

# **REPURPOSING SIMS: COMMUNITY VISIONING SESSION**

## **Givens Recreation Center**

---

### **Meeting Notes | October 17, 2023**

**PRESENTATION:** Jeremy Striffler, Director of Real Estate for Austin ISD, presented to community members in attendance on the repurposing process, a summary of previous meetings and results of the public survey, the feasibility study findings and potential redevelopment scenarios for the site. The following captures questions and concerns raised by attendees, plus responses from Austin ISD staff.

- **Why will the school be used as a swing space for 4-years?**
  - Necessary due to time required to accommodate construction and furnishing the new modernized facilities, plus the district prefers to only move students during certain times of the year (i.e. beginning of school year or winter break in January). Students will be housed at Sims from Fall 2024 to Spring 2028
- **Will bond money be used for the swing space and repurposing efforts?**
  - There are bond funds budgeted for swing spaces and those funds will be used to renovate Sims in lieu of portables. Money being invested to prepare for Harris - fresh paint, clean-up, HVAC repairs, kitchen upgrades, etc. Neither bond funds nor general fund dollars will not be used for repurposing efforts.
- **Concerns about the powerlines – how will they interact with the proposed townhomes?**
  - No structures will be built underneath the powerlines. However, it is possible that some parking could be accommodated in that area.
- **Can the townhomes be three- or four-bedroom units to accommodate families? How about 3-story townhomes instead of 2?**
  - The townhomes shown in Scenario A, B and C are 1700 square feet and could accommodate 2-3 bedrooms.
- **Concern that a lot of apartments in the area are capped at 2-bedrooms and not inclusive of people with families. Angst with development is that it is stopping with 2-bedrooms and pushing families out of the equation.**
- **Givens (Recreation Center) only has two community spaces - “we need additional community focused areas”**
- **Under Scenario C, concerned about parking and the number of cars/traffic on the two-way, narrow Springdale Road.**
  - A community member mentioned that two other apartment buildings with approx. 600 units total will be constructed across the street. Additional housing will bring

in 600 – 800 cars to the area. Draining and runoff and impervious cover are also concerns.

- Additionally, a sidewalk is to be constructed on Springdale Rd. These efforts will further narrow the road area.
- **Concerns raised about implementing public restrictive covenants.**
  - A restrictive covenant agreement between Austin ISD and the future homeowner could be created if the proposed townhomes were for purchase. The intent of the covenant would be to protect the long-term affordability of the townhomes. Similar restriction can be put in place if there is rental housing as part of the requirements in a long-term ground lease to whomever owns/manages the rental housing.
- **In Scenario D, is that underground parking?**
  - No, it would be an above-ground parking garage
- **In Scenario C and D, is there any historic preservation?**
  - These scenarios do not retain any of the existing building. It is possible if there are elements from the existing Sims that could be incorporated into the new structures if that is desired by the community.
- **Who is the housing for?**
  - District needs feedback from the community on who it should serve - low income, teachers, workforce housing, seniors, etc.
  - In general, the District does not intend for housing to be market-rate. It would be income restricted to allow it to be attainable for District staff and families.
- **Concerns about language used with future developers. Reference to St. Johns project – 99 years reduced to 60 years. Language changed after the deal and didn't account for community input.**
- **Similar concern with the former Baker Building site and the Alamo Drafthouse building. The retention pond / affordable housing promise was not honored.**
  - It was a huge lesson learned for Austin ISD and is why we want to maintain control of the site for the long-term. The district did not have any legal standing to force Alamo to build affordable housing as originally agreed.
- **Additionally, a community member raised concerns about the affordability of the units. At a different site, “affordable” rents were based on incomes of \$96,000. Relates to a community member’s concern about teacher salaries and housing affordability. She mentioned that Round Rock pays teachers more.**
  - Over 80% of Austin ISD employees fall under 80% MFI and the proposed housing for the site would cater toward those income brackets.\
  - Starting salary for Austin ISD teachers is now \$56,000 as of this year.
- **Concerns for housing for retired, single teachers. Some questions about building single-story units to accommodate senior citizens. Perhaps build accessible units in the existing building.**

**GROUP ACTIVITY:** Community members in attendance were invited to review each of the four presented scenarios and share their likes and dislikes.



