

*From Chaos to Common Ground*

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APRIL

*A blueprint for Austin*

*The Citizens' Planning Committee  
report to the Austin City Council*

April 11, 1996

The Honorable Bruce Todd  
Mayor, City of Austin  
Members of the Austin City Council

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Ladies and Gentlemen:

On behalf of the members of the Citizens' Planning Committee, I am pleased to deliver to you our final report as authorized by ordinances 940714-S and 950330-F.

The enclosed report, *From Chaos to Common Ground*, restates our original 12 recommendations and proposes dozens of detailed actions for re-engineering the city's development and planning process to inject more predictability, accountability and local responsibility for future projects.

We believe that the comprehensive strategy presented in this report can serve, as its subtitle makes clear, as *A Blueprint for Austin and Surrounding Communities*.

Compiling a set of recommendations like these has been a time-consuming and difficult process. We recognize, however, that making the actual decisions on how to implement these policies is an ever greater challenge.

We have welcomed this opportunity to serve and to share our findings with the citizens of Austin and our neighboring communities. We stand ready to help in whatever we can to ensure that we respond not to chaos but find common ground on which to build the future.

Sincerely,



Ben Heimsath,  
Chair, Citizens' Planning Commission

# Dedication

**T***o the people of the greater Austin area, from the members of the Citizens' Planning Committee and from the hundreds of citizens, including members of the city staff, who volunteered their input, valuable time, expertise and ideas to help shape an Austin future worthy of her proud past.*

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# From Chaos to Common Ground:

## **The Context of Change**

*"The best way to predict the future is to create it."*

—Stephen Covey, author

### **Picture this:**

- A city of diverse neighborhoods.
- Tree-lined streets featuring slower traffic and fewer cars on the road.
- Neighborhoods that encourage walkers and bicyclists, with streets that provide buffers between vehicles and pedestrians.
- Mixed development, with small businesses, cafes and day-care centers near single-family homes and townhouses.
- Accessible neighborhoods that make walking and the use of public transportation convenient and safe.

### **Imagine these scenes:**

- Less crime and more community interaction as people meet one another on their way to the corner store.
- Little League fields down the block, video stores within walking distance, town squares and parks providing a hub for retail, transit and community activities.
- Green belts, clean air and an efficient use of resources.
- Quiet neighborhoods with houses sporting porches and front yards.
- Homes and apartments close to the cosmopolitan amenities of downtown.
- Fewer isolated neighborhoods that are empty during the day and fewer business districts that are empty after dark.

### **And consider these priorities:**

- Opportunities for good jobs and economic growth.
- A stable tax base that fosters homeowner and commercial investments.
- Transportation links that move commuters and commercial shipments efficiently without destroying the mobility of nearby residents.
- Entire sustainable neighborhoods invested in the security, viability and character of their immediate surroundings, of the city and of the region as a whole.
- A community where everyone can find a home.

This is our vision for the next Austin, a city built on common ground, not on the current chaos of rules and regulations and a planning process that's far too long on process and way too short on planning.

Nearly two years ago, the Citizens' Planning Committee was assigned a unique task by the Austin City Council: to help our city fulfill its role as a community. We were asked to report on what's wrong—and to recommend specific steps to begin fixing it.

The effort has been both eye-opening and encouraging. But it doesn't end here. In fact, this is just the beginning.

The great reward of the work that went into *From Chaos to Common Ground* has been the reminder that Austin is a unique community. The greater reward will be when each of us, working individually or together, can say that we've made a difference—that we've blended opportunity, responsibility, and a celebration of our Hill Country traditions, into a prosperous city, alive with good jobs, personal safety and recreation in a complementary natural and built environment.

*"The framework provided by the Citizens' Planning Committee is a solid tool."* —editorial, Austin American-Statesman, June 6, 1995

The 22 members of the Citizens' Planning Committee first came together amid anxiety and mistrust. We represented a wide range of interests and had sometimes opposed one another on specific issues. Some of us were experts in planning, others in development. Still others had made a commitment to neighborhoods or transportation issues or the protection of the environment.

**The Austin metropolitan area is growing by 100 people a day and now totals more than 1 million.**

We quickly recognized that gridlock and a "win-at-all-costs" mentality was allowing unplanned growth to occur almost willy-nilly. We saw that dwindling federal and state funds mean challenges must be met with fewer resources than we have grown accustomed to. We learned that we represent a consensus of community and business activists who have learned, through experience, that the status quo benefits no one in the long run.

**O**ur future success depends on our ability to see the next step—and take it.

## **Five equally important principles lie at the core of this report:**

- The city's development and planning efforts should be simplified so that all parties affected by a project can count on clear, quick and complete service free from red tape or needless delay.
- Each neighborhood and community within the region should have increased responsibility for, and input into, the development of its immediate surroundings. There should be an array of options to eliminate the current "one-size-fits-all" mentality, and help to preserve the unique character of each neighborhood and community as a part of the whole.
- Austin's growth must be built upon a commitment to make the best use of all existing natural resources, maximizing green space opportunities and softening the impact of development on the land.
- Land use plans and the protection of natural resources must be linked to transportation and infrastructure decisions.
- Existing neighborhood groups should be formalized and recognized as a critical part of the planning process, and they must be offered a seat at the table during the earliest possible stage of development planning—before a project moves into the official approval process.

Austin's development process is the result of decades of band-aids. It is fragmented, unpredictable, cumbersome, rooted in distrust and often confrontational. It offers little flexibility. It encourages urban sprawl while limiting choices. What one Austin locality wants, another may not; yet each is shoehorned into a formula that promotes sameness, frustrates innovative projects and denies residents the ability to define their closest surroundings.

*"The current code is the scar tissue left from the development fights we've had."*

— Ben Heimsath, chair of the Citizens' Planning Committee

The neighborhood process is also imperfect, although it's improving. When we first began this study, we found that there were at least 415 active neighborhood associations and other local groups in the city—no one knew for sure. To date, we've been able to verify about two-thirds of them. Most are energetic and vital, contributing to the civic awareness that makes Austin special, but the city still lacks an efficient means to tap into these resources. Their sometimes overlapping jurisdictions and contradicting missions present another challenge to sorting out the current process.

The Citizens' Planning Committee recommendations are designed to allow regulations tailored to the specific standards and needs of each part of town. Our proposals will foster community policing and reduce crime. They will better serve children and the elderly and return to all individuals more control over their own lives. They will make it possible to provide a wide range of city services more effectively and efficiently. And they will lead to greater local responsibility for these decisions within the context of an overall plan linking all areas of Austin with one another and with our regional neighbors.

We've tried to show the results that our recommendations are meant to achieve. This report addresses the need for better communication and planning, with specific proposals to improve the city's outreach efforts to neighborhoods and businesses and to bring accountability to the process in every area, from mixed-use development to housing policies to citizen involvement. It encourages

**T**he current approach wasn't designed at all. It was left to evolve on its own into a planning system that isn't a system and does little, if any, planning.

the use of emerging technologies and information systems to meet the challenges of parklands maintenance, mobility and redevelopment of targeted areas. And it proposes new ways to increase efficiency and effectiveness through a total overhaul of the Land Development Code.

Finally, we've built the case for our recommendations by citing examples where similar actions have improved the quality of neighborhoods, communities and entire regions elsewhere.

We've done all this with an eye toward the goal of every neighborhood's ability to shape its own character within the overall vision of our community. Because the choice is simple: We can devolve into a chaotic city of rising unemployment, spiraling crime and ever-higher taxes, or we can secure a strong future for Austin—one that embodies the essence of Texas' most unique city and region, a place where our diverse interests and tastes are embraced, not battled over or dismissed.

We believe that the recommendations in this report can turn the Austin of tomorrow into a model for the nation. This is what's possible when a community reaches out to embrace change and shape it into the best possible future for all of its citizens.

## **Wasted Opportunity**

John Castellanos, a 36-year-old pastor in an Austin neighborhood struggling against gangs and decay, wanted to buy an abandoned tract on which three run-down buildings sat amid neglect. The site was an eyesore, and nearby residents were enthusiastic about his plans for a chapel to house his congregation as well as a classroom for the young people in the area. He lined up a financial benefactor, an architect willing to work free-of-charge and the support of folks in the area who welcomed the chance to clean up what had become little more than trash heap.

