Join Us In Austin is an awareness campaign and web-based hub that raises awareness about Austin and encourages new neighbors with grit, humor and humility to join the community. Join Us is a response to foreclosure that seems most effective long term: bringing new residents into Austin.

Austin is a fulfilling community for residents who appreciate wide porches, vibrant gardens, transit access and affordable housing. The foreclosure crisis has left empty or endangered homes scattered across many blocks, waiting for the market of potential buyers who want to join a neighborhood.

Filling these properties can help stabilize blocks, fortify property values and inspire pride in a historic community. Our goal is to attract and secure appropriate new Austin residents, using a tight budget and an easily maintainable campaign and website.

Join Us In Austin will inspire these potential neighbors to join the community, not usurp it. They’re tough but ready to settle down. Join Us will portray an honest taste of Austin: both the challenges and opportunities.

**CAMPAIGN**

The Join Us In Austin campaign will help raise awareness about Austin throughout Chicago, both to people looking to buy and planting the seed in the minds of others who might consider Austin in the future.

The campaign could include:
- Chalking in busy neighborhoods
- Advertisements on the train
- Stickers
- Pre-stamped postcards
- Mobile sno-ball truck bringing the messages of Join Us In Austin to elsewhere in the city.

**WEBSITE**

Enticed by stickers and signs all over Chicago, you ask: where’s Austin? The website provides historical context, news and an introduction to the neighbors.

Next, the events calendar and a map of destinations, with ideas about what to see and do, including walking tours created from the stories of residents.

Finally, Join Us In Austin guides your move. Rent for a weekend to try out the neighborhood, or learn about purchasing a home, short-sale or foreclosure, and get tips from Austin residents.

**Additional Features**
- Find and connect with diverse residents through profiles of neighbors.
- An introduction to living in Austin including types of homes, areas, challenges and assets makes it easy to explore.
- Suggestions and tips from neighbors at every step along the way provides detailed information, straight from the source.
IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Join Us In Austin was created to be implemented on a tight budget, with manageable maintenance.

Team conducts interviews with Austin neighbors to produce content including tips, history and “meet the neighbors” page.

- Expenses
  - $300 — appreciation gifts
  - Time
  - 2.5 months

Confirmation of home buying advice with real estate agent and lawyers.

- Expenses
  - $50 — appreciation gifts
  - Time
  - 1.5 months

Synthesis of interviews and writing, producing and editing web content based on Austin neighbors.

- Expenses
  - $0
  - Time
  - 2 months

Website development and testing. If possible, web developer will be an Austin resident.

- Expenses
  - $800 — fees
  - $15/year — hosting
  - $100/year — server space

Time
- 2-3 months

Finalize and secure marketing platforms, print materials and prepare for distribution.

- Expenses
  - $700 — fees & print costs
  - Time
  - 1.5 months

Launch website and marketing campaign. Monitor progress.

Annual content update with neighborhood survey and interviews.

- Expenses
  - $0
  - Time
  - On-going

Prepare for campaign to raise money for Austin snowball truck.

- Expenses
  - $0-3000 — fund raised
  - Time
  - On-going

Teams
- Expenses
  - $1965 — total cost for start-up and 1 year of operation
  - Time
  - Approximately 5 months from start to launch, plus minimal time for annual upkeep

- Expenses
  - $115 — annual operating cost

Costs:
- $2500
We are grateful to the residents of Austin, who welcomed us into their homes, yards, churches and gardens, and shared openly and generously their knowledge and passion for their community.

### June
- Team Kick-Off
- Attended Foreclosure Prevention Workshop
- Secondary Research
- Attended Midway Park Neighborhood Yard Sale
- Tour of neighborhood

### July
- Attended services at St Martins
- Phone interview with neighbors
- Storytelling walk with neighbor and property investor
- Interview with neighbor and activist
- Walking historic district and public amenities
- Porch conversations with neighbors
- Attended Austin Green Team garden tour

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**Secondary Research**

Through our secondary research, we explored programs to address foreclosure and neighborhood stabilization in Chicago and around the country. We also looked at responses to foreclosure, including artistic and political. We noticed that projects predominately focused on those who were foreclosed upon, with little focus on the neighborhood left behind. We also looked at neighborhood sharing, collaborative economies and new ways to build communities, including social media.

**Austin Visits**

Early visits to Austin by foot, transit and car allowed us to explore the space and character of the neighborhood. We held casual conversations with residents on porches, street corners, at yard sales and at church. We were struck by the relative density of Austin, the distribution of empty homes on many blocks and the openness of neighbors.

We toured the community on our own, with neighbors and even on the Austin Green Team Garden Tour. The neighbors we met had a few things in common: a desire to do their own hard work, a sense of humor and a love of their neighborhood. We took note of the infrastructure assets, including the density of homes, access to transit and historic character.

**Austin Neighbor interviews**

Once we had begun to immerse in the landscape of Austin, we conducted in-depth interviews with neighbors we had met on visits or through Everyblock. These conversations led to more events and more conversations. We heard about the impact that foreclosure had on neighboring homeowners’ property values, their pride in their community and the investments they made (including purchasing short sale homes) to help stabilize their neighborhood. We also toured the neighborhood with residents, giving us a clear view on the challenges of having vacant homes on a block.
Systems holding back progress
Throughout the neighborhood, we saw how the current systems were stalling opportunities for new buyers to come in and stabilize at-risk homes. Complexities of financing, inspection and demolition thwarted potential new neighbors.

