
New Positions Approved to Support Growing Housing Needs in Austin

The Austin City Council has approved a FY 2020-2021 [budget amendment to fund 41 additional positions](#) for the Development Services Department (DSD) to support the housing goals expressed in Strategic Direction 2023 and the Austin Strategic Housing Blueprint. Hiring is expected to begin in July.

Recent projections indicate the department will continue to experience growth in both commercial and residential permits through at least 2025. The resources requested this fiscal year are to support this current and projected development activity, with time included to recruit and train incoming staff. DSD has piloted process improvements and realigned staff to manage the increased demand for permit application reviews and the accelerated pace of submittals, and temporary staff and contracts have helped achieve some short-term gains. To ensure it can support the City's housing goals effectively moving forward, DSD will add positions in plan intake and review, community tree preservation, environmental review, support services, and equity and inclusion to help address these growing needs. DSD does not anticipate a fee increase to cover the cost of these positions in FY 2021-22, as anticipated revenue from the projected increase in volume will cover the costs for the requested staff.

Updated Technical Codes Approved by Council, Effective September 1

On June 3, the Austin City Council [approved several updates](#) to Technical Codes, which will go into effect September 1. The updates affect nine Codes that define various building requirements within the City of Austin: [Uniform Mechanical Code](#), [Uniform Plumbing Code](#), [International Residential Code](#), [International Building and Existing Building Codes](#), [International Property Maintenance Code](#), [International Energy Conservation Code](#), [International Fire Code](#), and [Flood Hazard Areas](#) (Chapter 25-12, Article 3). To learn more about these revisions, visit the [2021 Technical Codes engagement page](#).

DSD Stakeholder Meetings Postponed

Scheduled DSD stakeholder meetings previously scheduled for this month have been postponed to allow staff time to focus on project reviews and processing, while also preparing for the return of in-person services later this summer. Watch for more information soon about the opening of the new Permitting and Development Center, revised meeting dates, and continued service improvements.

Material Shortages Call for Radiant Roof Barrier Options

Supply chain issues following Winter Storm Uri are causing a shortage of radiant barrier roof decking. This material is commonly used to fulfill energy conservation requirements for residential construction in Austin in the [Land Development Code](#) (Local Amendments, R402.6). The radiant barrier prevents heat from entering the attic space and affecting heating and cooling equipment. The City Building Official [recently issued a memo](#) identifying options for, and exceptions to, this code requirement until September 1, 2021. If the shortage continues past the summer, DSD will re-evaluate current requirements. If you have questions, please contact Residential Inspections Division Manager [Eric Zimmerman](#) at eric.zimmerman@austintexas.gov or 512-974-2729.

Residential Projects Get More Time to Adapt to New Austin Energy Rule

Austin Energy has extended the effective date of new worker safety clearance requirements for projects on residential single family lots. The revised [Design Criteria Manual](#) includes a 15-foot safety clearance radius for workers around primary and neutral electric wires to allow space for scaffolding and other safety considerations related to multi-story structures. Although the new rules went into effect May 14, projects on residential single family lots, such as Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs), will be allowed until June 30 to adapt drawings and elevation plans to the new standard. Austin Energy is allowing this extra time to address stakeholder concerns about ADUs and other residential projects that were designed using previous criteria. All commercial site and subdivision plans will be required to follow the May 14 effective date, and the new rule will apply to all residential construction applications submitted after June 30.

Some 2020 National Electric Code Requirements Postponed

The Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation (TDLR) has amended its rules to delay a requirement in the 2020 National Electric Code relating to ground-fault circuit interrupter requirements for some outdoor outlets. Compliance with Section 210.8(F) of the 2020 code can interfere with proper function of some air conditioner and heating systems. Because implementation could pose a risk to health and safety, TDLR has postponed the effective date to January 1, 2023. The City Building Official [recently released a memo](#) announcing that enforcement of this code requirement will be postponed until September 30, 2021, while TDLR revisits the requirement. Meanwhile, GFCI protection is required only on lighting equipment covered by NEC Section 210.8(C). If you have questions, please contact Residential Inspections Division Manager [Eric Zimmerman](#) at eric.zimmerman@austintexas.gov or 512-974-2729.

Additional Notation Requested on Solar-Ready Construction Applications

If you build homes equipped with conduit for future solar power installations, there is a new step in the application process. To help improve future awareness and prevent unnecessary demolition and construction, contractors should now include “Pre-Wire for Solar” in the permit description on all residential construction applications when this conduit is included during initial construction. Although the City does not currently require this conduit in residential construction, it must be inspected before installing solar power sources. This notation will help ensure electrical inspectors check these facilities for code compliance early in construction, before it is covered. If the equipment is missing, the inspection will not pass until the conduit is installed or the notation is removed by an Inspections Supervisor. Adding this record will help ensure customers can use their solar-ready construction as intended and will assure future solar inspectors that the conduit and cables have been inspected.

Preservation Program Accepting Applications through June 14

Do you work on historic preservation projects or have an interest in older structures in Austin? The Historic Landmark Commission recently created a Preservation Plan Working Group to draft a new [historic preservation plan](#) focused on community heritage and equity. Designers, developers, and contractors working on historic properties are invited to participate in this planning process. If you are interested in being part of this working group, please [apply by Monday, June 14](#). Participation is expected to take 40-50 hours over 12 months, including preparation for meetings.

Thank you for your continued interest in Development Services topics.

City of Austin Development Services Department
