



# Workshop Report



**CODENEXT**  
SHAPING THE AUSTIN WE IMAGINE



Neighborhood representatives meet with the CodeNEXT Team to discuss expectations and concerns.

# Sound Check Recap: Executive Summary

Austin is known worldwide as a city with a soul, a place with weird culture and friendly people. Austinites make our city unlike anywhere else. Today, the heart and soul of Austin is being challenged by some serious issues and real attention is needed in how we plan our city. The good news is our problems are clear and curable.

The challenges and opportunities in our existing land development code have been discovered and re-confirmed by land development code experts and Austin residents. We have a comprehensive foundation with Imagine Austin, a Listening to the Community Report, a Code Diagnosis, and a Community Character Manual that captures the physical character of neighborhoods that make up our city.

With a better understanding of how our development code is hindering Austin, how might we prescribe a brighter future? With so much at stake, how might we ensure we get it right? One way is to check our work – and refine it – along the way.

The CodeNEXT Sound Check in November 2015 brought together code-writing professionals and more than 500 Austinites over five days. The event series was a learning exercise for the CodeNEXT team and the public to understand and evaluate the effectiveness of emerging code regulations. A series of “What if…” scenarios allowed the team to carefully calibrate draft concepts and sketch designs of what emerging code standards might look like on the ground. The Sound Check enabled us to get real about the gap between existing conditions and the aspirations of Imagine Austin. We saw what worked, what didn’t work, what was too aggressive, and what was not aggressive enough.

This report documents the outcomes of that testing, the lessons we learned, and next steps to produce a better land development code that works for everyone.



Sound Check participants discuss draft code standards.



Local artist Nathan “Sloke” Nordstrom creates an art piece to celebrate the Sound Check.

Public participation at the Sound Check.



## What We Learned

When we ask people to name Austin's biggest challenges, they say affordability and traffic. Seeking to address these issues, CodeNEXT examined how rules regulating our built and natural environment (this includes things like building height and placement, street types, and stormwater runoff) impact household affordability and how we get around, whether by car, transit, bike, or foot.

**Household Affordability:** Austin is becoming increasingly unaffordable and economically segregated. The issue of household affordability is complex and will not be solved by the land development code alone. There is no single fix for this crisis; confronting it will require a kit full of tools, including increased public expenditures, public-private partnerships, contributions from the private sector, and significant changes in public policy. The code does play a significant role because it determines what can be built, how much can be built, and where it can be built. At the Sound Check, we tested and refined these tools that can help create a more affordable Austin:

- Enhanced entitlements;
- Process and procedure improvements;
- Cost reductions;
- Location efficiency; and
- "Missing Middle Housing, a broad term to describe housing between detached, single-family housing and large multi-family complexes.

**Traffic:** How might we ensure Austinites can get around the city and roads work for all users, including walkers, bicyclists, and people riding transit or in personal vehicles? The Sound Check was a great opportunity to re-evaluate:

- Austin's "car culture" and reliance on the automobile;
- Parking requirements, and
- Methods to reduce congestion.

Our Places & Spaces: The land development code drives what, how much, and where something can be built in Austin. For example, it governs a building's height and distance to the street, as well as environmental factors such as stormwater and street. The Sound Check allowed us to test new standards and tools:

- Smooth transitions and compatibility to reinforce the character and vibrancy of our neighborhoods, and;
- Environmental protections, like stormwater management and flood protection.

## Next Steps

The final section of this report outlines the project plan for 2016 as a draft land development code is prepared for public review and adoption in 2017. Those next steps include a series of Code Prescription papers previewing how the code will address four of Austin's biggest issues: (1) Our Built and Natural Environment, (2) Mobility, (3) Household Affordability, and (4) Fiscal Health, which will look at the land development code in the context of financial accountability in city planning and investments.

We invite you to read through this Sound Check Recap and join the dialogue about Austin's future.



Sound Check opening presentation.



CodeNEXT team members discuss concepts for a focus area.



What if? The CodeNEXT team presents their work at an evening pin-up session.

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*Sound Check kick off presentation.*





### The Context of Place

As human beings, it is our nature to live in places that we love and feel welcome. We are social beings with needs to connect with people including family members and friends as well as animals. We need to experience beauty – both natural and human-made – such as art and physical places. We want opportunities, access, and choices to the things that fulfill our lives and make us happy. The [Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan](#) challenges us to meet these needs through the establishment of “complete communities” where people of all ages, cultures, abilities, and incomes can safely and easily interact and access their daily needs within a short trip. These places should be unique, inviting, beautiful, walkable and convenient. While some of Austin’s most cherished places have these amenities, many of our communities do not.

As an implementation tool of Imagine Austin, CodeNEXT will create people-friendly design standards. What are some elements of people-friendly design standards? They include the

“What is the city but the people?”  
- William Shakespeare

“First life, then spaces, then buildings  
- the other way around never works.”  
-Jan Gehl



*Land use and transportation are intertwined.*

location and relation of a building to a sidewalk, street trees, first floor windows and awnings, building diversity, landscaping and meaningful open spaces, location of parking, width of streets and sidewalks, and public and private gathering spaces.

By facilitating the creation of complete communities, people-friendly design provides many benefits including:

- Reduced transportation cost and pollution by reducing the number of driving trips and shortening those that people do take;
- Diverse housing types that complement neighborhoods and allow for a variety of price points;
- Preservation of undeveloped land by keeping development compact and reducing sprawl;
- Improved conditions for walking and biking and keeping communities active;
- Increased water conservation by reducing watering needs;
- Improved stormwater management and water quality; and
- Increasing city revenue and lower infrastructure costs.

People-friendly design also takes account of the diversity of our city. Austin is made up of various

communities including walkable urban places, drivable suburban places, and rural and natural places. These different types of places should have their own development standards rather than current regulations that take the “one size fits all” approach. CodeNEXT seeks to create regulations that recognize and support the various types of places in Austin.

## Imagine Austin

Adopted by the Austin City Council in June 2012, the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan provided a special focus on how the city can grow in a “compact and connected” way. The plan tackled quality of life issues including environmental and economic viability, social equity, and sought to create a partnership between the City and community. These values are laid out in the plan’s eight priority programs:

1. Invest in a compact and connected Austin
2. Sustainably manage our water resources
3. Grow Austin’s economy by investing in our workforce, education systems, entrepreneurs and local businesses
4. Use green infrastructure to protect environmentally sensitive areas and integrate nature into the city
5. Invest in Austin’s creative economy
6. Household affordability throughout Austin
7. Create a Healthy Austin Program
8. Revise Austin’s land development regulations and processes to promote a compact connected city. This is known as CodeNEXT

“As it approaches its 200th anniversary, Austin is a beacon of sustainability, social equity, and economic opportunity; where diversity and creativity are celebrated; where community needs and values are recognized; where leadership comes from its citizens and where the necessities of life are affordable and accessible to all.”

-Imagine Austin Vision Statement



“All land development regulations including zoning and map, subdivision regulations, roadway plan... and all city regulatory actions relating to land use, subdivision and development approval shall be consistent with the comprehensive plan”

-Austin City Charter, Article X, § 6

As stated in the City of Austin’s Charter, CodeNEXT must align with Imagine Austin and promote the goals of the plan. Imagine Austin recognized that a new code must address and balance numerous priorities including:

- promote a compact and connected city that embraces Austin’s diverse households;
- respect and nurture the character of different neighborhoods and parts of the city;
- promote affordability for Austinites at every stage of life and income level;
- integrate nature into the city and protect environmentally sensitive areas; and
- provide clear guidance in a user-friendly format.

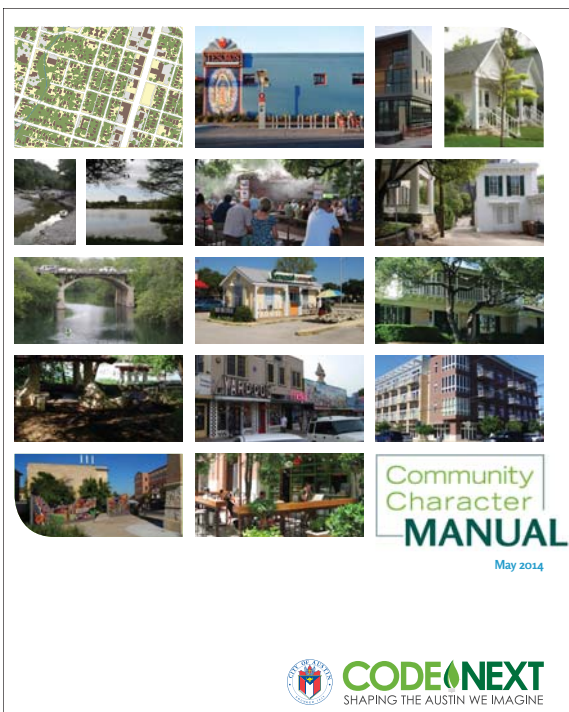
## CodeNEXT: How did we get here?

By rewriting the city’s Land Development Code (LDC), CodeNEXT will improve our built and natural environment, and create an efficient review process that is clear, predictable, and consistent. The first step, termed “Listening and Understanding,” assessed current conditions and challenges associated with the current code. Below are documents that reflect the work of the community and CodeNEXT team during the “Listening and Understanding” phase.

### Listening to the Community Report

The [Listening to the Community Report](#) summarized thousands of comments from nearly 800 Austinites. Key issues centered on:

- Affordability
- Environment and open space
- Neighborhood characteristics
- Design of development
- Transportation
- Code issues



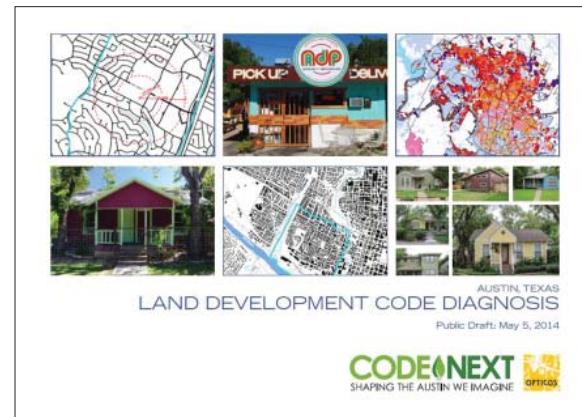
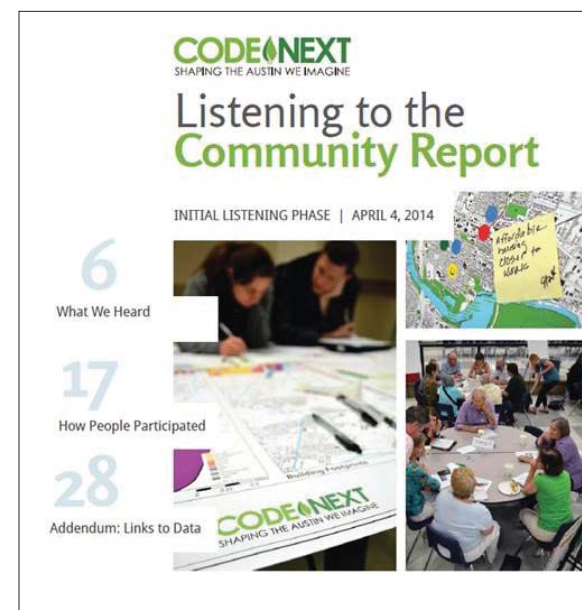
## Community Character Manual

The [Community Character Manual](#) is a map and visual dictionary of the unique character of Austin's communities. Austinites from more than 100 neighborhoods provided photos and maps showing strengths, challenges, and opportunities for improvement in their community. This input was distilled into a manual that presents both citywide considerations and a glimpse of the character of each neighborhood that participated. This tool will remain relevant and invaluable as we deploy the context-centered approach of a new LDC.

## Code Diagnosis Report

The [Code Diagnosis](#) examined the current land development regulations and summarized major shortcomings identified by the public, city staff, and the CodeNEXT team. It painted a stark picture of the current code and its many deficiencies. Key findings included:

- Ineffective base zoning districts.
- Competing layers of regulations.
- Complicated "Opt-in/Opt-out" system.
- Lack of household affordability and choice.
- An auto-centric code.
- Code is not always aligned with Imagine Austin.
- Lack of usability and clarity.
- Ineffective digital code.
- Code changes adversely affect City of Austin organization.
- Incomplete and complicated administration and procedures.





*The Sound Check provided community members an opportunity to meet the team and discuss code development and possible outcomes and provide feedback on concepts developed during the week.*



## The CodeNEXT Sound Check

At the CodeNEXT Sound Check, City staff and consultants tested draft code standards to identify problems, evaluate alternatives, and ensure alignment with desired outcomes. This was performed by examining what outcomes emerged when draft code standards were applied to specific test areas (Focus Areas). The team selected the Focus areas because they are representative of an assortment of types of places found throughout Austin. The outcomes – evaluated by the team and the community – helped evaluate the effect, and effectiveness, of the draft standards. This series of “What if...” scenarios allowed the team to carefully calibrate draft regulations and sketch designs of what development shaped by the draft code standards might look like on the ground.



*Facing page: Afternoon pin-up sessions gave community members a taste of the Sound Check code development and testing work.*

Leading up to the event, the CodeNEXT team promoted the event in a variety of ways:

- Bilingual outreach (Facebook page, posters, in-person) in English and Spanish
- CodeNEXT e-newsletter announcement
- Social media outreach on City of Austin, CodeNEXT, Imagine Austin webpages, Facebook pages, Twitter accounts, and Instagram account (CodeNEXT only)
- Collaboration with other City departments, parking lot exhibitors, and Austin Music People
- Print media: articles in the Austin Chronicle and Community Impact
- Multimedia promotion on KUT/KUTX radio stations
- Posters in libraries, recreation centers, and at various commercial establishments throughout Austin
- Small group meetings, called the “Road Show,” where CodeNEXT team members met with small groups on a by-request basis



### Sound Check at a glance

- A multi-day event on November 16-21, 2015
- 577 sign-ins
- 22 hours of Open Studio
- 3 City Council Members attended
- 4 Planning Commissioners attended
- 7 CodeNEXT Advisory Group Members attended
- Identified bugs, refined standards, and aligned outcomes
- A theoretical exercise based on predetermined criteria
- Illustrations developed to explain code standards
- Targeted and collaborative working sessions
- Targeted public educational sessions and opportunities for comment
- Public presentations on the goals, process, and achievements of the workshop




*The Sound Check featured live music, the Texas Rollergirls, and other entertainment.*

The Sound Check was promoted as an opportunity for everyone, no matter his or her level of expertise, to come and give input on the future of development in Austin. Content was available during the Open Studio and Pin-Up sessions for anyone to view and engage with the CodeNEXT team. Visitors had the opportunity to view and make comments on proposed regulations and renderings by placing sticky notes directly on a poster, talking with a staff member, or filling out a general comment card form. Staff actively drafting new code at tables in the center of the studio were also available for questions.

Attendees were encouraged to engage in more social activities during the evening Pin-Up sessions. CodeNEXT staff “Austinized” evening events to reach groups not normally active in city processes. A portion of the event parking lot was turned into a plaza with a rotating assortment of local food trucks, performers, musicians, a face painter, and exhibitors such as Austin Creative Reuse, Capital Metro, Bike Austin, and Austin Water. In this environment, attendees had the opportunity to meet one another as well as members of the CodeNEXT team. More than 500 people signed in during these public events, and all presentations and content was posted on the CodeNEXT website and social media.

