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PLANNING COMMISSION

Recommendation Number: 03/31/2015; ITEM #D4

Review of Planning Commission responsibilities and areas of influence

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission is charged with the duty of making recommendations to the city council on the adoption of the city's comprehensive plan and on all plan amendments, and recommending approval or disapproval of proposed zoning and subdivision changes within the city; and

WHEREAS, the City of Austin is undergoing tremendous growth resulting in tremendous challenges regarding affordability, transportation, environmental sustainability, economic prosperity for all, and endangered cultural diversity; and

WHEREAS, a disproportionate level of effort has gone into planning the central urban core, but additional efforts are needed to plan the entirety of the city including all potential areas for annexation; and

WHEREAS, Article X, Section 1 of the City Charter directs the city to "prevent the overcrowding of land and avoid undue concentration or diffusion of population or land uses;" and

WHEREAS, the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan Growth Concept Map provides guidance as to where the city may accommodate new residents and jobs, and calls for the development of several Regional Centers, Town Centers and Neighborhood Centers besides those found in the central urban core of the city; and

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WHEREAS, the Austin Neighborhoods Council has expressed serious concerns about the overwhelming growth and development pressure in the central neighborhoods, and repeatedly urged the Planning Commission to protect the character of existing neighborhoods by directing growth to areas identified by existing small area plans and neighborhood plans; and

WHEREAS, the Real Estate Council of Austin released a white paper on Affordability in January 2015 calling for 100,000 additional housing units in the city by 2025, in part, because it believes that the current population growth is out pacing the production of new housing both in terms of number of new units and the cost of this new housing (between 2000 to 2012, the Austin region grew by more than 570,000 new residents, but the number of housing units within the city limits increased by only about 84,000 housing units); and

WHEREAS, numerous environmental groups, including the Sierra Club of Austin, and the Save Our Springs Alliance, have called for future growth to be directed away from environmentally sensitive areas including, but not limited to, the recharge and contributing zones of the Barton Springs segment of the Edwards Aquifer and vulnerable East Austin Watersheds.

WHEREAS, the higher cost of living associated with the proximity to the urban core creates an indirect and undesired cumulative effect inciting residents to move away from the core into outlying areas which exacerbates traffic congestion issues; and

WHEREAS, the City of Austin often annexes, and subsequently zones undeveloped land on the outer rim of the city as Rural Residence (RR), Development Reserved (DR), or Interim Rural Residence (I-RR), which are zoning districts intended for a low density use; which does not allow the mixed uses necessary for the development of complete communities; and

WHEREAS, the outer rim of the city could be zoned with more intense uses such as Commercial Services-Mixed Use (CS-MU) to absorb some of the demand for denser housing and retail; and thus providing the opportunity for compact, connected, and complete communities; and

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WHEREAS, the City of Austin Planning Commission has the discretionary authority to make bold recommendations to the City of Austin City Council; NOW THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY OF AUSTIN PLANNING COMMISSION:

The Planning Commission recommends indefinitely postponing applications to amend neighborhood plans (after 30 days notice) until a strategy is in place to catalyze and substantially increase the development of high-density, mixed-use hubs with designated green spaces in the outer rim of the city which are consistent with the intent of the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT:

The Planning Commission further recommends that a City Economist be hired to study the economic effects and tradeoffs of implementing the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan and its focus on encouraging development of core transit corridors, centers and new development outside of the urban core so as to ensure that growth is managed to ensure economic diversity and prosperity for all of Austin's residents.

Date of Approval: _____

Record of the vote: _____

Attest: _____

Danette Chimenti, Planning Commission Chair