## Scenario A

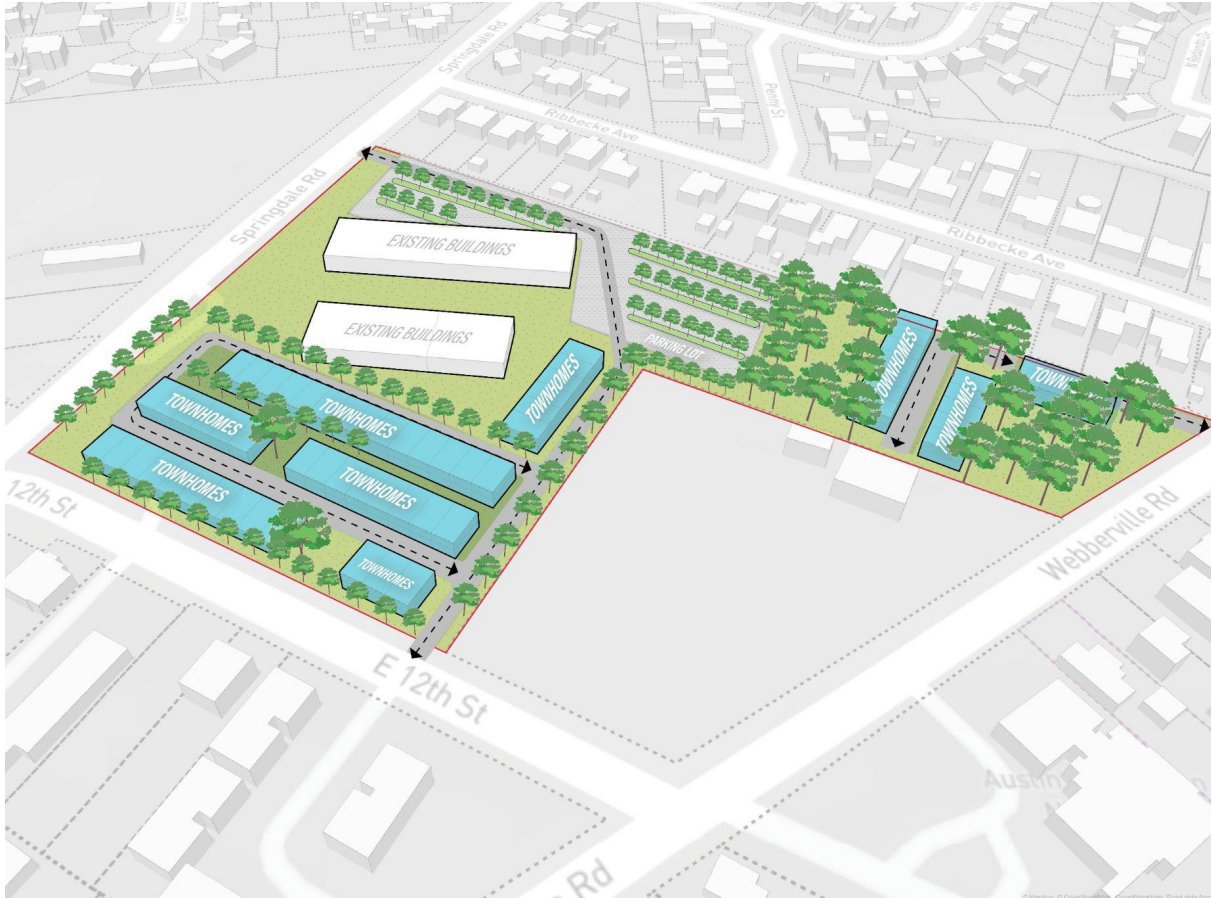
### Likes

- Potential affordable homeownership
- Potential African American Center similar to MAC
- Use cafeteria for a common space or for a Royal Blue Grocery
- Transform some of the rooms for single occupancy and a shared bathroom & shower
- All of the buildings are eligible for historic preservation
- Opportunity to have an area where the community can meet beyond Givens Park because the rec center is small
- More greenspace
- Community garden space - opportunity
- Retaining of historic building
- Multi-purpose use
- Single-story community space
- Trees & vegetation lining the streets
- Max space for community use - nonprofits, specifically

