

PLANNING THE AUSTIN OAKS PLANNED UNIT DEVELOPMENT

This paper presents a discussion of the proposed Austin Oaks Planned Unit Development, located generally in the vicinity of the Anderson Lane Station Neighborhood Center (ALSNC) and why a development of this type is appropriate at this location.

1. The Neighborhood Center Concept

The Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan (IACP) has identified the general area surrounding the intersection of Spicewood Springs and Mopac as a future Neighborhood Center (Anderson Lane Station Neighborhood Center, or ALSNC).

According to the IACP, the smallest and least intense of the three mixed-use centers are neighborhood centers. As with the regional and town centers, neighborhood centers are walkable, bikeable, and supported by transit. The greatest density of people and activities in neighborhood centers will likely be concentrated on several blocks or around one or two intersections. However, depending on localized conditions, different neighborhood centers can be very different places. If a neighborhood center is designated on an existing commercial area, such as a shopping center or mall, it could represent redevelopment or the addition of housing.

A new neighborhood center may be focused on a dense, mixed-use core surrounded by a mix of housing. In other instances, new or redevelopment may occur incrementally and concentrate people and activities along several blocks or around one or two intersections.

Neighborhood centers will be more locally focused than either regional or town centers. Businesses and services—grocery and department stores, doctors and dentists, shops, branch libraries, dry cleaners, hair salons, schools, restaurants, and other small and local businesses—will generally serve the center and surrounding neighborhoods.

Neighborhood centers range in size between approximately 5,000-10,000 people and 2,500-7,000 jobs.

During the development of the IACP Growth Concept Map, areas were identified throughout Austin where neighborhood centers were desirable in order to accommodate future population growth.

These centers were specifically not drawn with hard, discrete boundaries, but rather were intended to depict intersections, corridors, and other areas where, generally, some increased density would make sense. It is from this background that the following discussion occurs.

Simply stated, the IACP defines neighborhood centers in terms of 3 major elements: Population, Jobs, and Land Use. Of note is that the definition of a neighborhood center does not specify height limits.



1.1 Neighborhood Center Location

The factors used to determine where a center (regional, town, or neighborhood) may be located include:

- **Existing City Plans:** Areas with existing small-area plans intended to promote denser, mixed use development, such as Downtown, East Riverside Corridor, station-area plans, and North Burnet/Gateway;
- **CAMPO Centers:** Center identified in the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization's 2035 plan;
- **High Capacity Transit Service:** High-frequency or high-capacity transit service, such as multiple local or express bus routes, bus rapid transit, or commuter rail;
- **Access to Major Roads:** Either limited access roads (such as I-35 or SH 130) or at the intersection of Major Arterials;
- **Land Availability:** Areas with vacant land or land identified for redevelopment by neighborhood plans (generally, but not exclusively, by calling for one of the mixed use future land use categories);
- **Existing Development Agreements:** Areas already in the process of being developed at the scale of an activity center;
- **Proximity to Incompatible Land Uses:** Proximity to existing land uses incompatible with residential or mixed use development, such as landfills or existing industrial development; and
- **Other:** In addition to these general factors, other factors were also occasionally considered. Examples of other factors include lack of other Growth Concept Map features (Southside regional center, Pleasant Valley corridor through Dove Springs, or 71/Ross neighborhood center in Del Valle) or discouraging future residential development near the Decker Power Station.

Anderson Lane has been identified as an activity corridor, which is reasonable given the level of development and the mix of uses found along the road as it stretches from 183 South on the east to Mopac Expressway on the west. So a Neighborhood Center in this location has access to major transportation facilities nearby.

Further, the future Lone Star Rail commuter line has identified this center as a future commuter rail stop.

From a population growth perspective, according to the City of Austin Demographer, the centroid of the Austin Metropolitan Area's population is now found at the intersection of Burnet Road and North Loop Boulevard – significantly north of downtown Austin (Figure 1-1). From this perspective, it is obvious that locating centers north of downtown would help meet the population growth trends forecasted and alleviate traffic congestion.

