

# TRANSFORMING RAINEY STREET

## The decoupling of equity from environment in Austin's smart growth agenda

*Eliot Tretter and Elizabeth J. Mueller*

### Introduction

The 1987 Brundtland report, *Our Common Future*, is noted for galvanizing international attention on the environmental limits to growth through the concept of sustainability (Keil 2007). While the aspirations of the original concept – to foster development that meets present needs without compromising future generations – were potentially radical, over time the term has come to be embraced so widely as to be emptied of any meaning (Rosol 2013; Swyngedouw 2007). Instead, sustainability is invoked apolitically to justify ‘techno-managerial’ approaches to urban development, where aspirations have retreated from changing the nature of development to shifting the pattern of development (Miller 2015). ‘Smart Growth’ and/or ‘New Urbanism’ are primarily terms used to describe a range of ‘sustainable’ urban planning techniques, policies, initiatives and strategies that attempt to achieve sustainable growth by encouraging denser urban development, particularly in proximity to mass transit lines (American Planning Association 2000, 2002). While tensions between the three pillars of sustainability – economy, environment and equity – are acknowledged by some advocates of Smart Growth and New Urbanism, attention to equity concerns has been modest and far from the strong commitment to ‘just sustainability’ advocated by critics (Agyeman 2003; Campbell 1996; Krueger and Agyeman 2005; Oden 2016).

An increasing number of cities are being reshaped in the name of urban sustainability, with special concern for ecology, but a growing body of scholarship documents the ways that an urban sustainability agenda has simply monetized improved environmental conditions, rather than integrating environmental health with economic prosperity and social justice. In particular, environmental gentrification or “the implementation of environmental or sustainability initiatives that lead[s] to the exclusion, marginalization, and displacement of economically marginalized residents” (Pearsall and Anguelovski 2016: 2) has become increasingly common. Nearly all of the literature on environmental gentrification focuses on the recent push by cities across the USA and Canada to incorporate ecological concerns in the development process through the adoption of broad environmental sustainability goals, targets, agendas and strategies (Checker 2011; Gibbs and Krueger 2007; Krueger and Agyeman 2005). In addition, the literature points out how rapid neighbourhood revitalization, including economic and demographic transformation, is often preceded by the replacement of an environmental hazard with new environmental amenities (Anguelovski 2015; Bryson 2013; Curran and Hamilton 2012; Dooling 2009).

In other words, the tripartite sustainability agenda addressing the economy, environment and social equity is giving way to ecological gentrification in which issues of social equity fall by the wayside.

Environmental rationales figured into attempts to redevelop Austin's downtown Rainey neighbourhood long before the adoption of an urban sustainability agenda and the implementation of a series of Smart Growth and New Urbanist initiatives by the City in the late 1990s. Beginning in the 1960s, development plans for the neighbourhood consistently focused on improving the area's environmental quality, especially thorough the upgrading or creation of new environmental amenities, but with social equity as a policy consideration. Starting in the late 1970s, more intensive housing development began to be presented as a strategy for both neighbourhood revitalization and as a means to combat suburban sprawl. In the last decade, the push to develop denser, high-rise housing in the neighbourhood intensified as the neighbourhood's redevelopment became integral to the city government's sustainability agenda, tethered to its efforts to promote a more compact urban form. It is at this time that these two environmental rationales began to gradually converge into a single environmentally informed planning vision supporting the rapid upgrading and reuse of the CBD's environmental amenities as a means to attenuate residential suburban development. As support for higher-density luxury housing in the Rainey neighbourhood (and the city's adjacent CBD) has increased in recent years, it has become decoupled from an earlier sustainability agenda that focused on achieving more equitable urban redevelopment. In fact, concern for environmental priorities in the redevelopment of the Rainey neighbourhood have persistently undermined the demands of the neighbourhood's low-income residents who have long advocated for improvements to local environmental conditions that they could enjoy, while remaining in the neighbourhood.

The first part of this chapter outlines the historical context for Austin's recent urban-sustainability agenda, its efforts at Smart Growth and New Urbanism, and their impacts on the city's development. This is followed by a detailed historical account of the evolution of the Rainey neighbourhood, particularly how it was targeted by different local planning and redevelopment efforts since the late 1960s and how the area's fate became increasingly tied to broader discussions about housing density and residential growth in the CBD. The third section connects the first and second sections by focusing on how the recent changes in the Rainey neighbourhood are related to the city's current urban-sustainability agenda, particularly focusing on the connection between the neighbourhood's redevelopment and environmental sustainability. Finally, we discuss the implications of having a local sustainability agenda that is decoupled from a concern for equity. The construction of luxury high-rise housing is represented as serving the needs of all city residents, including low-income households; the reality does not quite match the rhetoric.

