

AUSTIN LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE

Code Draft Preview
Spring 2017



CODENEXT

Our existing Land Development Code was written 30 years ago when Austin's population was half the size it is now, and it has become overly complex after being amended hundreds of times over the years to accommodate unforeseen issues. The Code is being updated to help us create the kinds of places we want, as identified in *Imagine Austin*, and to address critical issues such as diminishing natural resources, household affordability, and access to healthy lifestyles.

What sort of city do we want Austin to be?

In 2009, Austinites began a big-picture conversation about how to best tackle our toughest challenges, and to set a vision that would help guide our future. This multi-year process led to the successful adoption of a new citywide comprehensive plan called the *Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan*, which was adopted by Austin City Council in June of 2012.

“Austin has a true sense of place and culture. To be from Austin means something to people, conjuring images of Barton Springs, music, food, outdoor recreation...open-mindedness. It's a little grungy, a little hippie, and a little country all rolled into one.”

Imagine Austin Community Forum
Series #1 participant

COMPACT AND CONNECTED

Imagine Austin Core Principles for Action



Grow as a compact,
connected city

Imagine Austin Core Principles for Action



Grow as a compact, connected city



Integrate nature into the city



Provide paths to prosperity for all



Develop as an affordable and healthy community

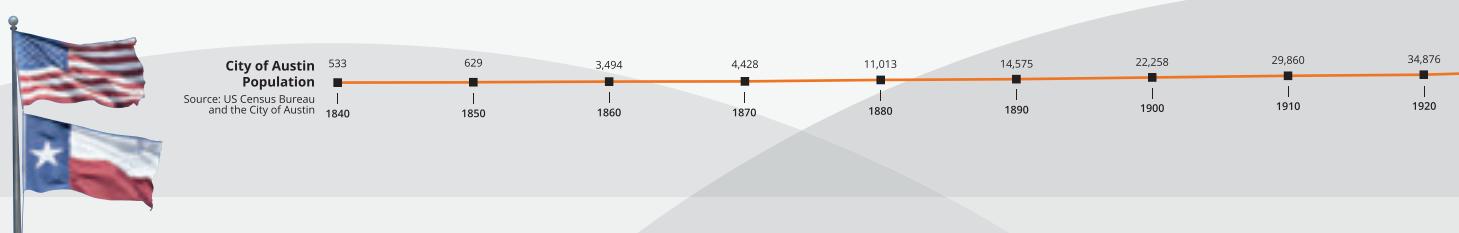


Sustainably manage water, energy and other environmental resources



Think creatively and work together

Learn more about Imagine Austin at
austintexas.gov/department/imagine-austin



Code Diagnosis: Top 10 Issues

A summary of major issues identified by the public, city staff, and the CodeNEXT team within the existing land development code.

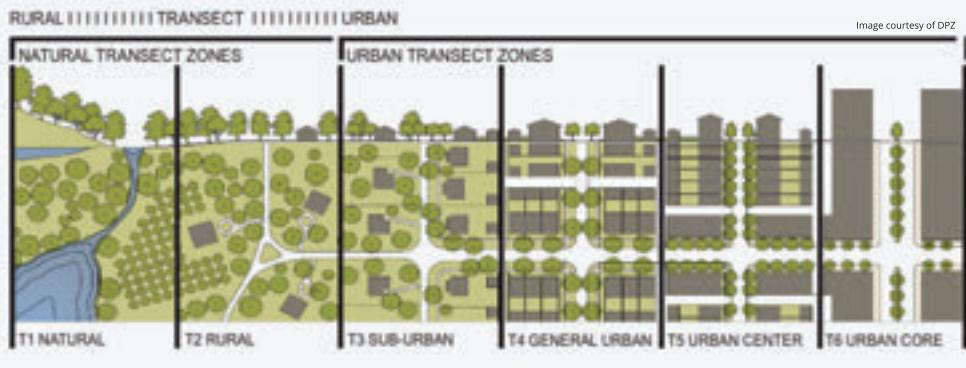
- 1** Ineffective Base Zoning Districts
- 2** Competing Layers of Regulations
- 3** Complicated "Opt-in, Opt-out" System
- 4** Lack of Household Affordability and Choice
- 5** Auto-Centric Code
- 6** Not Always In Line with Imagine Austin
- 7** Lack of Usability and Clarity
- 8** Ineffective Digital Code
- 9** Code Changes Adversely Affect Department Organization
- 10** Incomplete and Complicated Administration and Procedures

Read the full Code Diagnosis report available at austintexas.gov/codenext

Rethinking Zoning

The built environment can be categorized into different places that share common characteristics along a spectrum (or transect) from rural to urban. This classification is important because these different types of places require regulations that go beyond use, and consider if a design is appropriate for that specific context.

