



Tuesday, December 15, 2015 by [Elizabeth Pagano](#)  
**CITY COUNCIL**

## **Mobile home rezoning wins praise from all sides**

Last week's City Council meeting ended on a high note when a once-contentious rezoning for an East Side mobile home park found agreement and praise from all sides.

Council Member Greg Casar summed it up, saying, "This is how you negotiate a zoning case."

The case found a happy resolution that extended beyond the District 2 parcel. Council members voted in favor of the rezoning unanimously and held up a related agreement struck by Loma Vista residents and developer Roberts Communities as a model for the city.

"This is what, in my mind, community organization is about," said Council Member Ora Houston. "You get some support, you find your voice, and you use your voice."

Council Member Delia Garza said she felt like a "proud mama" seeing the two sides come to an agreement. "It always feels so great, seeing residents speaking up for themselves," said Garza.

Representing Roberts Communities, Husch Blackwell attorney Nikelle Meade explained that the developer was originally requesting rezoning of 181 acres of the Lexington Parke II mobile home park at Ross Road and Pearce Lane. However, after talking with neighbors of the tract, the developer was requesting instead that 169 acres be rezoned from single- and multifamily zoning to mobile home residence (MH) zoning. That will allow Roberts Communities [to create 855 home sites](#).

“This case has taken a lot of work on the part of a lot of people,” said Meade. “I’m not sure everybody went into it sure that there would be able to be an agreement reached, but at the end of the day, I think we have a much better project.”

As part of the agreement struck with neighbors, the developer has agreed to keep single-family zoning as a buffer, with an additional 50 feet of green buffer. It has also agreed to create a pocket park and allow neighbors access to existing and future amenities. Moreover, it has increased the lot sizes and spacing between homes and promised a minimum of two parking lot spaces per home.

Meade explained that, in addition to talking to nearby neighbors, Roberts Communities heard opposition from a group of “very passionate” District 1 residents who live in Loma Vista, a Roberts Communities-owned mobile home park. She said that when Roberts Communities purchased that park, about eight months ago, “there was a lot of concern among the folks who lived in the neighborhood that we were going to change things, and not change things for the better.”

Specifically, residents were worried about the potential for [predatory lease hikes](#) for people who had been lived for decades. Meade explained that they had subsequently organized a “very robust, very comprehensive” agreement with those residents, who have organized a Hidden Valley-High Meadows neighborhood association (reflecting the names of their two mobile home parks, now jointly called Loma Vista). The group worked with Texas RioGrande Legal Aid and Austin Interfaith to establish an agreement (finalized minutes before the Council hearing) to preserve quality of life for current and future residents.

Loma Vista residents turned out in force to support the zoning change after they struck their own agreement with Roberts. That agreement includes stipulations regarding rent increases, fines and fees, maintenance, parking, relocation protections and recreation spaces.

Council Member Greg Casar said that he supported mobile home zoning, which he pointed out had been increasingly pushed out of cities across the country.

“I think it really says something about this Council and the time that we’re in, and the constituents that are here, that we see this as a great affordable housing option,” said Casar, who pointed out that there were mobile home communities across the city fighting for the rights and protections included in the agreement. “It’s really amazing how much has gotten done. I think it’s a model,” said Casar. “I’ve watched Council very closely for a handful of years, and I’ve never seen so much get done for low-income folks on one case so quickly.”

Roberts Communities CEO Scott Roberts said he felt “honored” that so many residents showed up to support the zoning change. “It makes me feel that we really are making a difference in the city,” said Roberts.

Austin Interfaith leader Kurt Cadena-Mitchell spoke in support of the zoning change, and to the importance of the deal struck. “We believe that it’s important for us to make land-use decisions that protect our most vulnerable residents,” said Cadena-Mitchell. “It’s important to recognize that affordable housing doesn’t just come into place out of good intention. It doesn’t come into place because of the market or because of the property owner, but it actually requires a balance of citizens, of community groups, of property owners and government.”

Council voted to approve the zoning change on first reading and is scheduled to vote on second and third readings this Thursday, when the agreement has been finalized.

*Conceptual plan courtesy of the city of Austin.*

- See more at: <http://www.austinmonitor.com/stories/2015/12/28283/#sthash.iPvbrKDU.dpuf>