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MEMORANDUM

TO: Planning Commissioners

FROM: George Adams, Assistant Director
Planning and Development Review Department

DATE: January 8, 2014

SUBJECT: Status Report on CodeNEXT (Land Development Code Revision project)

As part of a briefing on the CodeNEXT project scheduled for your January 14, 2014 agenda we wanted to provide a brief overview of upcoming events, recent activity, and next steps in the CodeNEXT process. A more detailed summary of events to date is provided as an attachment.

Upcoming Events

The next major step in the CodeNEXT process is a series of Community Character Workshops scheduled for mid-January (details provided below). Our lead consultant, Opticos Design, utilizes a Community Character analysis to help understand the physical context of the community. The process consists of examination and analysis of all Neighborhood and other Small Area Plans, mapping of various physical characteristics of the entire city (street network, parks and open space, community assets, constraints and opportunities, etc.), and photo documentation of a diverse set of representative areas of the city. At the Community Character Workshops we will:

- Provide information on how the Land Development Code can impact citizens, why it is important to the average citizen, and next steps in the process;
- Present the preliminary results of public input received to date;
- Provide an overview of the Community Character process;
- Present preliminary work done on Community Character analysis and gather public input on this work;
- Enlist public assistance in gathering additional information through the "Community Character In-a-Box" toolkit.

The Community Character Workshop dates, times, and locations are:

January 15, 2014: SOUTH
6:30 pm – 8:30 pm
Crockett High School
5601 Manchaca Road

January 16, 2014: NORTH
6:30 pm – 8:30pm
Murchison Middle School
3700 N. Hills Drive

January 24, 2014: CENTRAL
7:30 am – 9:30 am (morning)
St. David's Episcopal Church
301 E. 8th Street

January 25, 2014: EAST
10 am – noon
ACC Eastview Campus
3401 Webberville Road

The consultant team will also present this information to the Code Advisory Group on Wednesday, January 15, 2014 at 8:00 am.

Overview of Recent Activity

Since the last update in November 2013 city staff, the consultant team, and the Code Advisory Group have been working to gather additional public input through meetings with individual groups, on-line surveys, social media such as Twitter, Facebook and SpeakUpAustin.org and use of volunteer ambassadors to reach out to communities that have not been adequately represented through other means.

City Staff met with representatives from over 20 stakeholder groups to provide information on CodeNEXT and gather input regarding their priorities and concerns. These meetings included groups from across the spectrum. A detailed list of the meetings is provided in the Attachment to this memorandum. Members of the Code Advisory Group provided additional outreach to numerous groups and assisted in the organization of several group meetings. Information gathered at these meetings will be included in the Listening to the Community Report.

The Austin Business Journal interviewed George Zapalac on the progress of the CodeNEXT project. A copy of the article is attached to the memo.

Next Steps

Over the next several months the CodeNEXT team will:

- Continue Community Character documentation and analysis.
- Finalize the "Listening to the Community Report" which will summarize public input gathered between approximately August 2013 and early-2014. The report will be presented to the community and Code Advisory Group in early 2014 and to the Planning Commission and City Council in late Winter or early Spring 2014.
- Develop a draft Code Diagnosis Report. The Code Diagnosis will be informed and guided by the Listening to the Community Report, the consultant's technical analysis of the Land Development Code, the Community Character analysis, and the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan. The report will be presented to the community, the Code Advisory Group, and Planning Commission in Spring 2014 and to the City Council in early Summer 2014.

Following Council approval of the Code Diagnosis the consultant team will identify alternative approaches to structuring the new code. These approaches will be presented to the community, Code Advisory Group, Planning Commission and City Council in Fall/Winter 2014.

We look forward to providing more information at your January 14, meeting. If you have questions or need additional information please contact either George Zapalac at 512-974-2725 or Matt Dugan at 512-974-7665.