### **The new Austin model: smarter growth and newer urbanism**

In the 1990s, the idea of Smart Growth took hold in Austin with force. A new political alliance had formed between mainstream environmentalists interested in diverting growth away from the city's karst aquifer, located under the hilly, affluent west side of town, and a coalition of business interests that wanted to transform Austin's CBD (Tretter 2016). The environmental and business communities had engaged in a nearly twenty-year battle over the appropriate scale of urbanization for Austin's western suburbs and the impact future development in this zone would have on the quality of the city's water supply and on the habitat of local wildlife (including endangered species) (Swearingen 2010). By 1997, this conflict had been partially resolved through a political arrangement offered by Mayor Kirk Watson. Building on earlier planning

efforts, Watson had run on a platform that offered a mix of environmental and economic goals – most notably a promise to revitalize portions of Austin’s existing urbanized area. Shortly after entering office, the new mayor convened a taskforce comprised of equal numbers of environmentalists and developers to develop a set of rules to govern future development (Moore 2007: 42). One outcome of this taskforce was the ‘Smart Growth Matrix’, which laid out criteria for incentivizing development in designated ‘desired development zones’, including the CBD and a large area to its east, historically home to the city’s African American and Hispanic communities and colloquially known as ‘East Austin’.

The Smart Growth platform had the benefit of being both anti-sprawl and pro-development. It favoured denser and more compact development within certain existing urbanized areas of the city as a trade-off for less development on greenfield suburban sites to the west. The business community liked its pro-growth stance and its emphasis on incentives, fee rebates and subsidized infrastructure (Barna 2002). Mainstream environmentalists liked the matrix because it promoted growth away from the less urbanized environment in Austin’s western hills. It was a ‘win-win’ proposal.

Equity, in particular affordable housing, was presented as one of the three central planks of Austin’s Smart Growth efforts, but it soon became clear that equity concerns would be subordinated to economic and environmental priorities (Portney 2013: 182). The city had established the Safe, Mixed-Income, Accessible, Reasonably Priced, Transit-Oriented (SMART) housing programme in 1999 to offer incentives for developers to produce affordable housing units, but the incentives offered, on their own, have never been enough to induce significant inclusion of affordable units in the CBD (City of Austin (COA) 2007; Community Action Network 1999). In particular, the way that the city’s Smart Growth matrix treated residential development in the CBD is particularly illuminating. Projects earned points for maximizing density (with maximum points for at least 12–25 units/acre downtown), for the total number of units per project (maximum points for 200+ units) and for inclusion of residential units in mixed-use buildings. These features were linked to urban design features associated with high-rise housing such as parking structures and pedestrian-oriented streetscape features (COA 2001). Several high-end residential projects in the CBD received Smart Growth incentives during this period (Barna 2002: 24). Initially, points were offered for providing a mix of housing types, but no incentives were offered for inclusion of units affordable to low-income households. By 2001, points had been added for ‘reasonably priced’ housing, but still no affordable units were produced in the CBD.

In many ways Austin’s Smart Growth efforts reproduced the equity problems found in the city’s previous growth-management and planning efforts. Smart Growth priorities aligned with the basic patterns of growth suggested and codified in the city’s 1979 comprehensive plan, *Austin Tomorrow*, and also with the mid-1990s recommendations of the Citizen’s Planning Committee’s (CPC). The CPC encouraged redevelopment of the CBD and other urbanized areas in the city, simplifying and reforming the land development code to promote infill and density (outside of existing single-family neighbourhoods), and encouraging more transit-oriented mixed-use projects. Yet like these past planning efforts, the vision and priorities embodied in the city’s Smart Growth initiative reflected minimal input from and consultation with leaders of Austin’s non-white communities (Busch 2015). It was their communities, especially in East Austin, that were targeted for substantial redevelopment (Moore 2007). Unsurprisingly, a number of studies have documented the impact of the city’s Smart Growth efforts on selected neighbourhoods, specifically how they have encouraged the gentrification of lower-income and/or non-white neighbourhoods in Austin (Busch 2013; McCann 2007; Mueller and Dooling 2011; Tretter 2016).

