



To: Mayor and City Council

Through: Dr. Eric A. Johnson, Assistant City Manager *EAJ*

From: Keith Mars, Director, Austin Development Services *KM*

Date: February 13, 2026

Subject: **Development Process Updates**

The purpose of this memorandum is to keep the City Council informed about improvements being made to the development process.

The Austin Development Services process is vital to both supporting City services and growing the City's tax base. As Austin enters its next chapter, mutual collaboration will be counted on more than ever to move this city forward. As we continue this work, the City's goal is to communicate that "**we are open for business.**" As part of reaching this goal, Development Services staff are implementing a series of actions designed to achieve the following:

- Provide greater clarity of the rules and processes
- Strengthen capacity by augmenting review staff and providing added assistance when workloads increase
- Improve the quality of plans submitted by the development community to ensure that everyone involved in the process are working towards a singular goal of development review efficiency

Collectively, these actions shall support the City as it works to grow the tax base and strengthen its competitive advantage as one of America's most dynamic cities.

Austin Development Services is coordinating with partner department leadership on the following actions which are effective immediately:

- **Recalibration of the City's [Technical Advisory Review Panel \(TARP\)](#):** Created in 2024, the Technical Advisory Review Panel (TARP) is a group of City staff and industry professionals that meets monthly to align development rules with City Council policies and recommend improvements or simplifications before rule changes move forward. In support of the referenced initiative, the City of Austin's Land Development Rules Administrator (LDRA) will work with the TARP to identify and leverage opportunities to enhance processes and procedures, drawing on the valuable experience gained over the last two years.

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- **Identification of Key Rules Impacting Housing:** For each criteria manual, the LDRA will work with stakeholders and partner departments to identify existing rules, administrative memorandums and other regulations that are not adopted as rules and that significantly affect housing construction. The rules identified will be scheduled for discussion by the TARP and/or its working groups. The LDRA will determine which rules require review and will collaborate with departments to establish a reasonable timeline for completion.
- **Holistic Review:** The LDRA and TARP will conduct a systematic review of the rules outlined above to determine whether each requirement should be retained, revised, or eliminated. This structured evaluation ensures that the rule framework remains relevant, effective, and valuable. It also establishes a formal process for assessing the ongoing costs, benefits, and impacts of each rule preventing outdated or unnecessary provisions from remaining in place without purpose. As part of this review, all language will be assessed for clarity, with a requirement that terms be written in plain, accessible language.
- **Prioritize Housing-Related Updates:** While moving through the review process and identifying opportunities for housing-related improvement, the TARP will give priority to these updates over other proposed changes. Emergency rules and those needed to implement City Council or legislative priorities will continue to receive timely attention.
- **Rulemaking Shifting to an Annual Cycle:** To allow space for initiation of these focused efforts, staff are pausing the rule adoption process effective immediately. Moving forward, except for rules related to transit system projects, emergency rules that are necessary for life safety or implementation of City Council or legislative priorities, rule adoption will occur once per year to provide for consistency and predictability in the development process. The City's objective is to establish an annual, transparent rulemaking process that promotes **predictability, efficiency, and transparency** in the development review system. The timeframe for annual adoption is to be determined and will be informed by the TARP.
- **Development Application Updates Shifting to an Annual Cycle:** To promote transparency and consistency for both staff and stakeholders, all development application changes will now follow an established annual cycle. This approach enables better planning and preparation, ensuring that updates are implemented in a coordinated and efficient manner. Exceptions to this cycle will be limited to those that apply to the rule adoption exceptions outlined above. The timeframe for annual adoption is to be determined and will be informed by the TARP.
- **Upcoming Code Amendments:** Staff will initiate a series of changes to simplify the City's development code, beginning with relocating non-zoning items currently in Section 25-2 to more appropriate sections. Additional amendments to further streamline the City's development code will be explored.
- **Third-Party Contracts:** Development Services staff are securing third-party contracts for citywide development-related review and inspection services to ensure efficient and scalable operations and high-quality community services when demand is high. These contracts will provide the flexibility to expand capacity when needed, supporting timely service delivery and upholding critical performance standards that Austinites depend on. This approach also advances affordability and fosters local economic development, helping keep essential services accessible. Development Services staff are collaborating with the Austin Financial

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Services Department to accelerate the issuance of a Request for Proposals by the end of the month, with the goal of finalizing a contract by April 30.

- **Possible AI Tool for Completeness Check:** From December 2024 to December 2025, approximately 85 percent of initial applications submitted were not complete, slowing down overall site plan review timelines. To work towards improving this metric, AI solutions to streamline and optimize a completeness check for faster, more efficient service are being evaluated.

Thank you in advance for your collaboration on this important effort. Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact Keith Mars, Director of Austin Development Services, at (512) 466-4598 or Keith.Mars@austintexas.gov.

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Jason Hadavi, City Auditor
Mary Jane Grubb, Municipal Court Clerk
Judge Sherry Statman, Municipal Court
CMO Executive Team
Department Directors