

Zoning and Platting Commission Consolidated Comments and Staff Responses April 5, 2012

This document intends to take the individual Zoning and Platting Commissioners' comments and organize and consolidate them for more manageable reading. Where practical, staff has shortened and combined similar questions. Please note that Commissioner Baldrige's comments were address previously and not included in this document.

Activity Centers and Corridors

- 1. There is a request to reduce the Regional Center at McNeil on the Growth Concept Map to a Town Center and disperse the expected increase in residents and employment in these areas into more established areas throughout the city.**

The Growth Concept Map's purpose is to provide general direction as to the nature of future growth and is not a FLUM or zoning map. The growth concept map contains numerous centers and corridors throughout the planning area that will disperse the projected increases in people and jobs.

Robinson Ranch was designated as Regional Center because it:

- a. is at the intersection of two rail lines
- b. is a CAMPO center
- c. is an approved PUD
- d. has access to major roads.

- 2. It has been recommended that FM620 and FM2222 not have a neighborhood center because most of the lands within 1 mile are either BCP or protected lands and FM2222 and FM620 are congested.**

The Growth Concept Map's purpose is to provide general direction as to the nature of future growth and is not a FLUM or zoning map. Also, the City of Austin determines that if new development and redevelopment generate a certain level of traffic then a study (to be paid for by the developer) will be required to determine what roadway improvements may be needed to accommodate the additional traffic. The City of Austin also requires environmental impacts be assessed to determine the appropriate location and amount of development.

The Four Points neighborhood center was added because it:

- a. is a CAMPO center
- b. has access to two major roads
- c. provides a walkable center and provides goods and services in an area lacking many amenities.

- 3. There are many neighborhoods that are ripe for walkable mixed-use neighborhood centers such as Rundberg/N. Lamar. This area is identified as a high priority walkable area in the CAMPO 2035 plan. Other potential neighborhood centers include Anderson/N. Burnet, the Triangle, and Pleasant Valley/ E. 7th.**

Rundberg Lane, Anderson Lane/Burnett Road, and E 7th are identified as Activity Corridors. Activity corridors can provide the same walkable compact places as envisioned by neighborhood centers. The Triangle was not added as a center because it is an existing mixed use center and any added development could occur as a result of it being along the North Lamar activity corridor.

- 4. The definition for activity corridors is too broad and should be modified to direct higher intensity development with the likelihood to add more auto traffic to already congested corridors to locations with high capacity transit stops/stations, existing nodes, or intersections of arterials and/or highways.**

Staff has worked with Mr. Steven Zettner as well as the Comprehensive Plan Committee to propose the following: " To improve mobility along an activity corridor, new and redevelopment should per capita reduce car use and increase walking, bicycling, and transit use. Intensity of land use should correspond to the availability of quality transit, public space, and walkable destinations. Site design should use building arrangement and open space to reduce walking distance to transit and destinations, achieve safety and comfort, and draw people outdoors."

Affordability

- 1. The plan must include an economic strategy for how it will close the gap between income levels and the rising cost of living.**
 - **How does this plan deliver either higher wages to the working class so they can keep up with the much higher income levels of the “creative class,” or bring down the cost of living for the moderate and lower income levels so they can afford to continue to live in the city?**
 - **In the Implementation Chapter, service industry workers are all but forgotten. If people need to work in Austin, but cannot afford to live near their work, they will move farther out, thus nullifying the goals and objectives of a compact city concept.**

Imagine Austin takes a very broad approach to affordability, wrapping housing, transportation and utility costs together. For housing affordability, the plan identifies market-affordability (i.e., improving the ability of the market to match the supply of housing to the demand for housing) and subsidized affordability as complementary strategies that must be pursued together.

There are several Priority Programs that address the economic well-being of all Austinites. Priority Programs 3 and 5 (investing in Austin’s workforce, education systems, and entrepreneurs, and supporting Austin’s creative economy), focus on expanding Austin’s economy by supporting its workers, local businesses, and a primary export sector. Program 6 directly addresses household affordability, directing the city to develop affordability targets based on housing, transportation, and utility costs. Furthermore, the entire plan, across all fourteen elements, aims to improve quality of life, affordability, and sustainability for all Austin residents, current and future. In fact, the central challenge of the comprehensive plan is how Austin accommodates its anticipated future growth in a way that improves life for its current residents.

