

Planning Commission comments

Submitted through March 6, 2012

Dave Sullivan

(questions underlined; everything else is comment)

p 4 Paragraph starting with "But other changes are negative." Says 20 percent "fail to graduate from high school." Later on page 25 the statistic is 14%. Is this a "GED" vs "graduate" difference?

p 20 Paragraph starting with "During the 1980s..." Important environmental initiatives in the 1990s & 2000s were closing the East Austin Tank Farm and deciding to close the Holly Power Plant, which should be mentioned in terms of improving the urban environment.

p 29 "Austin has a growing population of people without homes." Are there statistics to support this? Yes, housing has become more expensive, but only one year of data for a homeless count is provided (p 25, 2,357 in the 2011 Point in Time count) It makes sense that we have a growing homeless population, as I expect out-of-work folks to have moved here during the Great Recession.

p 30 Folks who crunch numbers may be confused that the numbers in different places do not agree. Using the 2010 population of 790,390 an area of 307.8 sq mi. gives a different density (pop/mi²) than in the table comparing densities among cities. Just 3% different. Why? Point in time? With & without water bodies?

p 33 Text says 38% land undeveloped, table says 34%.

p 40 "vehicle" should be "motor vehicle" in a few places. Bikes are also vehicles.

p 40 "The average household in the Austin region spends just under one-quarter of its income on transportation..."

p 49 & 60 - for Libraries (3.6 million, 700,000) and PARD (650,000), I believe the numbers quoted are for number of visits per year, not number of different people.

p 50 PARD spending, graph ~\$70 vs text \$20 O&M per capita. Is the \$70 capital + O&M?

p 54, under Society and Health, I do not understand the statement that "fewer quality schools" contribute to the disparity of households with children in the inner city. Quite the contrary - the inner city schools help to prevent families from moving out! I served on the AISD Facility Master Plan Task Force, and we heard a ton of complaints from parents when we proposed consolidating a few under-enrolled or low native population schools together.

p 55, under Education - can we say something about how many folks get "certifications" in training programs (as opposed to degrees)? My understanding is that many employers are looking for Microsoft, Cisco, SAP, or other tech certificates, and the trades are looking for

HVAC or other building or manufacturing certifications. Commissioner Hatfield may be a good resource for this.

p 54-59 There are several references to the teen pregnancy rate related to the drop out rate. Do we have numbers to show how severe this problem is?

p 65 The map of city limits is slightly different from p 21.

p 80 I haven't finished going through the new Feb. Draft version, but it appears to be missing the table from the Feb. 22 version, p 4-1 that lists the 10 original charter elements and the 4 PC elements. I suggest you enumerate these 14 elements. We are, after all, proud of having suggested the four additional ones, and it will be helpful to relate the fuzzy elements not explicitly mentioned in the Charter ("neighborhoods," "energy," "public safety") to named elements (#6 housing for neighborhoods and #7 public services and #8 public buildings for public safety and energy). Also we should mention "capital improvement program" under City Facilities and Services. Note at the top of page 4-2 of the Feb. 22 version there is an asterisk next to "Children, families, and education," but this was a PC element, not charter.

Thanks.

p 4-18 Economic policies. I am grateful that some of my concerns about the arts have been addressed. However, I believe ECO 5 needs to be recast. Sure, the arts draw tourists, and that is good for the economy. But the list of amenities in ECO 5, including rock&roll, er, I mean, the arts, help to attract talented individuals and creative businesses, plus they keep those creatives here in Austin. Perhaps ECO 5 could be broken into two policies, or just have two sentences.

p 168 the plan should list "Live Music Task Force Report" under related city initiatives.

Jeff Jack

Public Engagement process

1. The participation numbers from the Hispanic community are very low. What accounts for this and what was done in the way of outreach to that community for their input?
2. What is the total number of community inputs (individual comments, questions, meeting attendees, etc.) that occurred during the planning process? Is there any accounting of the number of individuals that participated? If so how many were they and what % of the population do they represent?
3. Did staff collect information on what part of town, what zip codes, did those who participated come from? If so please list the degree of participation by zip code areas.

4. Please provide copies of all organizations (neighborhood associations, business groups, environmental and social services or social equity non-profits, etc.) that submitted written comments on the draft plan.
5. can you provide a list of the articles that were published in the local newspapers about IACP over the two years of this planning process. Out of curiosity, when I googled the AAS for the comp. plan it came up with only two articles? Since I do not get the AAS I was surprised and wonder if there were actually more but just did not come up on google? I imagine that the staff keep a record of all the print media articles so can you give me the number of article done by each of the local newspapers and if you have it the title and date they were published.

