

Appendix E

Customer Survey Comments

Board of Adjustment

1. For Board of Adjustments: One meeting per month will absolutely not work for Austin's growth. The meeting I attended in September had over 30 cases, and went on until 11:45 pm. Many cases are postponed for very minor reasons or missing documents. The requirements for the application addendum are completely subjective. For example, our case was postponed because we didn't have the Travis County Plat map printed and included in their packets. This could have been determined prior to our meeting, and requested by email via the BOA liaison.

Case Manager

1. Have the Case Manager review the Entire set of comments and weed out duplicate comments or comments that conflict with each. Also make sure the comments are complete and the reviews have been completed BEFORE issuing the comments as being "Final"

Certificate of Occupancy

1. I was a tenant for 5 years in an older office building built in the early 70's. When we got approved by a gov't agency they required a C of O. I applied to the City of Austin to get a C of O. It turns out that no one in our Suite or in our entire bldg. has ever applied for a C of since it received its original C of O. The bldg. was also foreclosed upon in the 80's and went to RTC which then sold the bldg. to a new owner. None of the original C of O paperwork for the bldg. was apparently kept by the bldg. dept or the new bldg. owner. Bottom line: I was forced to go through the same process to get our C of O that a new bldg. developer would have to go through if they were proposing a new bldg. be built at that location. There was no remodeling proposed or performed at any time. There were no permits other than a C of O requested at any time. It was insane. It took over 6 months and way too many visits, emails, and begging for mercy before the city eventually decided that perhaps treating a tenant of a small office in a building which has been successfully occupied without incident since the early 70's the same as if they were the original developer was perhaps not the best use of city resources (not to mention my resources. I used to be an urban planner in Los Angeles and I have seen some pretty ineffective processes and procedures in my time by planning and bldg. departments but this was definitely one of the most extreme examples of what can happen to a process if there is not some basic safeguards built in to the process to ensure that the users of the system do not get caught up in a process which was never designed or intended for them to have to go through. Thanks for hearing my input.

Codes

1. I believe staff is doing the best they can with the complex, overlapping, poorly written, and sometimes unjust codes they have to enforce. Overall it seems the customer service mentality of trying to help development through the process is lost. In many cases it seems staff is tasked with trying to find a way to say no to the project, and with a complex code, in almost every case they can find a codified way to deny an application. The burden is then put on the specialized consultants to find a way around the denial. This leads to multiple updates, back and forth arguments and code interpretations, and ultimately, very long review and approval times. There are, in some cases, "obstructionist reviewers" whose job it is to stop development in Austin, rather than finding a way to help applications through the system. Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback.
2. The recent study shows the ridiculous maze the LDC has become accommodating everybody with an opinion...jump head first into code next with passion for the landowner, the economic stimulus, and not everybody else who may have an opinion about what the development should cost, look like, and BE. Houston has NO Zoning and has evolved naturally into a city millions of people have chosen to live happily. The property market regulates the same as zoning...imagine the savings if the COA dropped zoning...probably could just go ahead and build all the rail from the extra funds and put all the poor into a new high-rise condo.
3. Amend codes for remodeling that make homeowners ultimately spend more money for trying to improve their homes efficiency and look. To make a 1970's or 80's home meet current code cost a lot of extra money and leaving it the way it is doesn't meet current code and it's not efficient.
4. Streamline McMansion requirements for small projects. Get rid of side wall articulation requirements.
5. The land development code does not allow for development of communities/projects that Imagine Austin deems beneficial to future development of Austin. There seems to be a vast disconnect between city planners and plan reviewers.
6. The development process can be greatly enhanced with removing the existing code and creating a form based code. The current code is wrought with competing provisions and is very hard to understand. The current code has been modified extensively since 1997 and the changes have been done without a testing of the pother provisions of the code and the impacts. This code has bred a culture of distrust.
7. Get rid of, or greatly modify, McMansion ordinance. develop a small projects review process for speed and less cumbersome.

8. I have many ideas as to how to improve the process. 1. Rewrite the land development code - this is currently ongoing.
9. Loosen McMansion to allow for the many, many site issues that don't fit into the cookie cutter mode of an overall conservative and restrictive ordinance. This could be handled by hiring an experienced builder who cares about the City and the people and can analyze the plans relative to the site situation including the adjacent property.
10. The problems with development review mostly stem from a horribly written and overly complex development code. The convoluted and conflicting nature of the code results in slow and sometimes inaccurate review. The complexity of the code also results in overly complex applications which take longer to review. My experience is that the staff are generally helpful, but are given a horrible code framework in which to work, and they often take the brunt of customer dissatisfaction, when the true blame is in the code they are required to enforce.
11. The Land Development Code is too complex and does not work. We have easily over 20 projects in the City of Austin and have operated here in some sort of fashion for over 15 years. The Code was developed in 1980's Austin and has been patch worked together over the years. I don't believe that there is a site development permit in town that doesn't require a waiver, alternative equivalent compliance or a variance to the code or design guidelines to handle conflicting provisions in said code or design guidelines. This creates a situation that infuriates the neighborhoods, because it appears that PDRD grants variances to developers at an alarming rate and all developers are allowed to break the rules. On the flip side, it creates a serious degree of uncertainty for companies investing in Austin, because they always feel that they are having to give away parts of their project in the permitting phase. Staff is continually caught in the middle and apparently all decisions must be made a high level and this completely swamps the system. Solution: Completely revamp the code. In the interim: There should be smaller teams that specialize in one area who are experts in their area, can implement policy consistently and who can make decisions without coordinating with 15 other people all with competing views. You need to build TEAMS Problem 4: There are too many provisions in the code as stated above. The City of Austin is completely and woefully understaffed. In the last 6 or 7 years the City has added a Heritage Tree Ordinance, Commercial Design Standards, McMansion Rules, Watershed Protection Ordinance (new rules for the east side and new rules for floodplain), Project Duration rules, Transit Oriented Districts, Burnet Gateway Regulations, Landscape/Runoff regulations. When you add regulations, you need more and experienced people. City of Austin staff have an impossible task at this point and you literally couldn't pay me enough to put up with what they have to put up with on a daily basis. It is a miserable working environment and it shows. Solution: Hire more staff at the management and review level. Hire decision makers.

12. Rewrite the LDC so that it is clear and less confusing/conflicting.
13. Reduce the number of city ordinances, we already have building and fire codes. 2. Let the architect / engineer do their job without trying to regulate us.
14. The ability to allow customer input more when making decisions regarding additional regulation. e.g. OSSF intruding into commercial plan review without scrutiny.
15. Repeal requirement for duplex outlets at 15" in visit ability ordinance.
16. Reduce the amount of frivolous regulations in our city (we currently are regulating the depth of mulch. Ridiculous!)

Code Compliance

1. Revisit the Code Compliance Dept. mission aka Austin Code Dept. and the roles of their code inspectors with PDRD inspectors. Austin Code Dept. staff know very little about all the Codes. One person cannot know all the Codes, yet they issue citations for alleged Code violations for all possible aspects of the Code and end up causing more harm than good.
2. Lastly, when someone is caught doing work without permits, the fines should be steep and demolition of the work should be considered. Many contractors operate on a "asking for forgiveness" approach and get away with it.

Completeness Check

1. Fix the problem with Completeness Check process. Simplify the list of required items to be shown on the plans and not perform a review of the project. Have staff available for applicants who disagree with the rejection so that they can get the issue cleared without having to resubmit again. Stop making up requirements that are not based upon Code. If a new interpretation is applied, it should be vetted through the rules posting process.
2. Completeness Check should be eliminated. It wastes the city staff's time and delays the developer. Items are often overlooked and the engineer's summary letter is usually not read (which contains some of the information they need). The minor relevant comments that they sometimes produce can simply be handled in review.

Communication

1. I would say that if I had to choose one thing that was my biggest complaint, it would be communication. When we email or call, it is usually days before a response is received.

2. I think it's extremely important for staff to return messages and phone calls. I've had situations where I have had to follow up with e-mails and phone calls week on end before someone replied. As previously stated, there are staff members that are approachable and do their job and do it well. But, overall, the process is painful and frustrating.
3. The lack of communication is outrageous and the fact that phone calls are rarely answered and it takes 3 days to respond to emails is ridiculous.
4. Provide adequate staff so that reviewers are able to respond to emails and phone calls within a reasonable time frame.
5. Clear communications and a consistent system and process and streamline operation.
6. RETURN EMAILS. ANSWER CALLS. Just care about the job you do!
7. Reviewers and management should return phone calls and emails.

Counters/Intake

1. We should be able to make an appointment with a specific reviewer in person--there is a reception person; they can do that. We should be able to take a number rather than stand in line in front of the bathrooms in the hallway.
2. Make intake available daily all day instead of just 3 times per week at a contractor's peak hours of the mornings. Then the wait times would go down and the city would have the same work load either way. Stop having department meetings during intake hours. It wastes about 50 contractors driving to the city to find out the staff are in a meeting. Stop making contractors wait 1-3 hours for a clerk to print out a payment form to pay a permit or re-inspection fee. It could be handled in 3 minutes by the cashier. Double the number of admin staff that handle the issuance of a piece of paper so we can pay and get back to work. That lobby typically has 8-14 contractors waiting 1-3 hours for service. What a waste of production and dissatisfaction with the planning office.

County

1. We were dealing with county/city processes....what a mess!

DAC

1. DAC has always been courteous, informed and helpful for preliminary project planning and development. Great Department.

2. Keith Batcher does an outstanding job for the city. I hope he will be recognized for being a positive face of the City of Austin. The permitting center needs to improve their customer service. It should start with _____. She is rarely available when an issue arises. It shouldn't take a week or two to pick up a permit after it has been approved.

Driveway Permits

1. I am not sure of the inner workings of the planning department but the driveway permit process takes quite a bit of time and I am usually waiting more than a few days to hear back to approve payment. It isn't a very well thought out process. If there is a way to include it with the original volume builder and plan review process, I think it should be.

Email

1. Reply within 2 days to any and all correspondence with at least an email or message confirming that the information was received.
2. Here is an idea: Hire more reviewers that can be available for consultations on a consistent basis. Even if there is a charge for this, when you are needing answers and have to wait a week, it is not helpful. If you could schedule a 'pre-review' where you are given an opportunity to ask questions about your plans, you can get feedback right away. This way you don't waste time and money on plan printing, engineering etc- instead you have an opportunity to fix anything that may arise prior to submitting. In terms of customer service, hire people who actually care about their jobs/ people they work with and have good manners. It's not that complicated.

Engineering

1. The mantra is public safety and that's a great goal. Everyone I talked to was nice and attempted to be helpful, but they don't follow a set process. For example, one says here is the check list for what is needed. When that is brought in, another asks for more documentation. If you point this out, one will be annoyed and you risk both being annoyed. The additional documentation in my case was engineering drawings that are not required until the engineer has done on-site inspection of the site per the check list and first and second staffer, but not the third. These engineering drawings will be stamped by a licensed engineer but were requested for initial permit. The planning tech would not be approving the work or drawing since the city has opted out of taking responsibility for the engineering so the public safety aspect is not in play, only the paperwork. IF an engineer is required to sign off on a design drawing, and that design is not required on initial permitting, all staffers should know that. At that point I hired a professional engineer licensed in Texas with experience in Austin construction because it was clear to me a normal citizen is

given roadblocks if they try to permit on their own. The engineer has spent months trying to obtain a permit. How can this have anything to do with safety.

2. Stop making us put simple engineering plans to a scale. You do not look at them anyway except to measure them to see if they are to scale. There is no value added when they are legible and are attached. What trivia and arbitrary rules for college graduates at high salaries to check off yep it is to scale.
3. Too many costly surveys, consulting, reviews for city projects that seem to never get done. I firmly believe that the city wastes an enormous amount of money !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! I know an engineer with AISD and he tells me about ALL the money they waste!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Environmental

1. In general, the environmental regulations are cumbersome which causes a great amount of extra work for design professionals and consequently the review staff at the City. Staff can't really keep up with reviews because of the huge burden of regulations, and it becomes necessary for an owner to hire a plan expediter (typically one that worked in Watershed Protection and has friends there) or a lawyer to push the project through the process. A design professional that takes a project through the process themselves on occasion and not often, usually finds procedures have changed, and they must relearn them. A plan expediter is essential in Austin. Processing plans through Round Rock, Georgetown and Leander is a far more straight forward process and the staff is more responsive and pleasant as well.