The Natural-to-Urban Transect: Framework for Form-Based Code
This diagram illustrates a continuum of place types from the most natural to the most urban from left to right.



Leverage **Use-Based Zones** to preserve and maintain

Leverage **Form-Based Code** to shape desired character

Form-Based Code

Austin will introduce Form-Based Code to help revitalize certain areas that have been identified as existing walkable urban development or intended to transform to this pattern.

Form-based zoning standards focus on a desired building form, and the definition and activation of public space. They go beyond simply limiting an undesired effect to actually prescribing critical aspects of building scale and form to shape public spaces and desired character.

CodeNEXT Primary Outcomes

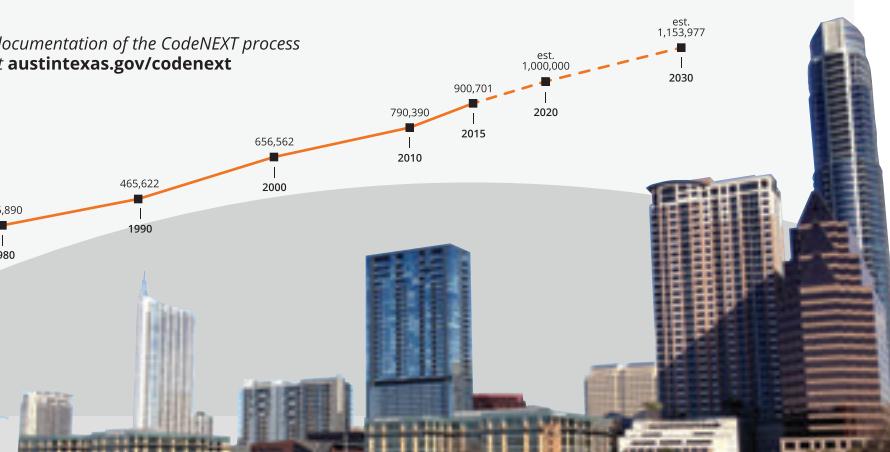
- 1** Increase effectiveness of zoning code by introducing form-based transect zones
- 2** Update, simplify and roll forward existing use-based zones
- 3** Improve organization of code and introduce graphics to demonstrate intent

CodeNEXT Process



Past reports and documentation of the CodeNEXT process can be reviewed at austintexas.gov/codenext

In 2013, the City engaged the help of both national and local experts to work with elected officials, staff, appointed representatives, and the community at large on how best to align our land use standards and regulations with the goals of *Imagine Austin*. From the beginning, this process—called “CodeNEXT”—placed as much emphasis on listening to people as it did on exploring the technical dimensions of the code.



CodeNEXT PRIORITIES

The opportunity to update our Land Development Code means more than making it simpler to use and understand; it means creating a framework to help improve our quality of life. The Code will play an important role in guiding the future growth of the city.

MOBILITY

COMMUNITY

ENVIRONMENT

HOUSING

PERMITTING

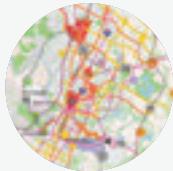


walkable+ CONNECTED

MOBILITY

Centers and Corridors

Challenge: By separating land uses, the old land development code encouraged sprawl and made it necessary for more people to get in their cars and drive to access amenities and work far from their homes.



Solution: The new code will be applied using a framework that encourages a mix of uses in centers and along corridors, supported by housing, giving more people the opportunity to live near transit and within walking distance of amenities.

Human-scale Street Design

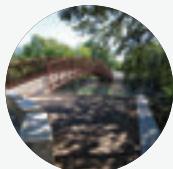
Challenge: Streets designed without adequate consideration for non-automobile users disregard the character of the places they connect or travel through and discourage the use of transportation options.



