

Austin Oaks PUD Approved on April 13

At its April 13, 2017 meeting, the Austin City Council approved the Austin Oaks PUD, completing a process that has been underway since the middle of 2014. The ordinance that was approved at this meeting now governs the development of the Austin Oaks site, with a set of regulations and an overall design that is documented in a multi-page Land Use Plan. Once published by the City as the final ordinance, those documents will be posted to the NWACA web site, along with the history of the case which is there.

Throughout these years, the NWACA Board has provided information to the neighborhood, surveyed the neighborhood for feedback, and reflected community input to City staff, commissions, and City Council. During 2014 and 2015, NWACA and other neighborhood associations met with the site owner's representative and were unable to achieve agreement on the plan being proposed. In June of 2015, the NWACA Board passed a resolution opposing the PUD and asking that community input be gathered via a charrette process conducted with City staff, the site owner, and a design team. In September, at a Zoning and Platting Commission (ZAP) meeting, we testified against the case and asked for a charrette; ZAP members agreed it was a good idea. In October, the owner selected a new representative and agreed to participate in (and fund) a charrette to build a plan that met the needs of the neighborhood, the developer, and the City.

NWACA, together with other neighborhood association representatives, including members of Northwest Austin Neighbors, helped organize and conduct a charrette design workshop in January of 2016. In February, the NWACA Board passed a resolution supporting the charrette process and its outcome.

Throughout 2016 and 2017 NWACA had a Zoning and Transportation Committee subgroup monitoring the case and reviewing key documents. The subgroup identified dozens of issues and questions in the half-dozen updates that were provided to the City by the owner, met with the owner's representative and City staff to resolve these, and were pleased with the resulting PUD submission. In September, as the case began moving through the City's review process, the Board passed a resolution in support of the submission as it appeared at that point – consistent with the charrette outcome. At the first reading by City Council in December, 2016, that PUD submission was approved to go on for further consideration and the development of an ordinance by the City Attorney.

At the Council's second reading, there were significant amendments made to the proposed plan, adding a 175-unit residential building, which in turn caused the owner to replace the hotel with office space, add garages over the planned restaurants that face the creek park, and add several floors to office buildings along MoPac, making one of them 9 stories and one 8 stories. The addition of a floor to the initially planned residential building also caused additional height to be added to an office building.

Because the changes in second reading seriously compromised the plan that came from the charrette, the NWACA Board, in its April 12th meeting, passed a resolution opposing the PUD plan that resulted from the amendments. That resolution was provided to Council prior to, and during testimony at the third reading. It is also posted on the NWACA web site, along with Board Meeting Minutes.

Several changes were made at City Council's third reading: they removed the additional floor on the original residential building (and accompanying garage), which we had asked for. They also reduced the height of one of the garages along MoPac by half a floor, and provided for other uses besides restaurant

on the parcels designated for restaurant (Financial Services, Personal Services, Pet Services, and General Retail - Convenience).

Although the result after third reading is not all that we had hoped to see based on the charrette outcome, there are significant benefits to the community in the final design: a mixed-use development with housing (including some affordable housing), restaurants, retail and office; a community park, including the funds to develop the park; a restored creek area; and traffic mitigation for all of the items requested by the City. There are downsides, but these would occur as well if the site was developed under current zoning as simply office space; that would also entail similar increases in traffic, removal of some of the existing trees, as they would double their current office space to an estimated 900,000 square feet.

The final PUD ordinance allows for 1,321,500 square feet of development, of which 875,000 is office. The remainder is restaurant, retail, and 375 residential units, of which 10.8% (41 units) are affordable for renters at 60% median family income or lower. The final copy of the City PUD Ordinance and accompanying Land Use Plan will be posted to the NWACA web site as soon as it is available, so that you can see all the detail.

Development of the site is likely to unfold over 10 to 20 years, and throughout that time, the NWACA Zoning and Transportation Committee will monitor any work done in the PUD. Each time a site plan is submitted, the committee will review and ensure that conditions agreed to in the PUD are honored. One important condition we got into the PUD ordinance is that any change to the agreed-on conditions – whether substantial or minor – will require notification to the neighborhoods, so that we can ensure what is in the ordinance is honored.