Expedited Reviews

1. Here is an idea: Hire more reviewers that can be available for consultations on a consistent basis. Even if there is a charge for this, when you are needing answers and have to wait a week, it is not helpful. If you could schedule a 'pre-review' where you are given an opportunity to ask questions about your plans, you can get feedback right away. This way you don't waste time and money on plan printing, engineering etc- instead you have an opportunity to fix anything that may arise prior to submitting.
2. Expedited "fees" for 48 hour expedited plan review.
3. Other cities provide the ability to request expedited reviews for an additional fee. This obviously takes additional man power, but clients are willing to pay additional fees for faster service.
4. Pre development meetings to explain the projects to all of the reviewers at once would save a tremendous amount of review time Pay to Play permit expediting.

5. I also think one should have the option to pay higher fees for expedited plan review and frankly if necessary increase fees across the board if that is what it takes to get a permit done quickly. A faster permit process will mitigate "outlaw" work being done without permits.
6. Provide an expedited review for an additional fee.
7. I would have been willing.. eager...in every case to pay an additional fee rather than be forced to hire a third party expeditor who may or may not have any success "expediting" the process.

Fees

1. There are certain fees that we are not able to pay from our escrow accounts. For example, Environmental Fines. The wait time at the Permit Center is crazy and always has been. Seems unfair to take so much of people's time.
2. The cost for a very small project to a single family residence by owner is way too expensive. I am in for \$420 to do about \$2000 worth of work. That is 21% of the cost to pay for a permit.
3. Lastly - my clients resent the raising of fees when the fees seem not to go to the improvement of the process, or the hiring of staff, but rather to "bring costs in line with where they should be."
4. Stop penalizing developers with fines and consistently rising dev. costs when we are creating revenue for city and putting people to work.
5. Raise the fees and hire more people.

Fire Department

1. Fire department inspections have a wait list, but if you pay EXTRA for the after-hours inspection they arrive the next day at 9am smiling. Stop the things like that, and you will improve the building and development process
2. in addition, there seems to be too many steps that get introduced without notice, most notably from the fire department introducing new paperwork needed after a project has been reviewed, new inspections required that no one knows about. if these items are to be enacted, they should be presented to the contractor at time of permit issuance, not when calling for a CO.
3. Did you know the fire department is three weeks backlogged in looking at plans?
4. Fire was great, planning was great, plan review was your typical process.

Historic Review

1. Historic review of a structure that is 40-50 old is ridiculous, a waste of time and money.
2. Stop the push for historic neighborhood designations. Issue landmark or protected status on a case by case basis for properties worthy of protected status.

Inspections

1. As a builder, we now charge a higher fee to deal with city inspectors and inspection process. It adds the minimum of a month to the construction of every home. For absolutely no benefit to the general public. Other municipalities have better trained inspectors and plan reviewer, West Lake using AIs for plan review and inspections, 3-5 business day turnaround and inspectors that call when they are on the way! The only good inspector is Carlos Botello who will answer your questions early and often and now he is no longer in the field. But more importantly in relation to the planning and review dept, there is absolutely no coordination. Plans are approved for construction then we are stopped midway because the inspector doesn't believe why we are into the setback although it was approved for a justifiable reason. Tent surveys were a perfect example, adding cost for no reason and for what benefit? I am convinced it is to increase review fees and reinspection fees.
2. For the website, scheduling inspections is cumbersome (it would be beneficial if you could schedule group inspections as such, not individually). It would also be easier if you could make the credit card process easier (it's ridiculous how painful it is to pay with a CC). Some of the inspectors do a good job of giving you info to resolve the problems and answer their phones, others you cannot get in touch with them no matter how hard you try.
3. The inspector for certain communities is enforcing items in the IRC code that the plan review department has not been enforcing and has requested plan changes w/out the plan review departments knowledge. This is very frustrating, time consuming and costly.
4. Provide a thorough layman's inspection checklist. There is an inspection list provided in the inspection department currently for builders, but it's worthless. It list only 1/5th of the items that inspectors actually check for. If builders had the same list to go through that inspectors use, you'd hardly ever see failed inspections happening.
5. PDRD for some reason insists on keeping builders in the dark about what's required and it's a miserable experience for everyone involved. This wastes so much of the city's money because there are so many inspections happening every day. 6) Get rid of entire City of Austin inspections department. No other city requires both city inspections and engineer's inspections. The most efficient cities just have 3rd party

engineers do all the inspections. The engineers are far more qualified and enormously easier to deal with. COA inspectors have pagers which they often don't respond to and they don't make appointments so they can come anytime in an 8hr window. This whole process is so antiquated and slows down development significantly. And half of the time the builders don't what the City Inspector comments are about because they are vague and then it can take another day or two just to get ahold of them and figure out what actually needs to be corrected. This never happens in the private sector with 3rd party engineer inspections.

6. I have been building in Austin for a long time. I think that the COA inspection process is appalling and lacks the normal mutual respect that is common in all other business aspects outside of the COA. 1. To have someone sitting and waiting all day for an inspector to show up at a job site and to not get a courtesy call or text that the inspector is not going to show up that day is completely unacceptable. That is a huge cost and waste of a professional persons time, not to mention, the delays caused in the forward movement of a project. We are paying them for this service but the treatment is more of doing us a favor if they show up. Where else does that happen in business? I don't understand why a four hour window could not be given along with a text when an inspector is running behind. 2. To bring in several different inspectors that have their own interpretations of codes, along with their personal pet peeves, to inspect and reinspect a particular aspect is more like a circus than a professional and protective service. As builders we take total liability for our building process and for city inspectors to turn us into jugglers at times due to their personal whims is very frustrating. Please send one inspector per aspect, and the same inspector to reinspect any issues or only allow a different inspector to ensure that the original inspector's issues were resolved. Do not allow different inspectors to revisit any aspects that have already been passed. The City's ordinances cannot be moving targets. All inspectors should be on the same page when it comes to interpreting codes and respectful to each other's evaluations and corrections! 3. Once a permit has been approved by the PDRD, inspectors should not be given the power to evaluate the merit of that long and arduous process. They should only be looking that the aspects being performed are done to code. In remodeling, most existing homes have many aspects that are not to code. It should be made clear in the PDRD process that existing aspects that are not to code and cannot be brought to code will not affect the approved changes.
7. I have just spent 15 months trying to complete a house that was started, but never completed, in 2002. The house was 90% complete when I bought it. Shell complete, roof complete, plumbing 90% complete, Electricity 90% complete, HVAC 90% complete, etc. I am still trying to get the final electrical inspection passed and have experienced numerous delays due primarily to having a stream of different inspectors instead of working with one individual. Each inspector finds a few things that we fix, and then the next inspector finds a few more, etc. etc.

8. Likewise, the Building Inspectors (who approve the different phases of a house's construction) feel empowered to apply their own personal set of rules, even if they are not in accordance with the LDC or IRC codes, and even if not enforced the same way by other inspectors. If a Builder can point to specific wording in the IRC 2012 code that shows the construction is correct, and the Inspector cannot show a clause in the LDC that supersedes this, then the Inspector should approve the construction.
9. Get inspectors to write out exactly what they flunk us on. They most often write some generic statement which then delays our fixing things because we have to call them or fix the wrong thing. Get inspectors to leave a written correction notice. Most times they do not and we have to waste our time looking on line through the hundreds of website options to find the inspection status and notes and this happens now over 50% of the time - no notice that the inspector even came and no valuable statement of what has to be fixed. I wasted 2 months on one job because an inspector did not clearly state what had to be done. It took three attempts to fix it before I finally got a communication that was clear.
10. For the size of Austin, this city has the most cumbersome and inefficient permitting department I have ever seen. It's absolutely ridiculous to spent 5 and 6 hours at a time at the permitting office when i have other things to do. We are at your mercy though. You have no competition. a huge time waster is waiting on inspectors. Its 2014!,, you'd think Austin being the tech city that it is, you could notify contractors when an inspection is to take place. Instead inspectors REFUSE to give you a heads up. i have waited around ALL DAY before on an inspector only to find out it was bumped to the next day. F__ you city of Austin. Our permit process BLOWS!
11. There were a couple of helpful inspectors but not many. _____ gave us false information that delayed our project on two occasions. His boss could care less. They do not follow there rules or the master plan which I am told is against the law. They don't care, they know there is no one that they will have answer to as they are all equally worthless. A city of misfits, disgruntled and miserable people for the most part. The city logo is Keep Austin Weird. The city continues to grow from the massive exit from California (a lot more undesirables that will fit right in in Austin) and the oil money despite the pitiful city government and associated agencies they have. We can spend our money anywhere we please, it will not be in Austin ever again.
12. Rapid review or inspection should be available for a fee.
13. Ensure that construction inspection staff understands that the permitted plans should be built as permitted.
14. One suggestion that I would like to make is to request a more convenient way to accommodate our customers when scheduling inspections, rather than only being able to allow for a 7:30am-4:00pm inspection schedule. I realize that the inspectors are incredibly busy with inspections back to back from start to finish each day, and I

can certainly appreciate that aspect; however, from my customer's side, it is inconvenient to wait at home all day.

15. There should be a limit to how much an inspector can ask for if it is determined that something was missing that should've been caught during plan review.
16. Make printable permits to post on the job site to eliminate having to go to the city office to pick them up.
17. Why is there only one person in the entire COA inspections, Dr. Hadley, that can approve difficult driveway construction scenarios? He only appears to work part-time due to poor health. The intake hours are few and random. Prefer daily intake even if limited hours.
18. Across the board, our dealings with the city inspectors and reviewers are always positive, however the processes in place for them to do their job, greatly impede our ability to conduct business as a GC.
19. Why have a drywall inspection for around a tub.
20. Inspectors are often over booked and have little time to actually inspect.
21. We were lucky to have a builder friendly inspector, meaning where he saw issues he communicated what he expected to see to pass at the next inspection. During the process he had a trainee with him one day, the trainee said "It's not our job to tell you how to get it right, just to tell you it does or doesn't pass." That is INSANE. It would create an environment of extra inspections, frustrated builders, homeowners and inspectors.

The inspector (who we liked) separately and supposedly once said to our builder something to the effect that "the homeowner doesn't tell you what they want, you tell them what they can have," which might make sense except in our case we worked with an architect well versed in Austin code.

Legal Department

1. Also, someone needs to fire the woman in the legal department. She seemingly does nothing. She has months-worth of back-logged applications literally sitting on her desk. It took her 5 months to sign a variance application asking to plant a few trees. When you approach her for updates, she is very stand-off-ish, she thinks she is untouchable.
2. Legal Dept needs an assistant in reviewing documents. There is only 1 (ONE!) reviewer and she becomes a major bottleneck (sometimes we are delayed getting a permit because of this). She is also the least responsive of all city employees we have dealt with. It takes multiple emails and voice mails (and

often her voicemail is full so you can't leave a message). And if she is gone for a several week long or month long vacation (which happens every year), there is no one else to review the documents in her place. There desperately needs to be an assistant or back up.

