Community Character in a Box FAQ

What is the purpose of this exercise?
An important part of CodeNEXT is a Community Character Analysis.   We are trying to understand how our current Land Development Code and the character of different parts of our City may be supporting the physical characteristics and uniqueness of Austin's neighborhoods or getting in the way of creating places the community values. During this process, we will be taking a careful look at the character of neighborhoods and the larger community. We need your help to make sure we understand Austin's "DNA" — those qualities, experiences, and places that people love. This new code must reflect the unique character of neighborhoods throughout Austin.

Why don't you just use the existing neighborhood plans?
For areas that have adopted neighborhood plans, we are using the plans to identify goals and policies that are important to the residents of those areas. However, most of the plans do not document the community character in the way that we are trying to do in this exercise: identifying the building types and other physical characteristics that make each neighborhood special. In these areas, the community character analysis will supplement, not replace, the adopted neighborhood plans.   In addition, less than half of the city limits is covered by adopted neighborhood plans. In areas without a plan, the community character analysis will provide a basis for defining what features the residents would like to maintain as well as opportunities for compatible new development.

What are the components of the Community Character Analysis?
The Community Character Analysis has two main components: the asset mapping and the photo documentation. Asset mapping involves marking an aerial photo with assets, constraints, and opportunities and writing a brief description of why the participants judge these features to be positive or negative. Photo documentation involves submittal of digital photos that identify existing conditions in the neighborhood, whether positive or negative.

Who can participate in the Community Character in a Box exercise?
The exercise is open to all residents of Austin. We encourage groups to work together on the mapping and photography, but individuals are also welcome to participate on their own.

How will the information submitted be used?
All information submitted will be displayed on the CodeNEXT website: http://www.austintexas.gov/department/community-character . Representative photos will also be selected and displayed on posters which will be included in the Community Character Manual, a library of data from all the neighborhood reporting areas in Austin. The first edition of this manual is online at: ftp://ftp.ci.austin.tx.us/GIS-Data/planning/CodeNext/Community_Character_Manual/. Updates to the manual will be prepared as information is received from additional neighborhoods throughout 2014.

The photo documentation will help the CodeNEXT team define new zoning districts for the City that are sensitive to the different contexts that exist in Austin. The asset mapping, in conjunction with existing zoning and adopted neighborhood plans, will help to define how the new zoning districts are actually applied to specific properties after the new Code is adopted by City Council (schedule for the fall of 2016).

Where do I return the box when I've finished the exercise?
Please return it to the 5th floor receptionist at One Texas Center between 7:45 AM and 4:45 PM, Monday through Friday. Please do not attach additional pieces of paper directly to the map that you submit. If you wish to include additional files, please include them in the returned box or send electronically to paulina.urbanowicz@austintexas.gov. All submitted maps will be scanned and put up on the Flickr website for viewing convenience.

How do I turn in photos after I've taken them?
Each box has a unique e-mail address to which photos should be sent. Please be aware of the following requirements:
- **Photograph file type**: Please submit as JPGs saved at maximum quality. We cannot process RAW files.
- **Photo file size**: approximately 3,000 KB - 10,000 KB (3 MB – 10 MB) as a jpg.
- **Email Attachment Limitations:**
  - The domain @austin.rr.com is incompatible for submitting photos to the email address supplied. All other email domains should work.
  - Email attachments need to total less than 80,000 KB (80 MB). You can submit more than one email with attachments.
- **Email Body Text:** Please note text added in the body of the email will not be received. Any text that participants wish to include should be sent as an attachment (NOT written on the photo).

Can I add comments to the photos I submit?
Please do not annotate photos that you are submitting. The mapping exercise and the photo documentation exercise are two separate parts. We are creating posters that capture the residential and commercial character of current existing conditions in each neighborhood reporting area. These are included and can be found in the Community Character Manual, and are meant to provide a visual library for readers. Annotations take away from the photo itself and the surrounding context that is meant to be captured.

We will accept and look at all feedback and documentation submitted. If you would like to submit photos with annotations, please know that if we cannot crop the annotated lines, they will not be included on a poster but will be posted on the website.

What are the deadlines for submittal of a completed Community Character in a Box?
We have broken the process into three phases:
- First submission deadline: April 21, 2014

- Second submission deadline: July 31, 2014
- Third submission deadline: TBD, Fall 2014

Photos can still be submitted after submission deadlines. Submission deadlines are benchmarks for staff to assess new sets of photos and input received from neighborhood reporting areas to help us with outreach efforts, as well as to create new and update existing photoboards. We also use these benchmarks to periodically update the Community Character Manual with new information.

Who should I contact for more information?
Please contact Paulina Urbanowicz at 512-974-5658, or paulina.urbanowicz@austintexas.gov.