Attachment - Overview of CodeNEXT Activity: March 2013 – January 2014

- March 5 2013 – First LDC Advisory Group meeting. Advisory Group members are: Chris Bradford, Stephen Delgado, Jim Duncan, Will Herring, Jeff Jack, Mandy DeMayo, Melissa Neslund, Stephen Oliver, Brian Reis, Beverly Silas and Dave Sullivan
- March 7, 2013 – LDC Advisory Group question and answer session with Consultant teams (Clarion and Opticos)
- March 21, 2013 – Council selects Opticos Design Team as consultant for LDC Revision project
- April 22, 2013 – LDC Advisory Group meeting
- May 20, 2013 - LDC Advisory Group meeting
- June 17, 2013 – LDC Advisory Group meeting
- July 22, 2013 – Phase 1A contract signed
- July 24-25, 2013 – Project kick-off with Opticos team
- August 14, 2013 – Presentation on the LDC Revision process as part of quarterly Neighborhood Plan Contact team training
- August 19, 2013 – LDC Advisory Group meeting
- August 21, 2013 – Presentation to ANC sponsored workshop on LDC Revision process
- September 5, 2013 – LDC Advisory Group meeting
- September 16, 2013 - LDC Advisory Group meeting
- On September 23-25, 2013 the Consultant team was in town for a series of events designed to provide an opportunity for the community to learn about the CodeNEXT project, understand how it is relevant to them, identify issues of concern with the code, and explore ways they can engage with the process. This included:
 - 3 large public meetings known as Listening Sessions. These meetings were held at Bowie High School, Kealing Middle School, and Lanier High School. Approximately 205 people attended the 3 meetings;
 - Approximately 60 interviews with key stakeholders, including neighborhood groups, real estate and business interests, environmental groups, affordable housing advocates, the disabled community, and members of the Code Advisory Group;
- On October 15, 2013 the Imagine Austin speaker series presented a panel discussion titled *Best Practices in Development Review* at the George Washington Carver Museum. Panelists were Peter Park, former Planning Director of Milwaukee and Denver and CodeNext sub-consultant, LaShondra Holmes-Stringfellow, City of Dallas, Mark White, White & Smith

Planning Law, Paul Zucker, President of Zucker Systems, and former Planning Director of Brookline, Massachusetts and Marin Co., California. Their discussion can be viewed at: <http://www.austintexas.gov/blogs/content/1780/imagine-austin-speaker-series>

- On October 16, 2013 members of the Consultant team and City staff presented to the Hill Country Conservancy.
- On October 23, 2013 the Consultant team and City staff conducted a walking tour of part of South Congress with members of the public.
- On October 24, 2013 the Consultant team held a fourth Listening Session at St. David's Church in Downtown Austin. Approximately 60 people attended.
- Also on October 24, 2013 the LDC Advisory group held their 10th meeting. Agenda items included: 1) a presentation by the Consultant team on the proposed Community Character Analysis. This analysis, which consists of mapping, photo documentation, and assessment of the Neighborhood and Small Area Plans, is focused on building an understanding of the unique characteristics and elements that exist in Austin's diverse neighborhoods. This analysis, along with the public input now being gathered, will shape the Code Diagnosis. 2) City staff presented a preliminary overview of the input received at the first three Listening Sessions. The preliminary analysis can be found at: <http://www.austintexas.gov/blog/codenext-input-listening-sessions>
- October 28, 2013 – AIA Local Chapter discussion on CodeNEXT
- October 30, 2013 – ULI Technical Assistance Panel discussion
- November 12, 2013 – ANC East, Capital City African American Chamber of Commerce Governmental Affairs Committee Small Group presentations
- November 14, 2013 – Southwood Neigh. Assoc. Small Group presentation
- November 18, 2013 – North Austin Civic Assoc. and Downtown Austin Neigh. Assoc. Small Group presentations
- November 18, 2013 – Advisory Group meeting #11
- November 20, 2013 – East Cesar Chavez Neighborhood Plan Contact Team Small Group presentation
- November 21, 2013 – Creative and Small Business Sector Small Group presentation
- November 26, 2013 - Capital City African American Chamber of Commerce Entrepreneurial Committee Small Group presentation
- December 4, 2013 – Small Group presentations to:
 - Community Advancement Network (CAN)
 - Greater Austin Asian Chamber of Commerce