Lessons learned from the Sound Check will set the table for further analysis and calibration of specific code issues needing follow-up and discussion at the staff and community level. The team will prepare a series of *Code Prescription* papers to clearly articulate how the draft standards can be expected to address the following issues: Household Affordability, Mobility, Built and Natural Environment, and Fiscal Health.



MONDAY, NOVEMBER 16	TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 17	WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 18	THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 19	FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 20	SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 21
		<b>Educational Brown Bag Breakfast</b> Mapping 9-10 AM		<b>Open Studio</b> 10 AM-Noon	
	<b>Educational Brown Bag Lunch</b> Form Based Code 101 Noon-1 PM	<b>Open Studio</b> 10 AM-Noon	<b>Educational Brown Bag Lunch</b> Street Network Noon-1 PM	<b>Open Studio</b> 10 AM-Noon	
	<b>OpenStudio</b> 1-7:00 PM	<b>OpenStudio</b> 1-7:00 PM	<b>OpenStudio</b> 1-7:00 PM	<b>Educational Brown Bag Lunch</b> Envision Tomorrow Noon-1 PM	<b>Block Party</b> Livable + Lovable 1-2 PM  Entertainment: Bidi Bidi Banda,  Food Trucks: Whooly Kabob, Know Bueno Nachos  <b>Closing Presentation</b> 2:00-3:30 PM, Marchesa Theater  iNo Faltes! Habrà interpretaci3n.
<b>Opening Ceremony/Block Party</b> 5:30-6:30 PM  Entertainment: Soul Track Mind  Food Trucks: Rosarito La Sirena	<b>Pin-up/Open Studio</b> 5:30 - 7 P.M iNo Faltes! Habrà interpretaci3n.  <b>Block Party</b> Arts & Culture  Entertainment: Sloke One, 5-7 El Tule, 5:30-6:30  Food Trucks: Texas Chili Queens La Sirena	<b>Q&amp;A</b> 4-5PM  <b>Pin-up/Open Studio</b> 5:30 - 7 PM  <b>Block Party</b> Eco Day  Entertainment: Kupira Marimba, 5:30-6:30  Food Trucks: Urban Cowboys, Southern Fusion, Heros Gyros	<b>Pin-up/Open Studio</b> 5:30 - 7 PM  <b>Block Party</b> On the Move  Entertainment: Amy Cook  Food Trucks: Whooly Kabob, Heros Gyros		<b>Public Presentation / Event</b>  <b>Open Studio</b>  <b>Brown Bag Sessions</b>
<b>Opening Presentation</b> 6:30-8 PM, Marchesa Theater  iNo Faltes! Habrà interpretaci3n.					



The Sound Check included a mixture of public events, including open studios, educational lectures, and studio presentations.



CodeNEXT team members work on concepts for one of the Focus Areas.

## What is context?

The context, or identity, of a place is defined by the character of its physical environment. No two places are quite the same, so why should a city apply the same regulations for places that look and feel completely different? Human activity, the built form, the natural environment, and patterns of development all influence context at a neighborhood scale. When aggregated, they create a community.

The new Land Development Code will provide tools that allow development standards to account for local context and character. These two primary tools are Form-Based Coding and the Transect.



*What makes these places different? What affects sense of place?*



*Form-based code doesn't neglect use, but focuses on creating places by addressing the physical relationships between buildings and their surroundings.*



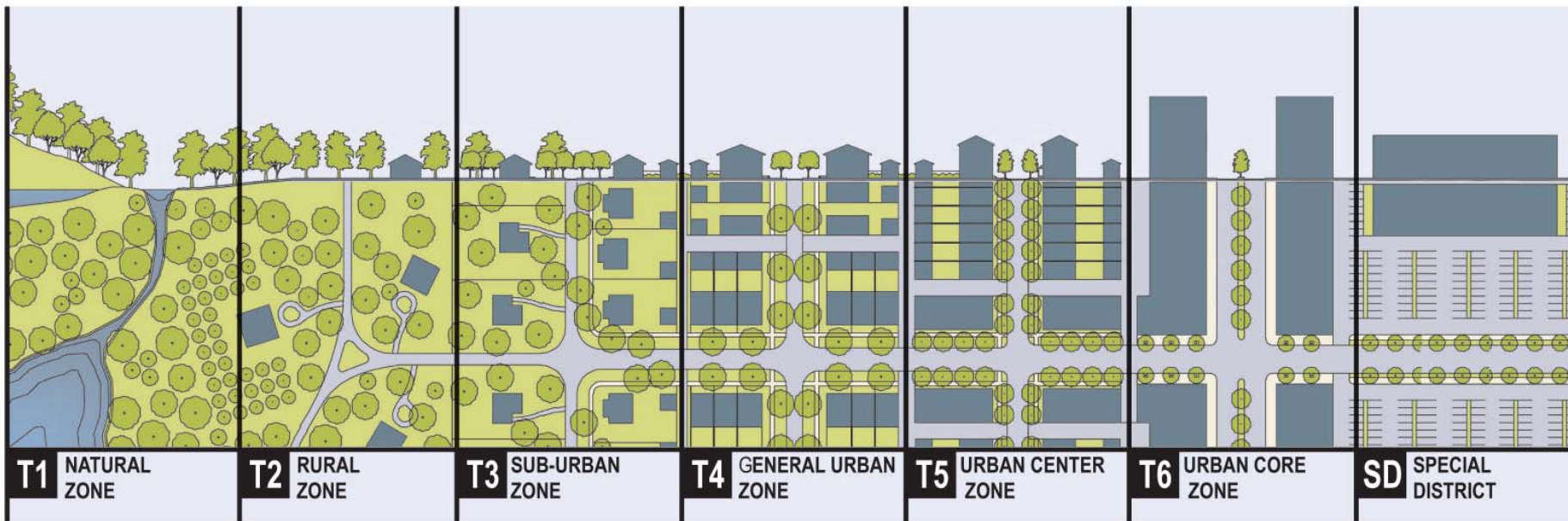
## Form-Based Code

A form-based code is a land development regulation that fosters predictable built results and a high-quality public realm by using physical form (rather than separation of uses) as the primary organizing principle. A form-based code, adopted into city, town, or county law, offers a powerful alternative to conventional zoning regulation premised primarily on land use.

Form-based codes address the relationship between buildings and their surroundings, the form and mass of buildings in relation to one another, and the scale and types of streets and blocks. The regulations and standards in form-based codes are presented in both words and visual representations. They are keyed to a regulating plan that designates the appropriate form and scale (and therefore, character) of development, rather than only distinctions in land-use types.

This approach contrasts with conventional zoning's focus on the micromanagement and segregation of land uses, and the control of development intensity through abstract and uncoordinated parameters (e.g., floor-to-area ratios, dwellings per acre, setbacks, parking ratios, traffic level of service), to the neglect of an integrated built form. Not to be confused with design guidelines or general statements of policy, form-based codes are regulatory, not advisory. They are drafted to implement a community plan. They try to achieve a community vision based on time-tested forms of urbanism. Ultimately, a form-based code is a tool; the quality of development outcomes depends on the quality and objectives of the community plan that a code implements.

Additional information on form-based codes can be found in the SoundCHECK Brown Bag presentation on Form-Based Codes 101 and in Appendix A.



The rural-to-urban transect. Image: DPZ

## The Rural to Urban Transect

A transect is a cut or path through part of the environment showing a range of different habitats. Biologists and ecologists use transects to study the many symbiotic elements that contribute to habitats where certain plants and animals thrive.

Human beings also thrive in different habitats. Some people prefer urban centers and would suffer in a rural place, while others thrive in the rural or sub-urban zones. Before the automobile, American development patterns were walkable, and transects within towns and city neighborhoods revealed areas that were less urban and more urban in character. This urbanism could be analyzed as natural transects are analyzed.



Form-based concepts under development at the Sound Check to develop local Transects .



To systematize the analysis and coding of traditional patterns, a prototypical American rural-to-urban transect has been divided into six Transect Zones, or T-zones, for application on zoning maps. This zoning system replaces conventional separated-use zoning systems. The six Transect Zones instead provide the basis for real neighborhood structure. The T-zones vary by the ratio and level of intensity of their natural, built, and social components. They may be coordinated to all scales of planning, from the region through the community scale down to the individual lot and building, but the new zoning itself is applied at the community (municipal) scale.

## Focus Areas: Austin Representative Place Types



*S 1st & Oltorf Focus Area aerial and concept drawing.*

For the purposes of the testing conducted during the Sound Check, the CodeNEXT team selected seven different types of places (Focus Areas) to evaluate how a new land development code could shape development in a variety of Austin places. The team selected Focus Areas not because of their location, but because each area represented a common development pattern. Diverse selections offered opportunities to address a variety of topics including compatibility and transitions; economics of redevelopment; green infrastructure; household affordability; infrastructure; and goals embodied in Imagine Austin's Growth Concept Map. The "testing" of the code was a learning exercise, and no direct changes are planned for any of the study areas.

## Opportunities by Focus Area

Each Focus Area offered a variety of opportunities to test new concepts and explore how new standards might improve outcomes. Below are specific examples discussed for each site, and how they could be incorporated into the code and applied to similar areas in Austin.

Place Type	Study Area	Similar Areas
Minor/Neighborhood Node	12 <sup>th</sup> & Hargrave	35 <sup>th</sup> /45 <sup>th</sup> & Duval San Antonio & 26 <sup>th</sup> Holly & Comal
Highway Node/Frontage Established Subdivision	183 at McNeil and Spicewood Springs	290 East and Cameron Road Research Blvd. from Shoal Creek to the Railroad Track 183 at Manor
Minor Corridor + Medium Node	Oltorf and S 1st Street	McNeil Dr. from 183 to Technology Blvd. 12th St: Curve to Poquito 38th & Guadalupe Cesar Chavez & Comal
Major Center	Slaughter at Manchaca	2222 at Balcones/MoPac Cameron Rd. at 290 East William Cannon at Brodie Manor at Springdale
Major Corridor	Lamar Blvd. between Justin and Denson	Airport: I-35 to Lamar Anderson Lane: Burnet to 183 Braker Lane: N. Lamar to Burnet N. Lamar from Rundberg to Braker
Neighborhood Commercial Node with Urban Context	MLK between Chicon and Poquito	43rd or 45th & Duval San Antonio & 26th 14th and Cedar
Minor/Neighborhood Node	Stassney and Nuckols Crossing	35th or 45th & Duval San Antonio & 26th Holly and Comal



12th and Hargrave





Concept for developing an affordability pilot project on City-owned land.

## 12th & Hargrave

The 12th and Hargrave Focus Area provided an example of how the new code might “complete” neighborhoods in Austin’s more established portion of the city. Several dead-end streets could extend and reconnect to surrounding amenities and neighborhood services. Rain gardens and bioswales incorporated into streets and a neighborhood park could improve water quality and mitigate local flood events. An affordable housing density bonus might work along streets like E 12th Street and Hargrave, increasing the City’s supply of affordable housing while building a great neighborhood district. A secondary corridor like Rosewood Avenue/Oak Springs Drive might be an appropriate location for integrating “missing middle” housing types into the neighborhood, thereby offering new and diverse housing opportunities.

12th & Hargrave Transect concept.

**Transect Key**

	T5 Main Street
	T5 Neighborhood Medium
	T5 Neighborhood Low
	T4 Main Street
	T4 Neighborhood Medium
	T4 Neighborhood Low
	T3 Neighborhood High
	T3 Neighborhood Medium
	T3 Edge





183

183

McNeil Commercial

CELESTINE ST

PARKWAY BLVD

SAN FELIPE BLVD

CHANNING CROSS CV

RAMBLING WAY

GRITTY ROCK DR

RUSTIC ROCK DR

EXPERIMENTAL

SWANWOOD

183

CHANNING CROSS RD

CHANNING CROSS DR

HEATHWOOD DR

SWANWOOD BLVD

CELESTINE ST

SWANWOOD FOREST

SCOTLAND VILLAGE

OSWALD ST

CHANNING CROSS RD

FRANCIS BREG

COMMERCE



Development intensity concept.

## McNeil Commercial

The SH 183 and McNeil/Spicewood Springs commercial Focus Area provided an opportunity to explore how new code might shape development in a suburban commercial context. The primary challenge is how to create an active and connected center that serves many purposes – a safe and comfortable environment for people walking and biking, a conduit for high volumes of regional vehicle traffic, and an environmentally sensitive design that protects natural features of the area. A green spine or central greenway along the study area’s major street could address each of these objectives – improve district water quality and stormwater mitigation, protect the Edwards Aquifer recharge zone, provide shade for pedestrians walking through the area, and foster a main street for storefronts to overlook. Development standards that direct business and activity to the center and along this green spine would allow for a gradual transition to surrounding residential communities.



Members of the CodeNEXT team conduct a focus area walk with residents of the McNeil/183 area.



**Transect Key**

<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #002060; border: 1px solid black;"></span>	T5 Main Street
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #191970; border: 1px solid black;"></span>	T5 Neighborhood Medium
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #4169E1; border: 1px solid black;"></span>	T5 Neighborhood Low
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #483D8B; border: 1px solid black;"></span>	T4 Main Street
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #6A5ACD; border: 1px solid black;"></span>	T4 Neighborhood Medium
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #8A2BE2; border: 1px solid black;"></span>	T4 Neighborhood Low
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #9370DB; border: 1px solid black;"></span>	T3 Neighborhood High
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #B0C4DE; border: 1px solid black;"></span>	T3 Neighborhood Medium
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #D8BFD8; border: 1px solid black;"></span>	T3 Edge

McNeil Commercial Transect concept.

## SH 183 Subdivision

The SH 183 subdivision Focus allowed the team to examine how the new code might shape residential subdivisions on previously undeveloped land. Using an existing subdivision as an example begs the question of how this development might look different if it were built under new code standards. For example, the existing development turns its back to a creek. What if the new code encouraged subdivisions to embrace natural features? What if connectivity was improved by connecting cul-de-sacs and reducing block lengths to 400 or 500 feet? Connected streets and shorter block lengths might encourage walking to neighborhood amenities like parks and open space. These parks and community centers could be evenly distributed throughout the neighborhood so no resident has to walk more than a quarter mile to enjoy the benefits of neighborhood amenities.