2. The plan must analyze the housing demands of the future, so public policies can get us there.

Generally, the activity centers and corridors are intended to promote a range of housing types that accommodate a range of income levels throughout the city. Identifying specific affordability levels is more appropriate to focused studies, such as NHCD’s Comprehensive Housing Market Study:

http://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Housing/Reports_and_Publications/final_austin_comprehensive_housing_market_study.pdf

Note that this study’s first recommendation is to re-evaluate the zoning and development process.

3. The plan needs to include affordable housing metrics.

The “Develop and maintain household affordability throughout Austin” Priority Program has the following metrics:

- Gaps in rental and homeownership supply and demand
- Median rent by zipcode
- Median wage by zipcode
- Percentage of residents who are cost-burdened or severely cost-burdened (including transportation and utilities)
- Percentage of residents who are homeless or at risk of homelessness
- Number of affordable units built.

Infrastructure

- 1. To ensure that the components of cost of living, quality of life, and affordability are dealt with up front, we need an economic analysis of the draft plan and especially of the growth concept map.**
- 2. Conduct analysis of infrastructure capacity to determine where we can accommodate growth with the most efficient use of our invested capital in our current infrastructure.**

3. **Compare that to the growth concept map to see how well-aligned the draft plan is with existing capacity.**
4. **Conduct an analysis of existing road and transit infrastructure to determine where we can expand at the least cost to accommodate the most new people.**
5. **Conduct an economic analysis/cost of public investment, especially of the growth concept map.**
6. **How are we going to pay for all this, especially road improvements?**
7. **How do we assure future growth pays for itself?**

During CFS-3, the public was presented with five growth scenarios (two compact, two sprawling, and the trend scenario) and associated indicators (such as vehicle miles traveled) for each. Indicators for each of the scenarios were calculated and presented during CFS-3. Over 70% of the participants supported the compact scenarios.

In addition, an analysis was conducted and compared a trend scenario (a reasonable expectation of how Austin will continue to grow if current development regulations and trends continue over the next three decades) to growing in a more compact manner (as envisioned by the growth concept map). The divergence between the two scenarios resulted in an additional 30 square miles of development under the trend. The infrastructure needed to serve the trend is estimated to cost at least \$4 billion more than if we grow in a more compact fashion. In addition, the South Congress study indicated that promoting and investing in compact development along our major corridors could be revenue-positive in a fairly short time frame. Furthermore, this study demonstrated that growing in a typical sprawling fashion would require nine times more land than growing in a compact manner. Also, as new development and redevelopment along our corridors occurs, it will provide the opportunity to replace aging and or obsolete infrastructure.

The planning process, as approved by City Council, is a values-driven process which uses citizen and stakeholder involvement to identify community interests and values. The challenge with simply directing growth to available capacity is that it may lead to development in places where it is not desired (such as a sprawling development).

8. **This plan must ensure that the future growth patterns of the growth concept map allow for sufficient family opportunities in neighborhoods, so we will have enough children to keep schools open.**

The plan acknowledges that families with children make up a smaller percentage of the urban core compared to the edge of the city due to factors such as expensive housing and lack of access to important amenities (p. 54 and Figure 2.6). Many policies and actions as well as the growth concept map seek to create

complete communities that are inviting to all, including families with children, to live near services such as schools. It is also important to note that the Citizens Advisory Task Force has a member who is an employee of AISD and two Planning Commissioners served on the Facility Master Plan Task Force, which focused on this issue.

9. This plan must include provisions to ensure the development of sufficient transit. This plan must trigger action on CapMetro's part.

Improving transit is one of the central tenants of the plan as illustrated by the "Invest in a compact and connected Austin" priority program. The public ranked transportation problems as the top issue facing Austin. In response, the public helped to formulate the numerous policies and actions that seek to build a complete transportation system that will help residents reduce dependence on the automobile. There are approximately 15 policies and 10 actions that seek to enhance transit. Several of these actions were prioritized by the Working Groups. CapMetro is identified as a partner for the aforementioned priority program.

10. Transportation is Austin's greatest challenge as conventional ways of moving people around have proven inadequate for present and future conditions. Austin could use this challenge as an opportunity to position itself as a leader in intelligent solutions to 21st century urban mobility problems. The following could be an action item under Building Block 1; Land Use and Transportation or a Long Term item under the program to Invest in a compact and connected Austin, p. 156. *Pursue transportation solutions that are innovative, advanced, and proven to address present and future mobility challenges.*

Numerous policies and actions seek to achieve innovative solutions through a linkage between transportation and land use. In addition, increasing mobility is one of the themes of the Vision Statement:

Austin is Mobile and Interconnected:

Austin is accessible. Our transportation network provides a wide variety of options that are efficient, reliable, and cost-effective to serve the diverse needs and capabilities of our citizens. Public and private sectors work together to improve our air quality and reduce congestion in a collaborative and creative manner.

