

Date: November 2, 2017
To: Public Safety Commission
From: Steve Hopkins, Senior Planner
Development Services Dept.
RE: Subdivision regulations in Code Next

The process to revise the subdivision regulations began in the summer of 2012, after the adoption of the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan. It began as a separate process, but in the spring of 2015, the subdivision regulations revision process was folded into the CodeNext effort. There was a significant amount of staff effort and public input submitted during the initial effort and it has been incorporated into the current process.

Some of the issues and concerns identified by the stakeholders and by staff include a desire to achieve predictability and simplicity in the review process, the need for flexibility in standards, and a concern over how additional regulations would constrain subdivision design possibilities. During the initial process, the stakeholders generally agreed that although there are several issues, a complete rewrite of the subdivision code is not needed to resolve those issues. In addition, because the Local Government Code and state law establish most of the subdivision criteria and approval processes, the ability to do a complete rewrite is limited.

Staff has researched subdivision ordinances and development codes from other cities in Texas and around the nation, to find best practices that can be incorporated into the code. It is anticipated that special requirements for water supply, setbacks from slopes and other structures, vegetation management plans, defensible space requirements and ignition resistant construction will be addressed by adoption of the WUI code and the associated mapping. Until then, the subdivision chapter will be amended to include elements that improve public safety.

All subdivisions must provide at least two points of access, unless the subdivision complies with an exception. The exceptions are adopted from the Fire Code. If a subdivision contains one point of access, there is a limit to the number of dwellings and the length of the access road. In addition, the access road cannot cross a floodplain or an area of high wildland fire danger.

The connectivity standards previously located in the Subdivision chapter, have been enhanced and moved to the Transportation Chapter. Those standards include maximum block lengths and access requirements for vehicles and pedestrians. The block length requirements will vary by zone, so the street layout will be context sensitive. Low density zones and areas with geographic constraints will have longer block lengths. Higher density zones will have shorter block lengths. Cul-de-sacs are only allowed in limited situations, and must include a pedestrian connection to the nearest public street.