

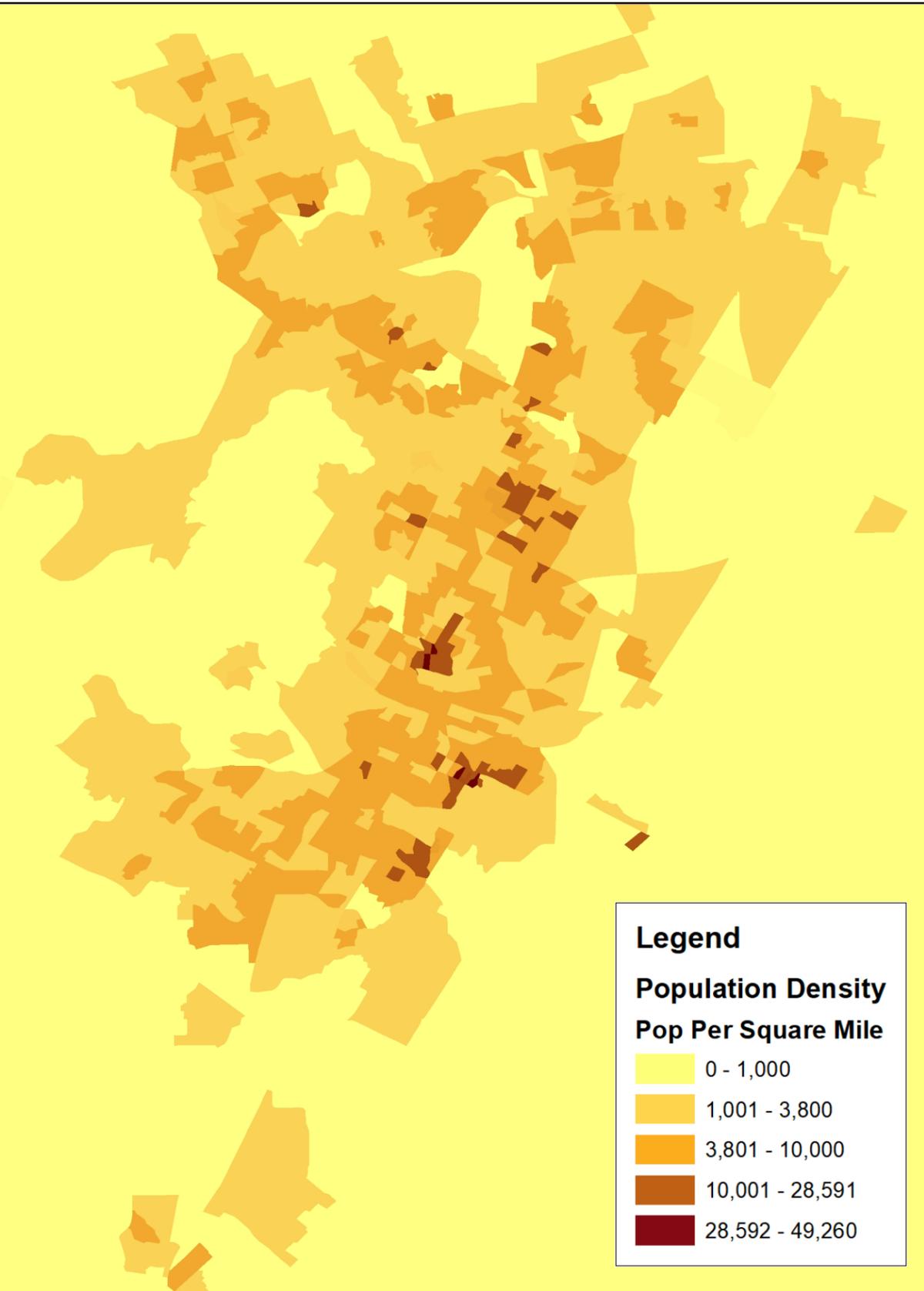
# Growing Weirder

Understanding Austin's Growth and Potential

## Housing + Transportation Affordability by Urban Form Across the Austin region

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# Three Austins

In this report, we examine the relationship between density and affordability

Affordability is often defined by the cost of housing. While housing is the most significant single household expense, transportation is second largest and therefore a significant component of true affordability. Transportation costs are primarily a function of location. Multimodal transportation options are more available in urban areas of higher density. In the Austin region, people can walk, bike, use transit, or take short car trips to their daily destinations primarily in dense urban areas.

We would expect those living in car-dependent, low density housing to spend more on transportation. The

map on the left shows urban, sub-urban, and rural portions of the Austin region as defined by standard density measures.