Managers

1. I will say we were just as busy before the dip in 2008. But Toby Futrell managed very closely with the PDRD managers. There is no management now. No one has any accountability. A lot of people will need to be replaced to turn this ocean liner around and it will take years to correct it.
2. Need to train managers to work with the public and personnel. They have no management skills much less understand public relations. All (100%) employees need to work 8 hours a day with the public. City offices need to be open all 8 hours a day as well.
3. Fire the management and get some new ones in that are service oriented to the contractors who are in fact their customers. I have worked 48 years and have never had a group give such poor service, poor hours of operation, arbitrary rules of no value, or waste of my life. I have written the management with long letters suggesting practical and effective suggestions three times in two years with great detail and data. Not one time I have ever received an acknowledgement or a response. The communication and care is missing.
4. Have stronger leadership at departmental level.
5. Management not afraid of superiors or staff capable of maintaining operational norms through both discipline and encouragement. Apathy and ineffectiveness cannot be effective qualities in management.
6. Management needs to give direction and then TRUST it employees.
7. Replace upper management.
8. Replace upper management!! The reviewers are great people - it's upper management who are making their lives miserable.
9. Hire one extremely qualified person from outside of the COA (like from McKenzie or Accenture) to overhaul all of these departments. Pay them +\$500k per year and let them be CEO. A good person will easily cover their cost and a great person will save the city millions per year, and increase the tax base through expedite private sector improvements. It's hard to understate how bad the culture is due to a lack of meaningful leadership.

10. Management does not foster a thriving workplace - sure, the review staff is paid well, but their general moral is terrible. I understand that they are faced with conflict at every turn, but something has to be done from the top down.
11. Problem 1: There are roughly 16-22 different reviewers for a set of plans. It is impossible for any manager to manage 16-22 people. On top of that, ask them to perform a site plan review. Most management books, seminars, etc tell you that the most people person can manage is 6-8 people. From the outside, it also appears that each case manager has multiple teams of reviewers to work with and work in multiple areas of town. Problem with this is that there are roughly 10-20 areas of town with different combinations of regulations (multiple types of watersheds, city limits, limited purpose, etc, TOD, urban core, core transit corridor, suburban, CBD, waterfront overlay, downtown creeks, neighborhood plans, North Burnet Gateway off the top of my head!). There isn't a team that specializes in one area and who is consistent. In short, there are too many heads to the hydra. Solution: Most other cities handle this with 3-6 people who are a team and are continually working together. There should be smaller teams that specialize in one area who are experts in their area, can implement policy consistently and who can make decisions without coordinating with 15 other people all with competing views. You need to build TEAMS.

Multiple Departments

1. I generally don't understand why the applicant has to visit all the different departments to assemble all parts of an application. Seems like it would be much more streamlined to have ESPA, required flow tests, or most other commonly needed parts to an application moved through the system by city staff more familiar with the process.
2. What is and isn't required. Do not let them send you to 5 different departments with no direction only to find out you have to come back to them. Require staff to return phone calls in a timely fashion.
3. Please look at Houston and San Antonio as case studies. Please consider a more integrated approach to review. The departments need to be more integrated, not segregated.

Office Hours

1. Provide more consistent hours between each department/office. It usually takes two trips to obtain all the necessary department approvals for a building ap. Provide Posting of all department hours. They seem to change often and you don't know until you arrive at each department. Parking?????

2. Limit city staffs ability to shut down office hours or not accept applications or documents during normal working hours.
3. Do what private businesses do...from 8-5 you address all customers, and provide all services. Schedules bottleneck work, and stifle productivity. If COA was a restaurant...the schedule would show food not be served from noon-1pm and 5-7pm because it's too busy clean.
4. Be open more hours.
5. Plan review hours are a joke. They are not accessible. Constantly in meetings about meetings.
6. All services need to be available every business day from 7:45a - 4:45p so we can check by dropping by before or after work.
7. Saturday services should be available for 1/2 day.
8. It's not reasonable to ask contractors to be there only between 8 and 11 am Three days a week only.. to submit a permit. It cost us too much wasted time and money during those hours as that's when we are most active without employees and subs.
9. The spotty hours of PDRD has to be resolved. I understand people need time to review. But surely there is room for improvement and intake can always be open.
10. Extend walk-in and intake hours. Currently, there are only 12 per week. I'd suggest Monday - Thursday 8-12pm and 1-5pm for permit submission. Meeting should be with reviewer, not intake personnel. Rejections for missing documents would be handled on the spot. Approvals granted Fridays.
11. When we submitted our plans for approval, the office was not open 40 hours a week and the hours open were not convenient. I think the office should be open from 7:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m. to allow for individuals who work to be able to submit plans.

Organization

1. The COA has too many layers of upper management that do not really benefit the development process as it cause additional delays. Staff has limited authority and many are scared to make a decision fearing for their employment which causes further delays.
2. The single greatest improvement to the PDRD would be to re-org the entire department to be structured with a single point of highly capable leadership

that would be responsible for supporting and enabling the reviewers throughout the process to be high performing in their duties. The leadership should focus on ensuring that projects are handling expeditiously and consistently and that an efficient system is in place to ensure the processes work in a way that supports the business' (customers) needs to make them successful in accomplishing their projects. The reviewer's expertise will address code compliance, but the leadership should address customer service.

3. The second greatest improvement would be to have project managers or case managers responsible to establishing a clear and predictable path and timeline for projects to be processed through the city and be responsible for facilitating the process to ensure things stay on track at all times. Each manager would be assigned to projects as they are submitted and would be responsible for those projects. They would be accountable for ensuring that the projects are reviewed thoroughly and in accordance with the timelines that was defined.

Other Departments

1. Obtain MOU's or other documents between departments to clarify decision authority on interdepartmental issues.
2. Coordinate with public works and AWU inspectors to verify that all construction details, etc. are consistent.
3. Better communication between departments.
4. Don't require pre-build and post-build surveys when you have plans reviewed and approved that included surveys and drawings to scale. This was a major waste of money and the surprise requirement of them at inspection time delayed the project considerably. I was also very upset at some departments (I'm looking at you ____ of Roads and Bridges) felt the need to treat single family home renovation/addition as a "real estate developer" and tried to extract unreasonable construction of public alley improvements as a condition of permit approval. I was treated like a new subdivision developer where I was expected to build new infrastructure that I didn't want or need for my project.
5. Having a solid plan in place to coordinate and organize all the departments - and someone in place who can actually enforce it. There is a lot of overlap in the different departments for even a simple remodel of a building... I should receive the same answer from all of them if I ask the same question using the same drawings.
6. Include within review every required review so that we don't have to chase reviews by other departments before our permit can be issued.

7. The water department should work on their attitudes. It is never ok to send a customer an email telling them that you are not their point of contact. The rate increase for the fee schedule is very difficult to understand. Try to be helpful the first time we ask a question and then we wouldn't need to contact you again. Be respectful!
8. Make sure to have the head of review departments (drainage, environmental, transportation, AWU, etc) be someone who is responsive and can get back to people in 24 hours. Also they need to be problem solvers to help those that work for them navigate through potential issues and not just sit on the issue so it gets made worse and then the only way to resolve is to go to Andy Linseisen.
9. More information on the plan review process and flow between external departments online. Easy to locate contact information for external department inquiries prior to permit submittal.

Regular classes for the public to understand the city's process. Updated website. Updated informational packets. Better training for coa staff, so they can answer questions initially that will help a developer get their plans through the system. If questions can be addressed before plan submittal, it will be less work for city staff during the review and the developer knows what they are dealing with when they go into a project. A win-win for city and developers.

Permits

1. Provide adequate seating for people who are waiting. There are, what 12 chairs in the building permit office? Yet, next door there is a spacious computer room for small businesses that is staffed with 2 people all the time. Every time I'm down dealing with PDRD, I take note of how many people are in this room - the most I've seen is two. Yet there are always people waiting for permits in the hall; all over the building. And don't you dare leave - city staff will let you know their time is important and they aren't waiting on you if you miss your turn. The arrogance/venom spewed by the person taking your name is almost incomprehensible.

Plan Reviews

1. Hire more reviewers, and train them effectively when you do!
2. Stay on schedule/provide overtime for reviewers to get caught up. Hire more reviewers.
3. Different reviewers will give different answers. Reviewers justify the existence as an employee by simply rejecting plans rather than finding a quick solution; like calling the customer.

4. I have to praise Keith Batcher in Residential Review. He is always helpful, very knowledgeable and does his work in a timely manner. Very professional!
5. Plan reviewers need to be more consistent in their interpretation of codes and ordinances.
6. I have been building residential custom homes in Central Austin for 20 years. The plans review process, as it currently operates, is rendered dysfunctional due to ever evolving interpretations of the McMansion ordinance. My interactions with the City leave the clear impression that special interest neighborhood groups run the show, and the real and practical needs and concerns of builders and architects are ignored.
7. The negative criticism on this review is in reference to a project started May 2012 and received a Certificate of Occupancy July 2014 (26 months). This equal process in 95% of the other cities we work in for a similar project should have only taken 9 months. The site plan review and approval process was cumbersome, primarily due to comments on the plan review process that were later found to be not required.
8. Expand the Quick Turn-a-round process to include more applicable remodels. Let the Manager use more latitude in allowing more QT's. Create another review period for large projects so they don't jamb up the system and delay the majority of the medium to small projects since they review then in chronological order. Put people in charge with some common sense Fire the deadwood employees who do little and reject every project for minor or misinterpreted items. Provide access to all reviewers so comments can be discussed in a timely manner. Building Plan Review has walk-in hours but Fire and Site Plan Review does not have open access. They are only accessible by appointment and that can take days to weeks to get.
9. I have been submitting building permits for over 15 years and each year and each improvement iteration by city has resulted in more complex and more difficult processes for getting a building permit. During the shut when residential staff left, my business was shut down for over 5 months. We had multiple customers cancel contracts and my business lost nearly \$300,000 in projects and the situation was exacerbated by the fact that it took months before they even admitted the situation had occurred and they were lying until that time as to when permits would be completed. The latest revision has seen some improvement, but is still taking too long. I feel the City is trying to manage liability where none exists. The construction of project simply needs to meet zoning, setbacks, and allowable structures (Mcmansion) for approval by the city. The technical review for structural and other reviews is unnecessary as it is the responsibility of the person getting the permit to ensure whoever is completing the project including general contractor, architect and engineer know what it takes to meet all building codes and city ordinances that pertain to technical aspects of the projects. If the team completing the project do not understand the technical facets of the work, it is their responsibility not the

City's. More emphasis should be placed on what is being built as opposed to what is on plans.

10. Allow in-person, one-day turn around residential reviews, in lieu of or in addition to online submissions. Do not allow developers or permit expeditors to jump ahead in the process. Reduce the amount of paper required for submission - are 3 sets really necessary? The scale and size of drawings is a real problem. For architects, the paper size requirements means that we often have to redraw the entire set to fit on 12 x 18 or 11 x 17, at a different scale than our typical 24 x 36 size. This requires, at a minimum, 5-10 hours of drawing set up. We should be able to submit PDF's or one full size set that can be scanned and sent to various departments.
11. Reviewers need to be more responsive (it takes multiple emails with some). Some reviewers need to be more proficient and diligent in their review. Canned comments should be eliminated, unless they specifically apply. We often have the information shown that they are asking for. Reports and attachments are OFTEN lost. This has been a huge source of frustration. Our comment responses note which items are attached, but instead of contacting us to get a copy of the lost information, they simply write in their report that the attachment was not received, thus wasting more time since we have to wait several more weeks for the next review. Reviewers blame it on intake, but I believe it is usually the reviewers that lose the materials, since our update packets includes the reviewers' names and all information stapled together. Again, if we comment that an item is attached and it is not in the packet, the reviewer should contact us prior to their review deadline and ask us to send another copy so that it can be completed in that review round.
12. I own a local land consulting and permit processing firm and I'm a former city employee. I have processed well over 5000 building permits and the past five years. I am considered an expert in the city of Austin when it comes to the code relations and process. The development review process is importantly hard to navigate and customer service is at an all-time low. There are some shining stars who have been there a long time and do what they can to assist, but the new hires in commercial and residential plan depts are inadequately trained, have zero personality, do not understand prior approvals that are allowed by other managers or codified as SOP's and therefore apply overly burdensome and rigorous application of existing codes. The best thing the city can do is train their staffers to be nice to applicants. Many of them do not know the code or process very well and because of that, they tend to get frustrated with the applicants and it is causing a backlash among the development community who do not want to deal with specific staff at all, or at least don't trust them to review specific projects.
13. The city plan review makes simple remodeling and home building a complicated process by the way they approve these permits. The intake plan reviewers make mistakes that then go to the plan review and after weeks then gets turned down.