Solution: Everyone starts and ends their trip as a pedestrian. New requirements for street design include human-scale elements to support walkability, including sidewalks, street trees for shade, and frontage designs that reflect local character.

Urban Trail Connections

Challenge: Residents seek ways to enjoy the outdoors and live healthier lifestyles but lack access to recreational trails and active methods of commuting.



Solution: Under new requirements for subdivisions, site plans, and building permits, projects must connect to existing trails or construct new urban trails where applicable, according to the Urban Trails Master Plan.



I could easily get to my job in 10 or 15 minutes in my car but it only takes 30 minutes on my bike; I wake up energized and enjoy the physical activity and mental awareness."



Eiler Rodriguez
Barista and renter

Multi-modal Transportation

Challenge: Many Austinites want the option to get around the city without having to rely on an automobile, but the city lacks multi-modal infrastructure and services necessary to make doing so safe and convenient.



Solution: The new code incentivizes the provision of facilities that make using active modes of transport, such as walking, biking, and transit, easier and safer.



Walk to Shops and Services

Challenge: Small neighborhood shops found historically in urban core neighborhoods are discouraged by the current code, and are rare in newer neighborhoods located further from the urban core.



Solution: The new zoning code allows small neighborhood shops, in many more Austin neighborhoods, to provide these amenities within walking distance. It also reduces the number of parking spaces required for most land use categories to allow for better use of land.

See how the new Land Development Code is helping to shape the Austin we imagine.

austintexas.gov/codenext/mobility

COMMUNITY

vibrant + PROSPEROUS

“I want Austin to be Austin in five years. We create a lot of culture here, and there's a lot of innovation. If we squeeze people out, we'll lose that. Sustaining communities is really important.”



Amanda Lewis
Homeowner,
Community Organizer

Strengthen Neighborhoods

Challenge: Development is unpredictable for neighbors and challenging for property owners due to multiple rounds of review and various layers of regulation that were created to bolster inadequate base zones.



Solution: More refined zoning districts that better reflect the variety of conditions found in Austin neighborhoods and the integration of existing tools, such as Residential Design Standards, make development more compatible and predictable.

Enable Small Enterprises

Challenge: Small businesses face hurdles to build or expand due to land use conflicts and zones that disincentivize spaces suitable for small-scale enterprises in locations convenient to residents.



Solution: Small businesses are allowed by-right or with staff review in more zones in the new code, and standards have been adjusted to remove conflicts and encourage the provision of spaces suitable for small-scale enterprises.

Right-size Zoning

Challenge: Base zones lack adequate regulations to ensure that development is compatible with its context, resulting in the application of complex overlays and ad-hoc rezoning that add to the complexity of the code.



Solution: Regulations to ensure compatibility with the existing context and character have been embedded into base zones, including finer-grain regulations for building form, size, and placement, which also help minimize the need for additional overlays.

Diverse Places for People

Challenge: Existing code incentivizes low-density suburban neighborhoods and high-density urban corridors, but discourages the types of places that could exist between these two extremes.



Solution: By refining existing zones and adding a suite of place-based transect zones, the new code allows for the creation of more diverse places with a variety of housing types in a range of suburban and urban settings.

Anticipate Future Growth

Challenge: Over the last 30 years Austin has faced increasing population growth, much of which has been accommodated through sprawl that strains infrastructure and exacerbates traffic and mobility challenges.



Solution: The new code encourages compact growth along corridors and centers, allows neighborhoods to grow intentionally while maintaining their distinct character, and creates walkable places where new development occurs.

See how the new Land Development Code is helping to shape the Austin we imagine.

austintexas.gov/codenext/community



natural + RESILIENT

ENVIRONMENT

Water Stewardship

Challenge: The cycles and intensity of drought and rain events are changing. In order to be a resilient city, Austin needs new ways to use water creatively.



Solution: The new code encourages smarter use of water. For instance, developments can be more resilient by taking advantage of stormwater for irrigation, reducing pressure on Austin's water supply.

Flood Mitigation

Challenge: Projects that do not increase impervious cover are generally not required to provide flood mitigation, even if the site contributes to flooding downstream. This can perpetuate flooding problems.



