RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL

Community Development Commission
Recommendation 20260722-001: Dog's Head Development

WHEREAS, the Environmental Commission was informed about the Dog's Head project by Endeavor Real Estate Group, city staff, and more than 35 concerned citizens at the June 17, 2026, meeting; and

WHEREAS, the Environmental Commission formed a working group to advise and make recommendations regarding the environmental aspects of the project; and

WHEREAS, the working group, comprised of commissioners and citizens, met on June 22, 24, and 29; and

WHEREAS, the working group was informed that the City of Austin has not conducted an Environmental Assessment Study or an Environmental Resource Inventory, or Tree Survey, or worked with the state to assess the existing pollutants on the property; and

WHEREAS, the City of Austin is recommending expanding access to the Dog's Head by at least 3 bridges across the Colorado River as part of the infrastructure package, yet has not conducted an Environmental Assessment or Impact Study; and

WHEREAS, the working group disagrees with the statements made by the developer that the ENTIRE property is "bombed out" or totally degraded to the point that it 100% has to be restored; however, we do agree major restoration is necessary and should be guided by the City's policies and practices; and

WHEREAS, Travis County and the State Historical Commission, via the Hicks Report, recognized portions of this property to have existing historic structures from earlier farms and ranching efforts in the 1850s, and adjacent properties that are still in ranching production; and

WHEREAS, the working group recognizes this project falls in the blackland prairie ecoregion, and that the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department states that less than 1% of this region is left in Texas; and

WHEREAS, the working group acknowledges the project is habitat for hundreds of species of migratory and resident birds that bring in birders from around the world every year who contribute millions to the regional economy; and

WHEREAS, the working group understands the project encompasses the alluvial aquifers that store and filter water along the river to provide drinking water for Austin's Colony, Manor, Travis County, downstream counties, livestock, and wildlife; and

WHEREAS, on November 6, 2024, the Environmental Commission passed a recommendation concerning the Colorado River Code Amendment, and subsequently the City Council passed Ordinance 20250327-084, amending section 27-7-32 of the Land Development Code as the "Colorado River Protections Ordinance"; and

WHEREAS, approximately 20% or greater of the area within the Dog's Head Development lies within the calculations of the 100-year floodplain, which is based on historical data and does not take into account future modeling or projections; and

WHEREAS, the working group is concerned that an Environmental Assessment Study has not been conducted, and the floodplain maps are being modified without the Assessment; and

WHEREAS, the working group agrees with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ)'s assessment that the Colorado River, as it flows south of Longhorn Dam, is considered to be some of the most pristine in the river system; and

WHEREAS, the working group is concerned about a catastrophic flooding event, especially given the high hazard potential categorization of the aging Longhorn Dam, that could cause existing pollutants from the aging mines and industry to leach into or be deposited into the river, and that could cause loss to life and property; and

WHEREAS, the working group is concerned that the contract waives hard-won oversight by citizen-driven boards and commissions for 45 years, specifically the Environmental Commission that oversees variances such as of cut and fill, impervious cover, watershed protections, and more; and

WHEREAS, the working group supports the idea of parks throughout the property and a trail along the river as long as the trail is outside of critical environmental features, and both the parks and trails are managed by Austin Parks and Recreation, and open to the public; and

WHEREAS, the working group supports the development of mixed-use, which includes residential units and single-family homes that meet the city standard of being within a quarter mile walking distance from a park, and to make the affordable housing accessible in a timely manner; and

WHEREAS, the working group finds the secretive manner and lack of community engagement in which the city conducted the meetings to green light this project to be a classic case of environmental racism; and

WHEREAS, the working group recognizes and seeks to call attention to the environmental harms inflicted upon this property and the East Austin community where it resides, and is emphatic that those environmental racist harms are not continued in this project; and

WHEREAS, the working group acknowledges that adjacent landowners and neighborhood associations were not made aware of the annexation until after the fact, breaking with healthy, expected, and necessary processes valued and codified by the City.

THEREFORE, the working group recommends the following:

1. Delay a vote on the Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone (TIRZ) until January 2027 or later
2. Include the Environmental Commission and other commissions in the process before and after the passage of the TIRZ
3. Conduct a full Environmental Assessment Study that includes the City of Austin's flood maps, cataloging and mapping of all critical features, and tree survey as defined by the Environmental Criteria Manual
4. Conduct and make public an environmental survey of the existing pollutants on the property
5. Conduct an Environmental Resource Inventory on the property and in the river
6. Adopt the County's standard of 400 feet of setback along the Colorado River to ensure a full water quality zone
7. Never offer any other project the option of 100% impervious cover
8. Reduce the impervious cover to 45% for the entire project to protect the alluvial aquifer and its recharge zone
9. Conduct a hydrological survey of the aquifers to better understand the depth of the aquifer and to understand the movement of pollutants in those systems
10. Based on a soil survey, set aside 20 acres or more in the uplands of the property for blackland prairie restoration and habitat
11. Set aside a portion of the property that has viable, high-quality soils to continue agriculture or at minimum include community gardens/farmland as recommended in the Austin/Travis County Food Plan
12. Designate parkland and trails to be owned and managed by Austin Parks and Recreation as stated in the Colorado River Corridor Plan
13. Require parks and open spaces to be made open to the public
14. Require parkland dedication fees be paid per normal city code
15. Designate that there shall not be data centers or chip manufacturing plants
16. Follow bird-friendly design and dark sky lighting best practices
17. Require entire property to follow the height restrictions required for the flight path
18. Engage the surrounding communities including historically underserved communities
19. Ensure that historic environmental harms are not repeated or further compounded on East Austin communities

FURTHERMORE, Affirm the Environmental Commission retains review authority over development within the City of Austin and the City's extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ) per existing City Code, where City Code Chapters 25-7 and 25-8 protections, Critical Water Quality Zones, Critical Environmental Features, or Erosion Hazard Zones may be impacted consistent with the Environmental Criteria Manual and consistent to the Commission's prior practices.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Community Development Commission approves the recommendation with the following additional comments:

- Allow and prioritize affordable housing ranging from 30%-80% Median Family Income (MFI) throughout the area

Date of Approval:

Motioned By:

Seconded By:

Vote:

For:

Against:

Abstain:

Off the dais:

Absent:

Attest: _____