

June 14, 2010

RE: Message from Music Commission regarding the Waller Creek Master Plan

Dear Mayor Leffingwell, Mayor Pro Tem Martinez, Councilmember Shade, Councilmember Morrison, Councilmember Cole, Councilmember Riley, Councilmember Spelman and City Manager Marc Ott:

Last week, the Music Commission discussed the Waller Creek Master Plan Final Draft. While we are all in agreement that Waller Creek redevelopment has the potential to create immensely valuable opportunities for the City, we are also all *very* concerned about the potential devastating impact of this redevelopment on the ecosystem of small businesses and the creative community that currently reside on Red River Street.

First, the Draft Master Plan neglected to research and discuss relevant facts in its “Creative Community” section. It is not our “famed” 6th Street, but instead the Red River district that serves as the epicenter of SXSW and is internationally known for its music and uniqueness, drawing dollars and visitors throughout the entire year, while creating substantial economic opportunities for the City, local businesses and local artists. Think Stevie Ray Vaughn, Janis Joplin and her trio, The Waller Creek Boys, and Ernie Mae Miller and the 13th Floor Elevators – the Red River district has historically played and continues to play a major role in incubating and developing young Austin artists into seasoned pros who can be exported internationally.

An understanding of the fundamental vitality of the Red River network to the entire music and creative community is clearly lacking from this report, and the significant economic, cultural and historical impacts of the Red River ecosystem deserve consideration. We intend to work with the consultants and City staff to revise this section to appropriately identify key facts about this creative network while also underscoring the devastating impact that destroying this network could have on our local creative industry and related economic opportunities.

Second, the Draft Master Plan merely states that these local businesses should be protected if possible, but if not, these businesses should receive incentives and subsidies for relocating to East 6th Street. The consultants have made a colossal assumption that displacement of these local business is an acceptable casualty of redevelopment and that these businesses can simply succeed by relocating to 6th Street. This evidences a failure of the consultants to communicate with these businesses and a true misunderstanding of both 6th Street and the character of the creative ecosystem that thrives on Red River.

Why not first incentivize developers on Red River to expand and incorporate existing local businesses in the creative industry into their projects? Why must redevelopment of Waller Creek and the growth of creative local businesses be mutually exclusive?

We therefore request Council: (1) to consider the recommendations of the Downtown Austin Plan regarding live music and incentives, and incorporate these into the Draft Master Plan; (2) to direct the Creative Community section of the Draft Master Plan to be revised to include all relevant facts; and (3) most importantly, to consider all available avenues to maintain this thriving creative ecosystem of businesses on Red River before the discussion focuses on relocation of these businesses.

Respectfully submitted by the members of the Austin Music Commission,

Brad Stein, Chairman
Paul Oveisi, Vice Chairman and Chairman of the Live Music Task Force
Rich Garza
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