

# **AUSTIN INTERFAITH STATEMENT ON AFFORDABLE HOUSING & codeNEXT**

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We, the institutions of Austin Interfaith, believe that any land use code adopted by the Austin City Council should be guided by the following basic principles:

- Austin consists of more than buildings, it is the community of people who live, work and worship here.
- Austin should have an inclusive and diverse population, and be welcoming to both longtime residents and new arrivals.
- Recognizing the injustice of historic land use practices that actively discriminated against whole segments of the community, care should be taken not to institutionalize further discrimination against vulnerable communities in any new or revised land use code.
- Neighborhood preservation is not about the protection of property so much as it is about the protection of communities of people who live and thrive in their homes.
- Austinites, including established communities of people of color, older residents, families with children, and people of modest means should be able to continue living in established communities.
- Home ownership is the foundation of strong families and communities. People of color, older residents, families with children and people of modest means should not be left at the mercy of skyrocketing rents and taxes due to the disappearance of affordable housing stock.
- Austin can achieve its affordability goals by preserving the affordable housing stock in existing neighborhoods and by ensuring that new construction addresses the full spectrum of income needs.
- Austin is now a city with strong resources, and as such is fortunate to have the power to exercise choices about its future. As caretakers of that inheritance, the City Council should insist that future housing development incentives include strong requirements for affordable housing for both rent and purchase.
- The City Council should take extreme care in adopting a new land use code. The final product must be of the highest quality. What is built to last cannot be a “rush job”.
- The City of Austin should work with Travis County and the Central Appraisal District to mitigate the impact of rising property taxes on all Austinites, particularly vulnerable communities of color, older residents, families with children and people of modest means.

While recognizing that any land use code, alone, will not entirely solve the affordable housing crisis, Austin Interfaith proposes the following changes to codeNEXT as they relate to:

## **Affordability:**

- CodeNEXT should, at a minimum, reflect the City of Austin’s own affordable housing goals as a priority. They should not be given away as an entitlement, but rather calibrated to incentivize the use of the density bonus to include housing options for persons with less than 50% Median Family Income in all parts of the city. This should include options for persons at or below 30% Median Family Income.

- The Code should ensure family friendly multi-bedroom and multi-generational housing is available throughout the city.
- The permitted size of accessory dwelling units should not exceed that of the City of Portland and the national average of 800 square feet. Any variances granted could be exchanged for affordable housing benefits.
- In order to create the widest range of options for low-cost housing for the most people possible, we propose expanding zoning for mobile homes and co-op housing, provided that the codeNEXT Citizens Advisory Group's definition of co-op housing is used.

### **Density Bonuses:**

Increased density entitlements, above and beyond those allowed in the present code, should come with corresponding affordable housing benefits. Toward that end,

- Density bonus programs must be calibrated to provide affordable housing in all parts of the city, and for even the most modest of incomes. Density bonus areas should be designated in accord with this goal, following the criteria of Imagine Austin and neighborhood plans.
- Increased density requirements in the code should be subject to strict compatibility requirements, including the McMansion ordinance.
- Density bonus target measures should be based on the number of units to better incentivize family friendly affordable housing.

### **Public Accountability:**

- Code change requests that negatively impact affordable housing stock should come before the City Council.
- Developers requesting fee-in-lieu rather than on-site construction of affordable housing in exchange for density bonuses should come before the City Council.
- Alcohol sales should continue to be prohibited within 300 feet of schools and places of worship. Care should be taken not to conflict with state law.
- The specific data, methodology and formulas used to derive code maps should be made fully available to the public.

### **Process:**

- Austin residents should be given sufficient time to read and provide feedback on our proposed land use code changes through public hearings. The current schedule of four hearings is insufficient for this purpose, given the number of concerned citizens who wish to offer constructive comments.
- As much as possible, the proposed land use code should be short, readable and jargon-free. Both the state and federal governments follow readability standards for proposed rules and regulations. There are several available models to use in this effort.
- Proposed changes/amendments to the draft land use code and maps should be announced to the public and made publicly searchable according to already established city procedures.