Our astonishing discovery is that today it is on average more affordable to live in the urban areas of Austin than in suburban and rural, not just in terms of transportation, but also housing costs. Urban Austinites spend 45% of the typical regional median income on housing and transportation. This number rises to 52% in sub-urban Austin, and 55% in the rural, least dense parts of the region. These figures challenge conventional notions of affordability.

## Average Housing + Transportation Costs as a Percent of Regional Typical Income in the Three Austins

	<b>H+T</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>T</b>
<b>Urban</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Sub-urban</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>21%</b>
<b>Rural</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>25%</b>

Many public policy decisions impact the amount of people realistically able to live in these three Austins. We

should make those with a better understanding of the housing + transportation affordability implications.

# Urban Austin

Places that are home to over 3,800 people per square mile

Numbers in black represent all urban areas, followed by particularly dense regions of 10,000-28,590 people per square mile and super urban areas home to over 25,000 per square mile.

People	Households
<b>735,659</b> 109,982 11,434	<b>272,582</b> 33,422 3,296

Average Housing + Transportation Costs as % of Regional Typical Income
<b>45%</b> 36% 39%

Renter-occupied households	% of households that rent
<b>154,813</b> 28,097 3,245	<b>57%</b> 84% 98%

% of city's renters	Average household size
<b>52%</b> 9% 1%	<b>2.7</b> 3.3 3.5

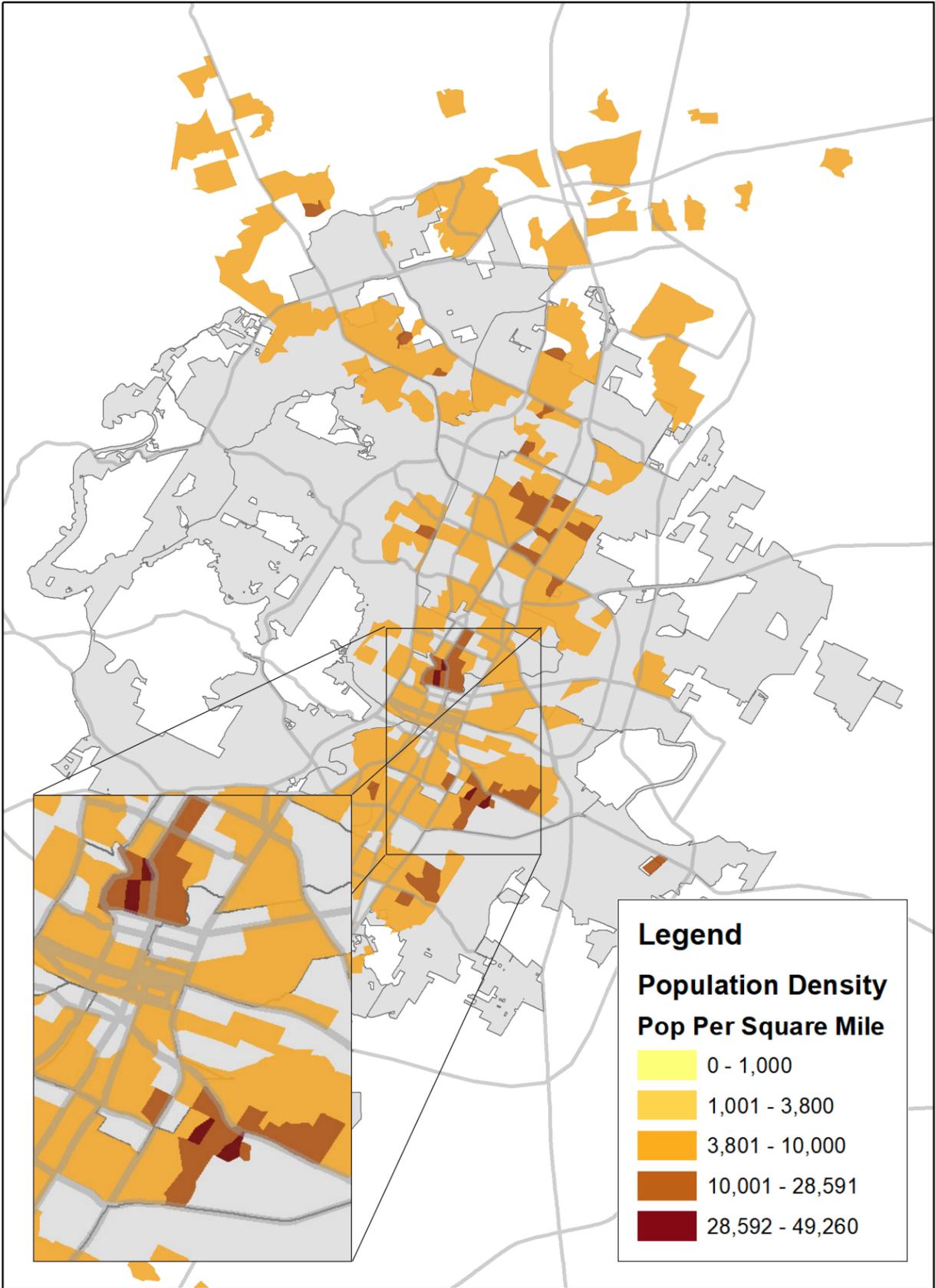
Total Vehicle Miles Traveled (millions)	VMT per capita
<b>5,206</b> 534 45	<b>7,078</b> 4,852 3,909