- Maintaining historic building
- Seems like a good amount of community space for the support of community resilience
- Preservation of historic site
- Number of townhomes align well with the existing road

### **Dislikes**

- There needs to be more bedrooms
- Not the best utilization of space
- Green space for the community pavilion
- How accessible will the existing buildings be for businesses? The pictured existing building closest to the townhomes seems inaccessible
- Community area? Park space?
- I don't like any of the scenarios. It's not welcoming enough. Why townhomes? Blacks earn \$42k (EDD, 2020). Few blacks will return to the old Sims space. Include mixed-use development (e.g. community garden to sell produce) 50% AMI max of income!



**Scenario B**

**Likes**

- Potential affordable ownership
- Like more green space
- Preservation of historic site
- Aligns well w/ the existing surrounding community
- Pays homes to the former Sims school w/ the building retention
- Retaining of historic building
- Multi-purpose use
- Potential for ownership
- Preservation of original space
- Affordable housing
- Townhomes allow for the potential of ownership. Condos with a CLT to limit inflation + maintain affordability. Great for 1st time homebuyers.

**Dislikes**

- LOVE the trees. Please keep for green space.
- Lack of community green space
- Missing community gathering space



### Scenario C

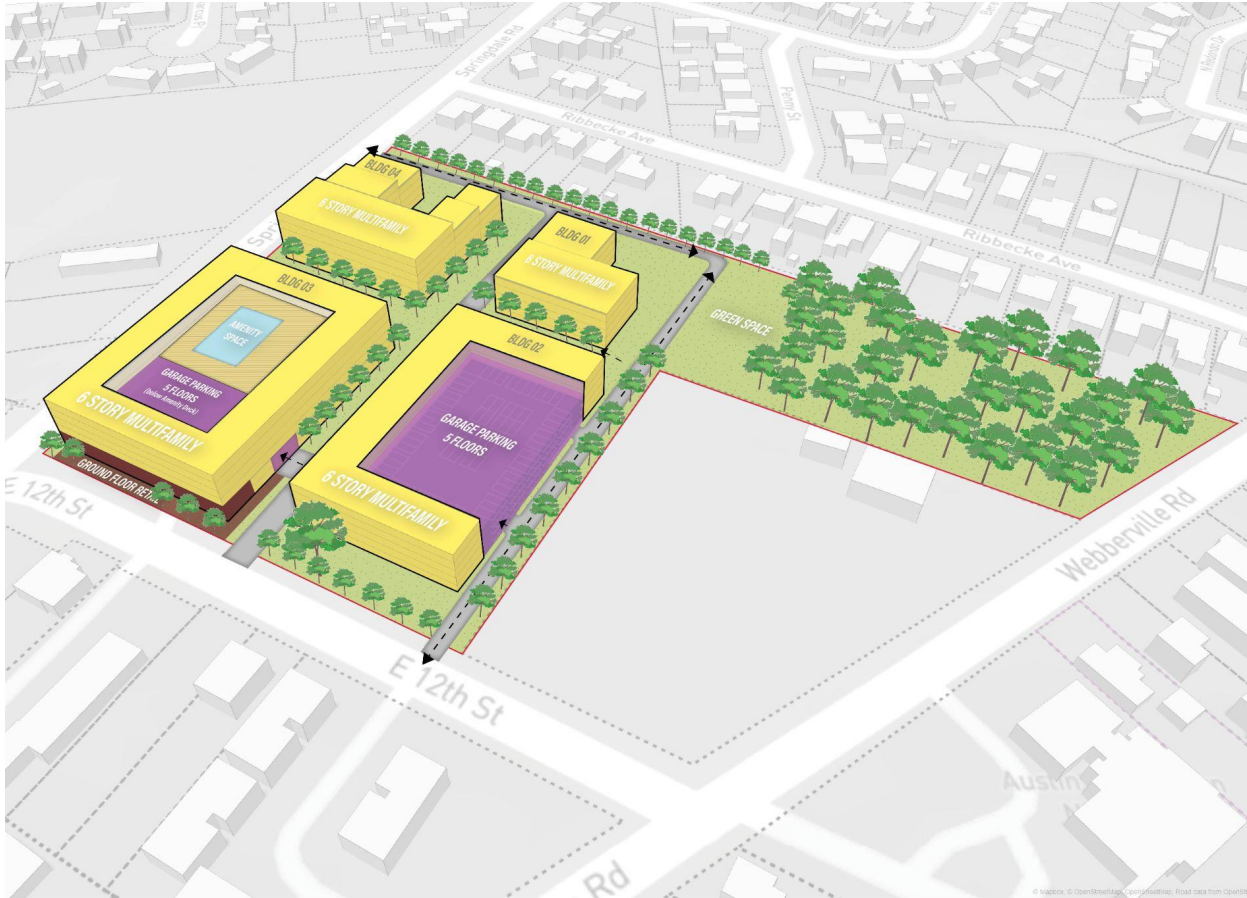
**Likes**

- Like the townhomes
- Please keep the green space for folks to get fresh air
- I like the townhomes & amenity space

**Dislikes**

- No community space
- Lack of green space beyond trees. Don't want apartments because of the 600 apartments being built across the street
- Do not like all the impervious cover
- NO NO NO
- Feels bland
- No community space
- Will this type of housing help enrollment of black & brown families?
- Parking concerns w/ no parking garage
- How will this help the historically underserved community?
- Will this be truly affordable after taxes & other costs?
- No community space. No multi-use space.
- No community spaces

- At least one of the buildings should be commercial



## Scenario D

### Likes

- Like that you keep the trees by Webberville
- Step down of building heights the closer it gets towards the houses

### Dislikes

- Don't like the height of building. Don't like the # of parking. Impervious cover. Lack of green space
