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# CRESTVIEW

## NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

### NEWSLETTER

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MAY/JUNE 2022

## Planning Commission Hears Case to Remove Gate at Morrow

By Chip Harris, CNA Newsletter Editor

The City of Austin Planning Commission met on Tuesday, May 24 and discussed the rezoning case for Crestview Station/Midtown that would allow access to Morrow Street that is currently prohibited. Unable to get a majority of commissioners to approve the change, the Commission forwarded the case to the city council without a recommendation, a somewhat rare event.

In the discussion, one commissioner who favored leaving the existing zoning intact was concerned about future zoning cases where the neighborhood and the developer reached a compromise to have the City Council approve the developer's requested zoning with certain conditions expected to be permanent – only to have the carefully crafted agreement set aside by a future Council. In such cases, the neighborhood may lose trust and confidence in the process and question the credibility of the Council.

Several Crestview residents spoke at the hearing, even those living in the new development, and all of them encouraged the Commission to maintain the restriction on vehicle access to Morrow that the Council committed to in the previous zoning of the development. Speakers from Morrow and other nearby streets spoke of increased traffic since the gate had been vandalized and left open by the city. In addition, those living in the new development explained how, since the gate had been opened, they were experiencing cut-through traffic that drove at faster speeds resulting in close calls with pedestrians and cyclists. And they expressed how they were worried about how the increased traffic moving at faster speeds would disproportionately affect those with visual impairments and other disabilities that lived in the new development to be closer to transit.

One Midtown resident who had lived there five years was concerned that the pilot program the City conducted was incomplete and limited to reviewing changes in vehicular traffic, failing to measure the effect on pedestrians, cyclists, transit and other road users. In his letter to the city opposing the zoning change, he explains that during peak hours, the pedestrian traffic on the sidewalks is so heavy that, in order to give each other enough distance to pass without conflict, some of the walkers use the roadway as an extended sidewalk. In his letter, he states: "Since the 2021 pilot, vehicles have entered this mix and have created new road conflicts. More than once I've participated in games of chicken with impatient vehicles at a stop sign in front of the gate. Perhaps once a week I must decide whether to risk conflict with an animal on the sidewalk

or a vehicle on the road." His letter continues: "Easy Wind Drive, on which this gate is located, is a designated TOD (Transit Oriented Development) Pedestrian Priority Street. According to the Regulating Plan, these designated streets are 'essential for providing appropriate pedestrian circulation within the Station Area. (They) typically lead directly to the transit stop or form a key part of the pedestrian network that leads to it.'"

In conclusion, he states: "I'd ask that you reject this change. On the basis of its impact on vulnerable road users, on its inconsistency with the goals and purposes of the TOD in which the gate exists, on the insubstantial arguments submitted by the Applicant, on the lack of any actual benefit to anyone, and on the inconsistency of this proposal with the goals of the City as it works to achieve its Vision Zero, transit, and environmental aims."

The City Council is scheduled to conduct a hearing and vote on this zoning case at their June 9th meeting. Interested citizens may contact the City Council with their concerns.

## The Lamar-Airport Intersection

by Philip Russell



On April 11, I attended the most informative, interactive Zoom I've been on yet. The subject was the Airport/Lamar intersection. Big changes are coming since the already funded Project Connect calls for a north-south rail line running up Lamar and crossing the existing rail line. Transportation law prohibits the two lines from crossing at grade level, so one line or the other will have to go up or down. One possible solution is to elevate the north-south line on Lamar with a bridge that would not only span the existing rail line but Justin and St. Johns.

Another possible solution is to lower the existing rail line so it would pass under Lamar. This solution would cost roughly \$200 million more and is not yet funded. Whichever solution is adopted will be complex since it has to manage not only two rail lines, but vehicular traffic on Lamar and Airport, bus lines, and pedestrian access.

The Zoom provided ample time for questions and for feedback using the menti.com app that allowed audience members to rank various options for developing the space.

