

**Summary of the Austin Oaks Charrette – January 25-29, 2016**  
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More than 250 individuals from the neighborhoods surrounding the Austin Oaks property participated in a week-long charrette design workshop during the last week of January, many attending on multiple days to see the progress and provide their input. This was the second of the three phase charrette process, using methods from the National Charrette Institute (NCI). The first phase of the process involved community information meetings in December, followed by Vision and Values (V&V) workshops for neighbors in December and January. The Vision and Values workshops shaped the Objectives, Strategies, and Measures for the charrette design workshop. The third phase of implementation began after the week-long design workshop finished.

The charrette week began with a day of background information. There were eight sessions, attended by both the design team creating the possible site plans and by interested members of the public. Topics ranged from a review of the Objectives, Strategies, and Measures used to guide the design work, to briefings on technical information used by designers in creating the plans.

Presenters discussed current traffic situations and how to estimate traffic demand based on land use. There was an overview of the environmental conditions of the site and the City's regulations about handling trees, endangered species, watershed protection, and parks. A review of the history and demographics of the area examined its history from the 1800's to current day.

Market researchers provided background information on the trends in housing, retail, and office space for Austin and this area. Austin Planning and Zoning provided an overview of zoning and the Planned Unit Development (PUD) process. The charrette facilitator, Doug Farr, presented an overview of town planning principles.

The day finished with a review of a baseline plan created by the design team reflecting what could be developed at the site under current zoning, separately redeveloping the 13 lots that currently exist on the site. This plan was referred to throughout the week as the "Code Compliant Plan" and was used as a reference point for comparison to the alternative designs developed each day.

Using the information from Monday's sessions and the input from the V&V workshops held in December and January, the design team spent Tuesday developing three competing potential plans (entitled Plans A, B, and C). Each was focused on one of the highest priority concerns of the neighborhoods as expressed in the V&V sessions – traffic, trees, and tall buildings. These designs were pinned up on the wall during the evening feedback session as the designers walked participants through the details of each design alternative. Participants then provided feedback by putting sticky notes on the designs. They were also invited to take part in table-top collaborative exercises where preferences were gathered in the form of a feedback ballots. The ballots enabled each participant to rate each geographic section of each plan as "Preferred," "Acceptable" or "Unacceptable." All feedback was then counted and collated.

Wednesday's design activity used the results of Tuesday's feedback to adjust the designs, creating two alternatives (Plan D and E) that incorporated the most popular elements of the three prior designs. There were also some adjustments made to the Code Compliant plan, including removing underground parking, making that plan a more realistic baseline reference plan. That evening facilitators again walked attendees through the details of each plan via a slide presentation including specific concepts for each design. On this night, various "amenities" available for inclusion in the plans were presented, along with their overall cost. These amenities were described as options for Plans D and E, but not for the Code Compliant Plan. These new plans were again pinned up for the evening feedback session, which had a very lively Q&A after the plans were presented. After a lengthy and active discussion by attendees in a large group format, a straw poll of attendees was taken at the end of the night and used to gather new feedback on several key aspects of the designs.

The verbal feedback and straw poll results from Wednesday were used to develop one final design for presentation as the design team's Recommended Plan for discussion on Thursday night. ("Recommended Plan" is a term of art in the NCI charrette process.) This plan represented the consensus plan as developed from feedback and voting during the previous three days and the input from the V&V workshops. The slide presentation about this alternative included descriptions of the traffic generated by the plan; height, density, and uses of each building; and unique elements in the design – a two-acre neighborhood park at the southwest corner of the site and the creek park to be established along the wetland area (Foster Branch of Shoal Creek), among other items. At the end of the evening, attendees were given an opportunity to vote on their preference between the Code Compliant Plan and the Recommended Plan, consistent with requests that an official vote take place between these options. 64% of those voting on an option supported the Recommended Plan over the Code Compliant Plan. Thus, the "Recommended Plan" moved forward into the Friday activities to become the "Preferred Plan," a term used in the NCI process for the output of the charrette.

On Friday, designers made small adjustments to the plan, based on the Thursday night session, and they updated the Thursday night presentation, completing the information in tables comparing traffic, square footage, height, overall density, housing units, trees preserved, and other pieces of data for the final presentation at noon. Attendees were again able to ask questions and provide feedback. The final Preferred Plan design now moves forward into the third phase of the charrette process, to establish the basis of an agreement that will be formalized in an application to rezone the site. This rezoning application must then go through the City of Austin approval process. Additional opportunities will be available during this process for the public to obtain more information and provide their feedback during the zoning process. This process will include hearings at the Environmental Commission, the Zoning and Platting Commission, and City Council.

*NOTE: Due to space constraints, this article provides only a brief summary of all the items that were discussed and debated during the charrette process. The feedback sessions were well attended and*

*lively. You can view all the slide decks, drawings, comments from sticky notes, and vote tallies on the charrette web page, <http://nwaca.org/austin-oaks-charrette/>*

The charrette workshop team was a very strong team of professionals, who put in a lot of time and effort to help the community arrive at the Preferred Plan:

- Ben Luckens - Project Manager, AICP, Pro Bono
- Farr Associates – Facilitators for the charrette
  - Doug Farr, FAIA, LEED AP
  - Kareeshma Ali, LEED AP
- TBG Partners – Design Team, coordinated by Sean Compton, PE, AICP, PTP
  - 4 staff level engineers
  - 1 certified arborist
  - 4 landscape architects
  - 3 urban designers
  - 605 hours of work in preparation for the charrette
  - 467 hours during charrette week
- Jeff Whitacre, Transportation Engineer, Kimley Horn
- Urban Design Group – Civil Engineering
  - Laura Toups, PE, LEED AP
  - Brian Runyen, PE
  - More than 116 hours of research and support to the charrette