

City-Led Neighborhood Planning in Austin, Texas

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Executive Summary

This paper identifies 1997 as the period in which the City of Austin begins to take a leadership role in the neighborhood planning process. A resolution passed on May 21, 1997 officially establishes the importance of neighborhoods and neighborhood organizations as part of the comprehensive planning process and proclaims that the City will be responsible for assisting neighborhoods and the development of neighborhood plans by implementing the Pilot Neighborhood Planning Process program. The City of Austin was largely inspired to take a leadership role within the neighborhood planning process as a result of recommendations made by the Citizens' Planning Committee in a series of reports that discussed twelve core recommendations and numerous action items that should be implemented to allow for a more comprehensive planning effort in Austin. Along with the actions of the Citizens' Planning Committee, the paper examines the significance of planning-related events occurring in Austin at the time like the foundation of redevelopment efforts for the Robert Mueller Municipal Airport and the citizen protests regarding a the proposed Triangle development in central Austin. It is suggested that these contextual events may have had a role in inspiring public interest in comprehensive planning and indirectly facilitating attempts made by the City to address neighborhood planning processes throughout Austin. The three initial neighborhoods involved in the Pilot Neighborhood Planning Process program are briefly introduced before the paper turns to an examination of neighborhood planning in the 1990s from a national perspective. The American Planning Association's (APA) 1996 neighborhood

collaborative planning symposium, 1998 adoption of official neighborhood planning policy guidelines, and 1998 symposium regarding the use of indicators as a tool in neighborhood planning were used to identify trends in neighborhood planning in the 1990s and place the Austin story into a national context. Three empirical studies were also discussed to provide an additional perspective regarding the evolution of neighborhood planning at the national level over the past twenty years. The paper concludes with a brief discussion of how neighborhood planning in Austin facilitates project implementation and capital improvements and suggests that this is an area that the City of Austin may be able to improve to take the neighborhood planning process in Austin to the next level.

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Introduction

This paper isolates 1997 as the year in which the City of Austin passed a resolution to begin taking a leadership role in the neighborhood planning process. The first section explores the events that led to this landmark resolution, including the defining work of the Citizens' Planning Committee, a discussion of contextual events occurring in Austin at the time, and follow-up reports that were designed to maintain momentum as neighborhood planning efforts progressed. Next, neighborhood planning at the national level will be discussed with an emphasis on the state of neighborhood planning in the 1990s in an attempt to put the emergence of city-led neighborhood planning in Austin into context with the prevailing trends of the time. Developing the Austin story in the context of national trends allows for a more informed evaluation of the contemporary neighborhood planning process. The paper concludes with a brief discussion of project implementation as an area in which City of Austin could improve the neighborhood planning process.

1997: The Watershed Year for Neighborhood Planning in Austin

The entity that is arguably the most responsible for the involvement of the City of Austin in neighborhood planning is the now defunct Citizens' Planning Committee, which was appointed by the Austin City Council in September of 1994 and consisted of professionals in the planning related fields as well as citizens from across the city. The

committee consisted of a diverse group that had the expertise necessary to devise new ways for the City of Austin to prepare for growth in the future. The Citizens' Planning Committee findings were initially presented to the Austin City Council in a report submitted on January 19, 1995. The following pages will highlight some of the more important findings and provide a summary of what is considered a groundbreaking analysis of the state of planning in Austin in the mid-1990's and the steps that were necessary to improve the state of the city.

The report was written under the basic premise of exposing an inadequate planning system and confronting the major stereotypes that committee members felt were stifling successful planning in Austin. The following passage captures these sentiments:

"The Citizens' Planning Committee decries the characterizations and stereotypes that fractionalize Austin in its time of greatest need.

These stereotypes include:

- Developers are intractable and *only* interested in profits.
- Neighborhood groups are obstructionist and refuse to accept *any* change.
- Environmental groups are unrealistic and blindly fight *all* growth.
- City planners are bureaucrats who are *out of touch* with the community.

It is time to confront these myths and the reactionary, visionless system Austin has developed. We believe that Austin is a very special and vibrant community. Its citizens are richly diverse, thoughtful and innovative. We believe that Austin has the energy and ability to create its own road, one that will produce both a built and natural environment, healthy for and worthy of its people."

(Committee, 1995, 2)

Confronting these stereotypes head on was an admirable call to action for the city council and all that were involved professionally in the planning of Austin. The report continued to establish twelve recommendations that became regarded as nearly infallible principles that could guide an improvement of the city's planning process.

The recommendations are listed below in their entirety, which is somewhat lengthy, but necessary due to their role as a guiding force for the City of Austin's

reexamination of their comprehensive planning efforts and adoption of neighborhood planning for the city.

“In order to produce and sustain a livable city with a viable tax base, all of the following must occur:

- I. The development regulations and permitting process must be simplified. They should be predictable, accountable, consistent, and clear in intent.
- II. The planning and development regulations should be coordinated with a comprehensive, integrated neighborhood association system.
- III. The comprehensive planning and development regulations should begin with integrative community plans created through neighborhood participation. This process should begin with a review of existing planning tools and documents including sector plans, AustinPlan, corridor studies, NCCD, overlay studies and Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team m (R/UDAT).
- IV. Mobility/transportation planning should be fully integrated into and compatible with land use planning and the development process.
- V. The planning and development process should encourage quality, transit-oriented mixed-use development.
- VI. The Austin Urban Core, as the heart of the region, must receive special attention to maintain and enhance attractiveness and encourage redevelopment as a vital, unique multi-use community (Central Business District and central city community).
- VII. Reinvestment, redevelopment, and remediation in East Austin must be encouraged and facilitated by the City’s planning and development process.
- VIII. Consideration needs to be given to the disproportional impact of negative environmental facilities on low-income neighborhoods and communities of color.
- IX. The City needs to make use of economic incentives, infrastructure and investment to coordinate and encourage development consistent with its vision.
- X. New development processes should create minimal environmental impacts and provide interface between the residents and nature.
- XI. The City of Austin should encourage, facilitate, and participate with communities in the MSA (Metropolitan Statistical Area) to coordinate and plan mutually beneficial regional growth.
- XII. Taxing jurisdictions and governmental entities should coordinate in order to facilitate comprehensive planning.”

