

# RYAN DRIVE WORKING GROUP REPORT

APRIL 2018



## Ryan Drive Working Group Report

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## INTRODUCTION

In spring 2018, the City of Austin Office of Real Estate Services intends to draft a request for proposals to redevelop an Austin Energy site located at the intersection of Ryan Drive and Justin Lane. Prior to this initiative, the Office of Council Member Leslie Pool plans to develop a Council resolution to establish high-level goals and guide the city's process for requesting proposals on how to develop the site. In November 2017, Council Member Leslie Pool and the Office of Real Estate hosted a meeting to discuss the opportunities and challenges related to redeveloping the Austin Energy site. Roughly 50 residents from Crestview and Brentwood attended the meeting and provided input via large group discussion, written responses, and one-on-one conversations with District 7 and Office of Real Estate staff. A summary of the meeting can be found at [crestviewna.com/ryan-drive/](http://crestviewna.com/ryan-drive/)

Common themes emerged from the initial input gathered during community meeting in November 2017. Participants indicated that affordable housing, parkland, affordable creative space, and robust transit access were shared community needs for this site. In order to further analyze the initial themes, a working group of 12 citizen volunteers formed in January 2018 to review site materials, gather input from residents of nearby neighborhoods, and craft a set of recommendations to guide redevelopment of the parcel. The working group was facilitated by CNA executive board members with support from the office of Council Member Leslie Pool.

### About the Property

The 5.2 acre property, located in the Crestview neighborhood, is currently used as an Austin Energy storage facility. The city's Office of Real Estate Development has indicated that the city intends to retain ownership of the land and offer a ground lease to a developer through a bid process. The zoning of the tract falls under the Lamar/Justin Lane Transit Oriented Development regulating plan and is adjacent, but does not currently have access, to the Crestview Metrorail station. The nearest major intersection is Airport Blvd. and N. Lamar Blvd. In 2013, nearby residents noted that Crestview is categorized as park-deficient and campaigned for the property to be redeveloped as parkland. The tract is located near single-family homes, multi-family homes, and commercial properties.



### About the Working Group

Member selection was guided by the goal of representing diverse backgrounds and viewpoints, as well as all of the nearby neighborhoods (Brentwood, Crestview, Highland, and Midtown). The community members who served on the committee were Allison Mabry, Anne-Charlotte Patterson (chair), Brian Carr, David Danenfelzer, Elaine Stegant, Joe Goessling, Jolie Willis, Julie Zuniga, Maya Pilgrim, Nancy Barnard (co-chair), Rachel Tepper, Ryan Kirk, and Whitney Johnson. Meetings were held 1/15, 1/22, 1/25, and 2/1, 2/7, 2/21 and 3/8. On April 9th, a public meeting was held at the Crestview United Methodist Church to present the findings of the working group.

# COMMUNITY SURVEY

## **Overview**

The Ryan Drive Community Working Group solicited community feedback regarding redevelopment of a underutilized city-owned property near the intersection of Ryan Drive and Justin Lane. The online survey was active from January 27, 2018 to February 12, 2018. To promote the survey, the link was shared widely by working group members on Facebook, Nextdoor, Twitter, neighborhood Yahoo email groups, and the Crestview Neighborhood Association newsletter. Flyers were also printed in Spanish and English and provided to the Midtown Flats, Midtown Commons, The Joplin at Crestview, and Argosy at Crestview apartment complexes.

The survey consisted of 30 questions organized into the four themes that emerged at the November 2017 community meeting: affordable housing, transit, parkland and creative space; as well as a number of questions intended to gather demographic information about survey respondents.

The online survey received 664 total responses. A Spanish version was available but received no completed responses. Paper copies of the survey were available upon request and 1 paper version was received.

**Complete survey results may be found at [crestviewna.com/ryan-drive/](http://crestviewna.com/ryan-drive/)**

## **Demographics of the Survey**

Demographic data gathered by the survey revealed that most respondents are white, middle class, and in their 30's, 40's, or 50's. 64% of respondents identified themselves as owning a home within 2 miles of the site, and 16% identified themselves as renters living within a 2 miles radius of the property. A large majority of respondents stated that they had in lived in Austin for 5 years or more. 80% of respondents reside in either the 78757 or 78752 zip code. (The Ryan Dr. property is located in a portion of 78757 that is adjacent to 78752.)