- Interconnected development patterns support public transit and a variety of transportation choices, while reducing sprawl, congestion, travel times, and negative impacts on existing neighborhoods.
- Our integrated transportation system is well-maintained, minimizes negative impacts on natural resources, and remains affordable for all users.

- Austin promotes safe bicycle and pedestrian access with well-designed routes that provide connectivity throughout the greater Austin area. these routes are part of our comprehensive regional transportation network.

11. Keep SH45SW off the map and out of the plan. The IACP talks about protecting resources and the environment, then why are we willing to build over our important aquifers? (Staff comment: other ZAP Commissioners stated their desire to place SH45 back on the growth concept map))

We suggest three alternatives for addressing:

- No change in draft plan
- Restore dotted line with companion text (recommended)
- Add companion text only.

As presented in the September 26 draft, the companion text reads:

SH-45 Southwest: A source of continuing discussion

SH-45 Southwest (a.k.a., Manchaca Expressway) has been and continues to be a subject of great interest and dialogue in Austin, both with respect to mobility issues and concerns about potential impacts to sensitive environmental resources. The segment of the project from South Loop 1 to FM1626 will soon be evaluated through National Environmental Policy Act, which by federal law requires an examination of all alternatives, including not constructing the project (“no-build”).

Including SH-45 Southwest on this map is not intended to represent a position on which alternative is selected. If an alternative other than no-build is selected, this plan recommends designing the roadway to be attractive and to meet the City’s objectives of non-degradation of water quality in the Barton Springs Zone of the Edwards Aquifer. In particular, if the project is built, it should be a roadway design identified as the locally preferred alternative in the results of the Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority Environmental Assessment/ Environmental Impact Statement, should avoid impacts to critical environmental features, and should incorporate advanced stormwater quality and spill containment controls to achieve a nondegradation level of environmental protection.

Environmental Resources

- 1. How much water must we have as we grow and how many people will it support? The plan should take into account the total amount of water we have under contract and how much more water we would need in 30 years if the IACP is implemented.**

2. Given the fact that our contracts require us to pay more if we use more, would there be a rate increase at some point? If so, when? How would such an increase impact our utility rates, cost of living and costs to businesses? How would we mitigate this?

With regard to water management, Austin has water rights and firm back-up contract for up to 325,000 acre-feet/year. Austin's recent 5-year average annual demand is approximately 156,000 acre-feet/year.

In 1999, the City of Austin paid LCRA \$100 million as a pre-payment for water use amounts up to the 201,000 acre-foot trigger amount plus a pre-payment of water reservation fees. In the future, when the city's average water demand for two consecutive years exceeds 201,000 acre-feet/year, subsequently, the city will pay LCRA for water use amounts above 150,000 acre-feet/year.

Based on projections of reducing water demands to 140 gallons per capita per day (gpcd) by 2020 and population growth, the LCRA water payment trigger is anticipated to occur in the Year 2025 to Year 2030 time-frame. It is estimated that the associated water served population will be in the range of approximately 1.25 million people.

Note that with water conservation and reuse, the projected payment trigger year has shifted further out in time from previous trend projections of reaching the trigger in the 2018 to 2021 time-frame.

The rate the city will pay at that point in the future will be the then current rate for firm water. For an order of magnitude, using the current rate of \$151/acre-foot, the first year's payment would be in the range of approximately \$8 million. This figure is expected to go up over time with future LCRA firm water rate increases. It is not now known what the future firm water rate will be once future payments are triggered, however, Austin actively engages in review of proposed firm water rates changes by LCRA.

Austin's current firm water supply of 325,000 acre-feet/year, with continued implementation of conservation and water reuse plans, is projected to meet Austin's municipal demands at least through the year 2050 to 2060 time-frame. This annual water supply of 325,000 acre-feet is renewable by the City of Austin to the year 2100.

Water conservation and water reuse are primary water management strategies Austin is planning on and investing in to extend current water supplies to serve long-term growth. However, in preparation for long-term needs, in 2007, Austin entered into an agreement with LCRA to jointly plan for additional water

supplies beyond 325,000 acre-feet/year as additional water supply increments may be needed in the future.