(Committee, 1995, 3)

These recommendations provide a thorough overview of the issues that the committee felt must be considered when discussing how to improve the planning process in Austin.

The report argues that the recommendations should be viewed as a whole and that implementing some and not others would hurt the holistic nature of a truly comprehensive planning effort. Recommendations two and three are the most directly related to planning at the neighborhood level and are probably responsible for the explosion of interest in neighborhood planning that developed over the years following

this initial report. Again, the recommendations are meant to be considered holistically, which means that along with empowering the neighborhood planning process the committee gives equal weight to simplifying the development review process and ensuring that environmental interests are prioritized.

The report continues by expanding on each of the twelve recommendations. For the purposes of this paper, we will look at some of the more relevant findings concerning the neighborhood planning process. The committee states that there are many potential actions that could be undertaken to improve the planning process at the neighborhood level, including implementing a system that provides for a single democratically controlled neighborhood association over a defined geographic area, providing training for neighborhood associations, and ensuring that staff and resources are provided by the city to encourage the creation of neighborhood plans. The report also suggests looking to successes in Portland, OR as a potential model for organizing a system of neighborhood associations in Austin (Committee, 1995, 9-11). The 1995 report concludes by discussing some of the contextual conditions that gave rise to the twelve recommendations and advises the City Council to seek additional input wherever necessary and to revisit with the Citizens' Planning Committee to facilitate future implementation.

The Citizens' Planning Committee followed up on these issues with their final report in April 1996. More than a year after reporting their initial findings, the committee restated their twelve recommendations and began to discuss more detailed actions that could be undertaken to implement these suggestions. The 1996 report begins by reiterating five equally important core principles that all were drawn from the previous

report. Upon further examination these five principles are best addressed by grouping them within one of three greater concerns: simplifying the development review process; preserving the unique character of neighborhoods and empowering them in the planning process; and ensuring that growth is pursued in harmony with the natural environment, transportation, and infrastructure needs (Committee, 1996, 2). The principles included in the opening statement of the 1996 report are similar to the stereotypes first discussed in 1995, which clarify that there are really three main constituencies being considered in these reports: the development community, neighborhood groups, and environmentalists. The role of the city seems to be to strike a balance between the three and to create a comprehensive planning process that is acceptable for all parties.

Focusing on neighborhood groups, the report states that at the time of writing there were more than 400 different groups, no one really had an exact number, and that it was difficult for the city to incorporate the expertise found within these groups due to disorganization, overlapping jurisdictions, and often times contradicting missions (Committee, 1996, 5). To this end, the committee had multiple action items that all deviated from the original twelve recommendations with actions that apply to neighborhood planning including the creation and maintenance of a neighborhood association database, assigning a community development coordinator, and establishing neighborhood plans as a key component of the citywide comprehensive plan (Committee, 1996, 11-13). The report concludes by highlighting the source material for the report which consisted of more than sixty actions that were passed by the Citizens' Planning Committee before they dissolved on February 29, 1996. The source material related to the neighborhood planning process will be discussed below.

The major findings following numerous studies were that most neighborhood organizations had informal organization and means of communication, that the City did not commit the resources necessary to track the actions of the neighborhood organizations, and that the lack of an effective organizational framework was creating confusion at all levels and contributing to the impasse between neighborhood groups and the development community. An assessment of these findings concluded that the City was the only entity capable of changing the unsavory environment created by the systemic problems with the structure of the current neighborhood organizations (Committee, 1996, 30). Roughly twenty different recommendations were provided to guide future efforts aiming to amend the neighborhood planning process. Conspicuously absent from these discussions were efforts already underway in Austin by entities like the Austin Neighborhood Council (ANC) to organize the neighborhood associations scattered throughout the city. It seems as if committee members were overwhelmed by the current state of affairs and felt that a City of Austin initiative would provide a fresh start and make the neighborhood planning process easier to integrate with the other facets of comprehensive planning.

The Citizens' Planning Committee reports were at the core of a reexamination of the state of comprehensive planning in Austin and the recommendations regarding neighborhood organizations were eventually adopted by the City. The City of Austin passed a resolution on May 21, 1997 to officially establish the importance of the neighborhood planning process and to initiate the Pilot Neighborhood Planning Process program. The resolution in its entirety is included in Appendix A at the end of this report. This event represents the point in which the City began to take a more active role

in organizing the neighborhood planning process and should be considered the start of contemporary neighborhood planning in Austin. The remainder of this section will discuss a follow-up report drafted by a reincarnation of the Citizens' Planning Committee (now referred to as the Citizens' Planning and Implementation Committee), events happening in Austin that galvanized the neighborhood planning process in 1997, the implementation of a citywide survey in 1998, and a brief introduction to some of the first neighborhoods designated to participate in the Pilot Neighborhood Planning Process program before attempting to place the emergence of city-led neighborhood planning in Austin into a national context.

The purpose of the Citizens' Planning and Implementation Committee report, drafted in September 1997, is perhaps most accurately summarized by the graphic of the capitol building on the cover which is encircled by the words "Maintain Momentum". The report provides a progress report on the actions items introduced in the previous Citizens' Planning Committee reports and praises the City for progress on numerous initiatives, including the Pilot Neighborhood Planning Process program, but cautions that there is still work to do as the development of a comprehensive planning framework for Austin continues. By reinforcing action items from previous reports as well as introducing some new suggestions, the 1997 report hopes to maintain progress and ensure that efforts are moving forward.

Concerning the neighborhood planning process, the 1997 report provides follow-up information to the resolution passed by the City stating that more than fifteen neighborhoods had submitted applications to participate in the pilot program which would enable two or three pilot projects to move forward (Committee, 1997, 10). The

recommendations that followed were similar to those found in previous reports and include maintaining a neighborhood organization database to assist in resolving boundary issues, appointing a Community Involvement Coordinator, developing a Community Assistance Center, and encouraging that neighborhood plans be adopted as part of a citywide plan and that opportunities identified in the creation of these plans are acted upon (Committee, 1997, 11). The report also provides updates on other facets of the comprehensive process, reinforcing that neighborhood planning is only a part of the greater picture, albeit an important one.

