



# City of Sugar Land

## Planning & Zoning Commission Agenda

Sugar Land City Hall  
2700 Town Center  
Boulevard North  
Sugar Land, TX 77479

Thursday, May 28, 2026  
Planning & Zoning Commission Meeting  
City Council Chambers  
6:00 PM

### I. Attention

Members of the City Council, Board and/or Commission may participate in deliberations of posted agenda items through video conferencing means. A quorum of the City Council, Board and/or Commission will be physically present at the above-stated location, and said location is open to the public. Audio/Video of open deliberations will be available for the public to hear/view; and are recorded as per the Texas Open Meetings Act.

The meeting will live stream at <https://www.sugarlandtx.gov/1238/SLTV-16-Live-Video> or <https://youtube.com/live/dlWsQ3ztYDA?feature=share>. Sugar Land Comcast/Xfinity Cable Subscribers can also tune-in on Channel 16.

### II. Call to Order

### III. Public Comment

Pursuant to Texas Government Code section 551.007, citizens are permitted to address the City Council, Board and/or Commission in person with regard to matters posted for consideration on the agenda. Each speaker must complete a "Request to Speak" form and give it to the City Secretary or designee, prior to the beginning of the meeting.

Each speaker is limited to 3 minutes, speakers requiring a translator will have 6 minutes, regardless of the number of agenda items to be addressed. Comments or discussion by City Council, Board, and/or Commission members, will only be made at the time the subject is scheduled for consideration.

For questions or assistance, please contact the Office of the City Secretary (281) 275-2730.

### IV. Minutes

#### A. MINUTES

Consideration of and action on the approval of the minutes of the May 14, 2026, meeting.

**Linda Mendenhall, City Clerk**

### V. Workshop

#### A. DEVELOPMENT CODE DIAGNOSTIC AND ANALYSIS

Review of and discussion on the Development Code Diagnostic and Analysis.

**Jessica Rodriguez, Assistant Director of Planning & Development Services**

### VI. Reports

#### A. Planning and Zoning Commission Liaison Report

- City Council Meeting May 19, 2026

**Sapana Patel, Commissioner**

## B. City Staff Report

- Calendar of Scheduled Meetings and Events

**Lisa Kocich-Meyer, Director of Planning & Development Services**

## VII. Adjournment

The Planning and Zoning Commission reserve the right, upon motion, to suspend the rules to consider business out of the posted order. In addition to any Executive Session listed above, the Planning and Zoning Commission reserves the right to adjourn into Executive Session at any time during this meeting for the purpose of consultation with the Attorney as authorized by Texas Government Code Sections 551.071 to discuss any of the matters listed above.

If you plan to attend this public meeting and you have a disability that requires special arrangements at the meeting, please contact the City Secretary, (281) 275-2730. Requests for special services must be received 48 hours prior to the meeting time. Reasonable accommodations will be made to assist your needs.

The agenda and supporting documentation is located on the [City Website](#) under meeting agendas.

**Posted on this 21st day of May 2026 at 1:00 p.m.**



**Planning & Zoning Commission Agenda Request**  
**May 28, 2026**

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**Agenda Request No:** IV.A.

**Agenda of:** Planning & Zoning Commission Meeting

**Initiated by:** Ashley Newsome, Deputy City Clerk

**Presented by:** Linda Mendenhall, City Clerk

**Responsible Department:** Admin

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**Agenda Caption:**

**MINUTES**

Consideration of and action on the approval of the minutes of the May 14, 2026, meeting.

**Recommended Action:**

Consideration of and action on the approval of the minutes of the May 14, 2026 meeting.

**Executive Summary:**

**Budget**

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**Expenditure Required:** n/a

**Current Budget:** n/a

**Additional Funding:** n/a

**Funding Source:** n/a

**Account Number (ORG-OBJ-Project):** n/a

**Attachments**

1. Planning & Zoning Commission Meeting\_Minutes\_Preview (1) (1)



# City of Sugar Land

## Planning & Zoning Commission Minutes

Sugar Land City Hall  
2700 Town Center  
Boulevard North  
Sugar Land, TX 77479

Thursday, May 14, 2026  
Planning & Zoning Commission Meeting Minutes  
City Council Chamber  
6:00 PM

### I. Attention

Members of the City Council, Board and/or Commission may participate in deliberations of posted agenda items through video conferencing means. A quorum of the City Council, Board and/or Commission will be physically present at the above-stated location, and said location is open to the public. Audio/Video of open deliberations will be available for the public to hear/view; and are recorded as per the Texas Open Meetings Act.

The meeting will live stream at <https://www.sugarlandtx.gov/1238/SLTV-16-Live-Video> or <https://youtube.com/live/uUyaotyKUNQ?feature=share>. Sugar Land Comcast/Xfinity Cable Subscribers can also tune-in on Channel 16.

### II. Call to Order

#### QUORUM PRESENT

Chuck Brown, Mary Smith, Randall Halbrook, Apurva Parikh, Fareena Dawood, Sapana Patel, and Timothy Hart were present. Matthew Caligur was absent. Bradley Tilton attended virtually.

### III. Public Comment

Pursuant to Texas Government Code section 551.007, citizens are permitted to address the City Council, Board and/or Commission in person with regard to matters posted for consideration on the agenda. Each speaker must complete a "Request to Speak" form and give it to the City Secretary or designee, prior to the beginning of the meeting.

Each speaker is limited to 3 minutes, speakers requiring a translator will have 6 minutes, regardless of the number of agenda items to be addressed. Comments or discussion by City Council, Board, and/or Commission members, will only be made at the time the subject is scheduled for consideration.

For questions or assistance, please contact the Office of the City Secretary (281) 275-2730.

No members of the public addressed the Commission.

### IV. Minutes

#### A. MINUTES

Consideration of and action on the approval of the minutes of the April 23, 2026, meeting.

**Linda Mendenhall, City Clerk**

A motion to **Approve the minutes of the April 23, 2026 meeting**, was made by Chuck Brown and seconded by Fareena Dawood; the motion **Passed**.

Ayes: Chuck Brown, Mary Smith, Randall Halbrook, Apurva Parikh, Fareena Dawood, Timothy

Hart, Bradley Tilton  
Absent: Matthew Caligur

## V. Subdivision Plat

### A. DEL WEBB SUGAR LAND AT RYEHILL SECTION TWO PRELIMINARY PLAT

Consideration of and action on Del Webb Sugar Land at Ryehill Section Two Preliminary Plat.

**Ethan Cantu, Principal Planner**

Ethan Cantu, Principal Planner, gave a presentation, made comments, and answered questions from the Commission.

A motion to **Approve the Del Webb Sugar Land at Ryehill Section 2 Preliminary Plat**, was made by Sapana Patel and seconded by Mary Smith; the motion **Passed**.

Ayes: Chuck Brown, Mary Smith, Randall Halbrook, Apurva Parikh, Fareena Dawood, Sapana Patel, Timothy Hart, Bradley Tilton

Absent: Matthew Caligur

### B. PRELIMINARY PLAT EXTENSION - RYEHILL SECTION FOUR

Consideration of and action on the Ryehill Section Four Preliminary Plat Extension.

**Ethan Cantu, Principal Planner**

Ethan Cantu, Principal Planner, gave a presentation, made comments, and answered questions from the Commission.

A motion to **Approve the Ryehill Section Four Preliminary Plat Extension**, was made by Chuck Brown and seconded by Mary Smith; the motion **Passed**.

Ayes: Chuck Brown, Mary Smith, Randall Halbrook, Apurva Parikh, Fareena Dawood, Sapana Patel, Timothy Hart, Bradley Tilton

Absent: Matthew Caligur

## VI. Workshop

### A. SUBDIVISION VARIANCE FOR MARANATHA ADDITION REPLAT

Review of and discussion on the subdivision variance requests for Maranatha Addition Replat located at 3706 Maranatha Drive.

**Jessica Rodriguez, Assistant Director of Planning & Development Services**

Jessica Rodriguez, Assistant Director of Planning & Development Services, gave a presentation, made comments, and answered questions from the Commission.

Timothy Hart, Vice Chair, made a motion to table the workshop for a future meeting. A second was not made. The motion failed. The Vice Chair, Timothy Hart, recused himself from the meeting at 6:19 p.m.

An election was held for a commissioner to serve as the acting chair during the workshop. Commissioner Chuck Brown nominated Fareena Dawood as the acting chair. Commissioner Mary Smith seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

## VII. Reports

A. Planning and Zoning Commission Liaison Report

- City Council Meeting April 21, 2026
- City Council Meeting May 5, 2026

**Sapana Patel , Commissioner & Fareena Dawood, Commissioner**

Commissioner Fareena Dawood attended and reported on the April 21, 2026, City Council meeting. Commissioner Sapana Patel attended and reported on the May 5, 2026, City Council meeting.