Sketches for SH 183 Subdivision



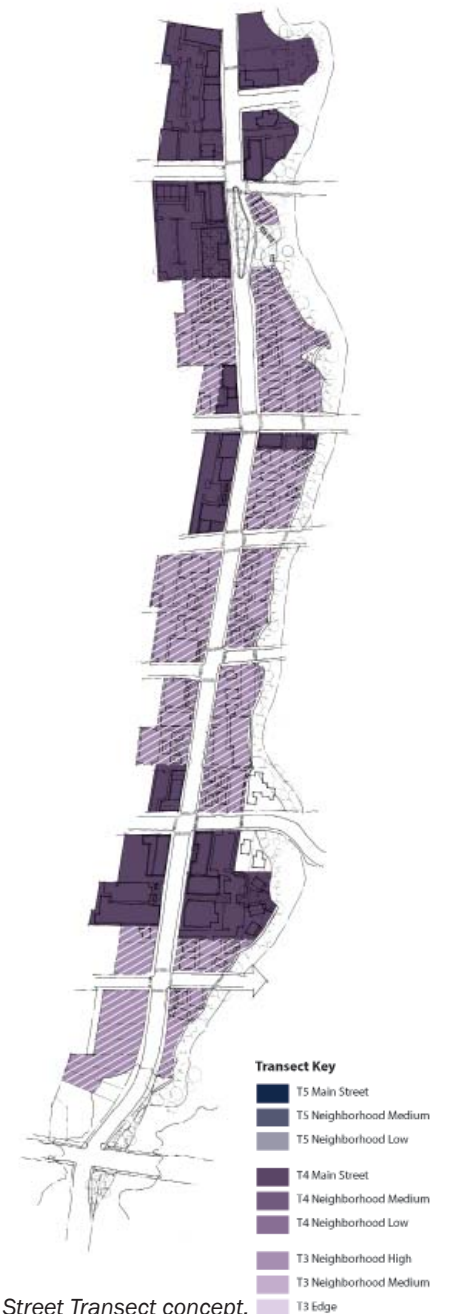


South 1st and Olcott



## South 1st Street and Oltorf

The South First and Oltorf Focus Area enabled a set of “What If” exercises to test how new code standards could strengthen the unique character of one of Austin’s smaller corridors. Development standards would require a fine-grained approach to how transitions occur between corridor-adjacent development and surrounding residential neighborhoods. Strategies could include increasing height along the corridor to two or three stories while developing design standards like maximum depth and width to complement the cottage-style character and scale of existing development. On-street parking along the corridor may be a viable strategy to relieve parking pressures constraining smaller lots. A short-term strategy might allow parking on the street during off-peak times, gradually moving toward full-time on-street parking as mobility options improve and new development occurs. This corridor also provides a unique opportunity to examine how a commercial corridor can connect to natural features. In this case, a creek runs parallel to the corridor, introducing a possible new pedestrian connection. The new code could provide flexibility for commercial properties to have two front doors – one facing South First Street and another catering to people on foot enjoying the new creek connection. Green infrastructure could serve as an amenity as well as a requirement.



S. 1st Street Transect concept.



Manchaca and Slaughter

OAK VALLEY RD

RACHEL CT

CEDRICK CV

LEAR CV

ROSMAN DR

Slaughter

Slaughter

Manchaca

W SLAUGHTER LN

GENOA DR

WILLOWFIELD TRL

MIDDLEFIELD CT

MEADOWSOUTH LN

ALLEY WAY DR

BLUEWOOD LN

BEENUT DR

BEECHBUSH LN

WAXBERRY LN

HUCKLEBERRY LN

SUGARBERRY LN

SWEETGUM DR

SWANSONS MANCH RD





Rendering showing how Manchaca and Slaughter could redevelop and transition to the surrounding neighborhood.

## Manchaca and Slaughter

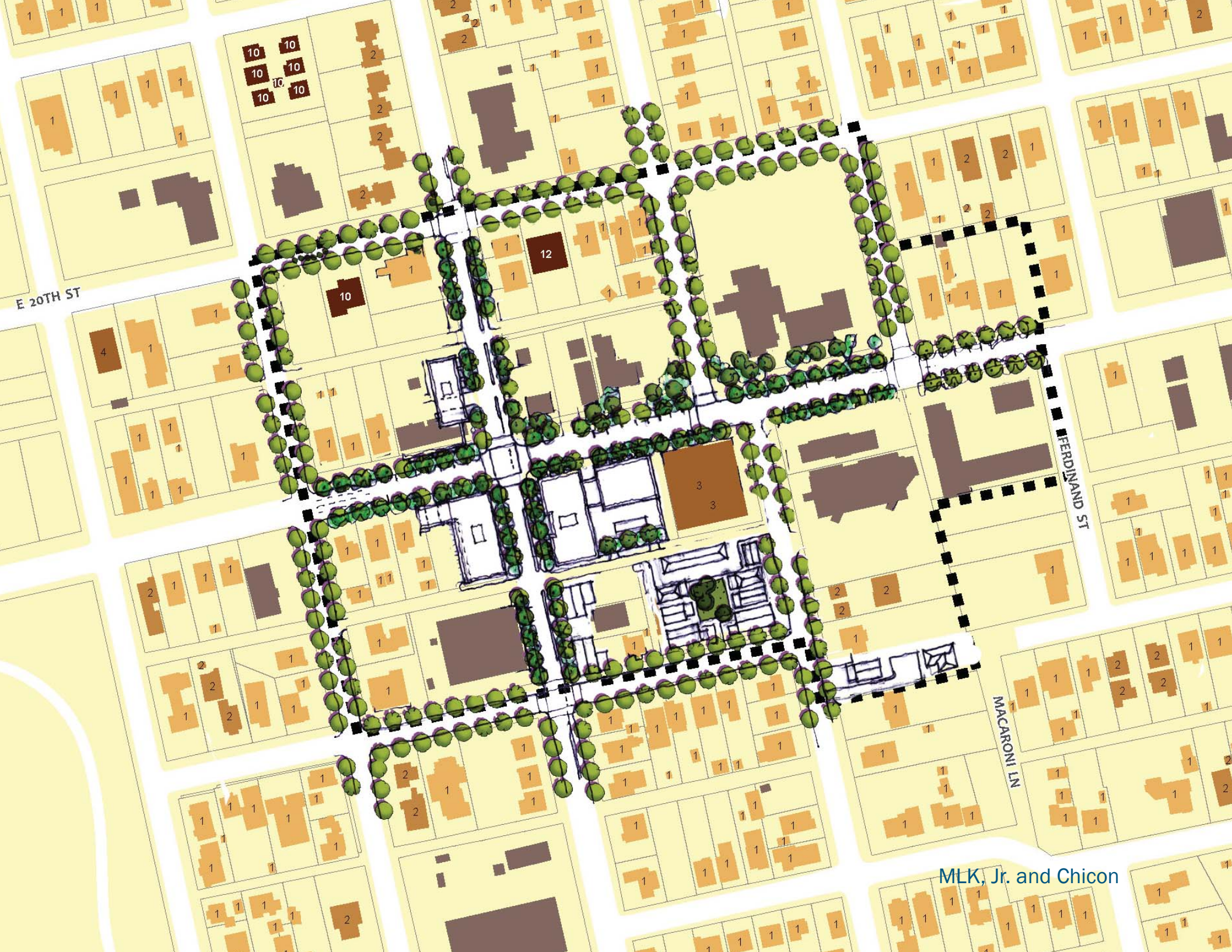
The Manchaca and Slaughter Focus Area served as a test for how new code could address aging big-box commercial strip centers. Under a new set of rules, this underutilized property could transition to a walkable center that serves as an asset for surrounding neighborhoods. Existing internal driveways could turn into a connected street network, while underused parking lots fronting Slaughter and Manchaca could become a mixed-use main street with shops and local businesses on the first floor. Development would taper off in intensity and scale as it nears existing residential neighborhoods. The proposed Lone Star regional rail connection (in the southeastern part of the Focus Area) could draw development and patrons east beyond the existing intersection, creating a regional center for the Greater Austin area. An urban trail could follow nearby creeks and connect surrounding neighborhoods, providing relief to pedestrians during the hot Austin summers as well as a water management strategy for large storm events.



### Transect Key

- T5 Main Street
- T5 Neighborhood Medium
- T5 Neighborhood Low
- T4 Main Street
- T4 Neighborhood Medium
- T4 Neighborhood Low
- T3 Neighborhood High
- T3 Neighborhood Medium
- T3 Edge

Manchaca and Slaughter Transect concept.



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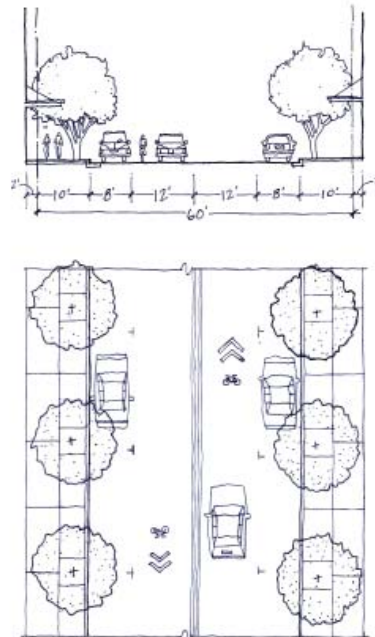
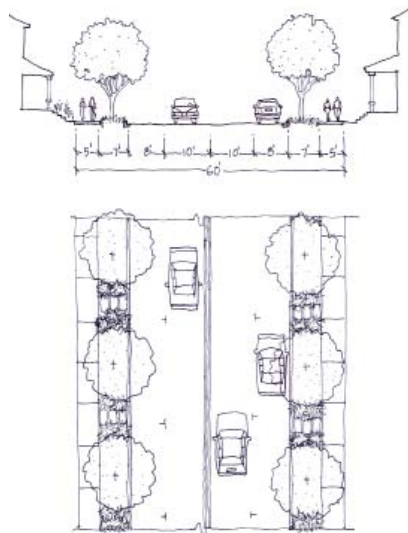
FERDINAND ST

MACARONI LN

MLK, Jr. and Chicon

## Martin Luther King, Jr. and Chicon

The Martin Luther King, Jr. and Chicon Focus Area is a small commercial node in walkable urban context. The block pattern is similar to downtown, but the last thing this area should see is a tall building that takes up an entire block. The challenge for new code would be how to encourage walkable, urban development that reinforces the small scale nature of the area. Transitions are very important and require a rethinking of compatibility, pulling through intent but sharpening the existing tool to a fine grained, lot by lot level. The Martin Luther King, Jr. and Chicon intersection could function as a neighborhood main street with two to three story buildings that quickly transition down to neighborhood scale. A new density bonus program focusing on increasing unit counts – but not increasing building height or massing - might provide an opportunity for affordable housing while maintaining the character of the area. The existing streets are relatively small, so the challenge is how they can serve all modes while enhancing the form and function of the area.

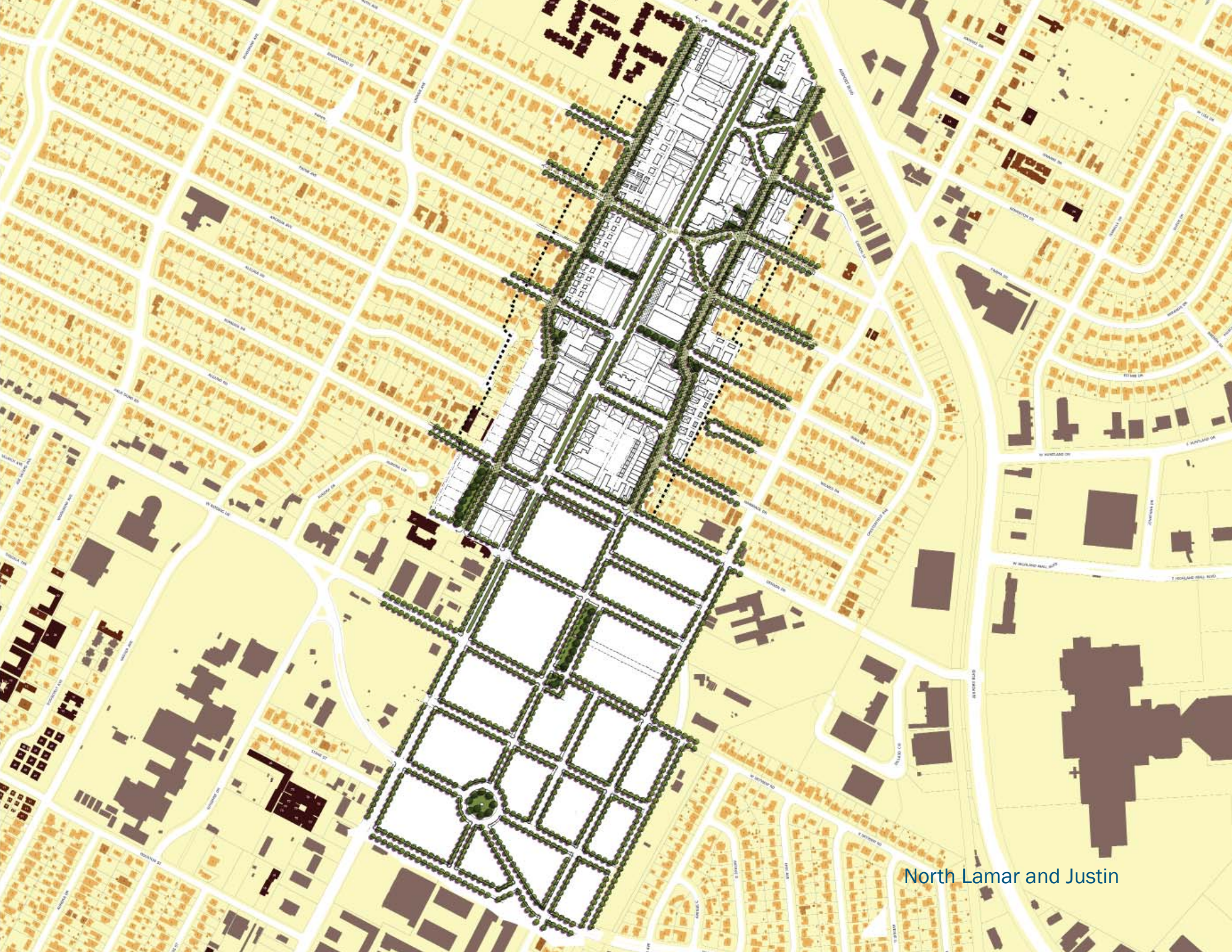


**Transect Key**

Dark Blue	T5 Main Street
Medium Blue	T5 Neighborhood Medium
Light Blue	T5 Neighborhood Low
Dark Purple	T4 Main Street
Medium Purple	T4 Neighborhood Medium
Light Purple	T4 Neighborhood Low
Dark Magenta	T3 Neighborhood High
Medium Magenta	T3 Neighborhood Medium
Light Magenta	T3 Edge

MLK and Chicon Transect concept

Street cross-section concepts for MLK.



