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## City Looks to the Future with Form-based Planning

by Wesley Gardner | July 25, 2014

The first of several town hall meetings held to further evaluate existing zoning ordinances in the greater downtown area was held at the Bastrop Convention Center Monday evening, giving residents a chance to hear some of the benefits of the city's form-based code initiative, as well as voice some their concerns about the overall direction of city planning.

Scott Polikov — founder of town-planning and economic-development firm Gateway Planning — was on hand at the meeting to explain what exactly form-based code entails and how it will affect the city.

“Form-based code takes into account how a building relates to a particular lot and how the buildings relate to one another,” said Polikov, noting that more traditional forms of planning are often defined by the specific use of a parcel of land rather than how that land can be used to enhance the overall design of the area.

The idea is to create a more unified and thought out identity for a particular area when developing land for use, he added.

Polikov, who has previously worked with small towns in Texas including Roanoke and Duncanville, noted several areas of concern moving forward for the city, including a lack of affordable housing for young professionals and the perception that some of the downtown area's amenities — e.g. Fisherman and Kerr parks, the Colorado River — are difficult to access and are not branded effectively.

One way to address the issue of accessibility would be to focus on creating as much walkability around the greater downtown area as possible, said Polikov, noting that providing more opportunities for residents to walk to their destination could also help cut down on vehicle emissions.

Betty Peterson, a Bastrop resident in attendance at Monday's meeting, raised concern about an area north of the designated planning zone that has seen a recent increase in vacant land.

City Councilwoman Kay McAnally echoed her sentiment.

“I'm concerned about that area too, because as older people become deceased, that land could be bought up and



*Gateway Planning representative Scott Polikov and city Planning and Development Director Melissa McCollum field questions about form-based code at the Bastrop Convention Center Monday evening. WES GARDNER/ACNNEWSPAPERS*

turned into housing that's not as affordable as it has been," she said. "I would hate to see that become a gentrified area and force more of the regular people who've lived here for generations out."

Polikov noted that while that area was outside the current general planning area, the issue would be looked into further by city officials.

Several other residents in attendance asked what would be done to make the city's riverwalk more accessible, drawing comparisons to Town Lake in Austin.

"We're definitely looking at the river loop," said Melissa McCollum, director of the city's planning and development department. "With the completion of the [Texas 71] frontage road, there will definitely be a greater pedestrian component."

Polikov also noted several measures that could be implemented to draw more attention to the Bastrop downtown area, including creating more signage along Texas 71 letting drivers know they are near the city's historic downtown district and attempting to bring in a larger portion of the roughly 17 million annual visitors flying in and out of Austin-Bergstrom International Airport.

Moving forward, Polikov said it was important that public continue to be involved in the planning process for the city.

"If we can at least frame the conversations and promote the problems, we're good with that," he said.