MAKE IT SIMPLE. There are complicated issues in building and then there are simple ones. They need to know how to separate the two.

14. Residential Plan Review should be a whole lot quicker. There should be a way to determine what can be built on a property before I buy that property. The way it is now, I can't get any answers until AFTER I buy the property. It doesn't make any sense. I should be able to get an Approval to build something and THEN buy the Property. Obviously, this makes my business VERY difficult, because even after all the footwork, I'm still "gambling" that the City will let me build what I want to build.
15. Train the plan reviewers so that they actually know the rules that they are supposed to be checking for. 2. Don't lose submitted applications and plans. 3. Make requirements for Submittal and for building within McMansion area clear and UPDATED on the website. 4. Make reviewers accountable for the information and interpretations they give out. 5. Streamline the water and electrical review- so they are with plan Submittal.
16. Formally communicate actual estimated review time based on staff workload
Consistency between reviewers when applying codes.
17. The city needs to find ways to retain competent plan reviewers, and add competent plan reviewers because the current staff is not capable of keeping up with the current review turnaround times. If there was a way to respond to rejection comments in a more-timely manner, this may assist the city in reducing the number of projects in review.
18. The temptation, when construction is booming, is to add bodies, understandably. But having a bad reviewer is worse than waiting for a good one. The commercial side is way better than the residential side, some of whom have no idea what they should be doing. The process works best with a seasoned reviewer who is also a clear thinker and good communicator. Its really best - and we have done this for years - to meet at least twice with a reviewer as the project is in design - so that all the assumptions can be agreed upon. Then we try to get that reviewer for the actual review. It would be nice if there was a way to formalize that. The new for-pay meetings with reviewers used to be free - OK, but in the current method we get something in writing, which is really great.
19. I am a small-time investor that occasionally builds single-family homes in Central Austin. I know the codes and the COA Plan Review process. The problem I experience is one which numerous architects and builders I talk to also experience: The Plan Review Department feels empowered to arbitrarily enact new rules or restrictions, without regard to what the LDC or IRC codes say, and without going thru any sort of city council approval of these new rules, and without applying them uniformly from one application to another.

20. Stop making us put a bunch of verbiage concerning smoke alarms which is just a restatement of the building code. We put the symbols on the drawings. Why isn't that good enough. Stop doing technical reviews. The truth is that the review is just checking off paperwork submitted or not submitted. I have not had one failure of substance in the last 2 years. Everything is just paperwork bureaucracy at its finest. I have not gotten one permit application through without a rejection in the last 2 years. I am constantly flunked for some arbitrary rule that makes no difference in the value of the permit application or the actual building of the task. I just tell customers now that they can expect 4 or more weeks for the simplest of jobs to get a permit.
21. Being told by a commercial plan reviewer that she would "kick my butt out of here" when I questioned a submittal requirement is far from customer service. They forget they work for us, not the other way around.
22. Hire more building plan reviewers who are knowledgeable. Keep the ones you have that ARE knowledgeable (starting with Doug Votra; you already let Ron Menard get away. He'll be IMPOSSIBLE to replace). I don't want to name any other names at this point. Initiate electronic submittals for permit review. Let the design/construction community know promptly when procedural changes are made that affect the review process. The website does not currently do that.
23. Consistency between plan reviewers OR assign a plan reviewer to each builder. We submit for 12+ homes per year. Can we have an assigned plan reviewer? Documentation of decisions during pre-consultation appointments. Ultimately, the assigned plan reviewer can reference those decisions to allow for efficiency and consistency. Plan reviewer assigned within 24 hours of intake. Allow structural update to submittal prior to initial comments.
24. Required response by plan reviewers. 24 hours? Many times no reply at all.
25. In dealing with the Residential Review process I found most of the staff to be friendly, courteous, knowledgeable and helpful. The most irritating parts of the experience were two. First, the process of having to arrive as early as possible in order to avoid standing in a long, disorganized line in the elevator lobby should be addressed. One of the times I was there the windows were not all manned although staff could be seen hanging around in the background. There was no attempt on the part of staff to conceal their apparent boredom and disinterest in helping things move along efficiently. I witnessed two instances of impatient and rude response to customer's uniformed questions. Yes, these people could have done more research prior to arrival but it's not appropriate for staff to be rude under any circumstances. One staff person was seen showing up at least 10 minutes late for work and in no hurry to take her place at the customer service window although at least 20 people were in line. She showed up after a time and was one of those who couldn't disguise her lack of interest. The staff who deal closest with the public are the face of the

organization, often even more than the elected officials and certainly more than the upper management who are mostly unknown to the public. The second issue (sorry for the long response....) is that the residential permit I was seeking was a 40 SF addition to an old garage. Yet, this request was subjected to the full review almost as though it was a full blown remodel. I'm an Architect and so am more prepared than most of the public to deal with the process. I feel for the homeowners who have to navigate all this on the fly. It would be nice if someone in the process had the authority to quickly apply a common sense response tailored to the project. Kind of similar to triage so the simple projects can be cleared out quickly and staff can devote time to the more complex reviews. The old process was much quicker and appeared to rely more on the inspectors to apply the review in the field. This was changed at some point in time to more resemble the commercial process. I don't know the reasons but they probably made sense to smart people. Hey, if you're still reading....thanks for listening!

26. When we have any issue arise as a GC, we assume we will have to devote half to a full day in lines and following paperwork protocol to solve an item that can be resolved in minutes. In addition, due to the protocol in the plan review department, the review process is not what seems to hold up the process, it's the act of getting the plans on the appropriate decision-makers desk for his feedback.
27. Dedicating a team of reviewers in commercial plan review to handle smaller projects (the currently labeled "7-10 day reviewers") so that a small remodel does not wait behind an entire 30 acre development, or 20 story hotel. Similar to what is currently done with QTs, but with a full review team instead of just a building reviewer.
28. Reviewers are chronically late with reviews, impossible to reach, and try hard to avoid us when they actually bother themselves to return a phone call about a review comment or a project. Codes are applied unequally - if it's a City/County/State/Airport/Educational project, anything goes; if a private developer tried to get away with these things, it'd never be permitted. City staff don't remember that as developers or consultants, we're clients and customers. Many staff seem to try to create massive gridlock instead of trying to assist a client in meeting regulations to complete the development. Many high-ranking City staff in the review team are incompetent and are in way over their heads, costing City and private projects a lot of money due to their ignorance.
29. It's frustrating when review staff does not understand something and as a result they will simply create an additional round of review comments instead of calling the submitter to work through the question and resolve the issue during the initial review. They double their work load by being too quick to deny applications for resubmit instead of being more flexible about working with people (architects) and allow them to fix and send potential issues on the fly.

30. If none of the site development permit application reviews can be turned around in two weeks, change the written policy.
31. The third greatest improvement would be to create more alternative paths for plan review to enable the PDRD to avoid becoming overloaded, which creates log jams and massive project delays which translates into millions of dollars being wasted by business owners. The alternative paths could include self-certification by licensed professionals on certain projects, using third party plan reviewers as a back-up and implementing a process similar to the Express Plan Review system that the City of Dallas used for many years.
32. More Commercial QT reviews until commercial building can get a seven day review out in seven days.
33. Updates for commercial review plans should never be in the review process more than seven days. There should be departments in the commercial building review department that specializes in certain types of construction, (i.e., high rise, mixed use, apartments) that work with other department to help clarify the City's use of the IBC and City amendments. Hire more people for all commercial review department. If someone is on vacation or is sick the review department struggles even more than usual.

Process

1. The fractionalization of the review process where each department has its own feudal authority is absurd. I have proposed to anyone who will listen that when the planning process is initiated, there should be one person on staff who is assigned as the point of contact for the owner or builder, that person having the responsibility and authority to coordinate with and direct all other staff involved with the project through to issuance of a CO. Pettiness is rampant. A classic example was when we submitted 5 sets of plans with multiple pages. One set [according to staff] had one page missing and we were directed to submit 5 new full sets to continue the process. I personally hand carried the allegedly missing page to the City offices and made it clear that this conduct is obscene and in any other setting would justify dismantling the entire system. Eventually after much discussion, the person whose set of plans was missing one page agreed to accept the page I was standing outside his office offering. The disconnect between the plan review process and inspection process borders on being litigable on substantive due process grounds as arbitrary and capricious. If a plan has been reviewed and approved, and construction has proceeded based on the approved plans, it is unconscionable for an inspector to step in after the fact and fail an inspection because he or she disagrees with plans that were approved and justifiably relied on.
2. Create a submitting process which actually expedites the process.

3. We have the worst permit process in the country. I know I used to travel around the country and build restaurants. It is way too slow and you have way too many stupid rules. In other cities you get a permit in a week but it costs \$4000 here the same size job would take 4 months to get a permit and cost \$390.... Our City does not care, they do not want development. And when a city employee retires or quits, they can't be replaced until after they leave, this leaves the other people on board to put their work aside and train the new employees to only work there 2-4 months because they don't like hearing everyone bitch about how slow they are. I once waited three hours to give the City \$2000 for a permit. They have the most screwed up system to pay for fees and permits. In other cities you can pay online, or just walk up to a window. The worst system in the world. They make the DMV look like Apple computer.
4. There needs to be options and an appeal process for Subchapter E requirements, which don't make any sense when applied to particular projects. For example churches typically can't function with the required amount of glass designated in Subchapter E. Adding trellises and "faux" windows to the facade is ridiculous to give the appearance of windows. This is just one example of many that I have experienced at the City.
5. Last, the city needs to adopt a policy of culpability and exceptions that they're responsible for creating some of the mistakes when a plan is honestly reviewed and approved then released. There are hundreds of cases where the project is built only to be discovered in the field by an inspector or even a nosy neighbor who is savvy enough to understand the code requirements that the building does not comply with code regulations. There are dozens and dozens of examples where in Apple kid has gone back to city staff and showing them the approved plans that were erroneously approved, but the city refuses to accept responsibility for creating these mistakes. I would be more than happy to talk to your group to provide more.
6. System needs to be streamlined. You can get 95 % of the comments cleared and getting the remaining 5% to get a permit or get on an agenda is way too long.
7. Allow more explanation or conversation in comments. 3. Make reduced set deliverables for permit a rational reduction from original, e.g. 24 x 36 to 12 x 18. It is very time consuming to meet the 11x17 and adds cost to the homeowner.
8. Expired permits where no work was performed should be easier to cancel. Subchapter E has many flaws, but the worst is having single family uses in a non-single family zoning ending up having compatibility setbacks from adjacent commercial properties.
9. City of Austin is extremely cumbersome and wasteful to deal with when applying for a permit. I oftentimes have to apply for three different permits where in other

- places you hand in one application, without having to wait for hours to drop it off. In addition, it is extremely wasteful that people have to wait 2-3 hours just to pick up and pay for a permit and get a pin. Payment and receipt of pin should easily be able to be done online and pick up of permit should be a short visit. Also, the city has lost my applications on more than 2 occasions and no one could tell me where they were. In one instance I had to drive down with a new set of drawings because one set had been lost.
10. There are too many employees, too much bureaucracy, too much regulation, and the rules are enforced not to assist those in making application but to figure out ways to slow down, and derail new development under the guise of protecting the environment or the quality of life in Austin.
 11. Why does it take so long to pick up and pay?
 12. I had no problems with the COA on my project. My suggestion is that there needs to be better upfront explanation of what the process is and what the expectations are. This would help a one-time user or a new contractor. I had to learn the process as my project went on...I had the time to figure it out....many owners do not....I this would reduce stress and frustration.
 13. There needs to be some buy in or consequences for the review team when a project gets stalled or is going to be rejected. Many of them seem like they don't care as long as it gets off their desk and onto someone else's desk or goes away. It will never really matter how many changes are made to the process until the attitude changes to customer service orientated. I had a project that was 2 phases of building renovation. When phase 1 was about to finish the contractor asked about going ahead and doing the plumbing saw cuts in the concrete on phase 2 to cut down on noise and dust once phase 1 was operational. I told them they could just go down and get a demolition permit at the permit center. They called and said the permit center told them to go to commercial building intake. They were told there that they would need to do a complete submittal with structural drawing but that they would accept it as a quick turnaround. We got everything together in about a week and I called to verify the fees for the quick turnaround. I was told by the same person that they were not longer accepting these type of things for quick turn around and that I would need to come in and meet with a building reviewer. I went in to meet with the building reviewer and he said we didn't even need a permit and to go ahead and make all the cuts.
 14. Unfortunately I do not see a way to improve the process without an entire overhaul. The city has tried for years to improve the process and it invariably cannot. The code would have to drastically change and the culture of PDRD would have to change as well. Until staff realizes that they serve us, the people they deal with each day, the culture will not change. One example is the parking lot outside OTC. It is generally 20% full with inspection vehicles. Shouldn't all the employees be parked at the top

of the parking garage so that the general public and the other professionals they serve can more easily and quickly access the building? There are many individuals who are proactive and highly knowledgeable, but overall there seems to be an apathy about doing the job by many who work there.