The Draft Plan

1. Page 1 – 1 This first page indicates in the first sentence that “Austin today is a model of livability” yet in the third paragraph it notes “housing that is increasingly unaffordable for individuals and families, a sense of loss about a simpler Austin of the past and to many low-wage jobs that lag behind Austin’s cost of living.” It further notes that 20% of our children live in poverty.

Question: How do these facts equate to a “model of livability”?

2. With regard to the same issues noted above, we have seen that the disparity between the rising cost of living and income levels continue to grow. To close this gap there are two possible strategies to address this problem. We either have to increase the income levels of the population or bring down the cost of living in the city or a combination of these. If we do not address this problem the moderate and lower income communities will be forced out of the city.

Question: In chapter 5 we list many priority programs but how do these relate to addressing closing this gap?

Request: Therefore please categorize all the priority programs item listed in Chapter 5 with regard to either their ability to increase the income levels of our residents or to bring down the cost of living, or both..

- 3 Page 1 – 2 and 1 – 3 The list of Key Challenges and Opportunities reframes the issue noted above under Preserving our Livability wherein asking “How we will keep Austin, healthy, safe, beautiful and affordable? The under Promoting Prosperity for All it notes that “how can we help wage growth catch up to the rising cost of living to close the affordability gap?” While this statement focuses attention on raising income levels, there is no mention of controlling the rising cost of living or even a consideration of returning Austin to a much more affordable city to live in. While it is clear that the strategy of increasing income levels has been tagged to supporting a more tech savvy, creative and innovative economy, this can not assist the majority of the working class in our city.

Question: Is there anything in this plan that lays out how we may bring down the cost of living to help the more moderate and lower income levels of our city that will not be able to

benefit from the development of the higher wage jobs suggested as the solution to closing the gap?

4. Page 1 – 3 The Key Challenges and Opportunities notes that Collaborating Regionally is essential and indicates that Austin needs to work with other jurisdictions to plan for our future. While it does not mention directly working with AISD, surely that has to be seen as a top priority as we look at the #1 priority noted in the Community Survey which was “Quality Public Schools” And considering the issue of potential school closures in many neighborhoods what degree of “collaboration” has occurred between AISD and this plan?

Question: Has AISD analyzed the growth concept map with regard to population distribution, family distribution and sizes and provided the COA planning staff with an assessment of what would AISD have to do to accommodate this development pattern?

Question: What is the impact this growth pattern would have on existing schools and where new schools would be needed to service this growth?

Request: If this has been done, please provide a map of how AISD would respond to the growth concept map proposed development pattern.

5. Page 1 – 3 Securing a Sustainable Future. This section notes that the City Council has established that “sustainability” as a central policy for the comp. plan. And this section points out the desire for sustainability for the economy, environment and social equity. And while it further states that we need to act “to protect Quality of life now and for future generations, it does not clearly state that we want a “sustainable” city of our existing population. In fact much of the plan text is focused on the expected growth in population and not on who we are now.

Question: What elements of this plan are specifically focused on making our city “sustainable” for our existing population?

6. Page 1 – 4 Core Principles for Action: the number 1 item in this section is “Grow as a compact, connected city” and it states “More compact growth contains costs by capitalizing on the land and infrastructure already in place” With this in mind it certainly makes sense to “capitalize” on the existing investment our city has in the existing infrastructure. However to utilize that existing investment we need to know where it has excess capacity that can be used to accommodate new growth in a cost effective way.

Question: Do we have an analysis of the existing capacity of our infrastructure, especially with regard to roadways and the sewer system showing where we could accommodate growth efficiently and how that relates to the growth concept map?

Question: Do we have and estimate of the build out cost for the infrastructure that would have to be added to our existing systems to accommodate the growth concept map?

7. Page 1 – 4 Core Principles for Action: Item #2 indicates that as we grow into a more compact city we will need to strengthen our “green infrastructure” and that “parks, urban forest, urban trails, greenways, rivers, creeks, gardens, urban agriculture, open spaces, and wildlife habitat...” This suggests a recognition that we will need more “public” green spaces and certainly that is true. But this focus on the “public” domain coupled with the

recommendation for a more “compact” city suggests that there will be a shift from private green space to accommodate more density and that will be offset with new Public green space.