Total Annual CO2 emissions from household transportation use
<b>2,157,910</b> 215,205 15,923

CO2 emissions per capita	Total square miles
<b>2.93</b> 1.96 1.39	<b>118</b> 7.8 0.3

The darkest regions on the map (left) have the highest residential density in Austin, including sections of West Campus and Pleasant Valley. These fare the most green parts of our region, and perhaps of all of Texas, in terms of the greenhouse gas emissions from transportation - one of the elements of the climate change crisis most squarely a responsibility of local government.

In the coming decades, a substantial portion of Austin may graduate into areas of complex, mixed-use, mixed-income high density, but the extent to which many more Austinites of all income levels are allowed options for healthy, low carbon lifestyles will depend upon two as-of-yet undecided major initiatives: CodeNEXT and the 2045 Regional Transportation Plan.



# Sub-urban Austin

Places that are home to 1,000 - 3,800 people per square mile

People  
**672,614**

Households  
**251,433**

Average Housing + Transportation Costs as % of Regional Typical Income  
**52%**

Renter-occupied households  
**96,084**

% of households that rent  
**38%**

% of city's renters  
**32%**

Average household size  
**2.7**

Total Vehicle Miles Traveled (millions)  
**5,568,521,504**

VMT per capita  
**8,279**

Total Annual CO2 emissions from household transportation use  
**2,310,421**

CO2 emissions per capita  
**3.43**

Total square miles  
**348**

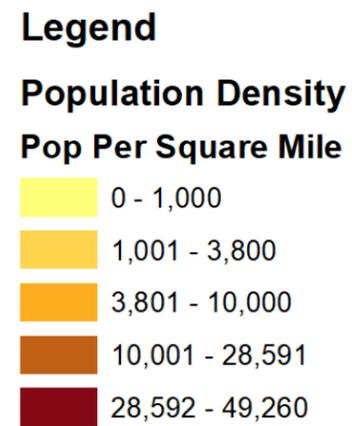
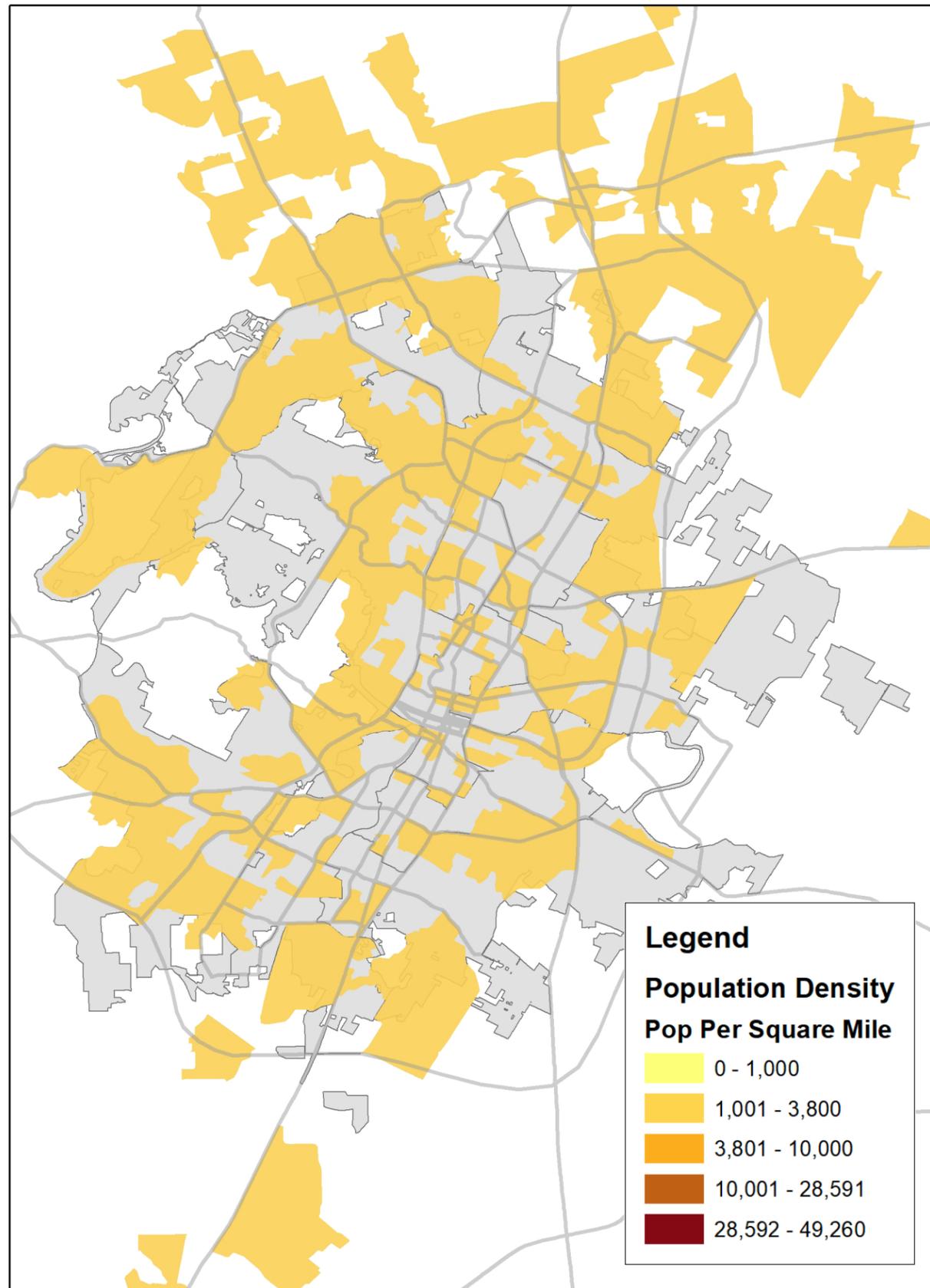
Sub-urban Austin is an economically diverse place, with low- and moderate-income neighborhoods alongside the expensive car-dependent neighborhoods of the hill country on the west side. All inhabitants of sub-urban Austin share a high cost of transportation.

