

THE AUSTIN OAKS PUD (PLANNED UNIT DEVELOPMENT): AN UPDATE BY THE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Part 1: The Past – The Charrette

Between January 25 and 29, representatives of neighborhoods near the proposed Austin Oaks PUD -- located on the southwest side of the Mopac/Spicewood Springs intersection -- worked together with the property owner and a design team to attempt to come up with a mutually acceptable site plan for the Austin Oaks property. That process, called a “charrette,” resulted in the presentation of a plan on the charrette’s final day. That plan is pictured below.

As one of the four neighborhoods bordering the Austin Oaks property, NSCNA was asked to participate in the charrette and to appoint a representative to the charrette Working Group. The Working Group was tasked with ensuring that input from charrette attendees was incorporated into the design team’s final product and that the final design meet the “OSMs,” the objectives, strategies, and measures that were collected at neighborhood input sessions before the design week.

Development Committee member Brian Brandon served as NSCNA’s representative on the Working Group. Committee members Sarah Brandon, Sharon Justice, and Kenneth Webb attended several of the charrette sessions. Their goal was to follow charrette developments, provide feedback to the design team and assess the impact the final design plan would have on our North Shoal Creek Neighborhood.

The NSCNA Board and the Development Committee’s major concerns were condensed into “the 3 T’s”: traffic, tall buildings, and trees:

- 1) Traffic: what effect would the development have on the Anderson/MoPac intersection? Would it also affect the Steck/MoPac intersection? How many additional vehicle trips would it generate daily? What traffic improvements were planned to handle the additional traffic? What effect would the additional traffic have on neighborhood streets?
- 2) Tall buildings: In the Fall of 2014, two rezoning requests came before the board and the membership for new buildings on MoPac and Burnet. At that time, NSCNA members approved a 5-story building on MoPac but said no to a 5-story building on Burnet. Viewing this 5-story limit as representing the will of the membership, the Board directed the Development Committee to support a maximum of 5 stories for Austin Oaks buildings.
- 3) Trees: Given the large number of both heritage and protected trees currently on the Austin Oaks site, the Board’s instructions were that the final plan should minimize the removal of the number of trees that are protected by city ordinance.

The charrette process ended with a plan, called the “Preferred Plan,” being approved by 59% of the charrette’s Thursday attendees but not by the majority of participating neighborhood

Associations (including our NSCNA representative and the Development Committee). This link will take you to the charrette presentation of the Preferred Plan:

http://nwaca.org/awd/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/2016-02-01_Friday-Presentation_TO-POST.pdf

There was strong dissent on three major points: 1) questions as to the impartiality of the process; 2) a lack of attention paid to traffic implications of the PUD; and 3) three 7-story buildings included in the plan. As a result, the Working Group continued to negotiate with the property owner after the charrette ended.

Part 2: The Present – The Preferred Plan (referred to here as the Charrette Plan)

After the charrette ended, NSCNA's Development Committee met informally to discuss whether the charrette adequately addressed North Shoal Creek's concerns (the "3 T's" listed above) and if committee members supported the Charrette Plan. The consensus was no to both questions.

1) As to traffic, while there will be a Traffic Impact Analysis west of MoPac, there will be none east of MoPac, even though the Anderson/MoPac intersection is operating at a failing level of service. Also, although a southbound access to MoPac's new toll lanes may add to traffic at the Steck and Anderson intersections, there are no plans to measure that and mitigate it. Thirdly, although the proposed Austin Oaks PUD is a multi-year development and, even though the City of Austin is beginning a Burnet Corridor planning effort that will be the basis for development along Burnet for many years, Anderson Lane -- the major east-west thoroughfare connecting both areas -- is being ignored by both processes. Finally, although the Charrette Plan is expected to generate 17,000 vehicle trips per day compared to the 4,118 Austin Oaks currently generates, there are no plans for mitigation along Anderson Lane. While Capital Metro will provide bus service to the site and the Charrette Plan includes two sheltered bus stops, our conclusion was that the Charrette Plan does not adequately address North Shoal Creek's traffic concerns.

2) As to building height, the Charrette Plan includes three 7-story buildings along MoPac. This sets the precedent for 7-story buildings in a neighborhood center. The Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan identifies the Anderson Lane/MoPac area as a future neighborhood center. With the 7-story precedent established, we can expect 7-story buildings on the east side of MoPac as well. It is possible that 7 stories will be viewed as a new baseline, with developers asking for 8, 9 or 10 story ones. North Shoal Creek, like other older Central Austin neighborhoods, does not have the traffic, transit, and drainage infrastructure to support that level of development.

Also, MoPac is one of Austin's Scenic Roadways as described in section 25-10-6 of the City Code. As such, it is protected from billboards and other advertising signs are regulated. Why should not similar regulations apply to building heights to protect its scenic nature?

On February 10, the NWACA Board passed a resolution endorsing the charrette process and supporting the Charrette Plan. Soon after, 12 of the 20 members of the charrette Working Group (all non-NWACA) signed a letter of no confidence in the charrette. NSCNA's representative to the Working Group was one of the signers.

The Development Committee presented its recommendation to the NSCNA Board at the Board's Feb. 23 meeting. The Board considered the issue and voted to endorse the Working Group's no confidence letter.

Part 3: The Future – TBD (To Be Determined)

The charrette's Preferred Plan will come before the Zoning and Platting Commission at its March 15th meeting, at which time City staff will request an indefinite postponement to allow the review process to continue. The NSCNA Board supports the postponement. NSCNA will continue to participate in the talks between the developer and the neighborhoods.

PREFERRED PLAN // CONCEPT

