



30 June 2014

To: City of Austin, Planning and Development Review Department
Re: Comments on Land Development Code Diagnosis document

From: Emily Chenevert, Director of Public Affairs

Contact: Andrei Lubomudrov, Policy Analyst

The Austin Board of REALTORS® (ABoR) is grateful to Opticos Design, Inc. for taking a critical look at the many ills that afflict the City of Austin's current land development code. ABoR would like to submit three points for further consideration in response to the code diagnosis document.

First, ABoR agrees that the current land development code is in need of thorough streamlining and simplification. The existing code is so convoluted and confusing that many homeowners must retain professional help to interpret and comply with it. This can make a project significantly more costly and also adds the risk of mistakes on the part of city staff and professionals. ABoR believes that one of the chief goals of the CodeNEXT revision should be a residential development code that can be understood and navigated by homeowners without undue expense or difficulty. A clear and navigable code, however, is only possible with a significant and substantive revision that eliminates unnecessary complexities and contradictions.

Second, ABoR is pleased to see Austin's lack of household affordability and housing choice figure prominently in the diagnosis. ABoR believes that the current code is overly rigid in prescribing a narrow range of development options, which artificially constrains supply and limits housing choice. The ongoing lack of adequate housing must be addressed in the long-term through changes to the development code that allow for market-driven solutions to the undersupply of workforce housing. Greater land development flexibility is needed to adequately house Austin's growing population, and addressing the "missing middle" is a great place to start.

Last, the CodeNEXT process should result in meaningful, on-the-ground code changes that advance the goals of Imagine Austin and embrace smart growth planning principles, which call for development of walkable-scale communities with good access to transit, compact building designs, mixed-use opportunities, and a wide variety of housing opportunities. These changes should be made in conjunction with changes to development review to ensure a process that is predictable, fair, and cost effective. However, a streamlined development review process is only possible with significant improvements to the underlying code that the process is meant to administer.

Thank you for your consideration.