B. City Staff Report

- Calendar of Scheduled Meetings and Events

**Lisa Kocich-Meyer, Director of Planning & Development Services**

Lisa Kocich-Meyer, Director of Planning & Development Services, reported on upcoming scheduled meetings and events.

**VIII. Adjournment**

A motion to **Adjourn at 6:55 p.m.**, was made by Chuck Brown and seconded by Sapana Patel; the motion Passed.

Ayes: Chuck Brown, Mary Smith, Randall Halbrook, Apurva Parikh, Fareena Dawood, Sapana Patel, Timothy Hart, Bradley Tilton

Absent: Matthew Caligur

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**Linda Mendenhall, City Clerk**





## **Planning & Zoning Commission Agenda Request** **May 28, 2026**

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**Agenda Request No:** V.A.

**Agenda of:** Planning & Zoning Commission Meeting

**Initiated by:** Emily Ercius, Planner II

**Presented by:** Jessica Rodriguez, Assistant Director of Planning & Development Services

**Responsible Department:** Planning and Development Services

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**Agenda Caption:**

**DEVELOPMENT CODE DIAGNOSTIC AND ANALYSIS**

Review of and discussion on the Development Code Diagnostic and Analysis.

**Recommended Action:**

Hold a workshop to review and discuss findings from the Development Code Diagnostic and Analysis document.

**Executive Summary:**

The City of Sugar Land commissioned a Development Code Diagnosis as part of a two-step consultant effort to evaluate whether the City's existing development regulations continue to support the community's long-term goals related to redevelopment, reinvestment, and infill development. Over the past several months, Planning and Development Services staff has worked alongside Simplecity Design to review the City's zoning, subdivision, and parking regulations and identify opportunities to better align the Development Code with current market conditions, community priorities, and future development trends. As Sugar Land continues transitioning from primarily greenfield development toward redevelopment and adaptive reuse opportunities, the Diagnostic is intended to provide a foundation for how the City's development regulations can evolve alongside the community and proactively support redevelopment efforts.

Throughout the diagnostic process, the project team engaged with the development community, Planning & Zoning Commissioners, City staff, and other stakeholders through a series of Listening Sessions conducted on September 22, 2025. Several recurring themes emerged during these discussions, including a desire for greater predictability and flexibility within the development process, particularly for redevelopment and infill projects. Parking requirements, stormwater management standards, and site development regulations were identified as potential barriers to redevelopment, while signage, landscaping, and nonconforming property regulations were recognized as areas where modernization efforts could improve flexibility while maintaining the quality and character that define Sugar Land.

The Development Code Diagnosis identifies opportunities for the City to explore additional zoning tools and updated development standards to better accommodate evolving housing preferences, walkability, and mixed-use development. The primary recommendation is the creation of three new zoning districts — Urban Center, Neighborhood, and Transition — intended to support flexible building types and development patterns without relying on Planned Developments (PDs). The Diagnosis also focuses heavily on parking regulations and recommends evaluating strategies such as shared parking, site-specific parking regulations, rightsizing existing standards, and the potential elimination of parking minimums. Additional recommendations include updates related to nonconforming properties, landscaping, signage, process improvements, and Low Impact Development (LID).

This workshop is intended to introduce the key findings of the Development Code Diagnosis and receive policy guidance from the Planning & Zoning Commission regarding future zoning and parking code amendments.

**Budget**

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**Expenditure Required:** N/A

**Current Budget:** N/A

**Additional Funding:** N/A

**Funding Source:** N/A

**Account Number (ORG-OBJ-Project):** N/A

**Attachments**

- 1. Sugar Land Code Diagnosis 2026 Vs. 10 Edit

# DEVELOPMENT CODE DIAGNOSTIC WORKSHOP

## Background

The City of Sugar Land commissioned a Development Code Diagnosis as part of a two-step contract for professional services to evaluate whether the City's existing development regulations continue to support the community's long-term goals toward redevelopment, reinvestment, and infill development. Over the course of the last several months, Planning and Development Services staff has been working in tandem with SimpleCity Design to conduct a diagnostic of Sugar Land's Development Code, with the intent behind the Code Diagnostic being to ensure that Sugar Land's current development regulations are reflective of the present needs and priorities of the community, with the team paying a special focus on the City's current zoning, subdivision, and parking codes. As Sugar Land continues to grow and new opportunities for redevelopment and infill development emerge, it is important that we as a City are prepared to help support these incoming projects as they arise.

While Sugar Land's existing development regulations have helped to establish the high-quality neighborhoods, commercial corridors, and economic centers that Sugar Land residents have come to know and love, many of these existing development regulations currently in place were written during a time when greenfield development was the primary pattern of growth. However, as Sugar Land approaches a new chapter in its development lifecycle, the City has become increasingly focused on redevelopment, adaptive reuse, and targeted infill opportunities.

City Staff and SimpleCity worked with members of the development community, the Planning & Zoning Commissioners, and other various community stakeholders to identify both strengths and areas for improvement within the City's current Development Code. In order to facilitate these conversations, the project team hosted Listening Sessions on September 22, 2025, to better understand where existing regulations functioned effectively, where they could create barriers for redevelopment, and what additional flexibility could be added into the code to combat these unintended barriers.

## Overview

Additionally, there were several key themes that emerged throughout the code diagnostic process. For example, the development community expressed a desire for greater predictability and flexibility within

## Development Code Diagnostic Workshop

the development process, particularly when it came to redevelopment and infill projects. Parking requirements, stormwater management standards, and site development processes were also identified as potential barriers for redevelopment. Similarly, discussions around signage, landscaping, and nonconforming properties highlighted additional opportunities to modernize standards while still maintaining the quality and character that define the Sugar Land community.

The Code Diagnostic also identified opportunities for the City to explore additional zoning tools and development standards that could work to better accommodate evolving housing preferences and an increased desire for walkability. The primary recommendation of the Diagnosis is the creation of three new zoning districts designed to support modern development patterns while remaining compatible with Sugar Land's existing character. The three new zoning districts include Urban Center Zone, Neighborhood Zone, and Transition Zone. These new zoning districts would allow flexible building types, housing options, and mixed-use development which vary in intensity without requiring PDs. The Diagnosis recommends shifting from highly prescriptive regulations like PDs to standards that focus more on building form and measurable impacts rather than strictly separated land uses.

The remaining portion of the Diagnosis includes recommendations to the Development Code for nonconformity, signs, infrastructure, landscaping, and process improvements. The other recommendations in the Development Code Diagnosis include:

- Creating clearer pathways for nonconforming sites and phased site improvements;
- Modernizing landscaping and tree preservation standards to improve flexibility and implementation;
- Developing more sign type regulations;
- Conducting a development process audit to improve efficiency; and
- Promoting Low Impact Development (LID).

The second step in our Consultant work includes drafting updates to the development standards focused on parking regulations. There are incremental changes that can be made soon that include allowing broader use of shared parking and future-proof parking garage regulations. Other options, such as on-street parking, rightsizing existing standards, and site-specific parking regulations, can be

## Development Code Diagnostic Workshop

considered with additional data collection and community engagement efforts. Another consideration for the Commission is the document's primary recommendation for eliminating parking minimums.

Finally, it is important to note that the Development Code Diagnostic is not intended to predetermine policy decisions or recommend a singular path forward, but it is more so intended to provide the City with a comprehensive assessment of the current code framework, identify potential opportunities for improvement, and to establish a foundation for how Sugar Land's development regulations can evolve and grow alongside the community itself.

This Workshop is designed to introduce key findings from the Development Code Diagnosis and receive the Commission's guidance on future code amendments related to zoning and parking.

## RECOMMENDATION

Hold a workshop to review and discuss findings from the Development Code Diagnostic and Analysis document.



# Sugar Land Development Code Diagnosis

# Project Background

The City of Sugar Land commissioned a Development Code Diagnosis to help the community right-size its development regulations and identify which standards should be updated, modified, or removed to support the community's next stage of growth. The purpose of the Code Diagnosis is to evaluate whether existing development standards and ordinances are limiting the community's ability to achieve its desired outcomes.

The process began with a series of topic based listening sessions, where community members discussed goals, obstacles, and opportunities. These sessions created a forum for open dialogue and allowed the code writing team to identify key themes to guide the code review.

Following the listening sessions, the team analyzed the City's development ordinances to identify the standards and patterns that shape development outcomes. These standards influence the community's look, feel, and day-to-day functionality. There is no single "right" set of standards; each component involves trade-offs, and some expectations will inevitably conflict. The Code Diagnosis is written with this reality in mind.

