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City of Austin City Council Housing and Planning Committee
P. O. Box 1088
Austin, TX 78767

August 29, 2024

RE: Sep 5 Agenda Item HPC005

Dear Austin City Council Housing and Planning Committee Members:

I'm writing on behalf of myself as a senior and Boomers Collaborative Foundation for all economically fragile seniors. We are very pleased that on June 11th, the Planning Commission heard our plea for action and passed a resolution to prioritize shared housing options for many of today's seniors and we encourage you to bring it to the full City Council for a **vote to prioritize City-owned land in ETODs for the development of shared housing for seniors, especially in the form of limited-equity cooperative housing.**

The Plight of Too Many of Today's Seniors

In their fall 2023 report "[Housing America's Older Adults](#)," the Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies concludes: "The US population 65 and over soared by 34 percent in the last decade, In the coming decade, the fastest growth will occur among those over 80, when people are more likely to need accessible housing as well as services and supports at home. **The US, however, is not ready to provide housing and care for this surging population.**"

What to Do

Ann P. Glass and Loretta Lawlor write in the [Generations Journal, Summer 2020](#), "Housing choices for older adults in the United States generally fall into two categories: continuing to live relatively independently or moving into designated senior housing with formal services. Interest in a third option is growing: **innovative housing models that bridge the gap between facing aging alone and paying for services** [These take the form of] **elder cohousing, senior cooperative housing, and home sharing** ... aging [together] through mutual support and healthy interdependence."

Independently and a decade ago here in Central Texas, seniors at [Boomers Collaborative](#), began to ask, what if we can ...

- Come together to live and age in place in vital, intergenerational, and walkable urban village settings?
- Own, operate, and manage a shared facility with the support and supervision of a sympathetic foundation and like-minded sponsors?
- Find economic opportunity, socialize, and serve each other onsite or nearby?

ETODs as Prime Locations for Shared Housing for Seniors

Seniors especially can benefit from shared housing projects within Austin's new ETODs for all the reasons cited in the proposed general recommendations (now resolution) of Planning Commissioners Alice Woods and Felicity Maxwell. As we lose the ability to drive and must somehow survive on meager fixed incomes in increasingly unaffordable urban areas primarily because we need to be near healthcare facilities, **seniors**

need affordable housing in vital economic settings where everyday goods and services are within easy walking distance and dependable public transportation is only footsteps away.

Of course, we understand how important ETODs are as HUBs of economic activity, social engagement, public transportation access, and housing for our workforce. But they are equally important for accommodating the needs of today's seniors.

About Limited-Equity Housing Cooperatives

We also understand that limited-equity housing cooperatives are new to Central Texas. But this should not keep us from piloting it. Cooperative development in all its permutations—zero equity, as in student coops and for very low-income households; limited equity, for low-to-moderate-income households; and market-rate, as in higher-end development—should be something we embrace. At the State level, our leaders support all sorts of agricultural and rural cooperative programming. We believe it is time for our local leaders to consider the first two versions of the cooperative housing model as significant options for new affordable housing. **At Boomers Collaborative, we especially want to see the limited-equity model because it is a housing ownership model for people of modest means—we believe it is the best approach for improving housing security and stability.**

A Missed Opportunity

When we began, Boomers Collaborative was but one of several cohousing initiatives. So **area seniors have known for a long time that shared housing for aging in place together offers many of us the best hope for an affordable and economically sustainable retirement.**

We thought we had made inroads into bringing our model to Austin when the City, in its resolution authorizing the original RFP for Ryan Drive, included housing cooperatives as preferred options for the site. At that time, we had an agreement with the group that became 3423 Holdings to include us in their redevelopment plans. Obviously, we were thrilled at the time but then very disappointed to have seen the Council's priority dropped from the recent RFQ for the same site after it became available again last summer.

Our Request

We encourage you to bring the Land Use Commissions' (Planning Commission and Zoning and Platting Commission) resolution to the full City Council for a vote. Because mixed-use settings are best for today's seniors, especially those of us identifying as elder orphans, **please prioritize shared housing models for seniors, especially limited-equity housing cooperatives on city-owned tracts within Austin-area ETODs at transit stations / neighborhoods important to seniors.**

Additionally, as technical assistance is vital to assure their success, **please continue the City's cooperative coaching program currently available through the City's Economic Development Department.** Coaching under this program has been crucial to the successful growth of the Boomers Collaborative initiative and we ask that it remains available to us and other groups seeking to develop cooperative housing.

Please reach out with any questions or concerns.

Thank you,
Carol Lilly, Founder & Chair
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