Austin

MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor and City Council

Through: Dr. Eric Anthony Johnson, Assistant City Manager EAJ

From: Keith Mars, Austin Development Services Director KM

Date: November 17, 2026

Subject: **Development Decision-Making Framework and Service Realignment**

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide an update on the City's ongoing efforts to strengthen, streamline, and improve the development review process.

A government that works depends on processes that are predictable, consistent, and repeatable. Uncertainty and risk impose costs on everyone involved in the development process, whether it is a homeowner pursuing an addition, a small business owner opening or expanding a business, or a developer making significant investments in Austin. By reducing uncertainty, improving consistency, and creating a more reliable permitting process, we enable better decision-making, support responsible growth, and deliver better outcomes for the entire community.

The City has made substantial progress in recent years toward improving the efficiency, predictability, and coordination of the development review process. The initiatives outlined in this memorandum build on those accomplishments and advance the City's ongoing commitment to providing consistent, high-quality service to residents, businesses, development partners and customers.

Development Authority

Effective September 25, 2026, Austin Development Services (DSD) was designated as the:

1. Central coordinating point for the development process;
2. Final authority on the interpretation and application of development-related rules when departments cannot reach agreement; and
3. Final authority for how development-related services are delivered across participating City departments.

Additionally, the Austin Development Services Director was designated as the final citywide department-level authority for these matters. These changes are intended to improve consistency, reduce delays, and provide clearer communication and accountability throughout the development review process.

This designation formalizes the leadership role that DSD has long played in coordinating development review activities across departments. It establishes a clearer governance structure that promotes predictable decision-making, aligns participating departments around shared service standards, and ensures development-related regulations are applied consistently across the organization.

Executive Intervention Framework and Executive Permitting Committee
To support this work, DSD is collaborating with partner departments to implement two complementary governance tools: an Executive Intervention Framework and an Executive Permitting Committee. These structures are designed to address complex interdepartmental issues that cannot be resolved at the staff level and that may otherwise result in inconsistent decisions or unnecessary delays. Guided by principles of collaboration, transparency, and departmental expertise, both efforts are intended to improve coordination while maintaining accountability.

Under the Executive Intervention Framework, development-related issues that involve conflicting interpretations, unresolved interdepartmental concerns, or significant delays will be escalated to senior leadership for timely review and resolution. The framework will establish a structured, time-bound process that enables City leadership to quickly address obstacles, provide clear direction, and ensure projects continue moving forward. This process will be finalized and implemented by December 1, 2026.

The Executive Permitting Committee will serve as a forum for leadership from development-related departments to review and resolve complex issues requiring cross-departmental coordination. By bringing together executive-level decision makers, the committee will ensure conflicts are addressed promptly and consistently, allowing City departments to operate as a unified organization while improving service delivery to the community. This structure will be finalized and implemented by January 1, 2027.

Review Realignment
The City is also realigning selected development review functions under DSD to strengthen service delivery and improve process consistency. Initial efforts include consolidating some private-property development reviews currently managed by Watershed Protection and the Parks and Recreation Department's parkland dedication fee-in-lieu process. These functions were selected to improve consistency in the development review process, streamline fee administration once Austin Parks & Recreation has made a fee determination, and reduce overlapping review responsibilities, particularly where environmental, drainage, and water quality reviews are already performed by Development Services. Additional realignments may be evaluated in the future as part of the City's broader continuous improvement efforts.

Throughout this transition, maintaining the quality and integrity of technical reviews remains a priority. These changes do not diminish the role of subject-matter experts. Technical professionals will continue to provide the expertise necessary for informed development decisions in alignment with City code and criteria. The new structure strengthens the integration of that expertise into a coordinated decision-making process, helping ensure technical input leads to clear, consistent, and predictable outcomes.

Building on the progress achieved through the City's Transforming Site Plan Review initiative and broader City Council direction, these actions strengthen governance, improve coordination, and create a more efficient and predictable development review process. Together, they support the City's commitment to delivering consistent, customer-focused services for all Austinites.

Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact Keith Mars, Director of Austin Development Services at Keith.Mars@austintexas.gov or 512-466-4598.

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