RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL

SMALL AREA PLANNING JOINT COMMITTEE OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION AND THE ZONING AND PLATTING COMMISSION

Recommendation 20261104-01: Dissolution of the Small Area Planning Joint Committee (City Code § 2-1-205) and return of its review functions to the Planning Commission

WHEREAS, Section 2-1-205 of the Austin City Code creates the Small Area Planning Joint Committee (the "Committee") of the Planning Commission and the Zoning and Platting Commission to advise the Council on planning and zoning issues in areas such as downtown, corridors and centers, neighborhoods, the waterfront, planned unit developments, and transit-oriented developments; and

WHEREAS, the Committee is advisory only, and the Code gives it no decision-making authority apart from the recommendations it forwards to Council; and

WHEREAS, Article X of the City Charter and Section 2-1-166 of the City Code charge the Planning Commission with reviewing and making recommendations to the Council on planning matters, including amendments to the comprehensive plan, and the Planning Commission also serves as a Land Use Commission under Title 25 of the City Code; and

WHEREAS, the Committee's own Annual Internal Review for July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2026, identifies the Planning Commission as a body that overlaps with the role and work of the Committee, and states that the Planning Commission reviews and has purview over all cases that come before the Committee; and

WHEREAS, during that same period the Committee approved only two recommendations, on C814-2008-0087.02 (South Shore PUD Addition) and C814-2025-0111 (1404 East Riverside Planned Unit Development), each of which is also subject to review by the Planning Commission; and

WHEREAS, the Committee meets at 11:30 a.m. at the Permitting and Development Center, on alternating first and second Wednesdays of every other month or quarterly, while the Planning Commission and the Zoning and Platting Commission each hold their regular meetings in the evening, and the Committee's Annual Internal Review reports that midday meetings make it difficult for both commissioners and members of the public to attend; and

WHEREAS, during calendar year 2025 the Committee was unable to convene a quorum at, or cancelled, four of its six scheduled meetings, and during calendar year 2024 the Committee was unable to convene a quorum at one meeting and cancelled two others due to lack of agenda items; and

WHEREAS, Austin Planning staff must prepare, post, and support each Committee meeting, including preparing the agenda, posting notice under the Texas Open Meetings Act, recording each member's vote in the minutes, and retaining records, and the cases the Committee reviews must be staffed and presented again before the Planning Commission, which makes the Committee's review a duplication of staff effort without an additional decision-making step; and

WHEREAS, review by the full Planning Commission at its regular evening meetings would give the public more opportunity to participate than review by a seven-member joint committee meeting at midday; and

WHEREAS, because the Committee was created by Code § 2-1-205, it can be dissolved only by an ordinance of the Council;

Recommendation

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Small Area Planning Joint Committee recommends that the Austin City Council:

1. Adopt an ordinance repealing City Code § 2-1-205 (Small Area Planning Joint Committee), thereby dissolving the Committee;
2. Provide that the review and advisory functions formerly assigned to the Committee, including planning and zoning matters in downtown, corridors and centers, neighborhoods, the waterfront, planned unit developments, and transit-oriented developments, and the review of small area plans, are transferred to the Planning Commission, consistent with its duties under Article X of the City Charter, City Code § 2-1-166, and Title 25, and without limiting the assignment of any particular case type to the Zoning and Platting Commission under Title 25 or under any reallocation of responsibilities the Council may adopt;
3. Provide that any matter pending before the Committee on the effective date of dissolution is transferred to the Planning Commission, with no loss of notice or opportunity for public comment;
4. Direct the City Manager, the City Clerk, and the City Attorney to prepare any conforming amendments to Chapter 2-1 and Title 25 of the City Code, and to retire the Committee's bylaws and its entry in the City's boards and commissions records; and
5. Release the four Planning Commission members and three Zoning and Platting Commission members now serving on the Committee from that service as of the effective date.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Committee requests that the Planning Commission and the Zoning and Platting Commission each take a companion action in support of this recommendation, and that the Chair be authorized to transmit this recommendation to the Council, the Planning Commission, the Zoning and Platting Commission, and Austin Planning.