All evaluations, recommendations, and trade-offs begin with what is best for the community both financially and physically. After establishing a clear understanding of public realm standards and assessing the City's responsibilities, the code writing team then evaluates private lot development standards. The relationship between public and private spaces must be aligned to ensure long term fiscal resilience. When these two systems work in concert, private sector productivity can be supported by appropriately scaled public investment.

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# Executive Summary

The City of Sugar Land's development codes and ordinances have successfully delivered what they were designed to achieve: a series of high-quality residential neighborhoods lined with commercial corridors. During the City's major growth phase, this development pattern aligned with market demand. However, as housing trends shift and infrastructure and land costs continue to rise, Sugar Land now has an opportunity to pivot toward a new development approach.

The general consensus was that the existing development standards and ordinances served the community well during its initial buildout. However, new zoning and development tools are now needed to support Sugar Land's next lifecycle of growth. Currently, the most flexible tool available for sites that do not meet minimum standards or lack sufficient land area for large-scale development is the Planned Development District (PD). While PDs offer flexibility, the time, complexity, and unpredictability of the process often discourage developers from using them. Predictability and consistency are critical for attracting future investment. To foster this environment, Sugar Land should incorporate new zoning districts into the development code to provide clearer, more predictable pathways for alternative development patterns and land uses.

To expand housing options and support infill commercial development, the primary recommendation is to create several new zoning districts. These districts will require calibration based on surrounding conditions and future development goals. They should offer flexible yet predictable standards, coded at a granular level to ensure projects are financially feasible for builders while aligning with community objectives. Coordination between the Planning and Development Services Department and the Economic Development Department will be essential to ensure the standards reflect market trends and support Sugar Land's long-term development vision.

As the new zoning districts are created, the City should also pursue parallel efforts in code maintenance, organization, and minor amendments. This includes targeted updates to parking, landscaping, and other development standards.

# Optimal Path Snapshot

The creation of the new zoning district standards can run concurrently with these efforts. It's possible the adoption schedule could align for the various efforts.

## Improve Key Development Standards

Modify applicable standards within the sign, zoning, subdivision, parking & landscape ordinances.

## Creation of New Zoning Districts

Add districts that allow targeted development types.

## Code Organization

Align development ordinances to reduce cross-referencing and add clarity through charts and graphics for a better user experience.

## Continued Code Maintenance

Development codes are not static documents and require consistent updates to align with new technologies, changes in development trends, and new tools as they are discovered.

# CH. 1 INTRODUCTION

## **Setting the Stage**

Sugar Land's beautiful natural setting and proximity to Houston positioned the community for rapid growth. Today, Sugar Land is mostly built-out with only a few large vacant parcels remaining, making way for great infill development opportunities. The current development style is predominantly suburban large lot residential neighborhoods featuring detached homes separated by commercial corridors that frame the subdivisions.

In 2025, The American Community Survey noted that Sugar Land saw a population decrease of 7.32%, equivalent to roughly 8,400 people from 2019-2023. There are many factors that cause a population decline. However, outputs from this effort can help diversify housing that leads to the creation of housing for families big and small ranging from lone artists to empty nesters. In recent decades, housing choice has shifted from large lots to more compact residential and walkable housing options. Sugar Land has the ability to customize its standards to attract builders to fill in these market gaps.

The shift in housing choice provides an opportunity for Sugar Land to re-examine the ordinances governing residential development to make them more supportive of alternative residential housing types. Focusing on infill development and adaptive reuse will be key to diversifying housing opportunities and maintaining the population.

This Code Diagnosis is the first step to the community recognizing and attempting to address the issues and opportunities realized by the current built environment. To best understand current conditions and community aspirations, a series of listening sessions was conducted to gather local insights into market trends and future community desires.

## Process

Simplecity Design was hired to conduct an in-depth evaluation of the current Development Code, supporting ordinances, and adopted plans. The project provides recommendations, ranging from a comprehensive code cleanups to specific code standards. By listening to issues raised by City staff, policymakers, and the development community, the goal of this process is to promote development opportunities that lead Sugar Land to a thriving next community lifecycle.

Beyond studying the codes, the team reviewed other key documents, including the 2025-27 Strategic Plan, the Development Application Handbook, various comprehensive plan efforts, and the City budget, to gain a holistic understanding of the current Sugar Land conditions.

“This (Strategic) plan reflects our unwavering dedication to building a city that is safe, dynamic, and future-ready where generations can thrive, new opportunities flourish, and Sugar Land remains a premier destination for living, working, and innovation,”  
-City Manager Mike Goodrum

# CH. 2 DEVELOPMENT CODE

## **Historical Overview of Development Code Updates**

The City of Sugar Land adopted its current development code in 1997. It established the framework for zoning, subdivision, site design, and administrative processes that have guided growth over the past several decades. The codes have continued to evolve in response to regulatory mandates, annexations and growth, redevelopment opportunities, and shifting community priorities. The initial development code provided the City with a comprehensive regulatory framework, organizing land development standards across multiple chapters.

## **Stormwater Improvements Updates**

In response to flooding and state environmental regulations, including MS4 (Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System), Sugar Land initiated updates to its stormwater and post-construction standards around 2020. These amendments introduced requirements for long-term maintenance of stormwater facilities, erosion control, and stormwater protection during the construction phase. They also formalized inspection protocols and added stormwater management to site design considerations. These changes helped the community best prepare for additional growth and reduced the chances of small area flooding. Being that many of the subdivisions are built around water, this was a critical step for future growth. The ordinances did not account for small lots or infill development which is creating limitations for small parcels.

## Historic Neighborhood Preservation Modifications

The original part of Sugar Land was built in the early 1900's. The Hill Neighborhood is the key example of the early settlement patterns. To protect the older part of the community, in 1997 the historic zoning district for this area was established. In 2021, the City adopted a series of zoning refinements tailored to protect the historic character. This included the establishment of more

detailed design standards related to building materials, setbacks, porches, and fencing. These efforts reflect the community interest in neighborhood preservation and ensuring quality infill development. Specific provisions addressed building form, façade transparency, permitted exterior materials, and compatibility with existing neighborhood character. Many of these features will help



The Hill Historic Neighborhood, Sugar Land Tx.

aid in walkable neighborhoods and preservation of key

features representative of the older neighborhoods. While the state no longer allows the regulation of building materials outside of a historic district or special districts, using the design characteristics in new development standards could help repair the street edge as redevelopment occurs.

## **Redevelopment Modifications**

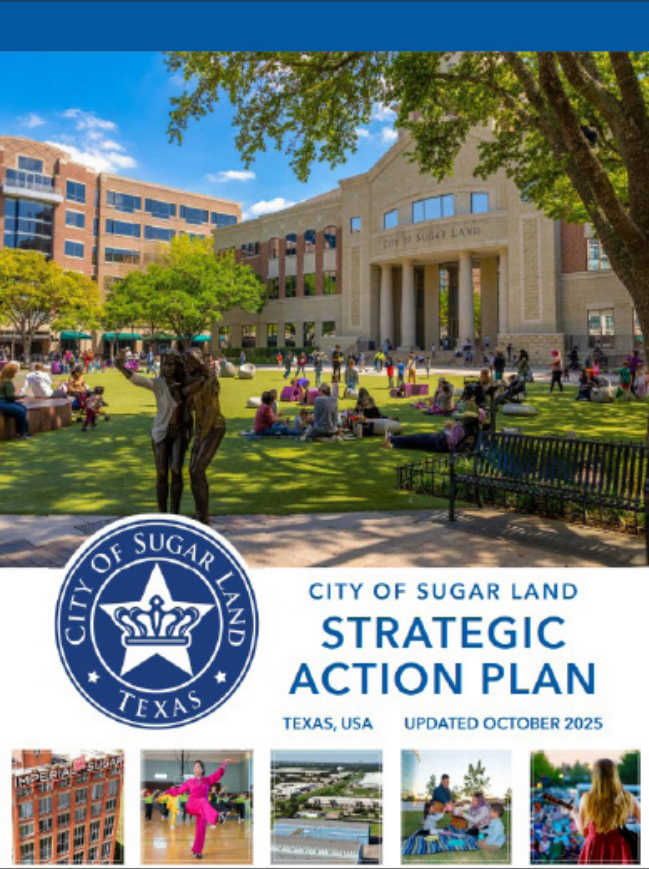
As the greenfield areas of Sugar Land approached buildout, code updates that supported greater diversity of housing types, mixed-use development, and pedestrian-oriented urban form were added to Planned Developments (PDs). While these changes are ongoing, key updates since 2023 have emphasized form-based standards for Lake Pointe, revised land use matrices, reduced setbacks, and introduced new zoning districts tailored to large-scale redevelopment sites such as the Lake Pointe Redevelopment (LPR) zoning district. Many of these standards were focused on the Lake Pointe Redevelopment but could be used to transform other districts throughout Sugar Land.

