

STATEMENT BY A NEIGHBORHOOD ADVOCATE

BEFORE THE LAND USE COMMISSION ON APRIL 28, 2018

A lot of the neighborhoods impacted most by CodeNEXT (Urban Renewal Austin Style) are those that still retain some diversity in income, occupation, ethnicity, lifecycle, and housing choice. A lot of people moved to these neighborhoods for what they offered and what they could *afford*. People built them into communities.

The CodeNEXT experiment started in neighborhoods in the 1990s with glossy brochures from the City during the neighborhood planning process that promised more affordability and more housing if special residential “uses” were adopted in the plans. Several neighborhoods in East Austin adopted the new residential types. Small lots amnesty which allowed substandard lots to be redeveloped, cottage lots – which allowed 2,500 sq. ft. lots, and urban home which allowed 3,500 sq. ft. lots with ADUs. Sound familiar? Sounds like the R2C CodeNEXT mapped for most of the older parts of the city? Sound like the answer to the affordability issue?

Some of these plans, such as the Chestnut Neighborhood Plan were adopted in **1999**.

Well – how did that work for those communities? The “tools” gentrified the communities, displacing low-income people, and their community voice was gone. In Dr. Eric Tang’s paper, *Those who Stayed*¹, original residents have both the burden of fast-raising property taxes and their belief that their neighborhood had lost its sense of community:

Between 2000 and 2010,
Black population decreased by 66%
Latino population decreased by 33 %,
White population increased by 442%

CodeNEXT increases entitlements on almost every residential property in the City, if not by increasing units, by reducing lot size. From an MIT thesis², “**Evidence from upzonings shows that ... Increased density appears to correspond to higher rents, higher median incomes, and more white and Asian inhabitants.**” In a national survey, **85%** of New Urbanist projects were unaffordable to someone making the Area Median Income³. **There are winners and losers in this redesign of Austin, and CodeNEXT is aimed at making Austin a “better” city for the demographic of people who are going to move here in the future at the expense of the people who live here now.**

I will close with a quote from an opinion piece in the New York Times: “The central weapon of assault ... that gives the city to a different social class (gentrification) is the massive rezonings of neighborhoods. It is a “a systematic class-remaking of city neighborhoods.” Widespread transformation is intentional, massive and swift, resulting in a completely sanitized city.”⁴

¹ Report from the Institute for Urban Policy and Research & Analysis (UT Austin) *THOSE WHO STAYED The Impact of Gentrification on Longstanding Residents of East Austin* by Tang, Falola & Desir

² Goldberg, Leo, 2015, <https://dspace.mit.edu/bitstream/handle/1721.1/98935/921891223-MIT.pdf?sequence=1>)

³ “ Affordable housing in New Urbanist Communities: A survey of developers, Emily Talen, Professor of Urban Planning, Arizona State University, 2008)

⁴ Jeremiah Moss, <https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2014/04/13/the-pros-and-cons-of-gentrification/new-yorkers-need-to-take-back-their-city>