

CodeNEXT Outreach and Public Engagement Plan

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Introduction, Project Timeline, and Goals

Introduction

CodeNEXT Outreach Plan

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CodeNEXT Process

Introduction

CodeNEXT is the City of Austin initiative to rewrite our outdated and complicated Land Development Code. Our Land Development Code dictates what we can build and where we can build in Austin. Whether you are building a deck in your backyard or a high-rise condominium, the Land Development Code affects your project. In January, CodeNEXT is releasing the first public draft of the new Land Development Code for public engagement and feedback.

CodeNEXT seeks to keep the parts of Austin we love while improving the parts we don't, "right-sizing" our zoning and other land use regulatory tools for the Austin we have today and the Austin the community has imagined for the future. For example, we intend to keep environmental regulations Austinites fought so hard for, and the neighborhood character that makes Austin a special place to live and work. On the other hand, the City's processes and procedures relating to permitting and zoning have been updated, as have the ways the code addresses affordability and mobility issues. While the code is not a silver bullet to solve the major issues facing Austin, it is an important measure to ensure that we are using every tool we can to improve life for all Austinites. The more quickly we can implement a code that has been fully vetted by a transparent and accessible public process, the more quickly we can implement the changes that are important to us and ensure we are maintaining the parts of Austin we love.

CodeNEXT Outreach Plan

The CodeNEXT team is seeking public outreach to gauge:

- How well we have aligned the Land Development Code with the vision we have for Austin as expressed in the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan, as well as
- How well we have incorporated the input we received so far during the CodeNEXT process.

To that end, the CodeNEXT team intends to keep the public informed about how the draft code was created, how it reflects community input and values, and how it evolves as we receive input throughout the public outreach and engagement process. We will listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide thematic feedback on how public input influenced decisions made by staff.

While City staff and the project consultants have worked diligently to ensure that the new draft code has made significant improvements over our current land development code (LDC), it is important that we hear from as many Austinites as possible, no matter your Council district, age, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, homeownership status, or any other factor. Austin is a diverse city, and we want the feedback we receive to reflect that diversity. The feedback we receive will be seriously considered by staff. City staff has committed to accounting for improvements to further drafts of the code on a thematic basis. This outreach plan is robust, incorporating many different tools into a cohesive strategy that will ensure Austinites' voices are heard.

Outreach Plan Goals

There are 3 major goals that inform the entire plan:

- To educate as many Austinites as possible about the basics of a land development code;
- To get feedback from a cross-section of Austinites across Council district, homeownership status, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and gender; and
- To engage that broad Austin community in a meaningful dialogue about whether the draft code reflects our community's values and shared vision of Austin.

Major Code Themes

In order to allow for more focused discussions, the CodeNEXT team has identified five major themes that express significant improvements of the draft code over our current LDC as well as key community priorities. Many of the public discussions and presentations will center around these themes. The five themes are:

- Process & Procedures
- Character
- Environment
- Mobility
- Affordability

CodeNEXT Timeline

The [draft CodeNEXT timeline](#) includes major milestones and the roles of stakeholders throughout the process. A more general timeline is described below.

January-April 2017:

Once the code is released on January 30, the CodeNEXT team will begin a robust public outreach process, which is detailed below and includes feedback tools and public meetings. At the same time, staff will continue working on the draft map for public release, and will be meeting with major policy-making bodies, including the Planning Commission (PC), the Zoning & Platting Commission (ZAP), and the City Council. These meetings will allow policymakers to better understand the major changes and improvements in the new code as well as highlight any major policy decisions that may be needed later in the process.

April-August 2017:

Both the public outreach process and the meetings with policymakers will continue after the map is released on April 18, but will now include the draft map in addition to the draft code text. While public outreach and engagement will continue until the end of the process, in order to give code writers sufficient time to make improvements to the code text and map, comments provided to City staff after June 7 will not be considered for the code draft being presented to the Planning Commission. They will instead be presented directly to the Planning Commission as a backup item for their consideration. Staff will be working on a second draft of the text and map after June 7, which will be presented to the Planning and Zoning & Platting Commissions in September.

September-October 2017:

During this period, the Planning Commission and Zoning & Platting Commission will be considering the second draft of the code text and map, which will have been

edited to reflect consideration of public feedback. The PC and ZAP will be voting on their recommendations. Public input can be provided directly to the commissioners at their meetings or through the existing public outreach process.

October-November 2017:

Staff will be creating annotations of the existing draft code and map to present to the City Council based on the recommendations of the Planning Commission and the Zoning and Platting Commission. Public input received during this period will be provided directly to the City Council in the backup materials, and will not be incorporated into the drafts.

