ENSURING EQUITY IN TRANSIT AND HOUSING: SCENARIO PLANNING FOR TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

Transit-oriented development (TOD) brings many benefits, but it also can lead to displacement and intense pressures on affordable housing. The City of Austin and partners used advanced geographic information systems (GIS), mapping and scenario planning tools to identify threats to affordable housing and find effective solutions for preventing displacement around TOD.

**skills and capacity**
- Partnership development, data analysis, mapping and GIS, regional planning

**issues**
- Housing Stability
- Economic Mobility and Inclusion

**partners**
The University of Texas at Austin, Austin’s Corridor Program Implementation Office, and Austin’s Neighborhood Housing and Community Development Department

**tools**
- Scenario planning, affordable housing funds, housing ordinances

**tool spotlight**

**scenario planning**
GIS and spatial analysis tools can be used to understand where development pressures threaten the availability of affordable housing and identify effective strategies to mitigate the problem.

**simplifying the land code**
Mapping tools can also engage stakeholders in conversations about the interrelated complexities of housing, transportation and development. In Austin, Envision Tomorrow was used to help stakeholders and planners simplify the Land Development Code, aligning it with the city’s new Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan.

**affordable housing and corridor bonds**
Metropolitan areas can create funds that strategically look at mobility improvements and the preservation and creation of affordable housing in targeted areas. Scenario planning has been used to help those working on investments along corridors understand the impact that their investment might have on existing rental housing stock and to help housing planners set goals for preservation of this stock along the corridors.

**TOD** is a popular Smart Growth strategy that encourages compact, mixed-use development near transit stops. Convenient access to transit reduces auto dependence and transportation costs while increasing access to jobs, schools, retail and other opportunities. Successful TOD projects can particularly benefit low-income residents or those with limited mobility, but they also stimulate growth pressures and increase property values in the real estate market overall, which can lead to displacement of low-income neighborhoods and residents.

The City of Austin used robust map-based analysis tools to deeply understand the interconnections between transportation, housing and development issues. The University of Texas at Austin (UT) and Cornell University, along with Fregonese Associates (creators of the scenario planning tool Envision Tomorrow) together developed the Corridor Housing Preservation Tool, a mapping and analysis program to better understand housing pressures and trends and identify strategies for encouraging TOD while protecting equity in housing and transportation. This tool was then used by Austin city planners to inform the key strategies recommended in Austin’s Strategic Housing Blueprint, completed in 2014.
Using Scenario Planning to Evaluate Potential Solutions

Many communities struggle to understand the complex interplay between affordability and growth in developing areas and to find solutions that optimize both. The City of Austin partnered with UT to evaluate alternative growth scenarios along eight fast-growing transit corridors. Scenario planning allowed the partners and residents to identify tradeoffs and find solutions to offset displacement while allowing transit-oriented development.

PARTNER
The City of Austin identified core partners that could fill critical gaps in the planning process. UT brought critical capacity in scenario planning, data analysis and research. At the other end of the spectrum, local housing advocacy groups helped the city understand conditions on the ground and engaged the community in conversations about alternatives. The city tied the project together with data and policy alternatives and is now poised to implement solutions.

ENGAGE
Stakeholder participation was a core component in the creation of the City of Austin’s Strategic Housing Blueprint. Outreach to a wide variety of local community members was accomplished through community meetings, gathering feedback online and surveys. The resulting Blueprint aligns resources and facilitates partnerships to achieve more affordable housing throughout the city.

ACT
Results from the scenario analysis helped shape strategies for how to apply the $120 million in bond funding to be used for mobility improvements, mostly along corridors. As part of the ongoing CodeNext zoning update, spatial analysis tools are being used to test the code’s impact on existing affordable housing. A new social investor fund is being developed to support efforts, including affordable housing preservation.

ASSESS
A UT-led research team developed the Corridor Housing Preservation Tool to explore three key questions: Where are jobs within a 45-minute transit commute? Which affordable housing stock is most vulnerable? Where is development pressure the highest?

This tool, linked to scenario planning software Envision Tomorrow, then allowed the team to assess the effects of different policy and development scenarios.
Impacts for Opportunity

Travel corridors and affordable housing units aren’t all created equal. Some are particularly important for low-income transit commuters, some have particularly vulnerable affordable housing stock and some are under extreme pressure from new development. Money for affordable housing preservation and development is limited, so the scenario planning analysis helped Austin partners identify the most important locations and strategies for maximizing the preservation of affordable housing.

Housing Stability

In any given year, a certain number of income-restricted affordable housing units are lost due to the expiration of subsidies. Increasing rents or redevelopment can also deplete market-rate housing units with affordable rent. Austin’s Strategic Housing Blueprint now includes targeted strategies to protect these vulnerable units, including land banking, community land trusts, and an affordable housing fund (called Austin’s Strike Fund).

Economic Mobility and Inclusion

Growth too often comes with the cost of displacement. Austin’s scenario planning analysis and resulting policy tools will help the city and its partners to increase access to jobs, transit and economic opportunities while helping long-time residents retain their affordable homes.

More information: Envision Tomorrow, Corridor Housing Preservation Tool, Austin Strategic Housing Blueprint

By the Numbers

Key Questions

- Where are the jobs, relative to TOD?
- Which affordable housing is most vulnerable?
- Where is development pressure highest?

$120M bond funding approved for mobility improvements

2,593 affordable units built, preserved or repaired

10 density bonus programs incentivizing affordable housing development

8 high-priority transit corridors analyzed for affordable housing preservation strategies