Considering the importance of maintaining momentum as a necessary facet of reforming Austin's neighborhood planning process, it seems worthwhile to consider some major events that were occurring in Austin around 1997 and how they may have contributed to a climate where comprehensive planning was more likely to be embraced by city officials and citizens alike. The broad contextual issue at this time was the successes of high tech companies in Austin and the breakneck speed of population growth that coincided with the burgeoning economy. Within this environment, two events stick out as especially important to the citizens of Austin: the monumental task of reintegrating the Robert Mueller Municipal Airport (RMMA) site into the city and protesting against the proposed Triangle development at 45th, Lamar, and Guadalupe which would continue for years following the introduction of a development proposal in 1997.

Looking back at the history of the RMMA project, we can see that many of the groundbreaking moments in the evolution of a master plan for the area took place in 1997 including the formation of the Mueller Neighborhoods Coalition, the awarding of a

master planning contract by the City Council to the ROMA design group, and the appointment of an RMMA Advisory Group and City Council Subcommittee (Robert Mueller, 2006). These groups began working on a reclamation/reuse plan for the area until the airport officially closed in May of 1999 and the same groups then began to work on implementation efforts. It is arguable that the pursuit of such a high profile project in Austin contributed to raising the public consciousness regarding the benefits of planning and made it easier for the City to move forward with adopting resolutions and taking actions to strengthen comprehensive planning efforts in Austin.

A similar impact can be drawn from the protests resulting from the proposed Triangle development, which was seen as bringing unwanted big box development to a unique area of Austin. An Austin Chronicle editorial reflects on how these events may have been empowering to neighborhood groups when examining the history of the Triangle development,

I suppose we've learned, or at least Triangle developer Tom Terkel has learned, that building something in Central Austin can be a real bitch, but I'm not sure that qualifies as new information. The neighborhoods, though, have learned something similar, which might be a genuine lesson. The Triangle saga erupted at the dawn of Austin's embrace of neighborhood planning (after the defining work of the Citizens Planning Committee, but before the city initiated its first pilot plans).

(Clark-Madison, 2004)

It is impossible to measure exactly how much impact a controversial development has on the strengthening of neighborhoods, but it is not difficult to see themes like identity, ownership, and a call to action being exhibited by citizens in this instance. Crediting the importance of rallying events as a way to increase participation and maintain momentum when implementing a new neighborhood planning process or examining the state of

comprehensive planning as a whole is not a farfetched concept and could be incorporated into future strategies.

Perhaps in response to the favorable planning climate, a citywide survey called the Austin Community Agenda was implemented in 1998 to gauge the quality of life and levels of community involvement as a way to provide an unbiased assessment of how citizens of Austin perceive their surroundings and would like to move forward. A similar survey was undertaken in 1995, but was smaller in scale and focused solely on East Austin (Austin Community Survey, 1995). Major findings of the 1998 survey included revealing that more than 80 percent of Austin residents surveyed were satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of life in Austin. Furthermore, the survey determined that residents could generally be grouped into three distinct groups: Community Optimists, Urban Environmentalists, and Nostalgic Individualists in response to the prevalent attitudes unearthed by the survey. These findings created some debate and what some would argue were negligible results, but they continued to provide momentum for comprehensive planning in Austin and the city-led Pilot Neighborhood Planning Process programs.

The three neighborhoods selected to initially participate in the Pilot Neighborhood Planning Process program were the East Cesar Chavez and Chestnut neighborhoods from East Austin and the Dawson neighborhood from South Austin. Some of the neighborhood issues identified in the Citizens' Planning Committee reports like the unmanageable number of neighborhood associations and overlapping boundaries created difficulties throughout the planning process in the East Cesar Chavez neighborhood as some groups felt they were being marginalized. The planning process for this

neighborhood would not result in a neighborhood plan until three years after the project began. The Dawson neighborhood completed Austin's first neighborhood plan in 1998, which continued to be adopted by the City Council and incorporated into the city's comprehensive plan (Trower, 1998).

Despite difficulties in some neighborhood areas, the Pilot Neighborhood Planning Process program successfully provides a framework for empowering neighborhood groups to create plans to be adopted by the City Council and allowing citizens to exert greater control over the direction of growth in their own neighborhoods. There has been impressive progress since the City resolution in 1997 to take a more active role in neighborhood planning in Austin, but the current process is not without faults. In many instances, the creation of a neighborhood plan can become uncomfortably political with neighborhood associations competing for influence and distracting participants from accomplishing true collaboration and meaningful progress. Although the neighborhood planning process could undeniably be improved, the framework established by the Citizens' Planning Committee is a solid beginning. At this time, it would be instructive to analyze the state of neighborhood planning at the national level around the same time as the emergence of city-led neighborhood planning in Austin in 1997. Taking a step back and placing the Austin story into a national context should allow for a more enlightened perspective when addressing the contemporary neighborhood planning effort.

Neighborhood Planning in the 1990s

Neighborhood planning is inherently a diverse and interdisciplinary undertaking, making direct comparisons between different programs difficult, but providing an

overview of neighborhood planning in the 1990s will help to put the 1997 emergence of city-led neighborhood planning in Austin into a national context. Hopefully this analysis will provide insight and the background information necessary to provide suggestions for the contemporary neighborhood planning process in the paper's final section. To that end, this section will explore the evolution of neighborhood planning at the national level by focusing on the efforts led by the American Planning Association (the national association charged with representing the interests and advancement of professional planners) and through a discussion of three empirical studies that collectively examine the state of neighborhood planning over the past twenty years.

From November 14-16, 1996, the American Planning Association (APA) in conjunction with support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation hosted a *Neighborhood Collaborative Planning* Symposium in Chicago, Illinois. The symposium was well attended with recognized leaders in the field of neighborhood planning from across the country coming together to tackle issues that seemed to be at the forefront of a trend towards neighborhood planning becoming more prevalent in city's throughout the United States. The following analysis is drawn from the published summary of the symposium proceedings (APA, 1996).