## **Subdivision and Infrastructure Alignment**

In 2024 and 2025, subdivision standards were amended to align with changes in zoning and redevelopment policy. Updates included revisions to lot configuration requirements, street design, connectivity, and utility infrastructure expectations to Lake Pointe. These changes reflect the City's interest in modernizing development procedures to match contemporary land use goals, encourage walkability, and ensure infrastructure is responsive to redevelopment pressures.

This historical summary provides the foundation for evaluating current code effectiveness. The trajectory of code changes— from initial greenfield development to infill, preservation, and environmental compliance highlights the importance of a code framework that can adapt to shifting priorities and spatial constraints. Subsequent chapters will build on this context to identify strengths, gaps, and opportunities for code modernization.

Examples of Sugar Land's consistent efforts in long-range planning that were studied as part of the Code Diagnosis.



# CH. 3 LISTENING AND ENGAGEMENT

## Review Process

Before the Simplecity team began studying the development codes, they met with the community through a series of Listening Sessions to understand local issues and opportunities. The sessions were broken up into four distinct focuses, which aimed to capture the community members' voices to get the most informed feedback on what is and is not working in the Development Code:

*Community Builders*-Business owners, nonprofits, spiritual leaders, or other community connectors, focused on how the various places function day to day ranging from parking to signage.

*Development Community*-Developers, landowners, consultants, and landlords, who highlighted issues they've faced in the development process.

*City Staff*- Highlighted administrative opportunities in working with the Development Code and issues from past developments.

*Planning & Zoning Commission*- Brought their views on code-related matters and weighed in on possible solutions.

The appendix to this Code Diagnosis includes the findings we heard from the various community members in each session that have been threaded into the recommendations of this report.



### Help Shape Sugar Land's Future

Sugar Land is evolving—and so is our approach to growth. Guided by the City's 2020-2032 Strategic Action Plan, we're reimagining how development regulations shape the future of our City. By taking a fresh look at the regulations that guide land use and design, we're ensuring our standards keep pace with innovation, build ideas, and a trailblazing vision for our next chapter.

To kick off this project, we want to first begin by hearing from the people who work with (or have experience with) the City's Development Code. As Sugar Land continues to grow and new opportunities for redevelopment and infill development emerge, it is important for us to reflect and look at the City's development regulations to ensure that they reflect the current needs and priorities of the community. A Code Diagnostic will take a closer look at the zoning, subdivision, parking, and sign codes—with particular attention to parking requirements, as these regulations directly influence project feasibility, how projects are designed, and the city's ability to support its long-term development goals.

Together, we're setting the standard for what a future-focused community can be. These Listening Sessions are designed for conversation where your ideas and experiences can take center stage (aka light refreshments are provided).

Your input will help shape the future of Sugar Land. RSVP with the QR Code.

**Session 1**  
**Community Builders • 10-11:30 a.m.**  
Calling all business owners and community leaders! Come share your ideas and help us shape the future of Sugar Land's Development Code.

**Session 2**  
**Development Community • 1-2:30 p.m.**  
We want your input! Developers, landowners, and design professionals are invited to come join the conversation to discuss future updates to Sugar Land's Development Code.

**Session 3**  
**City Staff • 3-4:30 p.m.**  
Sugar Land's staff plays an instrumental role in how the Development Code is interpreted and administered. This session is the opportunity for staff to come together to ensure that the Development Code next only reflects the needs of our community but the needs of our team as well.

**Session 4**  
**Planning & Zoning • 5-6:30 p.m.**  
Your voice matters! This project, called a Code Diagnostic, will be led by a Planning and Zoning Commission.

**Happy / Social Hour • 6:30 - 8p.m.**  
**at Little Woodrows - First Colony Mall**



Scan QR code to RSVP



## Key Takeaways

The Listening Sessions allowed the community to focus on a variety of topics such as:

Parking is misaligned with today's uses.

Shifting patterns mean many lots are over or under parked. Alternatives were discussed in the context of parking issues throughout the City.

More housing diversity and small-scale mixed-use. Desire for more options of housing and small-scale mixed-use throughout the City. This nationwide trend requires code adjustments to accomplish.

Signage needs to be contextual. Clear, corridor-based sign types/sizes; reconcile the City standards with private development design standards where applicable.

Nonconformities need clear lanes. Stakeholders want distinct paths for sites/uses/structures and a predictable way to legalize legacy conditions without all-at-once rebuilds.

Development predictability is a pain point.

Reduction of arbitrary standards and focus on clear and more efficient outcomes was voiced, both from the staff and the broader community.

Stormwater/detention adds cost; look at regional tools. There's interest in sub-regional approaches and clearer coordination. Better utilization of LID standards, which could improve onsite detention, was explored.

Landscaping/trees = design + maintenance clarity.

People asked for practical details (root barriers, workable tree wells, trimming rules) and clear ownership on maintenance requirements. The landscape standards require alignment ranging from the private lot requirements to the public landscape requirements.

# CH. 4 CODE REVIEW

The code review team began by analyzing Sugar Land's Development Code with the intent of identifying limitations or obstacles which precluded development patterns being sought by the community. The analysis layered the zoning, subdivision, and sign standards to gain an understanding of how the individual development standards assembled to create the outcomes found in Sugar Land's built environment. Next the team reviewed the standards to gain an understanding of why infill development is difficult within the existing set of standards. The findings noted that due to the stormwater management requirements, stacked with the minimum parking standards, layered with the lot sizes and setbacks caused the minimum land area to be greater than would be fiscally viable for infill development.

The purpose of this review is to highlight where the current framework creates unnecessary complexity, restricts desired forms of development, or hinders the City's long-term fiscal and community goals. Ultimately, it is up to the policymakers and the community to decide whether these opportunities are right for their community. The following recommendations are presented as opportunities rather than obstacles to modernizing Sugar Land's development framework so that it continues to support both prosperity and adaptability.

# Key Opportunities

» **Support the development code text with graphics and charts.**

- Graphics can help users of the code better grasp abstract concepts.

» **Provide existing sites with options for improvements without major permitting expenses.**

» **Enable by-right a broader range of development types.**

» **Align the development standards with market demands and land values.**

# CH. 5 SPECIFIC DEVELOPMENT CODE FINDINGS

## Introduction

Chapter 5, focuses on specific barriers to development, opportunities for additional development types, and recommendations for rightsizing the existing development regulations. Chapter 5 is divided into findings, and specific recommendations. Development standards and ordinances are inherently layered and come with trade-offs. Calibration of the trade-off is required to ensure developers can achieve the minimum standards and build a fiscally viable product.

Recommendations range from simple development code text amendments that can be implemented separately to more costly and time-consuming initiatives. The diagnosis is intended to serve as a supplement to the broader planning efforts of staff and policymakers. Chapter 5 identifies key structural and regulatory issues within Sugar Land's existing development code. The outcomes of this effort led to three categories of focus.

## Recommendation Categories

1. Decreasing Barriers to Development
2. Simplifying Regulations
3. Options for Infill



Sample Neighborhood

Simplicity.Design 2021

*Decrease Barriers to Development*



*Simplifying Regulations*



*Options for Infill*



Oftentimes, development projects start with calculating the size of the parking lot and stormwater detention ponds. The buildable square footage is the remaining land of the site. This is problematic when the number of parking spaces required by code exceeds those required by the development itself. The minimum ratios are not calibrated to observe site-specific demands; the standards function as one-size-fits-all mandates based on arbitrary mathematics. The empirical basis for these standards is weak; sampling and context limitations produce pseudo-precision, resulting in a policy that inhibits rather than helps development.

New developments in Sugar Land will likely include on-site parking spaces, regardless of the parking regulations. This is clear from the parts of Texas that have already removed parking mandates. Reducing parking mandates would make the size of parking lots a site-specific decision. This allows users to take advantage of specific situations for their needs. For example, if a half-empty parking lot is next door, they can share the spaces. It allows any area to gradually evolve, increases the likelihood of infill development, and reduces unnecessary costs. Furthermore, it allows more buildable area to add to the taxable value.

During the Listening Sessions, parking needs differed greatly among users in the Sugar Land Business Park. While this is a particular area, the issues are applicable in many settings. In more industrial settings, one company might rely heavily on robotics, resulting in extremely low parking requirements. However, the next tenant employs a more traditional workforce, and the previous parking count does not meet their parking needs.

