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## EngageATX

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### Online

[www.engageatx.org](http://www.engageatx.org)

### Contact

[engageatx@gmail.com](mailto:engageatx@gmail.com)

### Mission

*EngageATX is a membership organization for motivated young professionals seeking to collectively influence the political landscape by uniting our demographic and engaging the next generation of Austin community leaders.*

### Board of Directors

Kathleen Baireuther

Annie Dlugokecki

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Sly Majid

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Andrea Rado Hamilton

Dear Members of the City of Austin Code Advisory Group (CAG),

EngageATX, a young professionals' organization mobilizing our demographic to vote and participate in local policy, has taken an interest in CodeNEXT. The new land development code will forever change the way the city we love grows, which will, in turn, affect the choices available to us as we pursue our careers, further our education, start and grow families and continue to enjoy the culture and outdoor lifestyle that make Austin unique. As a demographic critical to the Central Texas workforce and as Austin's next generation of leaders and influencers, we believe we have a responsibility to show up and lend our voices to this important policy conversation.

After hearing from CAG members at one of our monthly "lunch 'n learns," EngageATX members decided to form a special committee to discuss the impact of CodeNEXT and how we might get more involved to help shape its progress. This letter represents the outcome of those discussions and our shared perspective.

We hope that we can contribute a young professional voice - that seems to be lacking - to the CodeNEXT process. Our members represent different parts of the city, varying political affiliations and a multitude of industries. Some of us are parents. What drives us to lend our voice is an overwhelming concern about housing affordability for young professionals and an equally strong desire for a walkable, livable urban lifestyle in an Austin that is as "weird" as ever.

### **Housing Affordability**

Young professionals with good jobs should be able to afford to live in Austin. Right now, we have experienced (and have seen our peers experience) the types of housing challenges we would expect in cities like New York City or San Francisco; supply has not kept pace with the demand for housing in Austin.

Unlike many of the community groups involved in CodeNEXT, EngageATX represents both renters and homeowners. Some of our members are renters by choice, while others would buy if that was an economically viable option for them. In either case, renters are especially burdened by the limited multi-family housing stock available in and around downtown and other budding city centers.

Multi-family housing, especially "missing middle" housing types, should be developed "by right" in central Austin neighborhoods. Duplexes and accessory

dwelling units present much needed options for young professionals, who, although employed, are often living without a financial safety net and with substantial student debt.

While our committee certainly wants a code that allows for suburban choice, our overwhelming sentiment is that we would trade lot and home size for housing that is affordable and walkable to amenities. Many of us have roommates, and even more of us are both willing and attracted to living in economically, racially and otherwise diverse neighborhoods.

### **Walkability + Proximity to Amenities**

The Imagine Austin concept of “compact and connected” resonates with our group because we are willing to make significant housing, lifestyle and even locational tradeoffs to live in walkable communities. We are concerned, however, that this concept is under threat in the CodeNEXT process, which is intended to follow the guidelines of Imagine Austin.

We want the ability to walk to amenities, such as grocery stores, restaurants, bars, coffee shops and green spaces. We envision the development of these walkable, higher-density housing options not only in central Austin, but also in the areas of Austin where major employers have set up shop (near The Domain, for example). In alignment with Imagine Austin, we would like to see the code enable and encourage the development of multiple downtowns – especially a stronger “Midtown” – as described by Mayor Adler in his 2015 State of the City address. More transit options, including rail, will only bolster this vision.

### **Keeping Austin Weird: What that means to us**

To develop walkable city centers in a way that draws people to them, they need to be “weird” just like the most treasured parts of Austin. What does that mean to us? It means that some of the shops in a Midtown, or other high-density areas, would be run by local small business owners and include locally sourced goods and products (picture Duval Street in Hyde Park). It means more farmers markets and access to nature and green spaces. For us, these green spaces do not need to be our very own quarter-acre lots; they can be shared with neighbors or public parkland, but should have a natural feel.

To this end, we ask you to lead a land development code rewrite that is bold. A tweak here or there will not get at the systemic issue of market rate affordability, especially for those who do not qualify for subsidy, like Austin’s many young professionals. Anything short of a bold rewrite will not usher in the change that Austin needs to secure the future of our city for the next generation.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments, and please do not hesitate to be in touch with our organization at [engageatx@gmail.com](mailto:engageatx@gmail.com) if we can put forward a nominee for the CAG to represent the perspective of young professionals or renters more specifically.

Sincerely,

EngageATX CodeNEXT Special Committee

*Annie Dlugokecki • Julie Fitch • Dave Floyd • Jennifer Houlihan • Casey Johnson • Allison Kaplan  
Meg Merritt • Andrea Rado Hamilton • Jarrad Toussant • Matthew Valdez*