Solution: Projects are required to contribute solutions to address downstream flooding. Providing flood mitigation for redevelopment reduces flooding and addresses longstanding problems due to insufficient flood controls or drainage.

Tree Protection

Challenge: Tree protection standards in the existing code are spread out between sections and are unclear about what to do in cases of conflicting rules.



Solution: Urban forest protection and replenishment standards are consolidated and located more prominently. Greater emphasis is given to tree and soil quality, preserving smaller trees, and tree survey and protection requirements for greenfield and urban sites.

Open Space and Parks

Challenge: As the urban core densifies, fewer residents have their own back yards. Existing parks and open spaces face additional pressure from a growing population.



Solution: New standards for large developments, and a new method for calculating open space, provide greater diversity and prominence of open space and parks, and promote expansion of trail networks and protected waterways.

Nature in the City

Challenge: Natural habitat for plants and wildlife in Austin have been lost as the city has grown.



Solution: A new palette of tools incorporates nature into the city using green roofs, green walls, stormwater collection and re-use, pervious pavement, and rain gardens to maximize the benefits of high-functioning landscapes.



Trees clean our air and water, lower hot summer temperatures, and are our first line of defense against flooding. It's important to plant new trees and help them grow, and more important to protect the ones we have inherited."



Thais Perkins

Executive Director, TreeFolks



See how the new Land Development Code is helping to shape the Austin we imagine.

austintexas.gov/codenext/environment

inclusive+ AFFORDABLE

HOUSING

More Diverse Housing Choice

Challenge: Two forms of housing dominate Austin: single-family houses and large apartment buildings. This lack of housing variety does not reflect Austin's diversity and contributes to growing affordability issues.



Solution: The new code allows, and sometimes requires, more diversity in housing types, such as duplex, multiplex, cottage courts, courtyard buildings, rowhouses, live/work spaces, and accessory dwelling units.

More Units By Right

Challenge: Housing supply has fallen well short of demand, due in part to cumbersome and unnecessary regulations. Much of the new housing that has been built caters only to specific market segments.



Solution: By allowing more units and incentivizing a range of unit sizes, the new code makes it easier to develop more housing to suit a range of space and economic needs while ensuring it is built in a context-sensitive manner to work within the character of the neighborhood.

Affordability Incentives

Challenge: The current mix of affordable housing incentive programs have provided some needed affordable housing units, but were individually crafted and are not keeping up with the changing market.



Solution: A new city-wide incentive framework that can be adjusted over time will help to stimulate the production of affordable homes.

Flexible Live/Work Places

Challenge: The existing code is based on an old model of large-scale office and industrial development, and limits the ability of small business owners to live and thrive in Austin.



Solution: A greater range of building types, such as live/work, and new uses that are compatible with neighborhoods, main streets, and light industrial areas, allow Austin to provide more housing and job choices.

Connected Communities

Challenge: New development occurs in pods of single-family or multi-family uses with few access points, weakening walkability, creating traffic bottlenecks, and isolating housing options.



Solution: Strengthening existing regulations for subdivisions, including street, sidewalk, and trail connectivity, and encouraging a diverse mix of housing types, creates development that connects with surrounding communities and improves walkability.

“ A lot of musicians are in group living conditions... four people in a house. And then they have to get studio space. People make a lot of sacrifices to do what they're doing, barely getting by.”



Thomas Echolz
Musician and renter



See how the new Land Development Code is helping to shape the Austin we imagine.

austintexas.gov/codenext/housing

PERMITTING

streamlined + USER-FRIENDLY

Clearer Zoning Districts

Challenge: Multiple layers of supplemental regulations that compensate for inadequate base zones result in confusing rules, making it difficult to implement and predict the character of new development.



Solution: Complete, predictable development standards and compatibility regulations are embedded within zones. Robust base zones allow overlays to be simplified or eliminated, reducing complexity.

Fine-Tuned Uses in Zones

Challenge: Regulations that are too general, and therefore unpredictable, have required conditional overlays to further regulate allowed uses and standards, making it difficult to understand the intent of a specific zone.



Solution: Zoning categories are no longer qualified by the terms "less restrictive" or "more restrictive." Distinct zoning categories with more refined use regulations and development standards incorporate the most frequently requested conditions.