And finally, there are very few locations on the Mopac Corridor where development intensity can be achieved while still generally complying with compatibility standards. These locations include two stations identified in the IACP (Anderson Lane Station NC, Far West NC) along with locations that may not have been identified in the IACP (State School property on 35th and Mopac).

So, overall, there seems to be little disagreement about the location of the Anderson Lane Station Neighborhood Center as being appropriate.

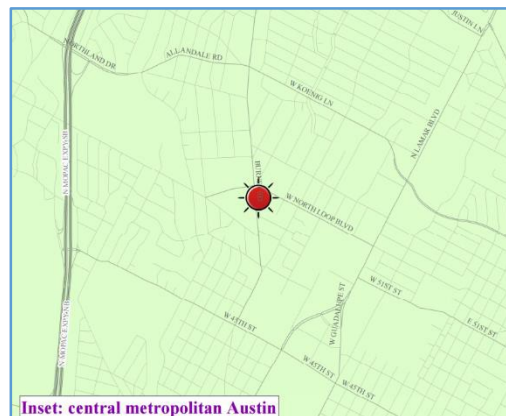


Figure 1-1. Centroid of Austin MSA Population

1.2 Neighborhood Center Geographic Extent

So, if this is a reasonable location for a neighborhood center, what should the geographic extent of that center really look like?

The Anderson Lane Station Neighborhood Center as drawn on the IACP Growth Concept Map does not realistically represent the limits of potential redevelopment in this area. During the development of the Growth Concept Map, these centers were specifically represented as nondescript “blobs” that were intended to note general areas desirable for additional density and a mix of uses that would promote a walkable and bikeable live/work environment, but not identify specific tracts or properties, as the limits and rate of redevelopment would be driven by market conditions.

With the development of the Austin Oaks PUD, an alternative representation of the Anderson Lane Station Neighborhood Center can now be contemplated to represent a more realistic redevelopment scenario (Alt ALS NC).

The two nodes of the Alt ALS NC boundaries lie on the southwest and northeast corners of Mopac and Spicewood Springs/Anderson Lane, and are centered on areas where existing commercial and retail uses exist or where the Austin Oaks PUD is proposed. Each node extends radially out to an approximate distance of ¼ mile – coincident with the limits of how far individuals may be likely to walk to access neighborhood center amenities. The Alt ALS NC limits do not encompass large portions of existing single family neighborhoods, as major density changes to these areas are not likely to occur.

Figures 1-2 and 1-3 present the limits of the Anderson Lane Station NC as drawn in the IACP and an alternative representation of a more realistic boundary (Alt ALS NC). In both Figures, the limits of the proposed Austin Oaks Planned Unit Development (PUD) are shown.