North Lamar and Justin



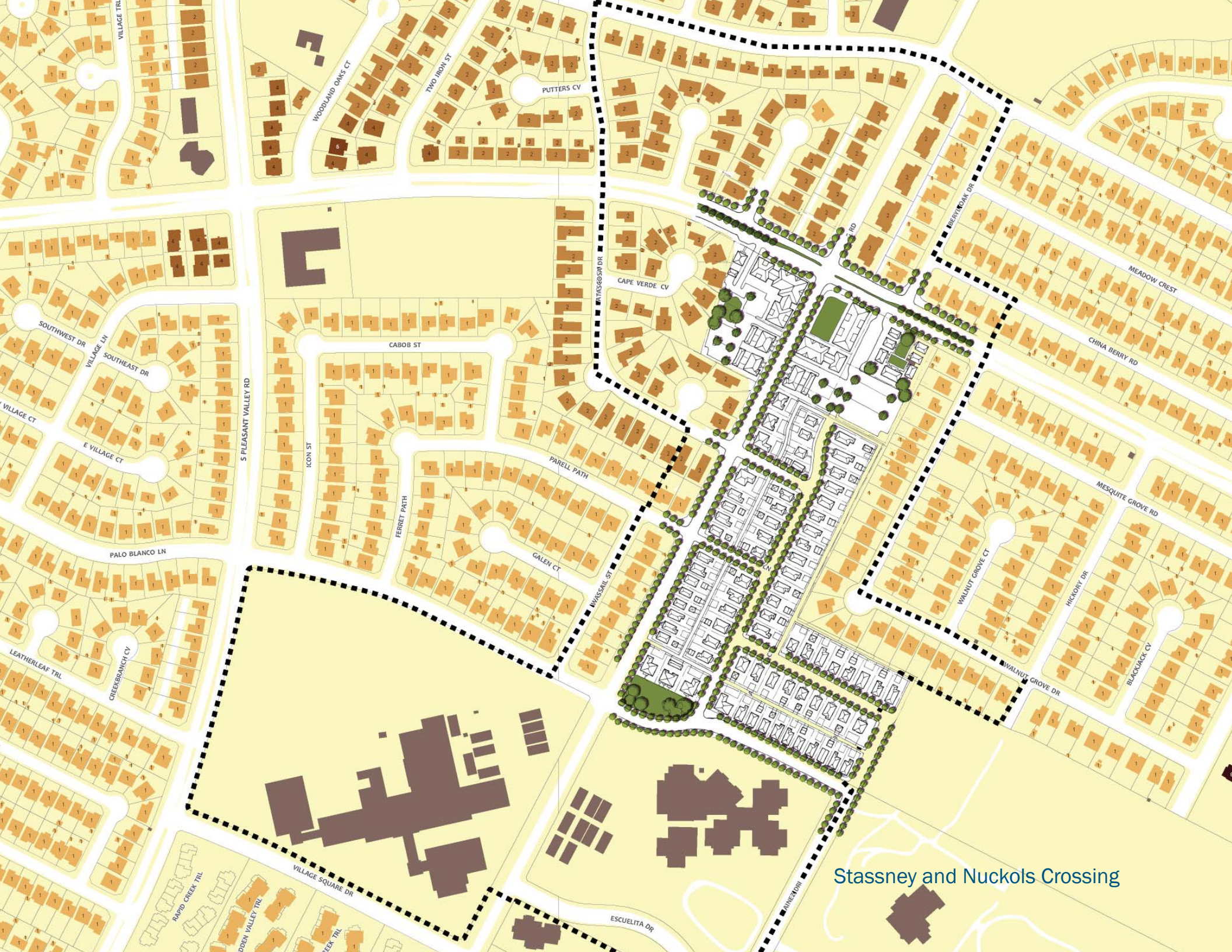
How might the focus area transition to the older, existing neighborhoods?

## North Lamar and Justin

North Lamar is a major north-south corridor in transition: it serves regional and local populations; it isn't walkable urban but it is not completely suburban either; it was built for the car, but is a major transit route. The new code should accommodate this evolution and lay the groundwork to make corridors like this a great place for both local residents and visitors, while maintaining its important mobility functions. One unique characteristic of this Focus Area is the deep lots fronting the corridor, sometimes 340 feet deep. To put this into perspective, an entire downtown city block is less than 300 feet. What if these lots were split by an alley or drive behind the commercial building and a new transition of missing middle housing faced the neighborhood instead of the faceless back side of large buildings? Streets running parallel to Lamar could be returned to neighborhood traffic, where families feel safe walking or biking, and green infrastructure could alleviate area water quality and flooding concerns. This secondary street would provide a safe alternative to the fast paced traffic along Lamar as it transitions to a more walkable, transit supported boulevard.



North Lamar Transect concept.



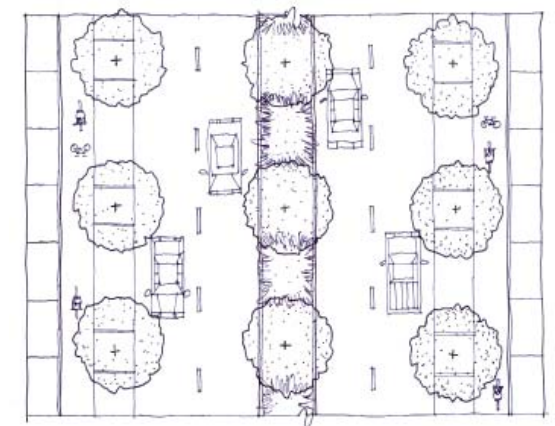
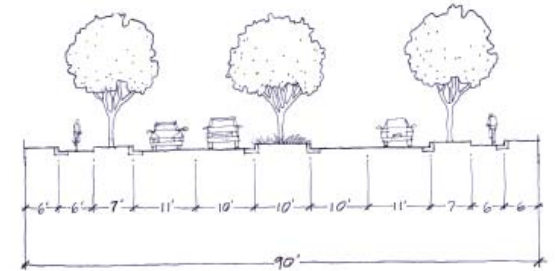
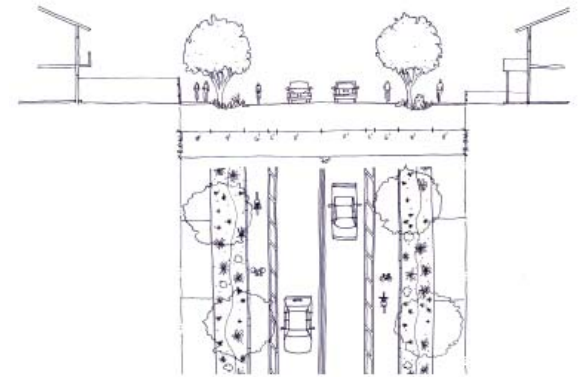
Stassney and Nuckols Crossing



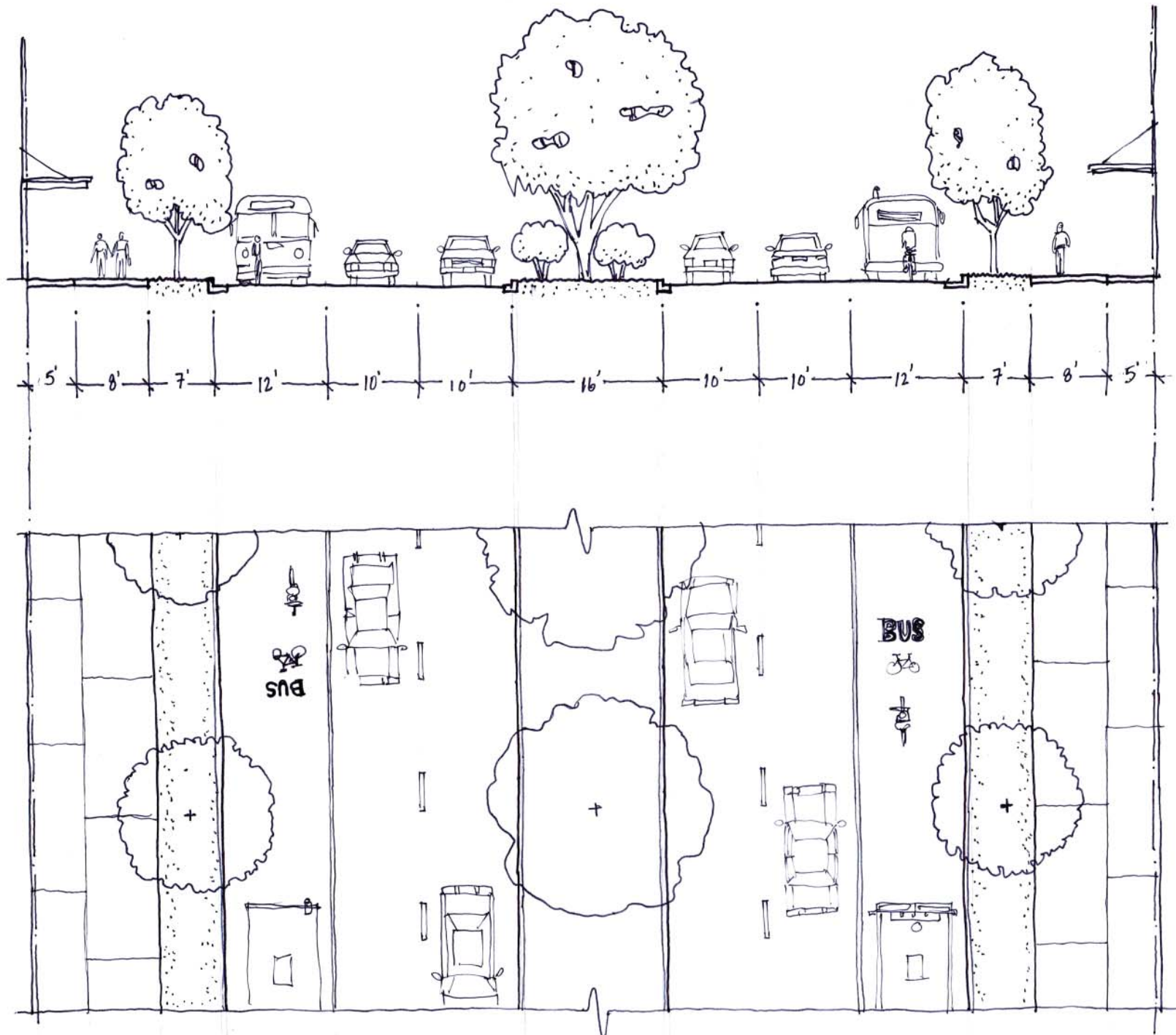
Potential development pattern for Stassney and Nuckols Crossing.

### Stassney and Nuckols Crossing

The Stassney and Nuckols Crossing Focus Area presents a fairly typical intersection in a suburban, neighborhood setting. Two of the four corners are occupied by commercial uses: fast food; auto parts; general store. The other two corners are occupied by residential units forming the corner of neighborhoods. Just south on Nuckols Crossing are an elementary school, a middle school, and a public library. New regulations could transform an intersection like this into a village scale commercial center with smaller blocks, new streets, and a range of housing types along those streets. Two or three story buildings might be allowed at the intersection, but quickly transition to missing middle housing and a scale compatible with the existing neighborhood. The intersection and its adjacent development might become a destination. Parking, water quality, and stormwater elements could be tucked behind the buildings, or integrated into a plaza at the intersection, functioning as a civic space as well as stormwater mitigation during large rain events. Traffic volumes along Stassney are projected to remain relatively low, so perhaps one lane of traffic could convert to on street parking, serving as “teaser” parking for new local businesses and a buffer from traffic for pedestrians.



Conceptual street cross-sections for Stassney.



Possible street section for Manchaca and Slaughter



## WHAT DID WE LEARN?

At the Sound Check, the CodeNEXT team evaluated draft code standards by applying them to specific areas of Austin – the Focus Areas – in a series of “What if” or “How might we” exercises. In many instances, the team sought to query how the draft standards could help Austin tackle some of the city’s big challenges in the realms of affordability, mobility, environmental protection, and enhancement/preservation of character. Below are specific challenges and opportunities confirmed during the event.

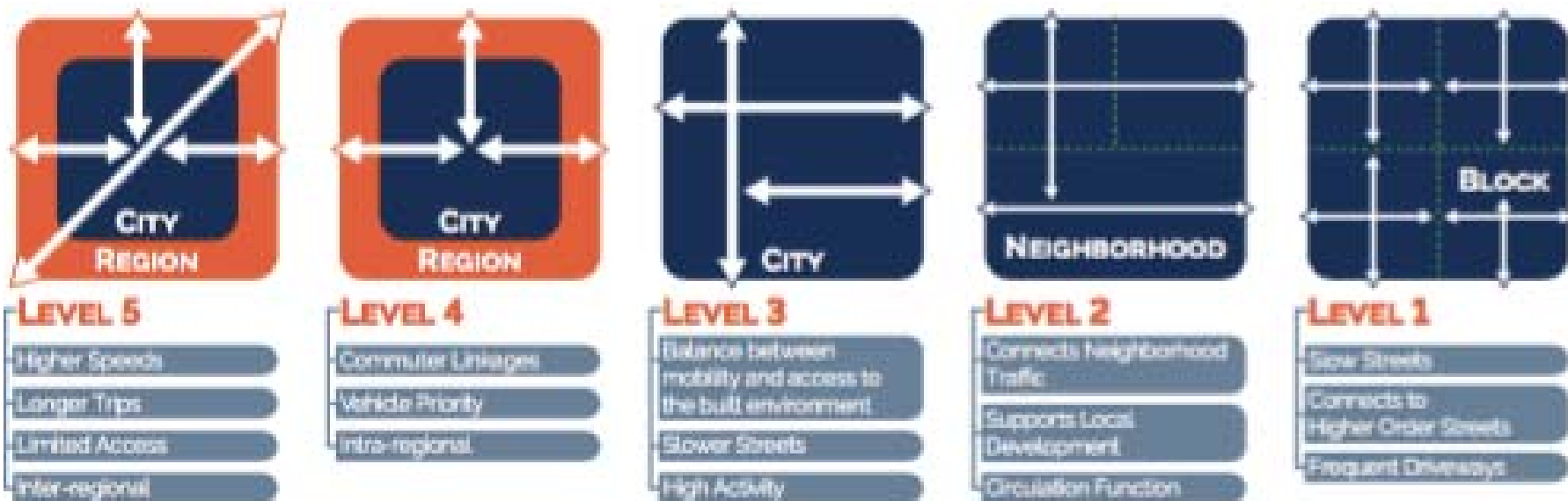
### Mobility: Rethinking our streets

Streets are an often-overlooked but abundant form of public space that shapes a person’s experience as they travel and once they arrive. Streets serve different purposes depending on context, and in many cases serve multiple purposes simultaneously. Rethinking our transportation network to reflect the many roles of streets and the people they serve is key to integrating the City’s Complete Streets and Vision Zero policies into CodeNEXT.



# CHAPTER 2





5 functional classifications were tested during the Sound Check.

## The Test

### Street classifications

Five functional street categories were identified before the SoundCHECK, spanning (City) and Region to Block level functions. The team tested these levels within a context sensitive transect and proposed new land development code scenarios, assuming that right-of-way width would not change in most cases.

### The Network

The team also tested the different roles of streets in the T3 through T6 and special district transect zones. Just as transitions between building types or land uses are important, transitions are also crucial for considering the design of streets; in this case, how different street types function as a part of the overall transportation network.



