

A LETTER TO NORTH SHOAL CREEK RESIDENTS FROM THE NSCNA BOARD ABOUT THE APARTMENT COMPLEX PROPOSED FOR 8528 BURNET

We take seriously our responsibility to protect the quality of life we enjoy in our neighborhood. We also recognize reality: Austin's boom is continuing, housing is badly needed in Central Austin, and development has now arrived in North Shoal Creek. We have worked to find a path that will accommodate growth, housing and development while not compromising the quality of life in our neighborhood.

We want this letter to do six things:

- 1. describe the proposed development, using information taken largely from the paperwork filed by the developer with the City of Austin;**
- 2. offer some pro's and con's that have been expressed so far about this case;**
- 3. explain why we have concluded this site is not a good one for this particular building;**
- 4. address the question of what we'd like to see there instead;**
- 5. offer a way to approach developing Burnet that we think may avoid the unintended consequences that have accompanied South Lamar's development; and, lastly,**
- 6. say what NSCNA will be doing next and what we'd like for North Shoal Creek residents to do.**

Basic description:

- The developer, Sackman Enterprises, wants to build a 300-unit apartment building* on the property at 8528 Burnet. It would include the Crump Plumbing and Gordon Automotive properties.
- It would consist of 195 studio/1-bedroom, 75 2-bedroom, and 30 3-bedroom units, projected to rent for between \$1,000-\$2,700/month. Size would range from 600 sq. ft. studios to 2,000 sq. ft. 3-bedroom units and would average 840 sq. ft.
- It would generate about 1,995 additional vehicle trips per day.
- The site is currently zoned CS (Commercial Services). The developer is requesting that it be rezoned MF-6, the highest level of multi-family zoning. MF-6 permits unlimited density. Austin, a historically low-density city, has little MF-6 zoning.
- This complex would have 107.5 units per acre. To qualify for MF-6 zoning, density must exceed 54 units per acre.*

**At the Feb. 12th City Council meeting, the developer's representative, C.J. Sackman, agreed to limit the number of units to 225, dropping the density to about 80 units/acre*

Arguments in favor of and against building this apartment complex at this site:

+ It's a good location because it's next to a Route 3 bus stop, .26 miles from a MetroRapid 803 stop to the north and just slightly further from another one to the south.

-The Route 3 bus runs every 30-40 minutes while the 803 runs every 12-15 minutes. A better location would be closer to the 803 stop and 183 and Burnet.

+You can live here and not need a car; there are several major employers within a five mile radius of this site; a substantial number of the residents could commute north to employers in the Domain/183 area.

-Burnet Road's traffic problems aren't just north-to-south; they're south-to-north as well, especially in the PM

+The developer has agreed to limit the height of the building to 60' and reserve 15% of the units for a 10-year period as "SMART" housing

-Agreeing to a 60' limit isn't much of a concession. While MF-6 allows heights up to 90', CS zoning, MF-4, and MF-5 all have height limits of 60'. MF-6 is unusual zoning in Austin, and MF-6 at 90' even rarer.

The City's SMART housing program is an inefficient way to get affordable housing; it would be better to build smaller, lower density, less expensive complexes instead.

+ North Shoal Creek's multifamily housing was built before 1985; this complex would offer an alternative to our neighborhood's aging existing multifamily.

-We agree new multifamily is needed but this density will have too great an impact on Burnet's already bad traffic and increase cut-through traffic on neighborhood streets, especially Rockwood, Primrose, and Ashdale.

+If this development is defeated, the zoning remains CS. If a developer buys it for a commercial development, North Shoal Creek could end up dealing with a lot more traffic from retail than this multifamily development will produce

-True. But right now the demand for multifamily housing exceeds the demand for commercial/retail development in our area.

Why does NSCNA object to this development?

The Board believes that this segment of Burnet Road cannot successfully handle traffic associated with MF-6 level density. We base our belief on a report by the Austin Transportation Department titled *Final Report of the Austin Mobility North Lamar/Burnet Corridor Program*. It can be found online at www.austintexas.gov/department/corridor-studies.

Some key points from the report:

- Burnet's traffic volume is projected to grow 38% between now and 2035.
- The report recommends \$76 million in improvements to Burnet Road over the next 20 years. In spite of these improvements, levels of service ratings for Burnet's major intersections will be WORSE in 2031. In other words, the improvements don't make travel on Burnet better; they mean conditions get somewhat worse instead of a lot worse.
- The segment of Burnet just south of 183 has the highest daily traffic volume (37,100). That's North Shoal Creek's segment and it's where this development would be built.

