



Newsletter of the
Zilker Neighborhood
Association

APRIL 2017

Austin, Texas
Established 1981

How Zoning Makes a Neighborhood

A message from ZNA President Jeff Jack

Mr. Rogers: "It's a beautiful day in this neighborhood"

NEIGHBORHOODS SUCH AS ZILKER are an essential part of what makes Austin, Austin. The need to protect the character of our neighborhoods is recognized in the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan. In the section on housing and neighborhoods, the plan states six specific policies to ensure the sustainability and vibrancy of our neighborhoods (page 138). Mayor Steve Adler has acknowledged this in a letter to the Austin Neighborhoods Council, stating, "I am committed to protecting neighborhood character for all Austinites." I think that statement includes Zilker!

But the trick is first to define the character of our neighborhood and then to decide how the zoning code affects it. Last month's *ZNews* presented a land use map identifying the types of housing we have in Zilker and the mix of commercial uses. It gave an overall view of where we have residential uses (both single family and multifamily) and commercial development. This time we'll look at the dimensions of those land uses under the current zoning code.

The Making of a Residential Area

The Zilker neighborhood was not developed at one time by one developer. It grew incrementally through the last century, as large tracts along the road to Fredericksburg were divided up and sold to meet new housing and business needs (described in the January *ZNews*). Today there are well over 100 subdivisions, ranging from one or two lots to many dozens of lots.

On the map in the March *ZNews*, the areas of conventional single-family subdivisions are shown in yellow,

Editor's note: This is the third in a series of articles to help Zilker residents prepare for the CodeNext rewrite of Austin's Land Development Code (LDC). The mapping is scheduled to be released April 18, and the ZNA zoning committee will be presenting a preliminary analysis of the effect on Zilker at ZNA's April 24 quarterly meeting. The January and March issues of *ZNews* are available at the ZNA website zilkerneighborhood.org. Related information can be found under Neighborhood Planning/Land Use.

ZNA General Meeting

April 24

Monday 6:30-8:30 PM

at Zilker Elementary School
1900 Bluebonnet



South Lamar Corridor Update
CodeNext Mapping

Other Zoning and Land Use Updates



Newcomers, homeowners, renters,
business neighbors

❖ ❖ **All Welcome** ❖ ❖

low, and the individual lots are outlined in brown. Most of those lots are larger than 6,000 square feet (sf), but in a few of the older areas, the lots are so small that they look brown on the map. For example, lots in the six blocks south of Linscomb are only 25 feet wide at the street. Called modular lots, they represent a strategy allowing buyers to purchase one, two, or three lots to form the largest building site they can afford. In these areas of Zilker, most homes were built on two or three lots. Later, when the City Code established minimum lot sizes, the modular lots remained "legal" lots, but restrictions were placed on how they could be redeveloped, depending on whether they were under 4,000 sf.

Single Family 3 (SF3) Zoning

The current code (adopted in 1984) has nine single-family (SF) residential zoning districts, from large acreage (Rural Residential) to clusters (*Continued on page 4*)

Principal Thomson says goodbye

Dear Zilker Families,

This is my last semester as the principal of Zilker Elementary School. I submitted my formal resignation to our associate superintendent, Sandra Creswell, on March 21. My last official day as principal will be June 30, 2017.

There is no way that I can express to you how very much the past nine years have meant to me. It is because of you and all of our Zilker team. Nine years... how can that be? My daughters, Lauren and Hayley, were in high school when I came to Zilker in 2008. Thank you to those of you who listened to so many of my "brag stories" about them. Now they are grown, successful, professional, working women in Chicago and Little Rock. That ol' "time thing" can really sneak up on you, so enjoy, love, and appreciate every moment that you have with your children in the coming days and years.

To our Panthers, the Zilker faculty/staff, all of you... it's been an absolute pleasure and joy for me to have had this opportunity to serve you. No words can adequately express my gratitude to each and every one of you. It likely became so trite and predictable for me to say, "I am the luckiest man in AISD!" during the past nine years, but I always meant it—sincerely. And I still do.

How very proud I have been to tell people that I am the principal of Zilker Elementary School—the best and most wonderful title I'll ever have. It is time now, however, for a post-Thomson era in Zilkerland. I know you will join our teachers as you and they take our Panthers to new heights with new adventures in the coming years! I look forward to hearing about your achievements and accomplishments. I know there will be many.

Thank you so much for your continued support of our teachers and staff who work so hard and diligently for your children as they (and you) continue to make "Zilker... a GREAT place for kids!"

Most sincerely,
Randall W. Thomson, Principal

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Or donate to the Friends of Little Zilker Park through the Austin Parks Foundation. Visit austinparks.org/

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(Continued from page 1) of townhouses (SF6). In most of Zilker the current residential zoning is SF3, considered a medium-density district, with a minimum lot size of 5,750 sf, street frontage of 50 feet, and setbacks for the front yard (25 feet), side yard (5 feet), rear yard (10 feet), and street side (15 feet). Maximum building height is 35 feet, and impervious cover is limited to 45% of the site area. On a typical interior lot (one without a side street), the result is a buildable area of 3,200 sf with up to 2,588 sf of impervious cover, or a house with a maximum footprint of 2,300 sf.