## Findings

### Function

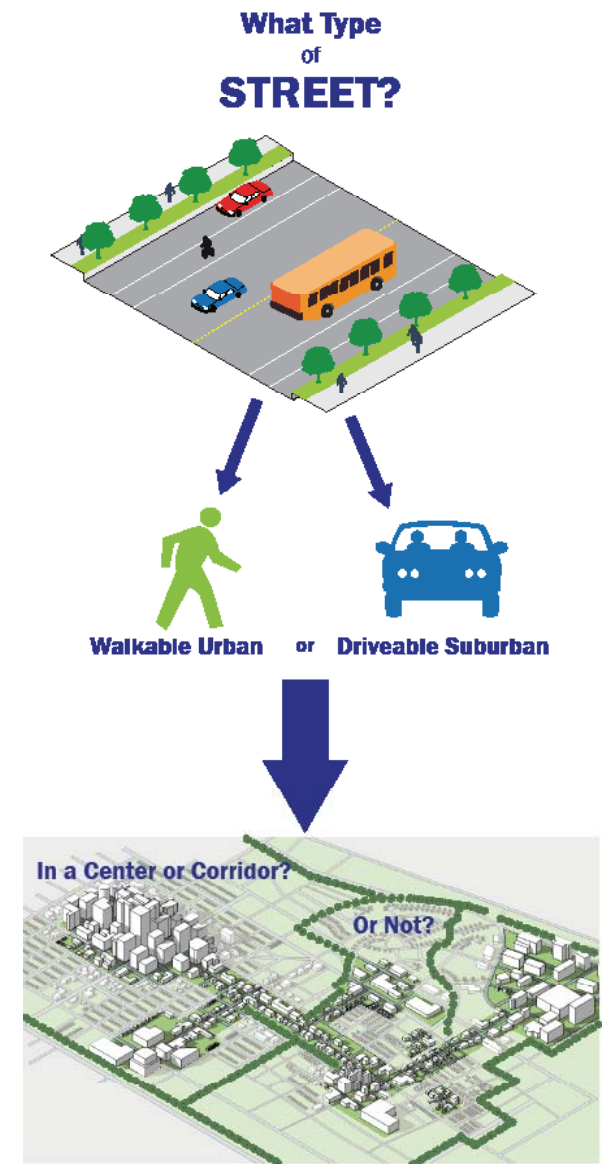
During the SoundCHECK, the range and hierarchy of street functions was inverted so that blocks became the first level to reflect most local and intimate of places, while the City and Region reflected the highest level in the range to reflect needs for inter-regional connections, longer trips, less access, and higher speeds. A new Level was created to capture the role of alleys, shared streets, and green streets.

### Drivable versus Walkable

Instead of developing contexts for each transect zone, the team found that street types could be distilled into two main categories: drivable suburban and walkable urban. These categories were further developed depending on whether a place was within or outside of an Imagine Austin Growth Concept Map Center or Corridor. Street types cannot be evaluated individually, because they are more than just function and local context. Instead, streets have to be considered as a part of the transportation network.

## Next steps

The tested street framework will be further developed and carried forward in the Austin Transportation Department's Strategic Mobility Plan. The Austin Strategic Mobility Plan will update and replace the 1995 Austin Metropolitan Area Transportation Plan and will further refine the transportation element of Imagine Austin. The planning process will initiate in Spring 2016, with a completion date targeted for fall 2017.





## Watershed and Green Infrastructure

Thanks to the hard work of City staff and hundreds of citizens during the re-write of the comprehensive watersheds ordinance and the Green Infrastructure Working Group, the Watershed Protection Department was able to provide CodeNEXT with recommended changes to the drainage and environmental chapters of the Land Development Code. During the Sound Check, the Envision Tomorrow tool allowed City staff to test how these changes might work in specific circumstances through the applications transect zones in the context of a form-based code.

### The Test

Recommendations tested during the Sound Check included:

#### **Flood Mitigation for Redevelopment**

Current code requires flood mitigation for “greenfield” projects but does not generally require flood mitigation for redevelopment projects that do not increase existing impervious cover or change drainage patterns—even if significant downstream flooding exists.

City staff tested the impact of requiring all projects to reduce post-development peak rates of discharge to match peak rates of discharge for undeveloped conditions (instead of existing pre-development conditions). Tools for mitigating flood impacts include on-site detention, off-site detention, off-site conveyance improvements, or participation in the Regional Stormwater Management Program. The type of flood mitigation solution needed will be specific to the location in the watershed (e.g., headwaters) as well as the available downstream capacity.

#### **Beneficial Use of Stormwater**

Current code requires on-site capture and treatment of the “half-inch-plus” water quality volume with release after 48 hours. While this requirement provides pollutant removal and controls erosive flows, it does not significantly or directly address maintaining creek baseflow or water conservation.

City staff tested the feasibility of requiring properties to prevent off-site discharge from all rainfall events less than or equal to the 95th percentile event through practices that infiltrate, evapotranspire, and/or harvest and use rainwater. Tools include rain gardens, rainwater harvesting, porous pavement, green roofs, and blue roofs. In urban watersheds, sites may request approval to reduce the requirement for beneficial use of stormwater and provide payment-in-lieu based on a checklist of applicable site conditions.

### **Impervious Cover**

Impervious cover limits are an important tool in Austin’s environmental code protections, especially in the Drinking Water Protection Zone. Impervious cover limits vary by watershed classification and land use. As between the limit specific to a particular watershed or the limit specific to the particular zoning district, the more restrictive limit applies.

City staff evaluated whether to retain existing watershed impervious cover limits. Note: There are no watershed impervious cover limits for the urban watersheds – only zoning impervious cover limits.

### **Water Quality Payment-in-Lieu**

Payment-in-lieu of on-site water quality controls is currently allowed for small commercial sites and residential subdivisions under certain conditions in urban watersheds. Projects outside the urban watersheds do not have a payment-in-lieu option and must make space for water quality controls on-site.

City staff tested the feasibility of increasing the payment amount to reflect current costs, refining the criteria to ensure more consistent review of payment-in-lieu applications, promoting more on-site treatment where feasible, and extending partial payment-in-lieu option to suburban watersheds for residential subdivisions that are less than two acres in size.





## Assumptions and Methodology

CodeNEXT’s efforts are supported by the use of the “Envision Tomorrow Prototype Builder,” a real estate pro-forma tool that allows users to input physical parameters based on zoning regulations. Users are able to test a development proposal in the same way a developer would – specifying building heights and densities, while adhering to proposed zoning standards such as parking requirements and setbacks. In this way, CodeNEXT can identify potential conflicts between proposed regulations, test the financial feasibility of regulatory requirements, and explore potential solutions.

To capture the range of potential development in different transect zones, the CodeNEXT team used a sample of building types (two or three per transect zone) to represent typical development forms. The team then modeled these buildings in Envision Tomorrow using the regulations proposed for each transect zone. Building forms and parking were maximized (per the form-based code), and pervious cover was quantified as the lot area remaining after accounting for the maximum site coverage occupied by building and parking.

For the purpose of modeling, the team considered most of the remaining pervious cover available for water quality and flood mitigation/stormwater management. Current water quality requirements and an approximation of the flood mitigation volumes were programmed into the green infrastructure “app” of Envision Tomorrow. This app assumes that the proposed stormwater requirements will be met first through passive, above-ground (and lower cost) controls (e.g., rain gardens, porous pavement, and flood detention ponds). The app assumed more active or complex (and often higher cost) alternative technologies, such as rainwater harvesting, green roofs, and subsurface flood detention vaults, to meet the stormwater requirements in more urban building types where pervious area is limited.



*The team looked at how to address water quality and mitigate flooding in the Focus Areas, including at SH183 at Spicewood/McNeil.*



## Findings

### Stormwater Management Technologies Depend on Context

Preliminary analysis of the beneficial use and flood mitigation requirements indicates that these requirements can be accommodated using varying technologies. More passive controls, such as rain gardens and above-ground flood controls, can be used on lots with approximately 75-77 percent or less impervious cover. For lots with more impervious cover, some combination of passive and more active controls, such as rainwater harvesting and underground flood controls, could meet the proposed standards.



### **Many “Missing Middle” Housing Types Comply**

Many of the “missing middle” housing types comply with the current watershed limits for impervious cover in suburban watersheds, even when built to the maximum allowed intensity. This is because of a combination of setback requirement and maximum building sizes. Within the T3 and much of the T4 transect zones, the small-lot single-family, cottage courts, stacked townhomes, duplex, and even the smaller-scaled multiplex buildings comply with existing suburban watershed limits for impervious cover.

### **Redevelopment Can Improve On-site Stormwater Management**

Many existing, older development sites have high amounts of impervious cover (e.g., large surface parking areas) and no stormwater controls since they were developed prior to the adoption of regulations for drainage and water quality. The modeling performed at the Sound Check confirmed that the redevelopment (using the new, draft standards) of older, existing parcels within Imagine Austin Centers and Corridors can produce improved in better flood mitigation and water quality. Thus, redevelopment can be a key tool to address flooding and water quality degradation.

### **High Parking Standards Increase Impervious Cover**

The testing done at the Sound Check also confirmed that right-sizing parking requirements based on a project’s location, walkability, and transit service can help address several important City goals such as lower housing costs, reduced dependence on automobiles, mitigation of flood and erosion, and water quality protection.



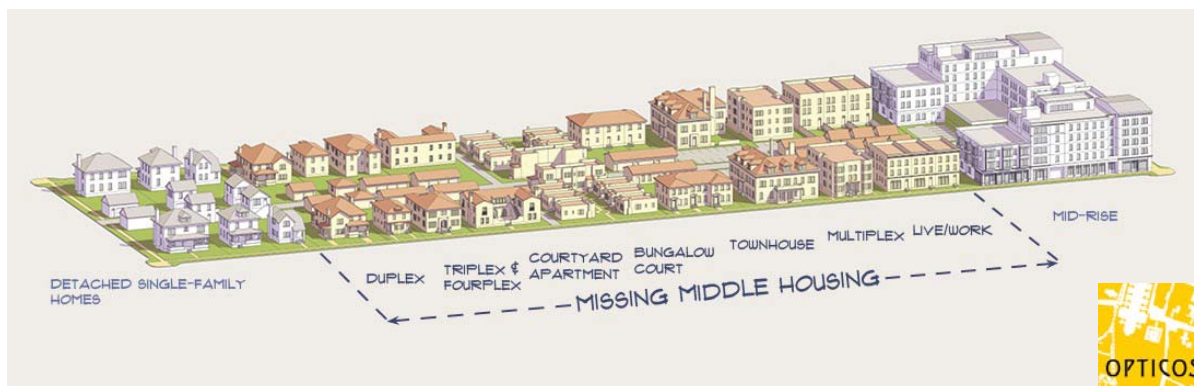
## Next Steps

The CodeNEXT watershed team plans to finalize an analysis of both the performance and cost of the new standards recommended by Watershed Protection Department. With the help of City staff and local experts, the project team incorporated Austin-specific performance levels and costs for stormwater management technologies into Envision Tomorrow, which will allow the team to analyze benefits, such as on-site capture and quality, as well as the associated costs.

Modeling of the flood mitigation and water quality recommendations also allows the CodeNEXT team to understand district, watershed, and citywide implications of these recommendations. The Centers, Corridors, neighborhoods, and watersheds that comprise Austin all have unique opportunities and challenges. Modeling at a variety of scales allows the team to examine the potential for district-scale solutions to flood mitigation and water quality as well as to quantify the impacts and benefits of the CodeNEXT recommendations to the overall watershed. The next phase will focus on the opportunities and constraints that exist at these various scales.

The City of Austin faces a significant challenge in meeting the growing demand for affordable housing. Though the city and its private and nonprofit partners have made considerable progress on a number of fronts, the Land Development Code (LDC) could better assist in reducing costs and enabling the creation and preservation of more quality affordable housing units. New regulations and processes could help lower development costs, encourage density and diversity, and promote the development of affordable housing in more areas. These changes include streamlining the permitting and approval systems, allowing more infill housing development, and adaptive re-use that incorporates affordable housing.

- CodeNEXT, Land Development Code Diagnosis - 2014





## Affordability and Financial Feasibility

There will be no one, silver-bullet cure for Austin’s affordability crisis. But the new Land Development Code will be a powerful tool to promote household affordability. The new code will integrate a broad range of affordability tools that include, but are not limited to, the following programs and standards.

### The Test

The CodeNEXT team tested a number of code tools that could positively impact household affordability during the Sound Check:

#### Density Bonus Programs

Density bonus programs can promote the production of affordable housing units by enabling developers to build more units on a property if they provide community benefits such as affordable housing. The city may want to consider adopting a relatively conservative expansion of base zone entitlements, thereby preserving the ability to incentivize the use of density bonus programs to allow developers to get higher intensity zoning entitlements in exchange for building affordable units.

#### “Missing Middle” Housing Types

Austin, like many recent-growth American cities, has not in recent years produced much housing in the broad realm between detached, single-family homes and large, multi-unit apartment buildings. This realm of Missing Middle Housing provides a way to diversify housing choices, accommodate additional growth in developed areas, and efficiently use precious land resources. More information about Missing Middle Housing can be found in the Code Diagnosis. The new Land Development Code will provide the ability to build small, multi-unit housing types that integrate

seamlessly with existing residential character. These could include duplexes, triplexes, and small multifamily developments at a two- to three-story scale with design standards that respect existing neighborhood character. Even though a building type has multiple units, the scale of the structure preserves the residential character and is compatible in context.

### Physical Cost Reductions

The CodeNEXT team tested a number of code elements that influence the cost of development. And of course, anything that drives up the cost of building housing typically drives up the cost of renting or owning housing. One of the most prominent of these code elements is parking. Parking most definitely impacts household affordability, and that relationship is discussed in greater detail below.

### Partnership Tools

While the focus of work at the Sound Check was on elements of the Land Development Code, the work confirmed the need to complement a regulatory framework with policy direction and other tools. These tools could include:

1. Tax Incremental Redevelopment Zones (TIRZ) along corridors where a form-based approach may be applied;
2. Enhanced funding for Land Trusts to generate cash used for construction and preservation of affordable units;
3. Expanding the density bonus program to capture in-lieu-of funds;
4. Identifying agencies and organizations needed to secure implementing authority and program support; and
5. A city pilot project to prove viability and set a high bar for quality and affordability.



*Two units at the scale of one house*





*Promoting greater affordability at MLK and Chicon. Larger buildings could still be compatible with neighborhood, but could bring greater affordability.*

## Findings

### **Providing Small, Multi-Unit Housing (“Missing Middle”) is Key**

The work of the Sound Check confirmed that Austin does, indeed, have many areas where Missing Middle Housing could be permitted and built in order to increase housing supply and choice, and reduce housing costs. Further, the modeling performed at the Sound Check generally indicated that Missing Middle Housing – when built in accordance with standards designed to ensure it complements, rather than undermines neighborhood character – might well be acceptable in many settings in Austin. The new code will need to be applied in a manner that takes account of the physical form and character of a neighborhood, rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach uniformly across all residential neighborhoods.

### **Density Bonus Program for Centers and Corridors**

Several of Austin’s existing density bonus programs (University Neighborhood Overlay, Vertical Mixed Use (VMU), and Downtown Density Bonus Program) have successfully leveraged new development to produce benefits for affordable housing. The new Land Development Code could carry these programs forward, and potentially implement new, similar programs targeting Imagine Austin Centers and Corridors where larger buildings are deemed acceptable. The testing conducted at the Sound Check preliminarily indicated that such programs would be feasible (allowing projects to be financially feasible while also producing affordable housing benefits) in a number of Corridor/Center settings around Austin.

### Density Bonus Program for “Missing Middle Housing”

A second type density bonus program might be more appropriate at the edges of Centers and Corridors or on collector streets where residents are more sensitive to building height and building size. In this type of bonus program, the “density” could take the form of units (rather than height or bulk), allowing more units within the same size building. This program could effectively provide affordable units within Missing Middle Housing. Relaxation of parking requirements, if deemed acceptable could promote affordability and potentially maintain neighborhood character. Initial testing during the Sound Check indicated that this type of program is feasible.

