



## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Mayor and City Council

**THRU:** Gina Fiandaca, Assistant City Manager

**FROM:** Richard Mendoza, Director, Public Works Department *Richard Mendoza*

**DATE:** October 1, 2021

**SUBJECT:** Update on staff response to Resolution 20210610-041 relating to the design and permitting of urban trails

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On June 10, 2021, City Council passed Resolution 20210610-041, which directed the City Manager to create an urban trail stakeholder group to make recommendations to City Council on City Code or administrative process changes with the goal of making the design and permitting of urban trails less costly and more efficient while maintaining appropriate environmental protections. This memo provides an update to the following five process improvements:

**Process Improvement:** Create a formal, collaborative, pre-submittal review process among the Watershed Protection (WPD), Development Services (DSD), and Public Works (PWD) Departments for urban trails projects.

**Implementation Progress:**

This has been implemented. WPD has established a standard general permit review process. Under this new process, at the time of pre-submittal, WPD staff will field verify the accuracy of the Environmental Resource Inventory, provide feedback and attend a one-time pre-submittal meeting to discuss. WPD staff will then be included formally in the general permit review process to aide in the review of formal submittals. This formalizes the process and creates more consistency in review.

To improve our collaborative approach from what is outlined in the general permit review process, the Urban Trails Program is funding an FTE located within the Watershed Protection Department. This position is supervised by WPD staff and works collaboratively on trail projects throughout the design and review process. This new FTE has already been hired is currently in training.

**Process Improvement:** Accelerate the site plan review process for urban trails using a streamlined list of DSD reviewing disciplines.

**Implementation Progress:**

DSD's CIP Review Team has created a simplified list of review disciplines applicable to the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) projects. Urban Trails staff is reviewing this simplified site plan distribution list to determine if it continues to include review disciplines that are not

typically needed for the review of Urban Trails. Urban Trails staff will begin reaching out to those disciplines to discuss trail projects and to reach consensus on the discipline's review protocol. The objective is to further streamline the CIP distribution list to create a distribution list specific to trail projects. This process improvement is expected to be in place by the end of 2022.

**Process Improvement:** Improve communication with developers regarding urban trail easement requirements at the time of zoning.

**Implementation Progress:**

This process improvement has been implemented. During zoning review, ATD staff now makes note of any proposed urban trail adjacent to the site in question. This allows the developer to plan to accommodate the trail as they design their site layout. The easement is then required to be dedicated during subdivision or site plan.

**Process Improvement:** Hold quarterly meetings of executive-level leadership, including PWD, WPD, DSD, the Parks and Recreation Department (PARC), and any other departments necessary to address significant challenges to trail projects.

**Implementation Progress:**

PWD staff formed a core planning team to plan the logistics of a quarterly meeting series. Staff include representatives from relevant departments and non-profit. A guiding framework for such meetings has been developed and reviewed by relevant executives. The first meeting will be held in October 2021.

**Process Improvement:** Ensure consistency in interpreting the City Code provisions governing trail projects, potentially by establishing a dedicated review team familiar with trail projects and relevant requirements and variances or, more generally, with Capital Improvement Projects.

**Implementation Progress:**

Process improvement will be complete with the launch of DSD's dedicated CIP review team. DSD is aiming to formally launch this team on October 1, 2021. The CIP review team will focus on CIP projects that do not qualify for a general permit. The team will have designated representation from each of the necessary review disciplines. Urban Trail CIP projects that do not qualify for a general permit will be reviewed by this team.

### **Amendments to the Land Development Code**

Council initiated the following amendments to the Land Development Code, as recommended by PWD and WPD in the January 4, 2021 memo from PWD and requested they be brought back to Council by August 26, 2021:

- a) Amend Land Development Code 25-8-341 and 25-8-342 to grant urban trails projects greater cut and fill allowances under specific environmental circumstances.
- b) Amend Land Development Code 25-1-261(B)(3)(c) to reflect current policy that trails within the critical water quality zone be limited to 12 feet in surface width plus one-foot shoulders on each side.

Staff requests an extension to February 2022 to bring these amendments to Council. City staff from WPD and PWD have agreed upon proposed code language and received City of Austin legal department approval; however, additional time is needed to present to commissions before

returning to Council. Staff has commenced these presentations, secured recommendations from Environmental Commission and Codes and Ordinances Joint Committee and is on the Planning Commission agenda for October 12<sup>th</sup>.

**Addition of Austin Water and Austin Energy to the Urban Trail Stakeholder Group**

Urban Trails staff has commenced conversations with Austin Water and Austin Energy staff to determine how best to collaborate. We will then add the trail stakeholders to these conversations as we work to establish recommendations for Council.

These negotiations require a baseline understanding that trails can co-exist within easements of these partner agencies. The conversations also require the negotiation and understanding of many design details to develop recommendations. To ensure we have time for the necessary, thorough conversations, staff is requesting an extension until February 2022 to return to Council.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or require more information on this matter.