

CodeNext Working Group - 2014 Feedback and Advisory Update 1.0

General Statement

1. Status

The working group of 9 members has monthly meetings, most often at 4pm during the week at City Hall. Meetings have been led by City Staff. Attendance has been high and consistent from all 11 members. The working group is without a chair and subcommittees though the idea of additional structure has been raised several times without action. Community attendance has ranged from just a few to as many around 20. Our regular tasks have been:

- a.) to review staff and consultant briefings on the work product (i.e. Community Character presentations);
- b.) to discuss outreach efforts by staff and fellow members;
- c.) to discuss consultant scope of work as related to working group expectations and those expectations raised in discussions with various stakeholders;
- d.) to hear community feedback during each meeting,
- e.) to provide feedback on upcoming CodeNext schedule of product and meeting format;
- f.) to discuss ongoing problem areas within our current land development code to better educate ourselves in how to be better ambassadors to all the various stakeholders;
- g.) to raise concerns regarding other parallel code revision efforts (i.e. subdivision rewrite) and how other efforts will be best folded into the CodeNext effort.

In addition we have also had intermittent presentations by group members on personal experiences and observations related to working within the current Land Development Code. We have requested and received some limited education on how our current code is structured and is implemented on projects and policies.

Though our work product has been relatively minimal in the first year as the CodeNext effort has been focused on community outreach and listening sessions, the group anticipates an increase in activity as the Community Character Manual, Code Diagnosis and Code Alternatives are coming forward this spring and summer. We anticipate an increased dialogue with City Council and Planning Commission, the Consultant and Planning Staff, stakeholders and the community as a whole as the work product should yield significant ongoing discussions.

2. Opportunities and Concerns

The significance of the CodeNext effort cannot be understated. The Working Group understands how critical it is to align the goals of Imagine Austin with a supportive Land Development Code. Two crucial elements have been identified in the first year of CodeNext that are both opportunities and concerns in moving forward. Our next steps must be thoughtfully and carefully made so as to best ensure a successful CodeNext process.

First, the Working Group has witnessed the key relationship between a simplified and effective LDC and the "operating system" of city departments and the plan review process. Repeated consistently throughout our meetings has been a desire to best align the plan review process and departmental structure within the CodeNext product.

We have the opportunity to look at both product and process almost simultaneously with the product writer under contract. Within the consultant team and at their fingertips are those with the expertise of how to best structure a review process around a revised code. We should take advantage of such insights now rather than create a subsequent realignment further down the road that may come forward as a reaction to further problems in adapting to a system. It is our understanding that the scope of work for analyzing the our plan review process with respect to an improved code is limited in nature and without the detail to fully support a recommended supportive restructuring. The CodeNext Phase 2 scope of work has not yet been finalized per city staff feedback. There are opportunities for changes or amendments to the scope of work.

Second, it has been clear as we have proceeded into the Community Character Analysis that our CodeNext scope of work is strategically divided into two parts: the Listening Session, Code Diagnosis and Alternatives effort then a subsequent mapping effort related to integrating suggested new zoning categories and elements as products of CodeNext.

It is our understanding that separating the code rewrite and the remapping of zoning allows for focused discussion on what are the best practices for our new code without tackling the difficult issue of actually applying it to a specific property. It keeps the conversation positive and theoretical. Code language and zoning districts can be devised more efficiently without some elements of what are most often complex conversations like this is too much here or too loud there. On the other hand, by not tackling the remapping head on, we delay the difficult conversation further down the road. Potentially, this will lead to additional frustration for groups within the community as to what pieces of the code should actually be used and what is politically, economically or practically not feasible. This has no perfect answer as we know our goals at times are in conflict with one another but it is certainly worth an open and very honest conversation early in the process. We would like to open this dialogue.

3. Observations and Consistent themes from Outreach Efforts

Staff and the Working Group have been working diligently to share the CodeNext process and educational components with a wide range of stakeholders and community groups. Some groups are very receptive to changes to the Code while others are skeptical as to the success of this endeavor. More outreach is consistently on our agenda and in the works.

Planning, Architecture and Engineering stakeholders have come forward asking for more strategic density, infrastructure improvements, incorporation of green technologies, improved transit and housing options, improved quality of public and private open space, and affordability incentives. Neighborhood Organization stakeholders consistently ask for increased protection from commercial creep into existing central neighborhoods, form demolition of single family homes in our urban core, measures to slow loss of affordability, and increased environmental protections.

Some recommendations and comments have been focused on tweaking the system while others push for a complete overhaul. Nearly all stakeholders ask for major improvements in the development review process, an easier code to follow and implement, and transparency in the CodeNext process. In addition most stakeholders are concerned about the transition of City Council structure during this massive effort and desire for strong city leadership from start to finish.

4. Recommendations to Planning Commission and City Council

1. Identify a strategic action plan to best transition the development review process and potentially related city departments to be in alignment with the CodeNext product. The software (the code) and the hardware (the city working structure) must be built for each other. We have the opportunity now to work holistically towards an integrated approach. The undertaking of a code alignment with staff and our development review structure is monumental. Change is painful but if city management is caught unprepared or in a reactionary mode, the

opportunity for the successful CodeNext implementation will be unnecessarily limited. We can take steps now to avoid these increased costs and burdens to the city.

2. Instruct Staff and the Consultant to explore options for integrating components of the subsequent CodeNext mapping process beyond just a 2 part process. Talk openly about it. Think through pros and cons.

By delaying mapping efforts we are risking the community and city's will to create an updated, efficient and simplified code across the entire city. We as a community work tirelessly to both protect what we love while encouraging a vibrant and robust economy. Imagine Austin has multiple levels of integration and analysis left to be done as we look for ways to accommodate growth throughout the core, incentivize housing affordability and a range of housing types, protect our environment, respond to water shortages and congestion, and plan for inevitable growth at our edges. It is possible to look at a range of city wide planning measures in support of CodeNext and Imagine Austin while the code is being reworked.

Based on recent discussions with staff and the consultant, it appears we are anticipating future rezoning in support of an improved Code and Imagine Austin to be negotiated property by property, neighborhood by neighborhood, council district by council district or planning area by planning area. What will it take to implement Imagine Austin's core values? Can these ambitious policies survive such a process? These questions should be broached and answered before we go too much further.

While a Code Rewrite is a chaotic and politically charged process, we must make continuous strides for implementation of sound city and regional planning practices that help us balance the policies within Imagine Austin. Having an action plan now that works up and down the planning and zoning ladder from 30,000ft (the Imagine Austin growth concept map) to the neighborhood plans, and to the zoning applications on the ground, we better support the entirety of Imagine Austin's goals. This will be critical in successfully responding to our immediate and ongoing growth pressures. The puzzle pieces are identified in Imagine Austin, but they have not yet been laid out in any specific order. It is critical that we not wait or be reactionary in our implementation measures. Put a roadmap on paper and work towards it. We must be flexible in our response, but with equal precision and decisiveness as well.