Two other non-code tools that could be used to promote household affordability deserve mention:

#### Expand Use of Tax Increment Financing (TIFs)

Austin is limited in the range of tools it can legally use to achieve housing. Tax increment Financing for affordable housing is allowed by state law, but the law restricts the amount of property that can be included within TIF districts to 10 percent of a city’s assessed value. City of Austin policy further limits this to five percent. Until recently, the City was not even reaching 2 percent of assessed property value in TIF districts.

The restrictive City policy stems from a desire to preserve a high credit rating and avoid risk. Many cities have maintained a high credit rating while using TIF districts to achieve policy objectives, such as affordable housing. The CodeNEXT team recommends consideration of increasing the self-imposed limit of five percent of assessed value within TIF districts. The potential of a responsibly employed TIF program to expand citywide taxable value could outweigh the potential risk to credit rating.



*Incentivize density bonuses along centers and corridors.*



*Affordability options need to be considered in all contexts.*

### Explore Property Tax Abatement for Affordable Housing

Property taxes in Austin are substantial, and constitute a large line item within a typical project's operating budget. This hit to a project's budget can be absorbed when the market supports high rents, as is currently the case. Many cities use property tax abatements as a tool to incentivize community needs, such as affordable housing. State law in Texas does not allow school districts to participate, but City and County taxes may be abated if both parties agree. The share of property tax attributable to the City is only 20 percent, so the impact would be limited if only the City abates.

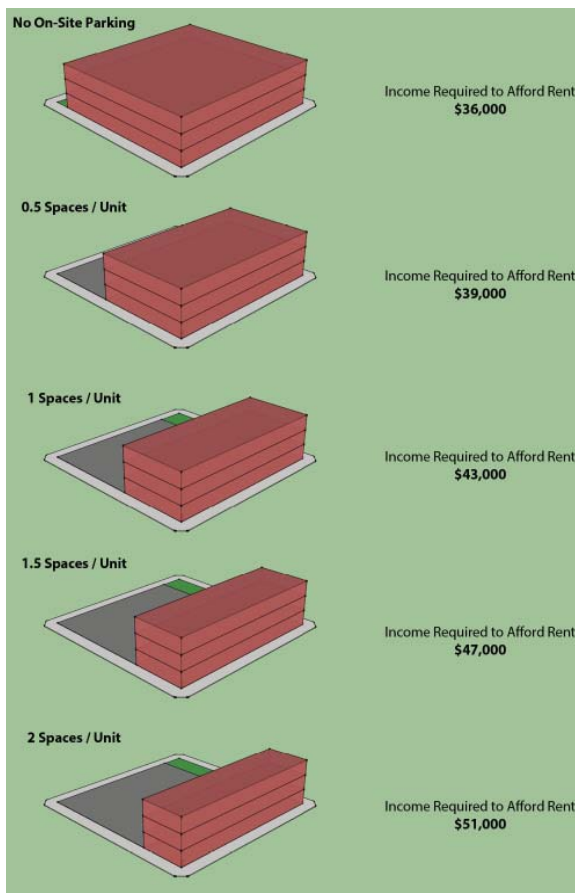
The benefits to both the School District and the County from providing more affordable housing are undeniable: higher overall tax revenue due to more development, lower busing costs, more opportunities for faculty housing, more opportunity for walkable schools, etc. The CodeNEXT team recommends exploring intergovernmental agreements with the County to abate property taxes for affordable housing. The team further recommends consideration of a long-term legislative strategy to change state law to enable school districts to agree to abate property taxes (even if narrowly limited to providing affordable housing).

Even with property tax abatements, testing during the Sound Check indicated that the net increase in property taxes from larger developments allowed in a bonus program could actually generate higher net taxes to the City, County, and School District. A coordinated abatement plan for affordable housing can produce long-term affordable units and expand tax revenue, not to mention the many other benefits.

## Next Steps

It is important to understand the limits of density bonus programs in how much, how long, and what types of affordable units can be carried by a privately financed development project. A private developer will calculate the added revenue from the increased entitlements of a bonus program and compare that against the added cost from the affordable units, and any added cost, time or complexity from any additional City processes. If the program does not add to the cash flow of a project, then a developer will opt not to participate and will simply use the base zone. Since Texas does not allow cities to compel developers to produce affordable units (inclusionary zoning), striking the right balance between the bonus and the affordability requirement is particularly important.





*Parking directly affects housing affordability.  
More parking = higher income to rent.*

## A Different Approach to Parking

The existing Land Development Code, in particular the base zoning district standards and regulations, create and perpetuate a car-dependent environment that does not further the Imagine Austin goals of investing in a compact and connected Austin, creating healthier communities, supporting multiple transportation options, and promoting household affordability. One could say that our existing code focuses on the movement and storage of vehicles rather than on the well-being and housing of people, creating safe and reasonably affordable environments for cars but not for people.

### The Test

Adequate parking is important. Retailers rely on convenient, short-term parking such as nearby on-site or on-street parking, and businesses require accommodation for employees commuting to work. An important question for new code is: why should a project in a walkable area, served by transit, provide the same amount of parking as a project in a suburban, auto-oriented setting? Another question deserving to be answered in crafting a code is: At what price (environmental costs, loss of affordability) parking? At the Sound Check, the CodeNEXT team explored the feasibility of right-sizing parking requirements based on a project's location, walkability, and transit service.



## Findings

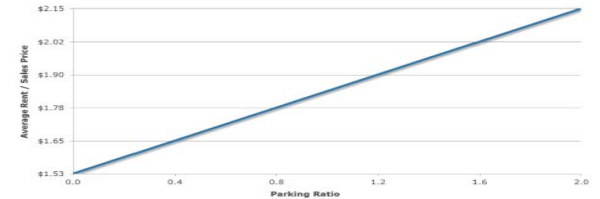
Requiring a set amount of parking without considering actual need can add significant cost and undermine the financial feasibility of development, especially in Imagine Austin's Centers and Corridors. The added cost of providing excessive parking puts development at a cost disadvantage, shifts the burden of increased cost to renters or tenants of the building, and contributes to more flooding and polluted stormwater runoff from parking lots.

More Parking = Less Affordable (Sound Check example):

- Increased impacts on water quality and impervious surface dedicated to parking
- 2 parking spaces per unit = 750 square feet (driveway + parking spaces) can be more space than is provided in units
- High impact on "Missing Middle" Housing feasibility
- Lowering parking minimums does not limit the amount of parking that may be built

## Next Steps

Any analysis of new code at the property and district level will include context-sensitive parking considerations as a primary component. These considerations will be evaluated and listed with an additional parking standards for areas where other mobility options are prioritized.



*Linear Relationship between Parking Requirements and Required Rents*



Compatibility can take many forms.



## Sharpen Compatibility While Reinforcing Intent

### The Test

Austin’s current Land Development Code standards mostly fail to consider the context of the surrounding area. Very few zoning districts, for example, are specific to a particular location; exceptions being Central Business District (CBD), “Downtown Mixed Use (DMU). The zoning districts that allow apartment buildings, for example, can be applied anywhere, ranging from the most suburban to the most urban. As a consequence, the scale, design, placement, and massing of large apartment buildings are often not sensitive to the context of existing neighborhoods, thereby increasing opposition to multifamily and affordable housing options that they might otherwise afford. Austin’s Compatibility Standards attempt to address this shortcoming of the base zoning districts, but with awkward and sometimes contentious and unsuccessful results.

### Findings

The new Land Development Code will provide zoning standards that steer new development into forms and massing compatible for a variety of contexts. The new zoning districts of a form-based code will allow zoning decisions to start at a compatible scale and height, as opposed to the current code’s approach of starting with potentially incompatible base district standards and adding restrictions to “make it compatible.”

Testing at the Sound Check strongly indicated that the new zoning districts will provide a “toolkit” that will enable base zoning districts produce true compatibility more effectively than our current roundabout methods. Preliminary findings also indicate that true compatibility often can be achieved in multi-unit zoning districts where heights are limited to two stories regardless of property size or location near a neighborhood, thereby potentially allowing higher densities on smaller lot sizes.

## Next Steps

Coupled with what was learned at the Sound Check, the team will continue to develop form-based standards that could be employed along the Imagine Austin Corridors and in Centers while providing an appropriate transition to established neighborhoods. The application of these new standards will include evaluation of neighborhood plan recommendations as well as character analysis done during creation of the Community Character Manual.

## What If... Base Zone Height Was Changed to Match Compatibility



**“Objective 1.2: Preserve South First Street..Height Setbacks Will Help Create Transition...Bouldin Creek Nhood**



CodeNEXT team members work on concepts to improve process and procedures.

*The Sound Check studio at full throttle.*

## Process and Procedures

The bulk of the existing code's administration and procedures is housed in chapters 25-1 and 25-5. Chapter 25-1 sets forth the code's general administration and procedures, while chapter 25-5 establishes the process for Site Plan Review. These sections of the code are in dire need of a process and procedure revision to create a new site plan review process that provides a predictable path to code interpretation and application; streamlines processes for infill development at medium- and small-scale; and potentially exempts small projects, under predetermined criteria, from a site plan process altogether.

## The Test

The administration and procedures were not tested at the Sound Check in the same manner as zoning and development standards. A series of seven meetings were held with relevant City staff, the consultant team, private developers, and other community members to discuss existing administration and procedures as well as components of a new site plan review process.

The staff and consultant team entered the meetings assuming the Austin community desires a new process that improves efficiency and reduces discretionary review. The team also assumed that site plan review constitutes a significant portion of the development review process.





*The Sound Check studio at full throttle.*



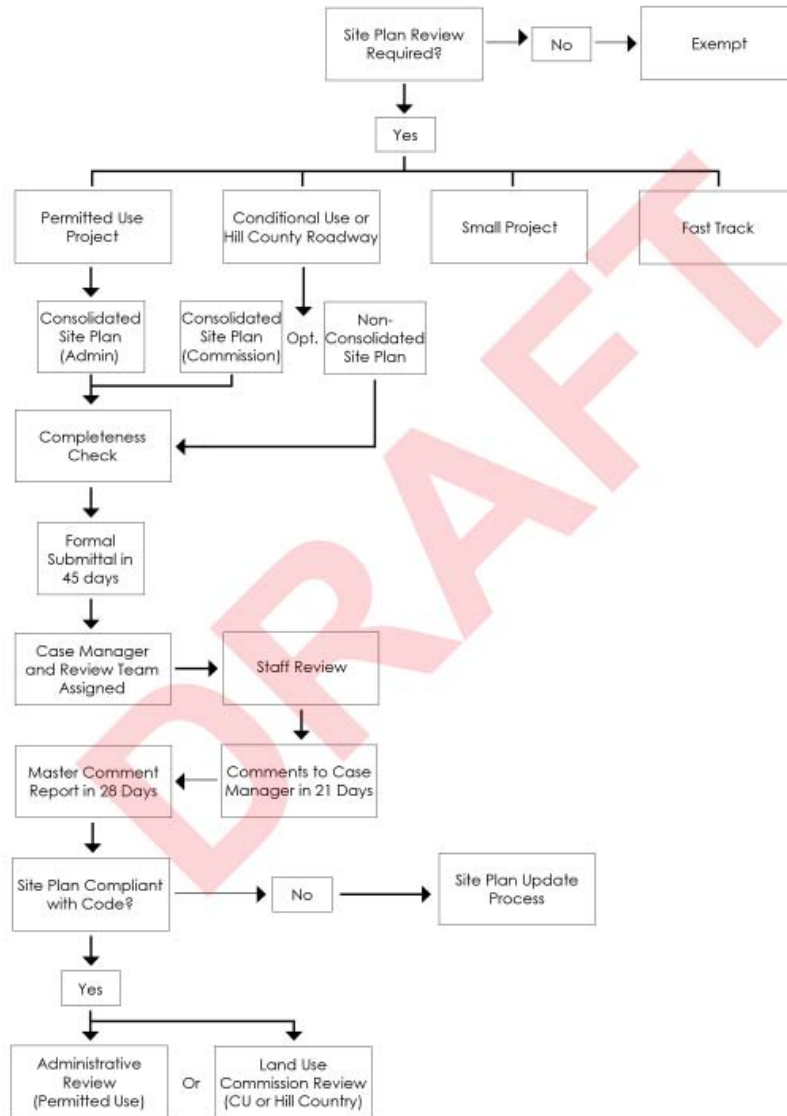
Other objectives discussed in the meetings included:

- Clarifying the policy consistency hierarchy in development review (i.e., the relative authority of Imagine Austin, neighborhood plans, land development code, and other City policy);
- Discussing alternatives for placement and structure of the administration and procedures elements in code update;
- Identifying opportunities to increase efficiency and effectiveness of development review; and
- Considering the appropriate degrees of review for different project applications.

## Findings

Meetings were highly productive in advancing the administration and procedures component. Below are some of the takeaways from the Sound Check:

- The code update should include a separate chapter on general administration and procedures, akin to the existing code's chapter 25-1.
- The site plan should remain the prominent vehicle for development review.
- The environmental review element of the site plan application may be improved by express inclusion in the new code's site plan provisions.
- More direction as to policy consistency review would resolve some ambiguities on this matter.
- When appropriate, administrative approvals may help improve efficiency.



## Next Steps

Relying on the information and direction garnered from the Sound Check, the consultant team will continue to evaluate the administration and procedures component. The consultant team will prepare an annotated outline of a new administration and procedures component, draft sections for new code, and meet with City staff for their review and comment.



Evening pin-up session at the CodeNEXT Studio.



# CHAPTER 3

## Public Participation and Outreach

CodeNEXT is now entering an exciting and vital time in code development. Even though the project is in a technical phase, public input remains vital. CodeNEXT will continue to offer an extensive array of ways for the public to engage, tailoring each activity to support major milestones so the public can keep CodeNEXT accountable and moving forward. Educational sessions will also be offered to help the public understand various technical aspects of the code.

The engagement and education tools fall into two broad categories: in-person and online. Our goal is to match the unique nature of Austin and capture insight from all demographics. In terms of the in-person engagement, CodeNEXT will continue to hold community walks, meet with stakeholder groups (also known as “Road Shows”), organize public forums, support the monthly CodeNEXT Advisory Group meetings in discussions of major topics, and coordinate social events such as “Coffee & CodeNEXT” and the Imagine Austin Meetup. CodeNEXT will continue to provide information about the major topics via its website and social media accounts (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc). The CodeNEXT team will also keep policy leaders engaged by providing updates to City Council, Planning Commission, and the Zoning and Platting Commission.



Public comment during pin-up sessions.

## The Path Forward

To use a medical metaphor – after two years of poking, prodding, checking our vital signs, and diagnosis, it’s time for CodeNEXT to start talking about “prescriptions.” What will CodeNEXT prescribe for our household affordability crisis? What will CodeNEXT prescribe for our Mobility woes? What will CodeNEXT prescribe for our challenges in protecting and enhancing our built and natural environment? And what will CodeNEXT prescribe to contribute to the fiscal and economic health of our city?

Over the coming months, as the CodeNEXT team works to bring a new code forward for review by our community, those questions will be answered.