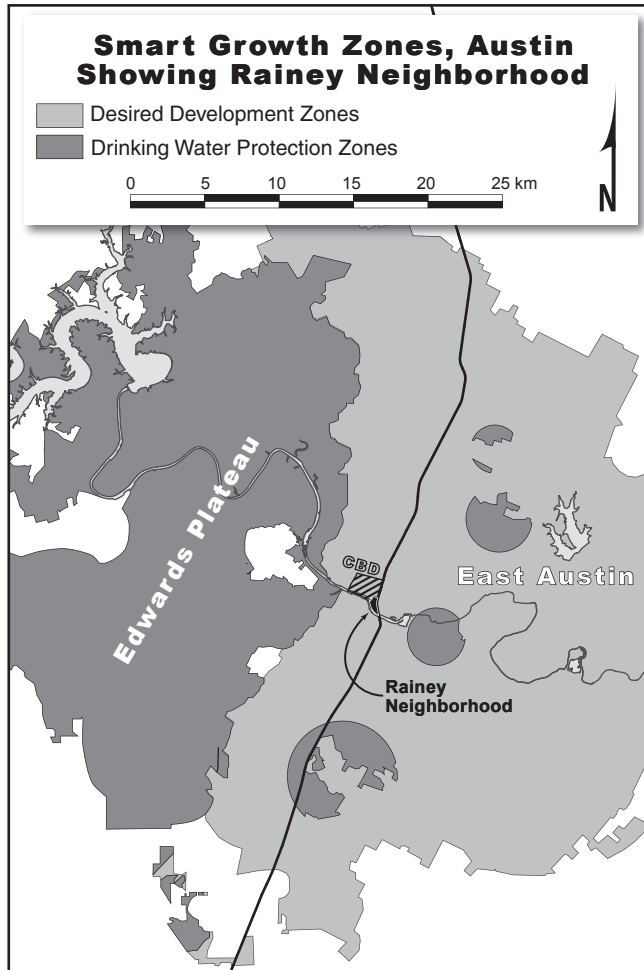


Figure 15.1 Smart growth zones, Austin

In 2000, official support for Smart Growth incentives began to wane but its sustainability goals remained embedded in future planning initiatives. The municipality has continued to strongly support mixed-use, transit-oriented development planning and higher-density projects for their ecological, fiscal and economic development benefits (Ellinor 2013). While local planning focuses on ways to encourage density on a project basis throughout the city, the CBD remains the primary focus of such efforts.

### **The Rainey neighbourhood 1970–1990: transitioning into the ambit of downtown**

In 1967 Austin's Planning Department undertook an urban-renewal study of twenty areas in Austin that were "beginning to show some signs of structural and environment blight" (COA 1968: II-25). One of the areas studied was the Rainey neighbourhood, an area that had "experienced very little physical change or growth until 1964 when the influence of large-scale private

and government development began to change the character of the neighbourhood". In particular, the report noted, "new high-density, high-rise structures" were leading to significant land-use changes in the area. Two new high-rise motels and one public-housing tower for the elderly had been built along the neighbourhood's perimeter. The report suggested that new development would continue to focus on the edges of the neighbourhood because of problems with the interior sections such as "lack of access, unpaved streets, small parcels, and existing structural blight. [But] before this area can develop to its fullest potential", the report went on, "these blighted influences must be removed" (COA 1968: 19-E). The planning department, therefore, recommended the relocation of "110 families [of the 166 families living in the area] and 33 individuals with 40 percent of the families having an annual income of \$3,000 or less and one-third ... with five members of more" (COA 1968: 19-F). After the removal of these people and their houses, the city's planners projected that there would be an additional 400 housing units in high-density dwellings and 1,000 new people in the renewed area (a net increase of 216 units and 260 people).

An Urban Renewal programme was never undertaken in the Rainey neighbourhood, but in the late 1970s, Austin's municipal government became increasingly concerned about the quality of development in the city's central neighbourhoods – particularly those areas in and around the CBD. A 1977 report observed that "since 1940 various parts of the core of the City of Austin have been losing population" because of rising utility costs and, more importantly, the "threat of busing" i.e. school integration (COA 1977: 2–5). However, the CBD still retained its strategic regional advantage because "living in the core is more convenient in terms of getting to and from work ... and most types of live entertainment" (COA 1977: 3).

The movement of whites to Austin's suburbs – driven in part by racist fears – reinforced racial division within what was already a highly segregated city. By 1928 a pattern of racial and income segregation had been established through private (deed restrictions) and public zoning efforts (Tretter and Souunny 2013). Subsequent public planning overlaid industrial zones and highways over these existing spatial patterns and protected whiter and more affluent, mostly west side, neighbourhoods at the expense of lower-income and mostly non-white districts. For instance, in the 1950s, the development of a highway along the Rainey neighbourhood's eastern edge led to the encroachment of industrial and commercial uses.

Environmental and social factors also interacted to undermine the value and quality of residential property in the Rainey neighbourhood, as in other neighbourhoods on Austin's east side (Tretter and Adams 2012). Intense and frequent flooding repeatedly destroyed and damaged many houses in the Rainey neighbourhood and, beginning in the 1940s, settlement by ever-greater numbers of Hispanics occurred (Dase and Ward 2000; Feit 2012). White supremacy limited housing choices and vocational opportunities for Hispanics, contributing to the neighbourhood's overcrowded and poor housing conditions (McDonald 2012). Yet despite these pressures towards segregation, in 1967, a neighbourhood survey found the Rainey neighbourhood to be almost evenly split between 'Anglos' and 'Latin Americans'; it had no 'Negro' residents (COA 1968: 19-A).

Although in close proximity to downtown, the Rainey neighbourhood was not considered part of the CBD until the 1970s, when a series of city-commissioned reports explored the redevelopment potential of the CBD and increasingly "incorporated [the Rainey neighbourhood] into its ambit" (COA 1980: 1). The report titled *Strategies For the Economic Revitalization of Central Austin* (1978) was the most significant. This report offered specific recommendations for the redevelopment of the Rainey neighbourhood – or what it called the Town Lake Redevelopment District. Echoing and going beyond earlier studies the report emphasized the neighbourhood's potential for mixed-use, high-density, high-quality residential and commercial development. This potential, the report stressed, was driven by both "the excellent

environmental amenities provided by Town Lake, Town Lake Park, Waller Creek and associated improvements and an abundance of large trees”, and the amount of undeveloped or “underutilized” land, in addition to five acres of city-owned land (COA 1978: 85–86). The report went on to recommend that these “environmental amenities should be bolstered by public investments” (COA 1978: 91).

