

Wildland-Urban Interface Code July 6, 2016 Information Session.

AFD sponsored event with guest speakers.

More than 100 select staff from City, County and State agencies invited, 60 attended.

The following individuals responded to AFD's follow-up questionnaire. No other formal comments were received.

1. Sue Barnett, Environmental Review, Development Services Department, Land Use Review
2. Daniel Berger, Deputy Fire Marshal, Travis County Fire Marshal's Office
3. Michael Embesi, Development Services Department, Urban Forest Division Manager
4. Glen Gilman, Travis County TNR
5. Edward A Poppitt III, PE, PWLF, Consulting Engineer, Infrastructure Management Group, Office of the City Engineer, Street & Bridge Operations, Public Works Department
6. Susan Kenzle, RLA, LI, ISA, Landscape Architect, Stream Restoration and Stormwater Treatment Section, Watershed Protection Department
7. Marc Coudert, Environmental Program Coordinator, Office of Sustainability
8. Sgt. Robert Andrews 2635, Emergency Management Coordinator, Austin Police Department
9. Ryan Hebrink on behalf of Watershed Protection Department
10. José G. Roig, CBO, Building Inspections Division Manager, Deputy Building Official, Development Services Department
11. Carl Schattenberg, Utility Forester, Austin Energy

Question 1: Was the information clear and understandable?

Respondent	Response
3	Yes
4	I didn't make the meeting.
5	Mostly, yes. The ICC presentation by Dave Nichols was helpful, but "meandering" and less organized than the rest of the message from Justice and Paul Summerfelt (Flagstaff).
6	Yes, it was clear and understandable.
7	It was. The pre-meeting where we were able to have a one-on-one discussion with Dave and Paul was particularly useful. Having them walk through climate change impacts and citizen perception was useful.
9	Yes.
10	Yes, we were able to get a clear picture of the technical aspects and how it will impact design.
11	Yes.

Question 2: Was it helpful to hear about wildfire safety concerns from another community?

Respondent	Response
3	Yes
4	No comment
5	Absolutely, yes. Great presentations by Justice and Paul Summerfelt (Flagstaff).

6	Yes, it was useful but I think we realize we have a huge impending issue given the fires of 2011. It was heartening to hear that, with a code in place, the situation might be manageable.
7	It was but I sometimes think there is a disconnect between assumptions about wildfires in the major mountain ranges and those in Central Texas. It might be useful to have a presentation on fires in the hill country vs. those in the Blackland prairies.
9	Yes
10	Yes, it also helped to see the challenges they faced throughout adoption.
11	Yes, would have been interesting to know if they have issues with endangered species habitat

Question 3: Do you have any specific areas of concern?

Respondent	Response
3	Applicability to the enforcement of the Land Development Code
4	Primarily vegetation standards. We have worked hard to be allowed to treat sensitive areas and although there are restrictions we are treating areas regularly. Part of that effort involved highlighting the HIZ and focusing on the home and 30 feet around the home. The media pieces about this event all highlighted a California Model and immediately mentioned the required 100 feet of clearance and the idea of defensible space (as opposed to the HIZ). AFD and the city should carefully consider the outreach they are putting out so that they do not undo previous work.
5	Many may still wonder how this affects them professionally and their Departments or Services. I see the personal connection as a homeowner and citizen of Austin easily, but the professional connections and interactions may only have anecdotally reached some of the audience.
7	You've done a great job at identifying overlaps between different city departments. For example, discussing the relationship between watershed and fire. We could go further and, as Ed mentions, show how wildfires will impact other departments.
9	Yes. Please see attached document for WPD's comments that were provided to Carl Wren in 2012, when AFD Wildfire last explored the IWUIC and drafted local amendments. This document is being re-submitted now for reference purposes only. Our comments were fairly comprehensive at the time they were submitted, but some may no longer be relevant. We look forward to re-engaging with AFD on the development of a wildfire safety code that is compatible with our mission.
10	Yes, here is the list, we may have more: ITEMS TO ADDRESS: Identify the areas and types of applications this will apply to. Need GIS layer. Address any conflicts with tree ordinance. Who reviews (Fire) and inspects (Bldg. Inspections)? Cannot add a review or inspection without sufficient additional staffing. Fire flow tests required for all construction, or set parameters? Increase in cost to customer. How do we propose to handle existing construction and infrastructure. Protection under decks, Zoning review staff will have to be aware of this for impervious cover calculations. Fire sprinkler requirements, conflict with state law? Landscape requirements, vegetation review. Who performs this review? Property maintenance, enforced by Austin Code? Flagstaff heavily amended the code. We are trying to get away from amendments, but it seems like we may have to amend this quite a bit. Wood decks, follow Flagstaff's lead and be more concerned about flame spread versus fire penetration? Do we allow cisterns if the flow is not available?
11	Most definitely, ie., maintaining utility line clearance in endangered species habitat

Question 4: Would you like more information?