15. Suggestion: most other Cities provide a pre-development in-person meeting where ALL of the departments who will review during the process sit down with the applicant and review the pre-submittal package to fully vet out any major obstacles. This pre-development meeting needs to be detailed, documented, binding, and submitted to subsequent reviewers. There also needs to be ONE point of contact for the ENTIRE permitting process (not just PDRD, but AFD, AWU, PARD, ROW, Public Works, AE, etc.). This individual needs to have the authority to work with other departments outside of PDRD and power to influence those individuals and departments that are not performing.
16. Speed up the variance process. The length of time it takes costs my clients money. They usually decide to seriously alter their floor plans instead of going for the variance. Those that have gotten the variance regret it because it took longer than expected. It's like they don't believe me when I say it's going to take several months. It's a no win situation. Why can't the reviewers get the BSPA and AWU form completed? Do the structural drawing check after the permit is approved. All you look at is if the drawings are there, it's not like you're looking to see if the building will survive a hurricane or other insurable incident. Getting the structural easily adds a week sometimes 3 weeks to the time it takes before we can submit. How about everything else is approved first, then you check for structurals? Thanks for asking, and hopefully listening!
17. There have been times when my permit has been issued but then just sits on someone's desk and not put in the box. I have several permits that were lost.
18. Keep it simple but thorough and keep up the great work!
19. Do not call the process a Seven Day Review if it will actually take 5 weeks. Sub out the review of the large projects or hire more staff. The projects that should be easy are placed in line behind massive projects. A Change of Use can cost an owner thousands of dollars while waiting for something that should be reviewed simply and fast.
20. Below is an email that I sent on Monday to Greg Guernsey, Andrew Linseisen & Roderick Burns and by no surprise have not had a single response. I have asked for 2 years to get the name of the person that does the applications - Nothing. This is a huge frustration because we (customers) cannot input the correct information on the applications and send to our clients for signatures without using "White-Out" and hand writing in where the fields won't let us complete descriptions. This looks terrible and is very unprofessional. The applications used to be in a format that we

could change the font to smaller if need be or to add to input fields. Sadly, that is no longer the case.

21. Staff need to become more accessible as well as learn that comments made should be thoughtful and provide alternatives for the designer. Too often staff make comments that can be easily fixed by the designer if the staff would just either email or call the designer and discuss the options. All designers are as busy as staff but solving issues on a submittal should not be that difficult and is a complete waste of time and money when we have to do a comment response on paper and make 10 copies of it. Also the City of Austin always preaches "Green" but when we do site plan submittals they ask for numerous full size copies of the plans when most other surrounding Cities have gone digital. Why is there still a mentality that the consultants and developers are "trying to get away with something". Most of the consultants in this town do good work and occasionally we all make a mistake. Staff should not lump the good consultants in with the bad and assume we are trying to "get away with something". One other item that needs immediate attention is the waste of time and money spent on having to post fiscal for erosion controls. With all the state and federal laws in effect why would anyone try and get away with developing a project and not put erosion controls up. The better way is to make the fines for failing to install so severe that no one would dare challenge it.
22. Picking up a permit is ridiculous, I have waited 2 to 3.5 hours. Timer to be creative. Residential reviewers are too strict. Architects should be able to seal small foundation additions and single story foundations. It is too expense to hire a structural engineer for these types of projects. It is our responsibility not the city's.
23. The License Agreement process is a huge burden. The City requires LAs due to design requirements (Subchapter E) then there is a very arduous process to be "allowed" to use COA ROW, which the client didn't want to utilize in the first place. Plus, the various agencies have no reason to help you or come up with solutions when there is a conflict with another agency. Not to mention the owner usually has to pay an engineer, a landscape architect, a irrigation designer, a surveyor, and a fee.
24. Standard operating procedures for staff. There are too many inconsistencies between reviewers and between departments. These need to be significantly diminished and management needs to enforce the SOP's. The ability for my critique to not fall upon deaf ears. As therapeutic as this experience might be I seriously doubt it will have any effect actually measurable.
25. Improve the 1704 review and approval process.
26. It would be helpful if there was ONE department that would be able to assist you on Development and give you a checklist/process to follow for your specific project. Each time I go down to DAC I know that I will end up on at least two additional floors to get my questions answered. The intake times are not coordinated so it can take

several trips to get in front of all of the right people which is a hassle. There should be a checklist for permit that you have met with the appropriate departments (can be done in one meeting) and as long as the checklist is complete then you should be able to get your permits within a week. I have made several trips during design and received input regarding parking, zoning, water taps and electrical easements that I had to go back and get written approvals (something that NO one at the City likes to do- put it in writing) in order to convince the Plan Reviewer (that is supposed to be reviewing the Plan- not everything else) that I could do what I submitted. It was still recommended that I go before BOA for a variance- which was ridiculous because there was no variance being requested... The system is broke and really needs to be overhauled- Thank you for asking- hopefully my answers are helpful but you can tell that there is a certain amount of frustration as well...it shouldn't be so difficult... Most of my clients will no longer build in the City of Austin...and I have seen firsthand clients that would rather remodel without a permit and face the consequences.

27. I have a really great checklist I invented. There are many, but mine features a Yes/No column that facilitates progress big time while not overlooking pending matters.
28. The issue isn't so much with the people ya'll hire. They are educated and do a good job. The issue with the COA is processes change every month and you never know what's changed from one visit to the next (I literally turn in BP's multiple times a month).
29. I do not want to come off as angry. But after 25+ years of architecture + development in this city, I have full knowledge of the COA development review system and the resulting frustration of enduring the process. As an architect and developer, I have submitted for platting, subdivision, rezoning, NP amendments, site planning, residential and commercial plan review. Over the years, I have been in appeals, met with directors, city council and city managers. And most of it sucked! Fortunately, it makes people like me a lot of \$\$\$ since we are part of the few that can actually navigate the system. Unfortunately, the inefficiencies and difficult layers to penetrate multi-departmental review and approval can take up to a year per task on complex commercial projects. This raises the public costs of review, the actual cost of construction and inspection and the developer's cost of capital. Please help! The COA PDRD culture is broken and plagued with disappointment.
30. Limit staffs ability to send projects backward when the customer has changed nothing. Provide an online paper trail for any staff recommendations or comments. It's not fair to have one staffer say something is needed or not needed and the next have a different go forward position. Provide some pre-approved plans. Provide some level of project approval that allows simple projects to start. For any step that requires an engineer's approval and stamp, remove the non-engineer city staff approval.

31. Ours was a fairly straightforward problem that involved two existing homes and a garage that had been organized into a two-unit condo by the lawyer owner prior to our purchase in 2006. We had neighborhood association and City Council approval, but the PD treated our application for a re-subdivision like a giant subdivision/shopping center application with, for instance, setback requirements that could not be met because our buildings already existed (since 1935!!!) We had to submit multiple (23 copies) of expensive plats, and then were told that a certain paragraph had to be added, and when corrected, that another paragraph was missing...Absurd! Eventually we were told that we just had to hire someone (estimate close to \$ 10,000) to complete the process ... and that's when we threw in the towel.... Suggestion: Make it clear at THE BEGINNING OF THE APPLICATION PROCESS, via an interview with a real person, whether the problem to be solved could be accomplished by a citizen applicant, or whether professional (expensive) help was required. Thanks.
32. It seems like each department you bring your application to, the staff person is trying to find something wrong so they don't have to process further. It's like the goal is to keep putting up road blocks for us. The staff from each department should work together to process the application. Every time I leave the permit office I'm frustrated and confused. Such a shame that the good karma from the Armadillo World Headquarters didn't rub off on that depressing place.
33. Basically, Plan Reviewers and Building Inspectors feel empowered to set their own rules, and to enforce them arbitrarily, and Builders are afraid to oppose them, for fear of retribution. Suggestions: 1) Do not allow Plan Reviewers and Building Inspectors to independently create rules that are not supported by either the LDC or the IRC codes, unless approved by the city council. 2) Require that Plan Reviewers and Building Inspectors enforce all rules uniformly, from one project to the next, so that all projects are treated the same.
34. It is not clear when you need to schedule and pay for a Residential consultation. I have paid several times for project specific questions and been told by the reviewer that I should have instead come in for general questions and vice versa. Also, reviewers will often read back the code to me instead of explaining and clarifying the conditions. The wait times to get permit applications and revisions reviewed are too long.
35. Get rid of the 11x17 scanner used for residential review. Why is the city using a scanner in 2014? Get a decent virus software (it comes pre-installed on most new computers) and start accepting cds of digital pdf copies of drawings. Nobody draws, and nobody builds from 11x17 drawings. This is costing us days of valuable time reformatting our drawings. And it's costing you time having to manually scan every sheet of paper that comes in the door. The fact that the city is ignoring construction drawing standards and forcing architects to submit non-standardized page sizes is

beyond absurd.... light-years beyond absurd. Every single residential reviewer I've spoken with has agreed.

36. Cover more broadly the things that can be included in the express permit. It took me 20 hours of my life to create, duplicate, wait on the planning department etc. for a 4 ft x 8 ft front porch repair which was considered an addition because it did not meet the definition of the express permit. It took me 8 hours to do the work and 3 times that in trips to the city, documentation, drawings, etc. I now charge my customers \$1800 for every time that I have to submit a permit. And that barely covers my cost and never compensates for the frustration and anger. Frankly I am not getting permits on many jobs now because the process is so onerous and expensive and of such little value add. I am now turning down jobs in the city that require a permit. I now focus outside the city or do inside work.
37. Provide a comprehensive rule book of about 50 pages or more that explains the rules, the city criteria for the hundreds of rules and procedures and checks. Make it available to every contractor that comes in. Provide copies of the submission checklist and the permit application available at all times. The last 3 times I was at the permit, I had to request the staff to find me a permit application, because there were none in the racks. Every time it took several minutes to wait on someone to find one. Go back to the process we had 5-10 years ago where we go arrive at the permit office, sit down with a permit specialist and normally get a permit issued within 45 minutes. The permit issuer did not critique the technical requirements. That was handled by the inspector. If the contractor did not know the code or did it wrong, he had to fix it at his cost at the site. That was a big incentive to get it right.
38. Make building code expertise more accessible to engineers and architects. We can't get answers. 2. There are frequently different outcomes when two different professionals ask for advice on the same thing. 3. Cut down on asking for the same data on many different forms.
39. Start over.
40. I am certain to come across as being unreasonable - I am not. It must have been difficult to have created such a dysfunctional mess as what exists at the City of Austin today. There is absolutely NO indication that these people are employed to SERVE the citizens. It is fast apparent that VERY FEW, if any, staff members are willing to make a common sense decision. Everyone acts as though they are incapable of signing off on anything. The system is FROZEN and no one seems empowered to make a decision. Roadblocks are put up at every single turn. One example (of dozens in this same vein) I cite; remodeling approximately 19,000 sq. ft. into office space. The plumbing department DEMANDED that we install 10 toilets in EACH of the two bathrooms (one male, one female). 20 places to go to the bathroom for a 19,000 sq. ft. building. NO PERSON with a brain would even think this could be useful or a requirement. Of course, we were forced to hire an outside

"consultant" and lo and behold, 5 weeks and \$10,000 later, the bathrooms are approved with 2 stalls in each. I cannot even call it incompetence because that would offer a logical explanation for the abysmal conditions that exist. I will tell you, NO ONE is willing to make a decision. Clearly, there is someone (or some group) that must make life a living hell if anyone approves something or exercises any brand of reasoning. I must stop now because my blood pressure is rising. I am THANKFUL that someone appears to be taking interest. The bottom line is the "head must be corrupt" because the entire body is that way....

