

## 8. Revise Austin’s development regulations and processes to promote a compact and connected city.

Austin’s City Charter requires that land development regulations be consistent with the comprehensive plan. Significant revisions to existing regulations will be necessary to fully implement the priority programs described above. For example, *Imagine Austin* calls for new development and redevelopment to be compact and connected, but many elements of the existing Land Development Code make this difficult to accomplish. Achieving these goals will require a comprehensive review and revision of the Land Development Code, associated technical and criteria manuals, and administrative procedures.

Since its adoption in 1987, the Land Development Code has been a continually modified and updated document, reflecting countless hours of community participation and input. Elements of the Land Development Code and the broader City Code incorporate carefully crafted compromises and significant community decisions that have been reached through long-lasting committees, task forces, and citizen referenda.

The existing neighborhood and area plans were crafted within context of this code and decisions were reached based upon the assumptions of the continued utilization of its provisions. This includes elements of the Land Development Code that are not specifically addressed in neighborhood and area plans but on which decisions were based (e.g., compatibility standards). The vision of the comprehensive plan can be achieved by retaining these protections and the approaches taken in the neighborhood and area plans.

Any suggested rewrite of the City Code, while striving to achieve the broad goals of the comprehensive plan, must recognize, respect, and reflect these carefully crafted compromises, balances, and the assumptions upon which the existing neighborhood and area plans were based and depend.

Continued protection and preservation of existing neighborhoods and the natural environment must be considered top priorities of comprehensive revisions to the City Code. The consequences and impact of additional density and infill in existing neighborhoods must be carefully identified and analyzed to avoid endangering the existing character of neighborhoods and exacerbating community health and safety issues, such as flooding.

Impacts on sustainability and livability by increased infill and density of units, including associated infrastructure costs and impacts on affordability, should be identified prior to adoption of a new city code. Modifications to the City code and building code should be measured with regard to their ability to preserve neighborhood character, consistency with adopted neighborhood and area plans, impact on affordability, and the ability of existing families to continue to reside in their homes.

LEAD
City of Austin Planning and Development Review
PARTNERS
Parks and Recreation Department; Watershed Protection Department; Austin Fire Department; Austin Energy; Austin Resource Recovery; Public Works Department; Austin Transportation Department; Capital Planning Office; Austin Water Utility; Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization; Travis County.
RELATED VISION COMPONENTS
Livable
Natural and Sustainable
Mobile and Interconnected
Affordable
RELATED POLICIES
LUT P1, P3, P4, P6, P8, P9, P11, P15, P17, P28, P32, P33, P36; HN P1, P4, P5, P7, P10, P13; E P13, P14; CE P11; CFS P13, P20, P21, P34, P35; S P2, P3, P9, P21; C P18.
RELATED ACTIONS
LUT A2-A11, A19, A26, A28, A30, A34, A35, A38, A42; HN A1-A4, A11, A14, A15, A17, A19, A20, A24; E A3; CE A3, A5, A21, A23; CFS A18, A20, A23, A25, A34, A36, A40; S A4, A12; C A3, A14.

<b>GOALS</b>
<b>Make Austin a more compact city.</b>
<b>METRICS</b>
- Residential density (people per square mile) within centers and corridors
- Units within ½ mile of retail and activity centers
<b>GOALS</b>
<b>Make Austin a more connected city.</b>
<b>METRICS</b>
- Sidewalk Density
- Intersection Density
- Units within ½ mile of transit and high capacity transit
<b>GOALS</b>
<b>Increase the percentage of mixed-use development.</b>
<b>METRICS</b>
- Development within activity centers and corridors
<b>GOALS</b>
<b>Create an efficient development review process.</b>
<b>METRICS</b>
- Percent of development needing discretionary approval
- Time needed for decision

The revised Land Development Code should incorporate direction from the actions attached to this program (see the Action Matrix, starting on page 228). Generally, these actions:

- Promote a compact and connected city that welcomes Austin’s diverse households
- Preserve the character of different neighborhoods and parts of the city
- Promote affordability for Austinites at every stage of life and income level
- Integrate nature into the city and protect environmentally sensitive areas
- Ensure the delivery of efficient services
- Provide clear guidance in a user-friendly format

The first step in revising the Land Development Code is an inclusive public process to examine the existing code and develop a shared understanding of the issues, conflicts and impediments to accomplishing the goals of *Imagine Austin*. Once a decision has been made on issues and directions to achieve these goals, the process of creating a more efficient, predictable, and understandable Land Development Code, criteria manuals, and review process will begin. When the revised code is in place, its application will need to be monitored and evaluated on an ongoing basis to ensure that it results in development outcomes such as more compact and connected places.

**STEPS TO IMPLEMENT THE PROGRAM**

**SHORT TERM (1-3 YEARS)**

1. Engage key stakeholders to create a public involvement process and timeline for revising the code and criteria manuals. This process should include significant educational components and workshops early in the process. These should be structured both from a technical perspective involving City Council, Planning Commission, and other Boards and Commissions, and the design community, as well as business owners, neighborhood groups, and residents. Examples of public input methods include surveys of regular code users, design workshops, site visits, visual tools, best practices, and technical reviews of proposed changes.
2. Initiate a comprehensive review to determine necessary revisions to the Austin Land Development Code and associated technical and criteria manuals.
  - a. Perform an initial review and assessment (diagnosis) of the Land Development Code and associated criteria manuals to identify major issues and key sections that need to be revised and those sections that will remain the same. This step also includes public engagement and interviews/focus groups with business owners, landowners, neighborhood groups, designers, developers, and community leaders.
  - b. Determine staffing levels, the need for consultants, and financial resources needed to complete the comprehensive review and code revision.

- c. Develop a process and timeline for updating the Land Development Code and manuals.
3. Assess the efficiency of the City of Austin’s development review process and implement necessary changes.

**LONG TERM (3+ YEARS, ONGOING)**

4. Adopt the code and manual revisions.
  - a. Create guidelines and a process to transition from current to new regulations in alignment with the Growth Concept Map and small area plans.
  - b. Revise the zoning map to be consistent with the revised Land Development Code.
  - c. Train staff on the new code.
5. Track new development and evaluate how well the new code and manuals encourage development that is compact and connected. Coordinate with the *Imagine Austin* annual report and complete communities indicator process described on pages 223-226.

**RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PRIORITY PROGRAMS:**

- Invest in transportation and other improvements to create a compact and connected Austin. The revised Land Development Code and technical and criteria manuals will include design standards and incentives for complete streets as well as standards to encourage public transit, walking, and bicycling as alternatives to driving.
- Use green infrastructure to protect environmentally sensitive areas and integrate nature into the city. Revising the Land Development Code, technical and criteria manuals will both incentivize and require “green” elements relating to street design, site planning and design, landscaping, as well as other aspects of the development process.
- Sustainably manage our water resources. The revised Land Development Code, technical and criteria manuals will include standards and incentives for low impact development, innovative water and greywater reuse, and preservation of environmentally sensitive land, floodplains, and water recharge areas. Changes to the Land Development Code will support development patterns that better manage water resources.
- Create a Healthy Austin Program. The revised code, technical and criteria manuals will include standards and guidelines for compact and connected development and design standards to make walking and biking safer and more attractive for residents.
- Develop and maintain household affordability throughout Austin. Revisions to the Land Development Code will be reviewed from the context of affordability. The City of Austin’s S.M.A.R.T. Housing Program has been held up nationally as an example of best practice and is a good starting point for examining process and practice issues within the Austin code.

The new code will also promote more flexible standards for the construction and preservation of affordable units.

**RELATED CITY INITIATIVES:**

- Healthy Austin Code
- Neighborhood Plans
- Corridor and Station-Area Plans
- Families and Children Task Force Report
- Urban Parks Workgroup Report