In the last century, most homes in Zilker were much smaller, 800 to 1,600 sf, and usually one story, reflecting the very different economic circumstances of Austin’s early population booms. By the mid-1990s we began to remodel the old houses and build new ones that maximized the buildable space. A house on three of the modular lots could easily exceed 3,000 sf. Some of the largest structures came to be called “stealth dorms.” This trend was not unique to Zilker. In the urban core, the push to maximize the building envelope threatened to change the character of our neighborhoods drastically.

In response, the City Council adopted what is known as the **McMansion ordinance**, to limit the size of new houses in the

older urban core neighborhoods, including Zilker, so that they did not overwhelm their neighbors and utterly change the character of the neighborhoods. It limits the height to two stories (with exceptions for attic space that functions as living space), and it limits the bulk of the house by establishing a ratio of usable space to site area (called floor to area ratio, FAR) of .4 to 1. So, for every 10 sf of site area, you can build 4 sf of habitable space.

SF3 zoning also allows **duplexes** on lots over 7,000 sf (just under half the SF3 lots in Zilker). The duplex rules require that the two units share a common wall, which can lower construction costs in hopes of making those units more affordable. Numerous variations on the classic duplex can be seen in the blocks south of Zilker Elementary School. Recent permutations of the **two-family** use, reducing the structural connection between the two housing units, have made this part of the current code ambiguous.

An **accessory dwelling unit (ADU)** is a free-standing building behind a primary house. The intention of allowing ADUs within SF3 was to provide homeowners an opportunity to have a rental income to offset the explosive cost of living in Austin or to provide housing for a relative (hence the term granny flat) or to take advantage of a rear alley access (alley flats). Originally ADUs were limited to 850 sf on lots over 7,000 sf, so that they did not encroach on

Before VMU: Zilker Neighborhood Acreage by Zoning District, 2007

Zoning	Acres	% Total
SF3	336	45
SF5&6	7	1
All MF	42	6
MF3	32	4
All commercial	169	24
CS&CS-1	131	18
Total	742.5	100

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the privacy of adjoining neighbors. But last year the City Council changed the limits to 1,100 sf on lots of 5,750 sf. The previous requirement that an ADU have at least one parking space was removed for lots within a quarter mile of a transit corridor, such as South Lamar. The ripple effect of this increase in zoning entitlement will be discussed as we evaluate other CodeNext changes.

Multifamily 3 (MF3) Zoning

Austin’s multifamily (MF) zoning districts range from low density (MF1) to high density (MF6), defined primarily by the number of units per acre. Most of the MF zoning in Zilker is MF3, with a minimum lot size of 8,000 sf, a maximum height of 40 feet, building coverage of 55%, impervious cover of 65%, and FAR of .75 to 1. Zilker’s densest multifamily housing, however, is in mixed use projects, described below.

Commercial Services (CS) and Other Commercial Zoning

The least intense commercial zoning is called Neighborhood Office (NO). The most intense base zoning in Zilker is Commercial Services (CS and CS-1). The only com-



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8:30am - 3pm
Fridays
8:30am - 12pm

mercial zoning in the interior of the neighborhood is a CS property at the corner of Bluebonnet and Anita (Bluebonnet Market). Along South Lamar and Barton Springs Road, however, the zoning is overwhelmingly CS (more than 130 acres), with less than 20 acres of General Retail (GR). Although building heights up to 60 feet are allowed in both districts, most of the older buildings in the South Lamar corridor are only one or two stories. This situation is often termed “time bomb zoning,” since neighbors never know when a 60-foot-tall commercial building will pop up next door. As the time bombs started going off in the 1990s, they caused so much conflict that the City Council adopted **compatibility standards** requiring commercial structures to be set back from adjacent residential property and stepped down accordingly.

The **Vertical Mixed Use (VMU)** overlay applies special restrictions and entitlements to a property in addition to its base zoning, if it is redeveloped with a mix of residential and commercial uses. ZNA’s recommendations for VMU along South Lamar and Barton Springs Road were adopted by the City Council in 2008. Height limits stay the same under VMU, but building coverage can increase up to the full allowance for impervious cover and parking requirements can be decreased. Tracts that were large enough for parking garages (mostly east of South Lamar) were the only parcels recommended for VMU. Lots that were too small or had difficult configurations

(mostly west of South Lamar) were not proposed for VMU. (For a detailed map, see zilkerneighborhood.org/land-use-and-planning-documents/.)

Other aspects of the LDC, such as the tree ordinance, sidewalk requirements, street capacity, utility capacity, and accessibility also help to define our neighborhood’s character.

We hope this information gives you a useful benchmark for where we are today with regard to zoning, so that you are better prepared to assess just how much change is in keeping with our neighborhood character. Please attend the April 24 ZNA meeting to see what is being proposed, to assess how it will impact you personally and our Zilker neighborhood, and to give us your feedback to the staff proposal.