41. There have been several layers added to the review process that slow down the approval of permits.
42. I would love to see a group of people that weren't overtaxed, and a merging of a number of unnecessarily duplicate functions and departments. It's like the offices in that building are physically incapable of speaking to one another.
43. I beg someone with authority from the city of Austin to go to San Antonio and experience how the plan review/permit process should be done. Effortless, seamless, communicative and straightforward (all foreign ideas to the city of Austin). I can't wait for these changes to be implemented right away at the City of Austin.....yea right!
44. Austin is the most undesirable dysfunction city we have ever developed in. We will not return to Austin under any circumstances to develop or even visit. When we bid the job several subcontractors told us they would not bid any work in Austin. Which we now understand is the opinion of a great deal of developers, contractors and sub-contractors. We were forced to do in excess of \$350,000 of work and improvements that directly benefited the city in the streets and improving their inter structure some which were not even needed for our project. But it was made clear if we did not our project would be delayed.
45. Overtime should be paid to get reviews and inspections out on time when revenue and activity is robust. Expected review times and inspections should be met 95% of the time even if people have to work late. Consulting with staff should be free. Inspections of existing buildings should be available for a fee. The codes should be enforced as adopted, not the way a reviewer thinks they should be. One year of sample behavior is too narrow since our problems have been going for much longer. Austin used to be an easier place to do business with just as tough regulations, because the systems were much more customer friendly. Like in a restaurant, some permits should be as quick as take-out and/or call-in orders, while those of us with more complex applications should take longer.
46. The city's process is has massive, none justified hold ups and costs more money than it is often worth.

47. Rely more on licensed professional seals (architect, engineer, landscape designer)
Make greater use of third party review and inspection.
48. The permit center needs more specialist. If you are knowingly receiving 50 permit applications a week, how is it logical to only have 5 permit specialist available for pick up? Poor planning and service on all fronts. Poor execution and poor organization. The city would do better to hire a private entity to process applications and permits than to change their system every 6 months.
49. Over the years, there have been many many changes and implementation of new policies and procedures, hours available, locations of offices within the building, etc etc, but I have always found working with the City of Austin and the staff within a pleasurable experience. Thank you for "Keeping Austin Permitted and Inspected!"
50. In my own home renovation projects I've found the city too difficult to work with on getting answers to questions I have - for something as simple as replacing my HVAC after a lightning strike, it has become a drawn out process because the inspector required me to add several CO2 detectors (how this was related to the HVAC, I don't know) and hasn't returned my calls or emails about a question (I work full time and it is very difficult for me to go to the DAC to address these questions in person). I have found that knowing I have to pull city permits has deterred me from doing improvement work at my home, because it's such a big hassle to deal with! In my professional work, I feel that a system needs to be in place that CLEARLY communicates not only code requirements but also clarifies the INTENT of the provision, so that applicants and reviewers are better equipped to prepare and review submittals. The process should be thorough and definitive.
51. Also, there needs to be a complaint system in case a project has problems with a reviewer that are above and beyond the project's control - ie, in case of a reviewer who is being unfair or unjust in their review of a project for unknown reasons.
52. First off, it is the process - not the people. The staff I encounter on an almost daily basis are in general friendly, courteous, knowledgeable, and they try to help you out. They look for issues and problems as well as they can on the front end. They are often as exasperated by the process as I am.
53. I have clients and contractors who WILL NOT WORK IN AUSTIN due to this process. The housing supply is artificially strangulated by this process, thus raising prices. Sprawl increases because it's so much easier to build outside the City. And eventually people looking to move to Austin will look elsewhere. However, to conclude, it is the PROCESS not the PEOPLE. I enjoy my interactions with City staff, many of whom I consider friends. All the staff I meet are well-qualified and have a sense of mission and purpose: they ensure public safety and urban livability. It is the PROCESS that is the problem.

54. I used the city's Commercial Plan Review, Zoning Review and Fire Department resources as part of my previous job (now retired) as an Architect and Sr. Project Manager for the Travis County Facilities Management Department. I found several of the staff to be exemplary in their knowledge, cooperation and assistance. I have no complaints on this level and the only comment is that they appear to generally be understaffed or burdened by too many tedious regulations. I do fully understand why there is so called government red tape. A lot of it is due to the requirement for public transparency. However, there has long been a tendency in the City of Austin to over-regulate, apparently to appease special interests but that's kind of a simple and un-nuanced observation.
55. The process is a bit overwhelming at first. Staff was really helpful through my process. The amount of red tape is ominous and hard to explain to my clients. They just want to get their facilities open and serve the public. My biggest problem was with AEGB. Working in the CBD, no one could give me a definitive answer on their Green requirement and the building department was, "Hey talk to them, it is not our problem".
56. I have been doing work from coast to coast, border to border for 30 years and AEGB has been a real burden. Their requirements almost doubles my fees to go through their process. I agree with their philosophy and want to move in that direction but my clients and myself were blindsided by their holding up my process. The bottom line is, folks want to do business in this great city but the red tape will come back to haunt Austin. Just remember the people that you step on the way up will come back to haunt you on the way back down. Austin, please don't get the big head. Times are good now but will not always be. People wanting to do business in this town in the future will remember the attitudes. SurveyMonkey? Scary!
57. The system is broken. It's been patched together by various Councils and department heads since the 80's. The people try hard, but are understaffed and/or under qualified to perform their duty.
58. Further, it's truly embarrassing to explain to someone from out of town that one has to turn in 17 sets of plans for review. This should be a shining example of how messed up the entire process is in its current state. Oh, and one also has to turn in a CD of the exact same content. I truly hope the results of this survey are scrutinized and publicized. If Austin really wants to encourage its inevitable growth in a manner that promotes affordability - rebuilding this department from top to bottom is the first step.
59. Incorporate ROW approval into the permit process so we don't get delayed every time with Dr. Bill Hadley having to approve everything. Relax on the residential. You don't need full drawings and MEP on minor remodels. Just make sure it's to code in the field. Only request an impervious survey if the final inspector thinks it is close.

60. Have a qualified person sitting at the front of the building to point people in the right direction. Last time I was there I signed in 3 different times to talk to different people who sent me to other places. I should be able to walk in and ask "who would i talk to about a residential water tap permit in the street?" and they would send me to the correct location. Would save everyone tons of time.
61. The One-Stop shop for C&J projects is completely broken. The fiscal process is very cumbersome. Far too many waivers and variances are required for normal development process.
62. This was my first time to deal with the PDRD, and it will be my last. Trying to obtain a simple business permit for a small business in a commercial strip center became too time consuming and finally gave up.
63. FULL overhaul is needed, not the other two options that are being considered! Speed has increased, but inexperienced and/or overworked staff with an attitude is a huge problem.
64. Simplify and shorten the residential process and requirements, especially for small projects. More people might actually apply for permits if the direct and indirect cost for getting a permit for a small project wasn't so high. Train the staff better so they know.
65. I don't even know where to start. The bureaucracy is mind-boggling. One person tells you to do something and you do it and come back and another person tells you that is wrong. Half the people there have no clue what the rules are. The first-line staff is helpful, albeit not well informed, but the people that ultimately approve your permit are inaccessible and unreasonable. I could write a novel on the kafkaesque ridiculousness I've encountered.

PDRD can institute some process improvements that focus on excellence in performing its mission while also being truly great at customer service the City of Austin would be significantly improved.

Here is an example. I wanted to replace my porch that had to be demolished to repair my foundation. Just to replace my porch I was required to submit an application for an "addition" which included signoff from Austin energy, flood review, etc. etc. Then I was told that I had to submit certified engineer plans for a 6 x 12 REPLACEMENT of my porch. Due to the engineering requirements I had to pour the equivalent amount of concrete that holds up my entire house. What should have been a \$700 porch replacement ended up costing me \$2500.

I could cite at least 10 more examples of the ridiculousness I've encountered with this department.

66. The department deserves credit for taking the initiative to do this survey. The first and most important thing the PDRD can do if focus on process improvements that support great customer service. Codes are important and Code Compliance is important, but the operations of the PDRD create an obstruction to an effective process for enabling businesses to successfully accomplish their objectives. If the Site Plans
67. During plan review, predominately, the site plan review. Give the full listing of comments during the first review process. We have seen where review comments in the 2nd round could have been noted and responded to after the first round, possibly saving several days in the process. Fire Dept., - recently experienced where meeting and getting a clarification and approvals from 1 member of the department, then when final inspections were needed, they sent a different representative who had a different interpretation and more delays to the approval process.
68. There is no impetus for City Staff to issue a Site Development Permit. I worked for 423 days for a simple 16 unit Townhouse project (2 of which are Affordable). My architect attended MIT for his undergraduate degree and has a PhD from Texas. He knows what he is doing. Only a threat of the Mayor Pro Tem being embarrassed for speaking at ground breaking without a permit being issued - yielded the permit. Multiple meetings with multiple departments for 16 simple townhouses. In any other jurisdiction the Townhouses would already have been built and occupied. My client receives 500 infill permits per year in Texas. Identical permits for identical projects in Austin take an enormous amount of additional time without improving the project.
69. I think that there are multiple problems in site development review. I will in general complain about staff, but for the most part staff are courteous and wonderful people. Though, I would say that in general, and at this time, most are not willing to help, much less in a timely manner. They appear to be overworked, overstressed, don't care and are generally unhappy. The word I would use is indifferent, which is a sure sign of a bad working environment.
70. The first review and even the second review are not complete and are woefully late. We have comments coming back 2 weeks late on a consistent basis and make comments on items that are clearly on the plans. On the third review cycle, we are consistently getting new comments even though the project has not changed. Staff have clearly not read the comment response letter, have not read emails that are sent to confirm the events of meetings, change their mind after a meeting and generally provide a confusing environment. We have resorted to redlining sheets in meetings and still get comments! Meanwhile, the project hasn't changed, the size of a pond hasn't changed, the outfall hasn't changed, and nothing has changed but labels. Solution: The City should get one bite at the apple and have a standard format for required items on all projects. Required items such as FAR, building coverage, impervious cover, net site area, height, slopes, etc should be in a standard

table on an independent sheet so there are no more questions regarding these items. There should be a template for all height requirements such as compatibility, waterfront overlay, zoning height, fire height etc. It would be basic and easy. Most importantly, the first round of comments must identify any issues. Any subsequent comments should be contained to the responses to comments. The third update and 5 months down the road is not an appropriate time to add 20 new comments to a project, because an adequate review was not performed earlier.

71. The most fundamentally challenging aspect of working with the PDRD is the unpredictability of what the process will be to see a project through to completion. One example is the Quick Turnaround plan review. The implementation of that process is highly inconsistent. It's a valuable process to enable appropriate projects to be expedited but although the criteria for qualifying projects is published, the implementation of the practice is not consistent with the published criteria. This makes it impossible to predict if any particular project, other than obviously non-qualifying ones, will be able to follow the QT review. The QT process should be expanded to enable a greater number of projects to take an expedited review path and the criteria for qualifying projects should be expanded, clearly defined and consistently applied.