The Department of Planning’s 1978 report, and the subsequent urban-renewal plan proposed for the CBD by James Rouse’s American Cities Corporation, was strongly opposed by the Rainey Street Association, which produced a 1978 bilingual comic book that claimed the proposed revitalization plans were a means to undermine Chicano power by displacing the area’s large Hispanic population. Moreover, the comic book charged the city government with using “taxpayers money to make downtown attractive to developers” and wanting to build “townhouses, condominiums, and apartments in the Rainey Street area” (Lowry 1978: 5). These efforts were successful and the City Council ultimately rejected the wholesale adoption of the recommendations in the *Strategies* report and the American Cities Corporation’s plan (Kreps 1979; Real 1979).

However, efforts to redevelop the Rainey neighbourhood did not stop. In 1980, Austin’s Planning Department released a study titled *Development Alternatives for the Rainey Area*, which described three competing options for the neighbourhood’s redevelopment. The first would provide the “greatest protection possible for current lower income residents”. Called the “Barrio Plan”, this scenario recommended

the development of low-density housing on vacant land ... that is affordable by low and moderate income households [and] rehabilitation and homeownership assistance to current and future lower income residents ... Extensive zoning rollbacks or land acquisition ... to reverse current market forces in the area. ... [And] the establishment of neighbourhood level services especially local retail and recreational facilities.

(COA 1980: 22)

In contrast, the second scenario recommended that redevelopment maximize market-rate uses and minimize government support for preservation of the existing income mix of the neighbourhood. It called for “the single-family housing ... [to] be preserved and improved, vacant or under-utilized land surrounding this area [to] be developed to the maximum potential under current and anticipated zoning, including market rate multi-family housing” (1980: 23). Moreover, it proposed that municipally controlled land be reused “as a public facility, cultural centre, or market rate multi-family housing” (1980: 57). The third option explored a mixture of proposals from options one and two. It emphasized

[the construction of] new housing [replacing existing houses and] more intensive uses, such as general retail ... along the boundaries of East First Street and Interstate 35. [But] [s]ome zoning rollbacks to moderate density residential uses would be required for vacant land adjacent to the single-family.

(1980: 23)

It also called for the city-owned land to be repurposed for “the construction of a mix of subsidized and market rate housing” (1980: 23). The third alternative also highlighted the potential environmental benefit of creating an “ideal environment for pedestrian and bicycle travel” (1980: 57). Importantly, all three scenarios envisioned the preservation of “the existing single-family housing along Rainey Street, and none propose[d] full-scale CBD zoning and





Figure 15.2 Revitalization and East Austin  
 Source: artist: Carlos Lowry.

development for the neighbourhood” (The Austin Chronicle 1999). Instead, the focus of this dispute was over the appropriate scale and type of the residential and commercial redevelopment and its potential impact on the existing residents (it was only later, as the focus shifted to more intensive high-rise high-end housing, that environmental factors became significant). In the end, the City Council failed to endorse any of the proposed scenarios in 1981, but it did adopt a number of “development safeguards contained in Alternatives II and IV [an additional set of compromise proposals]” (Lillie 1981).

Nevertheless, in 1981 ground was broken in the Rainey neighbourhood on a new high-rise condominium complex called the Towers of Town Lake. Significantly the developer (Pence) noted that while the high-rise “may be impacting the area, this is what the city is trying to encourage as an alternative to urban sprawl” (Douthat 1981). Aware that increasing the amount of market-rate multi-family housing, particularly in formerly commercial-zoned areas, would place pressure on the area’s low-rise residential character by increasing property values, Pence added a new environmental rationale for the redevelopment of the Rainey neighbourhood, suggesting that such development was beneficial precisely because it aligned with the city’s growth-management efforts. In contrast, project opponents focused on the potential negative social fallout on the neighbourhood’s local environment, arguing that the condominium project “compromised the integrity of the neighbourhood” (Hernandez 1981: 6). Despite concerns about the development’s impact, when the project was completed in 1984 a mere thirty-seven units were sold and the building’s owners went bankrupt (Breyer 1998).

The Pence development brought to the fore possible options for the neighbourhood’s existing single-family bungalows (The Community Economic Development Policy Research Project 1981). The Urban Renewal study had found “[Of] the 158 residential structures 67 percent [are] needing major repairs or dilapidated” (COA 1968: 19-B), but the *Strategies* report claimed, “[Some] residences in the Rainey neighbourhood have deteriorated but seventy-five percent of the substandard structures are economically suitable for rehabilitation” (COA 1978: 107). Even in the mid-1980s, as some single-family homes were demolished and replaced by multi-family dwellings or vacant land, a large stock of occupied single-family dwellings remained that could be rehabilitated for existing residents (COA 1985: 7). The prospects for preserving these bungalows received a significant boost in 1985 when thirty-two homes along a strip of Rainey Street were included in a Historic District by the National Register of Historic Places, a designation that was “primarily based on the qualities of [the area’s] residential architecture” (Dase and Ward 2000: 6). Barrio Plan advocates believed the preservation of single-family homes was the easiest way to preserve the neighbourhood’s Hispanic and working-class character.