The summary begins by identifying problems with current neighborhood planning practices that were presented within the following five categories: systemic, practical, process, perceptions, or local government (APA, 1996, 4). Looking at the system of neighborhood planning, participants in the symposium felt that most locations would benefit from a fresh start rather than incremental tinkering that effectively places a temporary band-aid on a broken process. The practical problems include similar themes

like the fact that few neighborhoods have plans and those that do are not always completed in a holistic nature, that plans should not be seen as a “finite” resolution rather they are a process, and that planning efforts are too often driven by problems. Perhaps because of the problem-driven nature of many planning efforts, the process was identified as often starting too late and being too reactive. The perception that planning is an endless undertaking with no real effective results was identified as a stigma that would be difficult to overcome. Finally, local government was explicitly implicated as not being traditionally involved in neighborhood level processes. Identifying local governments as a distinct problem within neighborhood planning practice leads one to believe that when examining this issue from a national perspective that neighborhood planning was not being officially adopted by most city governments in the 1990s.

One goal of the symposium was to allow for participating researchers, representatives, and practitioners to compare their notes on neighborhood collaborative planning to create a common definition that could be accepted by all parties, which could then be used as a foundation for addressing some of the problems discussed above. The final definition states that,

“Neighborhood collaborative planning seeks to enhance the quality of life in a specific area by joining attention to the economic, social and physical infrastructure of the neighborhood to realize the goals defined by a resident – drive/managed/lead vision.”

(APA, 1996, 5)

This definition leads into two bullet points which address the core of collaborative planning, “to learn the complexity of the dynamics of communities” and “to learn the normative values, behaviors of community members (to understand their needs in the context of their strengths, to sustain what works and do what needs to be done)” (APA, 1996, 5). Establishing a definition for neighborhood collaborative planning created the

clarity necessary to begin digging deeper in an attempt to unearth solutions that may be already embedded within the general process of planning at the neighborhood level.

The symposium participants identified fourteen different key elements for neighborhood collaborative planning that for ease of reference will be displayed as a table that identifies the key elements and provides a description of ideas that emerged following their discussion (APA, 1996, 6-7).

Key Elements of Neighborhood Collaborative Planning (NCP)	Description
Capital	A living wage for residents is needed to have a sustainable neighborhood. Neighborhoods can not always meet the need for jobs. Focus the dollars where they can do the greatest good.
Commitment	After the initial project has been started, a framework is needed for its completion and for the continuation of other projects and processes. Residents must be recognized as long-term players. Continuity should be secured by an organizational structure because leaders and resources change.
Power	It's important for people without money or traditional access to power to decide what is needed. The neighborhood group must be recognized by local government. The local power structure needs to be involved. There must be a knowledge base in order for the neighborhood to harness power. Power at the neighborhood level must be used responsibly.
Goals	A healthy neighborhood. Fundable solutions that are accompanied by timelines. Child and family-centered planning and action.
Context	Pay attention to neighborhood issues in the context of the larger community in order to solve the problems. (Such as the tax base throughout the region.) Get neighborhoods to play a larger role in the context of community/regional planning.
Involvement	More than just neighbors need to be involved, business owners, faith-based organizations, etc. Individuals with a commitment to the community seem to know how to do NCP.
Leadership	A leadership role within the neighborhood is needed for NCP to survive. Planning should be reinforcing leadership. Planning efforts should include training that empowers the neighborhood/community.
Getting past "we vs. they"	Collaboration requires mutual respect. Neighborhood players need to overcome their bias against government; government is needed as a partner. City Hall and neighborhood need to develop trust and a history of working together. Clear, consistent communication between City Hall and the neighborhood is vital to NCP.
Shared Vision	Community must develop a vision that will help coordinate resources. Identify all parties whose interests are at stake. All neighborhoods in a community should be involved with neighborhood planning to help overcome segregation.
Linked Services	Neighborhood planning must be connected to governance.
Authority	Develop and institutionalize authority for decision making within the neighborhood. The neighborhood should hire or be represented by its own planner. Perhaps a separate neighborhood planner position(s) is needed within city government that allows for neighborhood advocacy. Planning tools and resources should be accessible

	and available to people in the neighborhood.
Implementation	This step in the planning process is not always collaborative; know when collaboration is needed and when delegation is the most appropriate choice.
Accountability	There should be a means of measuring and ensuring that money is spent in the manner it was planned to be spent. Participants in the NCP process should establish binding partnerships.
Defining what's in and what's out of the realm of NCP	In some places NCP may need to expand to include responsibility for things that were once left to families (and perhaps still considered a family's responsibility) such as the care and well being of very young children.

Many important concepts can be drawn from the ideas presented in the table above, but looked at in their entirety and considering the panel that collaborated on their creation; they also provide a decent estimation of the state of neighborhood planning in 1996 from a national perspective. This state can be best described as still being in a formative stage, with loose and easily generalized concepts ruling the discussion. The proceedings continue by examining the process of neighborhood collaborative planning and the role of planners, which is collected as key phrases in the summary and will be reflected upon in the following paragraphs.

The description of the discussions regarding the neighborhood collaborative planning process (APA, 1996, 8) emphasizes structure, cogent starting and ending points, and returning to the basics. Recognizing that there is no “one-size-fits-all” solution to different neighborhood problems and that planning should not be seen as an immediate “fix” to events, but rather as a continuum of efforts is important to remember. As part of the continuum, planning should include on-going analysis and problem identification while maintaining a focus on the future. Finally, the process must consider the regional context to ensure that problems in one neighborhood are not just transferred to another, but that solutions create lasting benefits for both the neighborhood and the greater community. Absent from this discussion was reference to methods for inspiring

participation and promoting neighborhood ownership of the planning process. Perhaps due to the seemingly formative nature of the proceedings, some of the more detailed issues within the neighborhood planning process were intentionally not addressed.

The symposium summary provides many statements regarding the role of planners in the neighborhood collaborative planning process that basically establish the importance of planners acting as facilitators through informed and innovative approaches (APA, 1996, 9). Some of the more thought provoking remarks dealt with issues like having knowledge of what planners can and cannot do, using dynamic tools like focus groups rather than relying solely on meetings, providing an intermediary between neighborhoods and their elected officials, and basically to bridge any gaps in knowledge that might hinder progress throughout the neighborhood planning process. The role of the planner as educator should not be diminished, especially early in the neighborhood planning process. Interestingly, the summary also includes a few statements regarding the role of the APA, one of which states that, “the audience for this project is not neighborhood organization, but local government” (APA, 1996, 10).