Question: Has there been any analysis of the impact that priority program items that encourage denser development (reducing impervious cover, setbacks, compatibility stds., tree protection and conversion of existing residential zoning to more multifamily and commercial development) will have on the “private” green space in our city?

Questions: What would be the reduction of “private” green space, primarily on residential lots in our neighborhoods, if these priority program items are implemented and how much additional “public” green space would be needed to compensate for that loss and how much would that cost?

8. Page 1 – 5 Core Principles: Item #3 Paths to prosperity indicates “Growing our economic base should provide jobs and career paths for workers of all education and skill levels” This certainly should be a high priority and should guide policy with regard to business development. However for this to be meaningful from a policy perspective it is essential to have an inventory of the education and skill levels of our current work force correlated to the types of employment opportunities that would provide them with income levels to sustain them in our city. This would need to be done for both those currently employed, under or un-employed and those no longer looking for work.

Questions; Has there been any economic analysis to profile the work force now in Austin and to match it up with the related job and business opportunities need to employ this work force?

Question: If we have identified the type of job creation we need to our existing population, how does the growth concept map support those opportunities?

9 Page 1 – 5 Core Principles: Item #4 An affordable and Healthy Community indicates that to provide affordable housing in the future that “new mixed use areas need to have affordably priced housing.” And this section further suggests that residents can avoid the cost of car ownership by providing transit to job and other centers”

Question: Has there been any economic analysis of the income levels of the projected population growth so as to determine the need for future affordable housing?

Question: What level of affordability would be needed to provide an adequate supply of housing for the projected growth in population and where on the growth concept map would land prices allow for development of housing at these affordability levels?

Questions: Has there been any analysis of what the amount of public subsidy that would be required to provide the needed affordable housing for our projected population growth if it could not be provided by the market?

10. Page 1 – 5 Core Principles: Item #5 “Sustainably manage water...” is a great concern and we do need to “enact public policies and make choices on the basis of long term costs and consequences.” So with regard to water management, what is our situation?

Question: How much water does Austin have due to its contracts with LCRA, what is current yearly amount of water we consume and at what point in the LCRA contracts is the trigger for higher water cost? What will that increase be?

Question: Given the current consumption rates, when would Austin exceed the LCRA trigger levels based on the project growth estimates? As an example would we trigger that cost increase at 9000.000 folks or at 950,00?

Question: If Austin's conservation effort succeeded in lowering our consumption rates per capita to the stated goal of 140 GPD, when would we exceed the water availability from the LCRA contracts? At what point do we run out of water?

Question: If demand due to growth exceeds the amount of water that we have due to the LCRA contracts, what options would the city have to expand our sources of water and what would they cost?

11. Page 1 – 5 Core Principles: Item #6 Think Creatively: It appears that the focus on local music, arts, other creative enterprises, entrepreneurial business and the technology sector is an underlying theme of the plan. And that "Creativity and innovation are essential to realizing the sustainable future envisioned by Imagine Austin ". While these activities will be an essential part of our future, there seems to be a lack of respect for the rest of the work force which seems entirely missing in any discussion of what the future of Austin entails.

Question: What percentage of Austin's future economic strength is attributable to the types of business activity noted above compared to the percentage of the economic base that is attributable to the rest of the work force and local day to day business activity?

12. General observation concerning the plan introduction. The introduction contains many lofty objectives and goals espoused by the staff and consultant, yet goals and objectives of the plan were supposed to be a derivative of the planning process and the public engagement, but the way it is laid out, it seems that the result of the planning process was primarily driven by these concept, as an example:

Question: why is the Vision Statement, which was crafted by the CATF, presented so far back in the draft instead of as one of the first elements in the draft?

Chapter 5 implementations

Page 136 The South Congress Corridor Study noted that the estimated cost for the street reconstruction and water infrastructure cost to accommodate the projected mixed use development suggested in the study would cost \$55 million but would be re-couped by the city in just 5 to 6 years due to the increase of \$9 million in annual sales and use taxes. Since sales and use tax revenue go into the general fund to pay for all manner of city services including public safety, parks and libraries, all of which would be used by the new comers in this area, the total amount of new revenue could not be only dedicated to reimburse the city for the additional infrastructure cost.

Questions: If the cost of city services used by the added population in the corridor was deducted from the projected annual increase revenue stream, how much would be left to cover the additional infrastructure costs?

Question: It indicates that the \$55 million in infrastructure cost is for roadways and water service, but does this estimate include sewer cost as well and if not how much is that estimated to be?