Staff

1. It's got to be one of the hardest jobs there is. They should receive combat pay. The rules are impossibly complex and often poorly written. Staff often appear inexperienced with the practicalities of design, permitting and construction. Staff often seems very worried about getting in trouble, making trouble for themselves, something. That often makes it very hard to get decisions, and sometimes the decisions one gets are so absurd. I am impossibly weary with the whole thing. I think it would help enormously if there were a big timer set in the middle of each conference table, and that each meeting participant was required to enter their hourly rate at the beginning of meetings. And then at the end of the meeting, all could assess, was this meeting really worth the hundreds or even thousands of dollars it cost?
2. This is not generally a staff issue. Staff is just as stressed at the customers but they are afraid to interpret the code because of the repercussions and they have way too many projects. There has been a 200% increase in the number of submittals (commercial) but staff has not increased significantly.
3. The ability for ineffective or toxic employees to be terminated or reassigned more easily.
4. Staff for planning/zoning review in general is young and inexperienced.
5. Fire all the lazy bureaucrats and hire some people who want to get things done.

6. In terms of customer service, hire people who actually care about their jobs/ people they work with and have good manners. It's not that complicated.
7. An ideal scenario would be to get rid of 90% of the personnel from the PDRD and replace them with automated systems. Then take the remaining 10% and have them focus all of their time on consulting customers, educating them on the development process, and directing them to the proper resources. This is something the DAC does very well, but it's severely understaffed. There are so many people running around the rest of the PDRD that are just maintaining antiquated systems and not providing any real value to the public. If you need any other idea, feel free to call me. I'm very passionate about seeing this get turned around.
8. The next thing they can do is train the staffers to know their job. Many of the new hires simply have zero understanding of the development code their required and hired to enforce. This results in one mistake after another after another after another. It is extremely common for review staff to list a set of requirements that simply do not apply to a specific project. This requires us to seek input from a manager who may or may not be available to overturn the immediate staff's rejection. After waiting in line for two hours preparing an application for another two hours, it's very disheartening to get rejected at the intake level because the intake staff doesn't know how to do their job even though we try to educate them since we've been doing this for so long. There needs to be a policy put in place that requires all staff reply to emails or phone calls within 24 hours of receipt, even if they're only responding to tell you that they got the call or email and will respond more thoroughly at a specified date. The city is notorious for not responding at all. If these employees worked in the private sector they would be fired due to lack of project management or client management skills.
9. More staff to reduce review time. Don't charge for specific more detailed reviews Reduce wait time for questions & submittal.
10. Review staff needs to be better trained in building code.
11. Again, the city is a quagmire when it comes to developing within the city limits. They are untimely, unprofessional and under staffed. There is no consistency within the system. As a construction company owner, I like rules but with the city the rules are undefined and open to interpretation and change between jobs, reviewers and inspectors. We just want to be able to work within the lines without changes around every corner. This leads to unhappy clientele, expensive additional costs and headaches for all involved in the development and construction process.
12. Hire more staff.
13. In many cities the attitude of the review staff is to help the applicant to accomplish his goals. In Austin it is one frustration after another.

14. These are lazy people for the most part.
15. Train key staff members on the entire process of a project from initial submittal to City staff through acceptance of construction. Expect these staff members to pass along what they have learned to other PDRD staff members.
16. I have been working with the City of Austin for many years pulling plumbing trade permits. I have had many great successes with working with the staff in the permit center, tree permit center, building plan review, and commercial plan review. I have been especially pleased to work with Glenda Wilsford and Alma Rumsfield in the permit center, as well as others, but I primarily worked with the Glenda and Alma. I have also been very pleased to work with all of the intake staff for commercial building plan review, Mary Blount, Carol Raney Moncada, and Nicolette (I can't remember her last name :() as well as the approval staff for commercial Quick Turn-around building permits. I enjoyed working with Bryan Walker when he did approvals for residential quick-turnaround building permits before he moved to a different department, and Michael Watson is great to work with as well. I've worked with many commercial inspectors and residential inspectors over the years as well and have had many great experiences with our inspections and ease of scheduling and communicating, especially with Supervisors! I must also say that Brad Ward and Mike Grady are extremely easy and pleasant to work with when we have issues with sewer yard lines and problems involving the City tap. Even though I had a bad experience with Bill Waters a few years ago, I have been able to work amicably with him since that time. I think we all have bad days sometimes, myself included!!
17. Pay planners more money so that they stay at their jobs.
18. Hire staff that are customer service oriented and have the education/experience for the position. Make staff accountable for their actions.
19. Keep staff off Facebook during work hours. Get rid of about 1/2 of the staff and make the remaining work. I see too many staff setting around chatting when they should be working.
20. Stop letting experienced staff leave without training replacements.
21. Furthermore, what will ultimately help is more qualified staff for all PDRD reviewing depts. I am thankful I do not live in Austin. Because if the taxpayers knew what the city is wasting on the consultant and the software, someone would be having some explaining to do.
22. More staff ability to make minor decisions is needed.
23. Change the culture to one that encourages staff to help projects meet the criteria.

24. In the view of the business owners, construction contractors, design professionals and plan review expeditors, the PDRD appears to be severely under staffed, highly dysfunctional as a team and lacking in leadership. This is evidenced by a lack of responsiveness when project teams contact PDRD staff, slow processing of plan review and a lack of consistency in the interpretation and direction provided by PDRD staff.
25. Hire more staff so wait times are reduced.

Tax Certificates

1. Stop requiring a tax certificate for any permit. It is a terribly inefficient way for the city to enforce tax payments and has never added any value. I spend at least 4 hours of my staff's time to drive across the Austin traffic and put in the request and then do the same round trip when the certificate is ready. What a waste of my life, of the county tax office, of the bureaucrat that checks it off the arbitrary list of submission requirements. It literally cost me about \$240 of my time to get one of these. You should make the department head go get them and this would stop. Our city is coming to a standstill with traffic and the department is forcing every contractor on every permit to drive across the city for this meaningless, value less task. Shame on you.
2. PDRD checklists for submittals can be unclear at times. For example, when listing a document like a Tax Certificate, it should be listed whether an Official copy must be submitted, or whether a copy of the official tax certificate will suffice.

Technology

1. The ability to submit permit requests online would save thousands of man-hours waiting in line.
2. The biggest priority of PDRD should be to make online submittals possible. The amount of hours I spend weekly sitting in the waiting room trying to submit is utterly ridiculous. In the same manner, permits should be able to be paid for and retrieved online. On top of the hours sitting on the second floor, the hours sitting in the permit center are the biggest waste of time. I generally spend 12-15 hours week at the city just waiting.
3. The wait for the permitting department can be up to 4 hours. A type of online process submittal would be beneficial rather than having to wait for a person to handle certain situations. The department has gotten better and more organized, but still lacks good customer service. I dread going because of the negative atmosphere. A lot of people get frustrated because of the wait times.

4. Electronic review. Completeness check comments that can be cleared individually. AWU a part of AMANDA. AWU policy online so that we are not surprised at review time.
5. Once an application is approved, allow online payment for the permit. I do not understand the need to wait in line for 1-3 hours just to pay for a permit and have it printed out. All other cities allow online payments. I sincerely hope you will consider this suggestion. It will be the solution to many of the Development Services problems.
6. On Line submittals and ability to pay for permits online. I have worked within residential permitting for 10 years and have had dealings with every municipality within Central Texas ~ I can honestly say that City of Austin is BY FAR the worst to deal with.
7. Electronic submission should be allowed for plan review.
8. Very archaic most other cities around Austin allow us to submit applications via flash drive and then all corrections are done by email.
9. Please, please let us submit applications online!! We make PDF's anyways, and it would be so easy and TO SCALE! It would save our clients' money and you wouldn't have to scan in the drawings. And store them. Have workshops to explain building coverage, impervious cover, and gross floor area. Show off several well put together permit applications for applicants to look at as examples. I do Permit Searches to look at old permit applications, but I never know if they were done correctly. Create an online forum for people to ask questions to reviewers. Let us post pictures and such to clarify questions.
10. For residential review: Allow permit submissions via online portal, with clear step-by-step instructions.
11. Your idea of an electronic submittal is a joke. How is that going to speed the review of my plans up? Your grasp on what really happens at the city needs to be overhauled. Why would you (Mr. Zucker) come down at 4pm to see nothing happening when all depts. are closed. Try Wed. at 9 am on the 2cd floor, try the permit center at 12:30 any day, try DAC at 11.
12. Upon approval, why should we have to come to the city office and wait to meet with someone to pay. An online payment system seems obvious and needed.
13. Online plan submittal. This would get rid of all paper and eliminate the need for any city employees checking to make sure that everything has been submitted (the application could do that). 2) Online payments. Permits should be able to be paid for online. Nearly every department in the PDRD creates its own invoices which you

- then have to take to another department to pay them. All this could be automated digitally. 3) Online distribution of permits. Once permits have been reviewed provide a digital permit that can be emailed out to a customer which prevents them from ever even having to go to PDRD to pick anything up. 4) Build an automated plan review application. Build a piece of software that scans CAD files for code compliance. Customers submit their CAD files online and get instant feedback on what needs to be changed. This would eliminate the need for all reviewers and maintain consistency across the board.
14. This department needs to get out of the fifties and start working electronically. Create processes that eliminates all visits to their offices.
 15. It's 50 years almost since we put a man on the moon and we still have to stand in line on the first floor to pay Intake fees and such. This can't be done by phone or computer and with credit cards? ARE YOU KIDDING ME? It's the 21 Century already and a lot of what's happening at the City would embarrass the 20th Century. 2. Having to motor to town to pick up a permit instead of being able to pay for it online and collect it by email, is as ridiculous as it is outrageous. Austin government, please say hello to the 21st Century!
 16. Digital submissions could cut down on submittal times, lost drawings by the various departments, and the time it takes to pick up drawings from one department and submit to the next.
 17. I believe that most jurisdictions are moving to online application process through Govt online (Mypermit now). You can fill in application, upload plans and documents (and corrections) and even pay online or still have permits billed through escrow. It seems counterproductive to spend hours at the city to submit plans and updates. Especially when you then scan them in anyway later. I do enjoy coming to the city so I do not mind, but it would seem to be a more efficient way to process at least simple building permits.
 18. Move the permitting process online. For each step online, the system would have received, not received, approved, time allowed city staff to approve, not approved, steps needed to receive approval. All materials could be submitted online.
 19. I am very nervous that the new system is going to be more of the same.
 20. Should be able to submit application and plans electronically, be able to track application process. The application should be pushed automatically to other necessary departments--the applicant should be notified where the application is in the process should be able to pay online.
 21. Permit pickup and payment could be easier and less time consuming by providing more online services.

