

District 4 - Summary of City Council's Land Use Reforms

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The Austin City Council is taking action on our housing crisis!

Top 3 Upcoming Items

HOME ACT - 3 units by right and reduced lot sizes

Summary: The HOME Act (Home Options for Middle-income Empowerment) will create more home-ownership opportunities for the middle class by allowing for smaller homes on smaller lots. This will be accomplished by a combination of allowing up to 3 units (vs 2 now) on a lot and lowering the minimum lot size. Austin's current minimum lot size of 5750 sq ft is one of the highest in the nation and leads to the construction of large expensive homes. Allowing for smaller single family homes will reduce the cost of homeownership, making it accessible to future generations.

Timeline:

- Phase 1: Allowing 3 units by right, smaller changes to 2 unit standards
 - Joint PC/Council Public Hearing: Oct 26th 2023, 2PM
 - Planning Commission: Nov 14th 2023, 6PM
 - Council vote Dec 7th 2023, 10AM
- Phase 2: Lot sizes and site development standard changes: Late Spring 2024

Resources: [District 4 detailed explainer](#), [Council Member Pool's recent newsletter](#), [July 20th resolution initiating changes](#), [Speak Up Austin](#)

News Stories: [Community Impact](#), [Towers.net](#), [KUT](#)

Compatibility Reform

Summary: "Compatibility standards" are rules that impose setbacks and limit the height of multifamily and commercial buildings based on their proximity to single family housing and/or single family zoning. These limits are in addition to the setbacks and height limits that apply to almost every type of zoning in Austin. Austin's compatibility standards are very complicated and far stricter than similar standards in other cities, extending up to 540 ft in distance. These limits are consistently identified as one of the biggest barriers to building new housing in Austin. CM Vela is leading the council's efforts to reform these standards and bring them more in line with other cities.

Timeline: Planning Commission and Council: February/March 2024

Resources: [June 8th resolution initiating changes](#), [Resolution Explainer](#), [Staff report on city-wide compatibility impact](#)

News Stories: [KUT](#), [Community Impact](#)

Eliminate Parking Mandates

Summary: This ordinance will eliminate mandates requiring developments to have a minimum amount of off street parking, with the exception of ADA parking. This will not eliminate off-street parking, but will allow businesses, homeowners, and builders to decide how much parking they need based on real world demand for parking. Minimum Parking requirements drive up the cost of housing, encourage people to drive, and create lots of unnecessary impervious cover.

Timeline: Council vote on Nov 2nd, 2023

Resources: [Council Message Board post](#)

News Articles: [Austin Monitor](#), [KXAN](#)

Other Upcoming Items

Tiny Homes: This ordinance will allow Tiny Homes to be used as dwelling units and hook up to utilities. Tiny Homes currently are governed the same as RVs and not allowed to be a dwelling unit. The ordinance will separate Tiny Homes as their own use (separate from RVs) and allow them. This is being taken up on the same timeline as HOME phase 1 this fall.

Eliminate Occupancy Limits: Austin has occupancy limits restricting dwelling units to no more than 4 or 6 “unrelated adults”. This is a legally dubious and largely unenforceable regulation. Standards in the building code that limit the number of adults per bedroom based on square footage and other health and safety requirements will still apply. This is being taken up on the same timeline as HOME phase 1 this fall.

Site-Plan Lite: This is an expedited review process for medium scale housing projects between 5 and 16 units that will make it easier for these projects to be built, and not force them to go through the same rules and processes as larger projects that can more easily comply with the requirements.

Residential in Commercial Changes: This will streamline Austin’s “Residential in Commercial” ordinance and make it mirror the City’s VMU ordinance.

McKinsey Report: Led by Mayor Watson, this is a major outside audit of the city's permitting process that should help shorten and improve Austin’s permitting process for new development. The current permitting process is often cumbersome, confusing, and slow, driving up the cost of building housing.

Childcare Services: Austin has a major need for childcare. Led by CM Fuentes, this resolution takes numerous steps to make it easier to establish and run a childcare facility.

Windowless Bedrooms: Some builders in West Campus have used loop-holes to build apartment bedrooms that have no windows. This will close that loop-hole.

Ongoing Major District 4 Land Use Priorities

Equitable Transit Oriented Development

Project Connect is not only a once in a generation opportunity to change how people get around in Austin, it is a once in a generation opportunity to shape the development along the line in a way that creates opportunities for people to live, work, and shop along the Project Connect line.

The City of Austin, in partnership with the Austin Transit Partnership and Capital Metro, is in the middle of a multi-year Equitable Transit Oriented Development (ETOD) plan. In the spring, the city passed an ETOD toolkit. We asked for an implementation plan to flesh out how this will be implemented, that plan should be released in October.

Ensure big developments include a healthy mix of different uses and amenities

As Austin continues to grow and change, we want to ensure that the new development has a healthy diversity of uses, including ground floor retail and amenities that both new and existing neighbors can walk to. We want to avoid large projects that are car-centric and only geared towards one use.

This is a complex subject. What the market will support today doesn't always match the type of development that will support walkable communities in the long term. We are having to balance competing priorities, including maximizing affordable housing. We are working on a resolution related to this issue.

Connectivity

There are many places in District 4 where pedestrian connectivity is limited by disconnected road networks, fences, and inadequate infrastructure. We consistently look for opportunities to create new pedestrian and bike connections as new developments go through the zoning and permitting process.

Recent Wins

Exempt 3-4 unit projects from Site-Planning Approval: This change has 3-4 unit projects go through the same process as single family homes and duplexes, a far simpler process than site-plan requirements which are designed for larger projects.

Allow neighborhood plan amendments at any time: Led by CM Vela, Council removed unnecessary time restrictions that only allowed amendments one month out of the year.

Other Resources

Contact us: CM Vela policy advisor: Timothy Bray. timothy.bray@austintexas.gov
City website on code amendments: <https://www.speakupaustin.org/d0670>