

CodeNEXT Approach Alternatives & Annotated Outlines: Frequently Asked Questions

What is the difference between a plan and the code?

Plans are visionary and aspirational. They identify what the community would like to be in the future and set forth principles to achieve that vision. Codes are a set of regulations that govern how the community grows and develops and are one tool used to implement plans. Under the Austin City Charter, all land development regulations must be based on and be consistent with the comprehensive plan and any other plans adopted by the City Council.

What is an Approach Alternative?

An approach alternative is a suggested option for a general direction to revising the land development code. The Approach Alternatives & Annotated Outlines Document is comprised of three options suggested by the CodeNEXT Team, resulting from professional analysis and community input from the last twelve months. The selection of an approach will determine an overall direction for revising the Land Development Code, but it will not in itself change any standards, revise zoning districts, or create new zoning districts. Work of revising the code begins after an approach is selected; City Council will then determine which regulations get changed, taking into account community input and staff recommendation.

What does picking an Approach decide?

Picking a Code Approach sets the framework in which subsequent decisions about the content of standards and process will be based. This framework sets the direction for what the CodeNEXT team will explore regarding the format and organization of the LDC, the ways in which development applications are reviewed and standards are administered, and the mix of development standards that will be crafted. Each of the approach elements can be understood as dials whose settings determine the extent to which each element is incorporated into each approach alternative. These dials can be adjusted as the new City Council takes office and as discussions with Austinites continue in the next phase of the CodeNEXT project.

What does picking an Approach not decide?

Selecting a Code Approach does not change any standards, revise zoning districts, or create new zoning districts within the LDC. Instead it picks a direction for the CodeNEXT team to explore with Austinites. Decisions on what standards remain the same, what standards change, where standards apply across the city and how they are administered will be explored during the next phase of the CodeNEXT project. Picking an approach does not decide where new or revised zoning districts will be mapped or assigned to specific parcels of land. Decisions on where the new or revised zoning districts are mapped will occur after new zoning districts are crafted. At the same time that the new draft zoning districts are being reviewed by the public, the CodeNEXT team will begin testing how the new zoning districts can be mapped. Ultimately City Council will decide how the new districts are mapped.

How does the Listening to the Community Report inform the Approach Alternatives?

The Listening to the Community Report summarized community-wide conversations that explored what is working well and what needs to be improved in the places where Austinites live, work, and play, and how the City's land development code can be most effective as a framework for improving quality of life. Based on the input gathered by this report the CodeNEXT team developed a series of Approach Alternatives that address the issues raised by the community.

How will the Approach Alternatives affect issues identified in the Code Diagnosis?

While the code revision will ultimately address all of the top ten issues identified in the Code Diagnosis, the Code Approach Alternatives vary in the degree to which they address some of the issues. Because each approach proposes a different set of new or updated tools for the LDC document, the tools available for addressing the issues identified in the Code Diagnosis will be different, depending on which approach alternative option is ultimately pursued.

What are the code types?

Codes are typically classified as either Use-based or Form-based. Use-based codes rely on Euclidean zoning that focuses on regulating how land is used, while form-based codes focus on regulating the form of a building and place less emphasis on controlling land use. Codes may be hybrids, including both use-based and form-based elements.

What are Development Standards Models?

Development standards determine what a code regulates, and how it regulates those items. Generally speaking the different methods for creating development standards can be classified into three categories: Euclidean-based zoning standards; performance-based zoning standards; and form-based zoning standards.

What are Euclidean-based standards?

Euclidean-based zoning standards, also sometimes called use-based zoning standards, focus on use separation and simple height/bulk standards. Euclidean zoning limits uses in undesirable locations rather than encouraging uses in desired locations.

What are Performance-based standards?

Performance-based zoning standards focus on the impacts of use and are more complex than Euclidean-based standards. Performance zoning is still based on limiting an undesired effect; however, it allows for a more precise application of limits than conventional zoning.

What are Form-based standards?

Form-based zoning standards focus on building form and public space. Form-based zoning standards go beyond simply limiting an undesired effect by encouraging appropriate building scale and format in places where a specific type and form of development is desired.