth challenge for Austin? (If nothing comes to mind right away, prompt them with affordability, transportation, sustainability, social equity, etc.)
  - b. What recent projects (such as parks, multi-use developments, public art, etc.) or buildings do you like and why?
  - c. What recent projects or buildings do you dislike and why?
  - d. What types of projects or buildings you like to see more of in Austin?

**Topic 3: Let's talk a little bit about the land development code.**

7. Do you feel you understand what the land development code is?
- a. [If yes]: How would you define it?
  - b. [If no]: Okay. I will read you a definition and then you tell me if that helps you understand:  
*The land development code contains the rules and processes that guide how land is used and developed in the city of Austin. Austin's land development code regulates new development, redevelopment, zoning, subdivisions, transportation and parking, outdoor signs, site plans, drainage, watershed protection, open space and more.*
8. Have you ever used the land development code (to get a building permit or to change the zoning of a property)?
- a. If so, was it in a personal or business capacity?
  - b. Would you mind sharing your experience with us?
9. How could the existing code be improved to make it easier to understand (i.e. more graphics, tables, flowcharts)?
10. What would help you have a better experience with using the code (i.e. checklist)?

**Topic 4: Let's talk about how we can make sure that everyone participates in the process to rewrite the code**

11. What information would help you understand what the land development code is?
12. What do you feel are the “hot topics” with the land development code?
13. What would make you want to get involved in the conversation?
14. Any ideas/suggestions we should keep in mind while reaching out to the community?
15. What would the right code mean for the future of Austin – its residents, business owners, developers, and even visitors?

**Topic 5: Finally, let’s discuss some branding ideas.**

16. We are exploring possible names for the land development code rewrite process. Which of the following names do you like the most?:
  - a. Realize Imagine Austin
  - b. LDC Rewrite
  - c. Recode Austin
  - d. Code Next
  - e. CodeSmart
17. Those are all the questions we have for today’s conversation, is there anything else you would like to share regarding the land development code?