



October 14, 2014

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Mayor, City Council, and City Manager:

The Planning Commission is tasked with providing an annual report detailing progress made regarding *Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan (Imagine Austin)* implementation. In response to this charge, the Planning Commission would first like to express its support of the *Imagine Austin: The Way Forward 2014 Annual Report*.

The Comprehensive Plan Committee met with staff from the Planning and Development Review Department to review the 2014 Annual Report. As expected the City has made progress across all of the 8 priority programs in the second year following the adoption of *Imagine Austin*.

The Annual Report focuses on how *Imagine Austin* is being implemented through this five-point program: Education & Engagement; Internal Alignment (including the eight priority programs); Regulations; Capital Investment; and Partnerships.

Additionally, we would like to offer the following specific comments for consideration as the City continues to implement *Imagine Austin*. The following issues have been identified throughout this process: parking, household affordability, water, flooding/infrastructure issues and providing flexibility for the Austin Independent School District (AISD) Board Chairperson to participate as an ex officio member.

- Parking: Parking requirements are a critical consideration and can be an impediment to creating the walkable, complete communities envisioned in *Imagine Austin*. This is especially true in central Austin where smaller lot sizes, expensive land, and limited availability of surface parking may make providing on-site parking difficult. While driving is the primary way most people travel today, the comprehensive plan calls for a city of complete communities, where daily necessities are located closer together and walking, biking, and taking transit are viable alternatives to driving. Creating a comprehensive regulation strategy for addressing parking is necessary to reach that vision.

To create an Austin comprised of complete communities we will need to move in the direction of more effective transit and balances with automobile uses. How we achieve this transition and balance tradeoffs in the process will be an important element to the success. The balance between these tradeoffs will depend on the part of the city or the neighborhood, and there won't be a single solution. For example, we will need to find way to manage overflow parking from businesses such that

neighborhoods don't turn into parking lots with all the negative consequences to quality of life, safety, etc. The city must explore an array of parking management strategies; including parking districts, residential parking permits, park-once, shared parking, enterprise parking, and other tools to create solutions that meet the needs of different parts of Austin.

- Household Affordability: Household affordability is the cost of housing, utilities, taxes and transportation. During this past year the supply gap in household affordability has increased for the homeless and low to medium wage workers. With 110 net individuals moving in per day, supply and demand is a driving force in increasing the supply gap. For those earning less than \$20,000 there is a supply gap of approximately 40,000 rental units. Wages are also an issue in household affordability because for the past 9 to 10 years the spendable income for these individuals has decreased.

Imagine Austin includes the following as an official housing policy: HN P1. Distribute a variety of housing types throughout the City to expand the choices available to meet the financial and lifestyle needs of Austin's diverse population.

All reasonable efforts should be immediately undertaken to encourage the development of a wide range of housing types and housing prices throughout Austin. No one solution will suffice to deal with the complex issue of household affordability. But it is one of the most important issues facing our city and that should be reflected in policy decisions. This would include prioritizing affordable housing on the development of city-owned property and on-site affordability requirements for development bonuses. All policy decisions of City Council, Boards, Commissions and City Staff should consider the impact that their decisions will have on household affordability.

- Water: Recent rains have not replenished record low lake levels in Austin's water supply reservoirs Lake Travis and Buchanan. Austin is still under Stage 2 water restrictions. While the City of Austin has water rights and long-term firm water agreements for more than twice as much water as Austin currently uses from the Highland Lakes, the ongoing and unpredictable severe drought (7 years) has underscored the importance of protecting the City's water supply. Consistent with Imagine Austin's vision and guidance, the City must both continue to advance its water conservation and reuse efforts while also increasing its vigilance to insure that Austin always has an adequate water supply.

Changes to the City code to allow for increased opportunities for use of gray water should be immediately considered.

The Planning Commission appreciates the changes that the LCRA has implemented as that is a start toward a better water management plan for the region. The downstream reservoir is also another step but only accounts for 100,000 acre feet of water. We are still recommending contingency plans to augment Austin's water supply.

- Flooding/infrastructure issues: Recent experiences in the South Lamar neighborhood have demonstrated what can happen to established neighborhoods where adequate infrastructure does not exist to support infill development. The City must take measures to make sure that infill is done responsibly. Infrastructure must be in place and regulations should be revised as necessary to ensure any adverse effects from infill are mitigated against flooding. Planning efforts for all small area plans should incorporate up to date resources and tools to mitigate adverse effects.
- AI SD Board Chairperson: There is a need for the City of Austin (COA) and AISD to develop a partnership as the Planning Commission hears cases concerning AISD issues. The boundaries of the City of Austin and AISD are the same. The expertise of having an AISD ex officio member in attendance at PC meetings addressing AISD issues would be valuable just as it is valuable to hear from other ex officio members concerning their expertise in their official capacity such as Board of Adjustments and Public Works. Therefore, the PC recommends that when the City Council considers changes to the City Charter that the AISD ex officio representative on the PC be the AISD Board Chairperson or an individual chosen by AISD Board Chairperson.

We commend the work City staff and various departments have done to implement *Imagine Austin* and create the second Annual Report, and the work that will be done in the coming years. Austin's success will depend upon the partnerships formed between the community, city and business. During this next year the Comprehensive Plan Committee will continue to proactively work with City staff to ensure progress of *Imagine Austin* goals. We appreciate your attention to these matters and as always, welcome your questions and comments.

Regards,

Richard Hatfield

Chair Comprehensive Plan Committee

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Chair Planning Commission

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