



CONGRESS  
FOR THE NEW  
URBANISM  
CENTRAL TEXAS  
CHAPTER

CHAPTER OFFICE  
P.O. Box 685261  
Austin, TX 78768  
info@centraltexascnu.org  
www.centraltexascnu.org

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NATIONAL OFFICE  
140 S. Dearborn St.  
Suite 404  
Chicago, IL 60603  
Tel: 312-551-7300  
Fax: 312-346-3323  
cnuinfo@cnu.org  
www.cnu.org

December 8, 2014

Honorable Mayor and Members of the Austin City Council  
301 W. Second Street  
Austin, Texas 78701

Re: Proposal to revise Priority Program #8 of Imagine Austin

Dear Honorable Mayor and Council:

Item 189 on your December 11, 2014 agenda contains a proposal to make a major substantive change in Imagine Austin’s Priority Program #8, the rewriting of our development code. This proposal is being offered “to address concerns and perceptions that the [rewrite] is too focused on the compact and connected principle.” CNU is adamantly opposed to this suggested revision for two reasons:

**Reason #1: Content**

Imagine Austin has six core principles, the very first of which is to “Grow as a Compact and Connected City” (Imagine Austin, p. 10). The section of Imagine Austin that deals specifically with the rewrite of the code (Imagine Austin, pp. 207-210) was very deliberately discussed, negotiated and crafted to describe exactly how the code rewrite should help us accomplish that objective. It lists specific vision components, specific related policies and related actions, specific goals to be accomplished, and metrics to be used in evaluating the rewritten code. It sets out a list of both short-term and long-term steps to be taken under this priority program, and describes in detail what was intended with respect to this goal’s relationship with other priority programs. The revision suggested in item 189 would undermine this very specific section of Imagine Austin, in that it would replace these carefully drafted and specific provisions with a single direction that the rewrite should simply “promote . . . the adopted policies and goals of Imagine Austin.” This change would disregard the three-year public process that created the structure and content of the plan document. Such a revision would, in effect, give any group or individual that opposes compact and connected development an opening to argue that the rewrite should attempt to accomplish any “cherry-picked” goal, policy or objective for which that group or individual advocates, no matter the context and no matter the relative importance of that goal, policy or objective.

**Reason #2: Process**

Even if we did not disagree with the content of the change, the manner of the change remains problematic. By nature, a comprehensive plan, in catalyzing a **broad and representative** citizenry to face complex trade-offs, involves difficult decisions to form its vision. In the case of Imagine Austin, those trade-offs included many complex and interrelated problems and solutions, and contemplated many contexts across the community. Furthermore, the effort effectively engaged thousands of citizens via a variety of input mechanisms -- from group discussions, house meetings, speaker’s bureaus, public talks and working groups all across the city in this once-in-a-generation effort. A significant amendment to the vision, without a comparable representative public input process, weakens the voice of the public that worked so hard on this effort. And the timing of this substantive change, coming at the end of one Council organizational model, does not seem appropriate either. Any proposal to change Imagine Austin should follow a more holistic process with significant public input, and should not be pursued piecemeal.

We urge you in the strongest terms to vote against this revision.

Respectfully yours,

Cid Galindo, President  
Congress for the New Urbanism, Central Texas Chapter