Respondent	Response
3	Just to be kept informed of the progress
4	Yes, I'd like to know what is being proposed and what the stakeholder process will be.
5	Provide lists of general examples, concepts, and ideas about how WUI, CWPP, IWUIC could affect each Department, Service Provider, Type of Professional in the audience to get them thinking.
6	More information on specifics of what other communities do in terms of vegetation management on public vs. private lands. For example, do other communities restrict the planting of certain flammable plant species? Do they require homeowner's or businesses to remove the most flammable plant species? If so, how is that enforced, who oversees it?
7	I am a visual person. I would love to see a graphic heavy presentation that shows how wildfire impacts our communities and landscape and recommendation for moving forward
9	City stakeholders would benefit from a more detailed information session that explores the nuts and bolts of the base code. This will be a necessary pre-cursor if AFD wishes to obtain input from City stakeholders on how the base code should be amended to fit our specific community needs and values.
10	Yes, we would like to be involved in the discussions related to this resolution and adoption of the code.
11	What we need is support and more cooperation from BCP folks to allow us to clear our utility corridors adequately so that they also benefit wildland fire prevention and control

Question 5: What do you see as potential obstacles to adopting wildfire safety regulations?

Respondent	Response
3	Different uses of property and the lack of clarity on how to proceed
4	Code NEXT is already mired in bad publicity. Might not be a good time to add regulations. Also, we don't really understand the system so I'm not sure you're going to get agreement on solutions. No two people recommend the same solutions for any wildland fire management project in this area so I'm not sure how the vegetation standards can be developed consistently. We also have limited fire managers to assist with implementation, compliance etc.
5	More codes to follow gives the perception of more complexity and drastically higher cost to development. It also seems more difficult to integrate so many needs, values, and constraints into the design and implementation of new structures, retrofits, and development. We need to continue to highlight how well this will integrate into the existing framework of code compliance and the risk of inaction. Furthermore, it is not excessively difficult or expensive compared to the life, injury, and property protection benefits; lowered risk to all; and increased safety it will provide to citizens, businesses, and responders.
6	Private property issues.
7	I think there is a common misconception about the code. Simply: code ≠ planning. We need to work with communities to create a vision for how we want Austin to look and grow in the future and then create codes that support that vision. We need to show people what a fire adaptive community looks like and how the code can get us there.
9	Balancing vegetation reduction requirements with water quality and other green infrastructure objectives. Further fragmentation of (sub)urban wildlife habitat. Development community may view the code as restrictive.
10	Cost implications for residential & commercial infill applicants. City of Austin's tree ordinance. Also pushback from the design community.
11	endangered species habitat

Question 6: Could you use assistance in your or your department's role in wildfire safety?

Respondent	
3	Yes
4	We could use funding and implementation assistance.
5	Clear top down support is helpful. Please assure the key executives below the City Manager: ACMs, Dirs, ADS have an understanding the importance of this concern across the board.
6	It is not clear what my department's role is or who is charged with wildfire safety for my department (WPD).
7	You guys are doing a fantastic job of reaching out to folks and facilitating the conversation. Keep up the good work.
9	WPD is engaged in and generally supportive of AFD Wildfire Division's mission. Our current primary limitation to an increased role in wildfire safety is our staff resources.
10	We need to know what our role will be first and as we impose or adopt more regulations we need to make sure we have the resources that we need.
11	Yes

Question 7: Are you the right person to be included as a wildfire safety internal stakeholder?

Respondent	
3	Yes
4	I'm external
5	Yes
6	Yes, I believe so because I specify plant materials on in-house and CIP construction projects (stream restoration and green infrastructure), and am charged (somewhat) for post-construction management.
7	Sure. If you'll have me.
9	Yes, AFD Wildfire Division is familiar with appropriate WPD contacts for wildfire issues: Mike Personett, Roxanne Jackson, Sharon Cooper, Erin Wood, Mateo Scoggins, John Clement, Ana Gonzalez, William Fordyce, Robbie Botto, Chuck Lesniak, Tom Ennis, Kevin Shunk, Matthew Porcher, Mike Kelly, Denise Delaney, Ryan Hebrink. Ryan Hebrink will continue serving as AFD's single point of contact for general inquiries.
10	Both Beth Culver and I will be involved, also Carl Wren.
11	Yes, with AE management support - Current contact is Ray Henning

Question 8: Do you know of other City Departments or programs that may have concerns or responsibilities in one way or another for wildfire safety regulations?