# ANALYSIS

## Values and Priorities

Below are the most highly agreed-upon characteristics of an ideal neighborhood differentiated between home renters and homeowners living within 2 miles of the Ryan Dr. property. While both valued a safe and walkable neighborhood, renters most agreed upon an ideal neighborhood having easy access to mass transit and affordability while owners mostly agreed that an ideal neighborhood would include ample green space and be environmentally friendly.

### RENTERS'

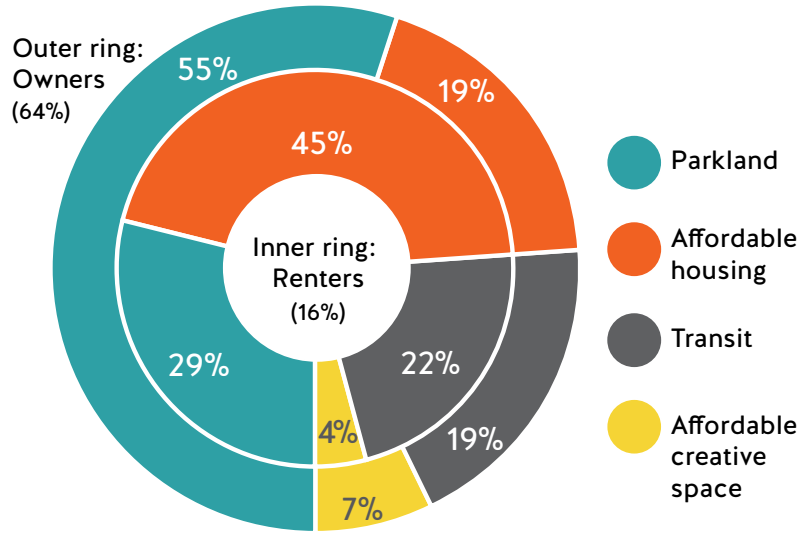
1. Safe and easy to walk
2. Easy access to mass transit
3. Affordable

### OWNERS'

1. Safe and easy to walk
2. Ample green space
3. Environmentally friendly

These differences were also reflected in renters' and owners' priorities, with affordable housing being the primary priority for renters and parkland being the primary priority for owners. The donut chart below demonstrates the opposing priorities between renters and owners when it comes to affordable housing and park/green space. Renters' priorities are the inside ring; owners' priorities are outside ring.

**First priority for Ryan Drive parcel, neighborhood owners & renters**





## Affordable Housing

Affordable housing is a clear desire for the majority of respondents. More than 50% of respondents agree that some form of affordable housing should be included in the redevelopment. Respondents support affordable housing with a mix of income levels and unit sizes with an emphasis on family-friendly 2 and 3 bedroom units. 49% of respondents were either very supportive or supportive of allowing additional building height (up to 60 feet or 5 stories) in exchange for additional affordable housing. The survey reflected differences in renters' and owners' priorities, for example renters were 15% more supportive of additional building height in exchange for affordable housing.

Both owners and renters overwhelmingly see affordability as part of an ideal neighborhood but differently prioritize affordability. Respondents shared open-ended comments about what affordable housing means to them. Housing costs between 20-35% of a household's total budget (or with transportation, 45%) and housing for households below MFI were shared most commonly occurring themes with both renters and owners.

Since not all feedback could be captured in the quantified survey questions, representative write-in comments on affordable housing are included below:

*"perfect spot for it I am reminded that the homes in Crestview were initially affordable to hard working young families - \$8,000 - \$8,500 price tag - that's our legacy"*

*"i definitely support it being an austin native and seeing how it has changed so drastically i was fortunate to make enough to afford to stay in the city and enjoy its amenities and i wish others had that opportunity as well"*

*"I'm worried about housing costs in the area I want housing that helps alleviate this stress and creates a more economically diverse neighborhood"*

*"We are in danger of becoming like San Francisco where most of the housing is targeted to young, well-off professionals There are almost no children in San Francisco, and families cannot afford to live there"*

## Transit

Survey results showed that access across the Metrorail line through the Ryan Tract is very important. 51% of responders ranked Crestview Metrorail station as their number one destination to access through the property and 20% ranked the nearby Capital Metro bus stops as their number one destination. Additionally, 55% ranked it very important that the new development include a transit plaza with access to the Crestview Station Metrorail. Other representative write-in comments on access through the site include:

*"Accessibility to the rail line WITHOUT having to go to Lamar Blvd is important"*,

*"Just safe lit paths for our kids to use to visit their friends and get to school via bikes"*

*"Having public transit access is a fundamental feature of this site"*

Since the site is over 5 acres in size it must be subdivided into blocks and an road internal to the site is required to provide fire and parking access. The TOD plan shows a wide typical roadway sections as a guide. The working group solicited feedback on the type of desired interior road elements order to aid in the development of a typical roadway section. Wide sidewalks and trees are the highest ranked roadway elements with 34% and 31% respectively. 61% ranked parallel parking as the lowest priority. When combined, the bicycling options rank high with 34% ranking either a striped bike lane, protected bike Lane, or combined shared use path as their number one roadway element.

