



Bait and Switch: Transition Zones, Imagine Austin and CodeNext

Austin's City Charter requires that the proposed sweeping rewrite of the land development code (CodeNext) be consistent with *Imagine Austin*, the City's comprehensive plan. It has been suggested that CodeNext should create "transition zones" – areas adjacent to *Imagine Austin* corridors densifying the existing neighborhood. This approach would corrupt the code-writing process, violate *Imagine Austin* and, in the process, betray the trust of the citizens of Austin.

Transition Zones are foreign to *Imagine Austin*, except as they deal with the natural environment. Because they are not part of *Imagine Austin*, Transition Zones are not defined in *Imagine Austin*. Except as noted above, they are not discussed in *Imagine Austin*. They are not a product or even a concept of *Imagine Austin*. They are not imagined by *Imagine Austin*.

Even the word "transition" is not defined in *Imagine Austin* and, in fact, is used only 18 times. The few times it is used in any way relevant to land use, it is used to promote compatibility, e.g., "ensure harmonious and compatible transitions between neighborhoods and adjacent commercial, mixed-use, and denser housing by regulating setbacks, building mass and height, and other design elements and uses." **"Transition" is never used in *Imagine Austin* to promote increased "density" or "intensity" or "entitlements" as has been suggested, much less to create calibrated zones or overlays.**

Searching further, **if one looks at the discussion of "corridors" in *Imagine Austin*, nothing in the discussion suggests (much less envisions) the existence of "transition zones" or other zones of entitlement around corridors.** A reader of *Imagine Austin*, including those who voted on it, could not know that entitlements were planned for undisclosed and undefined zones surrounding corridors. Because they were not. *Imagine Austin* proposes density *on* corridors. **To now use a code-rewrite to place density in the blocks *off* of corridors is bait and switch.**

Imagine Austin is a planning document. CodeNext and the CodeNext Map are not planning documents. They are implementation documents. While the temptation is understandable, **the implementation phase is not a license to rewrite *Imagine Austin* and create a third focus for density in addition to corridors and centers.**

Imagine Austin does not propose newly created entitlement zones around corridors. Additionally, absent clear direction from Neighborhood Plans, adding density to neighborhoods based simply on a geographic distance from a corridor has no demonstrable community support from those who will be impacted.

Misusing the Code and the Map to create new unauthorized entitlement zones in existing neighborhoods is putting the cart way ahead of the horse, will create irreversible unplanned conditions on the ground, and is unwanted by the community. **“Transition zones” by any name or no name are an attempt to use the code-rewrite process to hijack the planning process.**