December 2017-January 2018:

In December and January, the City Council will be considering, on first reading, the draft text and map as recommended by City staff and the Planning and Zoning & Platting Commissions. Public input can be provided directly to the council members at their meetings or through the existing public outreach process.

January-February 2018:

Staff will be working on an adoption draft of the code text and map to present to the City Council based on feedback from the first reading and subsequent Council deliberations. Public input received during this period will be provided directly to the City Council in the backup materials, and will not be incorporated into the updated drafts.

March-April 2018:

In March and April, the City Council will be considering the adoption draft text and map on second and third readings, as recommended by City staff, the Planning and Zoning & Platting Commissions, and direction from Council on first reading. Public input can be provided directly to the council members at their meetings in this phase of the process.

April 2018:

The City Council will vote on a final code text and map in April, which will conclude the CodeNEXT adoption process. Beyond April, the CodeNEXT implementation process will begin if the new code and map are approved.

Outreach and Feedback Tools

Introduction

Survey

Code Comment Tool

Mapping Tool

Group Position Papers

Outreach Toolkit

Introductory Video

Website

Introduction

The CodeNEXT team wants to hear from as many members of the community as possible to ensure that the new code aligns with priorities established in the City's comprehensive plan, Imagine Austin. We are aware that very few residents are willing or able to read the new draft code in its entirety and attend meetings in downtown Austin. Knowing this, we have developed a proactive, easy-to-understand set of outreach tools that we will use throughout our engagement process to reach Austin's diverse community of stakeholders. We have also created outreach training materials that will empower community leaders to bring our tools to more people than what would be possible through staff's efforts alone.

We have several major outreach and feedback tools, detailed below. Each of them is designed to be used in a wide array of settings for a wide array of Austinites. While we also consider our events to be important outreach mechanisms, they are detailed in the next section.

Survey

This survey will be one of the cornerstones of our outreach effort. It is simple to understand and allows staff to receive input in a way that is balanced, neutral, and accessible to all Austinites. The survey is focused on whether the draft code implements the [Imagine Austin Priority Programs](#) and alleviates the 10 major issues identified in the [Land Development Code Diagnosis](#). The survey will take about 10 minutes to complete and is written in a way that is understandable to all Austinites, regardless of familiarity with code. It has been vetted by the consultants, the Austin Energy Data Analytics team, and code writers to ensure it accurately reflects the changes in the code in a comprehensible way. The survey is set up so that staff can track whether people have taken the survey multiple times, preventing skewed results. The survey will be available in both English and Spanish. Staff will have a laptop station with the survey at every meeting in addition to its availability online throughout the outreach process.

Code Comment Tool

Recognizing that for many engaged Austinites, simply filling out a survey about the draft code is not sufficient for their level of interest in the code, staff has selected a tool that will allow for more detailed comments on the code itself. Using a tool (CiviComment) that has been implemented in code rewrites across the country, staff will receive comments on the actual code document from Austinites. All of the comments will be read and considered by the code writers. The comments will be public, and Austinites commenting on the code will be asked to create an account (a 2-minute process to ensure accountability). All of the comments will be provided to the code writers, and will be included as an appendix when staff presents the code to PC, ZAP, and Council for consideration. Members of the public who email City staff with comments on the code will be directed to this tool in order to ensure transparency and consistency.

Mapping Tool

Once the draft map has been released in April, staff will roll out an online tool that will allow Austinites to see what the rezoned map of Austin looks like. This tool will allow anyone, regardless of familiarity with the code, to get basic information about the draft map without having to travel to an event. This tool is designed to reduce the barrier to entry for Austinites who are curious about what will happen to a specific property. Comments can be provided on a specific property or on the map as a whole. For privacy reasons (because people are likely to comment on their own properties), comments will not be made public with location data attached. Staff is still working on a vendor for this tool, and will evaluate how best to publish the comments for the public to see once the vendor has been decided upon.

Group Position Papers

Many groups have expressed interest in the draft code, and as they have in past CodeNEXT phases, will likely send group position papers or code suggestions to City staff. In the interest of transparency, all group position papers and suggestions will be posted on the CodeNEXT document-hosting site, [Bloomfire](#). The comments will be read and evaluated in tandem with the comments from meetings and from the outreach tools.

Outreach Toolkit

While we have created a robust outreach plan, City staff recognizes that in many ways, our best asset is the involved citizenry we have in Austin. With that in mind, part of our outreach plan includes developing an outreach toolkit for community members and community groups to use as a basis for their own CodeNEXT discussions. This toolkit has slide decks, scripts, and handouts that policy makers, organized groups, and community members can share with their circles. While these materials alone do not equip Austinites to become code experts, they provide a simple, consistent way for interested residents to share basic information about CodeNEXT and initiate a dialogue with their communities that can be supplemented by the other pillars of the outreach plan, such as staff presentations, open houses, or office hours. They are designed to be picked up by any member of the community, no matter their code knowledge, and be put to use quickly and effectively. These materials will be available in English and Spanish and are available on the [CodeNEXT website](#) for download and distribution.

