

# CONGRESS FOR THE NEW URBANISM

## CENTRAL TEXAS CHAPTER

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February 14, 2011

Mark Williams, President  
Austin ISD Board of Trustees  
1111 W. 6th Street, A250  
Austin, TX 78703

Lee Leffingwell, Mayor  
City of Austin  
P.O. Box 1088  
Austin, TX 78767

Sam Biscoe, County Judge  
Travis County  
PO Box 1748  
Austin, TX 78767

### RE: Closing Neighborhood Schools

Dear President Williams, Mayor Leffingwell and Judge Biscoe:

The Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU) is the leading national organization promoting walkable, mixed-use neighborhood development, sustainable communities and healthier living conditions. CNU and our Central Texas chapter are dedicated to promoting alternatives to sprawl through the sustainable design and development of traditional neighborhoods, urban blocks, street networks, districts, towns, cities and regions.

As stated in the joint resolution of the City of Austin (City), Austin Independent School District (Austin ISD), and Travis County (County) signed in 2009 (attached), families, neighborhoods and schools are critical to the growth, diversity, vibrancy and economic vitality of Austin. The economic and environmental sustainability of our city requires ongoing reinvestment in the urban core, including central city neighborhoods. Neighborhood schools allow children and their families to walk or bike to school, and are a key component of strong neighborhoods.

As referenced numerous times in the Vision Statement for the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan (endorsed by city council), neighborhood schools and their campuses are critical to keeping Austin livable, attractive, accessible and desirable for all Austinites - especially families with children. In 2006, the national CNU Board of Directors endorsed the following policies for appropriately designed and sited schools:

- Schools should add value to their surrounding neighborhoods as a civic space and reinforce community identity.
- Minimum acreage requirements should be abolished. Schools should be sized and located to enable children to walk or bicycle to them.
- Parents should be allowed to choose the best schools for their children without having to move residences.

## CONGRESS FOR THE NEW URBANISM

### CENTRAL TEXAS CHAPTER

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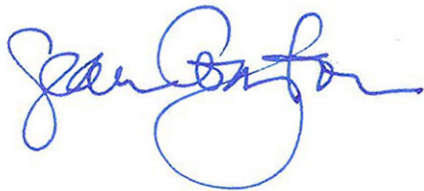
We urge the City, County and School Board to jointly meet now, to review in detail all the impacts of closing neighborhood schools. In particular, we urge study of whether the short-term savings created by closing schools in close-in neighborhoods - combined with a policy of continuing to build new, large schools in outlying areas of the city - will have long-term negative consequences for property values, the health of the central city and our economic vitality.

CNU-Central Texas and its Board has been following the comprehensive, master planning and facilities master planning efforts being done concurrently - but too separately - by Austin ISD, the City and the County. The lack of tight linkages and clear authority between these planning processes appears to have left a "gap" in responsibility. We therefore call upon you, as leaders, to convene a larger conversation: Which entity is responsible for ensuring that neighborhood school campuses continue to contribute to Austin's attractiveness, livability and economic competitiveness on the regional and national stage? How can school locations work to ensure that we grow as a compact, livable, sustainable city, rather than continuing to sprawl and what responsibility do Austin ISD, the City and the County each bear?

We urge you to work together to establish policies, incentives and partnerships that foster healthy and diverse neighborhoods for all ages. While we recognize the inherent complexities of the issues at hand, we are available to help co-host a work session with Austin ISD, the City and the County on finding constructive, sustainable solutions for all.

CNU Central Texas members include many experienced planners, development and design professionals, and current and former public-sector staff who can offer professional support on a volunteer basis. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Sean Compton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Sean Compton, LEED AP  
President, Central Texas Chapter CNU

Attachment

**JOINT RESOLUTION**  
**of the**  
**AUSTIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT, CITY OF AUSTIN,**  
**and COUNTY OF TRAVIS in the STATE OF TEXAS**  
**Regarding**  
**FAMILIES, CHILDREN, NEIGHBORHOODS AND SCHOOLS**

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**WHEREAS**, families and children, neighborhoods and schools are critical to the growth, diversity, vibrancy, and economic vitality of Austin; and

**WHEREAS**, the City of Austin, Austin Independent School District (Austin ISD) and Travis County are committed to their roles in providing a model place to live, ensuring that their collective policies and practices support and enhance the quality of life for Austin area families and children, and neighborhoods and schools; and

**WHEREAS**, the Austin ISD Board of Trustees on December 4, 2006 established the Community Committee on Neighborhoods and Schools (CCNS) to consider and make recommendations on the challenges neighborhoods and schools face in Austin ISD; and

**WHEREAS**, the Austin City Council on June 21, 2007 established the Families and Children Task Force (FAC) to provide recommendations to

improve the lives of families and children in the City of Austin; and

**WHEREAS**, the CCNS presented its report and recommendations to the AISD Board of Trustees on April 28, 2008, and to the Joint Subcommittees of the Austin Independent School District, the City of Austin, and Travis County (Joint Subcommittees) on March 7, 2008; and

**WHEREAS**, the Austin ISD Superintendent presented his recommendations regarding the CCNS report to the Board of Trustees on October 6, 2008, and the Austin ISD Board of Trustees directed staff to propose a plan addressing the recommendations of the CCNS and identify any additional resources needed in order to do so.