- Strong dislike
- No community space. No multi-use space.
- Max impervious coverage?
- No sky
- No community space
- Not community
- Will this include local retailers/small businesses?
- NO NO NO
- No community space. Do not like the height. Strongly dislike!!!
- Will amenity space be easily accessed by the public?
- Too high. Not community.



**GROUP DISCUSSION: After the activity, community members were asked to share out which scenario they most preferred and why.**

- Scenarios A & B could offer more community space like the Givens Community Center compared to Scenarios C & D
- Scenario A can be utilized as a MAC area / African American space similar to the Carver Museum
- Scenario B is favored because of the greater number of townhomes
- A community member mentioned that the Seattle school district has done similar work
- Scenario C
  - There will be existing apartments across the street and there are concerns for having too much weight and strain infrastructure that supports the area
  - No retail spaces
  - Loss of historic value
  - Q: What exactly are the community benefits??
- Scenario D
  - A community liked the preservation of the green space
  - Someone liked the staggering levels of the apartments toward the surrounding community/homes
  - Privacy is important, can't do that if you're cramming people
  - There is possible room for a community garden
- One of the community members didn't like any of the scenarios. Mostly because there is no emphasis on community space (i.e., community garden areas, rooftop gardens) - "if you look around at some point you have the responsibility to say Black people were here and we welcome back to the space. Black people in the area earn 40k and that means not everyone will be able to live there. Remember Mrs. Sims, the namesake."
  - "There are no Black spaces"
  - "There are no community gardens in this area"
  - "Green spaces are getting smaller" and the addition of more concrete makes the surrounding area very hot
  - "Be innovative in how we address community needs"
  - "People are not riding the bus"
  - "Density is not helpful"
- Need to think about climate change, green spaces in the community are shrinking
  - Need rooftop gardens or something more than trees
- What does engagement look like going forward?
  - More group meetings
  - Regroup when we have results of the survey