The following are a series of recommendations to help outline the options the City has for addressing parking. Some are City-wide solutions, while others are area-specific. The parking recommendations are categorized as: General Solutions - Alterations of the general parking framework and Policy Tools- Policies which can be added onto any policy framework that address a component of the issue.

The intent is to expose the community and policymakers to the options that have been used in cities similar to Sugar Land in order to discover what best fits. The following are the recommendations:

### **General Solutions:**

- » Remove parking minimums
- » Site specific parking regulations
- » Rightsizing (reduce) existing standards

### **Policy "Tools":**

- » On-street parking
- » Performance based parking
- » Shared parking plans
- » Unbundled parking
- » Future proof parking

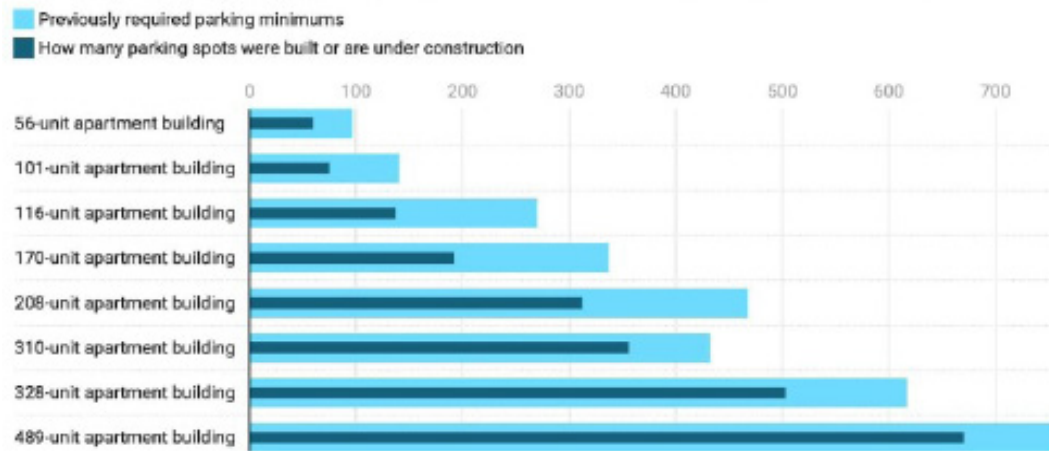
Parking is more of an art than a science. Parking ordinances are written with arbitrary standards and then regulated at a granular level. Furthermore, each project will have its own calculation of desired parking for the build type/size. Therefore the primary recommendation is to remove parking minimums as it offers the simplest, most effective solution to parking. While this may seem like a big policy decision many communities are getting out of the parking regulation business. The following are a series of recommendations and best practices that can be implemented in a range of intensities, locations, and times.

### Primary Recommendation: Remove Parking Minimums

Removing parking minimums is the most comprehensive solution towards a more effective parking management strategy. Here, there is no minimum standard set by the City, but it is instead at the developer's discretion on how much parking to build. It removes arbitrary standards and shifts decision-making to the private market. Here, interested parties who are concerned with the project's success (from the developers to the banks lending the money) will ensure adequate parking.

#### Without parking requirements, developers build fewer parking spots

Since 2019, the Austin City Council has let developers build as much parking as they want as long as they build homes for low-income people. This program gives us a sense of what might happen across the city.



This data has been pulled from development plans submitted to the city. This is a sample of the 14 projects KUT analyzed.

Chart: Audrey McGlinchy • Source: City of Austin • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

This policy shift has been carried out throughout the United States, in a variety of city sizes and makeups, with a consistently positive track record. Most recently, Austin, Texas, removed all parking minimums throughout the city. As the graph shows, parking throughout Austin has not plummeted but instead adjusted to reflect the parking reality more accurately.

Austin, like many other cities, has found that removing parking minimums does not decrease parking significantly but more of a modest decrease.

## **Option: Site Specific Parking Regulations**

Site-specific parking rules apply only inside a mapped boundary, such as Sugar Land Town Square, the Sugar Land Business Park or targeted commercial corridors. Within the designated boundary, projects may reduce or remove minimums, count on-street spaces along their frontage, and use shared off-site lots. This option requires coordination, but has potential to better utilize existing parking facilities.

### **Pros**

Can tailor rules to specific needs, like business parks or regional centers

Creates revenue streams for particular districts

Contributes to data for more accurate parking management and potential expansion

### **Cons**

Adds an additional administrative burden

Requires coordination and analysis of existing conditions

### **Examples**

Houston Market-Based Parking- Exemptions and flexible ratios only in mapped areas: Central Business District (CBD), downtown, and small portions of East downtown and Midtown. The rest of the City keeps the base rules.

Garland Downtown Parking District- Downtown has its own parking section, including credit for adjacent on-street spaces. Standard ratios apply elsewhere.

San Marcos Parking Benefit District- City created district-only paid parking with local reinvestment in the Downtown and River District.

## Option: Rightsizing Existing Standards

Decreasing existing parking standards is an option where parking is still regulated but with a reduction in the minimum spaces required. While every community handles parking differently, the Smartcode, a model zoning code, parking standards are easy to use or calibrate for Sugar Land. Its parking standards have proven to be well-adjusted for retrofits and provide an easy-to-use chart. As part of any modifications, incorporating a parking analysis is a critical recommendation to better understand parking realities, gaps, and surpluses. The Smartcode Transect Zones increase in intensity as the number increases, with T4 being denser than T3. Below is a graphic of the Smartcode parking requirements. The organization is similar to Sugar Land’s existing standards, regulating the number of parking spaces based on a series of variables, but offers lower parking ratios than the current code.

**SMARTCODE** **ELEMENT 5 – ZONING**

Municipality

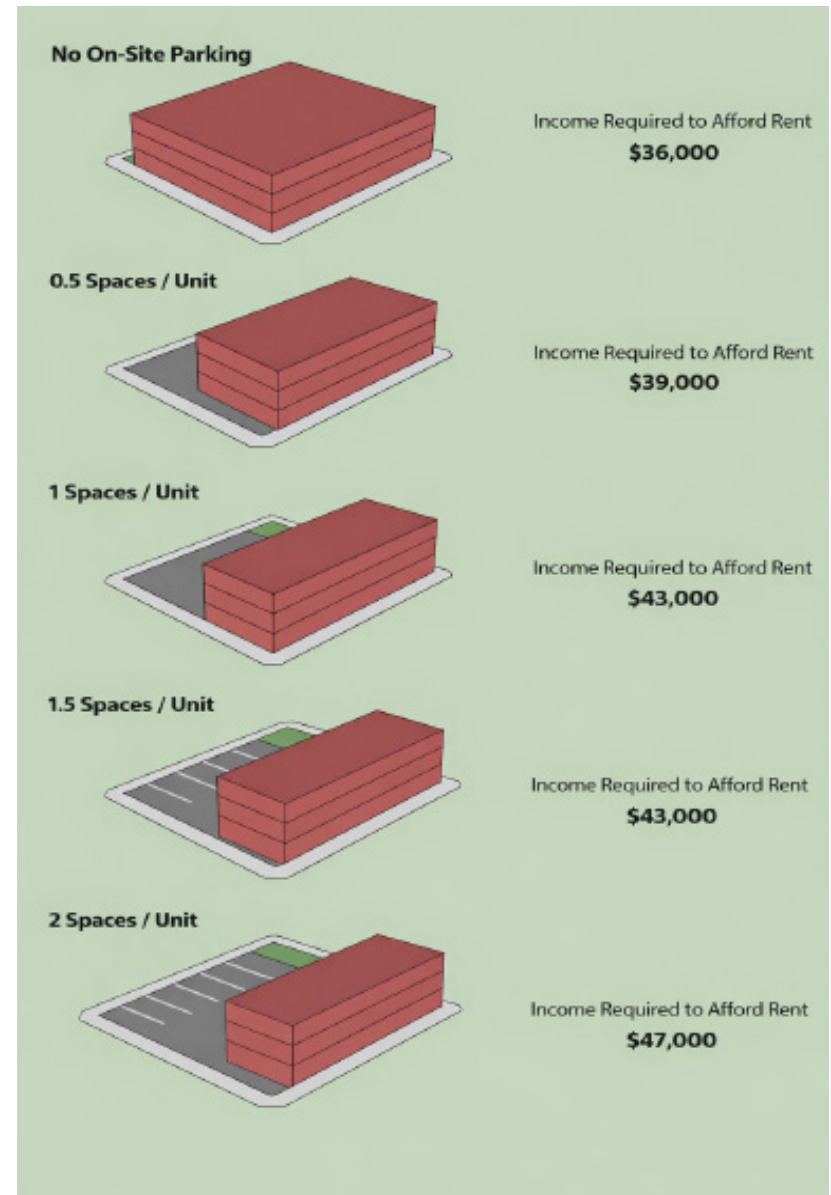
TABLE 5H. AUTOMOBILE PARKING REQUIREMENTS					
	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6
<b>Agricultural</b>	No minimum				
<b>Civic Space</b>	No minimum				
<b>Commercial</b>	4 / 1,000 sq.ft.		4 / 1,000 sq.ft.	3 / 1,000 sq.ft.	
<b>Entertainment</b>	Not applicable		Not applicable	1 / 6 fixed seats or patrons	
<b>Industrial &amp; Manufacturing</b>	Not applicable		Not applicable	1 / 4 employees	
<b>Institutional</b>	1 / 4 fixed seats or patrons			1 / 8 fixed seats or patrons	
<b>Lodging</b>	1 / room		1 / room	0.5 / room	
<b>Residential</b>					
Home occupations	2 / 1,000 sq.ft.			1 / 1,000 sq.ft.	
Accessory dwellings	1 / ADU		No minimum		
1 & 2 dwelling units per lot	2 / unit		1.5 / unit		
over 2 dwelling units per lot	Not applicable		1.5 / unit	1 / unit	