Everyone agreed—the developer, the neighborhood and city staff members, all of whom worked long and hard to help make the project a reality.

But they couldn't overcome the system—the city's Byzantine body of rules and regulations governing development. First, there was the matter of a subdivision permit, plus curbs and gutters and sidewalk requirements. Then came the asphalt parking lot, which lead to water-filtration and detention ponds to counter the increased impervious cover on the land. Next, there was the fact that Castellanos' lot was flanked on two sides by property zoned for residential use, eliminating 25 feet of the pastor's land from his development plans—one foot too few to accommodate the code's provision for a driveway 26 feet wide.

Castellanos suddenly found himself facing a delay of at least three months and additional costs of more than \$40,000 to hire the lawyers, civil, structural, electrical and mechanical engineers necessary to guide his project through the city system.

It was all too much for the well-intentioned pastor. Today, Castellanos' vision of a neighborhood church and teen center is still just a local junkyard, entangled in a thicket of weeds and wasted opportunity. The people all agreed, but the inflexible system of rules and regulations turned out to be a villain they couldn't overcome.

*—based on a report in the Austin Chronicle,  
December 8, 1995*

## **Taking Control**

Neighborhood associations across the nation are not documented in any formal way, but all indications suggest that their numbers have swelled in recent years. In Austin, neighborhood groups volunteer their time to work with a Parks Department health and nutrition program for children. In other cities, they organize block-watching programs to respond to gang shootings or trade hours of baby-sitting for, say, hours of plumbing.

In New York, residents of a housing project got fed up with living in a pockmarked patchwork of retail stores that had shut their doors in favor of street-corner drug dealers. With city budgets slashed, they sought the help of their local assemblyman and formed a neighborhood group to go after a state grant to start a nightly street patrol. Another neighborhood association got tired of being taken for granted and won city financing for three new parks, a new school and a new library.

These are examples of how neighborhood associations around the nation are taking on responsibilities that traditionally rested with cities. As budgets shrink, some residents detect a decline in the quality of their neighborhood lives and are spurred to find new ways to get their potholes fixed or streetlights repaired.

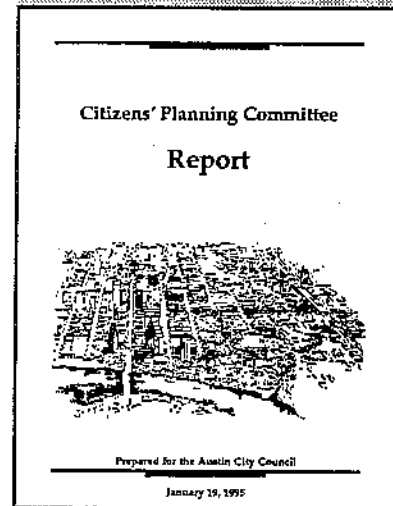
A spokesman for a community group says, "As resources get scarcer and the public purse shrinks, most of the angry citizens' groups that were there to protest have now turned to delivering services close to home. Now instead of hand-biting, it's hand-shaking."

*—based on a report in the New York Times,  
February 25, 1996*

# Twelve Original 1995 Recommendations

*In January 1995, the Citizens' Planning Committee formulated 12 recommendations to serve as broad guidelines for the specific action items presented in this report. After expanding our discussions to include a full range of community voices, we believe even more strongly that these original recommendations form the core of our current efforts to meet the challenge of change. The best ideas came from those who live and work on the front lines of Austin's future, and they bear repeating:*

- I. **Simplify the development process with clear purpose and flexible approaches to ensure predictability, accountability and performance.**  
The current system serves no one well. It's a hodge-podge of confounding rules and contradicting regulations that stifle innovation, drive up costs and frustrate everyone involved. Austin's development process should serve its true customers—neighborhood residents, entrepreneurial developers and local taxpayers—not the city's own inflexible rules and regulations.
- II. **Coordinate the new process with a comprehensive, integrated system of neighborhood associations.**  
Like the confusing tangle of city rules and regulations, the confusing array of current neighborhood associations, homeowners' groups and special interests makes it difficult for even the most conscientious project planner to consult. Everyone involved in the development process has a right to know who represents whom, and all citizens should be able to readily understand and gain easy access to the mechanics of neighborhood association activities.
- III. **New development should strengthen the entire community.**  
The current system is one in which projects are conceived, plans are filed, work proceeds—and the result is a collection of disjointed projects over time. When potential problems are uncovered or objections raised, projects grind to a halt in a flurry of finger-pointing and delay—all on the taxpayers' tab. All new development must reflect the neighborhood standards and should be brought to the city only for compliance and facilitation, in keeping with the broad guidelines and overall vision of the community.
- IV. **Consider transportation and land use needs as equal parts of the planning and development process.**  
The safe mobility of residents throughout the region must be an integral consideration in any development plans. Transportation and land use are closely linked, and proposed projects or solutions must enhance both—as well as the investments of homeowners and small businesses.
- V. **Encourage high-quality pedestrian- and transit-friendly mixed-use development.**  
New ways of thinking must replace the current one-size-fits-all concept of building and planning standards. The goal of high-quality mixed-use development must be a top priority for the community. Many residents are concerned about traffic congestion in their neighborhoods, making them worry about sending their children out to play and disturbing their homes with noise and exhaust. Developers and investors are concerned about these issues, too, because they decrease the potential market value of their projects. The city's process should foster community designs that improve quality of life while meeting the challenges of real-world constraints.



**VI. Urge immediate redevelopment of downtown Austin.**

Austin's central core deserves special attention to remake it into a multi-use central business district and central city community, free of crime and with easy access streets and sidewalks and available neighborhood amenities. A special redevelopment code for downtown Austin should have as its goal an urban fabric made up of higher densities, historic structures and mixed-use projects, and it should allow for alternative compliance with minimum lot size requirements, setbacks, parking and landscaping in recognition of the area's special character.

**VII. Reinvest in East Austin.**

Austin cannot sustain economic development and attractive growth as long as East Austin remains a community of concentrated needs and faltering quality of life. Many initiatives are already underway to address these challenges, and each will be helped along by the recommendations for redesigning the city's development and planning process contained in this report.

**VIII. Evaluate each project's effect on low-income neighborhoods.**

Residents fear gentrification and a loss of community while seeking the jobs and tax base improvements that new facilities may bring. Serious and constructive programs must reduce the atmosphere of mistrust and antagonism surrounding many redevelopment efforts. A primary goal of the new development process should be to reach a balance and lessen the disproportional effect of environmentally sensitive facilities on low-income neighborhoods.

**IX. Use incentives to foster positive development and investment.**

Proper economic incentives and infrastructure systems must promote development and investment consistent with the city's overall vision, including the city-wide need for affordable housing. All development, whether low-income residential or high-end commercial, should be consistent with the overall goals of the community.

**X. Include environmental protection measures in development plans.**

The impact on our natural resources must be a top priority throughout the new development process. Projects that enhance the community and balance development with the natural environment should be able to count on a quick processing time and infrastructure savings.

**XI. Coordinate closely with surrounding communities.**

The real challenge for Austin and surrounding communities is the rate of growth, not necessarily growth itself. Austin must coordinate with its neighboring cities to ensure that they become full partners in planned and reasonable regional growth.

**XII. Implement intergovernmental planning.**

Comprehensive planning among all nearby taxing jurisdictions and local governments must be facilitated. Representatives from taxing jurisdictions and elected bodies that share responsibilities within the city limits or its Extra Territorial Jurisdiction should meet on a regular basis, pursuant to a formal internal agreement.

# A Blueprint for Austin and Surrounding Communities:

## ***Specific Steps Toward the Future***

After intense study and thorough input from every segment of the community, the Citizens' Planning Committee has developed 34 detailed action items to help build toward the successful, sustainable Austin of the future.

Each of the action items that follow contains specific steps intended to serve as a blueprint for their implementation. Each is important in its own right, but each will work effectively only when undertaken as part of a comprehensive, balanced strategy. As tempting as it might be to implement some recommendations and disregard the rest, without a full strategy, each recommendation by itself will be little more than another band-aid on the general systemic overhaul required to move Austin and surrounding communities toward a future built on common ground, not chaos.