There will be an in-person presentation on developing the intersection Sunday, June 5, at 2 PM in the Black Star Co-op that is located at the intersection.

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## Get Ready: Mayor Adler Has Radical New Plans to Remake Austin

By Community Not Commodity (<https://communitynotcommodity.com/>)

If you think your home is safe from Mayor Adler and his allies, think again. Local residents may have beaten City Hall's controversial CodeNEXT rezoning plan in court, but the mayor and his cohorts are already starting to push for radical new changes to our local zoning code—changes that could reshape Austin's neighborhoods forever.

It all started last summer, when Adler told the *Austin Business Journal* he wanted his colleagues on the city council to make "gradual changes" to our community's land development code and to "move forward with the items they can agree on." He promised a consensus approach.

Council Member Ann Kitchen took the mayor at his word, and in November she announced a commonsense proposal to amend our community's Vertical Mixed Use (VMU) ordinance. Austin's VMU zoning governs buildings that contain both residential and commercial uses, and Kitchen wanted to make sure it provided for more affordable housing and preserved neighborhood compatibility standards. Compatibility standards provide modest height and other limitations on VMU developments adjacent to existing neighborhoods, ensuring they don't tower over nearby homes. By limiting size they also limit the amount of traffic and on-street parking that would otherwise be generated.

Now it looks like Adler is breaking his promise and abandoning his commitment to consensus. In mid-April, he and Council Member Chito Vela announced a plan to hijack Kitchen's VMU proposal and use it to achieve a radical goal: the elimination or dilution of compatibility standards across the city. If the mayor and his allies succeed, our new zoning code will allow buildings of unlimited size next to single-family homes—something land speculators and developers have been after for decades.

Compatibility standards are a common performance-zoning tool, and are especially valuable for cities that fail to base land-use decisions on consistent and sound planning principles (like Austin). Our current compatibility standards provide modest height and other limitations to ensure that new commercial and VMU developments do not dwarf nearby existing single-family homes. Under current rules, buildings six stories or higher must be at least 300 feet (a football field) from any single-family home, and structures 12 stories or higher must be at least 540 feet away, or one-tenth of a mile. The code also requires setbacks (the minimum distance between buildings and their property lines).

Developers and their allies claim compatibility is a major constraint on new affordable housing, but the VMU housing they are complaining about is targeted for 90 feet of height, which tends to be expensive due to the structural costs inherent to high-rises. Developers also ignore the fact that nearly 750 acres of local land is currently zoned for VMU use and is already unconstrained by compatibility standards. (That's twice the size of downtown and larger than the entire Mueller development.)

Removing the requirement that land uses be compatible eviscerates the zoning code. Contact the Austin City Council today and tell them to keep fighting for community consensus—and to stop Mayor Adler and his cohorts from killing compatibility!

Editor's note: In addition to eliminating commercial building height restrictions next to single-family homes, there's also a concurrent push to eliminate parking requirements. Without developers being required to provide on-site parking, apartment dwellers or office workers using the buildings along the corridors would resort to using nearby residential streets to park on. Some of the Crestview streets most at risk of becoming a parking lot near Burnet Road would include Cullen, Pasadena, Richcreek, Saint Cecelia, Saint Louis and Morrow. Along Anderson Lane, the streets would include Hardy, Mullen, Rutgers, Duke, Barbara, Woodrow, Northwest, Robalo, Lazy, Tisdale, Gault, Stobaugh, Taulbee and Watson.

The City Council is scheduled to discuss and vote on initiating these or similar amendments to the Land Development Code at their June 9th meeting.

"We may pretend that we're basically moral people who make mistakes, but the whole of history proves otherwise. - Terry Hands

"The mind of the logical thinker goes so easily from one point to another that it is hard not to mistake motion for progress." - Margaret Collier Graham

"If they can get you asking the wrong questions, they don't have to worry about the answers." - Thomas Pynchon





## Donate to the Family Eldercare Summer Fan Drive

Family Eldercare has been serving the Central Texas community for three decades now in one of the largest efforts of its kind dedicated to providing relief from the searing Texas heat for those in need. As temperatures continue to climb to unseasonable highs, this mission is more important than ever.

