



November 2, 2017

To: CodeNEXT Staff and Consultants

RE: CodeNEXT Draft 2.0 Affordability comments

Dear CodeNEXT Staff and Consultants,

Austin Habitat for Humanity has been building affordable homes in partnership with our community for over 30 years. We have completed over 400 homes while repairing hundreds more. Austin is also home to the first Habitat for Humanity ReStore in the country, where we have diverted millions of pounds of waste from the landfill while supporting our mission of affordable homeownership by selling gently used home and construction goods. Moreover, we are a HUD-certified Housing Counseling Agency that helps families across Central Texas with pre-purchase education as well as financial literacy and foreclosure intervention. Finally- we advocate for policies that will help see every Austinite have an affordable place to call home, whether that is through our program or elsewhere.

All of this to say- we see firsthand the impact that our increasingly unaffordable city has on families. We see it in our long waiting lists for new homes, our equally long waiting list for home repairs, and the increasing number of families asking for housing counseling or foreclosure intervention due to concerns about paying their mortgage and property taxes. We see it in the land prices locking us out of the urban core. We see it in staff moving farther away from downtown Austin and being forced to commute on our over-taxed highways. We want to see it change.

Part of the allure of the Habitat program is the ability to *break the cycle of poverty*. Moving into a safe, simple, affordable home is nearly unparalleled in its ability to permanently and positively alter the trajectory of an entire family for multiple generations and in myriad ways. Affordable homeownership improves health, education, economic, and societal outcomes. For the family, it requires they do something different: learn new skills on construction sites, work 300+ hours on their home and others' homes, start saving for a down payment, and learn how to manage their budget and eventually be a homeowner. It is a bold step for most of our clients. If the City of Austin wants to see similar, generational-level improvements for its residents, then it must take similarly bold actions.

The Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan ("Imagine Austin") was a step in the right direction. As you have seen, the six key challenges identified were: Preserving our Livability, Expanding Transportation Choices, Tackling the Ethnic Divide, Protecting our Natural Resources, Promoting Prosperity for All, and Collaborating Regionally. CodeNEXT is an opportunity to address all six of these challenges, but only if it is a bold rethinking of the way we do planning in the City. CodeNEXT is an opportunity for the City to break the cycle of unaffordability.

Two core concepts emerge from Imagine Austin: Complete Communities and a Compact & Connected City. The current draft does not push us towards achieving these goals. We echo many of the sentiments of the Austin





We build **strong, stable and self-reliant** communities

Housing Coalition and Evolve Austin- and we are members of both organizations. We would like to see the following changes to increase the supply of affordable housing across the city:

- Increased parking reductions for affordable housing.
- Reconsideration of excluded regulation plans (ERO, North Burnet Gateway, TODs).
- Increased opportunities for legally restricted affordability west of Mopac.
- Incentives for affordability in greenfield areas that are aligned with Imagine Austin's Growth Concept map.
- Relaxation of compatibility and form restrictions in areas targeted for density bonuses. Currently, these restrictions limit the ability to maximize the affordability through the density bonus program. Regulatory waivers should be considered in order to increase affordability.
- Minimal exceptions to on-site affordability while raising the bar for off-site or fee-in-lieu options.
- Calculation of the affordable units should be based on the method that produces the maximum feasible number of affordable units.
- Reduce lot size requirements for affordable developments.
- Target off-site units and fee-in-lieu specifically for families while understanding these units will require greater subsidization.
- Affordability Impact Statements should also include the estimated impact on demolition and preservation of existing affordable housing.

We also believe that the density bonus area should be geographically expanded throughout more of the city while the incentives increased. These incentives should include exclusion from the 80' two-story setback and decreased parking requirements. Moreover, we would like to see more R4 zoning that would allow for the "missing middle" housing the City needs- exactly the type of housing that Austin Habitat is prepared and equipped to build.

CodeNEXT should not and must not be a simple re-write of the broken system that got us to where we are today. This is our chance as a city to "break the cycle" and set our children and ourselves on a new course where everyone has an affordable place to call home.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Phyllis Snodgrass".

Phyllis Snodgrass
Chief Executive Officer

CC: Austin City Council
Planning Commission
Zoning and Platting Commission
Elaine Hart, Interim City Manager