A citizen would have to spend 21.47% of their income on transportation to live in sub-urban Austin, compared to 19.65% in urban Austin or 15.31% in super-urban Austin. Interestingly, sub-urban Austin is also more expen-

sive in terms of housing, with average households spending 30.6% of their income on housing compared to 26.2% in urban areas.

Sub-urban Austin also has smaller household sizes, higher carbon footprints, and more vehicle miles traveled than urban Austin.

Austin's sub-urbanites drive twice as much as residents of the very high density areas of West Campus and Pleasant Valley.



# Rural Austin

Places that are home to fewer than 1,000 people per square mile

People  
**592,217**

Households  
**207,080**

Average Housing + Transportation Costs as a % of Regional Typical Income  
**55%**

Renter-occupied households  
**96,083**

% of households that rent  
**23%**

% of city's renters  
**16%**

Average household size  
**2.9**

Total Vehicle Miles Traveled (millions)  
**5,236,638,780**

VMT per capita  
**8,842**

Total Annual CO2 emissions from household transportation use  
**2,186,908**

CO2 emissions per capita  
**3.69**

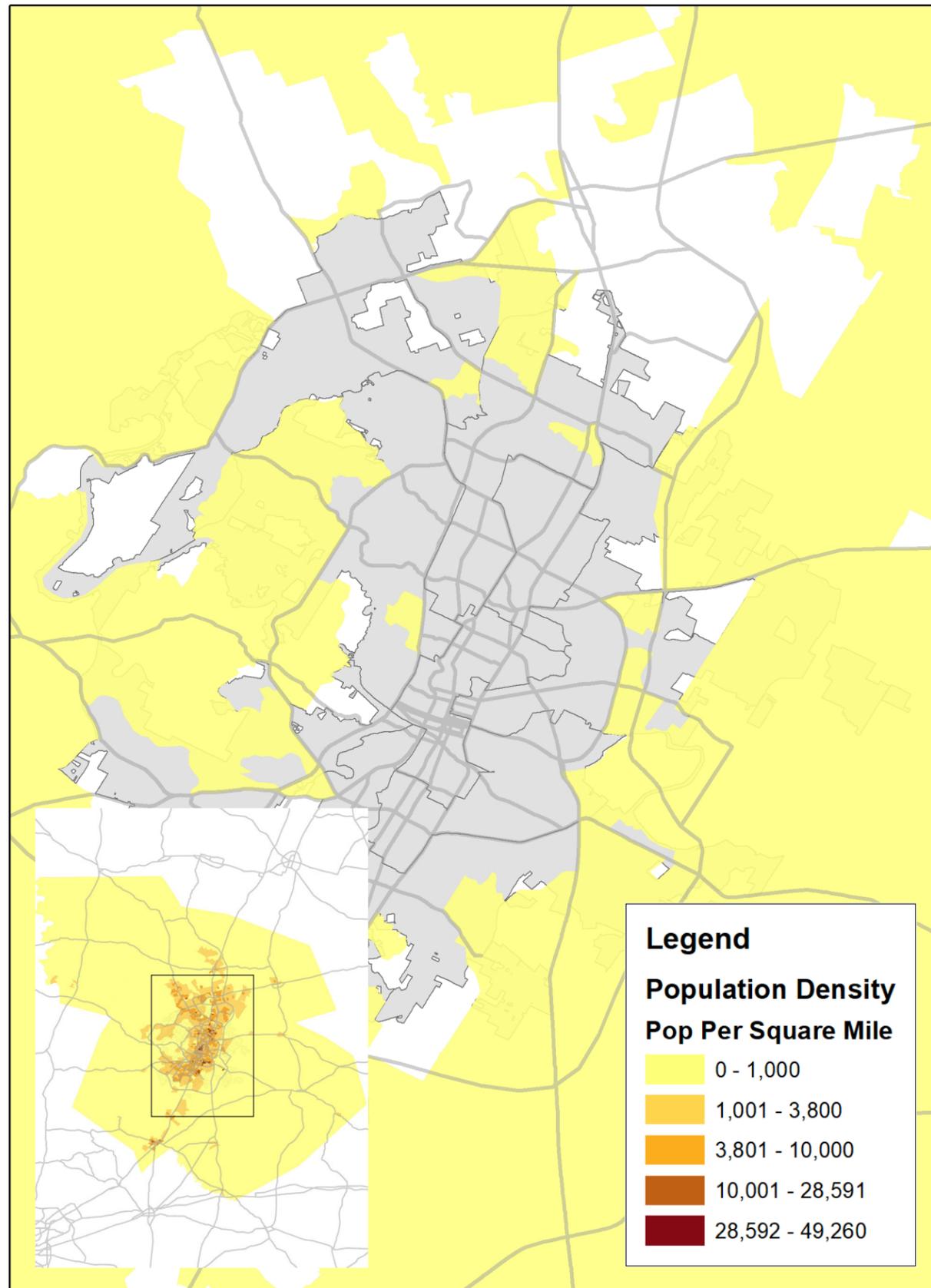
Total square miles  
**8,747**

Rural Austin has equivalent housing costs as sub-urban Austin, requiring roughly 30% of regional typical family income. However, rural Austin has the highest transportation costs at 25.19% of regional typical family income.

