

Austin Neighborhoods Council Call for Action to Manage Austin's Growth

Approved by the General Membership, July 25, 2007

I. Introduction

The Austin Neighborhoods Council is committed to working toward a high quality of life for all residents of Austin, current and future. We share our City Council's vision that "Austin is a place where all residents participate in its opportunities, its vibrancy and its richness of culture and diversity."¹ The ANC also shares a determination to make this vision a reality. However, as the City Auditor noted, policies that incorporate a vision for growth are not in place.²

In the absence of a coherent and living plan to manage growth, the City has reacted to various pressures and influences in a manner that has consistently:

- Disregarded neighborhood plans and ignored public input;
- Promoted disproportionate impact on established neighborhoods;
- Made decisions without adequate data or social and environmental impact projections and failed to provide neighborhoods with valid information with which to plan;
- Favored granting of development subsidies, entitlements and abatements over community preservation and enhancements; and
- Promoted gentrification and economic inequality.

II. Recommendation

In order to create a shared vision and correct the present unwritten policies, the Austin Neighborhoods Council makes the following recommendations:

- (1) That the City Council, in partnership with the ANC and a broad range of other community stakeholders, embark upon the development of a viable growth policy.
- (2) That within 90 days the City Council should prepare and adopt a work plan for the process of creating the growth management policy.
- (3) In the interim,
 - That the City Council approve neighborhood recommendations for Vertical Mixed Use as submitted and
 - For all other land use decisions
 - a. that the City make available to neighborhoods and to decision-making bodies relevant information regarding transportation, infrastructure, housing, and other critical matters, and
 - b. that Council decisions reflect the positions of the affected Neighborhood Plan Teams or Neighborhood Associations.

¹ Council Priorities. <http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/vision/priorities.htm>.

² City Auditor Summary "City of Austin Long-term Planning". <http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/auditor/au05101.htm>.

III. A Successful Growth Management Policy

The ANC believes that the lack of well-defined policies and long-term goals which reflect community values undermines the quality of life for the people of Austin and jeopardizes our future. The delay in garnering a city-wide growth vision, developing coherent strategies, and implementing consistent policies has allowed inappropriate development in many of Austin's communities and over the aquifer.

A healthy future for the City of Austin that achieves our shared vision requires a viable and living growth management policy. The ANC identifies the following as essential to success.

(1) A Community-based Process for Creation of the Policy

- Engage diverse stakeholders and the general public.
- Identify and articulate long-term goals that reflect community values.
- Develop a strategy on which to implement policies.
- Ensure that the policy provides an equitable balance of gains and losses for all stakeholders.
- Secure the citizenry's endorsement of the policy.

(2) Foundations for a Successful Policy

- Ground the policy in sound research and analysis: conduct social, economic, and environmental impact studies; transportation modeling and analysis; and long-term housing (nexus) studies to evaluate existing conditions and assess future impacts.
- Identify a method to assure that the policy is applied consistently with all new developments within the city boundaries.
- Develop a mechanism for the thorough evaluation of proposed annexations within the framework of an adopted policy.
- Collaborate with other municipalities and political jurisdictions, including AISD, Travis County and others, to ensure widespread governmental cooperation in the formulation of the growth management policy. This collaboration should identify legislative issues, such as zoning in non-incorporated areas that can be advanced with the support of surrounding and overlapping political jurisdictions.
- Update the policy on a regular basis so that it is a living document; likewise provide each neighborhood resources so that it may update its plan regularly, to assure that the plan functions to preserve the goals of the original document and allows for such flexibility as the neighborhood desires.

(3) Tools to Implement the Policy

- Provide versatile tools, planning information and resources that enable neighborhoods to manage development in terms of housing, critical infrastructure, economic development, transportation and traffic.
- Introduce new planning and zoning tools in a judicious manner that ensures their quality and feasibility, using beta-testing for complex policies that have city-wide impact.

(4) Adherence to the Policy

- Once adopted, consistently apply the policy for decision-making at all levels of city government including Council, Boards and Commissions, citizen task forces and committees.
- Ensure that city department policies and recommendations are made congruent with the updated growth policy and that all departments apply the policies with appropriate coordination.