



June 5, 2017

**Re: CodeNEXT draft code and zoning map**

Dear Mayor Adler, Mayor Pro Tem Tovo, Council Member Houston, Council and Planning and Zoning Staff:

The Organization of Central East Austin Neighborhoods, which serves as the neighborhood plan contact team for Central East, appreciates the opportunity to comment on the first draft of the new land development code and zoning map.

Like other longstanding neighborhoods in close proximity to downtown, we have experienced the positive and negative impacts of that adjacency and strived to accommodate growth and change but also promote preservation of people and places that our community has, over decades and multiple planning efforts, prioritized. Central East is the heart of the African American Cultural Heritage District, and its citizens have endured segregation, redlining, and wave upon wave of urban renewal that made renters of homeowners, displaced hundreds of Black and Latino neighbors and businesses, and hastened the demolition of modest to baroque historic structures that marked the achievements and vitality of East Austin people, cultures and values. Current residents are extremely mindful of this history of displacement and elimination and view with considerable trepidation any proposed entitlements under the new code poised to perpetuate it.

The single-family core of every Central East neighborhood is proposed to be zoned with transects T3 and/or T4, permitting residential density that equates to 26 to 69 units per acre. This allowance far exceeds standard SF-3 density per acre and even what is possible with the Urban Home infill tool, which was in its time successfully marketed to Central East as a path to greater affordability through density. Urban Home has instead resulted in the demolition of hundreds of relatively affordable homes and subdivided lots

hosting luxury housing priced between \$600,000 and \$1,000,000 per unit. T3 and T4 zoning will further exacerbate Central East land-to-improvement valuation differentials, undermining the long-term viability of homesteads and accelerating displacement of low and moderate income residents in a Homestead Preservation District. And it will further incentivize demolition of structures identified by the 2016 East Austin Historic Survey as contributing to potential local and National Register historic districts at a time when the City has expressed a commitment to achieving parity for East Austin in terms of historic preservation. It is impossible for us to support a land development code and zoning map at odds with these City initiatives and the Central East Austin Neighborhood Plan priorities for preservation of affordability, our housing stock and the historic fabric of East Austin.

Additionally, we are troubled that rezoning entire Central East neighborhoods to transects that permit much greater density and commercial uses contradicts hundreds of Future Land Use Map designations that City officials assured citizens would inform the new zoning map. And it flies in the face of Mayor Adler's 'Austin Bargain' to focus growth along and within activity corridors and centers rather than "force density in the middle of neighborhoods...where it would ruin the character of the city we're trying to save in the first place." Central East's current zoning map reflects decades of highly negotiated land use decisions driven by that same imperative for balance between preservation of single-family areas and ample room for missing middle housing, dense multifamily and pedestrian-oriented retail and commercial services. Treating our neighborhood cores as disposable in the CodeNEXT process undermines the hard work of consensus regarding appropriate growth that the Central East Austin Neighborhood Plan and Imagine Austin represent.

Ironically, the only parts of our neighborhood where current zoning is proposed to be retained is within the East 11th and 12th Street NCCDs, which convey extreme height and F.A.R. entitlements and waive compatibility standards adjacent to lower-density residential uses. We remain hopeful that the East 11th and 12th Streets urban renewal effort will deliver on its promise for a mix of right-sized missing middle housing and walkable commercial services that respects and enhances adjacent neighborhoods. As part of the CodeNEXT process, the City should adjust development entitlements along IH-35 and East 12th Street to provide reasonable compatibility protections that still allow for density on vacant parcels and put the NCCDs under the sponsorship of the Organization of Central East Austin Neighborhoods, to align our NCCDs with current code requirements. We believe in the flexibility of the NCCD tool to adjust entitlements up and down to incentivize and stabilize, and it should be available in the future to all neighborhoods. And in the interim, we respectfully request that the City process and support the long-delayed Kealing East 12th Street amendments that restore compatible height limits and promote retention of existing affordable housing stock in that neighborhood.

Going forward, we take comfort that Austin aspires to grow in a manner that is sustainable, expands housing choice throughout the city for individuals and families across the socio-economic spectrum and promotes equity via shared prosperity and quality of life in accordance with Imagine Austin and the Growth Concept Map. However, this first draft applies transect zones only in the central city, and only to certain central city neighborhoods. Dozens of centers and corridors on the Growth Concept Map are not proposed for new zoning to further incentivize development of inclusive, walkable, vibrant communities offering an array of housing types. The new zones and their application disparately enhance, dial back or eliminate key elements of our current code—such as compatibility protections and requirements that promote walkability—in a way that begs more questions, not fewer, about the Austin that we aspire to achieve. It appears that we now want a newly-divided city—areas sacrificed to and areas saved from the capacity adjustments needed to address the challenges of growth and expanded access to affordable housing. This is directly at odds with our understanding of Imagine Austin.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of our initial concerns regarding the first draft of the new code and zoning map. We would appreciate the opportunity to visit with Staff and consultants about the decisions they made in Central East and cordially invite them to attend our meeting in June.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nathan Jones', followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Nathan Jones

President, Organization of Central East Austin Neighborhoods