We also encourage the city to seek additional input and specialized guidance where necessary, and to use the ideas in this report as an action plan for successfully putting the overall strategy in place.

Every specific action item in *A Blueprint For Austin and Surrounding Communities* is linked to at least one of the Citizens' Planning Committee's original 12 recommendations from January 1995 and the source material adopted by the committee on or before February 29, 1996 and presented in the Appendix of this report.

## ***Communication and Planning***

Improve communication and planning to maximize the ability of citizens to work with the city in a coordinated and mutually accountable relationship.

### **Communication**

1. Centralize and coordinate a community group and stakeholder registry, along with appropriate notification processes and education efforts. Maintain the newly created Neighborhood Association Database on a Geographic Information System; implement an annual update procedure and reduce boundary and decision making conflicts. (*Original '95 recommendation II*)

2. Assign a community involvement coordinator to create a cross-departmental community involvement initiative and coordinate it with other public programs to maximize the city's current neighborhood-based outreach efforts. *(Original '95 recommendation II)*
3. Support the Austin Free-Net as a comprehensive service component that provides computing resources to Austin-area citizens in cooperation with educational, civic and corporate entities. *(Original '95 recommendations I and III)*
4. Create the City Connection, a one-stop information and referral shop, and expand the 499-CITY program and other customer service and informational projects. *(Original '95 recommendations I and III)*
5. Declare that community involvement in the development process is a City Council priority and should be measured in all future performance reviews. *(Original '95 recommendation III)*

#### Planning

6. Establish neighborhood and community planning as components in long-range planning so that eligible groups can identify their planning needs and create standards specific to an area. Provide a clear system of communication and criteria for the evaluation of projects that also creates incentives. *(Original '95 recommendation III)*
7. Develop standards and provide assistance for establishing neighborhood planning projects in Austin's Department of Conservation and Planning. Provide for the coordination of planning activities and inventory municipal planning activities occurring in city departments and the Austin community. *(Original '95 recommendation III)*
8. Implement housing policies that use incentives to create 3,000 residential units in downtown Austin, including affordable housing. *(Original '95 recommendations VI and IX)*
9. Form a task force to develop a comprehensive mixed-use program for East Austin that is consistent with the community's overall planning process, making use of the Community

Workshop tool to recommend ways to increase residential and commercial development in the defined redevelopment area. *(Original '95 recommendation VII)*

10. Establish criteria and implement Urban Core recommendations, including the creation of a Core Master Plan, with the option of holding a major international design competition funded through private contributions in coordination with federal and state agencies and the private sector. This work should be facilitated by new codes, improvements for Waller Creek, and support for the broad range of initiatives already planned or underway, as identified in the Appendix of this report. *(Original '95 recommendations VI and VII)*
11. Prepare a Sustainable Communities effort in coordination with the city's plan to implement improvements and in cooperation with city departments to make municipal operations sustainable. This effort should also be coordinated with other municipal and citizen planning initiatives, as well as with the completion of the proposed Sustainable Unit Development incentive package as part of the revised Land Development Code. It should also provide for and fund other related activities such as Green Builder Guidelines, clustered development and the preservation of major environmental features. *(Original '95 recommendations IX and X)*
12. Form an Environmental Justice and Plant Siting task force to evaluate the impact of industrial facilities on neighborhoods and natural resources, and develop a clear process for determining the cumulative effect of industries, including efforts to promote understanding and mediation. *(Original '95 recommendation VII)*
13. Establish a Parklands Code task force to accommodate the special needs of park projects and new construction as part of the revised Land Development Code. This proposal was approved by the Austin City Council in January 1996. *(Original '95 recommendation X)*
14. Develop clear street classification criteria that accommodate a variety of transportation types. These criteria should help

determine the cumulative traffic impacts of development on a particular area of town and on the area's transportation network. *(Original '95 recommendation IV)*

15. Develop a collector street plan to complement the Austin Transportation Study's (ATS) arterial plan, and encourage other ATS member jurisdictions to develop collector street plans. To the extent possible, identify and provide for the efficient use of collector streets in advance of development. *(Original '95 recommendations IV, XI and XII)*
16. Form a Sidewalks and Trails task force to evaluate the effect of past sidewalk variances, determine future guidelines and priorities, and assess existing construction requirements. This effort should be coordinated with the street classification system and the Community Vision Project. *(Original '95 recommendations IV and V)*
17. Formulate a redevelopment incentive plan for East Austin, including amendments to the Land Development Code. *(Original '95 recommendation VII)*
18. Encourage the city of Austin to strengthen its role as a catalyst for public-private initiatives. *(Original '95 recommendations V, VII and IX)*
19. Establish a Parklands Maintenance task force charged with improving the funding of park maintenance. This proposal was approved by the Austin City Council in January 1996. *(Original '95 recommendation X)*

### **Re-engineering, Technology, Education and Information**

Make better use of technology, education and information to allow Austin and surrounding communities to serve their citizens more efficiently and effectively.

#### **Reengineering and Technology**

1. Establish a new rules process that provides for early up front notification to stakeholders who are interested in the City's rule making procedures. This proposal has been adopted and begun in the first quarter of 1996. *(Original '95 recommendations I, II and III)*

2. Implement a Development Process Reengineering Vision to replace the current fragmented, permit-based system with one that is highly responsive to customers in achieving established community standards up front. *(Original '95 recommendation I)*
3. Fund and begin the Automated Site Plan and Subdivision Review Pilot Technology. This plan was approved by the Austin City Council in February 1996. *(Original '95 recommendation I)*
4. Establish a comprehensive affordable housing initiative that restructures the residential subdivision process; streamlines the administrative process for legal lot determination; and evaluates all development, permit and inspection, utility connection and impact fees to promote affordable housing. *(Original '95 recommendations I and IX)*
5. Amend the Land Development Code to simplify the development process. The following subdivision changes are generally endorsed by the committee to simplify the code and facilitate redevelopment efforts:
  - Redefine "major" and "minor" revisions or corrections to approved preliminary plans;
  - Amend the administrative approval of final plats based on proper notification and other conditions;
  - Bring the number of lots approved administratively into compliance with state law;
  - Revise the criteria for platting exemptions; and
  - Clarify the balance of tract requirements in specific cases.*(Original '95 recommendation I)*
6. Assign a team or individual to coordinate transportation and land use planning among city departments and between local jurisdictions. *(Original '95 recommendation IV)*
7. Develop a shared Geographic Information System agreement to improve coordination of this specialized technology throughout Austin and surrounding communities. The Austin City Council approved a resolution to support work with the Capitol Area Planning Council and the Travis County Appraisal District in January 1996. *(Original '95 recommendations I and XII)*

8. Conduct a pilot study within the Austin area to identify and determine future Geographic Information System needs and opportunities for coordination. *(Original '95 recommendations I and XII)*

#### **Education and information**

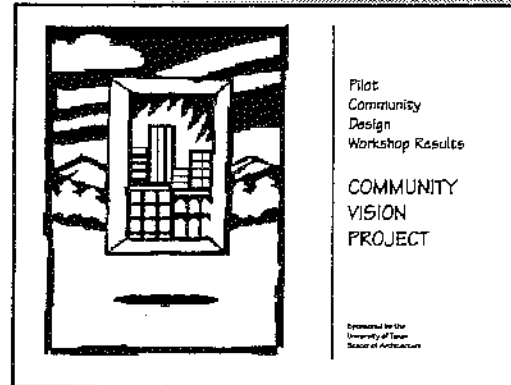
9. Fund and implement an interactive Land development Code project. This proposal was approved by the Austin City Council in February 1996. *(Original '95 recommendations I and III)*
10. Establish a Land Development Code education and training program for citizens and members of the city's staff. *(Original '95 recommendations I, II, and III)*
11. Compile and update yearly an environmental hazards database, and make it available to the public at a central location. *(Original '95 recommendations VIII and X)*

#### **Land Development Overhaul**

Simplify development regulations and permitting procedures to provide a clear, consistent and accountable process.