The proportion of the Austin metro area population who live in these very low density situations seems unique for Texas. Identical analysis was done on the Houston metro region, finding that 14% of Houstonians live in rural settings, compared to 30% of the residents of the Austin region.

Rural Austin drives the most and is responsible for the most carbon emissions per capita from household transportation. The costs of transportation are 65% higher for rural Austin than for the residents of the most dense part of the Austin region.

This perhaps is a significant explanation for why the Austin region has a much higher rate of vehicle miles traveled and traffic deaths than Houston and most other Texas metros.



**Legend**

**Population Density**  
**Pop Per Square Mile**

- 0 - 1,000
- 1,001 - 3,800
- 3,801 - 10,000
- 10,001 - 28,591
- 28,592 - 49,260

# CNT H+T Index

The data this report is based upon is readily available on-line for all to use.

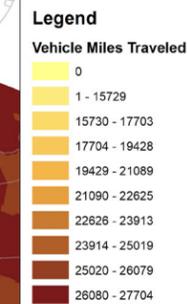
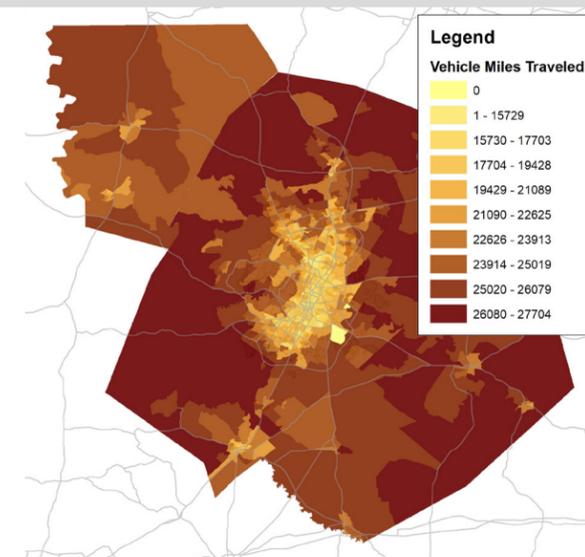
All of the maps and data in this report are derived from the Center for Neighborhood Technology's Housing and Transportation Index project. We believe this index is perhaps one of the most important and underused tool available on the Internet for urban planning, transportation, affordability, and environmental policies in American metropolitan regions.

