

Improving Connectivity Resolution Zoning and Platting Commission

Whereas: Priority Program 1 in the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan calls for “investment in a compact and connected city through the coordination of capital investments, incentives, and regulations;” and

Whereas: according to the 2020 Imagine Austin Compact and Connected Indicators, developed land area, annual unlinked transit passenger trips, vehicle miles traveled per capita, percentage of trips by biking and walking, and transportation system total annual delay are all “headed in the wrong direction”; and

Whereas: Imagine Austin also strives to Protect Livability; and

Whereas: Research shows that residents can experience enhanced livability on dead-end and cul-de-sac streets, with aspects such as safety (for in-street activities, children playing, etc.), security (increased recognition of neighbors and irregular activity), the opportunity to connect to community, increased peace and quiet (reduced traffic, noise, high-speed automobiles, etc.), access to areas for play and gathering of neighbors, and a degree of enhanced privacy.

Whereas: fatalities, serious injuries, and total crashes in Austin have increased year over year in the Austin area since 2018, the majority of which were pedestrian fatalities; and

Whereas: Dead-end and cul-de-sac streets can include pathways, right of ways, trails, and other options for connectivity. Short dead-end and cul-de-sac streets can be located along main arteries keeping residents connected to walkable/bikeable grids within the city, while also creating necessary buffers between commercial and residential areas.

Whereas: car ownership in Texas costs almost \$10,000 a year and can therefore result in a financial hardship for lower income households; and

Whereas: a connected street grid makes walking, biking, and transit use more desirable options, reducing the reliance on or need for car ownership; and

Whereas: designing communities with options for bicycling and walking increases opportunities for physical activity, especially for children and families; and

Whereas: dead-end streets and disconnected networks increase vehicle miles traveled and time spent in the car, which have been associated with obesity, decreased opportunities for active travel, stress, impacts on mental health, less time to spend with family and friends, and less time to engage in community activities; and

Whereas: subdivisions with traditional dead-end and cul-de-sac streets may include too few access streets resulting in dangerous situations in the event of flooding or wildfires; and

Whereas: the way streets are platted now determines the pattern for future growth; and

Whereas: connected street networks help reduce traffic on major thoroughfares, are cheaper to build and maintain.

Therefore, be it resolved that the Zoning and Platting Commission recommend that the Austin City Council seek to revise and amend Land Development Code sections § 25-4-151 through § 25-4-157 to meet the intent of Imagine Austin Priority Program and seek to enhance livability, connectivity and affordability in new subdivision design; and Be it further resolved that the proposed changes recommended by the Zoning and Platting Commission are:

1. § 25-4-152 – Define dead-end and cul-de-sac streets; and
2. § 25-4-152 – Require that dead-end streets and/or cul-de-sac streets be no longer than 500 feet or provide a multi-use trail connection to artery streets to enhance opportunities for walking and biking and accessing transit; and
3. § 25-4-157 – Require more connections to external streets for larger subdivisions.