

May 2023 Stakeholder Meeting
Site and Subdivision Plan Review/Inspections
Question/Comment Summary
May 16, 2023



Question/ Comment:
Will this be recorded for viewing later in case we have to jump off? Thanks
Response:
Yes, this meeting will be recorded. It will be available to view at https://www.austintexas.gov/page/public-meetings .

Question/ Comment:
My company is a tiny home builder. We want to offer affordable tiny homes to our clients to provide housing for their children, parents, and as income earning vehicles. What does my company have to do to qualify as Affordable Housing and what are the benefits of that to our clients?
Response:
The Housing Department has a variety of affordable housing program options. Please contact Housing and Community Development Officer James May at james.may@austintexas.gov for additional information.

Question/ Comment:
Do the subdivisions review times include time spent in a "completeness check" phase? Much of subdivision reviews have been front loaded to avoid "Shot Clock" as they don't start the clock until you go through another series of front-loaded reviews.
Response:
The review times presented reflect formal review and do not include completeness check.

Question/ Comment:
I'd be very interested to see the data and learn about proposed improvements associated with the Project Assessment process (the new pre-requisite process that came about due to the Shot Clock bill). I'm seeing similar review delays on Project Assessment (ETJ review) as the Site Plan review delays. The subdivision metrics are skewed due to the Shot Clock bill. I'm optimistic some of these same measures will be implemented with Project Assessment. Thanks for taking the time and all the efforts here. I'm optimistic about seeing meaningful improvements for the first time in many years!
Response:
We planned to report those numbers out here but had a problem with the dashboard. We plan to share that information as a part of the volume and performance data we publish and in future meetings.

Question/ Comment:

Do we know today how long the average site plan takes to review? Do we know today how long the average Subdivision takes to review?

Response:

Thanks for the question. Year to date (October 2022 thru April 2023), DSD site plan cycle times are averaging 51 days for initial review and 26 days for review of updates. DSD subdivision reviews are at 20 days for initial review and 9 days for updates. This does not include the time spent on the applicant side addressing comments and does not include partner department review times. As part of the Interim Director’s presentation, he committed to working with stakeholders to develop a set of performance measures that reflect the customer experience. Stakeholders will be further engaged as we work to complete the scoping of that project.

Question/ Comment:

According to the resolution, staff will be expected to develop a procedure called “site plan lite” for developments of three to 16 residential units. First, staffers are directed to add triplexes and fourplexes to residential review, which currently considers single-family housing and duplexes. These do not require a site plan.

Will a site with 3 detached units go through site plan light or will it go through normal residential review?

Response:

Per council direction, projects of up to 3-4 units will be subject to basic residential review. Projects of 5-16 units will be subject to a modified form of site plan review. This modified form of site plan review will borrow concepts from "limited site plan review" as proposed in the LDC Revision.

The first amendment (i.e., 3-4 units) will be at Council in the near future. The second amendment (5-16 units) should be moving forward later this year.

The proposal is for sites consisting of 3-4 units to go through standard residential review process. The more modified process will be for sites consisting of 5-16 units. This will be done in the name of affordable housing. A middle zoning category may be available in the future for sites consisting of 3-4 units to use something like a site plan light process, but until such a category exists they will continue to go through the standard residential review process.

Question/ Comment:

Is there a new org chart for the department with contact information?

Response:

We will have an [updated org chart](#) loaded by the end of the week and are thinking through the best way to publish contact information. You have our commitment to do so in some form or fashion.

Question/ Comment:

Is there a time frame provided for review of as-builts prior to the scheduling of the final inspection and prior to the transferal of right-of-way maintenance duties?

Response:

As-builts for site plans are generally handled as part of the correction process. The average for this process is a ten-day turn-around.

Question/ Comment:

Is there any plan to establish an efficient and binding interdepartmental conflict resolution system for land use?

Response:

As part of the larger permitting process, and more specifically pertaining to site plan, improvements in efficiency are expected in the future. These improvements may be realized as a matter of process, but how they will occur is not yet known. The City is aware of the need to implement such improvements and is working to do so. The conversations to realize this change are happening now, and more information will be provided in the future.