The map to the left, enlarged on the next page, is the housing + transportation affordability map of the Austin region. Accounting for transportation as well as housing costs presents a dramatically different picture than many of the predominant narratives about affordability. For example, the map reveals no truly affordable neighbor-

hoods in Manor. Most affordable housing in the Austin region remains in the City of Austin, where location efficiency means dramatic reductions in transportation costs.

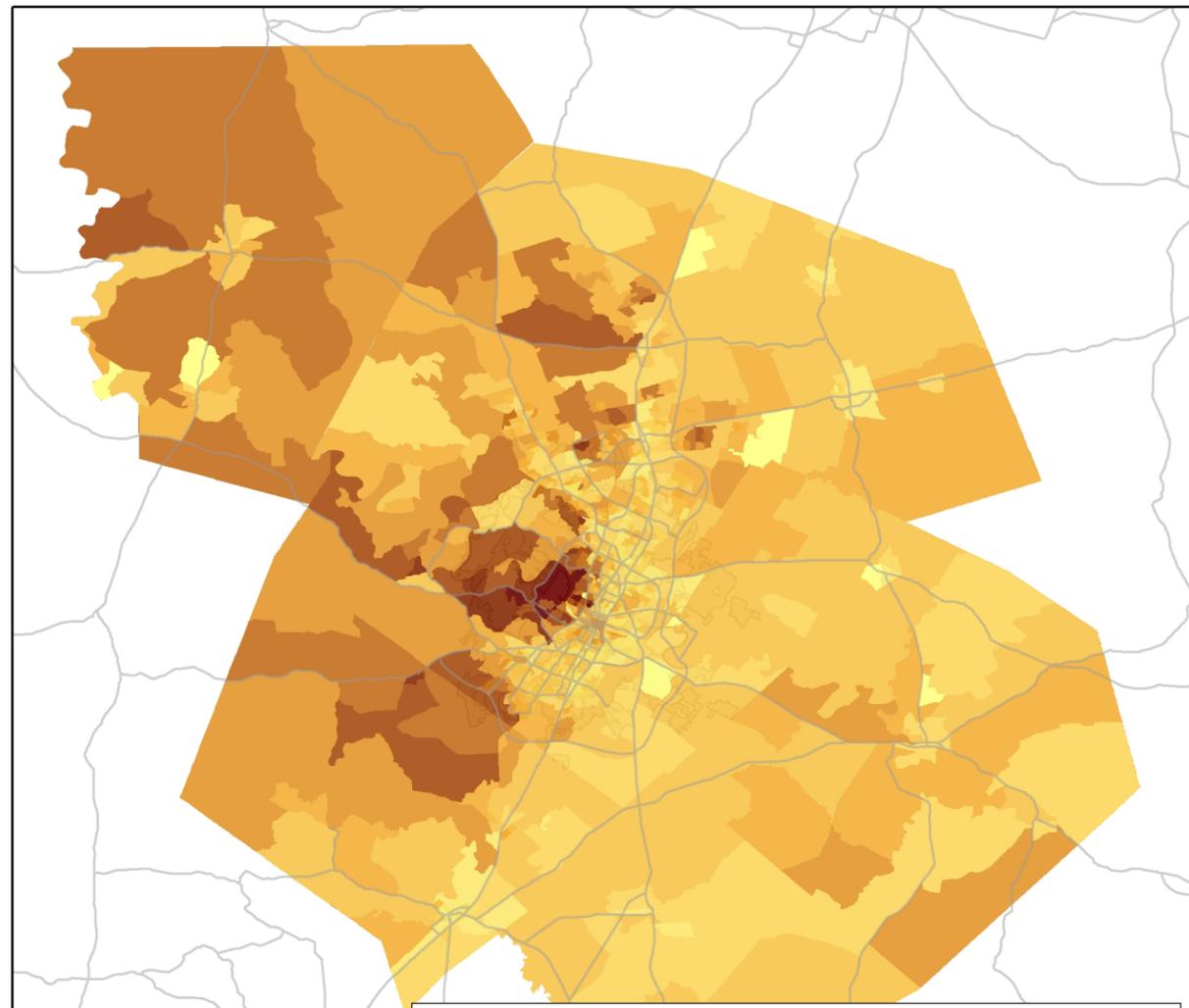
Location efficiency can and should be integrated in all housing and transportation-related public policies as well as private programs, such as websites related to realty and finding new housing. Regional growth policies such as CodeNEXT or the 2045 Regional Transportation Plan should fully integrate this view of affordability to give as many people as possible access to affordable housing options with better access.

