



Friends of Austin Neighborhoods (FAN) CodeNEXT Recommendations September 2017

In a September 2017 [letter](#) to city officials, Friends of Austin Neighborhoods (FAN) called for adoption of a set of nine CodeNEXT recommendations to foster neighborhood improvement and inclusion.

“The current land development code is a primary contributor to the Austin metropolitan area being among the most segregated in the country,” explained FAN’s president, Alysha Haggerton. “The current rules, and the ones proposed thus far by CodeNEXT staffers, carve the city and our neighborhoods into zones where only certain types of housing are allowed. We view the recommendations from FAN’s membership as essential to enabling all types of people to live in all neighborhoods.”

Recommendation 1: All Forms of Neighborhood-Scale Housing throughout All Neighborhoods

The land development code should allow all forms of neighborhood-scale housing (including small apartment complexes, single family homes on small lots, duplexes, triplexes, accessory dwelling units, row houses, co-ops, and tiny homes) throughout all neighborhoods.

- Imagine Austin calls repeatedly for a diversity of housing types throughout the city, not just in select neighborhoods.
- FAN embraces a greater abundance and diversity of housing as an opportunity to include more and different people in our neighborhoods.
- [The Obama White House Housing Development Toolkit](#) calls for allowing more multi-family buildings to enable more families to live where they want.

Recommendation 2: Increased Scale Near Activity Centers & Corridors

Increase the allowable scale (e.g. heights) of buildings within ½ mile (instead of ¼ mile) of Imagine Austin activity centers and corridors.

- The Federal Transit Administration uses densities within ½ mile of transit corridors to determine whether to provide matching funds for transit projects.
- The original complete communities indicators in Imagine Austin use ½ mile as the threshold to determine whether neighbors have access to daily needs such as transit,

shopping, groceries, parks and open spaces, medical services, schools, cultural venues, libraries and community centers.

- Capital Metro’s documented service standards list employment and residential densities as the top criteria determining level of transit service.

Recommendation 3: All Neighborhoods Should Be Eligible for “Density Bonuses”

All zones should be eligible for conditional density programs (“density bonuses”) that would embrace below-market affordable homes. The density bonus program should allow double the amount of density in that zone under base zoning, if utilized.

- Designating some neighborhoods as eligible for such programs, while excluding others, perpetuates income segregation.
- Austinites of all incomes levels should have access to high opportunity areas such as the interiors of our neighborhoods. We should not be segregating lower income individuals and families to only be allowed along high traffic major roads or corridors.

Recommendation 4: Eliminate Off-Street Parking Requirements

Eliminate off-street parking requirements from all zones. Allow owners to choose the appropriate amount of parking for their circumstances.

- [The Obama White House Housing Development Toolkit](#) recommends that localities eliminate – not just reduce – minimum off-street parking requirements.
- Parking can reduce the amount and diversity of housing that people may build within the constraints of their land, thereby making our neighborhoods less inclusive.
- Surface parking lots make commercial destinations less accessible to neighbors who walk, bike, and take transit.
- People are more important than cars. Consequently, no one should be required to provide free housing for automobiles. If we don’t require people to house the homeless, why should we require them to house cars?
- Parking requirements also [cause traffic and increase VMT](#) (Vehicle Miles Traveled).
- Parking requirements add unnecessary impervious cover that increases run-off and risk of flooding.

Recommendation 5: Apply Form Based Code Only

Apply only form-based code to all neighborhoods in the city. Eliminate Euclidean zoning, overlays, and neighborhood conservation combining districts (NCCDs), and don’t grandfather them.

Zones should only differ by aspects of the physical form such as height, but not on type or use of the buildings. Form requirements should be standardized such that the use of buildings and the number of units do not need to be specified – e.g. a small grocery store, small office, and single family homes may co-exist in the same zone and have similar form, instead of having different requirements such as setbacks, minimum lot dimensions, etc.

- All neighborhoods should have the opportunity to have a mix of shopping, jobs, and homes within walking distance. No neighborhood should be forever doomed as “drivable suburban”.
- Keeping Euclidean zoning, overlays, and NCCDs alongside form-based zoning categories greatly complicates the land development code, making it more difficult to improve neighborhoods and include a greater diversity of people.

Recommendation 6: Replace Impervious Cover Limits with a Tax or Fee

Replace impervious cover limits with a tax or fee, applied uniformly throughout the city, on square footage of impervious cover, or better yet, on likely run-off. Detention ponds, green roofs, and other measures could lower the tax liability based on likely run-off reduction.

- Limits on impervious cover are arbitrary and a “blunt instrument” that ultimately constrains housing supply and diversity.
- A uniform tax on impervious cover or likely run-off is a more effective way of reducing the amount of run-off and the cumulative effects on flooding, water quality, and environmentally-sensitive areas.
- A uniform tax on impervious cover or likely run-off reduces automobile-dependent development with large amounts of impervious cover dedicated to parking.

Recommendation 7: Allow Sharing of Infrastructure

Allow and facilitate the use of the public realm to house public infrastructure. House stormwater, parking, and utilities in the existing right of way (ROW). Reclaim excess ROW to create water quality and detention ponds.

- Sharing water quality and utility infrastructure is more efficient than requiring each property owner to create separate infrastructure.

Recommendation 8: Eliminate Minimum Lot Restrictions

Eliminate minimum lot measurement restrictions (lot depths, lot sizes, and lot widths).

- Minimum lot measurements limit housing diversity and smaller scale housing.
- Minimum lot measurements limit the abundance of housing.

Recommendation 9: Reduce and Eliminate Setback Restrictions

Reduce lot setbacks to 5 ft for all lots on all sides. Eliminate setbacks on sides where properties have the same owner.

- Standard setbacks between zones and lots provides for a simpler and understandable land development code.
- Lower setbacks allow for more housing, more flexibility on placement of housing, and greater freedom in the design of housing.

- High setbacks encourage heritage and other trees to be cut down because it leaves only a small area where housing can be provided. That area may already have existing trees. Lower setbacks provide the flexibility to work around trees and other areas.
- Eliminating setbacks on sides where properties have the same owner would allow row houses without complicated requirements. This would also allow more flexibility for housing and design by allowing lots to effectively combine without having to go through an expensive process while maintaining the allowed rights for the individual lots.

Details and rationales for each of these recommendations are available on the [Votes page](#) of the FAN website. Members of FAN voted separately on, and approved by wide margins, each recommendation.

FAN represents about 3,000 neighbors (homeowners, renters, and small business owners) among its 16 member neighborhood associations and individual members living in 184 other neighborhoods throughout the city. A complete [list of member neighborhood associations and individual members](#) is on the FAN website.

Friends of Austin Neighborhoods (FAN) is a coalition of neighborhood associations and neighborhood residents reclaiming the word "neighborhood" to include the full diversity of voices.