Want to get involved? You can make monetary donations at [www.Summerfandrive.org/donate](http://www.Summerfandrive.org/donate) now through the end of August, or bring inexpensive box fans to Whittlesey Landscape and Supplies locations or the KXAN TV studio on July 15 for the Fan Drop Off Event.

- When: July 15 from 7 a.m. – 7 p.m.
- Where: Whittlesey Landscape and Supplies or the KXAN studio at 908 W. Martin Luther King Blvd.
- What: Bring inexpensive box fans or monetary funds
- Why: Because FANS SAVE LIVES.

Heat is the No. 1 weather-related killer, with seniors, people with disabilities and children at the highest risk. As temperatures continue to rise over the next few months, so will the need for fans. Please assist Family Eldercare in helping Central Texans beat the heat.



## Third Batch of Free COVID Tests Now Available

Every home can now order a third round of free tests from the federal government. The program initially opened in January, allowing each household to request one order of four free COVID tests to be delivered through the U.S. Postal Service. In March, a second round of four free COVID tests was made available. Unlike previous rounds, each order will now include eight rapid antigen COVID tests, coming in two separate packages of four each. Like previous rounds, these tests will be shipped for free. For those that haven't ordered free tests from the government before, you can order an additional eight tests for a total of 16. If you didn't submit an order in one of the previous rounds, you can order an additional four for a total of 12.

To order your tests, go to [COVIDtests.gov](https://COVIDtests.gov) and select "Order Free At-Home Tests." You'll be taken to a form where you can enter your name and residential address. Or, to place an order by phone, call 1-800-232-0233.

This new round of tests comes as the U.S. death toll from COVID-19 has surpassed 1 million, a once-unimaginable figure that only hints at the multitudes of loved ones and friends staggered by grief and frustration. Thousands of individuals suffer from long-term COVID. Currently, the United States is reporting 102,943 new infections on average each day.



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## 7 Reasons to Limit Building Heights on Corridors at 60 Feet

(besides having a 90-foot tall building by people's homes)

(Editor's note: The source material for this article came from: <https://www.smartcitiesdive.com/ex/sustainablecitiescollective/7-reasons-why-high-rises-kill-livability/561536/>)

1. **High-rises separate people from the street.** According to world-renown architect Jan Gehl, because it's not as easy as walking out your front door, people who live on the high floors of a high-rise are less likely to leave their houses. This separates people from the outdoors, the city and from other people. Gehl maintains that, "meaningful contact with ground level events is possible only from the first few floors in a multi-story building. Between the third and fourth floor, a marked decrease in the ability to have contact with the ground level can be observed. Another threshold exists between the fifth and sixth floors. Anything and anyone above the fifth floor is definitely out of touch with ground level events."

"What high-rise does is separate large numbers of people from the street, so we end up with a city that is detached from street life, we end up with a city that is based on enclaves and gated communities," says

urban planning expert Michael Buxton.



2. **High-rise scale is not the human scale.** High-rises are

simply so tall that they make no visual sense to a pedestrian at eye-level. You become lost and engulfed in glass and steel canyons which can be isolating and dehumanizing. The Preservation Institute tells us that when you walk through a traditional urban neighborhood you can see the faces of people looking out of their windows, and you can see personalizing details. When you walk through a high-rise neighborhood you lose sight of the human-scale.

3. **High-rises radically reduce chance encounters and proximity to others.** Because high-rises tend to separate people from the street and each other, they greatly reduce the number of chance encounters that happen and reduce propinquity, the physical and psychological proximity between people. Living in a high-rise creates a very finite and encapsulated world in and of itself, especially those which include a restaurant, market, gym and other amenities. It ensures that people mostly interface with others of the same socioeconomic strata.

4. **High-rises are vertical sprawl.** Not unlike suburban sprawl that promotes isolation and is often devoid of people on the streets, high-rises offer up the same problems, but just from a vertical perspective.