Check out the CNT H+T Index yourself here: <https://htaindex.cnt.org>



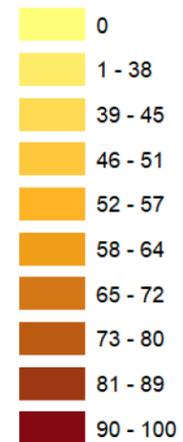
The amount people drive is dictated by where they live. It accounts for more than our work commutes, which make up only 15% of total trips. If citizens can't walk to a park, to dinner, or to retail stores from their house, they make another trip in the car.

We can reduce this reliance on driving by improving location efficiency through optimized housing, planning, development, and transportation policy.



## Legend

### H+T Costs % Income



## Definitions

### Density

Urban regions house over 3,800 people per square mile  
 Sub-urban are home to 1,000 - 3,800 people  
 Rural areas have a density of 0 - 1000 people

### Income

Regional Typical Household Income: \$63,437

The H + T Index represents the affordability experience of the 2 million people of the Austin region using this method: "the Regional Typical Household assumes a household earning the median income for the region, with the average household size for the region, and the average number of commuters per household for the region."

# Location-Efficient Solutions

Meaningful affordability will require myriad wise policy choices. Here are some.

Austin is experiencing an affordability crisis. Debate over potential solutions rages at city hall, neighborhood association meetings, and throughout the city. We support the following strategies for regional decision makers to consider to help the people of Austin:

## Location-efficient mortgages

As this report details, driving is expensive. Individual consumers feel the immediate financial impact, but the rest of society pays in congestion, reduced air quality, and the immeasurable suffering wrought by traffic injuries and fatalities, not to mention the heavy, and generally unaccounted for public costs.

Foregoing ownership of a single car allows Austinites to afford an estimated additional \$100,000 of a mortgage. Explicit policies enabling location-efficient mortgages would allow greater choice in housing location, allowing families to get by with just one car, and to instead invest the fuel and perishable asset budget into housing equity.

## Better Transit and More Transit Funding

People without cars still need to get around. People with cars deserve options for safe, multimodal transportation to reduce car trips. High-quality, frequent public transportation makes the city accessible and affordable to all, yet Texas radically limits its cities with poor transportation funding policies.

## Allowing more people to live in the City of Austin through CodeNEXT

The region is projected to grow by 699,552 people over next 10 years. Who will be allowed to live in the city, and thus benefit from the affordable multimodal transportation options, is determined by zoning.

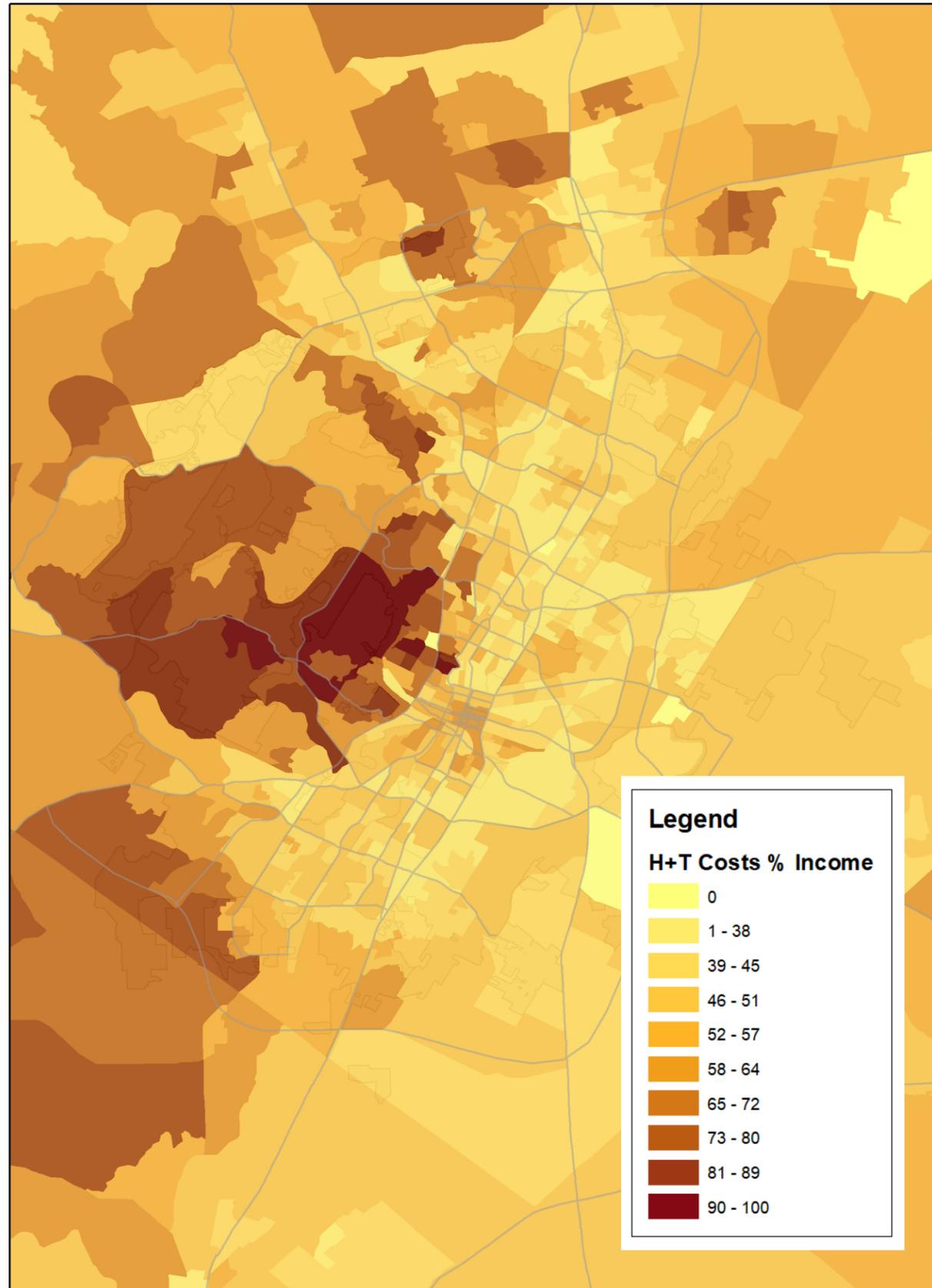
The current land use code allows 192,099 additional residents in the city's center; CodeNEXT Draft 3 increased this projection to 369,348. This is more closely examined in another of our Growing Weirder reports.

## Funding affordable housing through Tax Increment Finance Zones

As suggested by the Austin nonprofit Community Not Commodity and Council Member Greg Casar, allocating increased tax revenue towards the establishment and maintenance of affordable housing could provide one targeted funding source for improvements. We are working on a TIF proposal to fund light rail on Guadalupe integrated with affordable housing.

## Equitable Transit-Oriented Development

Transit-Oriented Development is recognition of the intersecting impacts of different aspects of land use. Our complementary report on an ETOD fund showcases the tremendous potential benefits of planning for equitable growth.



Growing Weirder is made possible by the generous contributions of these equitable sustainability focused entities:



**GREATER AUSTIN  
NEIGHBORHOODS**

**Blazek & Vetterling** | CERTIFIED  
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# Growing Weirder

## Understanding Austin's Growth and Potential



We can tell a new story of Texas metropolitan growth that empowers communities to engage in more productive conversations to build the future they want.

We can provide the analysis decision-makers and the public need to optimize our freedoms, our environment, and our quality of life. We can begin to shift our thinking to treat our growth as a shared responsibility and opportunity to complete our communities.

**We intend to substantially impact the outcomes of City of Austin's CodeNEXT, Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization's Regional Transportation Plan, Capital Metro's Project Connect, City of Austin Strategic Mobility Plan, state legislation, and various related public processes, such as local budgets and bond proposals.**

Displacement is real. Profit and abundance are real. Successful mixed-income, mixed-use community building is also real. We need to determine strategies and best practices that will minimize displacement, maximize affordable housing units in accessible and affordable locations, and achieve citizen priorities. The region's policy-makers and finance community need to learn the lexicon of location efficiency.

**We need a holistic set of understandings of growth, best practices for equitable policy making, and synergistic transportation policies to produce true affordability.**

Ultimately this work is intended to provide affordable access to a high quality of life to all the people of Austin.

We must measure our success by the ability of low income and disadvantaged people to live comfortably and access all the benefits of a modern city. We are trying to change the paradigm of growth, development, and transportation in their favor, but it will take time.

This report is part of a series of in-depth investigations on the various consequences of our major land use and transportation policy decisions. This is necessarily messy- our built environment impacts every aspect of how we live our lives in ways that aren't obvious and that we are only beginning to understand.

Other Growing Weirder reports took a closer look at environmental sustainability, how City of Austin policies limit the amount of people allowed to live in the City, and the potential for Equitable Transit Oriented Development strategies to build a more sustainable region.

# Growing Weirder

Understanding Austin's Growth and Potential



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