

Public will get to weigh in on redevelopment plans for East 11th

Revitalization Authority wants a mix of apartments, shops and offices on undeveloped parcel

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Stalled plans to redevelop land along East 11th Street are about to get a kick-start.

The Austin Revitalization Authority will hold public meetings soon to present its ideas for turning the mostly vacant block between Lydia and Waller streets into stores, offices and apartments.

The Victory Grill, which is currently on that block, would stay.

The authority is the nonprofit group that the City of Austin formed more than a decade ago to transform East 11th and 12th streets from a blighted corridor into a vibrant gateway to downtown.

The agency has restored two historical structures and constructed two commercial buildings on East 11th, but two large blocks still must be redone.

City officials and residents complained last fall that the redevelopment was happening too slowly, and an audit said the authority had too much debt. The city signed a new contract with the nonprofit in November that set out more deadlines to get projects done.

"We continue to push to get things moving. It's not moving as fast as I would like, but all of this takes time," said Kevin Cole, chairman of the Urban Renewal Board, which is a partner in the redevelopment effort.

The authority is proposing a denser project (with more housing, retail and parking) than it originally planned on the block between Waller and Lydia. The City Council must approve those changes.

The nonprofit will have to find money to pay for the project during a second phase of planning. It expects to break ground in about three years.

The nonprofit wants to build a \$4.2 million, 28-unit apartment building on Juniper Street and rent the units to people who earn less than 60 percent of Austin's median family income — \$29,850 for a single person and \$42,650 for a family of four.

The authority had wanted to build lofts and townhomes there and sell them at the market rate: about \$300,000 apiece. It switched its focus after residents complained about pricey, privately built loft projects springing up nearby.

Next to the apartment building would be a \$20.8 million, four-story building with 74,200 square feet for offices and retail. The nonprofit hopes to recruit businesses that the neighborhood has expressed interest in, such as a doctor's office and a dry cleaners, said the authority's president, Byron Marshall.

Beneath the housing and mixed-use building would be a \$7.3 million, three-level underground parking garage with 325 spaces — more than double the number planned a few years ago.

The area is growing fast, and small neighborhood streets can no longer accommodate patrons of new businesses and offices, Marshall said.

The redevelopment will also include \$800,000 to restore the historic East Room, which was once home to the Travis County Negro Agricultural Extension Agency and will become the authority's office.

At the public meetings, officials from the city's neighborhood housing department will also discuss the redevelopment of another East 11th Street block, between Curve and Branch streets.

The city wants that land to include a mix of uses, such as affordable housing and minority-owned businesses, and will seek proposals from private firms to develop it.

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If you go

The Austin Revitalization Authority public meetings will be held at the Street-Jones Building, 1000 E. 11th St., on:

- Tuesday, April 1, 5:30-8 p.m.
- Saturday, April 26, 9 a.m.-noon.
- Saturday, May 17, 9 a.m.-noon.

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