1. Prepare a comprehensive implementation program for rewriting the city's Land development Code consistent with the community's overall vision.  
Include the implementation of:
  - The automated site plan and subdivision review pilot project, the community planning pilot project and the interactive Land Development Code on CD-ROM project;
  - The recommendations of stakeholders participating in the task forces on Parkland Development Code, Park Maintenance, Environmental Justice and Plant Siting, East Austin and Sidewalk and Trails, as well as those developed by the Affordable Housing and Urban Core initiatives; and
  - The neighborhood communication and planning initiatives.*(Original '95 recommendations I - XII)*

2. Implement the recommendations developed from the Community Vision Project design workshops. Include incentive-based mechanisms in the Land Development Code so that pedestrian and transit-friendly mixed-use development will be embraced by the marketplace. These mechanisms should be developed by a team of professionals from Austin and other cities, with input and guidance sought from those who have participated in the Citizens' Planning Committee process. *(Original '95 recommendations IV, V and VI)*



3. Develop a new street design catalogue identifying street cross sections that expand options for pedestrian, bicycle and transit circulation, and that ensures street designs are appropriate for adjacent land uses. New street designs should provide consistent linkages to pedestrian and bicycle networks and should support adjacent land uses. *(Original '95 recommendation IV)*
4. Support cross-departmental coordination efforts to promote sustainability and continued improvements to the development process. *(Original '95 recommendation I)*

# Conclusion

Change is always a challenge, and few areas in the country have faced that challenge more than Austin and surrounding communities in recent years. More than 65,000 people have moved to our region during the past decade alone; another 300,000 are forecasted to relocate during the next two decades.

In the face of such sweeping change, the only viable choice is to reach out and shape it rather than let it wash over us, unplanned and uncontrolled.

*From Chaos to Common Ground* offers local leaders, citizens and taxpayers that chance. After long debate, we strongly believe that it is time to begin taking the steps recommended in this report and then to continue to build on their momentum in the years ahead.

The stakes are high, and it won't always be easy. But if we work together toward a future we can shape and sustain, a future in which we are willing to take both responsibility and pride, we can seize the challenge of uncertain change and turn it into a clear opportunity for everyone who lives and works here.

After all, the best way to predict the future is to *create* it.

# Appendix

## **Source Material**

The following pages contain the detailed text and specific language of the over sixty actions that were passed by the members of the Citizens' Planning Committee on or before February 29, 1996. These pages reflect the intense discussion, research and analysis that went into the process of developing this report.

The Citizens' Planning Committee ended its official status on February 29, 1996. Their recommendations for action are finalized with the issuance of this report.

## **Citizens' Planning Committee Members**

Ben Heimsath	Citizen's Planning Committee chair, Historical Landmark Commission member
Betty Edgemond	Committee Co-Vice chair, citizen advisor
Melvin Wrenn	Committee Co-Vice chair, citizen advisor
Larry Anderson	Urban Transportation Commission
Fred Blood	Environmental Board
Milosav Cekic	Design Commission
Smoot Carl-Mitchell	citizen advisor
Carroll Faulkner	citizen advisor
Phil Friday	Parks Board
John Bolt Harris	citizen advisor
Jean Mather	Planning Commission
Darwin McKee	Water & Wastewater Commission
Cecil Pennington	citizen advisor
Scott Polikov	Capital Metro Board
Alicia Reinmund	citizen advisor
Yolanda Reyes	citizen advisor
Mike Rivera	Planning Commission
Fred Robinson	Downtown Commission
John C. Rosato	citizen advisor
Abel Ruiz	Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
Curt Shaw	Austin Independent School District

# Final Recommendations for Action

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# **AUSTIN FREE-NET**

The Austin Free-Net is a comprehensive web of communication services that provides community computing resources for the benefit of citizens of the Austin area. The Austin Free-Net (AFN) provides on-line access to local, national and international information for the general populace to promote educational excellence, economic vitality and community involvement.

The Austin Free-Net is focusing on addressing the needs of children and youth in low income families. By using the Internet, young people can touch the broad array of possibilities for their lives while connecting with critical educational and health services needed by their families

The AFN is a cooperative effort involving Austin educational, civic and corporate entities. Organizations participating include the University of Texas, Austin Public Library, Literacy Austin, Austin Housing Authority, City of Austin Police and Fire Departments, Austin Independent School District, and other community organizations, private companies and communications providers.

At the core, AFN provides Internet connected computers and training in public spaces for the greater benefit of all residents. In looking at barriers to access to information, the AFN discovered that the main barriers in Austin are not related to cost per month for connectivity, but rather equipment cost and training.

AFN is a local 501(c)3 organization, and is affiliated with the National Public Telecomputing Network which is a national organization of community computing networks in over 50 cities in the United States and the world.

AFN and its partners believe that businesses and citizens of Austin want to be leaders in developing equitable access to the Information Superhighway, and AFN can make it happen.

## **Vision**

Use the Internet and other emerging technologies to connect people with information, services and people.

## **Purpose**

To provide every member of the Austin community access, through public access sites, to the Internet/National Information Infrastructure by the year 2000.

## **Goals**

- To foster universal access to advanced information technologies
- To provide a means and the tools for people to empower themselves
- To create community computing resources in the Austin region
- To provide free educational information, using the community computing resources
- Enhance the effectiveness of government by fostering greater public access and involvement in community decision making
- To create a model system which other communities can apply
- To have fun

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Support for the Austin Free-Net

(See Report - Communication #3)

# **CITY CONNECTION**

The Customer Service Unit in the City Manager's Office is currently responsible for responding to all customer contacts quickly, efficiently and accurately. This unit will be redesigned as "City Connection" and will serve as a "one-stop" shop to all customers.

City Connection will be composed of the following units:

## **ACAP - Automated Customer Assistance Process:**

This unit will be responsible for tracking requests for information and assistance from the Mayor and Council offices.

## **CAC - Citizen/Customer Action Center**

This unit will provide a one-stop information and referral shop. They will be responsible for maintaining departmental information on the Internet; ensuring that 499-City (499-2489) or 4-ACTION (422-8466) is answered during normal business hours and that it have at least one well trained backup.

The concept is to provide information and/or assistance to all citizens who dial 499-City without referring them to another department.

## **COR - Council Office Requests**

To provide coordination and assistance to all Council office requests.

## **ATIS - Automated Telephone Information Service**

A menu driven phone service that provides general information about city services.

## **SIN - Service Improvement Needs**

To provide continued review and assessment of services provided by City Connection.

## **DAM - Distribution and Archival Management**

Distribution and archival of city correspondence

## **ADS - Agenda Distribution and Support**

Assembly of the City Council agenda backup for city staff and citizens. Also included in this unit is the scheduling of the invocation for Council meetings.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Support the establishment of City Connection

(See Report - Communication #4)

## COMMUNITY VISION WORKSHOPS

The Community Vision Workshop (charrette) is a community participation project aimed at collecting and disseminating information related to the land development process in the greater Austin area. A hypothetical workshop was held February 23-24, and it studied the needs of four different hypothetical sites within the Austin area. The purpose of the workshop was to identify what a variety of community leaders would build if they had input into the development process. It provided an excellent opportunity for envisioning alternative urban designs, linkages between land use, transportation and urban design, and the value of enhanced mobility standards. The workshop was attended by 125 community residents from diverse backgrounds and interests.

The results of the hypothetical workshop will be applied at a final design workshop to be held June 14-15. The product will be a set of design principles and recommendations that consultants can incorporate into a revised land development code.

### Project Goals

- To develop a concept of pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use development appropriate for the greater Austin area
- To assemble a comprehensive set of design principles and visual images based on community input
- To utilize the new principles in amending both local land development codes and plan review procedures and in creating development incentives
- To promote an understanding and appreciation of varying development viewpoints in relation to communities

(See Report - Land Development Overhaul #2; Planning #16)

## DEVELOPMENT PROCESS RE-ENGINEERING

The current state of the development process is organizationally fragmented. At the present time the development process entails 63 categories of authorizations within 12 departments and 49 departmental sections. The authorizations are issued at 16 different locations within 10 different buildings. Each section and department has paper and/or automated records/information isolated from each other - some redundant, but all necessary for staff and the public.

The current process is a result of years/decades of evolution. All projects eventually require re-work, re-design, re-review, reconstruction and re-inspection. There is a lack of communication among all involved, and as a result, the process is unpredictable in terms of time, cost and requirements. This has created a situation of distrust, not only within the City organization, but between the City, development community and citizenry.

The Re-engineering Vision is community based with shared accountability. The vision will reorganize the City's process by creating a one-stop project oriented service.