78% said they would be likely (either very likely or somewhat likely) to use alternative transit (walking, biking, trains, bus) to access the site if including more amenities at the Ryan Drive property meant less space for parking.

Since not all feedback could be captured in the quantified survey questions, representative write-in comments on transit access through the site are included below:

"Sufficient bike rack space. I like the one at the highland train stop"

*"Small connections - devote most to parkland"*

*"Make this a park and ride spot I would probably take the Cap Metro if it was a Park and Ride"*

*"Keep cars out of the equation!!"*

*"If we want affordable housing, we need ways for people to get to their jobs if they don't have a car So, access to transportation to other parts of the city is important"*

*"It shouldn't create more traffic at the Lamar/Airport exchange"*

*"Transit access is good, but we should be careful not to lose too many housing units by crafting the perfect sidewalk and bike access ROW"*

*"Make a safe crossing for the Red Line trail across Lamar Right now it dead ends - very poor and unsafe access"*

## Parkland

82% of survey respondents use Brentwood Park, 52% use Northwest District Park, and 31% use either Ramsey Park or the pocket parks at Crestview Station/Midtown Commons. Citizens use their neighborhood parks for walking (76%), exercise (61%), relaxation (58%), to spend time with family and friends (49%), and to walk dogs (46%). Nearly half (49%) of the respondents use their neighborhood park on a weekly basis.

Of the 664 respondents, 289 people said parkland and outdoor amenities is their number one priority for the Ryan Drive property.

67% of respondents said they would prefer a traditional park (open green space, gravel trails) to an urban park (plaza-style hardscape and paved areas). However, 56% of the respondents said they would be more likely to visit a park at Ryan Drive if that park offered features not available at their neighborhood park.

When asked about amenities to be included in a new park, specific comments mentioned: "dog park," "playground" or "playscape," "splash pad," "trails," and "skate park"

## Creative Space

Although creative space did not weigh as high a priority as the others, one thoughtful comment summarized it best: *If the decision is to pursue affordable housing on this property, it should be calibrated with the other goals. You can't neglect any of them if you want this development to truly benefit the community.*

In response to survey questions regarding creative and arts space, respondents felt that the ideas were "worth considering." Specifically, the first priority for 44% of the respondents was an outdoor amphitheater.

When asked what amenities they would like to see included in a creative space, specific comments included (out of 119 total comments):

"amphitheater" – 9 comments

"music" – 9 comments

"outdoor" – 9 comments

"classes" – 6 comments



# RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are organized into the four themes that emerged at the November 2017 community meeting: affordable housing, transit, parkland and creative space.

## General Recommendations

**Recommendation:** The Request for Proposals for the Ryan Drive property should emphasize a multi-use approach for the site.

**Reason:** Community input, via survey and community meetings, has indicated that both parkland and affordable housing are needed at the site. At the same time, neighbors have noted that developing the site in a way that supports alternative transportation and provides access to nearby mass transit options is an opportunity not to be missed. Lastly, the working group does *not* recommend that significant portions of the site be developed for commercial retail purposes, as community members have not indicated a need for that use at this site, and there is ample space for retail endeavors at adjacent properties. In lieu of commercial retail, non-housing portions of structures built on the site could be using for non-profit spaces.



**Recommendation:** Style, design or other comments about how the property will look should not be emphasized in requests for proposals for the Ryan Drive property.

**Reason:** While it would be nice to design this site ourselves, the working group members cannot assume that we, as individuals will have the same design standards that the neighborhood as a whole will. The nearby communities should feel free to comment on setbacks, heights and other aspects of the project, but avoid the use of styles (i.e. Victorian, Art Deco, Modern, etc...) that might otherwise limit the possibilities of the developer, or create confusion among the stakeholders.

**Recommendation:** Though not specifically noted in the survey questions, several respondents noted the benefit that land trusts may have at the Ryan Drive property.

