



Volume 40, Number 43

February 8, 2019

Dear Client:

No doubt the availability of affordable housing is important inside the Austin city limits. Check the exploding growth in metro suburbs where less expensive residential units can be found. Austinites recognized this and voted in last November's bond election to raise \$250 million toward affordability initiatives. But, did they realize this expenditure could possibly reduce parking? This is part of a proposal the Austin City Council will consider 2.21.19.

Austin City Council member **Greg Casar** has put forth a plan that will be considered in less than three weeks, and it has gained support from other council members. City staff has been directed to draft a resolution to accomplish his objectives. Generally, his plan would **relax building size and parking restrictions if affordable housing is included in specific projects.**

Right now, **his plan would apply to the entire city** – not limited to areas such as downtown or the West Campus adjacent to UT Austin. As an example, this could include the high-dollar West Austin neighborhoods where it is difficult if not impossible to find lower-priced living units.

Admittedly, Casar's plan is aimed at developers who are already specializing in subsidized, low-income housing. **It would allow those developers to make at least 50% of all rental units available to renters who earn 60% or less of the median family income.** For homeowners, income restrictions would be set at 80% of the median family income.

In return, developers would have looser height restrictions. They could go **25% higher than the current building codes allow.** Also, and this is important, **parking minimums would be eliminated.** Casar maintains that waiving these current requirements would allow a significant number of affordable units to be build at little cost to the taxpayer.

Of course, **this does not address the additional stress of more vehicles in areas with no parking provided for them.** Don't forget: once these regulations are in effect for areas where affordable housing is currently desirable, the plan is still slated to be citywide. **So the devil will be in the details as the language is locked-in prior to the 2.21.19 City Council meeting when it will be up for consideration.** Another factor to consider: this is planned to stand apart when the City Manager presents an overall code rewrite in the weeks ahead. Stay tuned.

Speaking of parking in Austin, another official city group (it's possible you never have heard of it) is attacking parking. The chair of the city's Pedestrian Advisory Council (PAC) was quoted this week as saying "parking spots are getting in the way of progress." PAC's members a few days ago voted unanimously to eliminate mandated parking minimums entirely. And this is just one action PAC is proposing to the Austin City Council.

According to the *Austin Monitor*, the PAC has unveiled a range of recommendations, including **dis-incentivizing construction of aboveground parking structures in new developments.** The recommendations are too numerous to include here. But, true to its mission to support pedestrians, much of what it is suggesting impacts vehicles citywide.

It *does* however acknowledge the reality of a car-centric city, but with a **change in how the city charges for parking.** The *Monitor* reports "to ensure that parking is always available as demand increases, PAC is also recommending citywide adoption of **demand-based dynamic pricing for parking.**"

What does this mean? It means **the cost of hourly parking on each block citywide would be adjusted according to demand.**

PAC Chair **Jay Blazek Crossley** sent an email to the *Monitor* saying that to be the "smart city" Austin wants to be, it needs to **abandon "dumb old policies."** He went on to write: "Enhancing every person's ability to walk or wheelchair safely to places they actually want to go to nearby **is an essential strategy for a 21st-century city, and parking spots are getting in the way of progress.**"

While on the topic of changing old practices, don't know if you noticed Texas Governor Greg Abbott this week suggested merit-based teacher pay should create a pathway where the best teachers could earn a six-figure annual salary. And he wants the Texas Legislature to do something about this within the next few months.

He said teachers across Texas should have the same opportunity he saw when he visited Blanton Elementary School in Dallas: "**I met an outstanding teacher who was only in his third year and already making more than \$90,000.**" Watch how the Legislature responds.

Big, bold reforms are planned for Texas property taxes. Just how big and how bold remain to be seen. But the governor has tagged this as an emergency item – which means your legislators can consider it within the next few weeks. Wanna know why the urgency? For the past 20 consecutive years, local property taxes have seen an average annual increase of 5.85%. Oh yeah, and constituents are pressuring the legislature for action.

