October 13, 2014

Mayor Lee Leffingwell
and members of the Austin City Council
City of Austin
301 W. Second Street
Austin, Texas 78701

Re: Code Approach Alternatives & Annotated Outlines

Dear Honorable Mayor and Council:

For the past year, the CodeNEXT consultant team has worked with citizens, developers, landowners, local officials and planning staff to determine a direction for the city’s land development regulations. The recently released Code Approach Alternatives & Annotated Outlines provides options for the new development code, ranging from a “brisk sweep” to a “complete makeover.”

After deliberate consideration, CNU supports “Approach 3,” a complete makeover.

This City Council has labored under this dysfunctional code for many years, crafting custom solutions on a case-by-case basis. The arduous task of making our City a better place in spite of outdated regulations has been yours. CodeNEXT is your opportunity to create a more equitable and functional code for all. Your unique perspective gives you the responsibility to set the direction for this critical project.

While it is tempting to select a less comprehensive approach, we do not believe that the problems Austin is facing, including skyrocketing housing costs, diminishing diversity in many parts of our City, and land-use patterns that do not support a multi-mobility system, can be resolved by tepid half measures.

The Code Diagnosis found serious flaws with our current code: it’s disorganized, laden with contradictions and an administrative labyrinth. The code rewrite represents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to:

- Simplify the code and the development review process
- Accommodate growth, while making our City a better, more diverse place
- Address affordability (all housing options at all price points in all parts of the City)
- Integrate transit and improve mobility options
- Create complete and diverse communities

Critically, the selected approach must:

- Use the code to shape the City envisioned by our Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan
- Continue to gather representative public input
- Promote more by-right development
- Focus more on form than use
- Reduce the application of customized, site-specific zoning
In conclusion, the CodeNEXT project provides you with an immense opportunity to create a long-lasting impact on the entire city and its surrounding region. The weight of thousands of voices is behind the Imagine Austin Plan, and the Plan sets high expectations for the adoption of a great land development code through a complete makeover.

CNU is a multi-disciplinary organization recognized globally as a leader in city-building. The local members of the Congress for the New Urbanism stand ready to provide assistance and expertise on this project that is so critical for the future of our great city.

Regards,

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