### Benefits

- Inclusive and open
- Shared responsibility and accountability for projects to meet community standards
- Projects are designed to meet community standards up front
- Projects are constructed as initially designed
- Information and data sharing from remote locations throughout the community
- Develop community partnerships in education, certification and audit programs where all participants

(public and private) have a clear understanding of requirements and procedures - building trust to accept designs and construction certified as meeting community standards

- Encourage neighborhood involvement early in the process utilizing recommendations for reorganized neighborhood groups

### **RECOMMENDATION**

Adopt and Implement a Development Process Re-engineering Vision

(See Report - Re-engineering and Technology #2)

## **DIGITAL ORTHOPHOTO**

This pilot program is for the attainment of digital orthophoto information of geographic terrain for a four (4) square mile area within the Austin city limits. This information will be displayed on Geographic Information System (GIS) and shared with regional and local entities.

- Further the cooperative effort between the City and other governmental agencies
- Improve opportunities for regional planning initiatives
- Test the new data for the ability to perform complex drainage and terrain modeling, flood plain analysis and land use assessment
- Evaluate the value-added features gained through the GIS tool, namely a product which can demonstrate the usefulness of GIS in solving problems and bringing information to the desktop to make more accurate, consistent and timely decisions
- A basis from which to analyze:
- Specification requirements such as degree of resolution, pixel size, contour interval;
- Peripheral needs such as hardware requirements to store additional data, impact on the system due to size of files transferred and stored;
- Assessment of the interaction between the digital orthophoto information to current GIS coverages; and
- Value-added capability of the City to enhance the Capital Area Planning Council's (CAPCO) participation in leading a successful coordinated GIS effort in their jurisdictions.

(See Report - Re-engineering and Technology #8)

## **EAST AUSTIN INITIATIVES**

The original Citizens' Planning Committee Report dated January 19, 1995, included East Austin in its definition of Austin Urban Core, and also issued two recommendations specific to East Austin. These recommendations were made with the awareness of several initiatives which had already begun and specific recommendations were made with an eye toward facilitating those and other initiatives by correcting the process without getting involved with specific initiatives.

On January 25, 1996, the Committee was asked to review existing East Austin initiatives in light of the previous recommendations. The initiatives analyzed were the Austin Redevelopment Agency for the 11th and 12th Street Commercial Corridors; Ole' Mexico, and Saltillo Plaza. The committee's final recommendations reflect how the various initiatives can be assisted by improved development processes.

Each of the initiatives run into shortfalls that could be cured by the enactment of a Redevelopment Code and a revised review process. In order for all of the initiatives to go forward, there is the need for waiver of minimum lot sizes, etc., similar to those granted under the affordable housing initiative headed by the Office of Neighborhood Housing and Conservation.

Each of the initiatives makes creative use of development strategies including the use of tax incentive financing to create capital and the leveraging of Housing and Urban Development funds to increase the pool of capital.

#### **Recommendations of the January 19, 1995 Report:**

- VII. Reinvestment, redevelopment and remediation in East Austin must be encouraged and facilitated by the City's planning and development process.
- B. The recommended development code and review process should address issues specific to East Austin. The Code will require the use of good developmental practices, but should not penalize the downtown and East Austin areas for their physical limitations relative to lot size, parking, setbacks, etc. Parking and landscape requirements should be relaxed when necessary to promote redevelopment in East Austin.
  - C. The City of Austin and City Codes should support development strategies, encourage small businesses and urban infill, and prevent gentrification. Consideration needs to be given to the disproportionate amount of industrial zoning in East Austin. Existing plans for the creation and promotion of positive images, such as Ole' Mexico should be supported. There should be an extension of the mixed-use zone in the downtown business corridors into East Austin that would be reviewed on a case by case basis.
- IX. The City needs to make use of economic incentives, infrastructure and investment to coordinate and encourage development consistent with its vision.
- B. Pursue public-private partnerships that are financially and socially beneficial, but only when there is substantial probability of a reasonable return of the investment. The public-private partnerships should be considered in terms of increased property and sales tax revenues, increased employment and the like. The City should investigate successful public-private partnerships in other cities.
  - C. Develop an award system (fee exemptions, streamlined process) that will be given to developers that provide the community with projects that implement the City's goals and vision.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

1. Provide a streamlined process for administrative lot affirmation of legal lots.
2. Evaluate and adjust, on a case by case basis, all development fees, construction, permit and inspection fees, utility connection and impact fees, and all other fees associated with the subdivision and residential construction process.
3. The City of Austin should continue to be a financial catalyst for public/private initiatives that capture tax base from increased property and sales taxes as a potential means to fund additional redevelopment initiatives.
4. Recommend enactment of a Redevelopment Incentive Program, including appropriate amendments to the Land Development Code, for a geographic area bordered approximately on the west by IH-35; on the north by Manor Road/Springdale Road (including the site of Robert Mueller Airport); on the east by U.S. 183; and on the south by Riverside Drive, to remove impediments to redevelopment of the area.
5. Establish a task force to develop a comprehensive mixed use program, consistent with the City's overall planning process, to recommend ways to increase residential and commercial development in the defined redevelopment area and to make use of the Community Design Workshop tool.

(See Report - Planning #9, 17; Re-engineering and Technology #5)

# ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS DATABASE

Currently, information related to environmental hazards is fragmented throughout the city. The City and State have relevant information, but the information is not consolidated or accessible. For example, safety data base, underground storage tank information and other pollutant emission information is dispersed throughout the city.

## Benefits

- Enhanced accessibility of public information
- Promote awareness throughout the City
- Promote informed decision-making

## RECOMMENDATION

Compilation of an Environmental Hazards Database to be updated on an annual basis, and accessible to the public at a centralized location.

(See Report - Education and Information #11)

# ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND PLANT SITING

## Purpose

To give consideration to the disproportional impact of negative environmental facilities on low-income neighborhoods and communities of color.

## Background

There is a growing concerns from neighborhoods that have become the neighbors of multiple large manufacturing facilities. There is the real sense of loss of community, the fear of gentrification, and the questions "how does this benefit me?...how does this hurt me?" In general, this situation provides opportunities for mistrust and lack of empowerment resulting in antagonistic, defensive strategies. It currently is a No Win situation, resulting in a Lose for the neighborhoods and a Lose for the industries as well as a Lose for the general community that desires additional local tax base.

The most outward and specific example of this is a civil complaint filed against the City of Austin and the TNRCC by PODER and the Montopolis Area Neighborhood Improvement Council that alleges:

"...City of Austin discriminates against people of color...by ignoring environmental protection and public health needs...City of Austin...engaged in...systematic discriminatory conduct through the concealment of information...to deny minorities and low income citizens, equal protection of the law."

## Benefits

- Raise public awareness of siting needs for industry
- Raise public awareness of socio/environmental impacts of industry on neighborhoods
- Raise public awareness about cumulative impacts of Industrial/Manufacturing Parks
- Provide a reasonable and equitable process for neighborhood values and industry needs can be mediated and mitigated

## RECOMMENDATION

Establishment of a Task Force to accomplish the following:

- Evaluate what factors are important for industry siting
- Evaluate what impacts there are on the natural environment and local neighborhoods
- Evaluate a process to determine potential cumulative impacts
- Establish a process through which local neighborhoods and industry can learn to understand each others concerns
- Establish a fair and balanced mediation and mitigation process in which a Win-Win process can be constructed

(See Report - Planning #12)

## HOUSING POLICY

### Purpose

To implement a city-wide Affordable Housing Policy.

### Background

On February 22, 1995, the City Council approved a resolution to formulate a Comprehensive Affordable Housing Policy for the City of Austin. Several key departments have since been instructed to bring back recommendations on what their department can do toward the adoption of such a policy.

Affordable Housing has been defined as housing which can be leased or purchased by families with incomes below 80% of Median Family Income (MFI) if the family spends no more than 30% of the family monthly income on rent or mortgage payment.

For Austin, the figures\* based on family size are:

Family Size	Annual Income	Monthly Income	Availability for House Payment per month
1 person	\$24,200	\$2,016	\$604
2 persons	27,650	2,304	691
3 persons	31,100	2,591	777
4 persons	34,550	2,879	863
5 persons	37,300	3,108	932

\*To be revised annually per Federal standards

## RECOMMENDATION

Adopt a Housing Policy which includes mechanisms to ensure housing affordability to all throughout the City of Austin.