Question/ Comment:

Who oversees 911 Addressing? Is there any resolution to resolve the long review/response time?

Response:

The City's Communications and Technology Management Department (CTM) oversees and manages the 911 addressing process. As follow-up to this inquiry, DSD followed up with CTM for a response. The following was provided.

CTM has been taking great strides to reduce response times. While applicants can generally expect a response within 10-15 days, CTM has been operating at a 3 to 5-day response time since mid-April. This is a standard they are striving to maintain.

Question/ Comment:

In terms of site plan review, how is the city addressing communication between customers and the reviewers? Many reviewers work from home and no longer answer calls. What steps have been taken to address reaching specific reviewers across all disciplines?

Response:

Customer service should be seamless whether an employee of the City is working from home or from the office. The Development Services Department (DSD) is investigating options to improve communication with the public to close the gap between response times when someone is working in the office versus when they work from home. A new city-wide telework policy is expected to begin on October 1, 2023. This telework policy will allow a city employee to work from home at most two days weekly. This will be a decrease of telework by one day from what DSD currently provides employees. DSD considers communication to be a fundamental aspect to the work done by the department, and the department is working to improve communication at all levels.

Question/ Comment:

What is the long-term goal for review times for both Site Plan and Subdivision? How long should it take ideally?

Response:

Although currently working through a backlog of reviews, continued progress is the short-term goal. Incremental progress will eventually lead back to being on time. When fully staffed and fully trained, it should be more attainable to be on time.

Question/ Comment:

If a new software program is implemented, will there be training sessions for contractors, developers, homeowners, etc.?

Response:

Development Services Department (DSD) generally does not manage the implementation of new software programs. This is instead managed by the Communications and Technology Management (CTM) Department. When possible, DSD will ensure training sessions are provided to the public when new software is implemented. Investigation of new software is just beginning, but specific thought is being given to ensure training and communication to ensure it is part of the process of implementation.

Question/ Comment:

From our perspective, Project Assessment has added significant time to the permit process. How is this process being evaluated and updated for efficiency?

Response:

Project Assessments were derived from shot clock requirements (House Bill 3167). This legislation does not allow the subdivision review process the ability to conduct a full technical review even though technical review elements are required. Technical review elements are more likely when reviewing a complex project that may require variances. Project Assessments were designed to address this issue. DSD is currently reviewing the Project Assessment process to find opportunities for improvement.

Question/ Comment:

Can you give a quick overview of the SMART housing process and how that is beneficial to applicants? Is the team that oversees SMART housing solely responsible for SMART housing or do they also oversee additional aspects of affordable housing?

Response:

Development Services Department (DSD) has an affordable housing team consisting of one Planning Officer (Robert Anderson) and three Project Coordinators. Applicants who are eligible for these services will indicate their desire to apply for SMART housing by selecting certain options in the web form for site plan or building plan review. This will inform the team of your application.

Robert's team oversees all aspects of affordable housing under DSD. For additional information, please contact the Housing Department.

Question/ Comment:

How can I get a copy of the sample site plan templates prior to receiving comments?

Response:

These are still under development. Once they are complete, we will post them online and notify applicants they are available.

Question/ Comment:

Although data is not available today, is it possible to get an idea as to how much time the average site plan or subdivision review is taking? It is one of the hardest parts of building to guess how long these projects will be in review. Is that data available to customers? How can we better understand what timelines to suggest to customers?

Response:

Site plans cover a very large variety of projects. Focusing on housing will make this information easier to find. The Development Services Department will investigate options to realize this data and get back to you.

Question/ Comment:

Will there be an option for expedited site plan review? The building permit process works best when working in the same room or on the phone with every department. This helps realize building permits prior to the site plan process.

Substantive, coordinated comments are more important than on time reviews. Simply returning plans after being reviewed in a certain number of days should not be the only metric for success. Please consider this when determining how best to improve processes.

Response:

Thank you for the suggestions. The focus for future improvements will be end results, not specific measures of one aspect of the process. This focus will help us achieve improved processes that end with the desired results.