



## Editorial

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### Faulty tower

Houston needs a tool to protect its neighborhoods from inappropriate development.

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Led and influenced by wealthy developers, many of whom reside in zoned communities, Houstonians have repeatedly rejected all but the most rudimentary regulations on land use. Given the city's history, perhaps residents shouldn't be surprised or alarmed when inappropriate projects encroach on their neighborhoods.

But sometimes they are taken by surprise and become alarmed, and with good reason.

The most recent cause célèbre is a proposal to erect a 23-story mixed use building on the corner of Bissonnet and Ashby, near Rice University. The outsized project would literally tower over the houses that make up the upscale Southampton and Boulevard Oaks subdivisions.

Showing appropriate leadership, Mayor Bill White supports opponents of the tower. The mayor recognizes the desire of many Houstonians to move closer to their work, which will add density to the central city. However, White said in a statement to concerned parties that he believed the proposed project would impede traffic on two-lane Bissonnet, already congested during rush hours.

White said he would use "any appropriate power under the law to alter the proposed project as currently planned." The challenge going forward is that city officials have few tools at their disposal. The city asks developers to study how each project will affect traffic, but no law yet requires them to do so.

Influential opponents of the Ashby Tower have won considerable support at City Hall and are represented by prominent litigator Rusty Hardin. Their clout has led some Houstonians to charge favoritism and inequity.

Well, of course. Well-heeled, civically active voters wield more influence than low-income residents who might have less time or inclination to vote and take part in civic affairs. Human nature is not easily repealed, but that's not all bad in a democracy in which politicians are supposed to consider their constituents' concerns.

Chris Amandas, a leader of the neighborhood task force opposing the Ashby Tower, said the project might never be built because of physical limitations. The property is not large enough to accommodate the required construction materials and equipment.

Whatever the outcome, he said, the city needs some kind of system based on the building code to review projects' impact on traffic, particularly fire and emergency equipment. Such a system would give all of the city's residents a fair, uniform method to keep unwanted, inappropriate, damaging development from encroaching on their neighborhoods.

Houston probably will never have strict zoning, and no zoning proposal is on the table now. But the city needs a better way to protect all its neighborhoods, regardless of how much their residents make or how much influence they wield with elected officials.

BY THE WAY

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gary302 wrote:

Marinedaughter: I completely agree with you. When interviewed by the West U Examiner, one of the developers said that because of the employment growth in the Medical Center, if they didn't build this high-rise, someone else will. So they would rather destroy the neighborhood themselves and make the bucks than let someone else try to do it. So much for their claim of being sensitive to the neighborhood, what a couple of