Site Planning Process

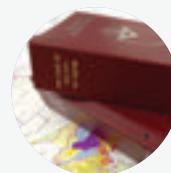
Challenge: Current planning processes emphasize either small projects, such as single-family homes, or large commercial projects, and do not work well for fine-grained infill projects at neighborhood scale.



Solution: A new simplified site plan review process provides faster review for projects with 3 to 9 units, which will increase feasibility and, potentially, affordability.

Simplified Permitting

Challenge: The old code includes permitting procedures that are incomplete and hard to follow which makes them difficult for staff and the public to understand and apply.



Solution: Permitting processes and procedures have been updated to reflect current City practice and State law, and, where necessary, they have been simplified, streamlined, and reorganized to ensure consistency and ease of use.

Organized Graphic Code

Challenge: The existing code is text heavy and lacks graphics, making the regulations difficult to understand.

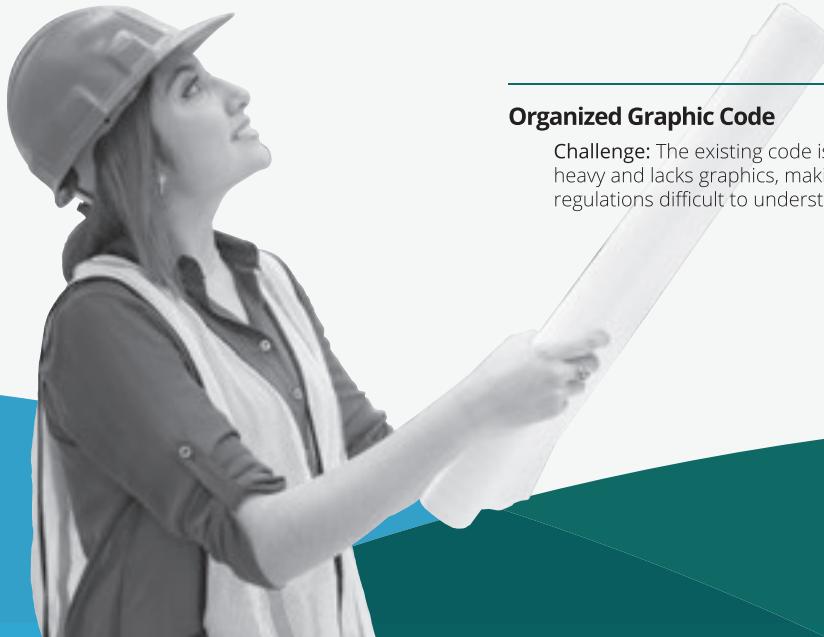


Solution: Regulations are more straightforward and arranged within a clear graphic layout and labeling system that makes it easier to understand and use.

“ The code shouldn't stand in the way. It should be neutral, so that those who are engaged in the community, trying to inspire, be inspired, can excel at those things and allow it to happen.”



Scott Ginder
Principal/Founder, Forge Craft
Architecture + Design



See how the new Land Development Code is helping to shape the Austin we imagine.

austintexas.gov/codenext/permitting

anatomy of THE CODE



What it looks like:

The code document has been designed to make regulations easy to understand and the document clear to navigate. Strong headers and footers explain where you are inside the document. A Table of Contents is included in each new section. Graphics and illustrations visually explain regulations, and indenting, section breaks, and labeling add clarity.



The existing code document lacks clear visual hierarchy and graphic illustrations.

“As an architect, I am going to implement what we decide on as a community on a day-to-day basis.”

CodeNEXT Listening Session participant

How it's organized:

Relocated under a different title number, an extensive reorganization of the Land Development Code elevates community priorities, consolidates procedures, and introduces a hybrid zoning code with new form-based standards.

