



Austin (TX) REALTORS® Begin Process to Refresh High-Profile Waterfront Area-- *September 2014*

The Austin Board of REALTORS® had been actively involved in re-writing the outdated land-use development code of its rapidly growing city, trying to solve the urgent need for more housing and promote a new urbanist way of life. So it was only natural that when asked to sponsor a public event to create a vision for the underdeveloped South Central Waterfront, it jumped at the chance. Extensive studies had shown that the 97 near-downtown acres, on-axis with the capitol building itself, were prime for development to the tune of \$2 billion in the next 20 years. Did we mention it's on the shore of Austin's beautiful Lady Bird Lake?

The area in question is relatively small, and just one of Austin's many urban tracts that are ripe for re-development, says Emily Chenevert, Government Affairs Director of the 9,500-member Austin Board of REALTORS® (ABR). But this high-profile site is a perfect example of the potential of a revised municipal development code. The project fit seamlessly with ABR's established strategic objectives, and its goal to grow with the city; the association had already sponsored two of the "Smart Growth for the 21st Century" courses offered by the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® in recent years.

"We were right in step with NAR's Smart Growth programs," says Chenevert, "but it was a well-informed city staffer who sourced the Smart Growth Action Grant, and called and asked us to secure one to sponsor an upcoming charrette. We were happy to do so!" The multi-day charrette, a gathering of community stakeholders and national thought leaders to establish a vision and provide a cohesive set of recommendations to guide public and private development, was the culmination of months of extensive planning and outreach, and would be integral to the master plan for the South Central Waterfront area.

The charrette was held at the nearby Texas School for the Deaf, and was lead by national consultants with expertise in urban planning and design, architecture, economic analysis and modeling, and real estate development, in cooperation with staff from various departments of the City of Austin. The Urban Design Studio of the Kansas University Department of Architecture and the University of Texas/Austin Graduate Program in Regional and Community Planning provided preliminary work and support during the charrette. An architectural illustrator captured the final vision for the waterfront, giving palpable form to the priorities and desires of the stakeholders.

Besides the \$15,000 grant, ABR supported the April 24-28 event by participating in several focus groups, and by providing a group of expert members who were on-call as local market experts to assist the charrette design/consultant team. ABR member John Rosshirt, 2014 Chair of NAR's Smart Growth Advisory Board, was especially active in his role on the Stakeholder Outreach Committee of the City Council's Waterfront Planning Advisory Board.



The charrette resulted in a 40-page report to the City Council detailing what the community wants, says Chenevert. "The city is thrilled," she says, noting that ABR received public recognition from the city, and that its relationship with key city departments has been strengthened immeasurably. The final report informs not only the redevelopment of this specific and important site in Austin, but will likely have a significant impact on regulatory reform as the city rewrites its land development code. "The process we went through with this little piece of land shows in so many ways how the zoning could be improved," says Chenevert, "and how these are really big decisions that we need to get right!"

To learn more about how the REALTORS® of Austin are playing a vital role in the redevelopment of their waterfront, and the future of their entire city, contact Emily Chenevert, Government Affairs Director of the Austin Board of REALTORS®, at echenevert@abor.com or 512-454-7636.



Photo of existing access road from Riverside Drive (a major arterial) to parking lot next to Lady Bird Lake



Illustration showing potential transformation of the access road with green infrastructure, a recreation trail, and a green strip that reserves space for potential rail connection in future



Illustration showing how design of new street/trail connection to waterfront can elegantly accommodate a future rail stop.