

Demolition Permits Audit



Objective

The objective of this audit was to determine if the City's demolition permitting process was effective and efficient.

Background

The City of Austin requires property owners to get a permit before demolishing any structure on their property.

According to a best practice guide, demolition permits are required to ensure that the activity is safe, complies with regulations, and minimizes impacts on surrounding neighbors.

Over two fiscal years (2015 and 2016), the City approved approximately 1,700 demolition permits. Approximately 77% of those permits were for single-family homes.

Demolition permits were approved for properties in every Council district, with the most in district 9, followed by districts 10, and 3. Since 2008, more than half of all approved demolition permits were for properties in those three districts (see map on back page).

What We Found

Austin's demolition permitting process is not designed to efficiently and effectively meet City or stakeholder needs.

Demolition permit applications are accepted by two departments

Both the Development Services Department (residential) and Planning and Zoning Department (commercial) accept and process applications. Planning and Zoning's Historic Preservation Office accepts all commercial applications even if the property is not eligible for historic designation.

Safety risks associated with demolishing structures are not fully considered

The City process may not adequately address safety risks because it does not:

- fully comply with State requirements for asbestos testing,
- consider mitigation for lead in structures,
- require that qualified or licensed contractors perform the work, or
- require that safety measures (i.e. fences) are needed or in place.

Limited verification that property owners complete certain tasks

The City process relies on property owners to stop utility service, ensure trees are protected, and schedule inspections. There is limited verification by the City that these tasks are completed and we found they are not always done.

Notification about demolitions is limited

Some requirements for notification exist, but neighbors may not be aware when demolition permits are approved for certain property types. This limits the ability of neighbors to appeal the permit.

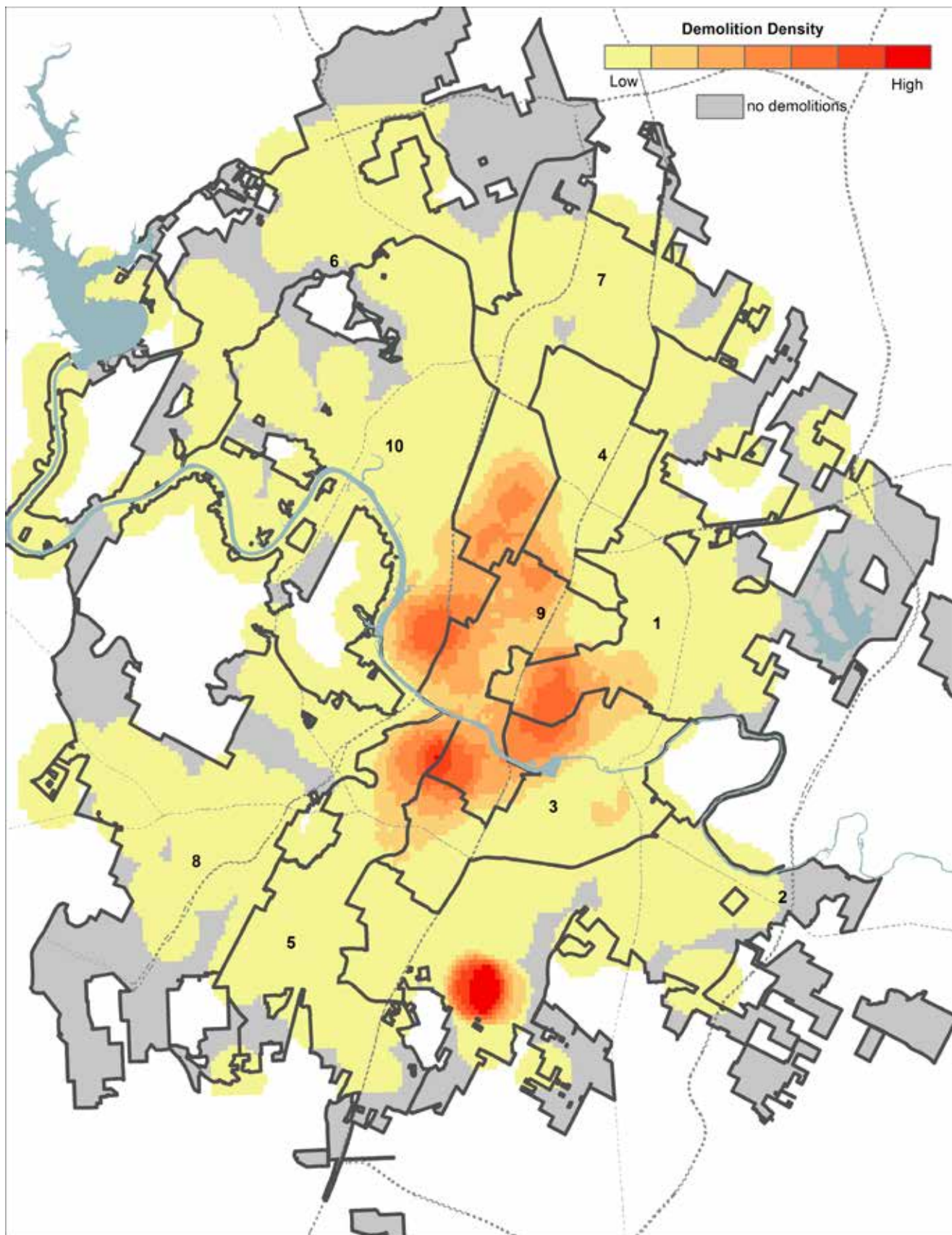
Required documentation is not always collected and may be unnecessary

Only 2 of 23 sampled demolition permit applications included all the required documents. Also, management stated that staff could waive requirements, but there did not seem to be any direction or oversight for this practice.

What We Recommend

The Development Services Director should meet with stakeholders to identify the goals of the demolition permitting process, then redesign the process to meet those goals.

Density Map of Property Locations for Approved Demolition Permits, FY08 to FY16



SOURCE: OCA analysis of demolition application data, May 2017