## Parking Tools

The following parking tool is an immediate action that can be implemented City-wide or in site-specific cases that best fit the City's needs.

### Add & Utilize On-Street Parking

On-street parking is a great tool to offset on-site parking. Providing the option to use existing on-street parking or create on-street parking will reduce the area required for on-site parking. On-street parking can serve as overflow parking or be used for employees, freeing up on-site parking spaces for customers. Sugar Land streets are wide and can accommodate lane reductions by converting that area to on-street parking. Utilizing existing city rights-of-way can be a low-cost solution for addressing site- or area-specific parking shortages. This option should begin by performing a mapping exercise to evaluate where this could be a viable solution throughout the community. It's also possible to reclaim street area by changing the street cross-sections to accommodate new on street parking.



### Future Proof Parking

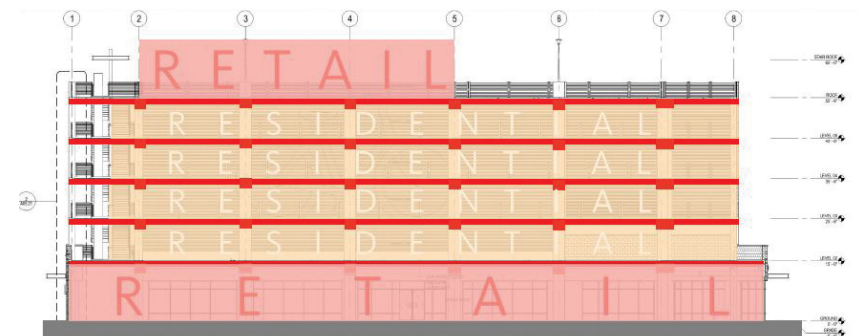
Conversion-ready parking garages require new garages to be built differently from a conventional garage. Typical features include flat floor plates, higher floor-to-floor heights, removable or externalized ramps, regular column grids, and ground-floor liner space ready for retail or office. The intent is to avoid locking valuable sites under structures that cannot adapt.

Conversion-ready garages are estimated to have a premium of 18–25% higher front-end costs. Still, the alternative is costly tear-downs, dead frontages, or apartments forever pinned above unconvertible parking decks. Cities can offset the increased cost by applying the policy in targeted districts, offering height or FAR bonuses, reducing or removing minimums so fewer stalls are built, or using public financing tools for shared garages. This can be applied to select districts, Imperial and Sugar Land Town Center Regional Activity Centers (RACs), or other commercial areas, that are expected to undergo parking garage construction.

### Houston Example: Fairview District Parking Garage



In the Fairview District, the garage is treated as a future building, not a single-purpose parking deck. Design techniques like flat floor plates with removable “speed ramps” and increased floor heights allow floors to be leveled and repurposed. The designers are not expecting the parking garage to shift uses immediately but by incorporating key design decisions the structure has the possibility to change as technology and the city evolve.



## Shared Parking Plans

Shared parking allows multiple properties to rely on the same parking supply, instead of each site building its own dedicated lot. This works exceptionally well when peak parking times differ (for example, offices are busy during the day and restaurants are busy at night). Agreements identify the number of spaces, hours of use, and acceptable walking distance; require ADA access, lighting, and signage; and are recorded so they run with the land. If stalls are lost, replacement is required or the served use must be reduced. A city map or app could help show open lots, eligible users, and available times.

Shared parking is most effective where destinations cluster together and trips can be combined:

### Town Center and Main Street

Offices, restaurants, small shops, civic buildings, and services with different peak times.

### Medical and Office Campuses

Clinics, professional offices, and training spaces with staggered schedules.

### Mixed-Use Districts

Housing, retail, offices, entertainment, and gyms within the same block or development.

### Industrial or Employment Parks

Shift changes and training/event spaces that create variable demand.

### Civic and Institutional Areas

Churches, schools, libraries, community centers, and event venues that peak at predictable times.

Parking reductions change the conversation of parking management from “mandate supply” to “manage and coordinate demand.”

### **Shared Parking as the New Norm:**

Private lot owners, like those in an industrial park, can choose to share their underused spaces during off-hours. This means that a business that only needs a handful of spots for its employees can let the public use its lot in the evenings or weekends. In return, they get some flexibility, a potential revenue stream, and the comfort of knowing that if their needs grow, the shared system can adapt accordingly.

### **Building a Coordinated Parking Ecosystem:**

The City provides a unified map or app so that drivers can easily find available parking, whether it's on a shared private lot, a right-sized public lot, or a garage. It's a bit of a culture shift for private lot owners, but the benefits are clear and include less overflow parking, more efficient use of spaces, and a little extra income. Ultimately a coordinated approach reserves land for a high and better use on the tax rolls.

## Comprehensive System Integration

Identifying the appropriate stormwater management solutions will require a comprehensive analysis of the City's existing built and natural conditions. Furthermore, opportunities upstream for detention should be analyzed to ensure the best management practices for stormwater are being completely evaluated for maximum storage capacity.

When reviewing the existing natural patterns, it's possible to evaluate for dual-purpose facilities, which will provide recreational and stormwater benefits. It would also be advantageous to review the existing built systems to ensure they are in the best working order and interconnect with future stormwater system additions. This effort can best be realized through a GIS mapping analysis and an examination of transportation facilities. Retrofitting facilities, right-of-way reclamation, and the use of existing parkland facilities could provide substantial capacity to help with increased stormwater.



This bioswale example demonstrates onsite stormwater management integrated into the landscape.

Runoff from this parking area in Nashville, TN is channeled into vegetated median where the water supports a lush planting. The plants then help to filter out pollutants and other contaminants from the water on-site. The result is a lower impact on existing stormwater infrastructure and a more attractive landscape.

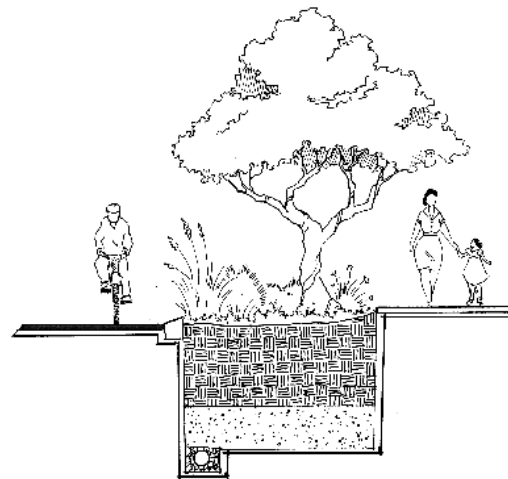
Photo: Juniper Hentz

## Implementation

Low impact development (LID) is an essential stormwater management tool designed to capture, filter, and infiltrate runoff onsite using vegetation, permeable pavers, and other media. Spaces are naturally landscaped to reduce runoff and become more inviting and attractive. Strategic tree planting can provide additional shade and reduce urban heat islands. In addition to providing storage for excess rainwater, LID practices can help improve water quality before the water is discharged to the waterways.

## Implementation Limitations

Often conventional drainage manuals, and development codes conflict with LID infrastructure. Sugar Land offers LID tools but it is not the principal tool recommended, therefore it may not be the first choice by the development community. It is recommended to structure the design manual to where LID practices are the default and conventional practices are supplemental when necessary.