**WHEREAS**, the FAC presented its recommendations to the Austin City Council on October 16, 2008, and to the Joint Subcommittees on January 30, 2009; and

**FINALLY WHEREAS**, it is in the best interest of all residents of the City of Austin, Austin ISD, and Travis County that the City, School District, and County maximize collaboration in and coordination of all major planning efforts, including the City's Comprehensive Plan and the School District's Strategic Plan and Master Facilities Plan;

**NOW THEREFORE, BE IT JOINTLY RESOLVED BY THE  
CITY COUNCIL OF AUSTIN, TEXAS, THE BOARD OF  
TRUSTEES OF AUSTIN ISD, AND THE COMMISSIONERS  
COURT OF TRAVIS COUNTY:**

That the Joint Subcommittees are hereby authorized and directed by their respective governing bodies to assist in the development of policies and programs that are supportive of families and children, and neighborhoods and schools, including but not limited to, the following recommendations from the CCNS and FAC:

- Develop an assessment tool that enables the City of Austin, Austin ISD and Travis County, as appropriate, to identify, evaluate, and communicate the educational impact of land-use law, policy, and development and redevelopment projects;
- As a standard practice, actively seek and promote opportunities to establish multi-use facilities at new and existing schools in partnership with public/private/non-profit entities, including housing non-profits (eg., community center; social services screenings and referrals; shared recreational facilities and programs; etc.);

- Develop a housing assistance program to help in the reduction of student mobility rates, including, but not limited to, credit counseling for families and foreclosure assistance;
- Recognize and support feasible expansion of quality extra-curricular initiatives and innovative programs, including after-school and summer programs, through public/private/non-profit partnerships; and
- Continue support for neighborhood-based schools collaborating on city planning initiatives to ensure quality education, equity and the viability of neighborhoods, using a variety of approaches, including, but not limited to, augmenting and geographically dispersing affordable housing,

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:**

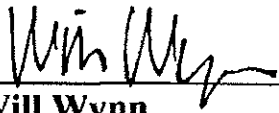
That the Joint Subcommittees may establish working and advisory groups as they deem necessary or appropriate to assist them in their efforts.

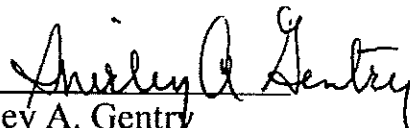
The City Manager, the Austin ISD Superintendent, and the County Judge are authorized and encouraged to provide on-going staff support to assist the Joint Subcommittees in coordination and collaboration between and amongst the City, County and District, and to participate fully as expert stakeholders.

**FINALLY, BE IT RESOLVED:**


That the Joint Subcommittees shall make recommendations regarding  
policy, budget, and programming to the Austin ISD Board of Trustees,  
Austin City Council, and Travis County Commissioners Court.

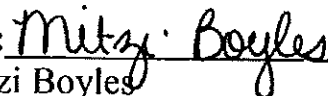
ADOPTED: March 12, 2009

  
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Will Wynn  
Mayor  
City of Austin Mayor

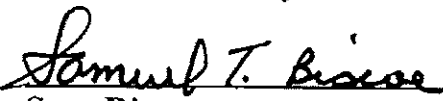
ATTEST:   
\_\_\_\_\_  
Shirley A. Gentry  
City Clerk


ADOPTED: March 9, 2009

  
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Mark Williams  
President  
Austin ISD  
APPROVED AS TO LEGAL FORM  
MFW 3.9.09

ATTEST:   
\_\_\_\_\_  
Mitzi Boyles  
Secretary to the Board

ADOPTED: March 17, 2009

  
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Sam Biscoe  
Judge  
Travis County

ATTEST:   
\_\_\_\_\_  
Travis County Clerk  
County Clerk

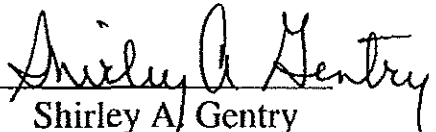
**RESOLUTION NO. 20090312-021**

**BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF AUSTIN:**

The Council adopts the joint resolution that authorizes the Joint Subcommittees of the Austin Independent School District, Travis County, and the City to develop policies and recommendations that are supportive of families and children, and neighborhoods and schools, as set forth in Attachment A.

**ADOPTED:** March 12, 2009

**ATTEST:**

  
Shirley A. Gentry  
City Clerk