

CONGRESS FOR THE NEW URBANISM
CENTRAL TEXAS CHAPTER

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February 19, 2010

Members of the Austin City Council

Mayor Lee Leffingwell
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Council Member Bill Spelman, Place 5

Mayor Pro Tem Mike Martinez, Place 2
Council Member Laura Morrison, Place 4
Council Member Sheryl Cole, Place 6

City Hall Council Chambers
301 W. 2nd Street,
Austin, TX 78701

RE: February 25, 2010 Agenda Item – East Riverside Corridor Master Plan

Dear Mayor Leffingwell and City Council Members,

The Central Texas Chapter of the Congress for the New Urbanism supports the East Riverside Corridor Master Plan (ERCMP) as presented to the Planning Commission on February 9, 2010. We urge City Council to adopt this plan, as the vision for a vibrant urban corridor that could develop along Riverside Drive.

We urge Council to remand the regulatory details of compatibility standards and zoning classifications to the next phase of this process. Development of the regulating plan and ordinances to implement the vision will take community involvement, expert planning, and time to be sure that the result is implementation of the ERCMP vision. Adopting one or two regulations now, as attachments to the ERCMP, would sacrifice the deliberate balancing of competing community goals that properly belongs in the next phase. All stakeholders deserve to have a full discussion of regulatory options, with a clear understanding as to the implications of each option.

We are particularly concerned about the possible adoption of compatibility standards that are currently part of the citywide zoning kit. These compatibility standards are not tailored to the topography, resulting in limiting heights on buildings below the ground level of some dwellings on the bluff overlooking Riverside Drive. The current compatibility standards are not sensitive to design, to efficient urban transit, or to the overall form of a good urban neighborhood.

We feel confident that the City staff and the community of stakeholders can develop a regulating plan that can meet the goals of compatibility standards, i.e., protecting single-family neighborhoods, while also meeting the goals of a redeveloped urban corridor. Great places have older neighborhoods, new developments, thriving businesses, and lively public spaces.

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The East Riverside Corridor can be a model for the region of how to preserve and protect neighborhoods while adding sustainable development in the heart of the City. We urge you to take the first big step towards achieving that goal by adopting the East Riverside Corridor Master Plan as presented and recommended by staff, and directing staff to move forward with the development of the regulating plan.

We stand ready to help and appreciate the opportunity to comment on the plan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Austan Librach". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Austan Librach, P.E., AICP
President, Central Texas Chapter CNU