Title 23

Introduction 1	<i>General process and procedures such as noticing, public hearings, variances, and special exceptions</i>
Administration and Procedures 2	<i>Standards that regulate and/or protect elements that are important to Austin</i>
General Planning Standards for All 3	<i>Standards to promote an attractive, efficient, and livable community</i>
Zoning Code 4	<i>Technical and legal requirements for subdividing property and site plans</i>
Subdivision 5	<i>Requirements for the submittal and review of Site Plans</i>
Site Plan 6	
Building, Demolition and Relocation Permits and Special Requirements for Historic Structures 7	
Signage 8	
Transportation (Mobility) 9	<i>Provisions to promote Complete Streets to serve all users and integrate roadways into the context of the built environment.</i>
Infrastructure 10	
Technical Codes 11	



how the CODE WORKS

Along with streets, sidewalks, public spaces, and natural areas that comprise the city's public realm, the Land Development Code regulates certain aspects of the thousands of individual lots and buildings that make up the city's private realm.

Example: Reinforcing an existing Neighborhood Main Street

New zoning tools intentionally craft and cultivate special places that enliven neighborhoods and strengthen their unique qualities and character.

*See next page
for description
of transect zones
(T3-T6)*



AUSTIN LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE

Planning requirements that embed our shared values and shape healthy communities.



See Code Draft Chapter 3 for Affordable Housing



See Code Draft Chapter 3 for Parkland Dedication, Urban Forest Protection and Replenishment, Water Quality

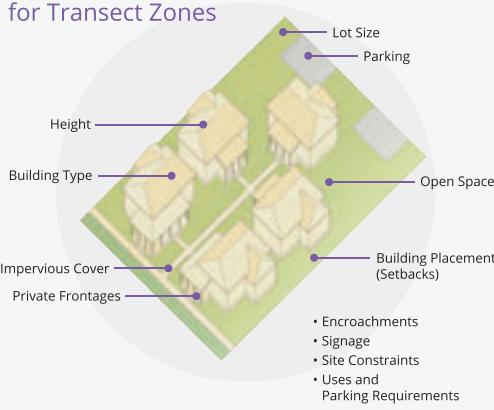


See Code Draft Chapter 9 for Transportation

transect zones AT-A-GLANCE

The transect zones reflect the community's vision for implementing the intent of *Imagine Austin* to strengthen or create walkable places. These standards are intended to ensure that proposed development is compatible with existing and future development on neighboring properties, and produces a walkable urban environment of desirable character.

Detailed Standards for Transect Zones



T3

LESS URBAN

T3 NE.WL	T3NE	T3N.DS	T3N.IS	T4N.IS*	T4N.SS*	T4MS*
Building Height Up to 2 Stories	Building Height Up to 2 Stories	Building Height Up to 2 Stories	Building Height Up to 2 Stories	Building Height Up to 2 Stories	Building Height Up to 2 Stories	Building Height Up to 3 Stories
Building Types Wide House Long House Duplex: Side-by-side ADU	Building Types Wide House Duplex: Side-by-side ADU	Building Types Small House Wide House Duplex: Side-by-side Cottage Corner Cottage Court ADU	Building Types Cottage House Small House Duplex: Stacked Wide House Duplex: Side-by-side Cottage Corner Cottage Court ADU	Building Types Cottage House Small House Duplex: Stacked Wide House Duplex: Side-by-side Multiplex: Medium Cottage Court ADU	Building Types Cottage House Small House Duplex: Stacked Wide House Duplex: Front-and-back Wide House Duplex: Side-by-side Multiplex: Medium Cottage Court ADU	Building Types Rowhouse: Medium Live/Work Main Street ADU

T4

Building Types

Small House Form



Medium House Form



Missing Middle Housing is a range of multi-unit or clustered housing types compatible in scale with single-family homes that help meet the growing demand for walkable urban living. These types provide diverse housing options along a spectrum of affordability, including duplexes, multiplexes, and cottage courts, to support walkable communities, locally-serving retail, and public transportation options.

About Building Types

Building types are based on a combination of their form and use. They help define the physical character that sets one neighborhood apart from another and reflect an area's scale, density, and walkability.