Respondent	Response
3	Not which are not already included in the discussion
4	No comment.
5	Ingress and Egress will be affected by ATD. Although PWD sets some of the standards and details for roadways, ATD sets geometric standards and standards for the control of traffic affecting mobility and connectivity. ATD, Transportation Engineering dictates things like street widths, intersection angles and curb return radii, distance between intersections, connectivity of the street network, permitting within the ROW, etc. PWD affects the rest of the ROW like pavement structure and strength, bridges, railings/barriers, sidewalks, driveways, standard details for street construction, material and construction standards for items in the ROW, maintenance of the medians and ROW vegetation, and ROW (street) tree maintenance.
7	Maybe we should engage Imagine Austin more. Right now, we are focused on CodeNEXT - but we will need to follow up with the Imagine Austin update in short order.
9	All city departments will have some level of responsibility for wildfire safety regulations. It appears that AFD is targeting appropriate city department stakeholders for consideration of new safety regulations.
10	Austin Water, Land Use Review, Site & Subdivision Inspections, Arborist, Environmental Review (landscape)
11	BCP

Question 9: Who would be the most important external stakeholders to reach out to if City Council directs us to pursue new regulations for wildfire safety?

Respondent	Response
3	Home Builder's Association
4	I imagine you have all of them.
5	Home builders and developers. Homeowners of Austin if there are mandatory retrofits or severe remodeling or small development permit triggers.
6	Private property owners (neighborhood associations), council members, home builders associations, commercial real estate associations, property managers.
7	AIA, ASLA, APA, ABoR, etc.
9	City of Austin Environmental Commission, Applicable external regulators (such as USFWS, TPWD, TCEQ/Edward's Aquifer Authority) to verify proposed code is compatible with existing regulations, Insurance companies covering properties in Austin, Developers, Professional landscapers, PUDs (i.e. building design, road design (evacuation routes), water supply, etc.)
10	Home Builders Association (HBA), American Institute of Architects (AIA), National Association of the Remodeling Industry (NARI), Associated General Contractors (AGC), etc. Any organization related to design and site development.
11	BCP, US Fish & Wildlife

Question 10: What do you think might be a reasonable time frame to adopt wildfire safety regulations?

Respondent	Response
3	2 years
4	I'm not sure you have buy-in and/or focus on the CWPP. Not sure a new initiative is necessary. Maybe this is the critical piece that is missing from the CWPP. Not sure. Given the challenges of completing the CWPP I suspect you would look at a similar time frame-2-4 years.
5	Possibly 18 months with all of the public interaction and meetings that would be needed to inform the public, gather concerns, allay fears, convince the negatives, prepare everyone for the change, and post the new criteria for adoption.
6	As the weather gets hotter and drier, it seems like we need to jump on this quickly as it will take some time to write the code and get it vetted through all the stakeholders.
7	CodeNEXT goes public in January. It took us several years to get here. It will take several more year to get this thing adopted.
9	Stakeholder engagement process will take significant time. Based on information gained during Paul Summerville's presentation, 18 months may be a reasonable time frame to expect for successful code adoption.
10	We are already in the process of adopting the 2015 codes, the adoption of this code may have to wait until the adoption of the 2018 codes.
11	First start with getting BCP & US Fish & Wildlife to loosen their grip

General Comments

Respondent	Response
1	My 2 cents regarding building construction is the “vented roof” system is meant for a cold climate, so soffits and vents are not necessary here- in fact enclosed attic with insulation along the underside of the roof is best here. (conditioned attic) It is my understanding that it is probable that sparks enter an attic through the vents and soffits. Make it so that here in Austin houses along this interface should not have soffits and vents. Commercial buildings usually do not have this type of roof system.
2	I am interested in the relationship between the COAs subdivision requirements and unincorporated Travis County’s requirements. There are many subdivisions we review that are in the ETJ or limited purpose areas. While we are all looking at WUI-related issues, now may be a good time to ensure we’re all on the same page concerning residential developments in the County that may soon be annexed and other residential development issues.
4	I didn’t make the meeting. Don’t really have much to contribute as I’m an external stakeholder and haven’t been too involved with fire management issues lately.
8	Evacuation, to include standardized marking, is a big concern of ours. Traffic control is an issue, and our Highway Enforcement guys have been working on that. Reentry, the other end of the problem, is also a concern. I’m still the best POC for APD, or I’ll send one of my officers if I can’t make a meeting for any reason. The info was good, and hearing from other jurisdictions helped. The only problems I see is any possible retrofits required to existing structures. The folks in the areas of most concern may not be very cooperative.
9	Watershed Protection hopes to have additional opportunities to coordinate with AFD on code adoption matters. Can we coordinate a meeting with WPD staff and the Wildfire Division so that we can speak more directly to some of the issues/questions/concerns that we may have?
10	We decided to provide you with a combine response to your questions since both Plan Review and Inspections share the same concerns about the adoption of this code. So, these answers are from Beth Culver and myself.

