



RECA Statement on the City's Strategy to Mitigate Development-related Plan Review Backlog

On Friday, the City of Austin's Development Services Department (DSD) released a proposed plan detailing how it will eliminate the current permitting backlog. The plan calls for several city departments to take specific actions to reduce and eliminate the backlog, and RECA welcomes the timely and actionable efforts described in the report.

While most departments state they will be able to eliminate their backlogs within 90 days, or in some cases claim to have already eliminated their backlog, some departments have not committed to meeting that timeline. **RECA believes it is critical that every department involved in the permitting process should eliminate their backlogs within 90 days.**

Throughout the proposed plan, there are references to the difficulty of training staff, the challenges of hiring third-party reviewers and the length of time needed for review. It's unclear to RECA why hiring temporary staff is preferred to hiring third-party plan review sources when both would likely be trained similarly. Additionally, each of these issues referencing the challenges of training additional staff or third-parties point squarely at the critical and complimentary need for CodeNEXT to simplify the land development code (LDC). A simplified, comprehensible code will be more easily applied by both applicants and staff, eliminating most of these problems.

While the actionable items described within each department are an important piece of a short-term solution, RECA believes it's also necessary to improve the coordination of processes across department lines in order to see real immediate and long-term improvements to the permitting process. Better coordination among departments and an acknowledgement that the DSD should have ultimate authority over all parts of the development process are not evident in the proposed plan. In order to achieve successful coordination among departments, there should be greater accountability, transparency and performance tracking during the permitting process. To that end, RECA strongly agrees with the plan's focus on more robust implementation and use of the City's AMANDA database system that many departments have committed to in the plan, among other coordination and performance measurement efforts we believe are necessary.

As experts who work through the City's development review processes regularly, RECA members are continuing to review the plan and will provide additional detailed feedback as this process continues. We're also looking forward to the release of the final Zucker Report and the subsequent city plan to address broader development review challenges. Our membership stands ready to provide assistance and feedback where needed. As we continue to work together toward a long-term plan to improve the development review and permitting process, we should keep focused on the fact that each additional day it takes to review a plan or permit means more money out of pockets of Austin renters and home-buyers.