The intersection of Sixth and Congress in Downtown Austin has been a hub for downtown since the mid-1800s. Of course, at times it has been less vital than others – like the time many retailers fled the area due to the advent of shopping malls, and before skyscrapers started sprouting up like bluebonnets in the Texas springtime. Now it is an iconic symbol of one of the most dynamic downtown revitalizations in the nation. It has to do with people.

To put this into perspective, Sixth and Congress has a **dense *pedestrian* population of more than 21,000 in a one-mile radius**. Adding to the vibrancy, more than 15 hotels with 6,000 rooms are within walking distance. But there's more.

“Downtown not only has incredible population density, but the large number of offices, hotel rooms and events adds to the walkable retail dynamic of this location,” Weitzman's **Brett Maze** told GlobeSt.com.

All this is triggering constant change. One change is an Eatertainment Concept (yes, the spelling is correct). **Just announced for Sixth and Congress, in the venerable Scarbrough Building on the SW corner, is a retail outfit called Punch Bowl Social**. It is said to have a focus on food and fun in an urban setting.

Or, to put it another way, “it combines a diner-inspired, scratch-kitchen, craft beverages and classic parlor-style entertainment ranging from bowling to shuffleboard.” And it has leased 23,038 sf of space to accommodate this concept. Yep, the Avenue keeps changing.

Change is happening as we speak to Austin-Bergstrom International Airport (ABIA) -- another important hub of Austin activity. In fact, compared to 2017, 13.9% more passengers used ABIA than in 2018. This percentage increase translates to a record 15.8 million people trudging the concourses this past year.

To keep up with this change, **portions of a new 9-gate terminal expansion are planned to open and start servicing passengers this month**. And right now, two levels of a new six-story parking garage have opened. This is resulting in 1,900 new parking spaces, that will ultimately increase to 6,000 total new parking spaces when construction is complete

To handle the increase of two million flyers in 2018, **11 carriers announced or started 42 new routes**, according to the numbers-crunchers at ABIA. New *nonstop* international flights include **Calgary, Canada ... Frankfurt, Germany ... London Gatwick ... and Mexico City**.

Bigger jets and more departure options added last year helped manage the increase in flyers. And, in case you're interested, the record number of passengers consumed **833,507 breakfast tacos and bought 56,978 T-shirts** (Core Austin and ACL shirts were the most popular).

In today's world, it seems that personal, seemingly-innocuous actions taken decades ago can have major consequences. Nowadays, some of the controversies swirl around years-ago photos in printed college yearbooks. But when you compare personal pics and comments posted on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, etc. these days, it's a quantum leap from yesteryear. Today's posts could have even greater ramifications down the line. Here's a UTAustin example that has not yet been caught up in a public controversy.

Hey, when you're young and foolish in college, you do things that – at the time – may be fun (though stupid). **Take the state officials in Virginia who are caught in a big controversy over yearbook photos, showing kids in black face and KKK outfits.** Could've been a costume party fueled by beer and booze (Do they still drink in college? Just asking).

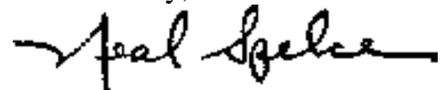
Members of the Texas Cowboys student service group performed in fund raisers on UTAustin property in the 1950s to benefit a chosen charity. Sounds okay so far. **But the rollicking, well-attended event in Gregory Gym was a Minstrel Show.** (You'll recognize the Texas Cowboys. They fire Smokey the Cannon at football games. Their uniform consists of black cowboy hats and leather chaps).

In the Minstrel Show, the **performers blacked their faces and told jokes with a Negro dialect.** The MC was called Mr. Interlocutor (mispronounced in a variety of ways). One year, Mr. Interlocutor was a popular student named **Bob Armstrong.** This is where it gets interesting. Bob was a popular student leader who got a law degree, was elected a **State Rep from Austin, the Texas Land Commissioner and later served in Washington as Assistant Secretary of the Interior.** Bob could NOT have served in any of these positions in today's climate.

Bob died several years ago. But, just wondering about today's students and their fascination with **putting anything and everything on the Internet.** Something for them to think about.

Speaking of drinking during his college days, **Dr. Louis Overholster** says "in alcohol's defense, I've done some pretty dumb stuff while completely sober, too!"

Sincerely,



Editor/Publisher