For information on potential water supply options or water management strategies, including costs, please refer to the following:

LCRA's Water Supply Resource Plan at:

<http://www.lcra.org/water/watersupply/index.html>

Senate Bill 1 - Lower Colorado Regional Water Planning Group (Region K) adopted 2011 Regional Water Plan at:

<http://www.twdb.state.tx.us/wrpi/rwp/3rdround/2011RWP.asp>

3. The IACP must address climate change as it relates to water shortages and how an ongoing drought would affect the growth concept map.

The plan addresses climate change through policies that support Austin's Climate Protection Plan including Policy WPD P 5 which seeks to plan for and adapt to increased drought, severe weather, and other potential impacts of climate change on the water supply.

4. Promote Low Impact Development (LID) principles as part of the green infrastructure priority program.

The definition of green infrastructure is "strategically planned and managed networks of natural lands, parks, working landscapes, other open spaces that conserve ecosystems and functions, and provide associated benefits to human populations." LID is a type of sustainable building practice for residential and commercial buildings. While LID contributes to sustainability, it is substantively different from green infrastructure.

Local Businesses

1. Local businesses need to be addressed in the Comprehensive Plan itself, and specifically in the Implementation chapter.

The importance of local business is recognized throughout in the plan and was an important issue for the Council-appointed Comprehensive Plan Citizens Advisory Task Force. In the first chapter the plan, it states that preserving small businesses and local entrepreneurs is critical in ensuring our economic health.

The vision also deals with the topic:

"Austin's prosperity exists because of the overall health, vitality, and sustainability of the city as a whole—including the skills, hard work, and qualities of our citizens, the stewardship of our natural resources, and developing conditions that foster both local businesses and large institutions.."

There are a number of Economic Policies that target local businesses:

- **EC P1.** Promote and measure business entrepreneurship, innovation and a culture of creativity.
- **EC P2.** Implement policies that create, nurture, and retain small and local businesses and minority and women owned business.
- **EC P6.** Support up-to-date infrastructure, flexible policies and programs, and adaptive reuse of buildings so that local, small, and creative businesses thrive and innovate.

Several Economy actions address local businesses including EA-18 which seeks to partner with the Austin business community to develop policies, regulations, and programs to foster the development and success of local businesses. The importance of local businesses is also underscored with the listing of area chambers-of-commerce as key partners in implementing the “Continue to grow Austin’s economy by investing in our workforce, education systems, and entrepreneurs” priority program.

Public Open Space

- 1. The plan seems to suggest that there should be more public open space for the growing urban infill population. Is there evidence that such a change would be successful in keeping families in the urban core?**

One of the main principles of Imagine Austin is placing people closer to amenities such as parks, schools, and shopping. Often times, and when they can afford to, families decide to locate to an area based on access to these amenities. The plan acknowledges that families with children make up a smaller percentage of the urban core compared to the edge of the city due to factors such as expensive housing and lack of access to important amenities (p. 54 and Figure 2.6). We are also working with the recommendations from the Families and Children Task Force Report as well as the Urban Parks Workgroup that suggest access to parks is an important aspect for families with children. The Trust for Public Land has conducted numerous studies about the benefits of parks including “Measuring the Economic Value of a City Park System” found at <http://cloud.tpl.org/pubs/ccpe-econvalueparks-rpt.pdf>.

Health

- 1. Is there mention of slow city or slow food movements?**

Yes. HHS P6 promotes the availability of and seeks to educate the community about healthy food choices (local food traditions, small-scale food processing, and organic agriculture) and nutritional education programs. The Sustainable Food Policy Board worked closely with staff and the Citizens Advisory Task Force to ensure that healthy food was addressed.

Quality of Life

- 1. How do we assure growth adds to the quality of life of existing and future residents?**

The entire plan, across all fourteen elements, aims to improve quality of life, affordability, and sustainability for all Austin residents, current and future. In fact, the central challenge of the comprehensive plan is how Austin accommodates its anticipated future growth in a way that improves life for its current residents. Given that Imagine Austin takes its direction from the public, it would be surprising if it were any other way.

Implementation

- 1. The plan necessitates rewriting parts/all of the LDC, yet no work has begun on the rewrite and from the IACP it is a 3 year objective. If the IACP is approved this year, what will the COA use to make determinations during the rewrite time? What will we use?**

The first step of revising the land development code would be to do a code diagnosis, identifying which features of the current code make it difficult to achieve the vision articulated by the public through the Imagine Austin process.