T5

T6

► MORE URBAN

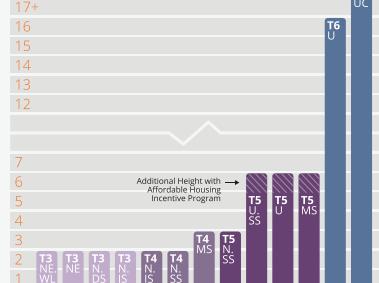
T5N.SS*	T5U.SS*	T5U*	T5MS*	T6U	T6 Urban Core
Building Height Up to 3 Stories	Building Height Up to 6 Stories	Building Height Up to 6 Stories	Building Height Up to 6 Stories	Building Height Up to 16 Stories	Building Height Unlimited Stories
Building Types Multiplex: Medium Multiplex: Large Rowhouse: Medium ADU	Building Types Rowhouse: Large Courtyard Building Low-Rise Mid-Rise ADU	Building Types Rowhouse: Large Courtyard Building Low-Rise Mid-Rise ADU	Building Types Main Street Live/Work Mid-Rise	Building Types Main Street Mid-Rise High-Rise/Tower	Building Types Mid-Rise High-Rise/Tower

* Includes an "Open" sub-zone which has the same building form regulations but allows for a more diverse mix of uses.

These diagrams demonstrate the relative building form and street character achievable within each transect zone.

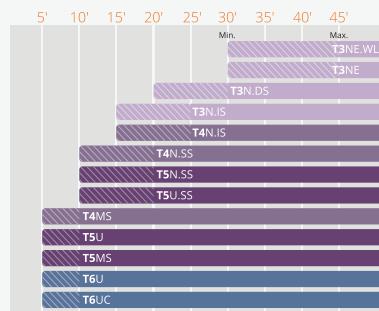
Each transect zone allows multiple building types, which may vary based on lot size, use, or sub-zone.

Comparing Transect Zones



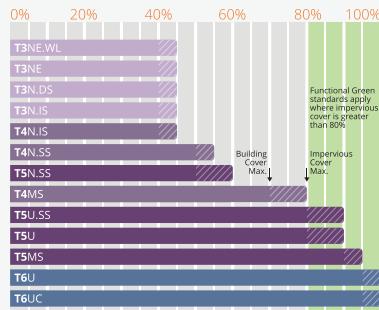
Building Height

Building height limits preserve community character and ensure smooth transitions between zones to protect neighborhoods and encourage walkability, while focusing high-density development in urban cores.



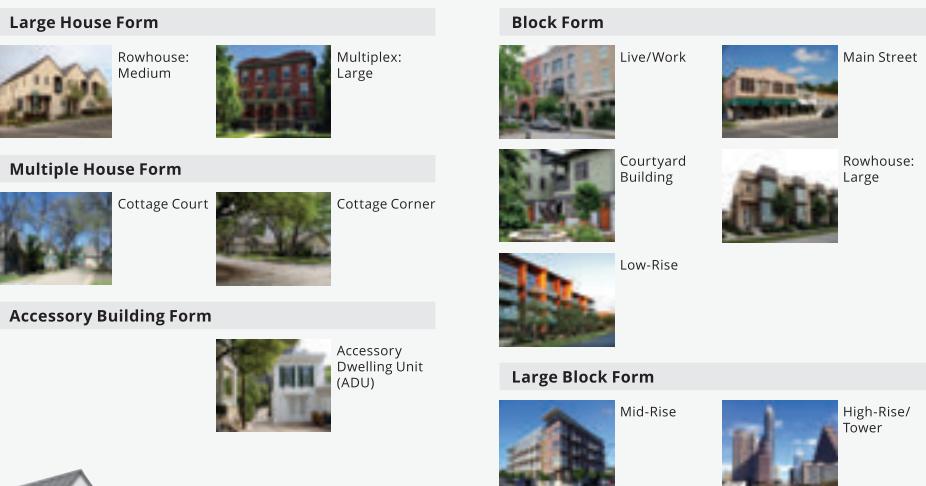
Front Setback

Setbacks are defined as the mandatory clear distance between a lot line and a building. In addition to side and rear setbacks detailed in the code, front setbacks shape the character of a street or neighborhood.



Building Cover / Impervious Cover

Building cover and impervious cover maximums protect watersheds and allow for trees and open space within neighborhoods. In developments that exceed 80% impervious cover, "functional green" standards apply to site and building design with the purpose of bringing nature into the urban environment, improving water quality and drainage, and reducing heat island effect.



non-transsect zones + OVERLAYS



Non-transsect zones are consolidated and refined, and will continue to be utilized primarily in suburban areas.

