CodeNEXT Land Development Code Advisory Group
Activities Update thru August 31st, 2014

Composition:
11 members including Chris Bradford, Mandy De Mayo, Stephen Delgado, Jim Duncan, Will Herring, Jeff Jack, Melissa Neslund, Stephen Oliver, Brian Reis (Vice-Chair), Beverly Silas, Dave Sullivan (Chair)

Structure:
CAG has monthly meetings, most often at 4pm during the week at City Hall. Meetings were initially led by City Staff but transitioned being led by Chair Sullivan. Attendance has been high and consistent from all 11 members. The roles of chair and vice-chair were approved by the CAG members after nearly one year of meetings. Community presence at CAG meetings been high and consistent as well. Typically there are 10-20 community members present

Activities:

1) to review staff and consultant briefings on the work product (i.e. Community Character presentations);

2) to discuss outreach efforts by staff and fellow members;

3) to discuss consultant scope of work as related to working group expectations and those expectations raised in discussions with various stakeholders;

4) to hear community feedback during each meeting;

5) to provide feedback on upcoming CodeNEXT schedule of product and meeting format (i.e. CodeTALKs);

6) to discuss ongoing problem areas within our current land development code to better educate ourselves in how to be better ambassadors to all the various stakeholders;

7) to raise concerns regarding other parallel code revision efforts (i.e. subdivision rewrite) and how other efforts will be best folded into the CodeNEXT effort.

Work Product Review

1) Listening to the Community Report was the summary and documentation of the first 6 months of outreach and listening efforts conducted by City of Austin staff, the CodeNEXT consultant, the CAG and invested stakeholders and community members. It was made available to illustrate the many steps and mediums of the initial listening phase of CodeNEXT. The report serves as a guide for the documentation of feedback, interviews, questions and additional resources received and provided during this phase.

   CAG involvement: The CAG reviewed the work product with staff, represented stakeholders and the consultant during our monthly meetings as well as participated directly in the Listening Sessions documented in the report. The CAG recognized that this lengthy initial phase helped significant additional information that can be used in the context of understanding community needs and concerns surrounding the Code Rewrite. Austin's listening phase has been identified as uniquely more in depth that Code Rewrite

efforts in other peer cities. However, the CAG also recognizes that the conclusion of this phase should not be viewed as the end of significant "listening efforts".

2) Community Character Manual

3) Code Diagnosis

CAG Feedback – Moving Forward

The significance of the CodeNEXT effort cannot be understated. The Working Group understands how critical it is to align the goals of Imagine Austin with a supportive Land Development Code. Key steps have already been recognized by the CAG and have been set in motion.

1. The CAG has witnessed the key relationship between a simplified and effective LDC and the "operating system" of city departments and the plan review process. Repeated consistently throughout our meetings has been a desire to best align the plan review process and departmental structure within the CodeNEXT product. The City of Austin has now hired a consultant to specifically address this relationship between code and administration of the code to which the CAG fully supports.
2. Continued Communication and expansion on difficult and/or sensitive areas within the code prior to later Draft approaches is necessary to build a foundation of understanding of how are code currently works. Often Code can be simultaneously successful and failing in helping our community realize the goals of Imagine Austin. This duality can be confusing to even seasoned professionals working daily with the LDC. The CAG strongly encouraged beginning CodeTALKs as early as possible so as to directly address difficult development issues early in rewrite process. In June, the first CodeTALK was held centered on the topic of "Compatibility". The event, held over two sessions, was strongly attended.
   a. The CAG feels the momentum of holding CodeTALKs should be aggressively maintained throughout the second year of the rewrite
   b. Identifying follow up meetings on each topic is critically important so that there may be opportunities for progress on each issue.
   c. Explore small or localized opportunities to highlight or test zoning assumptions or mapping exercises. This would enable all members of the community to gain additional and timely insight into what future zoning discussion may entail upon completion of the new Code. The lack of opportunities to gain additional understanding of the parameters of the future mapping process often creates further uncertainty and resistance to the ongoing Code writing process.

In addition the following areas have been identified by the CAG to be addressed during the upcoming phases of work.

3. Clarity in the Neighborhood Planning process – CAG members have identified significant and growing confusion in the current and future Neighborhood Planning efforts related to CodeNEXT and the implementation of Imagine Austin. A wide range of stakeholders representing Neighborhood associations as well as those involved with design and development have pointed to a lack of clarity in the relationship of upcoming CodeNEXT mapping (2017), current formulation of new Neighborhood Plans, and the future update of small area plans. This confusion often takes significant time and energy in CAG meetings though not directly related to current CAG agenda items. However, addressing these concerns about "What will happen next?" is key to the CAG being able to best provide input to City of Austin staff and the Consultant on current and future Code work products. The CAG has reached out to City of Austin and Planning Commission to support additional efforts to address Neighborhood Planning confusion.
4. Utilization of Envision Tomorrow – the CAG established a working group to track and provide input into the development of the zoning capacity modeling software being utilized by the Consultant team. It is important to understand and appropriately define expectations for the work product. The software has been targeted as key opportunity for understanding area specific issues related to zoning, affordability, infrastructure costs,

and patterns of population growth. The software can be used to test assumptions when considering a range of zoning and LDC implications.

Observations and Consistent themes from Outreach Efforts

Staff and the Working Group have been working diligently to share the CodeNext process and educational components with a wide range of stakeholders and community groups.   Some groups are very receptive to changes to the Code while others are skeptical as to the success of this endeavor.   More outreach is consistently on our agenda and in the works.

This report specifically highlights the following items for additional consideration:

1. Ongoing fears by some stakeholders, specifically Austin Neighborhood Council, that the process is moving too fast to be properly vetted by the community as a whole.
2. Consistently the CAG hears from stakeholders wanting answers to Code Rewrite questions that will be answered during later phases of the rewrite effort. Because the initial listening session was robust and long in duration and the Draft Code is still several steps away, there is a natural impatience for wanting concerns to be immediately addressed related to specific areas of the code.
3. The presentation of the LDC rewrite during CAG meetings and Community Outreach events has been significantly weighed towards Imagine Austin principle of "Compact and Connected", though Imagine Austin identifies 6 other core principles.
4. The CAG hears many concerns related to fears of the unknown which is to be expected during such an extensive review of how our current LDC impacts our city policies, goals and the built environment.

Recommendations to City Staff, Planning Commission and City Council

The CAG suggests the following set of actions to positively address opportunities and obstacles of successful progress through the LDC Code Rewrite process:

1. Develop a "Decision Tree" of what is known and unknown in future scenarios of updates to existing Neighborhood Plans and the formation of New Plans. Though the structure and representation of City Council will change during both during the early and later stages of the lengthy Code Rewrite process, it is critical to resolve as much of the confusions surrounding the future of neighborhood plans, their updates, the remapping efforts of CodeNEXT and the resources necessary to engage the community for each scope of work. Neighborhood Planning and CodeNEXT are different but parallel efforts in the context of Imagine Austin.
2. Provide a more balanced effort to address other Imagine Austin priority programs in CodeNEXT:
    a. Sustainably manage our water resources
    b. Continue to grow Austin's economy
    c. Use green infrastructure
    d. Grow and invest in Austin's creative economy
    e. Develop and maintain household affordability
    f. Creative a Healthy Austin Program
    The emphasis on Compact and Connected without due mention of other priority programs leads some to the conclusions that CodeNEXT is only for the implementation of "Compact and Connected".