**Reason:** Though community land trusts that focus on conservation are well understood, land trusts for affordable housing are only now taking shape in Texas and in Austin. For example, Austin Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC) has partnered with both for-profit and nonprofit developers in the recent past to develop projects similar to the one proposed for the Ryan Drive property; and the Austin Creative Alliance and city council are exploring the possibility of cultural land trusts to address the rapid loss of creative space.

**Recommendation:** This site alone is not large enough to address Crestview's parkland deficiency, affordability crisis, or transportation issues. The neighborhood and city leaders should continue to develop separate initiatives to solve these issues.

**Reason:** The Ryan Drive property, at just over 5 acres, is a small parcel. While it's the hope of this group that the future development will represent best use for this type of property, we realize that devoting it exclusively to one use is not enough to meet the any one of the challenges facing North Central Austin.

## Affordable Housing

**Recommendation 1:** Allow up to 5 stories or 60 feet of height for housing that includes affordable units on east side of property furthest away from existing single family homes.

• *A higher density might be acceptable as a bonus for greater affordability restrictions.*

**Reason:** The west side of the site is closer to lower-density residential facilities. In order to integrate with nearby residential properties, higher-density residential facilities should be located on the east side of the site. The eastern side is also adjacent to commercial/warehouse structures and is likely going to have higher density redevelopment in the future. 49% of respondents were either very supportive or supportive of allowing additional building height (up to 60 feet or 5 stories) in exchange for additional affordable housing.

**Recommendation 2:** Provide a mix of unit sizes from 1 to 3 bedrooms.

*Points should be given to developers willing to provide*

- *a higher percentage of "family-friendly" units such as 2-3 bedroom units*
- *a higher percentage of units accessible to persons with disabilities than what is required by law.*
- *family friendly amenities such as a playground, picnic tables, sport courts, and childcare facilities.*

**Reason:** Affordable housing is a clear desire for the majority of respondents. Question 8 demonstrates that more than 50% of respondents agree that some form of affordable housing should be included. The highest positive response rates were for housing for Persons with Disabilities (61.27%) and Families (57.27%). There was also a clear desire to provide a mix of housing unit sizes in Q5, and mix of income groups in Q6.

**Recommendation 3:** At least 50% of the housing provided on the Ryan Drive property should be affordable to incomes ranging from <30-80% median family income (mfi). Consideration should also be given for housing for incomes that range from 80% to 120% mfi.

**Reason:** Over 70% of respondents support affordable housing for a mix of income levels. Q6 asked respondents to weigh in on how affordable the units on the Ryan Drive property should be. The highest majority of respondents (47.32%) prioritized housing affordable to a mix of incomes (<30-80% median family income). Q4 asked participants to indicate on a scale from 1 to 100%, how much of the housing on the site should be affordable. The average number provided by respondents was 47.

**Recommendation 4:** In order to preserve maximum flexibility and site amenities, ensure the adjacent property to the west is integrated into the design of the Ryan Drive property.

**Reason:** Currently the Ryan Drive property is not within 100 feet of low-density residential uses and therefore does not trigger compatibility requirements. However this could change if the parcel to the west sought rezoning. The city should include a plan for the parcel to ensure that this tract is integrated into the Ryan Drive property and provides a transition from the higher density residential to the east and the lower density residential to the west.

**Recommendation 5:** Due to the proximity to a Capital Metro Hub, reduce the minimum parking requirements for apartments on the Ryan Drive property to 40% of that prescribed by the LDC (Land Development Code).

**Reason:** 78% of survey respondents indicated that they were very likely or somewhat likely to use alternative transit if the Austin Energy site included more amenities in exchange for parking. The Justin/Lamar TOD regulating plan permits a 60 percent reduction in minimum parking requirements. Since the adoption of the TOD plan in 2009, Capital Metro has significantly increased transit service on Lamar Blvd. Studies show find that TODs typically build 23 to 61 percent of the minimum parking required by code. A benefit of reducing the amount of parking is it will reduce the number of cars driving through the neighborhood.

## Transit

**Recommendation 1:** Provide pedestrian and bicycle access across the Metrorail that is easily accessible from both the amenities located at the Ryan Tract and from Justin Lane.

*• Points should be given to developers that provide an at-grade crossing for uninterrupted direct traffic across the railroad tracks.*

**Reason:** Survey results ranked access across the tracks to Crestview Station as very important. (Question 10) On question 13, over 70% of respondents said they want a transit plaza with access to Crestview Station Metrorail was a “very important” or “important” feature of the site. Numerous respondents noted that traveling through the Ryan Dr. property would allow pedestrians and cyclists to avoid the heavy auto traffic at the corner of Airport and Lamar.



