

DRAFT

GOOD NEIGHBOR POLICY

This Good Neighbor Policy is offered in response to Austin City Council resolution 20110113-040, which called for a broad community dialogue that includes stakeholders from neighborhoods all across Austin to establish successful approaches for integrating low-income housing throughout the city. The resolution called for research and a report on best practices in engaging communities and building support for permanent supportive housing projects.

Introduction

In Fall 2011, the City conducted meetings to engage community participants in discussions on expectations related to a community engagement plan and process among proposed affordable housing developers, City officials and area stakeholders. Participants in the discussions included neighborhood leaders, tenants of permanent supportive housing, housing developers, service providers, and members of business and faith communities.

Common themes for desired outcomes in the above conversations included:

- Transparency of information about a proposed development (whether provided by the developer or the City of Austin);
- Consistency with existing neighborhood plans and other city-approved planning documents designed by community stakeholders;
- Effective and predictable methods of communication between parties; and
- Respectful dialogue and good-faith effort from all parties engaged in the community.

The Neighborhood Housing and Community Development Office (NHCD) offers a Good Neighbor Policy to standardize process and identify expectations for all projects funded through the City of Austin's Rental Housing Development Assistance (RHDA) and Acquisition and Development (A&D) programs. Applicants of these programs are required to prepare and begin implementing a community engagement plan, including neighborhood notification activities. The community engagement plan is required whether the application is for funding for new construction or renovation of an existing building, regardless of whether there is a change in ownership.

A successful community engagement plan leads to open, ongoing two-way communication between developers and neighbors. This requires good-faith efforts and cooperation by developers, City officials and residents. A positive, open dialogue between housing developers and neighbors can prevent misunderstandings, facilitate prompt resolution of any inadvertent misunderstandings, and provide a fair, thoughtful, dependable means of resolving differences.

While not meant to be a definitive process for each proposal and neighborhood, the steps outlined below suggest a list of recommendations for a comprehensive notification and engagement process in the City's ongoing support of affordable housing projects that will preserve and enhance the strengths of Austin's neighborhoods.

Fair Housing

The City supports and is committed to promoting diversity in Austin neighborhoods. Consistent with local, State and Federal law, housing may not be excluded from a neighborhood based on any of the following characteristics of the persons who will live there: race, color, national origin, religion, gender/sex, familial status, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, student status, and age.

The Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing prepared for the City of Austin, which is available on City's Web site: www.austintexas.gov/housing, includes a thorough overview of Federal, State and local fair housing law. One goal is to ensure that housing for Austin's lowest-income residents and most vulnerable populations is available throughout the city, including in Austin's most opportunity-rich neighborhoods in terms of transit, employment, schools, parks and retail.

Guidelines for Affordable Housing Developers and Neighbors

This section is intended to provide guidance, acknowledging that neighborhood notification efforts and appropriate community relations plans may vary in order to provide the most effective outreach in neighborhoods across Austin.

(1) Preliminary Research

The developer should consult with NHCD staff. NHCD will offer guidance to assist the developer in his/her development of the community relations plan. Examples include identifying developers of other affordable housing projects in the neighborhood(s) being considered and suggest neighborhood organizations to contact.

The developer should review the Neighborhood Plan (if applicable) Neighborhood plans may provide language describing the vision a particular neighborhood has for the area encompassing the proposed site for the development. This information will be important in understanding the perspective of area residents and help guide in the initial planning of the development. If a rezoning or change in the Future Land Use Map is necessary, additional public process requirements will apply. For more information, consult the City of Austin Neighborhood Planning Website: www.cityofaustin.org/planning.

(2) Pre-Application Notification

(a) Who should be notified?

The developer should notify neighbors within at least 500 feet of the site and registered neighborhood organizations with boundaries included in the proposed development site, using a written notice, letter or flyer.

Neighborhood organizations are listed on the City of Austin's Community Registry www.cityofaustin.org/neighbor. They include organizations such as neighborhood associations, Neighborhood Planning Contact Teams, home owner associations, business associations, and advocacy groups. The Registry includes contact information for each group.

(c) When should the notification occur?