22. Why not ask the consultants (who are going to be put out of business by this electronic submission) to come up with a solution instead? Please email me if you want any further discussions.
23. It might be worth all city's employee's time to step up and produce an ONLINE permit process.
24. More use of online submittals (but is it possible to stop posting copyrighted architectural plans online for everyone to see including burglars?)
25. I frequently apply for pool and patio permits. Please have this available online... as driving to the city during rush hour, only available 3 days a week is cumbersome and inconvenient. Additionally, driving to the city and looking for a parking space to pick up the permit is even more inconvenient. The wait has been up to 5 hours just to pick up a permit. Definitely a waste of time and energy. Cedar Park and Leander do these type of permit applications all on-line. Extremely efficient. Thanks for asking. Permitting via the city of Austin is a HASSLE.
26. Make any and all applicable fees payable online either through credit card or escrow account.
27. Simplify all aspects of express permitting online to help reduce foot traffic at the city office and give them more time to answer phone calls.
28. Enable online submission of projects. This is the single biggest problem in my work: either I must go to the City, or hire someone to do so, to drop off projects at specific times and dates. Especially in Residential Review, where intake only occurs for a total of 11 hours per 40-hour week - and at inconvenient times - the lack of online submission is a major headache and costs me time and fees, and increases the cost of a project. I spend less than half of my time actually "being an architect" (designing, meeting with clients and contractors) and more than half of my time navigating City codes and procedures. 3. Further to (2), online submissions would save literally millions of square feet of paper. This City purports to want to be sustainable, yet the wants of (some) individual reviewers - who like paper - overrule collective desires for sustainability. So much waste, so much waste, so much waste. 4. Online payment. The payment procedure is straight out of the 1980s (or earlier). 5. Online tracking of project comments. You never know what is wrong until you get a "rejection." It would be better to be able to see this online, in real time, so you would be able to fix it in a timely manner. The federal government gets a bad rap for being overly bureaucratic and slow, but their project submission and review system was excellent. Submit online, get comments online, and the reviewers spend less time pushing paper and thus can answer the phone when you call to ask questions. The state (specifically University of Texas System) also has a better process. Projects are reviewed in parallel by all departments, and then comments are conveyed to the client in review sessions with all reviewers attending. However, with the sheer

number of customers, this would be overwhelming (thus online tracking of comments).

29. On-line plan submittals.
30. On-line permit pick up. On-line payments (other than escrow).
31. The permit process has been greatly improved over the past several years, but it seems like there are some things that could be done to eliminate some of the crowd in the permit office. Online payment of re-inspection or after-hours inspection fees would be one.
32. There DEFINITELY needs to be a faster way to pay for an APPROVED permit. Why cannot this be done online?

Telephone and Emails

1. Getting City employees to accept or return phone calls is almost impossible. I have been told, and believe, that the philosophy of City staff is to ignore calls and voice mail messages ... that if a customer really wants to reach staff they will call back. I have had repeated calls ignored repeatedly for weeks on end. Some calls have never been returned. I have sent emails that were not acknowledged much less returned for weeks. In some cases my only recourse has been to go to the City's office unannounced and demand a response or action.
2. There are no repercussions for the reviewers to not return phone calls or emails. They are aware that their performance evaluation does not judge them on this, so they don't bother calling back

Timelines

1. I find the City of Austin to be very frustrating to deal with. It would really help if we could at least have a realistic deadline of when we can expect feedback, even if it is longer than what is proscribed in the department policy. It is outrageous and frankly embarrassing that, when a client asks me how long their project will take to receive a building permit, I do not have a way to give them an answer that I feel comfortable will actually happen.
2. City staff would have a limited time to either approve each step or not approve with reasons. No fair for the city staff to give only one reason and continue to not approve. Reward personal for correct approved permits.
3. The permitting process takes too long, is very cumbersome and nothing is grandfathered when policy and code changes occur.

4. The wait time for turning in a residential permit is ridiculous.
5. Although the plan review to permit times change it seems as large as Austin is and continues to grow permit time seems excessive. When there is a time limit set to have corrections addressed it appears that nothing happens on the case until the last day.
6. The review process with the majority of other cities is under 2 weeks, heck I can get a permit within the city of Round Rock or Pflugerville within a couple of days. The processes and procedures have always been difficult with City of Austin. With such high turnover within the review department, I can only assume the delay in review is from the lack of knowledge within the staff... they have no idea what they are looking for. If a builder is required to have plans architecturally stamped and all engineering stamped, why does the city even need to review?? Thank you for generating this survey, I hope you come up with a better way of serving contractors and builders.
7. People coming to Austin from out of town, out of state or out of country are dumbfounded by the fact that the review times take so much time for comments or approval. IF I GOT PAID TO TURN PROJECTS AROUND IN TWO TO THREE TIMES LONGER THE TIME FRAME THAN I SAY I WILL THEN I MUST HAVE A GOVERNMENTAL JOB BECAUSE THIS IS THE TREND WITH THE CITY'S REVIEW DEPARTMENTS. AS A PRIVATE PROFESSIONAL I WOULD BE OUT OF BUSINESS & BROKE WITH THIS SAME DELAYED DELIVERY SYSTEM WITH MY OWN CLIENTS. I CAN BELIEVE HOW BROKEN THE SYSTEM IS BECAUSE OF HOW LONG I HAVE BEEN DEALING WITH IT. PEOPLE WHO CANNOT BELIEVE HOW BAD IT IS OBVIOUSLY HAVE NOT BEEN DEALING WITH IT FOR VERY LONG. IT IS VERY BELIEVABLE AND IT IS VERY REAL. PLEASE, PRETTY PLEASE, WITH SUGAR ON TOP, HELP FIND A SOLUTION TO THE INEFFICIENCIES WITHIN THE CITY OF AUSTIN'S PLAN REVIEW PROCESS.
8. A clear and established point of contact and 3-5 day response time that is noted, measured and recorded would be helpful. Do you want to be Nordstrom or Walmart? I often say it is an honor and a privilege to be a home builder. It is also a responsibility that I do not take lightly. What are your core values? What is your mission statement? BTW I have read your mission statement and I don't believe a word of it. I dare say neither do your employees.
9. I realize that there is a lot of construction going on in Austin and PDRD has undergone major reorganization. Some bumps in the process are to be expected, and perhaps there is improvement overall. But I still cannot give my clients a realistic expectation of how long the permitting process will take. And as I'm sure you're aware, speed is of the utmost importance. It makes us as architects look bad when we double or trip.

10. . Have faster project review times, 60+ days for first comments is simply unacceptable. Have all City issued Comment letters on Formal Letterhead, with comments numbered and referencing specific code sections. Many reviewers are often subjective and do not address specific Code sections or regulations.
11. My biggest complaint is the timeframe it takes to get plans reviewed and approved. It appears that plans are being rejected at the first pass just so the plans can be moved from the 'to be reviewed' pile to the "rejected pile" just to clear a departments backlog. That may not be the case but it sure seems like that's how things have been operating. The staff is knowledgeable but doesn't necessarily have the time to thoroughly research projects that may be a little different than normal so they get rejected on the first pass. Upon further review they see that what was proposed is acceptable to the intent of the code. I hope the city can find it in their budget to hire additional reviewers.
12. Allow submittals to be done digitally on PDF's, even online. It would be a lot easier to have PDF's with all the stamps on them that we could print out at any time in case they are lost/wet/destroyed in the field. Be able to pay online or on the phone re-inspection fees. Right now it takes hours going downtown or we have to open an account and fax in payment requests. That's stupid, just take a freaking credit card like everyone else.

Training

1. Consistent Staff Training would be a great place to start....
2. Involve the law dept. and do much better training of staff. Train them in code history and proper interpretation techniques. Train them to look things up before making decisions esp. DAC Train boa staff and provide some history and background to assist commissioners. Require permit staff to have experience and training in building profession and with code institutions. A non-architect should not be reviewing architectural plans. Same for engineering etc.

Transportation

1. Given that Traffic/Transportation is probably the most important issue facing the City of Austin at this time, I would have thought the City would invest more time/dollars towards Staff to make sure projects that impact the Traffic/Transportation System are addressed and well managed. ATD is missing a variety of key staff members due to recent departures. The Signals office is severely understaffed and wear too many different hats not allowing them to do a good job at their primary tasks.

2. Parking. A lot and garage that is supposed to be for people working in the building process (many of whom drive large trucks required by their trades) - this parking lot is striped and designed for smart cars.

Trees

1. Getting a tree review is a good example of the stupid bureaucracy: there are pieces of paper taped to the walls to direct you to the reception office because the hallways are like a maze. At the reception office, they send you back through the maze to another room to turn in the paperwork. Then they send you downstairs to stand in line to pay for the review.
2. Building around heritage trees has become nearly impossible. Allow for reasonable critical root zone infringement that will be unlikely to harm trees, especially for residential additions.
3. Tree review (_____) can be a nightmare and hold up the permitting process. The wait time to get a tree permit reviewed/approved can be up to two weeks. Also, the conditions for approval can be unfair and unnecessary.

Web Site

1. More detail on the web about how to fill out a building application. I know new ones are in the works with better explanations, but there are still quite a few grey areas that aren't being addressed by staff. The latest application is actually more difficult to complete than the old one! Would like the ability to submit plans by PDF in the future - rather than standing in line for intake that is only open a few hours a week, especially for resubmits.
2. Recently on-line access and browsing of the City technical manuals has been much harder than before.
3. Organize website more intelligently; use subject and keyword searching instead of making people know City terminology and department naming. Put department organization and subject matter into the search engine.
4. Improve the city's website so that all recent changes in LDC rules are prominently posted.
5. Easier website to navigate.
6. The website needs to be easier to navigate as far as documents that are required for the permitting process-one place to find consistent information.

7. Gentlemen, Could someone please tell me who is in charge of modifying all of the online applications (site plan, subdivision and zoning). They are in desperate need of attention. There is no way that we can complete the applications correctly as they are structured now. All of the fields to enter the property information, owner information etc. are too limited in length and do not allow all correct information to be entered appropriately. I have asked numerous times to have this looked at. Looking at the Subdivision application online today I noticed it was updated August 2014 and the same problems exist. If you do not understand what I mean, please go online the same as we have to do and select one of the applications. Try to type in every field all the information needed. IMPOSSIBLE! This is very frustrating and very unprofessional when we have to send the application out to our clients for signature and the darn thing is incomplete because the form won't let us type full descriptions. Please let me know if you have any questions.
8. The process flow charts are extremely helpful to disseminate information to a group. I think they should be more widely used and updated continually.
9. Please fix the on-line website to include all figures, charts, graphs, exhibits, and standard details. This is a big issue when even the City reviewers cannot find these online to support their review comments. Please fix the searchable fields so that codes and ordinances can be found more easily by exact wording. Every time I search, lots of erroneous information shows up. Please improve the data download portal (GIS and DXF and particularly dwg. files) so that information is easier to obtain. This has been a major issue and time waste over last 20 years. Particularly make the dwg files more easily geo-referenced. Include a point person that understands the needs of consultants to obtain this information (such as dwg files and geo-referenced topography and aerial data) so we may better assist land owners. And have them answer the phone. Automation is great if dispensed and immediately corrected by the human touch.
10. Alphabetical research will NEVER be trumped. You should be able to go online and find a SIMPLE home page, WITHOUT fanfare, ads, business that features a single simple Search box. Assume you want to know what's required to build a deck for BBQs, etc. SEARCH: Deck SUBSEARCHES: Construction materials permitted Design, minimal requirements Elevation from ground, how attached to home, etc. Foundation requirements Inspection(s) required Permit requirements (Applications for, Floor and Room #) Project Plan (selfie? architect generated? general contractor?) Railing (height, hand rail, guard rail, etc.) Ramp (handicap requirements) Size (size allowed, how determined, etc.) Stairs (minimum width, angle, etc.) UPDATE HISTORY: Foundation requirements (9/23/14 update replaced 7/07/12 guidelines) Ramp (10/14/14 update replaces 8/20/13 guidelines). Notice too that even the SUBSEARCHES are in alphabetical order. Yes, it will take a lot of initial organization, but investigating permits

should not be as difficult as the nightmare it is. And please notice "Permit Requirements," which tells you WHAT floor to go to, WHAT room to go into (not one City room has a number, not one!). Also please notice that the UPDATE HISTORY allows the individual to go online and see if a given guideline has changed and when this happened. The UPDATE HISTORY only needs to list the date of the last guideline and the date of the most recent guideline superseding it. And please note that even the UPDATE HISTORY is in alphabetical order. The rule for a powerful alphabetized SEARCH engine is very simple: + NOUNS always take precedent. List things by their simplest, most popular name: Landing, Deck, Stairs, Awning, Shed, Sidewalk, Driveway, Septic, Plumbing, Water, Wastewater, Sewer, Roof, etc. When a noun won't work, list the item by VERB. One of these two will ALWAYS apply no matter what the project or action is. YOU DIDN'T ASK DEPARTMENT:

