



The Myth at the Heart of CodeNEXT

“Austin needs 135,000 housing units over 10 years.” That’s the myth at the heart of CodeNEXT.

The Austin City Council has been [told repeatedly](#) that the correct number is 80,000 units, and that the 135,000 figure is a five-county regional number. The latter found its way into the [Strategic Housing Blueprint](#), even though it was challenged as early as April 2017 in [a memo by the city demographer](#), who pointed out that “[t]he vibrant housing market that exists within Austin operates at the metropolitan-level and not at the municipal-level” and that “it seems unrealistic to assume that the City of Austin could somehow reverse these macro trends and gain an increased share of future regional growth that will more than likely occur within the metropolitan area’s suburban realm.”

All of the density goals of CodeNEXT flow from this false housing goal. The city demographer went on to warn that “[u]sing the urban region’s projected population growth rate from 2015 to 2025 to calculate the number of future housing units needed for the City of Austin could lead to unintended consequences.”

His advice still hasn’t gotten through. As recently as June 20th, Council Member Ann Kitchen [summarized](#) the council’s position in an email, stating that “[o]ne of the goals of CodeNext should be to allow an overall housing capacity that lets us reach the Strategic Housing Blueprint and Imagine Austin goal of 135,000 housing units being built in the city in the next 10 years to address our housing needs.”

There is no such numerical goal in *Imagine Austin*, and the Blueprint number is wrong.

Before his untimely death, CodeNEXT consultant John Fregonese [confirmed](#) that the city has current capacity of 140,000 units under existing rules. He also advocated that estimates of housing needs should be doubled to establish future capacity. Fregonese told Community Not Commodity researchers that his study started with the 135,000 figure, as instructed by city staff. Somehow, 135,000 became 140,000, and has since been doubled to 280,000.

Put another way, if the City of Austin had applied Fregonese’s method and multiplied the true need of 80,000 units by two, future capacity would be 160,000, not 280,000. Since we already have capacity for 140,000 units, the shortfall would be 20,000 units over 10 years—only 2,000 units per year. Surely the land development code could accomplish this goal without redeveloping Austin’s neighborhoods and displacing current residents.

It’s time to stop spreading myths and start dealing in facts.