



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council

FROM: José M. Guerrero, P.E., Interim Director
Watershed Protection Department

DATE: October 14, 2019

SUBJECT: Atlas 14 Floodplain Regulation Code Amendments

The purpose of this memo is to provide a brief update on both the process and the substance of staff proposed code amendments relating to development activity in floodplains. This update is being provided to you in advance of a City Council public hearing and consideration of the code amendments at the November 14, 2019, Council meeting.

Atlas 14 Summary

As you are aware, Atlas 14 represents a re-calibration of rainfall intensity statistics resulting from the addition of 56 years of additional historical rainfall data to the period-of record used in the statistical analysis. For the Austin area, for certain storm frequencies, such as the 1 percent storm (100-year), the rainfall intensity is roughly 30 percent greater than previously thought. In terms of the City's overall efforts to reduce flood risk, the consequence of this re-calibration of rainfall intensity statistics is that the delineation of "regulatory" floodplains, as well as drainage infrastructure design criteria, must be updated.

Proposed Code Revisions for Floodplain Regulation

The City's floodplain regulations are the central element of our overall program to reduce future flood losses by ensuring that development and redevelopment activity in a floodplain does not increase flood risks to other properties and minimizes flood risk to the development. Accordingly, a little over a year ago the Watershed Protection Department (WPD) undertook a process to develop amendments to the Land Development Code (LDC) to address Atlas 14. This has included a very robust stakeholder process. WPD is now ready to bring forth a draft ordinance for formal public hearing and Council consideration. Council acted on October 3, 2019 to set a public hearing on the proposed ordinance and potentially act on the proposed LDC amendments, which involve four changes:

- On an interim basis until watersheds throughout the City are restudied and remapped using Atlas 14 statistics, staff proposes that the 25-year and 100-year regulatory floodplains be defined, respectively, as the current pre-Atlas 14 100-year and 500-year floodplains. The primary goal of this redefinition is to maintain the level of flood risk protection afforded by the current LDC. Based on the Atlas 14 rainfall data, the current

500-year floodplain serves as a good approximation of what will become the new 100-year floodplain. With adoption of the proposed ordinance, the interim maps will be replaced as studies and mapping is completed for each regulatory floodplain.

- Establish a residential redevelopment exception, which would encourage private investment to reduce flood risk to existing buildings in floodplains. This exception would provide WPD staff the administrative authority to approve developments that substantially or fully redevelop a residential building if, among other requirements, the entire building is elevated a minimum of 2 feet above the 100-year floodplain (using the current 500-year floodplain on an interim basis). The safe access regulation would be waived. The intent of this exception is to provide an incentive for private redevelopment of at-risk properties such that the overall flood risk is reduced. The incentive comes as a result of having a less costly, less time-consuming, and a more certain administrative approval process, as compared to the only currently available option of a Council-approved variance.
- Extension of the existing Colorado River exception to Lake Austin and the portions of Lake Travis within the City's jurisdiction. The existing exception provides that buildings may encroach on the 100-year floodplain if they are along Lady Bird Lake or downstream of Longhorn Dam. The justification for this extension is that the Colorado River, which is regulated for flood control, is not subject to the type of flash flooding that smaller streams are. Extension of this exception will provide uniform regulations along the Colorado River within the City's jurisdiction.
- Increase the required freeboard (elevation above the 100-year floodplain) for buildings from one foot to two feet uniformly across the City.

In addition to proposed code amendments, WPD staff are proceeding with the process to revise the City's Drainage Criteria Manual (DCM) to reflect Atlas 14 rainfall statistics. A draft of DCM changes has been released for review and internal and external stakeholder meetings are being held to gather input. It is anticipated that the rulemaking process for DCM revisions will conclude in early 2020.

If you or your staff have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Kevin Shunk (COA Floodplain Administrator) at 974-9176 or kevin.shunk@austintexas.gov or Mike Personett (WPD Assistant Director) at 974-2652 or mike.personett@austintexas.gov.

cc: Spencer Cronk, City Manager
Executive Team
Department Directors