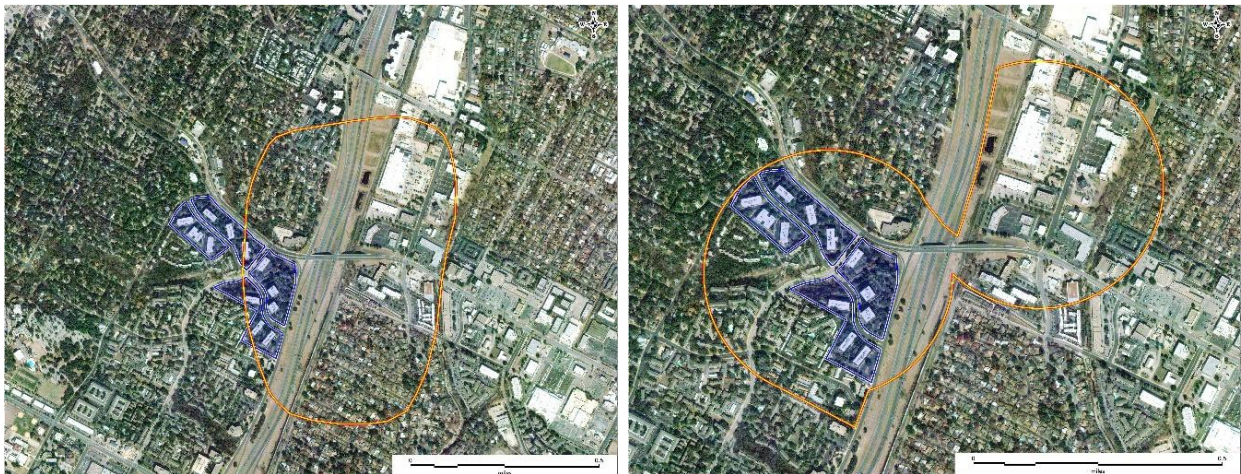


Figure 1-2. Limits of Anderson Lane Station Neighborhood Center
Figure 1-3. Alternate Limits of Anderson Lane Station Neighborhood Center

For purposes of this analysis, the alternative boundary of the Anderson Lane Station Neighborhood Center will be used as the more realistic of boundaries, and the potential impacts of the Austin Oaks PUD applied to that scenario.

1.3 Neighborhood Center Size & Demographics

If the Alternative Anderson Lane Station Neighborhood Center is taken as the more reasonable geometry (when compared to the “blob” drawn in the IACP), one can begin to think about this Center’s ability to accommodate the population and jobs envisioned in the IACP. Existing demographic conditions within the two neighborhood scenarios are presented in Table 1-1.

Table 1-1. Existing Conditions Demographics¹

	IACP ALS NC	Alt ALS NC
Estimated Population (2014)	1,977	2,062
Projected Population (2019)	2,200	2,296
Projected Annual Population Growth Rate	2.3%	2.3%
Estimated Population Density	5,140 psm	5,708 psm
Estimated Households (2014)	1,099	1,288
Projected Households (2019)	1,199	1,405
Projected Annual Household Growth Rate	1.8%	1.8%
1 Person Households	49.6%	58.5%
2 Person Households	33.4%	30.3%
Median Age	38.2	33.0
Age 5 to 19 Years	9.6%	7.8%
Family Population	53.7%	39.4%
Non-Family Population	46.2%	60.6%
Total Employees	2,555	3,477

¹ Demographic Source: Applied Geographic Solutions 08/2014, TIGER Geography

From this data, it is apparent that the population in each scenario is far below the target population for a neighborhood center (as defined in the IACP) of 5,000-10,000 individuals.

Interestingly, according to the City of Austin demographer, between 2000 and 2010 the population encompassing this Neighborhood Center actually decreased, highlighting the importance of equitably accommodating future population growth throughout all portions of the City.

And while there are not reliable employment/job numbers available from the census data (the data shown above is generated by taking the employment data that has been developed for each census tract and prorating it based on the area of the Neighborhood Center falling within that census tract, as opposed to counting jobs in this particular geographic extent), the data shown represents a total number of individuals employed within the geographic limits of the Neighborhood Center in the lower to middle range of the targeted number of jobs according to the IACP of 2,500-7,000.

If the Austin Oaks PUD were to be approved as part of the Alternative Anderson Lane Station Neighborhood Center, two things become very clear. With the Austin Oaks PUD in place:

- *There remains a major gap between the existing and target populations within the Center, which would need to be made up under future development scenarios; and*
- *This Neighborhood Center provides a future job climate that matches well with the job/employment goals listed in the IACP for Neighborhood Centers.*

2. Site Characteristics

If the size and location of the Neighborhood Center is generally known, and it appears to be able to accommodate the number of jobs and population specified in the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan, the next question becomes what characteristics need to be evident in the Austin Oaks PUD development to satisfy good planning principles and the goals of the IACP.

In this section several site characteristics are discussed.

2.1 Land Use

Existing land use conditions for the Alternative Anderson Lane Station Neighborhood Center scenario is presented in Figure 2-1.

