

Greater Austin Home Building Association Advocacy Forum Notes

Sept 19, 2019

Attendees: Chief Vocke, Mark Baker, Kimra Hamilton, David Glenn, 7 others

Mark Baker presents.

Public: We have projects happening now in limited purpose land in ETJ areas. Who will review plans for compliance with the new code? City of Austin or Travis County? Will these projects fall under WUI Code? We have trouble knowing from where to get approvals.

Staff: We will turn this over to the local authorities. We would inspect, accept the project, and then turn over to the ESDs. Individual reviews will be new for AFD.

Public: Jurisdiction boundaries are odd. You can have people across the creek from you that have a different set of requirements.

Public: What is the land on the map in Hayes County?

Staff: Water Utility land that is owned by the city of Austin.

Public: How do I read Quick Response Codes with my phone? How do I access the maps on your website?

Public: I am curious about defensible space- I went to arborist training in the spring, and I need to know what trumps what. Where should I remove trees? How much percentage of canopy should I remove?

Public: How will slope effect where I remove trees?

Public: I need more information on how to create and maintain defensible space.

Staff: Shaded fuel breaks keep the trees and canopy, and just remove brush underneath.

Public: After you clear the brush, do you leave the mulch or do you remove the vegetation?

Public: What is the cost effectiveness of chipping versus hauling out the brush?

Public: How do you quantify access to water and rate conforming and nonconforming water supply?

Staff: Access to engine, fire apparatus, and to fire hydrants.

Staff: We will stay with the existing fire codes.

Staff: We will focus on the fire resistant building materials and leave the vegetation out.

Public: Does the code apply to remodels?

Public: How does this work for subdivisions that back up to the greenbelt, and clearing defensible space is impossible? This is complicated.

Staff: Fire resistant construction will be required.

Public: What do mean? Are we talking sprinklers?

Staff: Fiber board siding, masonry, fire rated doors and windows. We will have a list of requirements.

Public: Where is this information?

Staff: We adopt the model code and our engineers will modify it to better fit Austin.

Public: Would you want to see a sign on the wall about the fire rating?

Staff: we want to reduce risk of embers causing fires.

Public: All of these requirements will make difference on design standards. HOA documents will have to be altered. Builders will need to be sure they can access fire rated materials. We need to be educated. It would be helpful to access a source where you can see what this WUI Code really means. Criteria will change for subdivisions and others developments.

Public: Developers are required to plant trees and plant riparian restoration projects. How will the WUI Code's defensible space coexist with these other requirements?

Staff: The WUI Code would be the first baby step.

Public: Talk about the review process: How will it work?

Staff: If the code passes we will have 4 engineer, 4 inspectors, a WUI Code Specialist, and 2 administrative support people. There will be 1 hour of inspection, 1 hour of review, and a permit. Residential reviews will be new to the fire department. We plan to do 300 reviews per month.

Public: Quantify reviews for me.

Staff: We will do pilot plan reviews. We hope to implement WUI Code in My 2020.

Public: If you are focusing on construction, will the code focus on that? Or will it include other things?

Staff: The Code will focus on fire resistant construction. Our engineers will interpret the code.

Public: Who all these pieces fit together is important. How will the WUI Code interact with other codes? We need this information as soon as possible.

Public: Land development is working on background manuals. The WUI Code will not stand alone, it will mostly be for fire resistant materials.

Public: HBA need the specific code and specific information on the fire resistant materials.

Staff: We have been working to reduce duplications in code.

Public: I heard the code will increase the cost per house by \$6,000 to \$8,000. Is this a correct estimate?

Staff: Affordability is a big issue in Austin.

Public: I am not against this. I am concerned about our fire safety. I need to know how to incorporate this into my present agreements and projects. The WUI Code would change many things. I need to know the details.

Public: Constructing with fire resistant materials is a one and done. Vegetation management is reoccurring, and harder.

Staff: We are proposing to remove defensible space from the code.

Public: If we keep it to construction, then we can get something done. Vegetation management is another piece; where we can't get anything done.

Staff: We need to do something to prevent increased risk of fire danger.

Public: Yes, baby steps.

Staff: AFD's model is to do reviews, inspections, and permits.

Public: Building permit applications versus construction permits- will there be more than one application?

Public: What is involved in passing inspection for a class A roof: Is it the materials alone or the construction method?

Public: \$6,000-\$8,000 per house is a lot of money for us. We need to know when this will happen.

Staff: We are aiming for May 2020.

Public: We do not know how Travis County will plan to get engaged in this? Will ESD 2, 6, and 11 be involved?

Staff: I do not know if ESD 11 will be involved.