## Examples of LID Practices:

- » Bioretention areas
  - ex: plantings in parking lot islands
- » Green roofs
- » Downspout disconnections
  - Rain barrels, planter boxes and permeable areas
- » Rain gardens along trails, bottom of slopes
- » Bioswales along roads, parking lots, near buildings
- » Native plantings
  - Attract beneficial insects and birds
- » Wetland and floodplain preservation and restoration
- » Conservation and protection of open lands, natural areas and green spaces
- » Permeable and porous pavements and paved surfaces
  - Pervious concrete, interlocking concrete pavers
- » Urban tree canopy protection and restoration, tree planter boxes and tree trenches

## Case Study: Dallas, TX

Dallas integrates Low Impact Development (LID) directly into its landscape regulations by treating LID strategies as a standard compliance option rather than a special approval or fixed planting formula. Projects may meet landscape requirements through rain gardens, bioswales, and other LID practices that manage stormwater on-site. Compliance is evaluated through a point-based landscape system, where projects achieve a minimum score based on performance metrics including stormwater infiltration, water conservation and long-term landscape viability.

### Pros

- Treats LID as a standard compliance pathway rather than an exception or overlay
- Reduces reliance on rigid, species-specific planting requirements that have been shown to be difficult to source
- Encourages water-wise landscape suited to Texas climate
- Aligns landscape standards with stormwater management goals
- Simplifies review by offering predictable, code-supported alternatives

### Cons

- Requires staff familiarity with LID concepts and performance criteria
- May require updated training to ensure consistent application. This can impact decisions of what is designed from the beginning, potentially discouraging projects from being pursued.

### *Dallas City Code*

#### *SEC. 51A-10.126 Landscape Design Options*

(9) Low impact development (LID). The applicant may improve the property with low impact development design to manage stormwater flow and provide surface heat abatement. The improvements may be combined for a maximum of 20 points.

(A) Rain garden. Maximum six points.

- (i) 1 to 5,000 square feet: three points; and
- (ii) Each additional 1,000 square feet: one point.

(B) Bioswale. Maximum 10 points per bioswale.

- (i) 50 to 100 feet long: three points; and
- (ii) Each additional 50 feet: one point.

The City of Sugar Land's current landscape ordinance relies on a static, codified plant list and fixed species requirements that have been shown to not reflect actual market availability or provide measures to respond to changing wholesale production cycles.

The goal of a codified planting list is to create clarity and consistency across projects. Issues may arise when the rigidity of this approach comes up against market fluctuations in plant material availability or suitability. This is due to codified plant lists being difficult to change and therefore slow to adapt to real-world fluctuations. A plant palette embedded in the zoning code must go through formal amendments to be updated. The codified list is static by design and may inadvertently lock in requirements that cannot be met and may limit the implementation of more appropriate designs.

The result is a list that is both authoritative and outdated. This combination may delay projects and potentially undermine the purpose of the codified standards.

#### Easing Staff Burden

By easing the burden of updating the Approved Landscape Materials list, the purpose and intent of the document might be better met. Potential solutions may include the removal of the Approved Landscaping Materials List from the ordinance and maintaining it as an external planning document. The goal of restructuring the approvals list would be to ensure flexibility without sacrificing clarity or consistency of enforcement across development projects.

#### Further Consideration

An issue cited by City Staff was that of approved landscape plans specifying plant materials that cannot be procured from any nurseries or landscape suppliers within the region. Plan reviewers often approve highly detailed plant schedules that lock in specific cultivars, sizes, or species without considering procurement feasibility at the time of installation. Real-world supply trends may render certain approved species unobtainable, creating unnecessary friction in the development process. Process and interpretations of standards is important to maintain consistency. Small developers may be disproportionately affected as they can lack the time and capital to manage repeated plan revisions.

The underlying issues may be the lack of a defined substitution pathway. The code does not include a by-right substitution mechanism, so every change requires a formal plan amendment. This process can needlessly hinder development when substitutions are minor and functional equivalents can be readily procured.

## Recommended Strategies

Implementing a more dynamic Landscaping Materials List as an External document where updates are managed through department updates rather than ordinance changes.

### Pros

- Allows for the City to maintain flexibility and responsiveness
- Improves feasibility of approved plans and keeps landscape requirements aligned with market conditions and emerging issues
- Administrative efficiency improved through avoiding frequent ordinance revisions while maintaining consistent enforcement standards

### Cons

- Requires clearly communicated and transparent process for how the list is updated, approved and published
- Annual or periodic updates will require staff to consult experts such as environmental professionals
- Care will need to be taken to educate plan reviewers so as to avoid uneven plan interpretation during review

## Examples In Other Cities

### *Dallas, TX*

Dallas's landscape ordinance delegates authority to the Director to maintain a list of acceptable plant materials for required landscape plans

SEC. 51 A- 10 . 103 . ACCEPTABLE PLANT MATERIALS.

(f) The director shall maintain a list of acceptable plant materials for required landscapes.

The Dallas Approved Tree List document was published in 2018 and was most recently updated in 2022. This demonstrates Dallas's use of an administratively maintained list can evolve over time without ordinance text amendments.

The creation of landscape plans often begins with the identification of every Protected Tree on site and mapping them according to the City's definition. Under the current code, any hardwood tree with a caliper of 8 inches or larger is automatically treated as a Protected Tree, regardless of species, ecological value or location.

This near universal threshold may not reflect the wide range of conditions found on development sites. The standard assumes all trees above a certain size provide the same benefit and warrant the same level of protection. In practice, this equivalence may undermine the protection of significant or historic trees.

Issues can arise when truly significant tree specimens or exceptional canopy contributors receive the same baseline protection as ordinary trees or trees poorly suited to urban environments. This regulatory framework lacks nuance. When all trees are treated as equally protected, review processes may become lengthier, mitigation becomes more expensive, and redevelopment becomes more challenging.

#### Approximate Tree Age at 8" Caliper

Southern Red Oak (*Quercus falcata*)  
- 20 - 30 yrs

Live Oak (*Quercus virginiana*)  
- 25 - 40+ years

Water Oak (*Quercus nigra*)  
15 - 30 years

Drake Elm (*Ulmus crassifolia*)  
15 - 30 years

Pecan (*Carya illinoensis*)  
25 - 40 years

Red Maple (*Acer rubrum*)  
15 - 30 years

Southern Magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*)  
20 - 35 years

Eastern Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*)  
15 - 25 years

American Holly (*Ilex opaca*)  
25 - 40 years

Yaupon Holly (*Ilex vomitoria*)  
- 15-30 years

## Recommended Strategies

The blanket approach is well intentioned, however it may create challenges for both plan reviewers and development teams. A potential solution would be the establishment of a tree classification system that allows the City to calibrate preservation expectations based on the actual value and function of each tree.

Rather than relying on a single 8 inch threshold, trees can be categorized into tiers. For example heritage trees warrant the highest protections, protected trees maintain current protections, standard trees requiring minimal replacement, and a classification for exempt trees that may include invasive or non desirable species.

Moving from a single-threshold Protected Tree definition to a nuanced classification brings the code into alignment with ecological reality and removes unnecessary constraints on development and regulatory burden while safeguarding meaningful canopy.

## Examples In Other Cities

### *Austin, TX*

The City Arborist Program administers the City of Austin's Tree Ordinance and issues permits to remove or impact regulated trees. On private property, the City regulates three classifications of trees: 8- to 18-inch diameter, Protected Trees, and Heritage Trees.

### Levels of Tree Ordinance Protection



#### 8" and larger

- Survey required on commercial and multifamily site plan submittals



#### 19" and larger are Protected Trees

- All species are protected
- Tree permit required for removal or impacts (residential and public)



#### 24" and larger may be Heritage Trees

- Applies to Pecans, Bald Cypress, Eastern Black Walnut, American Cedar Elm, All Oaks, as well as a few less common species
- Variance required for removal or impacts that exceed code requirements



#### 30" and larger Heritage Trees

- Proposed variances must go through public process

## *Recommended Strategies*

- Reduction of impervious surfaces - Any hard, paved area that blocks runoff from soaking into the ground does not allow for the filtration of pollutants and increases total site runoff.
- Disconnection of effective impervious areas - An effective impervious area is directly connected to stream channels via storm drains or impervious surfaces. Runoff moves from the effective area to stream channels without first filtering through an intervening permeable surface or treatment system.
- Restoration of natural functions - The preservation or reestablishment of natural hydrologic and ecological processes on a site include infiltration, evapotranspiration, and natural drainage patterns for the purposes of reducing stormwater runoff, improving water quality and supporting long-term landscape resilience.
- Additional standards for specific land uses that can generate stormwater pollution and need special attention during development review - Targeted development and design requirements applied to land uses with a higher potential to generate stormwater pollutants to ensure effective on-site management or runoff during and after construction.
- Encouraging LID practices in comprehensive plans, grant applications - The explicit identification of LID practices as the preferred approach to stormwater management within the comprehensive plan, and regulatory purpose statements can help guide public and private development towards decentralized, site-integrated solutions.