This scenario generally depicts a healthy mix of uses. It reflects less than 10% of the area attributed to the single family land use and approximately 60% of the land use spread somewhat evenly between office, retail, and multifamily land uses. Of note is the relatively small portion of open space.

As the development of the Austin Oaks PUD has been considered, it has been aware of the uses described as desirable in the IACP:

“Neighborhood centers will be more locally focused than either a regional or a town center. Businesses and services—grocery and department stores, doctors and dentists, shops, branch libraries, dry cleaners, hair salons, schools, restaurants, and other small and local businesses—will generally serve the center and surrounding neighborhoods.”

The Austin Oaks PUD actually diversifies the uses found in either Neighborhood Center as currently envisioned. While currently only providing office use, the PUD as proposed will provide office, retail, multifamily, and open space uses.

And because of the use of the Planned Unit Development zoning tool, local uses – as specified in the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan – can be programmed into the development at the front end, thus securing local services for residents inside – and near – the Neighborhood Center.

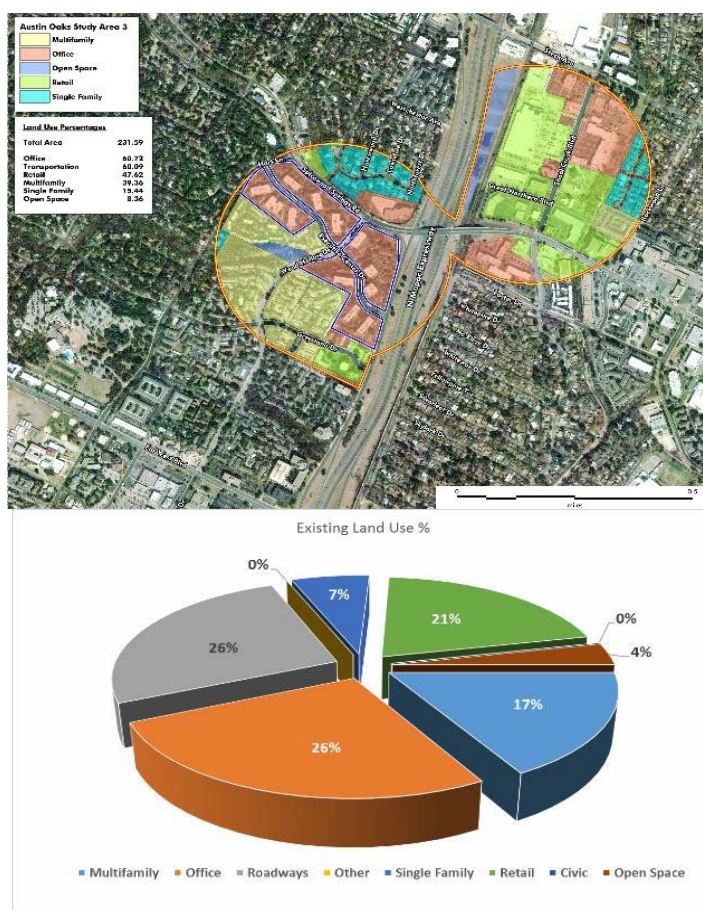


Figure 2-1. Existing Land Use for Alternative Anderson Lane Station Neighborhood Center

2.2 Height

There has been significant discussion about the appropriate height for the Neighborhood Centers (and all Centers) proposed in the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan. Several points can be made about height with respect to the Austin Oaks Planned Unit Development:

1. Building height was not specified in the definition of any Centers in the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan – only jobs, population, and uses were addressed. This is because there was a realization that each center could take significantly different forms based on the surrounding areas. Artificially limiting height in the IACP could significantly negatively impact the Plan's ability to successfully tackle the massive population growth the document was specifically developed to address.
2. The pictures of the Centers in the IACP, similar to the text, are provided as guides on what development could look like, but it was specifically addressed during Citizen Advisory Committee meetings and Planning Commission meetings that the ultimate look and feel (height being one component) of the Centers – while informed by the IACP – will eventually be driven by market conditions.