It is common practice to make revisions to an existing LDC following the adoption of a new comprehensive plan. To achieve the future aspired to by many Austinites as described in the plan, we need a LDC that will create the built environment that we want to achieve. Any revision of the LDC would include an extensive public outreach and involvement process. This would allow interested parties the opportunity to engage in the process and to express their ideas. Note that completing the code update may take longer than three years.

- 2. Chapter 5, Implementation, is light on specifics. Some parts are good while others rely on future plans, such as the LDC rewrite, for direction.**

We disagree with this assertion. Staff spent many hours coordinating with numerous partners, including the lead agencies, focusing on ensuring that this chapter provide clear guidance for implementation and believe this gives clear direction. The priority programs utilize short and long-term steps as well as actions to achieve the outcomes.

- 3. What tools do we have available for growth management and what tools are still needed? (i.e. State enabling legislation for County land-use control, more cohesive regional governance that combines our COG with our MPO such as NCTCOG in the DFW Metroplex, or updated State water laws.)**

The powers available to local governments are discussed under “Different legal powers to regulate development” on p. 64 as well as under “Annexation” found on page 187. This plan recognizes these challenges and addresses them through partnerships as well as lobbying the State of Texas to revise laws to promote best practices.

- 4. Annexation needs to be included in the plan because it defines the likely extent of Austin's future zoning jurisdiction. This plan needs to factor in the possible plans of all the municipal jurisdictions around Austin. Other municipalities will be in competition to grow their own tax bases and will be annexing as they can to capture as much land area as they can. If they do, and we do too, when do we become land-locked?**

The plan covers annexation (pg. 187) and regional partnerships (p. 187-188). In addition, numerous policies and actions call for working with regional partners as well as priority programs 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, & 8 listing regional partners. Staff has been meeting regularly with local and regional governments and will continue to do so. They all had the opportunity to participate and review Imagine Austin.

- 5. All of the indicators seem like very good metrics to assess the level of progress in implementing the plan. Even though the indicators will be presented numerically, the yearly assessment of overall progress of plan implementation still seems like a very subjective exercise. A matrix that lays out numerical scores of indicators would be of value so that the annual review can be assessed from a more objective standpoint when measuring progress. (i.e. reduced VMT, reduced CO2 emissions, parkland density, water conservation, re-use, etc.)**

That is what we expect to do.

Neighborhood Planning Process

- 1. Finishing the neighborhood planning process is a critical step that must be accomplished before adopting the IACP as some neighborhoods have not finished or begun their plans. The Austin Neighborhoods Council has strongly insisted that this be done.**

Imagine Austin provides a city-wide perspective whereas the neighborhood and other small-area plans provide local details. Concerns have also been expressed that the plan will mandate the direction of future neighborhood and small area plans. Imagine Austin will provide direction to future planning efforts and establish expectations of the planning process to develop future plans. However, conditions uncovered during a small-area process could lead to changes in the comprehensive plan.

The neighborhood planning areas (NPAs) cover only a portion of the City of Austin's area and very little of the extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ). Imagine Austin provides direction to those areas not covered by NPAs as well as a majority the ETJ.

The neighborhood planning process is continuing and following the adoption of Imagine Austin, a combined neighborhood planning process is planned for several neighborhoods located south of US 290/Ben White. As comprehensive planning division staff becomes available, additional planning processes are expected.

Public Involvement

- **The 2.3% engagement with citizens in the development of the IACP is inadequate even though the target was to achieve 17,000. Just as much time and money should be spent on this plan as the Downtown Austin plan.**
- **The plan should be given the proper amount of time, budget and effort to make sure the public at large understands it.**

When compared to other big-city and regional planning initiatives, our participation compares more than favorably. Our research does not support the proposition that more time and budget produces better city plans. Sometimes, the reverse is true.

General

1. **Ch. 4, P. 92; Misquote of LUT 20, add the "quality and quantity" part of the quote.**

This has been corrected.

2. **P. 157; the downtown plan may be appropriate to add to this list.**

We recommend against adding to the list because the Downtown plan has other focuses and a limited geographic area.

3. **The plan needs more maps, graphics tables diagrams, and pictures. Chapter one begins to act as an executive summary, but maybe it is here that the entire plan is graphically distilled down to a few pages. Please also reference Chapters in Table of Contents as well. Associative graphics for the building blocks such as land use and transportation or economy, or other major elements of the plan, would help engage readers from different backgrounds, help the reader navigate/flip through the document more easily, and could even be carried forward as city signage and graphics for web and mobile device apps.**

The plan's design has been and will continue to be modified to make it more readable and navigable. More graphics have been added.