1. Re-engineer the residential subdivision process, Building Code and Land Development Code to automate, accelerate, simplify and provide a more efficient and economic delivery of finished affordable lots.
2. Evaluate and adjust, based on affordability, all development fees, construction, permit and inspection fees, utility connection and impact fees, and all other fees associated with the subdivision and residential construction process.
3. Implement tax foreclosure initiatives to put vacant properties to use.
4. Require accessible affordable housing.

5. Evaluate amending the Capital Recovery Fee Ordinance that waives fees on CDBG funded projects to include projects funded in part by CDBG, HOME or other federal or state funds used specifically for affordable housing programs. (Excludes projects funded with low income tax credits or tax free bonds.)
6. Recommend that landscaping and major appliances be included in the financing package of affordable housing assistance programs.
7. Provide a streamlined process for administrative lot affirmation of illegal lots.

(See Report - Re-engineering and Technology #4)

## **LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE**

The current Land Development Code is difficult to understand and is seen as the result of decades of narrowly focused issues. The code is also seen as being inflexible and exists only as a "suburban" code that does not support urban development or redevelopment.

The desired state of the code is viewed as having incentive and performance-based design standards as well as being accessible, interactive and understandable. The future development code is also envisioned as being flexible and supportive of neighborhood, area and regional plans.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

Preparation of a Comprehensive Implementation Program to rewrite the Land Development Code.

(See Report - Land Development Overhaul #1 and 2)

## **LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE (LDC) EDUCATION & TRAINING PROGRAM FOR CITY STAFF & CITIZENS**

There is a clear and undeniable need to educate citizens, developers and all participants in the land development process about the City's land development code. The Land Development Code and Process subcommittee and the Neighborhood Subcommittee share this belief. In addition, educational criteria and audits are concepts introduced in the City's Reengineering Report.

Poorly understood codes result in redesigns, revisions and re-inspections - a major motivating force for the committee's efforts. Further, active citizens may know how the process works but can be intimidated going before City boards and commissions. Without education and training it can be difficult for citizens to make logical arguments about a project before the project's final design.

This recommendation could lead to the development of curriculum on all aspects of the code; and the training of neighborhood and staff participants, and the public design community. All these efforts should be administered in a way that the City could become more efficient. The ultimate goal of this effort is that projects will one day be built to community standards.

### **Benefits**

- An informed neighborhood, staff and design community
- Reduction of the information barriers that currently exist
- Improved Submittals
- Greater understanding of the nature and need for City requirements

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Recommend the establishment of an education and training program for city staff and citizens on the City of Austin Land Development Code.

(See Report - Education and Information #10)

## **LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE - SUBDIVISIONS**

For the purpose of facilitating redevelopment efforts, the Citizens' Planning Committee recommends the following:

1. Define major v. minor revisions and corrections to approved preliminary plans.
2. Upon proper notification, allow administrative approval of final plats for preliminary plans with four or fewer lots that meet the criteria for minor plats.
3. As per State Law, increase the number of lots that can be approved administratively.
4. Expand the platting exemption provision to include existing tracts that meet certain criteria.
5. On previously platted lots where an owner is requesting a "balance of tract" waiver, clarify balance of tract requirements, e.g. who should be notified within the original tract, especially if the majority of the land area has been platted; identify criteria for notification and participation in a pending subdivision application.

(See Report - Re-engineering and Technology #5)

## **LAND USE AND TRANSPORTATION**

- Develop a street design catalogue identifying street cross sections that expand options for pedestrian, bicycle and transit circulation, and that ensures street designs are appropriate for adjacent land uses. New street designs should provide consistent linkages to pedestrian and bicycle networks and should support adjacent land uses.
- Develop Intermodal criteria for street classification cases. This criteria should facilitate determination of the cumulative traffic impacts of development in a particular area of town on the area's transportation network as a whole..
- Develop a collector street plan to complement the ATS arterial plan, and encourage other ATS member jurisdictions to develop collector street plans. To the extent possible, identify and provide for the efficient use of collector streets in advance of development.
- Establish a land use and transportation coordinator who will coordinate transportation and land use planning among city departments and between local jurisdictions.
- Retain a professional team to develop incentive mechanisms for the Land Development Code so that transit and friendly mixed-use development is available in the market place based upon the principles and processes developed during the Community Vision Program.

(See Report - Planning #14, 15; Re-engineering and Technology #6; Land Development Overhaul #3)

# NEIGHBORHOODS

## Findings

The Neighborhood Empowerment Subcommittee examined the city's relationship with Neighborhood Associations. A variety of systems were examined. Following meetings in neighborhoods, six months of subcommittee meetings, the State of the Neighborhood Report, a survey of City of Austin neighborhood programs, the Curry Proposal, and a final public hearing, the following is found:

- Absent rules or expectations. Over 70% of homeowner and neighborhood associations have reasonable degrees of organization and representation, but only informal, ad hoc, coordination of boundaries, decision making and communication.
- A lack of priority to maintain lists and provide information as City funds and staff dwindled. Multiple lists kept in different departments have created undue confusion, frustration and mistrust.
- Neighborhoods complain of late notification, lack of information, and being treated as a hindrance to providing services rather than a stakeholder for many programs, not just planning department functions.
- Developers complain of difficulty determining to what extent of interaction is sufficient, who to work with, and the group's legitimacy as representatives.
- The community and developers alike face the same communication problems, fragmentation, and turf issues when problems of projects cross department functions.

## Assessment

Only the City can change the environment that created and perpetuates the stereotyped development impasse. The problems are systemic and require departmental changes that will stimulate voluntary changes by community groups, the press and developers alike.

- Recognize the community as a legitimate stakeholder in public and private objects. City departments must respond to and support proactive involvement by developers or civic groups, businesses and neighborhoods to shape the city.
- Invest in technology, education and support services to facilitate community involvement and improve communication with all stakeholders and at all levels.
- Coordinate existing and create needed department functions, including processes (pre-submittal meetings) and programs (community policing) that create an effective comprehensive community involvement network.
- Facilitate voluntary organizational changes that create a broad based coalition of community groups as representatives for a geographic area.

## RECOMMENDATION

- I. Declare Community Involvement as a Council priority to be assessed in performance audits.
- II. Appoint a Community Involvement Manager to carry out the following:
  - A. Assess, coordinate, and recommend changes in programs and processes to create a cross departmental community involvement initiative and coordinate it with other public entities' community involvement programs.
    1. Catalogue numerous processes and programs directed at the community
      - Identify duplication, inefficiency and opportunities
      - Centralize and coordinate efforts to reduce costs, provide a unified public interface and foster a proactive approach
      - Maximize existing community organization efforts in APD and Health and Human Services to combine with new long range planning functions to form an integrated planning and service delivery initiative
    2. Initiate joint efforts and coordinate with community involvement programs of other entities such as ATS and Capital Metro

3. Promote city, peer and non-government assistance to community groups to resolve boundary and decision making conflicts, foster community coalitions to act as city and neighborhood liaisons, and support proactive initiatives with departments
  4. Solicit participation of registered groups in community planning programs and facilitate support services for interested groups to meet eligibility criteria
- B. Centralize and coordinate a community group/stakeholder registry, notification process, and education activities for all departments under the Public Information Office and City Connection. Failure to register does not impair an individual's ability to exercise their common rights before the City Council or boards and commissions.
1. A centralized registry maintained by categories and boundaries to ensure sufficient notice and referrals as mandated by law and expressed by interest requires:
    - an annual update of group notification information
    - group deletion if no response is received upon 60 days following two written notices and one phone contact
    - new registrants must demonstrate that they do not conflict with existing groups or have just cause to be registered
  2. Improved community education, awareness, and notification should be expanded to include local newspapers, Channel 6, the "At Your Doorstep" Newsletter, neighborhood newsletters (34 listed) videos, pamphlets, and the Internet.
  3. A handbook for community participation detailing city processes, common rights of citizens and groups, and setting organizational expectations to enable groups to play a more proactive role in planning their community, and facilitating and improving the land development and other processes.
- C. Amend the land development code, modify forms, and direct staff to support early community involvement in private development projects.
1. Promote voluntary pre-submittal meetings between applicant and registered community groups.
  2. Require a pre-submittal meetings between applicants and community groups for Council adopted community plans such as NCCDs.
  3. Require a report of contact be kept and that staff provide a summary of contacts as part of the case record to boards and commissions that reflects the community's position on projects.
- D. Establish Community Planning as community involvement program area in long range planning to allow eligible groups to identify their planning needs and create standards specific to the area and provide a clear system of communication and evaluation of projects.
1. Direct staff to create and support a localized level of codes and uses, and transportation plans for geographic areas directed at achieving community goals.
  2. A steering committee should be appointed to work with staff and consultants to determine:
    - criteria for community involvement, planning process, adoption procedures and format developed from the outcomes of the community planning pilot and community vision project; and
    - community involvement processes for plan implementation to be developed in conjunction with land development code revisions and CIP planning processes.
  3. Designation of Re-engineering funds for staff and equipment to the Development Services Department, the Planning Environmental and Conservation Services Department and Public Information Office (PIO)-City Connection for the following projects:
    - Neighborhood association list development maintenance. Facilitate during FY 95-96, the annual sign-up of neighborhood associations, centralize and maintain the list, and facilitate communication with neighborhoods at time of development applications.
    - Develop a process, during FY 95-96 to include standards for establishing a pilot neighborhood planning project.