5. **High-rises=gentrification and inequality.** According to Suzanne H. Crowhurst Lennard, co-founder and director of the Making Cities Livable International Council, tall buildings offer increased profits for developers. However, the higher a building rises, the more expensive is the construction. Thus, the tallest buildings tend to be luxury units. Tall buildings inflate the price of adjacent land, thus making the protection of historic buildings and affordable housing less achievable. In this way, they increase inequality."

6. **Are High Rises Even Green?** Contrary to public opinion, which thinks high-rises must be sustainable because they allow for so much density, Patrick Condon of the University of British Columbia says that high-rise buildings are not

See 7 Reasons, continued on page 5

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green at all. He says, high-rise buildings are built largely of steel and concrete and are less sustainable than low rise and mid-rise buildings built largely of wood.

A report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change found that the single biggest contributor to amplifying heat and warming in cities is “urban geometry,” the relationship between city layouts, building construction, and density. The main problem driving the so-called “heat-island effect” is tall buildings. They create urban canyons, blocking winds from cooling things down and locking in heat. Urban centers can range as much as 22 degrees warmer than nearby rural areas. Stoked by climate change, extreme heat kills more people in the U.S. than any other weather event.

**7. High Rises are not good for your health.** Psychologist Daniel Cappon writes in the Canadian Journal of Public Health that high-rises keep children and the elderly from getting the exercise the extra effort it takes to get outside encourages them to stay at home and flip on the TV. High-rises, he says, also deprive people and especially children of “neighborhood peers and activities.” And he believes that the level of alienation and isolation, things that have been proven to negatively impact health and even shorten people’s lives, increase with the height of the building.

## Upcoming City Council Agenda Items

The City Council will hold a hearing at their June 9th meeting and will vote on proposed amendments to the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan, a document that includes a classification for every street in Austin, ranging from 1 to 5 with most residential streets classified as a 1. In the current amendment process that was started in late 2021, many streets across the city were upgraded from level 1 to level 2, something that called for increasing right-of-way widths on many streets from the current 50 feet to possibly 84 feet when

redevelopment occurs. After a public outcry, city staff revised the list of streets to be upgraded, leaving the majority of them at their level 1 status, including Tisdale Drive in our neighborhood. However, on Morrow Street, the only street in Crestview besides Woodrow that was labeled level 2, city staff recommended increasing the level of the strip between Burnet Road and Hardy known as St. Joseph to a level 3 street, the same level as Anderson Lane, and are still recommending that it be upgraded. Given Morrow’s narrow width and residential characteristics, it should be classified as a level 1 street with no portion classified the same as Anderson Lane.

On June 16th, the City Council will consider approving a Neighborhood Plan Amendment to change the designation of the property at 7301 Burnet Road. Currently it is labeled as commercial on the Plan’s Future Land Use Map and the owners are requesting that be changed to mixed use. Several residents spoke up at the city’s community meeting, wanting to know more about their plans for the property but left empty handed. The Planning Commission approved the proposed designation change at their May 24th meeting

## Thank You to the Civic-Minded Soul Weedeating the Median at Morrow and Hardy!

With high weeds in the summer blocking every driver’s vision, this intersection is very dangerous and unfortunately, has been the scene of accidents in past years. When the City is unable to keep up with their mowing schedule, the neighborhood appreciates the efforts of this anonymous volunteer.



## Thank you, Crestview!



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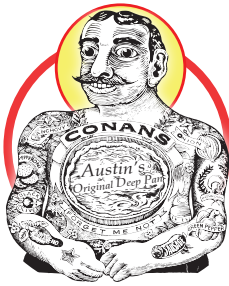
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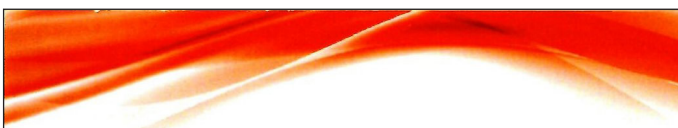

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