The text gives 2 or 3 descriptions of what various scenarios might look like in a Neighborhood Center, but begins with the statement *"However, depending on localized conditions, different neighborhood centers can be very different places."* Therefore, it is conceivable that the maximum heights for some NCs will vary greatly from others, but all Centers should be walkable, bikeable, supported by transit, offer some level of local services, and provide users with a true sense of place.

3. Different Neighborhood Centers around the city will have different heights based on their location, the geographic area they encompass, and site characteristics (i.e., environmental issues), because they all need to accommodate a certain population and number of jobs.

It is reasonable for Neighborhood Centers along highways to have significant height in order to accommodate the population or jobs envisioned by the IACP.

Similarly, the smaller Neighborhood Centers should also be expected to have taller buildings for the same reasons. And, if a portion of a Center is environmentally sensitive, it is reasonable that the other portions of the Center would accommodate additional height and density to promote a more environmentally sustainable Center overall.

Commercial Highway Zoning for instance, allows 120' heights just north of US Highway 183 North (less than 1.5 miles north of the Austin Oaks PUD), but would seem a reasonable guideline under which commercial (office with ground floor retail) buildings along the Mopac Expressway could be built – again, as long as compatibility standards are met.



Figure 2-2. Austin Oaks Rendering Depicting Height

Even if CH Zoning was considered too intense for the Alt ALS NC scenario, a significant increase over the 60 foot height limit currently allowed by right would be necessary to accommodate the jobs goals envisioned for this Neighborhood Center.

4. For a Neighborhood Center, it is important to realize that height - in and of itself - does not preclude the existence of active, vibrant, mixed use spaces. There are examples across Texas and the United States where office buildings are integrated into 2-4 story mixed use centers. Just because you have height on one portion the Austin Oaks PUD does not preclude the entire site from being a truly unique space that is exactly the manifestation of the IACP's definition of Neighborhood Center.



Figure 2-3 Active Pedestrian Areas In Relation to Height

2.3 Development Intensity

The building coverage and impervious cover of any Neighborhood Center dictate in a large part what the Center will look and feel like. This is very true on the Austin Oaks PUD site.

The Austin Oaks PUD proposes to set aside nearly 4 acres of parkland for public use in an area of town that is sorely lacking for open space.

Further, while redevelopment could achieve up to 90% impervious cover by right on portions of the site (and 70% in other areas), the Austin Oaks PUD is limiting itself to 50% impervious cover.

From a comprehensive planning perspective, providing the necessary development density to achieve the population, job, and local services goals, while still creating meaningful open space for the public to use and limiting the overall intensity of the development, the Austin Oaks PUD is providing the exact type of project envisioned for the site.

2.4 Environment

A Neighborhood Center – just like any development in Austin – must do more than just minimize harm to the environment; it must be integrated into the environment. The Austin Oaks PUD provides an opportunity for redevelopment of the site to be truly superior to what either exists today or could be built by right today.

- **Impervious Cover:** Pursuant to the GR/LO regulations that apply to the site today, impervious cover would be allowed at 90% for the GR portion of the PUD and 70% for the LO portion of the PUD. The site is currently developed with 66% impervious cover. The Austin Oaks PUD is proposing a maximum impervious cover of 50%, which is a 15% reduction in the amount of existing impervious cover.
- **Open Space:** The project as it exists today does not currently contain public open space as defined in the Austin Land Development Code. To meet the Tier 1 PUD requirement for open space, a PUD project would be required to provide a total amount of open space that equals 10% of the residential tracts (0.805 acres) and 20% of the nonresidential tracts (5.062 acres) within the PUD project for a total of 5.867 acres. The Austin Oaks PUD is proposing to provide an additional 25% of open space over the Tier 1 requirement (an additional 1.46 acres) for a total of 7.33 acres of open space.