Moreover, there was also the contentious issue of whether subsidized or non-market rate housing would be built in the area. Neighbourhood activists were demanding the reuse of municipally controlled land for affordable housing. The ‘Barrio Plan’ called for the City Council to give the land to the East Austin Chicano Economic Development Corporation (EACEDC) so that it could build houses that would be “available for purchase by low and moderate income people such as current tenants in the Rainey neighbourhood” (Martinez 1980: 5). Some residents, owners and members of the City Council resisted this proposal, but in January 1982 the City Council voted to “commit” the city’s land to “a low and moderate income housing project” (Wilson 1982). However, this was contingent on the city’s ability to raise \$1 million to move its existing facilities to an alternative location – and funds for such a move had been rejected by the electorate in a ballot referendum in August 1981. By 1985 the City Council remained committed to the construction of a “small lot subdivision for low and moderate income households”, though the central partners were now members of the Austin Home Builders Association rather than the EACEDC (COA 1985: 15). Yet nothing was built.



In the face of increasing uncertainty, in 1985 Mayor Frank Cooksey proposed locating a new civic centre on the city's land. The idea of building a civic centre had been floated since at least 1969, but in 1984 the idea gained new life when several proposals for a "publically funded convention centre" were released (Cannon 1989: 2). The mayor wanted to locate the civic centre in the Rainey area because it only required minimal amounts of additional land and there were already some landowners eager to sell. However, resistance among some residents and the city's business community doomed this proposal (Slusher 1986). Nevertheless, the proposal succeeded in undermining the affordable housing plan by offering a viable alternative use for the site.

By 1989 no houses had been built and instead the city's parcel was made into parkland (COA 1989). The Town Lake Comprehensive Plan, a plan initiated by the City's Parks and Recreation Department in 1986, suggested action in its recommendations:

The Rainey Street neighbourhood has been the focus of considerable attention in the past decade, most notably for efforts to preserve its historic character and its Mexican-American legacy. Despite these considerable efforts, this once-thriving neighbourhood has experienced physical deterioration. Only 36 houses, fewer than half of which are owner-occupied, remain in the neighbourhood today. South of River Street, the land is virtually vacant ... Significantly, the Rainey Street Neighbourhood Association has recently abandoned its preservation stance in favour of redevelopment at a higher intensity. [This report] endorses this position and recommends careful redevelopment into mixed uses featuring small-scale shops and offices combined with residential living. Commercial activity should animate the edge of Waller Creek, and the mature trees that shade the neighbourhood should be protected so that they continue to dominate the character of the area. All the land south of River Street is proposed to be acquired and dedicated as parkland to protect its pecan forest and enhance the neighbourhood. Similarly, the City's Street and Bridge Yard will be better used as parkland than for its present function.

*(COA 1987: 70–71)*

The dedication of this land for a park came at about the same time a study funded by the City Council had determined the parcel would be the best location for a Mexican American Cultural Centre (MACC) (Garza 1998). Certainly the creation of such a cultural centre had been a demand of local activists for some time, but their proposals for the site had always included housing (Marban 1996). When the MACC finally opened in 2007, the site contained no housing.

### **The Rainey neighbourhood since 1998: the new urban housing transition**

By the late 1990s, proposed redevelopment plans increasingly focused on the environmental benefits of the Rainey neighbourhood's redevelopment, especially its potential impact on arresting suburban sprawl and promoting walkability, while also increasingly emphasizing how property owners would take maximum benefit from the private-market-led wholesale remaking of the area. As development pressures continued to rise in the 1990s, two local developers, Perry Lorenz and Robert Knight, assembled land in or near the neighbourhood and met with a number of landowners interested in redevelopment; by 1999, fifty-one of the about sixty-nine property owners had signed letters declaring their intent to be party to a large-scale redevelopment plan (Rivera 1999). Initially, these developers helped property owners up-zone their properties, but by 2000 they had become advocates for a New Urbanist-inspired plan that called

for the demolition of all single-family homes and the creation of a mixed-use neighbourhood with thirty-five detached row houses (Austin American-Statesman 2000; Breyer 1996). But before this plan could be officially considered, a different developer purchased and rezoned a key site for a condominium development and he refused to include it in this redevelopment effort (Clark-Madison 1999). However, in 2001 both this housing project and the neighbourhood's redevelopment plan collapsed (Novak 2001).

The area's architectural heritage initially presented a barrier to plans to rezone the properties, but under the neighbourhood redevelopment plan proposed in 2000 it was reimagined as a tool for economic development. As mentioned before, in 1985, historic preservationists had succeeded in placing thirty-two houses along a strip of Rainey Street on the National Register of Historic Places. This designation posed some impediments to wholesale rezoning since any demolition permit would trigger review by the local Historic Landmark Commission. Moreover, if this commission recommended historic zoning, then six of seven City Council members would have to vote in favour of a demolition for it to proceed (Osborne 2003). In the 2000 redevelopment plan the new housing was organized around a central square made up of these historic houses, but they would be "converted to uses compatible with a central pedestrian area. Coffee shops, small restaurants, delicatessens and offices have been suggested" (Rainey Street Neighborhood Association 2000: 28).

In 2003, the Downtown Commission, an organization seeking to revitalize downtown, put forward a formal plan that incorporated a reimagining of the use of single-family historic housing. This plan, strongly influenced by New Urbanist planning principles and echoing the plans from the 1980s, called for intensive housing development and claimed that "The development of additional housing in the Rainey Street area will be key to both the future of the area and to Downtown as a whole [because a] sizable residential population would help support ground-level retail" (Downtown Commission 2003: 3). In 2005 the City Council largely embraced the Downtown Commission's redevelopment plan and, marking the end of more than two decades of negotiating future land-use patterns in the neighbourhood, "finalized Rainey Street's rezoning as a [mixed use] business district" (Carney 2011). In turn, property owners sold their parcels to developers to build luxury apartments or condominiums and, if their homes had historic value, they would be transformed into restaurants, bars or coffee shops. The existing low-income residents would be priced out of the neighbourhood and the single-family quality of the area, while remaining constant in appearance, would be altered in its use and meaning. While a handful of these bungalows would still be affordable homes, they would not remain in the Rainey neighbourhood. In 2013, the municipal government funded the relocation of six historical bungalows from Rainey to the Guadalupe neighbourhood, where they became part of a community land trust for low-income homeowners run by the Guadalupe Neighborhood Development Corporation (Guadalupe Neighborhood Development Corporation 2013; Semuels 2015).

The final plans for redevelopment of the Rainey neighbourhood incorporated New Urbanist principles that encouraged better environmental stewardship by promoting walkability, denser living and recreational amenities but without concern for equity, particularly affordable housing and a commitment to the existing lower-income community. A density bonus programme adopted for the Rainey neighbourhood in 2005 required that 5 per cent of the 'bonus' units that a developer built be affordable to households with incomes at or below 80 per cent of the regional median income – well above the income levels of renters in the neighbourhood when neighbours first organized in the 1980s (COA 2005). More importantly, however, due to an oversight, the programme did not require that the units remain affordable after first occupancy (COA 2001). In practice, this meant that affordable units could become market-rate units

as soon as the units were re-rented. Thus the programme would provide no ongoing inclusion of low-income residents in the transformed neighbourhood and, in effect, it did nothing to ensure that existing low-income residents remained. By 2014, the effects of this strategy were striking: the population in the Rainey neighbourhood had almost doubled, going from 702 in 2000 to 1,357 in 2010 (US Census Bureau 2000, 2010). By 2014, half of neighbourhood households had incomes above \$125,000 per annum – almost double the regional median income and of the 212 households with incomes below \$25,000 in the neighbourhood, 164 lived in the Lakeside public housing development (American Community Survey 2014; COA 2016). In short, the social and environmental transformation of the area has been dramatic.

### **Concluding thoughts**

The evolution of proposals for the redevelopment of Austin's Rainey neighbourhood highlights the vulnerability of low-income neighbourhoods near the CBD. In many respects, the transformation of the Rainey neighbourhood is a paradigmatic example of ecological gentrification (Lees *et al.* 2016). On the one hand, its redevelopment was fuelled by a persistent 'rent-gap', a situation where sizeable profits could be earned based on the difference between the actual and potential price of a neighbourhood's improved land. At the same time, the influx of younger people desiring a more urban lifestyle has supported the neighbourhood's redevelopment. Furthermore, the neighbourhood's change was stimulated by a convergence of local government actions (and inactions) and private-market actors. While environmental priorities were part of initial community proposals for redevelopment, they were ultimately transformed and used to undermine political support for the housing vision that would have ensured the continued presence of low-income residents in the area. Since the early 1980s, discussions regarding the neighbourhood's redevelopment have become increasingly intertwined with the city's urban sustainability strategy: the neighbourhood's redevelopment has been promoted as an antidote to urban sprawl, where new ecological amenities and improvements are used to attract new higher income residents for high-density urban living.

But the Rainey neighbourhood case study also points to a thornier decoupling of environmental and equity goals from the city's Smart Growth (and to a lesser extent, New Urbanist) agenda. While the need for affordable housing was initially identified in Austin's sustainably agenda, over time this has been weakened and is not directed towards particular communities. In recent years, the Rainey neighbourhood's transformation into a series of large-scale luxury high-rise residential complexes is presented as benefiting all city residents – even more modestly resourced households. Some proponents claim that adding these high-end housing units frees up other housing units further down the housing-income ladder. Of course, verifying this claim requires empirical research. What's clear in the Rainey neighbourhood case is that low-income residents were never going to be able to occupy the new, high-rise housing or the preserved and renovated bungalows.

A concern for and commitment to equity at a neighbourhood scale has remained elusive. Increasingly, the Rainey neighbourhood's historic role as home to a community of lower-income residents is seen as unrelated to the city's pressing need for affordable housing. City Council has not valued Rainey's historic homes for their affordability to low-income residents, but rather for their potential to be redeveloped into commercial space to serve nearby luxury high-density residential development. Moreover, in the early 1980s a majority of City Council members agreed that the city-owned land in the Rainey neighbourhood should include some non-market housing, but this housing was never built and it was not included in any of the bonds floated for the future redevelopment of the CBD. Even in the 2000s, efforts to produce

affordable housing for the neighbourhood failed when the city's density bonus programme neither targeted existing residents nor attempted to ensure ongoing affordability. Instead, the Rainey neighbourhood is seen as integral to the economic development of the CBD, enhanced by the improvement of its local environmental amenities. Social sustainability has, in essence, been dropped from Austin's sustainability agenda for the Rainey neighbourhood.

## References

- Agyeman, J. (2003). *Just Sustainabilities*. Boston: MIT.
- American Community Survey. (2014). *Austin, Texas 5-Year Estimates, Household Income, T56A and B*. Social Explorer. Accessed 15 November 2016.
- American Planning Association. (2000). *Policy Guide on Planning for Sustainability*. New York: APA.
- American Planning Association. (2002). *Policy Guide on Smart Growth*. New York: APA.
- Anguelovski, I. (2015). From Toxic Sites to Parks as (Green) LULUs. *Journal of Planning Literature*, 31(1), pp. 23–36.
- Austin American-Statesman. (2000). A Center-City Test. *Austin American-Statesman*, 10 January.
- Barna, J. (2002). The Rise and Fall of Smart Growth in Austin. *Cite, Rice Design Alliance*, 53, pp. 22–25.
- Breyer, R.M. (1996). Urban Housing with a Lake View. *Austin American-Statesman*, 28 November.
- Breyer, R.M. (1998). Pre-Sales Keep Condo Developers in Line with Market. *Austin American-Statesman*, 18 September.
- Bryson, J. (2013). The Nature of Gentrification. *Geography Compass*, 7(8), pp. 578–587.
- Busch, A. (2013). Building a City of Upper-Middle Class Citizens. *Journal of Urban History*, 39(5), pp. 975–996.
- Busch, A. (2015). The Perils of Participatory Planning Space. *Journal of Planning History*, 15(2), pp. 87–107.
- Campbell, S. (1996). Green Cities, Growing Cities, Just Cities? *Journal of American Planning Association*, 62(3), pp. 296–312.
- Cannon, S. (1989). *The Austin Convention Center Site Selection and Feasibility Analysis*. Austin, AHC.
- Carney, H. (2011). Priced Out in the Shadow of Downtown Austin. *Texas Observer*, November.
- Checker, M. (2011). Wiped Out by the Greenwave. *City and Society*, 23(2), pp. 210–229.
- City of Austin. (1968). *Area Analyses: Austin Community Renewal Program*. Department of Planning. Austin, AHC.
- City of Austin. (1977). *Downtown Austin: Its Decline and Potential For Revitalization*. Huffman & Company. Austin, AHC.
- City of Austin. (1978). *Strategies For the Economic Revitalization of Central Austin*. Department of Planning. Austin, AHC.
- City of Austin. (1980). *Development Alternatives For the Rainey Area*. Department of Planning. Austin, AHC.
- City of Austin. (1985). *Rainey Street Area Update*. Office of Land Development and Services. Austin, AHC.
- City of Austin. (1987). *Town Lake Park: Comprehensive Plan*. Parks and Recreation Department. Austin, AHC.
- City of Austin. (1989). *City Council Ordinance No. 890126: An Ordinance Adopting the Town Lake Park Comprehensive Plan*. Austin, COA.
- City of Austin. (2001). *Smart Growth Criteria Matrix*. Planning and Design Department Transportation. Austin, COA.
- City of Austin. (2005). *City Council Ordinance No. 20050407-063: An Ordinance Amending Section 25-2-739 of the City Code Relating to the Rainey Street Subdistrict of the Waterfront Overlay Combining District*. Austin, COA.
- City of Austin. (2007). *The Affordable Housing Incentives Taskforce Final Report*. Austin, COA.
- City of Austin. (2016). *Lakeside Apartments*. Available at: [www.hacanet.org/communities/lakeside.php](http://www.hacanet.org/communities/lakeside.php) [accessed 15 November 2016].
- Clark-Madison, M. (1999). A Change of Scenery. *The Austin Chronicle*, 16 July.
- Community Action Network. (1999). *Through the Roof*. Community Action Network. Austin.
- Curran, W. and Hamilton, T. (2012). Just Green Enough. *Local Environment*, 17(9), pp. 1027–1042.

## Transforming Rainey Street

- Dase, A. and Ward, R. (2000). *The Peculiar Genius of Rainey Street*. Austin, AHC.
- Dooling, S. (2009). Ecological Gentrification. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 33(3), pp. 621–639.
- Douthat, B. (1981). Condominium Tower Proposed. *Austin American-Statesman*, 16 May.
- Downtown Commission. (2003). *Rainey Street: Recommendations for Action*. Austin, AHC.
- Ellinor, B. (2013). *The Costs of a Growing City*. Master's thesis, University of Texas, Austin.
- Feit, R. (2012). The Ghosts of Developers Past. *Austin Chronicle*, 25 May.
- Garza, M. (1998). Tracking the MACC. *The Austin Chronicle*, 12 June.
- Gibbs, D. and Krueger, R. (2007). Containing the Contradictions of Rapid Redevelopment. In: R. Krueger and D. Gibbs, eds. *The Sustainable Development Paradox*. New York: Guilford Press, pp. 95–122.
- Guadalupe Neighborhood Development Corporation (2013). *What is a Community Land Trust*. Austin: GNDC.
- Hernandez, P. (1981). *An Experiment in Anti-economic Development in the City Core of Downtown Austin*. East Austin Chicano Economic Development Corporation, AHC.
- Keil, R. (2007). Sustaining Modernity, Modernizing Nature. In: R. Krueger and D. Gibbs, eds. *The Sustainable Development Paradox*. New York: Guilford Press, pp. 41–65.
- Kreps, M. (1979). Downtown Revitalization Plans Changed. *Daily Texan*, 14 November.
- Krueger, R. and Agyeman, J. (2005). Sustainability Schizophrenia or Actually Existing Sustainabilities? *Geoforum*, 36(4), pp. 410–417.
- Lees, L., Shin, H.B. and López-Morales, E. (2016). *Planetary Gentrification*. London: Wiley.
- Lillie, R. (1981). *Rainey Street*. Councilman Deuser's request for information on the City Council's 1980 action related to the Rainey Street area. Austin, AHC.
- Lowry, C. (1978). *What Are You Going to Do When They Run You Out?* Rainey Street Association, AHC.
- Marban, A. (1996). The Great Brown Hope. *The Austin Chronicle*, 28 June.
- Martinez, P. (1980). *Rainey Barrio Preservation Plan*. Rainey Area Neighborhood Association. East Austin Chicano Economic Development Corporation, AHC.
- McCann, E. (2007). Inequality and Politics in the Creative City-Region. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 31(1), pp. 188–196.
- McDonald, J. (2012). *Racial Dynamics in Early Twentieth-Century Austin, Texas*. Lanham, MD: Lexington.
- Miller, B. (2015). Sustainability For Whom? Sustainability How? In: D. Wilson, ed. *The Politics of the Urban Sustainability Concept*. Champaign, IL: Common Ground, pp. 107–116.
- Moore, S.A. (2007). *Alternative Routes to the Sustainable City*. Lanham, MD: Lexington.
- Mueller, E.J. and Dooling, S. (2011). Sustainability and Vulnerability. *Journal of Urbanism: International Research on Placemaking and Urban Sustainability*, 4(3), pp. 201–222.
- Novak, S. (2001). Foreclosure Ends Town Lake Condo Project. *Austin American Statesman*, 11 September.
- Oden, M. (2016). Equity: The Awkward E in Sustainable Development. In: S. Moore, ed. *Pragmatic Sustainability*. New York: Routledge, pp. 31–49.
- Osborne, J. (2003). City Urged to Rezone Historic Rainey Street. *Austin American-Statesman*, 16 October.
- Pearsall, H. and Anguelovski, I. (2016). Contesting and Resisting Environmental Gentrification. *Sociological Research Online*, 21(3).
- Portney, K. (2013). *Taking Sustainable Cities Seriously*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Rainey Street Neighborhood Association. (2000). *Rainey Street Neighborhood Redevelopment Strategy*. Austin, AHC.
- Real, D. (1979). Groups Voice Reservations About Austin's Revitalization. *The Daily Texan*, 26 April.
- Rivera, D. (1999). A Neighborhood Puts Itself Up For Sale. *Austin American-Statesman*, 1 July.
- Rosol, M. (2013). Vancouver's 'Ecodensity' Planning Initiative. *Urban Studies*, 50(11), pp. 2238–2255.
- Samuels, A. (2015). Affordable Housing Always. *The Atlantic*, 5 July.
- Slusher, D. (1986). Cookey Covets Rainey Street. *The Daily Herald*, 5 June.
- Swearingen, W. (2010). *Environmental City*. Austin: University of Texas.
- Swyngedouw, E. (2007). Impossible Sustainability and the Postpolitical Condition. In: R. Krueger and D. Gibbs, eds. *The Sustainable Development Paradox*. New York: Guilford Press, pp. 13–40.
- The Austin Chronicle. (1999). Past Planning Efforts. *The Austin Chronicle*, 16 July.
- The Community Economic Development Policy Research Project (1981). *Community Economic Development*. Community and Regional Planning Program. LBJ School, University of Texas Austin.

- Tretter, E. (2016). *Shadows of a Sunbelt City*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- Tretter, E. and Adams, M. (2012). The Privilege to Stay Dry. In: S. Dooling and G. Simon, eds. *Cities, Nature, and Development*. New York: Ashgate, pp. 187–206.
- Tretter, E. and Sounny, M.A. (2013). *Austin Restricted*. The Institute for Urban Policy Research and Analysis. Austin: University of Texas.
- US Census Bureau (2000). *Travis County, Total Population, Tract 11, Block Group 7*. Social Explorer. Accessed 15 November 2016.
- US Census Bureau (2010). *Travis County, Total Population, Tract 11, Block Group 2*. Social Explorer. Accessed 15 November 2016.
- Wilson, J. (1982). City Commits Land to Housing Project. *Austin American-Statesman*, 22 January.