Beginning in March 2016, a series of “Code Prescription” papers will articulate how the proposed new code will address four key issues:

1. Code Prescription: Built and Natural Environment.
2. Code Prescription: Household Affordability.
3. Code Prescription: Mobility.
4. Code Prescription: Fiscal Health.

Each of these Code Prescription papers will give our community a preview of the new code as well as stimulate productive conversations and continued stakeholder input. Though the Code Prescriptions will be specific and detailed, they will not be draft code language; instead they

will provide a direct platform for conversations on how standards in the new code will achieve community values.

The CodeNEXT Advisory Group will serve as the primary venue for those conversations. The first paper will be presented to the CAG in March 2016. The group will then conduct a focused discussion of the topic of that paper in April – providing a forum for whether the “prescription” matches the “diagnosis.” Continuing the medical metaphor, there can be discussions such as: Does it go too far? Does it not go far enough? Are there additional remedies to add? And in each of the following two-month cycles (May-June, July-August, and September-October), the CAG will review and discuss the remaining papers.

Five basic questions about this approach include:

1. Why were these four topics selected?
2. Where will the positions articulated in these Code Prescriptions come from?
3. How will these papers be organized, and what can I expect about the content of each?
4. How will the discussion of these Code Prescriptions advance the progress of CodeNEXT?
5. When will the public see the draft land development code?

## 1. Why were these four topics selected?

Three of the four themes (Built and Natural Environment, Household Affordability, and Mobility) have been consistent and prominent themes throughout CodeNEXT. They are highlighted as three of the “Top Ten Issues for Consideration” in the Code Diagnosis report released in May 2014:

- Ineffective Base Zoning Districts (Built and Natural Environment): “Austin’s base zoning districts are ineffective because they apply the same development regulations to vastly different types of places.” The report continued: “The zoning districts do not regulate an appropriate/compatible form, partially because they are use-based and form is a secondary concern. . . . The zoning districts . . . have been particularly ineffective in the central Austin neighborhoods which . . . have a fine-grained pattern of small blocks and lots, quick transitions from major corridors, and wide range of building types and mix of uses.”

The Built and Natural Environment paper will also identify how the new LDC will work to preserve, protect, and enhance Austin’s natural environment, including issues associated with tree protection, open space, responsible use of water resources, water quality and stormwater management, and flood mitigation.

- Lack of Household Affordability (Affordability): “[T]he Land Development Code (LDC) could better assist in reducing costs and enabling the creation and preservation of more quality affordable housing units. . . . The current regulations and processes could be revised to help lower development costs, encourage density and diversity, and promote the development of affordable housing in more areas.” These will form the crux of the Household Affordability paper.
- Auto-Centric Code (Mobility): “The LDC is centered around the automobile and is compromising the character of Austin’s communities and not achieving the goals of Imagine Austin.”

These three themes have resonated through to the present. For example, at the most recent CAG public comment meeting on January 12, 2016, the concerns and aspirations of most of the citizen speakers centered these three topics: Household Affordability; Mobility; and Built and Natural Environment.

The fourth theme, Fiscal Health, was identified as worthy for a Code Prescription paper because of the inextricable relationship between the code, which determines “what can be built where,” and how the City spends its operating and capital dollars to support the multitude of communities built according to that code.

## **2. Where will the positions articulated in these Code Prescription papers come from?**

The starting point for each set of code positions is Imagine Austin. Imagine Austin articulates a clear and decisive position on each of the four sets of issues. In part, the Code Prescription papers translate the broad, policy-level values of Austin into code direction. In addition to Imagine Austin, the last two and one-half years of work have given us a multitude of sources to tap for informing content and positions articulated by these papers: the hard-work and products of the CAG; the thousands of pieces of community input offered by Austin’s residents; white papers and other offerings by stakeholder groups; further policy direction provided by the Austin City Council; and the research of professional expertise of City staff and the CodeNEXT consultants.

## **3. How will these papers be organized, and what can I expect about the content and specificity of each paper?**

The Code Prescription papers must strike a balance between staying short enough to be “digestible” but detailed enough to address the weighty topics they cover. Each paper will contain:

- A “problem statement” summarizing the challenge that Austin’s next code must help solve. Imagine Austin and the prior work of CodeNEXT (Code Diagnosis, Community Character Manual, etc.)

have provided much of the “problem statement” already.

- Identification of the community values – oftentimes competing community values – that are embedded within that challenge. Earlier portions of this Sound Check report have provided examples of these “tradeoffs,” for example the tradeoff between convenient parking and housing affordability.
- Articulation of how the new code will seek to reconcile those competing public values.
- Specific examples of what the community can expect from the new code in terms of how its provisions will implement that reconciliation.

## **4. How will the discussion of these Prescription Papers advance the progress of CodeNEXT?**

Austin has a very sophisticated populace, many of whom have contributed greatly to the CodeNEXT effort. Many of those involved are eager to know the answer to questions like: How will the new code help solve Austin’s affordability crisis? How will the new code help solve Austin’s mobility woes? And they want specificity. But most Austinites are not interested in sifting hundreds of pages of draft code to decipher the answer to those questions. These Code Prescription papers will provide answers to those questions without asking Austinites to search for the answers in draft code language.

In the coming months, City staff and the CodeNEXT consultant will focus on bringing the draft code to the public for its review. But the Code Prescription papers will provide the community with a preview of that code and an opportunity to react. While the staff and consultant team will not be able to provide responses to each and every community comment, the CodeNEXT team will absolutely use those comments to influence the draft code presented for public review.

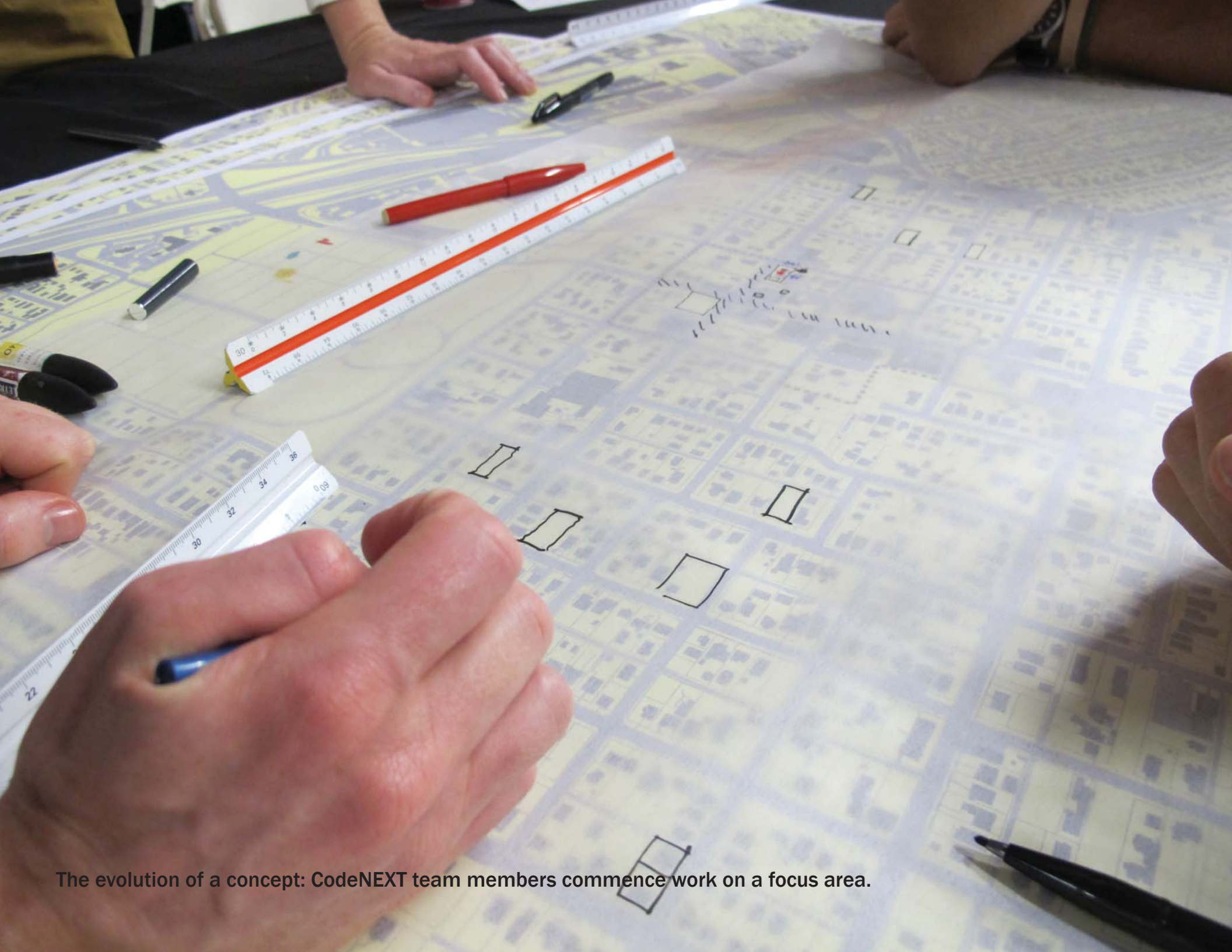
#### **5. When will the public see the draft land development code?**

As noted above, the four Code Prescription papers and the discussions that follow will occupy the eight months from March through October. The CodeNEXT team (staff and consultants) will do their utmost to bring the draft code to the community for review in January 2017.

The CodeNEXT Team Consists of:

- City of Austin Staff from multiple departments
- Opticos Design Inc. (Lead Consultant)
- Lisa Wise Consulting
- Peter J. Park
- Kimley Horn and Associates
- Fregonese Associates
- ECONorthwest
- Taniguchi Architects
- Mcann|Adams Studio
- Urban Design Group
- Group Solutions
- Cultural Strategies
- Civic Collaboration
- Code Advisory Group





The evolution of a concept: CodeNEXT team members commence work on a focus area.

APPENDIX

# A

Appendix

# CODENEXT

SHAPING THE AUSTIN WE IMAGINE



## What is a Form-Based Code?

Daniel Parolek  
Principal, Opticos Design, Inc.  
[daniel.parolek@opticosdesign.com](mailto:daniel.parolek@opticosdesign.com)