Question: In the original draft of this report it was suggested that much of the infrastructure costs would be paid for by the development along the corridor. Is the \$55 million that is suggested to be a city cost on top of the cost paid for the developers? And if so what is the share that the developers will be paying for?

Page 136 The list of other potential benefits of mixed use and compact development includes “Reduced Travel Congestion and Green house gas emissions” and reduced household transportation cost” However is the mixed use projects completed in Austin are any indicator for what we could expect from future mixed use projects, these projects are not affordable to most of the moderate and lower income levels of our city.

Question: So if these folks are pushed out of our existing neighborhoods and forced to move to cheaper and further out housing, what will the resultant city wide be on congestion, green house emissions and transportation costs?

Page 5-2 The list of Priority Programs includes #8 “Revise Austin’s development regulations and processes to promote a compact and connected city.

Question: How many public inputs made this recommendation compared to all suggestions?

Question: Please provide examples of what development regulations would be considered for revision based on this priority program. Be specific is it changes to development standards such as impervious cover, setbacks, heights, compatibility standards, McMansion or what. And if this include zoning changes indicate the type of zoning changes envisioned.

Page 5-3 Under Work Program, short term (1 – 3 years) is suggests continuing to implement the “Capital Area Metropolitan Organization’s 2035 Regional Transportation Plan. However the CATF has vote to remove SH45SW from the growth concept map.

Question: Will this comment be amended to reflect the CATF decision?

Page 5-4 Under Work Program, short term (1 – 3 years) #4 lists a number of major corridors targeted for planning and construction of “complete street improvements

Question: How were these corridors selected and are they consistent with the neighborhood plans that may be in those areas.

Question: Is there a cost estimate for the improvements envisioned by the “complete streets” concept?

Page 5-5 Under Work Program – Relationship to other priority programs bullet point #1 it indicates that the “code” will be revised to “include Incentives for compact and transit oriented development ...”

Question: Please list what “incentives” would be included in this proposal?

Page 5-7 Under #2. Sustainably Manage Our Water Resources, Work Program Ongoing and Long Term (+3years) it indicates that we should use our Water Utility rate structure to “reduce water use while maintaining affordability for low water use households.

Question: Is the current Water Utility rate increase proposal consistent with this goal?

Page 5-10 Under #3 Continue to grow Austin’s economy..., work program, short term (1-3) years it indicates that we should identify “gaps between Austin’s targeted industries and growing economic sectors...”

Request: Please provide a list of what the “targeted Industries” are and any analysis of how these industries correlate to the existing work force education levels and skill sets? In short will these targeted industries put our existing work force to work, or will they depend on bringing new workers to Austin?

Question: What is the projected income levels of the work force that would be needed by these targeted industries?

Page 5-10 Under #3 Continue to grow Austin’s economy..., work program, ongoing and long term

#7 indicates we should actively recruit and retain businesses that create well paying job opportunities for lower skilled and blue collar jobs or that provide a path upward from entry level jobs.

Question: Based on the current work force and the population projections, what kind of jobs would meet this objective, please provide a list of these job types.

General comment

There needs to be a glossary that includes all the terms that could be interpreted in different ways. This glossary should be very specific and comprehensive of all planning jargon and vague terms used in the draft.

Chapter 5: table 5.1 Action Matrix

Land Use and Transportation

Page 5-45 LUT2 to “Promote diverse infill housing...” it sets as a priority program the revision of Austin’s development regulations and processes...”

Question: What current development regulations and processes would need to be changed to accomplish this action item. Please list specific examples of what is in the current code that would have to be changed.

Page 5-45 LUT4 “use incentives and regulations to direct growth to areas consistent with the Growth Concept map that have existing infrastructure capacity...”

Question: Where do we have excess infrastructure capacity to accommodate growth? Please provide a map of where this existing capacity is and show how it relates to the growth concept map.

Page 5-45 LUT5 “create a regulatory environment to promote redevelopment...” This includes “revising parking design requirements...”

Question: Please define exactly what is meant by “regulatory environment” is this the Land Development Code, Administrative procedures, zoning changes, just what is this?

Question: What changes in the parking design requirements does this envision? Would this include parking ratios for various uses or overall parking requirement reduction?

Page 5-47 LUT13 “urban rail and rapid bus transit” coupled with LUT14 Under “Increase public transit ridership “ The population in need of public transportation the most are those who cannot afford to own a car and are dependent on public transit.

Question: Is there any analysis of where the most in transit dependent population lives now and will likely live in the future and compare that to the growth concept map and the proposed urban rail and bus rapid transit plans?

Page 5-45 LUT16 “enhance cross town transit options”

Question: In the context of this statement, what types of transit options are included in this recommendation?

Page 5-49 LUT30 “Create a regulatory environment to allow flexibility in how buildings are used in compact centers and along commercial corridors”

Question: Are the new “activity corridors” the same as these commercial corridors?

Question: Exactly what is meant by “simplifying the process” to allow these proposed use changes use changes

Page 5-50 LUT38 “Change building and zoning codes and incorporate best practices to promote green building and sustainable development

Questions: What changes would be needed to the building and zoning codes to facilitate “sustainable development? Please be specific

Request: Please provide a list of the best practices suggested by this item.

Housing and Neighborhoods

Page 5-51 HN1 “establish regulations and programs to promote the development of a variety of market rate and affordable housing types...”

Question: what are the changes in regulations that would be required to respond to this item?

Question: Define what is meant by affordable “housing types”

Page 5-51 HN3 Under “produce regulations and enhance programs to promote affordable housing throughout Austin by...” it includes Modify regulations that adversely affect affordable housing”

Question: Please list all the regulations that are assumed to adversely affect affordable housing.

Page 5-52 HN4 Under “ resources for rehabilitation and repair of affordable housing” it includes “flexible development regulations.

Question: What existing development regulations are seen as prohibiting the rehabilitation and repair of affordable housing, please be specific.

Page 5-52 HN5 Incentivize and subsidize the construction of infrastructure for projects providing affordable housing.

Question: What levels of affordability is assumed here and does it relate to the current MFI of the area that the housing would be built in?

Question: Is there any estimate of the cost of the infrastructure that would be needed to support the dispersion of affordable housing throughout Austin?

Page 5-52 HN9 “retain long-time residents of neighborhoods experiencing rapidly increasing property values and an influx of wealthier new residents

Question; What are the programs or authorities available to the city to combat this gentrification/

Question; What consideration has been given to the impact on property values of the proposed regulatory changes that are suggested to support a more compact city. What happens when development entitlements are increased by the relaxation of site design standards, minimum lot sizes, and other regulations that now govern development? And what impact will that have on property valuations and therefore property taxes?

Page 5-53 HN19 “Ensure ...compatible transitions between neighborhoods and adjacent commercial, mixed use and denser housing by regulating setbacks, building mass and height and other design elements and uses” The current Building and Land Development Codes already addresses all of these elements but this action items suggests that there should be changes to the existing code.

Question: What specific aspects of the building and land development code regulations that now exist that are preventing the “harmonious and compatible” transitions between residential and commercial areas?

Page 5-53 HN223 “align” neighborhood and small area plans with IACP It is stated that this included infill development, increased density, mixed use centers and corridors, variety of housing types on the one hand and Open space, historical preservation, affordable housing and neighborhood preservation on the other. These appear to be conflicting actions.

Question: At what point do the former objectives overwhelm the latter objectives and result in the wholesale conversion of our neighborhoods into a completely different character, with different people than who reside there now?

Page 5-54 HN29 Establish a regulatory environment that creates communities across Austin that “provide a range of housing”

Question: How will changing our current regulation to allow more density and housing types address the increase in property taxes that make cost of living rise? How do these action items protect our moderate and lower income levels from being gentrified out of Austin?

Page 5-55 ECON3 Under “Create a regulatory Framework to foster a business friendly environment it lists creating development incentives (including tax incentives), density and floor-to-area ratio (FAR) bonuses, reduced and alternative parking requirement, expedited review, etc. it goes on to suggest that we need “simplifying and clarifying the development review process...” and allowing more “by-right” development and making development regulations more flexible.

Question: Please give an example of each one of these actions and how they will impact future development?

Question: What exactly does “by-right “ mean and give an example

Question: What would be the impact on neighborhoods of relaxing parking regulations for adjacent commercial development?

Page 5-56 ECON9 “support the development of creative industries...”

Question: How does this match up with the job creation opportunities we need for our existing work force and under and un-employed?

Question: Why does this plan ignore the meaningful contribution to our economy of all the other business sectors other than the “creative class” and also fails to understand the negative consequences of assuming that economic trickle down will benefit all of Austin? IT appears we are just hanging our hat on the next economic bubble in hopes that it will pay for the growth, is this sound economics?