(See Report - Communication #1, 2, 5; Planning #6,7; Land Development Overhaul #1)

# **NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION DATABASE ON GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEM (GIS)**

Austin's first neighborhood association formed in 1965. The City has amassed some 500 potential neighborhood associations over the years. There are numerous duplications and inactive associations shown on the City's current list. In addition, the map used by the Development Services Department to identify neighborhood boundaries is so overlain with boundaries that it is extremely difficult to read and update. The current status of many groups and notification entities is difficult to ascertain.

To address this problem, the Citizen's Planning Committee staff has contacted each neighborhood association on the list to obtain basic data information, updated the list, and have entered the information on a GIS data base.

## **Benefits of Creating a Neighborhood Association Database on the Geographic Information System (GIS):**

- Improved citizen participation
- Improved notification
- Improved ability for neighborhoods to coordinate with each other
- Improved ability for City to coordinate with neighborhoods, such as implementing neighborhood based service delivery
- Ability to analyze the existing status of neighborhoods in Austin
- Ability to better administratively manage the neighborhood association process

(See Report - Communication #1)

## **RULE PROMULGATION PROCESS**

Currently, there are four phases to the City's rule promulgation process:

(1) Administrative; (2) Public Comment; (3) Appeal; and (4) Implementation or Adoption.

The major change in this revised rule promulgation process relates to the initial rule preparation phase. Under the new process, stakeholders are involved in the initial review phase. In addition, the City's review will not occur unless stakeholder participation can be verified.

### **Benefits**

- Enhances citizen awareness regarding City department proposals
- Allows citizen input in rule development at an early stage
- Improve City and Neighborhood cooperation
- Lessen conflict through early and efficient communication between all affected parties

(See Report - Re-engineering and Technology #1)

## **SIDEWALKS AND TRAILS**

### **Purpose**

To evaluate existing conflicts in sidewalk rules and provide a procedure to mitigate problems with a cost effective solution.

## **Background**

For some projects either a lay-out or cost of building a sidewalk is greatly disproportionate to the benefits gained. In other parts of town, minor relatively inexpensive additions are desperately needed to complete a needed addition. The task force will investigate processes where special circumstances will allow a transfer of sidewalk construction costs from a poorly benefited area to an area of need.

## **Benefits**

- Provide a standard of need to prioritize resources
- Reduce the costs of unneeded sidewalk construction
- Improve connectability of existing sidewalks and trails

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Establish a Task Force to accomplish the following:

- Evaluate examples of previous sidewalk variances
- Determine guidelines to evaluate need and priorities based on pedestrian circulation network
- Evaluate existing construction requirements for sidewalks and trails
- Consider mitigation/swap process in lieu of waivers
- Coordinate action with street classification system and Community Vision Program

(See Report - Planning #16)

# **SUSTAINABLE UNIT DEVELOPMENT**

## **Background**

The Infrastructure Task Force was appointed by the City Council to examine development incentives for projects adopting appropriate sustainable or "green" development strategies. The Task Force worked towards (1) establishing desired "green" elements; and (2) development strategies.

This led to the creation of a Sustainable Unit Development (SUD) proposal. This concept offers an alternative to the standard development processes, and includes two primary benefits:

1. It incorporates features that enhance the community and balances development with environmental quality; and
2. allows innovative developments to reduce the typical processing time and realize cost savings in infrastructure.

The SUD concept proposes two development pathways:

1. A standard process under existing land development regulations
2. A "fast track" of projects originating with and meeting certain "green" features

The concept will be studied further to include differing minimum green features for differing zones, to develop further criteria and specific requirements, and to determine how this alternative will interface with current land development code requirements.

## **Potential Benefits**

1. Ecologically Integrated Plan
2. Mixed use development
3. Economic Diversity
4. Renewable Energy "farm"

5. Transportation impact for daily needs
6. Stormwater reuse
7. Wastewater reuse
8. Green Builder certification
9. Financing Package
10. Tax Package
11. Use of existing infrastructure

#### **Minimum Green Features**

- Homes built to 4-Star Green Builder Standards
- Landscape plan, including Outdoor Water Budget that incorporates 100% Xeriscape and Integrated Pest Management
- 50% of buildings oriented for solar access (within 15% of Solar South)
- Rainwater from impervious cover captured for reuse
- 5% less impervious cover than required by ordinance
- 10% of the site left in natural state
- 25% minimum green space
- Clustered housing (current code definition)
- Exceed street requirement by 10%
- Additional 50' setback from CIFs
- Mixed Use Development
- Sprinklers in all buildings
- Neighborhood park and recreational facilities

#### **Development Benefits**

- 21 day review process for initial comments; 14 days for returned comments
- 10% reduction in development fees
- 27' street width and reduced cul-de-sac requirements
- 10% reduction in water and electric hookup fees
- Marketing and recognition through the City's Green Builder Program
- Parkland requirement met

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

The Citizens' Planning Committee recognizes that this is an ongoing program and thus encourage the completion of this initiative as follows:

- a. Support development and preparation of a Sustainable Communities Initiative to:
  - Include a CIP Plan, working with City departments to make municipal operations sustainable
  - Assist in the coordination of municipal and citizen planning efforts
  - Completion of the proposed Sustainable Unit Development Incentive Package
  - Coordination of planning activities; inventory of municipal planning activities occurring in city departments and the community, and make recommendations on appropriate coordination.
  - Support cross-functional systems to support Sustainability initiatives, community-involvement initiatives, and the Departments of Planning and Environmental Services and Development Services.
- b. Funding of Sustainability Initiatives such as:
  - Green Builder Guidelines
  - Clustered Development
  - Preservation of significant environmental features

(See Report - Planning #11; Land Development Overhaul #4)

# URBAN CORE

## Policy Recommendations

- I. Immediate: 6 months to 1 year
  - a. Establish criteria defining the urban core boundaries eligible for development initiatives.
  - b. Identify special effort zones
  - c. Follow and build upon RUDAT recommendations
    - Make a strong public commitment to downtown development
    - Complete work on Tax Abatements and TIF districts
  - d. Address security concerns in the urban core area
- II. Short Term: 1 to 3 Years
  - a. Establish overall direction for urban core development by initiating the creation of an Urban Core Master Plan and related district plans.
  - b. Support efforts to organize a major international urban design competition as a mechanism for generating a Master Plan.
  - c. Develop interim design guidelines to encourage pedestrian and transit friendly mixed-use development in the urban core.
  - d. Upon completion of a Master Plan, create new development codes (Urban, Architectural and Sustainability).
  - e. Explore the use of independent development authorities to facilitate the implementation of a Master Plan.
  - f. Make design a principal concern in the development process.
  - g. Identify existing and future needs and capacities in infrastructure; determine Critical Path Method (CPM) approach to address deficiencies, and establish collaborative processes.
- III. Long Term: 5 Years and Beyond
  - a. Complete work on new development codes (Urban, Architectural and Sustainability).
  - b. Create a special service within the re-engineered Planning Department to specifically address urban core development issues.
  - c. At the initiative of independent development authorities and the Planning Department, review, and if needed, revise the vision and codes every five years against current community values and the market place.