Introductory Video

In order to ensure that all interested Austinites are able to understand the basics of CodeNEXT and how they can get involved, the outreach team is creating a short introductory video. Created with the help of the City's Emmy-winning film production crew, the video will show, in a short, easily-digestible manner, a brief overview of CodeNEXT and how viewers can provide feedback. This video will be available in English and Spanish.

Website

The CodeNEXT website (austintexas.gov/codenext) will be completely revamped to ensure a better user experience. Important documents, programs, and links will be featured clearly on the front page, and the rest of the website will also been edited to ensure that the most up-to-date information is available to the public. All outreach tools, CodeNEXT background information, and archived public comments will be available here, as well as a full list of public meetings. Additionally, all of the position papers we receive from organized groups will be posted on the site to ensure transparency, and a new FAQ will be featured as well.

Public Meetings

Introduction

Major Events

Text Open Houses

CodeNEXT Topic Talks

Map Open Houses

Conversation Corps

CodeNEXT Office Hours

Introduction

In addition to extensive outreach and feedback mechanisms available online, staff recognizes the pressing need for public meetings and the opportunity for the public to interact directly with City staff and consultants. Staff has designed several different types of public meetings in order to reach a wide variety of Austinites. In addition to the different types of meetings outlined below, staff will be attending City Council Work Sessions and Boards and Commissions meetings to explain elements of the code. These meetings, however, will not give the same opportunity for the public to discuss the code and ask questions of the code writers and consultants as the public meetings do, and serve separate purposes.

Major Events

There will be two major CodeNEXT release events: a draft code release event on February 1, 2017 and a draft map release event on April 18, 2017. These events will be opportunities for the public to learn more about the code text and map and to interact with CodeNEXT staff.

Open Houses

The CodeNEXT Open Houses will be a major opportunity for the public to meet with code writers in their own districts. There will be five open houses distributed across the city, but they are all open to the general public, regardless of district. Each event will have a short panel discussion as well as an open house segment with code writers stationed around the room to answer questions. This will allow code novices, code experts, and everyone in between to get a better idea of the reasoning behind different aspects of the draft code in a more intimate setting and allow people to ask code writers specifics about the code. The CodeNEXT team will be working closely with each council member and the district's corresponding Land Development Code Advisory Group member to ensure each event is well-attended and effective. The purpose of these open houses is to educate the public, answer questions, combat misinformation, and promote the CodeNEXT outreach and feedback mechanisms. While staff will have mechanisms by which to accept feedback at these events, the primary focus of these events is code education and answering the public's questions.

CodeNEXT Topic Talks

In addition to the Open Houses, which are more general and are designed to introduce people to CodeNEXT and answer general questions, there will also be 5 topic-based events, branded CodeNEXT Topic Talks. These Topic Talks will be open to all members of the public, but will be based on some major topics of interest in the new draft code. During the Topic Talks, CodeNEXT consultants will be presenting information and answering questions about one of

five major topics of interest. The purpose of these talks is to allow for a more focused conversation on some of the major points of interest in the new code, and to answer the public's questions, both general and specific, on these topics.

Map Open Houses

While the first two sets of large public meetings will focus on the text of the draft code, staff also recognizes the importance of the public seeing and understanding the implications of the code as it is mapped in each district. For many Austinites, the code alone is not as compelling as understanding how the new code will be applied to their property, neighborhood, and district. There will be one mapping open house in each district. The purpose of the mapping open houses is to allow the public to view the rezoned maps, understand the reasoning behind it, learn more about what each zones means for them, and provide input on the new map.

Conversation Corps

In an effort to reach as wide an array of the interested public as possible, and to provide the public with more opportunities for discussion of the draft code (differently than the survey, the code comment tool, or the open houses), CodeNEXT will provide a short discussion guide and fact sheet drawn from the outreach toolkit to the members of Conversation Corps, trained facilitators able to host conversations across the entire City in a variety of settings. These conversations are designed to help citizens who would like to chat about some of the issues raised by the draft Code in a more convenient and comfortable setting than a large open house event. Conversation Corps staff, including Communications and Public Information Office staff, will provide the necessary support to ensure conversations are well publicized and reach many different audiences.

CodeNEXT Office Hours

In an effort to reach Austinites on a personal basis, CodeNEXT staff will be hosting weekly office hours in order to answer individuals' questions and discuss concerns about the draft map in a more private setting. The office hours will usually be in a central location, but some will be held in community centers around the city to be more accessible to Austinites who are not able to attend otherwise. The office hours schedule will be made available on the CodeNEXT homepage.