

Position Paper of the Judges Hill Neighborhood Association
Honor the Recent Downtown Austin Plan

Problem: The current CodeNEXT draft offers no mapping or text alternatives that would honor the Downtown Austin Plan (DAP). CodeNEXT fails to include the Judges Hill District (JHD) of the (DAP) ordinance and its adjacent two blocks south and east. Link to DAP: ftp://ftp.ci.austin.tx.us/DowntownAustinPlan/dap_approved_12-8-2011.pdf

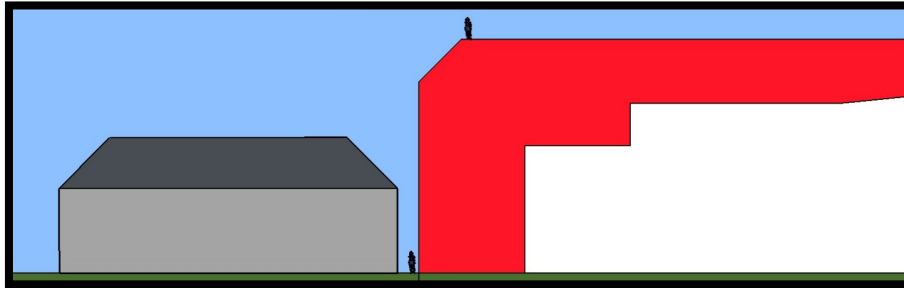
Solution: Use the 2014 DAP Staff Implementation recommendations with existing zoning to map the JH District and adjacent.

Examples of Non-Compatibility

This diagram below shows that CodeNEXT draft Compatibility is not “baked in” for our area and uses McMansion as an example.

McMansion (current) - Grey

T4MS 55’ tall on lot line (CodeNEXT) - Red



Current Compatibility Standards in DAP Overlay – White

55 feet tall -T4MS “row houses” with zero lot lines and flat roofs that allow nightclubs, restaurants and bars are non-compatible with adjacent homes in a historic area.

The Future of Judges Hill in Question

The DAP’s Judges Hill District (JHD), Austin oldest residential downtown neighborhood, a unique, forested, historic garden district, was found to be a concise amenity in the extreme northwest corner of downtown worth preserving. After visiting our area, Staff and officials agreed that the old growth tree canopy and historic cultural assets together provide a respite to the concrete canyons arising nearby, to be enjoyed by those residents, workers and visitors. The JHD relies upon the DAP to provide an orderly transition of increasing heights and density up to the mammoth increment in density of the Capitol Uptown District.

Tragic history will repeat itself. Prior mass “upzones” in our area resulted in numerous losses of magnificent trees and historic homes as detailed in the moving talk, “Ghosts of Judges Hill”. Pictured next is the unique shingle-style home of Col. E.M. House, after whom House Park was named:

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In its place now sits a historic plaque before a surface parking lot adjacent to 1970s condominiums. See the “Ghosts of JH Video” at: <https://vimeo.com/user24073289>

What does the DAP (a three-year dialogue) say about Judges Hill?

Quotes from that Council-approved ordinance:

1. “. . . Judges Hill should generally be preserved as a single-family residential neighborhood.”
2. “Downtown’s historic fabric is at risk of being demolished.”
3. “Compatibility Zones are . . . aimed at providing an appropriate scale transition to Judges Hill”

Challenges with CodeNEXT

CodeNEXT zones in JHD would provide minimal additional density compared to the already council approved 75 million square feet of new density from the DAP. And here the “missing middle,” like other housing downtown, would not be affordable. The majority of properties would be made *non-conforming* under the proposed CodeNEXT.

Critical DAP parameters that must also be included in CodeNEXT: compatibility standards and zones; FAR caps; lot size; uses; heights and their method of measurement; density bonuses distribution; streetfront, side and rear setbacks, and City Public Lands and Greenbelt Designations.

Market Driven Displacement Pressure on Judges Hill

Since CodeNEXT discussions began, there’s been a particularly alarming change in our appraisals. Our land is increasing in value by as much as a third (33%), year after year, while many of our structures’ values remain flat and some drop. One sturdy, well-maintained 3,000+ square foot home’s structure market value dropped to \$1,000 dollars for consecutive years, while its land skyrocketed by over \$500K to \$1.25 million. It’s a classic sign of the displacement pressure seen from measures like CodeNEXT in more expensive cities like Seattle, Portland and Denver, and TCAD recognizes that.

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Commitment to DAP Overlay

Mayor Adler and Mayor Pro Tem Kathie Tovo, along with City Planning Staff, have assured us that DAP would be honored by CodeNEXT. An overlay must be applied rather than using current CodeNEXT zoning and mapping to achieve the protections of DAP.