Insights to build on
A sample of key insights from research:
- An endangered home has a localized impact on an otherwise stable block
- Austin residents are persistent and plant deep roots — they’re not going to fly off tomorrow.
- Perceptions of Austin from the outside don’t reflect daily life.

Potential project directions
These insights led us to four different project directions to consider:
- Help me sell my home (before it’s too late) for Austin residents.
- Make Austin an option for potential homebuyers
- Run naked through my living room to help Austin neighbors realize their challenges and opportunities.
- Make it possible for me to invest my money in Austin and help stabilize my own neighborhood.

Goals and final direction
Based on user testing feedback from Austin neighbors, residents and potential home buyers, we pursued an approach that focused on raising awareness about Austin and made it easier for new residents to purchase homes in Austin, with a focus on building a community among current and potential neighbors.

While the direction we selected was less adventurous than some of our interim concepts, we set a goal of proposing something that could be done on a tight budget, required minimum maintenance and would highlight Austin as an option for people in Chicago. Join Us In Austin is a platform for Austin to grow as a community of neighbors ready to welcome the right new member: committed, involved and persistent, just like the long history of Austin residents.
CAMPAIGN: SIDEWALK CHALKING
CAMPAIGN: SNOW CONE TRUCK
WEB SITE: WIREFRAMES
WELCOME

On behalf of the community of Austin, welcome! We’re glad you’re here and are excited to share our neighborhood with you. Located on Chicago’s west side, Austin is home to historic architecture, beautiful parks, stunning churches, and wonderful neighbors. We hope you’ll use this site to explore our rich history, meet some current residents, plan to visit us for an upcoming event, and learn more about how to join our community.

Please make yourself at home!

EXPLORE

VISIT

JOIN

ABOUT
MEET THE NEIGHBORS

Austin is home to a diverse group of neighbors. Some have called Austin home for generations, while others are more recent additions to the community. They all have experiences and stories to share about what makes Austin unique. But don’t take our word for it—we think it’s best you hear it straight from the neighbors! Browse the introductions below and click the phone symbol to say ‘Hello’.

THE FIRST-TIME HOMEBUYER
When these neighbors were looking for their first home, they didn’t just want a house—they wanted to find a community they could contribute to. They needed a neighborhood with easy access to downtown and wanted a house big enough to start a family one day. They love the block they joined and have great advice about how to get involved.

THE FAMILY WITH KIDS
Austin’s big yards and convenient parks are great for these neighbors with school-aged children. The parents are active in the local schools and have the inside story on raising a family in Austin. They wanted a community feel for their kids and found it in a neighborhood that’s also convenient to work.

THE INVESTOR
These Austin residents are realizing the dream of picking their neighbors! They’re investing in rental properties, and welcoming new neighbor-approved residents to their area. They have lots of experience in the process of buying and remodeling many kinds of homes.

NEIGHBOR TIP:
“We won over our new neighbors at the block party with this easy muffin recipe.”

NEIGHBOR TIP:
“Our kids love playing at the nearby waterpark. Sign up early for swim classes!”

NEIGHBOR TIP:
“Get discounts on remodeling supplies by making bulk orders with other neighbors.”
EVENTS

OCTOBER

SUN | MON | TUES | WED | THU | FRI | SAT
---|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|-----
Oct 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7
11am Neighborhood Brunch
5pm Historic District Tour
8am-1pm Farmer’s Market
8am-1pm Farmer’s Market
8pm Garden Tour
9pm Potluck
14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20
21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25
6:30pm BBQ in the park
10/31/2011 7:00pm to 10/31/2011 10:00pm
Add event

NEIGHBOR TIP:
“Grab lunch at MacArthur’s after the farmer’s market, but be ready for a wait on Sundays!”

NEIGHBOR TIP:
“Parking can be tough on festival days- try the sidestreets off of Adams.”

NEIGHBOR TIP:
“Swing by the bakery on Madison to pick up something sure to impress at the potluck- I won’t tell.”

NEIGHBOR TIP:
“Don’t miss the Halloween block party! Prize for best costume.”

Download the Event Organizing Guide to ensure that your next event is a success!
WHERE CAN I RENT?

Find your perfect Austin home among these listings of properties currently available. Browse by location or search by the presets. Click the icon for full listing information.
HOW DO I BUY?

Select the type of purchase you are considering to see an overview of the necessary steps. Purchasing a home, especially a short sale or foreclosure, might not be a linear process. Each step will take you to a page with more information, including local referrals. For more information about the different sale types, see the comparison.

- general
- short sale
- foreclosure

Purchasing a short sale can be time consuming, but if you have time to wait, you might find a great deal! Compared with purchasing a foreclosure, it can be much easier to secure financing.

SECURE YOUR FINANCING
THANK YOU!

We would like to thank all of the members of the Austin community who welcomed us into their neighborhood.

We would also like to thank the Noun Project, particularly those designers whose work we’ve used:

Box Trolley Icon designed by Miguel Caldeira, from The Noun Project

Businessperson Icon designed by everyone, from The Noun Project

Hammer Icon designed by John Caserta, from The Noun Project

House Icon designed by Maurizio Pedrazzoli, from The Noun Project

Letter Icon designed by Samuel Green, from The Noun Project

Magnifying Glass Icon designed by The Noun Project

Money Icon designed by Nathan Thomson, from The Noun Project

Second Thought Icon designed by Dima Yagnyuk and Benjamin H Byron, from The Noun Project