



Dan Fredine <secretary@srccatx.org>

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## Fwd: 305 S. Congress PUD: A park that excludes Austin residents

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Sat, Aug 20, 2022 at 6:56 PM

To: Secretary <secretary@srccatx.org>

Letter from City of Austin Parks and Recreation Board Chair, District 9 Representative, SRCC Resident Laura Cottam-Sajbel to attach to 8/16/22 meeting minutes

Dear Council Members:

Thank you for your time on this project. I chair the Parks Board, sit on the South Central Waterfront Advisory Board, and have lived for 26 years just south of Riverside, near the proposed South Central Waterfront. Concerns raised by both PARB and SCWAB have gone unaddressed, so I am **writing as an informed, individual resident** to implore you to vote against the [305 S. Congress PUD](#).

In 1982, I moved to Austin and, like so many others, fell in love with the laid-back vibe, the focus on lighthearted fun in the outdoors—Spam Fest, Aqua Fest, Eeyore’s birthday, the Trail of Lights. We’ve owned a home in Travis Heights since 1996, then a place full of hippies without fences, who were friends with their neighbors.

Appointed to Parks Board in 2019, I began to realize all the ways this **city built around nature was under attack by developers who have always wanted to privatize the best parts**. As a rep on the South Central Waterfront Advisory Board, I saw how hundreds of stakeholders, donating thousands of volunteer hours, coalesced to polish a vision for the South Central Waterfront. Under that **adopted Vision Plan, the whole city would benefit** from well-considered mixed-use development and **a signature park for Austin along one of the last remaining slices of wilderness on Ladybird Lake**.

How disappointing it has been, as a long-time resident, to watch the shameful spin of this applicant. The process has included lots of pretty pictures and promises of public amenities that in reality morphed into **taxpayer dollars funding a road extension to serve primarily the development**. A **drainage pond under the bats**, too close to a river that floods. The Vision Plan’s **proposed Grand Staircase from South Congress to access the lake and signature park was co-opted and moved into the center of the development**. Extra height on skyscrapers will create a canyon effect, forcing pedestrians to navigate a maze of stores and buildings to find the five access points touted by the developer. **Cut off from the streets by high buildings, the park will feel like a beautiful front yard for an exclusive, private development**.

Volunteer community stakeholders and board members spent hours negotiating in good faith only to learn that these wealthy developers feel any contribution to the city would make their hulking project “unfeasible.” They prey on New Urbanist notions of density—yet **density is successful only with associated open space for people to enjoy the outdoors**. These developers hired a PR firm to lobby running groups, touting the project’s “improved access”—yet in real terms, the **parkland decreases from the Adopted Vision Plan’s 9 acres to less than 3.5 deeded, some of which is under water**.

Mayor Adler, *a friend of the project’s lawyer and of the developer*, talks about the need to increase building height to make the project more profitable—but never mentions the **environmental impact of height, like additional waste right by the river, the traffic increase on constrained roadways, the effect on residents who lose access to a view of the river and sky**. **No mention of Dark Sky best practices, nor of the effects constructing a 600-foot building next to the bridge could have on our beloved bats**. Do we need 1.5 million more square feet of office space in the age of remote work? The Mayor may not have been here in the ‘80s when overbuilding hollowed out downtown. He may not run the trail and consider it a sanctuary where everyday people enjoy the trees and the herons and a break from city life.

Mr. Rusthoven claims the “underground parking alone makes this project superior,” but if the applicant’s nearby project and the difficulty of digging into solid rock is any indication, the “underground” parking may be built merely below the buildings, raising all of them to street level. If parking is really dug into limestone next to the river, what would happen during a flood? So, **“Pave paradise and put up a parking lot...”**

We have a **dire need for affordable housing, but that is “too expensive” on this precious land...because the sad fact is these developers’ appetites can never be satisfied.** The lack of affordable housing pushes out of town musicians, songwriters, and other creatives who make our city unique and who set the stage for ACL and SXSW and other Austin successes, as well as service industry workers who support those events. Our own kids, with good jobs, cannot afford a home or condo here in the town where they were born and raised.

**Austin has been consumed by those who continue enriching themselves with the beauty of this place at the expense of those who fight to preserve the quality of life and the environment here.**

Other developers would give their eyeteeth to work with the city on a sustainable plan for mixed use at this location. This PUD *amendment*—ridiculous, as it tries to grandfather rights from the low-profile Statesman building— is **not superior**.

**We have one chance to do this right.** Please vote NO on the [305 S Congress](#) PUD amendment.

Sincerely,

Laura Cottam Sajbel

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