- **Green Builder:** The current property is not developed under the Austin Energy Green Builder Program. The Austin Oaks PUD is proposing to comply with the Austin Energy Green Building requirements at a two-star rating – which meets the Tier 1 requirements for Planned Unit Developments.
- **Water Quality:** There are currently no water quality treatment facilities on the site today. The Austin Oaks PUD is proposing to remove an additional 25% of Total Suspended Solids over what is currently required by Code. The PUD will also utilize bio-swales, rain gardens, and other distributed hydrologic stormwater treatment methods – via Low Impact Development (LID) techniques – to provide pollutant removal throughout the site. Further, the removal of existing impervious cover that currently lies within the Critical Water Quality Zone will further improve water quality over what exists today.
- **Flooding & Drainage:** The majority of the site currently drains from the south to the north and/or northwest to the Foster Branch of Shoal Creek or an unnamed tributary to Foster Branch. Currently the site has no detention facilities on site. Due to the reduction in impervious cover being proposed for the site, the peak stormwater flows from the site should be the same or less than what exists on the site today. As such, no on-site detention is being proposed. However, to ensure stormwater quantities are managed appropriately, the site will utilize bio-swales, rain gardens, and other distributed hydrologic stormwater detention methods – via LID techniques – to mimic natural hydrologic conditions.
- **Water Conservation:** The site does not currently utilize rainwater collection. The Code requires that at least 50% of the total required landscaped area on a project must be irrigated by stormwater runoff conveyed from impervious surfaces. The Austin Oaks PUD is proposing to exceed that requirement, utilizing rainwater harvesting for a minimum of 75% of the proposed project rooftops – and use that rainwater to irrigate over 50% of the total required landscaping on the project.
- **Trees:** Currently, there are 750 trees located on the site greater than 8 inches in diameter. The Austin Oaks PUD will preserve more than 57% of the overall caliper tree inches within the project. A maximum of 89% of the caliper inches of heritage trees (24 inches and larger) will be preserved, 50% of the caliper inches of protected trees (19 inches to 24 inches) will be preserved, and more than 50% of the caliper inches of non-protected and non-heritage trees will be preserved. Additionally, the Austin Oaks PUD is proposing to remove 1.5 acres of impervious cover within the critical root zone of existing trees, improving the existing condition by over 65%. Further, the project will exceed the mitigation minimums suggested by Staff.
- **Critical Environmental Features:** The site currently contains five (5) CEFs including four (4) Wetland CEFs, all of which lie within the Critical Water Quality Zone along Foster Branch and the unnamed tributary to Foster Branch. The site also has a Rim Rock CEF located in the uplands to the southwest of the Wetland CEFs. The Austin Oaks PUD proposes to meet the staff-directed 50 foot buffer for the Wetland CEFs, reduce the encroachment into the Rim Rock CEF, and to exceed the 150 foot minimum setback for a spring located across Spicewood Springs Road to the north of the site by an additional 150 feet (300 feet total). Finally, the Austin Oaks PUD proposes to remove all impervious cover currently within the Critical Water Quality Zones on the site.
- **Multi-Modal Facilities:** The Austin Oaks PUD would locate residential and office density, together with needed retail options, at the intersection of a highway (Mopac Expressway) and a Major Arterial (Spicewood Springs Road). Additionally, a high capacity transit stop is planned for the eastern portion of that intersection.

2.5 *Parkland*

As stated previously, any Neighborhood Center must make public space a priority. And this part of Austin is lacking in public parks.

By designating more than 4 acres of space as park land accessible to the public, the Austin Oaks PUD is providing not only the jobs and housing to meet the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan goals, it is doing so in a way that creates memorable places where the public can enjoy retail and restaurants while watching family members and neighbors enjoy the wonderful open spaces (See Figure 2-4).



Figure 2-4. Austin Oaks Rendering of Open Space

3. *Impacts on the Surrounding Area*

A Neighborhood Center not only has impacts on the site itself, but it can also either be a benefit or a detriment to individuals and businesses in the vicinity of the Center itself. Many of the choices made regarding the site characteristics in the last section influence the degree of impact the Austin Oaks PUD has on the surrounding area. This section presents those impacts.