- In addition, the complex has an entrance/exit onto Rockwood which itself has a speeding problem that will be worsened by cut-through traffic trying to avoid Burnet's congested intersections. Rockwood runs by Pillow Elementary School, which presents a safety hazard for students and other pedestrians near that block.

In short, this is a poor location for a large MF-6 density development because it would be 1) on a traffic corridor with a limited capacity to carry additional traffic; 2) on the segment of the corridor with the highest current daily traffic volume; 3) located between a failed intersection to the north (Burnet/183) and a failing one to the south (Burnet/Anderson), both of which are projected to deteriorate over the next 16 years in spite of improvements. Plus, it would increase traffic on Rockwood, which has an existing problem with speeders and which runs by a school.

What does NSCNA think should be built there instead?

The board believes North Shoal Creek currently is and should remain a medium/moderate density neighborhood. We recognize that additional housing is badly needed throughout Central Austin. **We would like to see MF-4 zoning at this site.** A moderate density MF-4 development would have advantages over MF-6: 1) less expensive to build; 2) at half the density, would halve the traffic impact; and 3) could attract families as well as singles and couples because MF-4 can offer more 2- and 3-bedroom units than can a denser MF-6 building.

We have requested an MF-4 development instead, but Mr. Sackman said no. From his perspective, MF-4 cuts the developable square footage in half, which means it is no longer feasible for him to build the apartment complex he plans to build at this location.

Mr. and Mrs. Gordon of Gordon Automotive have said they can no longer afford to pay taxes on their property and that selling to this developer will allow them to retire. We sympathize with them and wish them well in their retirement, but we feel Austin's increasing property values and taxes are a symptom of a larger issue. We still believe a smaller, less dense development would be better for the neighborhood.

The wider context: our neighborhood plan and the Burnet Corridor Plan

Austin's current development policy focuses on increasing density through large, upscale rental developments located ad hoc based on where a developer is able to put together enough property for such a development. Two such apartments have recently opened on Burnet: Amli at 5350 Burnet and Burnet Flats at 5433 Burnet. A third is under construction at 6701 Burnet (Burnet Marketplace). This focus on large, dense projects increases traffic unnecessarily, drives up property values, ignores *Imagine Austin* and CodeNext recommendations which call for placing large dense developments near transit nodes, and fails to provide adequate affordable housing.

North Shoal Creek first requested a neighborhood plan in 2006. Since 2006, we've been approved for a planning process 4 times, most recently in 2014. We've also supported moving forward with the Burnet Road Corridor plan. None of our efforts have been successful so far. These plans are the best opportunities we residents have to influence development in our area. We would like for the Austin City Council to instruct City staff to start both our neighborhood plan and the Burnet Road Corridor Plan. We believe the quality of life in our Burnet Corridor

neighborhoods is being negatively affected by the City's current development focus and that, as residents, our best chance to improve rather than degrade the quality of life of Burnet neighborhoods is via the Burnet Corridor Plan.

Where do we go from here?

Two more readings are required before the MF-6 zoning is legally approved. In the meantime, Development Chair Kevin Wier and Sustainable Neighborhoods' founder Steven Zettner will be talking with city council members who voted to support the MF-6 zoning. They plan to better explain our position and to understand what objections these council members have to it. They hope to convince two to change their votes.

What do North Shoal Creek residents need to do?

First, inform yourself about this issue. Take a look at the Austin Transportation Department's report on North Lamar/Burnet road. Look in particular at page 4-7 of the Final Report and at pages F-7, F-10, F-14, and F-21 of Appendix F: Traffic Studies. See if you agree with the conclusions we drew.

Tell the mayor and city council what your position is on this rezoning. If you want to email them all as a group, use this address: austintexas.gov/email/all-council-members

To email them individually, substitute their names for "all-council-members":

austintexas.gov/email/SteveAdler

austintexas.gov/email/LesliePool (etc.)

Tell your neighbors about this development. Ask them to inform themselves, spread the word, and call or email the mayor and the city council.

Lastly, this proposed rezoning will be the topic of our next general membership meeting, on Tuesday, March 3, 6:30 pm in the Pillow Elementary School cafeteria. District 7 Council Member Leslie Pool and her staff will be attending. Please come.

Thank you.

North Shoal Creek Neighborhood Association
Board of Directors