

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Austin, Texas
July 24, 2014

On July 24, Mary Ingle, who is president of the Austin Neighborhoods Council, filed on her own behalf an ethics complaint against a member of the City's Land Development Code Advisory Group. The complaint alleges that Melissa Neslund is an unregistered lobbyist in violation of the City Code and that she is barred from serving on the Code Advisory Group that was created for citizen input on the current plan to revise the City's Land Development Code.

"By filing this complaint, I am trying to signal what is symptomatically wrong with our City's land planning and development process," said Ingle. "The Land Development Code Advisory Committee was appointed by the City Council and City Manager. The composition of this group is almost exclusively from members of the real estate industry to the virtual exclusion of neighborhood advocates. Only one of the 11 members of the group can be characterized as speaking for neighborhood interests. Too many of the others either have financial ties to real estate industry or motives to please the City staff. I think that I can safely say that the real estate industry shares my lack of confidence in the Planning and Development Review Department. The bottom-line is that this exclusionary group will produce undue, biased influence on the new code product. Undue influence of developer -financial interests can be linked to the root cause of many of our community's problems."

At a press conference today in East Austin, Ingle observed that older core neighborhoods are being radically transformed by profit-driven developers given almost a free hand by City staff to demolish existing affordable homes and replace them with less affordable structures not compatible with neighborhoods.

She said that higher property taxes are driving ordinary citizens to the suburbs.

"We can do a better job than this," she said. "The current process to revise our land development code is flawed. The data-gathering process is statistically invalid, and those relative few people who have given input have been excluded from commenting on the data compilation. This is a bad start for a process that will affect the lives of generations of ordinary citizens".

Ingle said that the complaint is not personal. "Our laws should be enforced, and an investigation of business relationships of other members of the Citizens Advisory Committee should commence."

"It's time for ordinary citizens to wake up," she said. The Citizens Advisory Committee and City Staff are advocating sweeping changes in our neighborhoods, including possible radical zoning changes. Our Land Development Code needs updating, but not this way," she said.

"We need to go back to the drawing board and get this right," Ingle concluded.