On April 6, 1998, the APA adopted an official Policy Guide on Neighborhood Collaborative Planning to represent the collective viewpoint of the association’s members and provide principles for practitioners across the country (APA, 1998a). The policy was created in response to the APA 1996 symposium on neighborhood collaborative planning and some follow up surveys that were distributed to APA members. The findings that relate to planning at the municipal level are discussed below,

“Neighborhoods are the strategic building blocks of overall community development. Neighborhood collaborative planning requires understanding of the economic, social and physical characteristics in order to maintain both the sense of place and the sense of community. Neighborhood planning is not consistently found at the municipal level. Very few neighborhoods have plans. Many have piecemeal plans, such as housing plans, business revitalization plans,

traffic plans, but not a comprehensive and integrated plan. Unfortunately what is more commonly found is a confusing array of programs, boundaries, staff, and objectives.”

(APA, 1998a)

This passage identifies the lack of consistent neighborhood planning at the municipal level, while reinforcing the importance of following a comprehensive strategy when creating neighborhood plans. In reference to the role of planners in the neighborhood planning process,

“Planners have unique skills to provide communities with information and alternatives, help coordinate the efforts of many players to resolve neighborhood problems and maintain a long-term perspective that incorporates various disciplines. It is incumbent upon municipal planners, familiar with the workings of local government, to help neighborhood residents see their local problems in the broader contexts of the city and the region. Planners can contribute assistance on a wide variety of subjects including plan- and grant-writing, the use of maps, models, and case studies, and appropriate contacts within government agencies and other organizations. Research conducted by the American Planning Association and other groups has shown that the best neighborhood plans are developed by informed residents collaborating with decision-makers, service providers, and business leaders in a process designed and facilitated by neighborhood planners.”

(APA, 1998a)

The theme of planners as the primary disseminators of information was revisited as the topic for a second APA symposium in the fall of 1998.

The 1998 symposium was entitled “Using Indicators to Advance Collaborative Planning in Neighborhoods”, a topic that arose following the 1996 symposium and was revisited after intriguing many planners and the interests of the Annie E. Casey foundation. Symposium participants introduced a wide range of topics including how indicators can contribute to neighborhood planning, what information most appropriately reflects the health of neighborhoods, how indicators relate to growth pressures and livability, contributions to research and development, and others (APA, 1998b, 5-7). The proceedings identified the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership (NNIP), consisting of Atlanta, Boston, Cleveland, Denver, Oakland, Providence, RI, and Washington, DC as an example of best practices in the field (APA, 1998b, 8-9).

The symposium continued with a discussion of the following ten lessons: 1) develop information to change, not just monitor, 2) develop an integrated system for one-stop shopping, 3) develop indicators at the neighborhood level, 4) build a data “warehouse”, 5) serve multiple users but build capacity in poor communities, 6) democratize information, 7) help stakeholders use data in a way that leads to comprehensive strategies, 8) use information as bridge to collaboration, 9) use indicators but recognize their inadequacy, and 10) assure integrity in both the data and the institution that provides them (APA, 1998b, 10-11). These lessons were meant to provide insight into current practices involving indicators that inform neighborhood planning, which would be explored and expanded on throughout the proceedings.

Some issues raised that relate to the role of local governments include ensuring that the data is provided by an objective and credible source. City planning departments were identified as likely candidates for leading the information dissemination process, with the exception of a discussion regarding the case of Denver and some reservations on the part of their planners that housing data resources within their department has the danger of making the process politicized (APA, 1998b, 17-18). One solution could be requiring that the data be supplied and used by multiple departments as a way to ensure that the data is accurate and that when different agencies, or neighborhoods, attempt to answer similar questions they will be finding similar answers. The role of planners as the primary disseminators of information will be revisited later in the paper, but first a discussion of the empirical work regarding national trends in neighborhood planning will provide additional context for the Austin effort.

The three studies that will be the focus of the following paragraphs include William Rohe and Lauren Gates (1985) Planning with Neighborhoods, Michelle Gregory's (1996) working paper presented at the 1996 APA symposium "Anatomy of a Neighborhood Plan: An Analysis of Current Practice", and Deborah Myerson's (2004) report on an Urban Land Institute forum "Involving the Community in Neighborhood Planning". Collectively, these studies provide an overview of neighborhood planning trends and case study examples from the past twenty years, which should provide valuable perspective for establishing the national context surrounding the emergence of city-led neighborhood planning in Austin. Whenever possible, examples of case studies that describe coordination between project implementation and neighborhood planning efforts will be provided to complement the final section regarding suggestions for improving this process in Austin. The cities and neighborhoods included in these studies are listed in Appendix B to illustrate the scope of each work and the state of neighborhood planning when the studies were completed.

The Rohe and Gates (1985) study is the most rigorous of the three and includes a survey of fifty-one different city's neighborhood planning programs along with more intensive case studies of efforts in Houston, TX, Wilmington, NC, Cincinnati, OH, Saint Paul, MN, Raleigh, NC and Atlanta, GA in the early 1980s. Several important generalizations about neighborhood planning in the 1980s can be drawn from this study and a few particularly intriguing caveats will be shared in the following statements. Most neighborhood planning efforts (80 percent) relied on federal Community Development Block Grants for funding and were created primarily as a vehicle for accomplishing the public participation requirements of this program. Many programs, however, also relied

on local funding (70 percent) and fewer obtained state support (25 percent) (Rohe, 1985, 81). The legal sanction for neighborhood planning programs was identified as an important variable with most being ratified by a council resolution (50 percent) (Rohe, 1985, 77). Finally, the most common administrative agency for a neighborhood planning program was the planning department (50 percent), followed by community development corporations (25 percent) and the city manager (10 percent) (Rohe, 1985, 78).