The developer should consider sending the notification as early as possible to ensure a comprehensive community relations plan. Early communication with neighborhood organizations and nearby residents provides the opportunity to exchange information before to ensure meaningful community input.

(3) Pre-Application Engagement

(a) How should the developer and the neighbors initiate communication?

The developer should contact neighborhood organizations to provide current information about the project, including any neighborhood association boundaries included in the proposed development site and Neighborhood Planning Contact Team (if applicable)

The updated information may include final site selection, schedule, proposal for ongoing communication with the neighborhood, and where (such as a web site) to find out more information about the project. The ongoing communication plan may include presentation(s) at regularly-scheduled neighborhood organization meeting(s); invitations to meeting hosted by the housing developer; formation of a neighborhood advisory committee; and/or regular project updates in neighborhood organization publications. It may also be posted at local libraries, recreational centers, etc.

The neighborhood organization should invite the developer to a community meeting, possibly a pre-scheduled neighborhood meeting should there be enough time to facilitate a productive dialogue. The neighborhood organization should extend an offer to the developer to provide information ahead of time to the general membership, such as through a list-serve or on the neighborhood-hosted website.

(b) What information should be made available to the neighborhood?

Information the housing developer should consider sharing as early as possible as it becomes available may include the following:

- Experience as a housing developer and manager. Provide names and addresses of other affordable housing developments;
- Description of targeted population of the proposed housing, to the extent that it does not compromise the safety, confidentiality or well-being of the residents or compromise adherence to fair housing policy;
- Information about property management and support services, if applicable;
- Description of expected property design elements, such as parking, unit count, and additional community amenities (green space, community center, etc.);
- Planned mechanisms for communication between the housing developer and neighbors, including a 24-hour contact person and phone number if possible and;
- Estimated schedule for construction and completion.

(c) How should meeting logistics be managed to facilitate a productive dialogue?

The developer should:

- Strive to make the meeting convenient to the neighborhood organization by either requesting time on already-scheduled agendas and/or by meeting at a time and location that is convenient for the nearby neighbors.
- Seek feedback from the neighborhood on how best to continue dialogue.
- Make pertinent information about the proposed project available as promptly as possible and set reasonable expectations by communicating when other information will be ready for distribution.
- Extend an invitation to appropriate city staff to attend the meeting to be available as potential resources about the city process and general information about affordable housing or other issues as needed.
- Consider using a facilitator when working on potential agreements or obtaining input from the neighborhood organization.

The neighborhood organization and nearby neighbors should:

- Provide feedback on the developer's communication plan to ensure the dialogue is productive and works within the construct of expectations for both parties.
- Express the vision of the neighborhood, such as explaining the language of the neighborhood plans.
- Provide feedback on the design, operation and management of a project. Work collaboratively with housing developers and/or residents to identify ways to address concerns.
- Consider appointing a representative or committee from the neighborhood organization to serve as the liaison for exchanging information and working out language for any potential agreements.
- Consider formalizing input in a resolution or letter adopted by the neighborhood organization. This will help ensure the applicant/developer receives all of the relevant feedback and understands the information conveyed is representative of a large group of people.
- Invite organizations with experience in successful affordable housing developments in the to talk about affordable housing and explore lessons learned from those developments.

(3) Implementation / Ongoing Relations

(a) How will agreed-upon provisions be implemented as the development moves forward?

- As a part of the application process, the developer must provide to the City a communications plan, including potentially a developer-designated community liaison to work with neighborhood organizations and nearby neighbors throughout the project's design and construction phase.
- The developer and the neighbors may consider appointing a joint advisory committee to establish a process to help track the success of the agreement between the developer and the neighbors.

(b) How should communication between the developer and the neighbors continue after the housing is operational?

The developer should:

- Honor the terms of the agreement.
- Invite neighborhood organizations and nearby residents to view the project. This can be through an open house or other appropriate forum.
- Establish ongoing communication with neighborhood organizations and nearby neighbors and businesses. Promptly address emerging issues and share successes.
- Ask the property manager or an appointed representative to regularly attend meetings of the neighborhood organizations.

The neighborhood organization should:

- Honor the terms of the agreement.
- Welcome the housing developers and residents into the community, invite them to neighborhood meetings and events, and provide them with information on how to become members of the neighborhood organization.