Council Briefing  
February 23, 2015  
Austin, TX





# Conventional Zoning = Out of Date Operating System

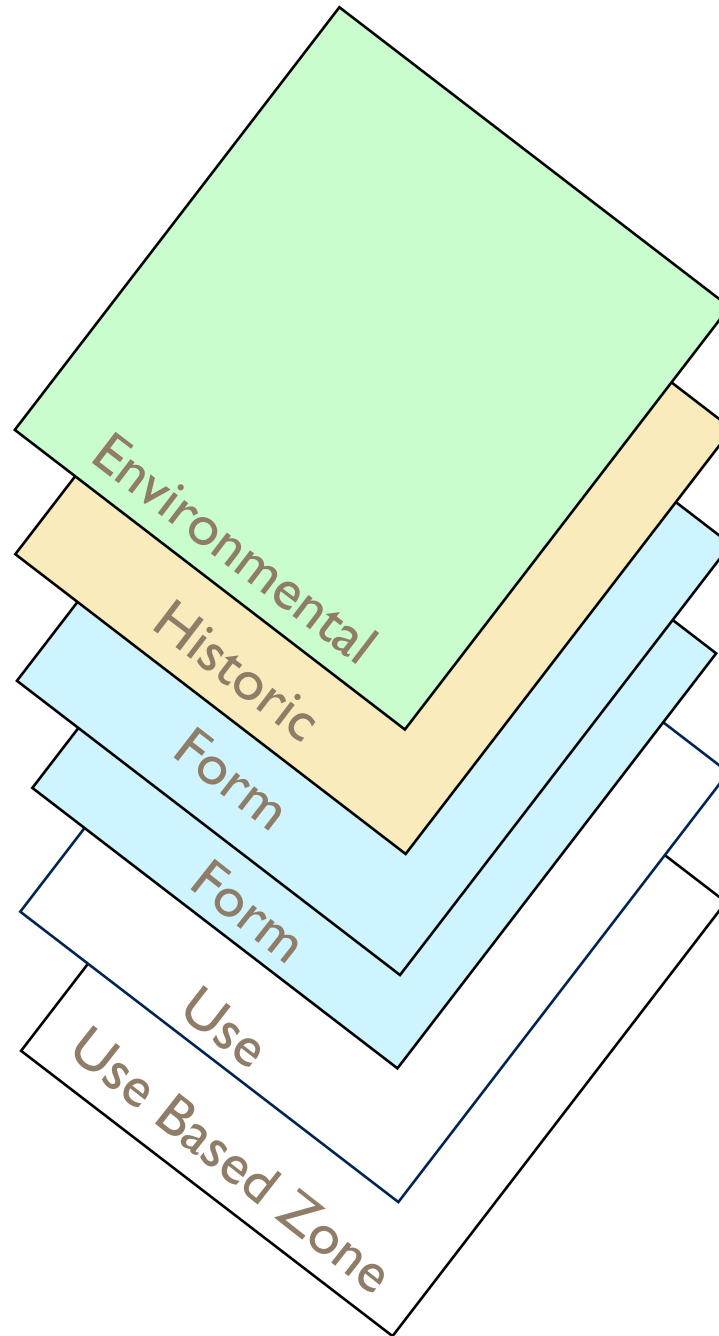


Especially for Walkable Neighborhoods

# Conventional Zoning Focus

USE  
FORM

# The Response: Added Layers of Regulations in Attempt to Fix



# Form-Based Code Focus

FORM USE

# Not All Form-Based Zones Allow a Mix of Uses



Little Mix of Uses



Large Mix of Uses

# Why Does this Matter?

## Current System Recognizes by Use Not Form or Context

### Both are Single Family Use, but Very Different Forms & Contexts



Allandale



Central East Austin

# Current System Recognizes by Use Not Form or Context

Both are Commercial Use, but Very Different Forms & Contexts



Neighborhood Main Street

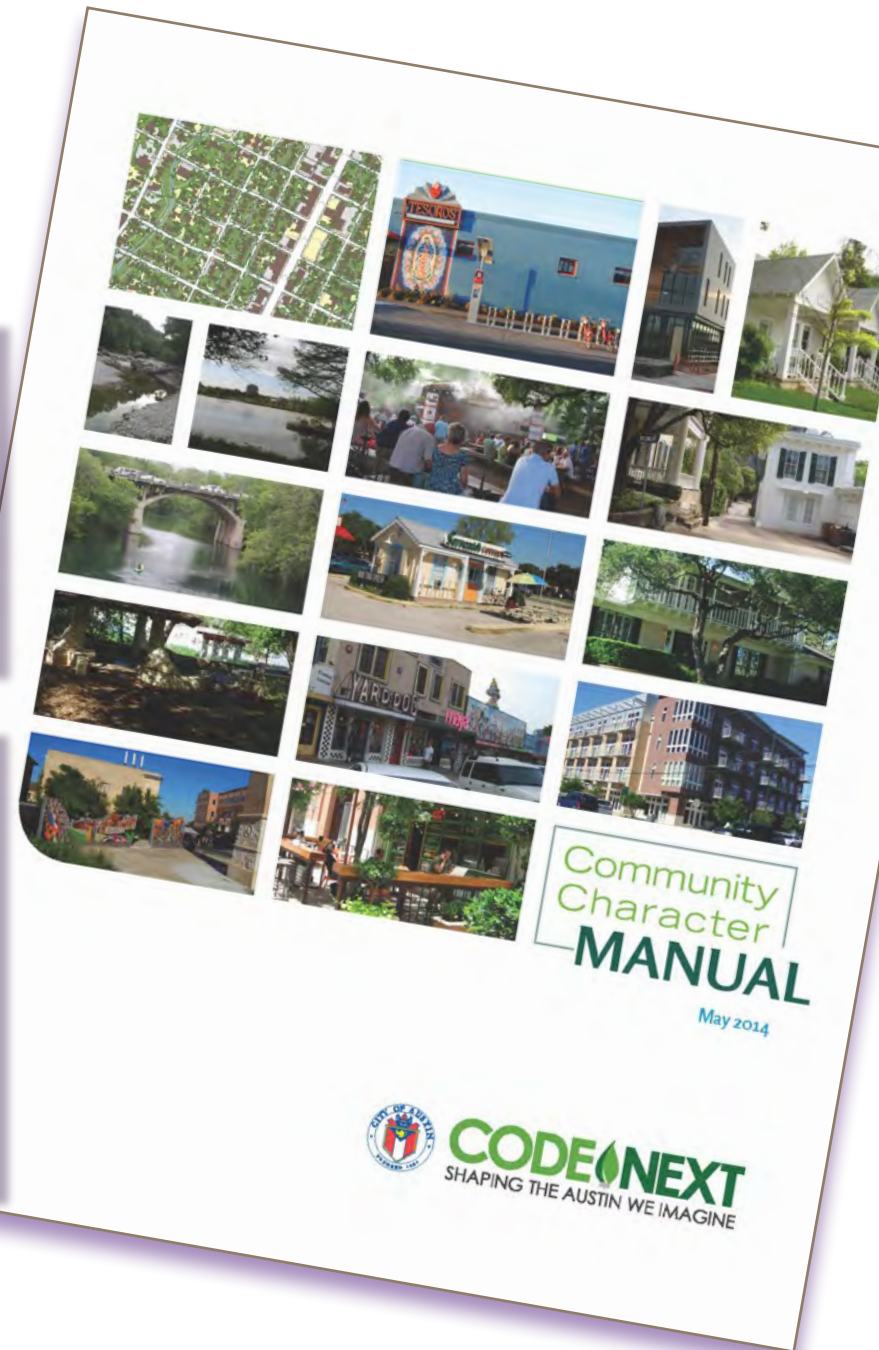


Strip Mall

# It's All About Understanding Different Contexts

## Community Character Manual:

- **Understand different places** that exist throughout Austin.





# Context Approach Enables Us to Reinforce Existing Patterns



Provide Compatible Yet Diverse Housing Choices

# Clarity = Confidence

**10-40.40.080**  
**T4 Neighborhood 2 (T4N.2) Standards**

**Key**  
 - - - - ROW/Property Line    ■ Building Area  
 - - - - Building Setback Line    ▨ Facade Area

D. Building Placement		
Setback (Distance from ROW/Property Line)		
Principal Building		
Front <sup>1</sup>	5' min.; 12' max.	<b>A</b>
Front facade within area	50% min.	
Side Street/Civic Space	10' min.; 15' max.	<b>B</b>
Side <sup>2</sup>	3' min.	<b>C</b>
Rear	3' min.	<b>D</b>
Outbuilding		
Front	20' min.	
Side	0' min.; 3' max.	
Rear	3' min.	

<sup>1</sup>Setback may match an existing adjacent building as follows. The building may be set to align with the facade of the frontmost immediately adjacent property, for a width no greater than that of the adjacent property's facade that encroaches into the minimum setback.  
<sup>2</sup>No side setback required between townhouse and/or live/work building types.

E. Building Form <sup>3</sup>		
Height		
Principal Building		
Stories	4 Stories max.	
To Eave/Parapet	40' max.	<b>E</b>
Overall	52' max.	
Outbuilding		
To Eave/Parapet	18' max.	
Overall	28' max.	
Ground Floor Finish Level	18" min. above sidewalk	<b>F</b>
Ground Floor Ceiling	9' min. clear	<b>G</b>
Upper Floor(s) Ceiling	8' min. clear	<b>H</b>

<sup>3</sup> See Division 10-50.100 (Specific to Building Types) for additional building form regulations.

Footprint	
Depth, ground-floor residential space along primary street frontage	30' min.
Lot Coverage	80% max.

**Miscellaneous**  
 Upper-floor units must have a primary entrance along a street or courtyard façade.  
 Ground-floor residential units along a street must have individual entries.

**10-74** **Flagstaff Zoning Code**

**E. Building Form<sup>3</sup>**  
**Height**

<b>Principal Building</b>	
Stories	4 Stories max.
To Eave/Parapet	40' max. <b>E</b>
Overall	52' max.
<b>Outbuilding</b>	
To Eave/Parapet	18' max.
Overall	28' max.

**Principal Building**

Stories	4 Stories max.
To Eave/Parapet	40' max. <b>E</b>
Overall	52' max.

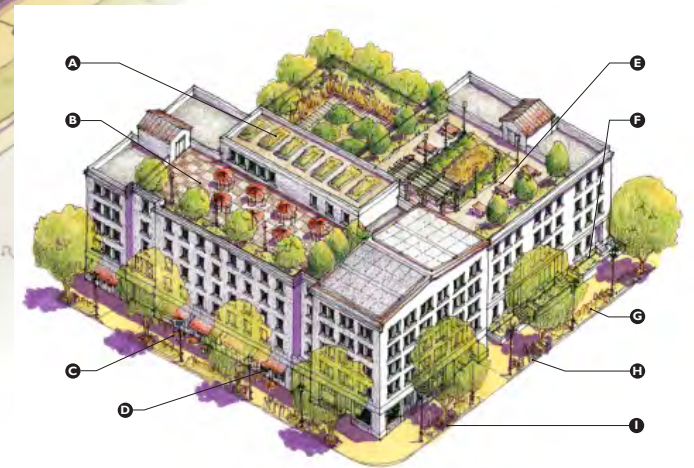
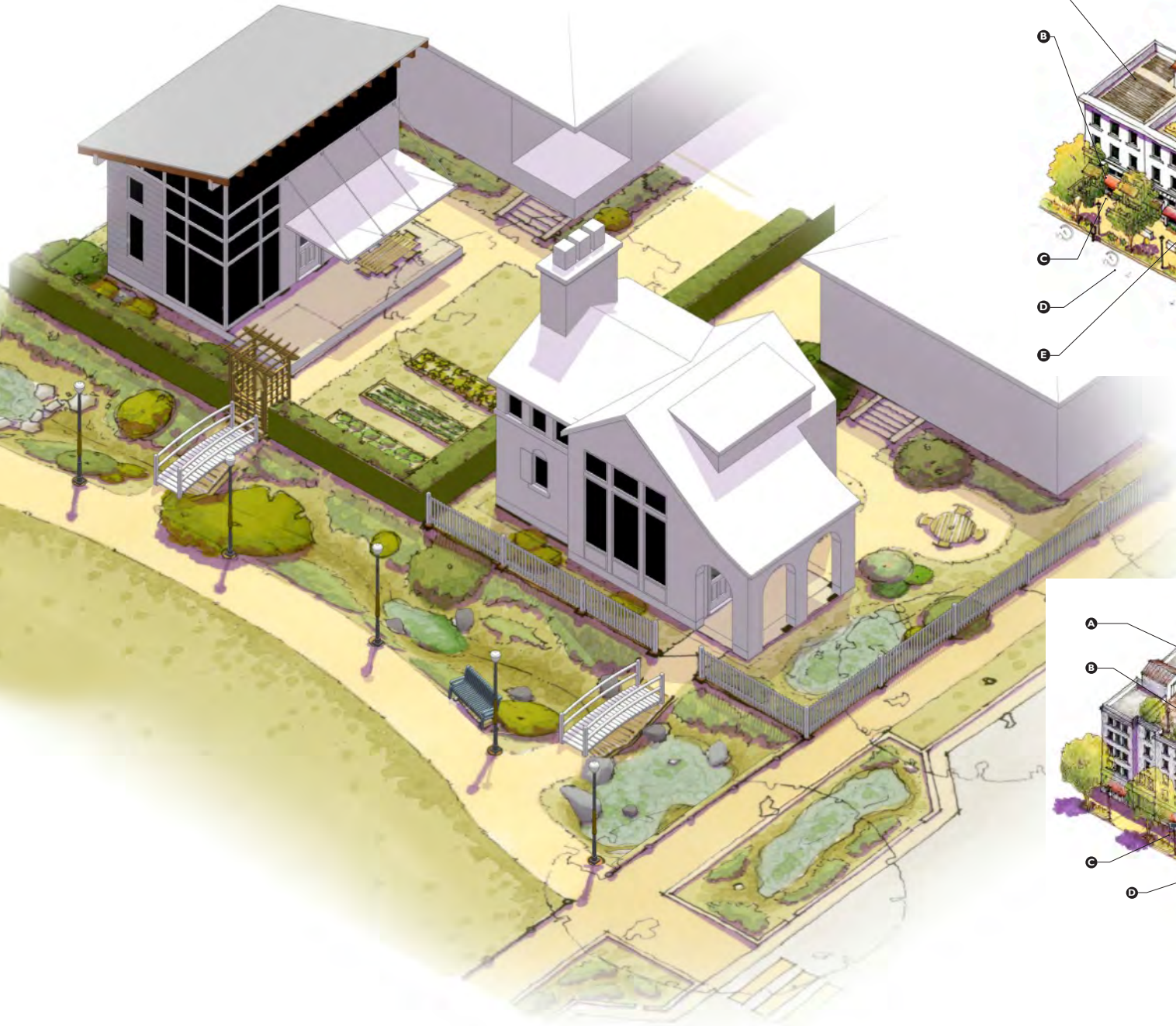
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**Outbuilding**

To Eave/Parapet	18' max.
Overall	28' max.

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# We Can Integrate Sustainability into FBCs



# Austin Will Get A Hybrid Code: Form-Based and Conventional Elements

PLANNING PRACTICE

## Going Hybrid

*How one city overhauled its zoning code while combining form-based and conventional elements.*

By Roger E. Eastman, AICP, with Daniel Parolek and Lisa Wise

**F**LAGSTAFF, ARIZONA, entered an exclusive club in November. It is now one of the few cities in the U.S. that have adopted a hybrid zoning ordinance with both form-based components and conventional Euclidean elements as part of a complete code rewrite. “Simplified, streamlined, predictable” raved an editorial in the *Arizona Daily Sun* while praising both the code and the process used to adopt it. Getting the new code adopted wasn’t easy, but many city residents think the effort will be repaid in a more efficient, more equitable, and easier-to-use zoning system. The adoption of the new zoning code also caps off a successful public engagement process that has changed the generally negative perception of city planners.

### TIME FOR AN UPDATE

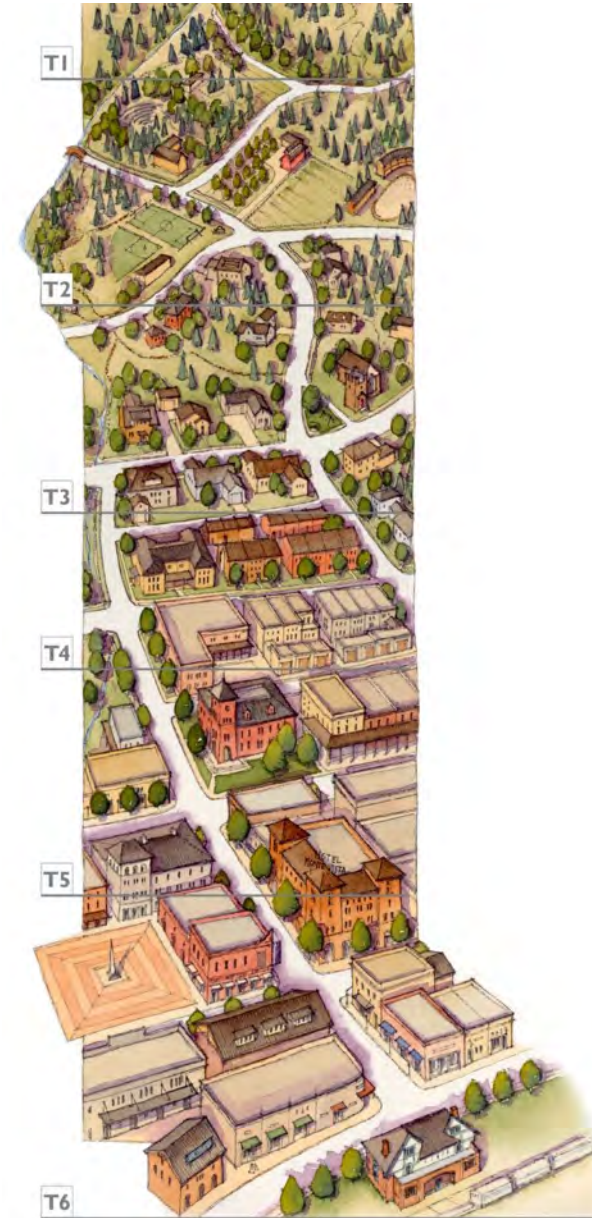
An important first step in approaching a new code was differentiating between what Christopher Leinberger calls “walkable urban” areas from “drivable suburban” areas (*The Option of Urbanism*, Island Press, 2008). By making this distinction, Flagstaff could apply a form-based code in the walkable areas of the city while generally leaving the existing conventional code in place in the

Thus, a new transect-based hybrid code resulted that defaults to promoting and allowing for walkable urbanism while seamlessly incorporating refined yet otherwise conventional Euclidean zoning tools for the drivable suburban areas. Because the regulations for the two different types of areas are not muddled together, the form-based code could be kept intact—and development opportunities could emerge in a manner con-

Flagstaff (pop. 62,000), at an elevation of about 7,000 feet, is the regional hub of northern Arizona. Established as a stop on the early transcontinental railway in 1882 and later Route 66 and Interstate 40, Flagstaff quickly grew as a logging and ranching town, and as a gateway for tourists visiting the Grand Canyon and other national parks and monuments. Residents appreciate the natural beauty of the area and enjoy outdoor pursuits such as hiking, skiing, hunting, fishing, and camping.

The downtown and oldest neighborhoods were planned with small blocks and lots, and today are valued for their historic buildings and inherently walkable urban character. Typical of many American cities, Flagstaff’s urban form changed after World War II as auto-oriented suburban developments were added to the periphery of the city. Until recently Flagstaff’s zoning ordinances have actively promoted these drivable suburban development patterns.

The need for a comprehensive update of the city’s land development code had been apparent for some time as developers, contractors, design professionals, and residents complained about the code’s complexity and inconsistency. Some even blamed the cumbersome nature of the code for contributing to the high cost of development and the failure of big projects and economic develop-



# Austin Needs this New Operating System



Not Adding Additional Layers. A New Foundation

# CODE NEXT

SHAPING THE AUSTIN WE IMAGINE

<http://www.austintexas.gov/department/codenext>