3.1 *Traffic*

Transportation in the vicinity of the proposed neighborhood centers is dominated by vehicles and is already significantly congested. The existing Austin Oaks development – 450,000 square feet of office use – is estimated to generate 4,118 unadjusted two-way trips over a 24 hour period. When adjusted for internal circulation, that numbers falls to approximately 3,912 two-way trips over the same 24-hour period.

In addition to the significant traffic improvements proposed by the Traffic Impact Analysis (TIA), the Austin Oaks PUD will provide an additional, and unprecedented, amount of transportation funding equal to approximately \$9,000,000 as the project develops. This additional amount, together with the traffic improvements contemplated by the TIA, not only mitigates the additional traffic generated by the PUD, but also provides the financial tools that are necessary to address problems caused by background traffic in the area of the Austin Oaks PUD.

3.2 *Transit/Bike/Pedestrian Transportation*

The Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan has a future high capacity transit stop planned for the IACP SS NC. And within the Alt ALS NC limits, Capital Metro has a bus stop in the area at the intersection of Wood Hollow Drive and Greystone Drive that serves UT Shuttles 616 and 681. While minimal at this time, the site is prepared for increased transit use as it is built out.

From a bicycle and pedestrian standpoint, more pedestrians and bicyclists in the area means less traffic – which creates a safer environment to bike and walk. By making changes in and around the 30+ acre Austin Oaks PUD that facilitate pedestrian and bicycle use, we aim to convert existing

vehicle trips to pedestrian or cycling as local residents access the public amenities (such as parks, playgrounds, and running/walking trails) and much-needed retail spaces at Austin Oaks.

This will be done by providing core transit corridor treatments along the roadways within the site, including wider sidewalks with shade trees, textured pedestrian crossings (along with traditional signage), improved signage, building placement to facilitate walking and biking, and expanded bicycle lanes in areas along Hart Lane and Wood Hollow Drive.

Finally, we will be investigating the installation of Pedestrian Hybrid Beacons (PHBs) and associated cross walk signage at the following locations (see Figure 3-1):

- Northledge Drive & North Hills Drive
- Thorncliffe Drive & North Hills Drive
- North Hills Drive & Hart Lane
- Hart Lane
- Far West Boulevard & Hart Lane
- Far West Boulevard and Northledge Drive

Overall, in terms of transit, bicycle, and pedestrian facilities, the Austin Oaks PUD either has – or is committed to implementing or accommodating – a wide range of non-automobile transportation improvements.

Collectively, they will make getting around not just the project, but the area overall, safer and more quickly.