- Oak Hill Neighborhood Plan Contact Team
- December 5, 2013 - Greater Austin Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Economic Summit Small Group presentation
- December 9, 2013 - CodeNEXT Household Affordability Community Discussion with Abe Farkas
- December 11, 2013 – Leadership Austin Small Group presentation
- December 16, 2013 – Field Tested the “Community Character In-a-Box with a diverse set of stakeholders. Advisory Group meeting # 12
- December 18, 2013 – Austin CHDO Roundtable Small Group presentation

Austinites provide feedback for development code rewrite

POSTED: Jan. 3, 2014

[Robert Grattan](#)

Staff Writer- *Austin Business Journal*

One way Austin is expected to manage its growth is through its land code. The code, which governs who can build what and where, is being rewritten by the city with help from Opticos Design Inc.

I asked [George Zapalac](#), development services manager in the city's Planning and Development Review Department to weigh in on how the project is going.

What was done during 2013 for the land code rewrite?

City Council approved a four-step process to revise the Land Development Code. City staff conducted early informal outreach with four key stakeholder groups to understand how best to engage these groups throughout the process.

An 11-member Code Advisory Group was appointed to assist with public outreach for the project and provide feedback on specific products, and it has met 12 times to help us structure a meaningful public outreach process. Council selected Opticos Design as the leader of a multi-disciplinary consultant team. As part of the Imagine Austin Speaker Series two events were held, one focused on four other major cities' recent efforts to revise their codes and the other focused on best practices in development review processes.

The first phase kicked off in September with four large public meetings known as listening sessions. Since then there have been 22 small group meetings and 78 stakeholder interviews to gather input regarding the current code and priorities for the new code.

What were some of the most important concerns heard at the listening sessions?

Some of the more frequent comments include:

- People like proximity and easy access to restaurants, shopping, parks, natural areas, downtown, transit, and schools. They value neighborhood character that is friendly, safe, family-oriented, and green, and a community with mixed incomes and all kinds of people.
- People dislike traffic congestion, the lack of suitable alternative travel modes such as walking, bicycling and transit, increased cost of living and lack of affordability and diversity, and the lack of neighborhood-serving businesses within walking distance.
- Regarding major issues that should be addressed, the most frequent comments include creating as simple and clear a code as possible, enhancing mobility and walkability, maintaining affordability and diversity of housing, addressing density (both pro and con), protecting neighborhood character and providing parks and open space.

How will that information be used moving forward?

[The code rewrite] aims to create the framework in which we can build the kinds of neighborhoods, buildings, and places that support better lives for all Austinites. At the heart of this process is understanding the unique character of our community and neighborhoods and crafting a code that not only enhances the best qualities of our communities, but also creates a process that is fair, predictable, and easily understood by all. A key concept is that different neighborhoods require different solutions and that regulations should be designed to encourage the types of development that we want to see in different areas. The information collected will help define the similarities and differences among our neighborhoods and serve as the basis for developing appropriate regulations.

What are some of the important steps to be taken in 2014?

In January we will hold four community character workshops to present the preliminary findings of public input gathered thus far, and the results of work conducted to understand the community character of the

many diverse areas of Austin. This information, along with an analysis of our development code prepared by the consultant team, will result in a report to council in summer 2014.

The code diagnosis will serve as the basis of a more detailed outline of the new development code and will help structure the initial draft of the code.

For our community character workshops in January, we need the community's help to make sure we understand Austin's unique "DNA;" those qualities, experiences, and places that make it a place people love so revisions to the code can be more successful.