## **Specific Project Recommendations - Six Months to One Year**

### **Waller Creek Development**

- Make a public commitment to permanently solve the flooding and water quality problems along the creek.
- Allocate funds and commission further studies, and within three years, begin implementation of water flow diversion tunnel.

### **Inter-Modal Facility Development**

Commission urban and architectural design (City of Austin, Capital Metro) with an intent to begin implementation within three years.

### **Downtown Housing**

Use development incentives to create 3,000 housing units within five years in the downtown area; the majority of which would be affordable.

## **Public Transit**

Begin development of a fixed guideway transportation system connecting the University of Texas, the Capitol Complex, downtown, East Austin and the airport.

## **Great Streets Project**

Accelerate the "Great Streets Project and coordinate with the Catalog of Urban Streets.

## **I.H. 35**

Consider depressing IH-35 as the only solution for the urban core in terms of compact city patterns and connection to east Austin.

## **East Austin**

Accelerate work on East Austin Initiatives:

- East 11th and 12th Street Areas
- Ole' Mexico and Saltillo Plaza Projects

## **Downtown Mobility and Transition from IH-35 to City Streets**

Based on Downtown Master Plan, begin studies for an overall downtown distribution of transit and parking facilities

## **Government**

- Accelerate work on the municipal office complex (MOC) in an effort to reinforce Austin's core as the seat of government
- Encourage local, state and federal government agencies to stay in the core area
- Consolidate city government in the core area

## **Arts District**

Make a focused effort to concentrate the arts in the urban core area. Establish diverse venues for arts and entertainment in new and existing facilities.

(See Report - Planning #8 and 10)

# RECOMMENDATIONS APPROVED BY COUNCIL

## RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the City Council has previously established the Citizens Planning Committee, and charged it to "devise updated planning principles and policies for the land use decision-making process"; and

WHEREAS, the Citizens Planning Committee, in its formal report to the City Council, has made the following recommendation:

"Rec. X,C Provide a special Land Development Code review for park projects and construction. Regulations such as those pertaining to flood plains, landscaping, pest management plans and the like, should be revised to fit the practical context of parkland development. Waiver of inapplicable issues should be administrative"; and

WHEREAS, the Citizens Planning Committee has subsequently identified the foregoing issue as a priority, and recommended that a task force be established to recommend appropriate changes to the Land Development Code; NOW, THEREFORE,

### BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF AUSTIN:

That the City Manager appoint an internal task force made up of representatives from the following City Departments, citizen groups and private sector professions:

- Parks and Recreation Department
- Development, Review and Inspection Department
- Planning, Environment and Conservation Services Department
- Drainage Utility Department
- Environmental Organization
- Recreational Organization
- Architect or Engineer
- Citizens Planning Committee; and

### BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the aforesaid task force be chaired by the representative of the Parks and Recreation Department; and

That the aforesaid task force shall convene within three weeks, and shall present to the City Council by April 25, 1996, an outline of its conclusions and recommendations; and

That the City Manager provide appropriate staffing assistance; and

That the members of this task force be exempt from the requirements imposed by Sections 2-3-71 through 2-3-77 of the Austin City Code of 1992, as amended.

ADOPTED: January 11, 1996

ATTEST:

*James E. Aldridge*  
James E. Aldridge  
City Clerk

RC/ln  
20325

## RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the City Council has previously established the Citizens Planning Committee, and charged it to "devise updated planning principles and policies for the land use decision-making process"; and

WHEREAS, the Citizens Planning Committee, in its formal report to the City Council, has made the following recommendation:

"Rec. X,B Parkland maintenance generally has suffered. Furthermore, the existing policies and lack of funding prevents the development of neighborhood pocket parks. Neighborhood pocket parks should be encouraged. The City should increase funding for parkland maintenance"; and

WHEREAS, the Citizens Planning Committee has subsequently identified the foregoing issue as a priority, and recommended that a citizens' task force be established to recommend policy for dealing with the issue, and that such task force should consist of representatives from neighborhood associations and the development community and a member of the Citizens' Planning Committee, and should be supported by representatives from the Parks and Recreation Department, the Finance Department, and the City Council itself; NOW, THEREFORE,

### BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF AUSTIN:

That a temporary task force be formed to consist of nine members appointed by the City Council. One member of the task force shall be a representative from the Citizens Planning Committee and one member from the Parks and Recreation Board; and

### BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the aforesaid task force shall recommend policies to enable the City to deal more effectively with the problem of parkland maintenance, including the problems of maintaining neighborhood pocket parks and identifying additional financial resources for parks; and

That the meetings of the group shall be public. The afore said task force shall coordinate its work with the Parks and Recreation Board and the Citizens Planning Committee and shall publicize its meetings and solicit input from other interested citizens and City staff; and

That the aforesaid task force shall recommend changes to the Land Development Code provisions, including provisions dealing with flood plains, landscaping, pest management plans and the like so that requirements for parkland development will be more practical and will facilitate parkland development; and

That the meetings of the group shall be public. The aforesaid task force shall coordinate its work with the Parks and Recreation Board and the Citizens Planning Committee and shall publicize its meetings and solicit input from other interested citizens and City staff; and

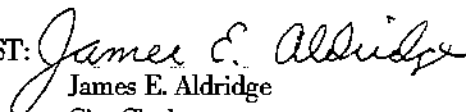
That the aforesaid task force shall convene within three weeks, and shall present to the City Council by March 25, 1996, an outline of its conclusions and recommendations; and

That the City Manager prepare a scope of work and timeline for carrying out the recommendations of the aforesaid task force and that appropriate staffing assistance be provided; and

That the members of this task force be exempt from the requirements imposed by Sections 2-3-71 through 2-3-77 of the Austin City Code of 1992, as amended.

ADOPTED: January 11, 1996

ATTEST:

  
James E. Aldridge  
City Clerk

RC/ln  
20324

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the Capital Area Planning Council, also known as CAPCO, is recognized as the regional planning council for the ten-county region, including and surrounding the City of Austin and Travis County; and

WHEREAS, CAPCO has the legislative responsibility to design, plan, implement and administer the 9-1-1 Emergency Telephone System for this region; and

WHEREAS, Geographic Information System, also known as GIS, and mapping are major components for a 9-1-1 Emergency Telephone System; and

WHEREAS the Citizens Planning Committee recommends the exchange of information and resources to support a cooperative GIS program; NOW, THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF AUSTIN:

To endorse the naming of the Capital Area Planning Council as Regional 9-1-1 GIS/Mapping Coordinators and to encourage them to take a leadership role in establishing a CAPCO GIS Coordinating Council; and

The GIS Coordinating Council will assist local governments in establishing and maintaining interactive relationships between governmental agencies and cooperating organizations that are currently using or have a need for accurate, up-to-date aerial photography, map, and geographic data in the CAPCO region; and

To establish communications and data exchange standards, pursue geographic data sharing initiatives, establish on-line data services, coordinate global positioning systems (also known as GPS development), and seek funding for this project.

ADOPTED: January 11, 1996

ATTEST:

*James E. Aldridge*  
James E. Aldridge  
City Clerk

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## RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the City's Reengineering Report has found that doing development in Austin is unpredictable, costly and time consuming; and

WHEREAS, technological improvements which allow for electronic submittal and review of plans can reduce communication and fragmentation problems, reduce staff review and cycle time, and increase staff productivity; and

WHEREAS, the Citizens Planning Committee endorses a subdivision and site plan review pilot to study the advantages of submitting subdivision plans and site plans by using electronic systems; and

WHEREAS, the Citizens Planning Committee believes that the inaccessibility and price of the City's Land Development Code has a negative effect on the need to inform citizens and design participants about the land development code process; and

WHEREAS, the Citizens Planning Committee proposes that the current Land Development Code be made available to the public via CD ROM and the Internet; NOW, THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF AUSTIN:

That the City Manager be directed to proceed with an automation review pilot and an interactive land development code project.

ADOPTED: February 8, 1996

ATTEST:

*James E. Aldridge*  
James E. Aldridge  
City Clerk

MT/alc/H/AACENDAELECTRIC.WPD  
2/8/96 #46(a)