Other Zones

Zone	Zone
Agricultural	North Burnet/Gateway
Aviation Services	Open Space
Development Reserve	Public
East Riverside Corridor	Planned Unit Development

Overlay Zones

Standards for overlay zones are intended to ensure that proposed development is compatible with existing and future development within unique parts of the city that have a particular character or open space considerations.

- Barton Springs
- Capitol View Corridor
- Downtown Civic Spaces
- Hill Country Roadway
- Historic Landmark
- Historic Area
- Lake Austin
- Neighborhood Plan
- Planned Development Area
- University Neighborhood Overlay
- Waterfront

Low to Medium Intensity Residential

Zone	Uses / Intensity	Similar to
Rural Residential	Single Family Detached	RR
Very Low Density Residential	Single Family Detached	SF1
Low Density Residential	Single Family Detached	SF2
Low to Medium Density Residential	Single Family Detached, Duplex	SF3, SF4B
Low to Medium Density Residential - Small Lot	Single Family Detached, Duplex	SF4A

Medium to High Intensity Residential

Zone	Uses / Intensity	Similar to
Medium Density Residential	Duplex/Townhome 12 units/acre	SF5, SF6
Medium to High Density Residential	Multi-Family + residential services 18 units/acre	MF1, MF2
High Density Residential	Multi-Family + residential services 24 units/acre	MF3, MF4
Very High Density Residential	Multi-Family + residential services 54 units/acre	MF5, MF6
Manufactured Home Park	Mobile Home Park(s)	MH

Restricted Commercial

Zone	Uses	Similar to
Neighborhood Commercial Sub-Zone Limited, Open	Limited retail, office, restaurant, local services. Open also allows residential up to 12 units/acre	NO, LO, LR
Local Commercial Sub-Zone Limited, Open	Limited retail, assembly service, office and medical, excluding uses such as alcohol sales, bars, auto sales/repair, restricted services, storage. Open also allows residential up to 18 units/acre	GO

Retail and Office Commercial

General Commercial Sub-Zone Limited, Open	General commercial, entertainment, and services including auto and service type uses not allowed in Local Commercial zone. Open also allows residential up to 36 units/acre	GR
Regional Commercial	Similar to General Commercial, with added allowed intensity. Slight restrictions on uses, commensurate with added intensity.	new

Mixed-Use Commercial

Commercial Core	A variety of retail, restaurant, employment, civic, medical, office, mixed use.	DMU
Downtown Core		CBD

Service and Highway Commercial

Warehouse Commercial	Storage and warehousing of commercial and retail goods; auto sales, repair, and storage; does not include manufacturing.	W/LO
Service Commercial Sub-Zone Limited, Open	Retail, entertainment, commercial services, office, equipment sales/storage. Open also allows residential up to 36 units/acre.	CS, CS-1
Highway Commercial	Large format mixed use and commercial, civic, visitor uses that benefit from highway visibility such as big-box retail, hotels, and drive-throughs.	CH

Special Commercial

Commercial Recreation	Recreation	CR
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Industrial Zones

Zone	Uses	Similar to
Flex Industrial	Artisan workshops, bakeries, office, retail, live/work, light manufacturing and storage.	LI
General Industrial	General manufacturing, storage and distribution, offices, breweries, recycling and re-purposing.	IP
Heavy Industrial	Bio, pharmaceutical, and technology manufacturing and distribution, recycling, resource extraction.	MI
R&D	Technology and software testing, offices, product development.	R&D



what's NEXT?

AUSTIN LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE

As we reach the culmination of the CodeNEXT process, a few important steps remain before we can start using the new Land Development Code. Your feedback is still needed to help us get it right.

Zoning Map Update

City planning staff will prepare an updated zoning map for public review that leverages a more refined set of zones to accommodate existing conditions and policy directions.

ESTIMATED APRIL 2017

Adoption Process

An adoption draft incorporating all changes recommended by the Planning Commission, will be presented to City Council for formal approval.

SEPTEMBER 2017 – APRIL 2018

Notes:



Help us get it right.

Austin's Land Development Code is getting its most significant update in thirty years. As we work toward adoption of the new code, we invite you to review and comment on the draft code document, ask questions, and stay connected.

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austintexas.gov/codenext
codenext@austintexas.gov

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