Regarding the case study examples, Cincinnati, OH had the most integration between project implementation and neighborhood planning at the time of the survey (Rohe, 1985, 92). Neighborhood planning in Cincinnati was initially under the purview of the Planning Commission, but five years after the program's inception, management was transferred to a newly established Division of Community Assistance, which established 47 community councils based on the adoption of existing neighborhood groups. The integration of the neighborhood planning program with the government budgeting process was accomplished by establishing four Community Assistance Teams that each consisted of a team leader, a human services planner, a land-use planner, and a technician to deal directly with the community councils. The CAT teams were responsible for providing information, advising community councils of city projects that may affect their area, and assisting each community council with a yearly work plan that was reviewed and after negotiation included in the city budget. The Cincinnati example provides an interesting framework, but the program was eventually overwhelmed by the fact that the community council boundaries were formed without City guidance, which resulted in numerous conflicts.

Similar to Cincinnati, most of the earlier neighborhood planning efforts arose independently of each other, which often resulted in piecemeal pockets of planning across cities and gave rise to problems such as overlapping jurisdictions, competing interests, and general disorganization as highlighted in the 1996 APA symposium. Comparing the current neighborhood planning effort in Austin to the trends typical of earlier neighborhood planning efforts reveals many similarities, but a striking difference is the fact that the City of Austin prioritizes linking neighborhood planning to a comprehensive plan. This goal is listed as one of the fifteen recommendations included at the end of the Rohe and Gates study, but was not found in many of the plans surveyed (1985, 189). The 1990s is arguably when city-led neighborhood planning in conjunction with comprehensive planning first began to surface in many local governments across the country, which is supported by the findings of the APA symposiums and innovations in Portland.

The second empirical study to be discussed was submitted as a working paper at the 1996 APA symposium and includes a review of forty-seven different neighborhood plans that were collected after an open call for submissions and from the APA research library (Gregory, 1996). This study credits the Rohe and Gates (1985) work for providing the framework for their review, but the two efforts focus on different aspects of the neighborhood planning process. Rohe and Gates focused on the structure and results of neighborhood planning programs while Gregory (1996) investigated the actual content of completed neighborhood plans. Her study prioritized plans that included collaboration between different departments and stakeholders with the goal of optimizing service delivery to neighborhoods, which could be seen as the ultimate goal of all neighborhood

planning efforts. A closer examination of the plans reviewed in Gregory's study should allow for conjecture regarding the state of neighborhood planning in the 1990s.

The neighborhood plans reviewed in the Gregory (1996) study had at most two examples from a single community until Portland contributed eleven different neighborhood plans from 1992-1993. Portland's neighborhood planning process seems to be the first attempt by local government to complete a series of neighborhood plans in the context of a citywide comprehensive plan that systematically covers all core neighborhoods in the municipality. The absence of multiple collaborative efforts in most cities at the time was noted by the author who states that, "the small number of completed and adopted plans may be an indicator of how cumbersome and painstaking truly collaborative planning can be" (Gregory, 1996, 1). Nowhere is this statement more applicable than in regards to current neighborhood planning efforts in Austin, which has yet to complete their initial round of neighborhood plans nearly ten years after the official process was initiated.

Gregory's report consists of descriptions of neighborhood plan elements with an accompanying symbol to indicate whether the element was an essential part of all neighborhood plans, an optional element that is dependent on local circumstances, or an optional element that is included if collaborative planning is the community goal (1996, 2). Unfortunately, detailed case studies of the plans and individual city programs were not available in this study. It is important to note that within the survey, nearly all of the plans included an element regarding implementation but fewer than 25 percent included an element addressing funding (Gregory, 1996, 22). Those that did address funding covered many different sources including city capital improvement funds, tax increment

financing, CDBG grants, donations, fund raisers, private investors, community loans and others. Included in the appendix is an action chart regarding housing from the King Neighborhood in Portland, which describes projects, potential implementers/advocates, and a timeline for completion. It seems that including a summary chart with a consistent format in each neighborhood plan in Austin could facilitate collaboration with other city departments and the budgeting process in regards to project implementation.

Unfortunately, a rigorous study of contemporary neighborhood planning efforts has not been completed to compare with the Rohe and Gates (1985) study or the Gregory (1996) working paper. The closest example of an empirical work regarding the state of neighborhood planning, and the empirical classification is applied loosely, is the Myerson (2004) report on a Urban Land Institute (ULI) forum on neighborhood planning that incorporates case studies of South Chicago, San Jose, CA, and Austin, TX. This study echoes many of the themes that arose in the APA symposium and within the Gregory paper by focusing on collaborative planning and again lamenting the lack of collaborative and comprehensive planning at the neighborhood level in most cities across the nation (Myerson, 2004, VI). The report continues to highlight seven neighborhood planning principles that include: 1) community building, 2) foster leadership, 3) plan for implementation, 4) take advantage of available tools and resources, 5) be financially realistic, 6) communicate the planning process effectively and 7) make the neighborhood's "social" capital grow (Myerson, 2004). The nature of this report reflects a much more applied forum, whereas the APA symposium seemed to deal with more formative issues. Perhaps this illustrates that neighborhood planning is currently on more solid footing today than in the mid-1990s.

Certainly, this is the case in Austin. Neighborhood planning in Austin was not featured in either of the previous studies reviewed in this paper and had accomplished little to merit the attention of researchers. The fact that the Director of the Neighborhood Planning and Zoning Department was invited to attend the ULI event and that the neighborhood planning process in Austin was featured speaks volumes about the progress that has been made since the programs inception in 1997. The case study does not go into much detail, but does introduce three goals for the neighborhood planning process in Austin: 1) to accommodate higher-density growth (and address neighborhood resistance to it), 2) create more livable neighborhoods and 3) involve the emerging immigrant community. These goals will be addressed by focusing on land use, zoning, transportation, urban design, neighborhood character, city services, and infrastructure (Myerson, 2004, 15).

The neighborhood planning process in Austin is described as a 12-month collaborative process in which anyone living, owning property, or operating a business in a neighborhood to participate in two community workshops and numerous task group meetings to complete a neighborhood plan. Neighborhood Planning and Zoning Department staff are cited as being responsible for guiding this process from start to finish. After adopting the neighborhood plans, the City is responsible for referring to the plan in implementing local projects and making decisions regarding zoning cases. Some other general accomplishments include finding areas suitable for new housing, preserving and protecting neighborhoods, identifying areas for commercial or industrial development, locating sites for mixed-use development and improving open space, parks, and transportation routes (Myerson, 2004, 16).