Your neighbor, Jeff Jack

Neighbors Restore Creeks on Robert E. Lee

The Friends of South Zilker Park (volunteers from our neighborhood) continue in their multi-year efforts to restore and beautify two small creeks in Zilker Park. These two creeks, Robert E. Lee Tributary and Old Little Zilker Channel, are located in the part of Zilker Park bordered by Robert E. Lee Road and Barton Hills Drive. Workdays are scheduled throughout the year to remove invasive species, plant native species, and clean up trash. If you would like to know about work days, contact Gail Rothe at grothe@austin.rr.com.

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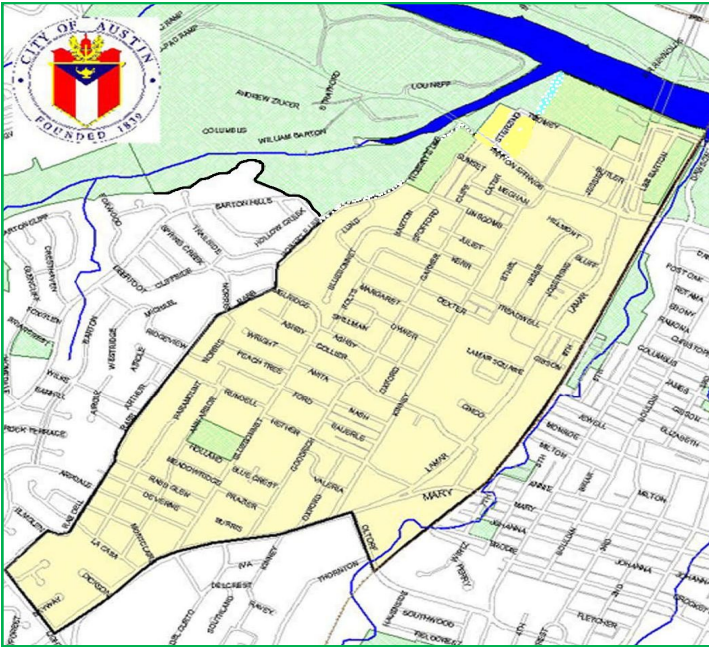
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ZNA includes Zilker Park and Rabb Road on the west and extends to the railroad on the east, Barton Skyway on the south, and Lady Bird Lake on the north. Residents on both sides of boundary streets may join ZNA.



First Tuesday Happy Hours
by Pat Cramer, ZNA Social Chair

Greetings, Zilkerites! Join your neighbors at ZNA's First Tuesday get-togethers. We visit a different Zilker venue each month. The next three dates are:

May 2, 5-7 pm, Gibson Street Bar, 1109 S. Lamar, \$3 well, \$4 select drafts

June 6, 5-7 pm, Sazón, 1816 S. Lamar \$4 margaritas, 1/2 price select appetizers

July 4, 5-7 pm: Uncle Billy's, 1530 Barton Springs, \$2.50 pints

Look for updates on the ZNA web site, zilkerneighborhood.org, and on the Yahoo group zilker@yahoogroups.com. Or email me at patcramer42@yahoo.com.

BECOME A ZNA MEMBER TODAY

Membership is open to Zilker residents (renters or homeowners) 18 years old or older. (See map.)
Nonresident property owners are not eligible for membership.

Annual dues are \$7 per person. Please list each member's name and e-mail address below.

Name: _____

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Please make checks payable to Zilker Neighborhood Association and mail with this form to:

ZNA Memberships, 2009 Arpdale St, Austin, TX 78704

or bring this form with you to the next ZNA meeting

For ZNA bylaws and other information, visit zilkerneighborhood.org.



Newsletter of the
**Zilker Neighborhood
 Association**

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**2017 Executive Committee of
 the Zilker Neighborhood
 Association**

Officers:

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- 1st Vice President:* Dave Piper
- 2nd Vice President:* Bobby Rigney
- Secretary:* Gary Hamilton
- Treasurer:* David King
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- Austin Neighborhoods Council Delegate:* Katy Fendrich
- Newsletter Editor:*
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Other executive members:

- Parks and Environment Chair:*
 Gardner Sumner
- Zoning and Code Chair:*
 Bruce Wiland

The Executive Committee may be contacted by e-mail through zilkerneighborhood@gmail.com



About the Zilker Neighborhood Association

ZNA holds quarterly meetings on the last Monday of January, April, July, and October, at Zilker Elementary School, 1900 Bluebonnet Lane. The Executive Committee meets at the Umlauf Museum, 605 Robert E. Lee Road, 7 PM the first Monday of most months. Watch the Web site for updates.

Our Purpose: To improve the quality of life in the neighborhood in matters of land use, environmental protection, public services, consumer protection, preservation of the historic and unique character of the community; to provide support in other matters of neighborhood concern; and to promote and participate in the civic life of the city.

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