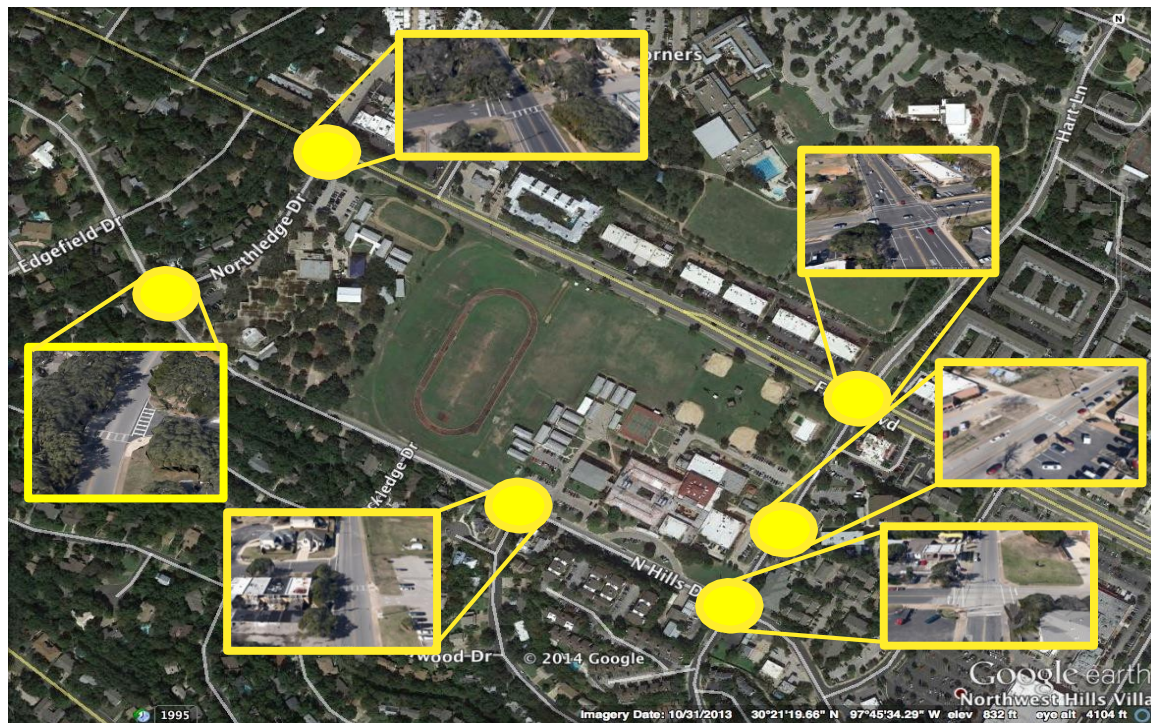


Figure 3-1. Potential Pedestrian Safety Improvements Near Schools

3.3 School Impacts

The impacts of the Planned Unit Development on local schools cannot be underestimated. The need for a vibrant live-work-play Neighborhood Center must be balanced with potential enrollment issues on our local public schools.

The current enrollment of 920 at Doss Elementary places the percent of permanent capacity at 169%, significantly above the target of 75-115%. Similarly, Murchison Middle School is currently above the target range of permanent capacity by enrollment at 122%. The percent of permanent capacity by enrollment for Anderson High School is within the acceptable range.

In recognition of these student population challenges at both Doss Elementary and Murchison Middle Schools, the Austin Oaks PUD has reduced the number of residential units from 610 to 277.

Using the Austin Independent School District's student yield factor for apartments (across all grade levels) of 0.23, the 277 multifamily units are projected to add approximately 64 students across all grade levels to the project student population. However, because the development is proposing 75% one bedroom apartments, the number of students from the Austin Oaks PUD is likely to be lower than the project district wide average of 64. It is estimated that as of the 64 students, 34 will be assigned to Doss Elementary School, 10 to Murchison Middle School, and 20 at Anderson High School.

4. Conclusion

As the City of Austin contemplates continued nation-leading growth rates, we must be bold in how we approach our planning decisions. The Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan was developed over many years – with much public input – to do just that. The Austin Oaks PUD has taken the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan at its word, and the development was fashioned to meet the goals and objectives of the plan. The Austin Oaks Planned Unit Development:

- Is proposed to be located within the alternative boundary of the Anderson Lane Station Neighborhood Center, which was drawn in a way that cuts out single family residences and takes into account walking distances to amenities;
- Proposes a number of multifamily residences within the PUD that is thoughtful about potential impacts to local schools but also promotes a successful mixed use development;
- Proposes a height that will increase the office square footage and promote job creation in the Center that falls within the proposed IACP range;
- Increases the mix of uses on the site;
- Balances the issue of development intensity (impervious cover and height) with the creation of open space and the preservation of trees and the natural environment on the site;
- Improves the environmental conditions on the site as compared to what exists on the ground today or what could be built by right today;
- Provides funding to not only mitigate additional traffic from the PUD, but also to address problems caused by area background traffic;
- Broadens the transportation options in the area by adding new sidewalks, extending bike lanes, and putting new amenities closer to the neighborhood – all of which keep cars off the streets; and
- Improves pedestrian safety in the area by providing pedestrian crossing infrastructure and traffic calming devices