In summary, most neighborhood planning efforts prior to the 1990s were plagued by problems including a lack of definition and overlapping boundaries among neighborhood groups, conflicting interests, and disorganization. In the mid-1990s municipalities began to realize the benefits of collaborative planning and integrating these efforts into a comprehensive plan, a movement that likely can be attributed to successes in Portland and the APA symposiums that reinforced these ideas in the national consciousness. The emergence of city-led neighborhood planning in Austin in 1997 follows the model established by Portland and was implemented to address the problems listed above. In this context, the creation of the Pilot Neighborhood Planning Process program was not particularly innovative, but does show that Austin reacted to the prevailing wisdom at the time and as a result has established a solid foundation for neighborhood planning that has achieved national distinction.

Suggestions for Neighborhood Planning in Austin

Today, more than twenty-five neighborhoods have completed neighborhood plans and most of the city's urban core has either finalized a plan or is currently involved in the process with the hope that the initial round of neighborhood plans will be completed within the next few years. As year ten of the Pilot Neighborhood Planning Process program quickly approaches, it would be worthwhile to examine facets of the process that could be improved as the state of neighborhood planning in Austin continues to mature. Returning to the Rohe and Gates (1985) study, respondents to their survey identified inadequate project implementation as the most frequent problem with neighborhood planning programs. Project implementation and organizing the distribution of services

were also identified in the 1996 APA symposium as the primary reason for pursuing collaborative neighborhood planning. Although, as stated earlier in this paper, there are undoubtedly many aspects of the neighborhood planning process that could be improved, the remainder of this section will focus on the relationship between neighborhood planning and project implementation in Austin. The Myerson (2004) case study states that adopted neighborhood plans should be referred to when implementing local projects, but the issue of whether the City of Austin is merely providing lip-service to neighborhood plans or truly integrating neighborhood planning into project implementation and their budgeting process remains unresolved.

Project implementation is synonymous with capital improvements, which are generally pursued in accordance with a plan that describes the costs and benefits of each project to establish the priority for their implementation. Austin annually drafts a capital improvement plan by soliciting information about projects being undertaken by each department before the document is reviewed by the Planning Commission and presented for approval to the City Manager and City Council. As for an intersection between capital improvement planning and neighborhood planning, Austin's Capital Improvement Plan does include a map of adopted neighborhood planning areas and identifies the planning area that will be impacted by each project, but it is unclear whether the existence of a neighborhood plan has a measurable impact on the likelihood that a project will be implemented (Austin, 2005). It may be feasible for the City of Austin to implement a procedure similar to the Cincinnati example discussed earlier where community councils (or in Austin's case neighborhood planning areas) create an annual work plan to be reviewed and integrated with the city capital improvement budget.

Looking at the existing Capital Improvement Plan reveals that the funding for neighborhood enhancements through the Neighborhood Planning and Zoning Department, which seems closely associated with adopted neighborhood plans, did not receive a new appropriation (Austin, 2005, 41). However, there are countless projects that did receive approval in many other departments including Parks and Recreation, Public Works, and others are at a neighborhood scale and should be recognized and integrated into neighborhood planning efforts. Currently, the projects in the Capital Improvement Plan are organized by department making it difficult to readily discern which projects will affect each neighborhood planning area and how neighborhood plans impact the budgeting process. Perhaps the Neighborhood Planning and Zoning Department could reorganize the projects by neighborhood planning area as a way to make the existing Capital Improvement Plan more compatible with neighborhood planning efforts. Including uniform charts that summarize desired projects in each neighborhood planning area and presenting these to City departments would also help to integrate neighborhood planning and the distribution of City investments.

Another important source for project implementation funding is the federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program, which has provided the City of Austin with over \$200 million since 1975 to pursue community improvements. CDBG funding is administered by the Neighborhood Housing and Community Development department, who hold a needs assessment each year that is open to the public and helps establish how the grant money will be distributed. The needs assessment informs an annual action plan that complements a five-year consolidated plan to maximize the long term impact of proposed projects (Austin, 2006). The overlying goals for the CDBG

program in Austin are to increase affordable housing and create jobs. Eligibility for CDBG grants is determined by federal guidelines that target census tracts with 50 percent of households with incomes below 80 percent of the area's gross median income or a poverty rate of 25 percent. Similar to the City of Austin Capital Improvement Plan, the CDBG five-year consolidated plan and annual action plan are lengthy documents and even though many of the projects funded by CDBG grants impact neighborhoods, they are difficult to relate to adopted neighborhood plans.

Examining the methodology behind how the City of Austin Capital Improvement budget and CDBG funding are organized and disbursed reveals significant disconnect between the neighborhood planning process and the governmental funding that makes project implementation possible. The suggestion that City staff could work to make both the Capital Improvement Plan and the CDBG plans more accessible to the neighborhood planning process is a good place to begin addressing this problem, but the reformation of the process should not stop there. The City of Austin could consider the findings of the 1998 APA symposium on using indicators to advance neighborhood planning and focus on supplying information to neighborhood planning areas that facilitates successful project planning and allows neighborhood plans to have a more proactive rather than reactionary role in the City budgeting process. Perhaps more importantly, access to information at the neighborhood scale will make neighborhood planning efforts more successful at attracting project implementation funding from more unique financing sources like in-kind donations of capital and expertise from local businesses, neighborhood fund-raising events, or philanthropic organizations. In this area, the City of Austin has the potential to be truly innovative and should more completely integrate

neighborhood planning with capital improvements, the disbursement of city services, and other unique funding sources.

