AUSTIN MONITOR

East Cesar Chavez zoning granted despite neighbors' objections

by Jo Clifton | AUSTIN MONITOR

(AUSTIN, TX) - Although former City Council Member Raul Alvarez and other east side advocates argued strenuously during last week's meeting against granting DB90 zoning to the property at 3020 E. Cesar Chavez St., Council members approved the change on all three readings. The old zoning allowed for a relatively modest mixed-use building. Developers are now expected to replace it with a 90-foot-tall mixed-use building, which will include residential uses on the upper floors.

In order to be eligible for DB90 – a new zoning category that allows buildings up to 90 feet tall – the developer must provide a minimum of 12 percent of rental units affordable for households earning 50 percent of the median family income, or a minimum of 10 percent of units affordable for households earning 50 percent of the local median family income. Either way, those units must be available on those terms for 40 years, according to the ordinance approved by Council. Alternatively, the developer is allowed to pay the cost of those units as a fee-in-lieu to the Housing Trust Fund.

The developer is James Eustace operating as Eastside Partners, LLC. Leah Bojo of the Drenner Group represents him.

Alvarez wrote a letter to Council in July requesting that they postpone consideration of the East Cesar Chavez zoning case, as well as eight others, all of which were seeking the DB90 designation in East Austin. Alvarez wrote, "The community has been blindsided by DB90 because, for many years, an MU or VMU zoning change typically meant 60 feet in height. Also, VMU2 (the category that DB90 is replacing and which it most closely mirrors) was limited to certain corridors and city staff and Planning Commission are now failing to respect these conventions that were collectively developed." He noted that there were 17 DB90 proposals for Central East Austin, either coming to Council or to the Planning Commission. He asked, "Please consider the individual context of each DB 90 case," as well as the cumulative impact on the east side of "these out of scale proposals."

The file also included a letter from Daniel Llanes, chair of the Govalle/Johnston Terrace Neighborhood Contact Team. Llanes complained that a number of DB90 cases were going to the Planning Commission despite the fact that the developers had not met with the neighborhood contact team. He also wrote a letter to city staff indicating that he would be appearing at the Planning Commission to voice his group's opposition to the DB90 case.

A representative of the Govalle/Johnston Terrace Neighborhood, Valerie Menard, also requested postponement of all DB90 cases on the agenda. She disputed the usefulness of DB90, noting that it allows "development to rise to 90 feet, 30 feet above what had been considered compatible to neighborhoods, and removes compatibility requirements. In return, developers are merely required to set aside a fraction of units for affordable housing, which, defined is as 80 to 60 percent of MFI. (This) is a failure from the start. It's a failure if the goal is to increase the stock of affordable housing. In 2023, the Texas Affiliation of Affordable Housing Providers ranked Austin third-worst metropolitan area in the country for providing affordable housing for extremely low-income communities. ... Just this week, the same organization reported that Austin has only 21 of 100 homes available for very low-income households," Menard said.

She concluded, "I seriously doubt most Austinites have any idea of what DB90 will do to their neighborhoods. Looking at the list of zoning cases, I know that East Austin stands to be the most seriously impacted, and especially District 3."

The item was approved without comment from Council with Council Member Alison Alter off the dais and Council Member Natasha Harper-Madison absent.

Texas would need about $81.5 billion a year to end property taxes, officials say

By Joshua Fechter | THE TEXAS TRIBUNE

(STATE NEWS) - Texas would have to spend tens of billions of dollars to get rid of the state's property taxes, state budget officials said Wednesday — a reality check on some conservatives who want to end them once and for all.

Republican lawmakers have been on a yearslong push to bring down the state's property taxes, among the highest in the nation. Some Texas conservatives have long dreamt of getting rid of at least some property taxes altogether — an idea others have criticized as unrealistic given the gargantuan cost of doing so. Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, a skeptic of doing away with property taxes, tasked lawmakers earlier this year with tallying the cost.

Now, lawmakers have those figures in hand. Getting rid of all property taxes collected by school districts would have cost the state $39.5 billion in tax year 2023, figures presented to the Texas Senate Finance Committee by the Legislative Budget Board show. School property taxes, which pay for costs like teacher salaries and new facilities, represent the largest chunk of a property owner's tax bill.

In addition, the state would have had to shell out another $42 billion to cover the property taxes collected by cities, counties and special taxing districts last year. All told, the state would have had to spend $81.5 billion to completely eliminate all local property taxes. That's more than half of the $144 billion that lawmakers allocated for Texas' current two-year budget.

Spending that much money on tax cuts would significantly hamper the state's ability to pay for other costs and would likely require a significant sales tax hike, lawmakers said Wednesday. There appeared to be little appetite among committee members to do so.

Homeless Strategy Office Announces $2.1 Million to Break Down Housing Barriers, Strengthen Partnerships

The National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty

(AUSTIN, TX) - The City of Austin's Homeless Strategy Office (HSO) announced more than $2 million in new funding to help individuals and families exit homelessness. The funding can be used to remove barriers that keep people from securing housing or as incentives for local property owners to make housing units available for people at-risk or experiencing homelessness. Applications are due by October 3, 2024.

"The two goals of this funding – removing barriers to housing and increasing the number of available housing units – are essential to effectively help individuals and families exit homelessness," said David Gray, City of Austin's Homeless Strategy Officer. "Through this opportunity, we are offering the necessary foundation for people to rebuild their lives. Our approach supports the long-term stability that individuals require to achieve their full potential and end their homelessness."

The new funding opportunity consists of two programs. The Property Engagement and Education program ($600,000) aims to improve relationships with local property owners to increase housing availability for persons experiencing homelessness or at-risk of imminent homelessness. The Housing Barrier Reduction program ($1,500,000) aims to launch a fund that reduces immediate barriers for individuals and households trying to obtain or maintain stable housing. Applicants may apply for one or both programs.

The total amount available through this solicitation is $2,100,000 from the United States American Rescue Plan Act. HSO anticipates that contracts for this funding will begin on December 15, 2024. All funds must be used by December 31, 2026, which is the federal deadline for cities to spend their American Rescue Plan Act funds.

Full eligibility requirements and application details are available through the City's PartnerGrants database (https://partnergrants.austintexas.gov) or on the City's website: RFP HSO 2024-003 ARPA Property Engagement and Housing Barrier Reduction.

To learn more about homelessness in Austin, please visit www.austintexas.gov/homelessness

Know Your Texas Voting Regimen

Oct. 7
Last day to register to vote

Oct. 21
Early voting starts

Oct. 25
Last day counties can receive mail-in ballot requests

Nov. 5
Election Day