

Testimony by Rev. Michael Floyd to Joint Land Use Committee on codeNEXT
All Saints' Episcopal Church | Austin Interfaith
April 28, 2018

Good morning. I am Michael Floyd, a member of All Saints' Episcopal Church, speaking on behalf of Austin Interfaith, a non-partisan broad-based coalition of 36 congregations, schools, and non-profits working for the common good.

As a homeowner in East Austin, I have seen how the skyrocketing rise of property values creates undue pressure on middle class homeowners. Between 2016 and 2018 the assessed market value of my property DOUBLED, causing my taxes to rise accordingly. I know, from the small-group conversations in our member institutions all over the city that my family is not alone. Austin is in an affordability crisis.

Housing is increasingly unaffordable for growing numbers of low- and middle-income residents. Families with children, seniors, and people of color, particularly in East and South Austin, are being pushed out of the city.

While recognizing that any land use code will not entirely solve the affordable housing crisis, Austin Interfaith nevertheless believes that a land use code guided by the following basic principles can mitigate its negative effects.

First, displacement due to skyrocketing land values, housing costs, rents and taxes should be minimized. Recognizing the injustice of historic land use practices that discriminated against whole segments of the community, care should be taken to prevent further discrimination.

Second, for Austin to have an inclusive and diverse population, and be welcoming to both old and new residents, there must be a wide range of affordable housing options, based on the preservation of existing affordable housing stock, encouragement of such alternatives as co-ops and mobile home parks, and incentivizing new construction for the full spectrum of incomes.

We have held civic academies at churches in south, central and east Austin. After learning about CodeNEXT hundreds of citizen participants have concluded that it falls short of these goals. CodeNEXT could be improved by two changes in particular.

First, entitlements in residential zoning categories, above and beyond those provided in the present land use code, should not be granted "by right," but should be calibrated to incentivize the construction of affordable units in all parts of the city.

Second, the qualifications for the density bonus should be strengthened so that the privilege of increased density can be earned only by the construction of family-friendly,

multi-bedroom units, intended for those making 50 to 30 % MFI or below. The fee-in-lieu option should be applicable only when the fee is not less than the cost of a 2-3 bedroom unit and can only be used to fund affordable housing projects.

We appreciate these hearings, but the problems with CodeNEXT are not resolvable within the anticipated time line. Because of the number and complexity of these problems, there is no “quick fix.” We hope that there will be time for more discussion before any action is taken, so that Austin can become as affordable as possible.