Final Thoughts

Significant progress has been made since the city-led neighborhood planning process was implemented in 1997. As the ten-year anniversary of the Pilot Neighborhood Planning Process program approaches, the process should be questioned in the spirit of finding ways to improve the program. Will neighborhood groups accept the City as a facilitator and not as a competitor? Have we overcome the stereotypes that were said to impede successful planning in Austin in 1995? What procedural changes should the City of Austin pursue to take neighborhood planning to the next level? It is an exciting time for neighborhood planning in Austin and even though completing the initial round of neighborhood plans has been a longer and more arduous process than anticipated, everyone should step back and appreciate the magnitude of what has been accomplished. Neighborhood planning is much more integrated with comprehensive planning today than it was ten years ago. An impressive foundation for neighborhood planning in Austin is in place, the potential for greater integration between neighborhood planning and project implementation exists, the final question that remains is where do we go from here?

Appendix A

City of Austin Resolution adopted May, 21, 1997:

WHEREAS, it is in the public interests of the citizens of the City of Austin that all interests in the community should be represented in the planning process for the City of Austin; and

WHEREAS, one of the most effective ways of including the interests of the general citizenry of the City of Austin is to involve neighborhoods and neighborhood organizations in the planning process; and

WHEREAS, the City should assist neighborhoods in an effective planning process; **NOW, THEREFORE**,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF AUSTIN:

That, in recognition of the endorsement for neighborhood planning by the Citizens' Planning Implementation Committee, the City Manager or his designee is authorized to develop and implement a Pilot Neighborhood Planning Process; and

That the Pilot Neighborhood Planning Process shall include neighborhood area plans that assure representation of all interests within a community; identify neighborhood assets, needs and concerns; establish goals for neighborhood improvements; provide recommendations for reaching improvement goals; provide guidelines for policy, financial, service delivery decisions, and development decisions for City officials and departments; and

That the Pilot Neighborhood Planning Process shall provide for recommendation for approval of neighborhood area plans by the Planning Commission and final approval by the City Council; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED

That the Pilot Neighborhood Planning Process be collaborative in nature, involve a broad cross-section of interests, and provide for an application process for those neighborhood and community organizations desiring to participate in the program; and

That the City Manager report to the City Council those neighborhood and community organizations requesting to participate in the pilot program for final selection by the Council of those areas to be designated as part of the pilot program.

Appendix B

List of programs surveyed:

Rohe and Gates (1985)

Allentown, PA	Fresno, CA	New Orleans, LA	St. Paul, MN
Asheville, NC	Gary, ID	LA	Salem, OR
Atlanta, GA	Honolulu, HI	New York, NY	San Antonio, TX
Baltimore, MD	Houston, TX	North	San Diego, CA
Boston, MA	Independence, MO	Wilkesboro, NC	Seattle, WA
Boulder, CO	MO	Oak Park, MI	Spokane, WA
Chicago, IL	Jacksonville, FL	Oakland, CA	Tacoma, WA
Cincinnati, OH	Kalamazoo, MI	Omaha, NE	Toledo, OH
Denver, CO	Kansas City, MO	Phoenix, AZ	Trenton, NJ
Des Moines, IO	MO	Pittsburgh, PA	Washington, DC
Detroit, MI	Lincoln, NE	Portland, OR	Wilmington, DE
Eugene, OR	Madison, WI	Providence, RI	Wilmington, NC
Flint, MI	Minneapolis, MN	St. Louis, MO	
Fort Worth, TX			

Gregory (1996)

Arvada, CO (1980) – Southeast Arvada Neighborhood
Denver, CO (1986) – Cherry Creek Neighborhood
Denver, CO (1986) – Highland Neighborhood
Ft. Lauderdale, FL (1986) – Ft. Lauderdale Neighborhood Master Plan Program
Phoenix, AZ (1986) – Coronado Neighborhood
Denver, CO (1987) – Curtis Park Neighborhood
Fort Collins, CO (1989) – West Side Neighborhood
St. Petersburg, FL (1990) – North Shore Neighborhood
Lexington, KY (1991) – Aylesford-East University Small Area Plan
Tulsa, OK (1991) – Kendall-Whittier Neighborhood
Columbus, OH (1991) – Northwest Plan
Hampton, VA (1992) – Fox Hill Neighborhood
Champaign, IL (1992) – Champaign Comprehensive Neighborhood Planning Program
St. Petersburg, FL (1992) – Roser Park Neighborhood Plan
Houston, TX (1992) – Second Ward Neighborhood
Rock Island, IL (1992) – Broadway Neighborhood
Bremerton, WA (1992) – Campus/Evergreen Neighborhood
St. Petersburg, FL (1993) – Old Southeast Neighborhood
St. Petersburg, FL (1993) – Childs Park Neighborhood
Portland, OR (1992) – Woodlawn Neighborhood
Portland, OR (1993) – Irvington Neighborhood
Portland, OR (1993) – Kenton Neighborhood

Portland, OR (1993) – Piedmont Neighborhood
Portland, OR (1993) – King Neighborhood
Portland, OR (1993) – Arbor Lodge Neighborhood
Portland, OR (1993) – Boise Neighborhood
Portland, OR (1993) – Eliot Neighborhood
Portland, OR (1993) – Concordia Neighborhood
Portland, OR (1993) – Humboldt Neighborhood
Portland, OR (1993) – Sabin Neighborhood
Seattle, WA (1993) – Northgate Neighborhood
Covington, KY (1993) – Lewisburg Neighborhood
Baltimore, MD (1993) – Southeast Community Plan
Rock Island, IL (1993) – Chicago Addition Plan
Las Vegas, NV (1994) – University Medical Central Valley Hospital Plan
San Diego, CA (1994) – Poco Way Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy
Hickory, NC (1994) – Hickory Neighborhood Planning Process
Rock Island, IL (1994) – Douglas Park
Jackson, MS (1995) – North Midtown Neighborhood
Greeley, CO (1995) – Northeast Greeley Neighborhood
Sarasota, FL (1995) – Laurel/Nikomis Neighborhood
Sarasota, FL (1995) – Bee Ridge Neighborhood
Rock Island, IL (1996) – Longview Neighborhood
Rock Island, IL (1996) – Keystone Neighborhood
San Rafael, CA (1996) – Montecito/Happy Valley
Manchester, CT (1996) – West Side Neighborhood
Manchester, CT (1996) – Verplanck Neighborhood

Myerson (2004)

Chicago, IL
San Jose, CA
Austin, TX

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