**Recommendation 2:** Internal site access should be primarily pedestrian but designed to accommodate emergency vehicles. Automobile circulation should be minimized by providing quick access to the parking garage so that people can park once and walk.

**Reason:** Sidewalks and trees were the highest ranked roadway elements, and respondents place importance on safety and walkability. A innovative permeable and plantable pavement system like this one could be used for the roadway.

**Recommendation 3:** Include bicycle amenities throughout the site and establish connections to existing bicycle networks.

**Reason:** 34% ranking either a striped bike lane, protected bike Lane, or combined shared use path as their number one roadway element and another 34% ranked wide sidewalks as their number 1 priority.

**Recommendation 4:** Protect the existing residential streets (specifically Ryan Dr and St. John’s Circle) from increased parking and traffic created by the new development at the Ryan Drive property.

**Reason:** At a community mobility discussion on March 3, 2018 led by Council Member Pool’s office and attended by Capital Metro representatives and city transportation experts, nearby residents and neighborhood leaders expressed concerns that overflow parking from the site would cause congestion and decrease safety on nearby residential streets.

**Recommendation 5:** In order to maximize park space and other amenities, provide a minimal number of parking spaces for parkland and transit users with 2-hour limits, and develop an underground parking space.

**Reason:** 77% of respondents said they would be very likely or somewhat likely to use alternative transit (walking, biking, trains, bus) to access the site if including more amenities at the Ryan Drive property meant less space for parking. Several write in comments indicated a desire to maximize affordable house and/or park space on the site and limit the space for cars and ROW.

## Parkland

**Recommendation 1:** The Ryan Drive property should include, at minimum, a 1.5 to 2-acre neighborhood park.

• *Points should be given to developers that can maximize space by including adjacent parcels in order to create an even larger park.*

**Reason:** Via survey and community meetings, neighbors have indicated a strong desire for parkland in this space. In addition, Crestview is classified as park-deficient by 15 acres

**Recommendation 2:** The park at the Ryan Drive property should include unique features not available in the existing parks and greenspaces within a ½ mile of the site.

**Reason:** 56% of the respondents said they would be more likely to visit a park at Ryan Drive if that park offered features not available at their neighborhood park.

When asked what amenities they would like to see included in a new park, specific comments mentioned “dog park,” “playground” or “playscape,” “splash pad,” “trails,” and “skate park”



**Recommendation 3:** The park at the Ryan Drive property should be a single contiguous space, designed as a central component of the site, with active edges and buffered from traffic.

**Reason:** Several survey respondents indicated a desire for open park space and a prioritization of safety and walkability that would be difficult to achieve with small pocket parks.

**Recommendation 4:** Austin Parks and Recreation Department should be included in public meetings and in the next phase of planning and development.

**Reason:** The Parks Department can help determine the appropriate size of the park and what amenities should be included to accommodate the wants and needs of residents. Community outreach meetings should include a park mapping exercise that helps neighbors visualize and give input for what could be included.

## Creative Space

**Recommendation 1:** A small, flexible use outdoor performance space, similar to the one found at Ramsey Park, should be incorporated as an element of site.

**Reason:** A significant number (44%) ranked an outdoor amphitheater their top priority for creative space on the site.

Due the small size of the parcel, the working group recommends a small outdoor performance space that utilizes features such as grassy terraced seating and a covered stage area which can be used and enjoyed by park-goers daily, not just at performances times.

**Recommendation 2:** Development on the site should included affordable and flexible spaces that could be used as studios, art classrooms, or rehearsal spaces.

**Reason:** A number of respondents (42%) ranked either arts classroom space or studio space as their top priority for creative space on the site. Flexible arts spaces could be used for either purpose. The nearby AISD schools (Brentwood Elementary, Lamar Middle School, and McCallum High School) all feature robust fine arts programs, therefore creative studio/classroom space at this location is a natural fit for the student population in the area.



**Recommendation 3:** The Austin Creative Alliance should be included in public meetings and in the next phase of planning and development.

**Reason:** The Austin Creative Alliance is focused on finding solutions that address the ongoing loss of affordable creative space in Austin.

## NEXT STEPS

- Council Member Pool's office drafts council resolution informed by the Ryan Dr. Working Group recommendations
- The District 7 office hosts a meeting to recap the process and present the resolution and solicit feedback.
- CM Pool presents the finalized resolution to Council