### Opportunities Over Constraints

Establishing a nonconforming use category tied to Low Impact Development (LID) allows sites to pursue performance-based stormwater and landscape improvements.

Original §CODE.sample.123	Amended §CODE.sample.123
<p>Show location of all existing landscaped areas to remain and proposed landscaped areas to be installed including all plant materials with ht. at planting and mature crown spread of new and existing plants.</p>	<p>The landscaping plan shall incorporate the stormwater management approach and grading plan for the site and shall indicate the location and size of all landscaped and vegetated areas that are intended to provide stormwater treatment or control functions.</p>

Preferred approach to stormwater management within the comprehensive plan, and regulatory purpose statements can help guide public and private development towards decentralized, site-integrated solutions.

## Organization

One of the many challenges with development regulations is that a wide range of experts use the code for many different reasons. Development regulations can be clear and understandable to people who consistently engage with the regulations. But for those who do not regularly engage with the document and development regulations, they are likely to be confused on where to go, what to do, and in what order to do them in. Effective navigation and organization is as key to an effective policy as the policy itself. Quality graphical outlines can make all the difference in providing a clear understanding to describe particular processes, organizations, and policies.

The following are examples of graphic visualizations used in development regulations to:

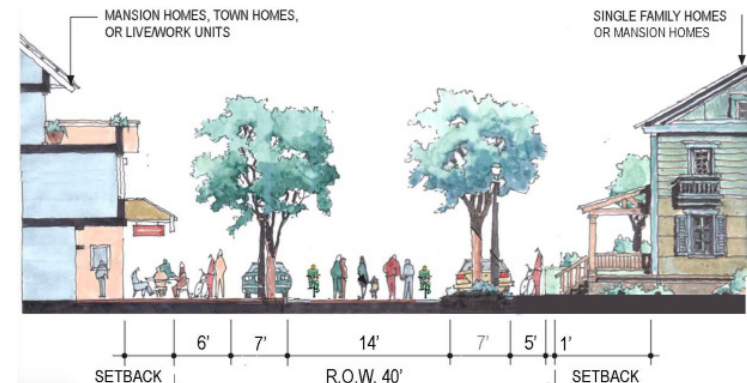
- Provide a clear consolidated “cheat sheet” of the most important standards to know regarding development.
- A visualization of a street section.
- A development process flowchart with a complementary table outlining review authority for each process type.

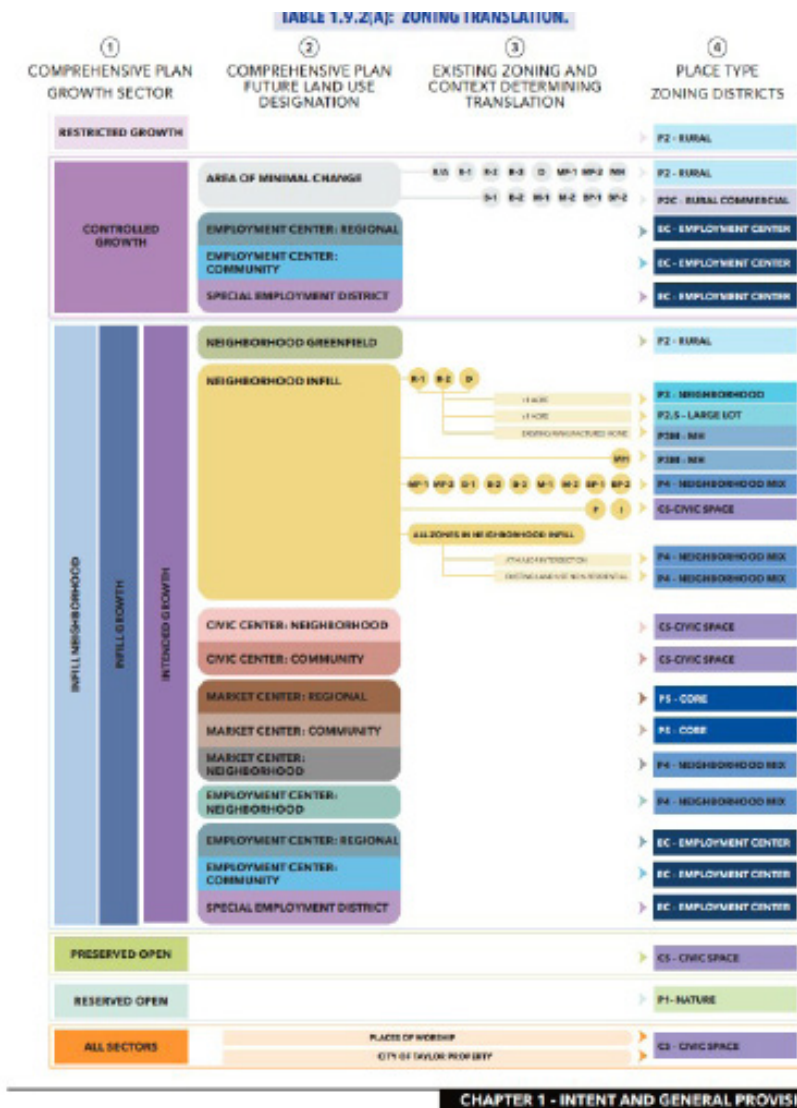
### 4.3 PLACE TYPE ZONING DISTRICT DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS.

The following table contain the details necessary to develop using this LDC to create complete neighborhoods in a variety of forms and patterns.

STANDARDS	PLACE TYPES									
	P1	P2	P2C	P2.5	P3	P3M	P4	P5	CS	EC
<b>BLOCKS</b>										
BLOCK LENGTH (MAXIMUM)	N/A	720'	720'	720'	330'	330'	330'	330'	720'	720'
BLOCK PERIMETER (MAXIMUM)	N/A	2,880'	2,880'	2,880'	1,320'	1,320'	1,320'	1,320'	2,880'	2,880'
<b>PUBLIC FRONTAGE</b>										
SIDEWALK ZONE WIDTH	N/A	5'	5'	5'-15'	5'-15'	5'-15'	5'-15'	12'-18'	8'-24'	8'-24'
LANDSCAPE ZONE	N/A	NP	NP	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
VEHICULAR PARKING ZONE WIDTH (PARALLEL/ANGLED)	0'-10'	8'-11.7'	8'-11.7'	8'	8'	8'	8'-11.7'	8'-12.7'	8'-12.7'	8'-12.7'
VEHICULAR TRAVEL ZONE WIDTH	20'-24'	20'-24'	16'-24'	16'-24'	16'-24'	16'-24'	16'-40'	16'-40'	16'-40'	16'-40'
<b>STREET TYPES</b>										
RURAL STREET	P	P	P	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP
RESIDENTIAL ALLEY	NP	P	P	P	P	P	P	NP	P	NP
COMMERCIAL ALLEY	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	P	P	P
YIELD STREET	P	P	P	P	P	P	NP	NP	P	P
NEIGHBORHOOD STREET	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	NP	P	NP
NEIGHBORHOOD AVENUE	NP	NP	NP	P	P	P	P	NP	P	NP
SIDE STREET	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	P	P	P
3 LANE COMMUNITY BLVD.	NP	NP	NP	NP	P	NP	P	P	P	P
4 LANE COMMUNITY BLVD.	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	P	P	NP	P
PATH	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
<b>LOTS</b>										
WIDTH (MINIMUM)	None	None	None	None	None	None	None	None	None	None
AREA (MINIMUM)	None	2 acre	1 acre	1 acre	None	None	None	None	None	None
LOT COVERAGE (MAXIMUM)	N/A	40%	40%	40%	60%	60%	90%	100%	TBD	TBD
BUILD TO LINE (MINIMUM)	N/A	10'-150'	10'-150'	10'-150'	5'-20'	5'-20'	5'-15'	0'-15'	TBD	TBD
FACADE BUILDOUT (MINIMUM)	N/A	0%	40%	40%	50%	50%	60%	90%	TBD	TBD

P = PERMITTED NP = NOT PERMITTED N/A = NOT APPLICABLE TBD = TO BE DECIDED DURING DEVELOPMENT PROCESS





## Process Modifications

There are no obvious process issues that have been identified by the Code Diagnosis, however process conflicts, gaps, and overlaps can occur based on policy changes that were not mapped back to the development process.

One of the best ways to identify issues is to conduct a Development Process Audit. It documents the full path of an application from pre-application to Certificate of Occupancy (C of O), records what is required at each step, measures actual processing time, and calibrates time and staff resources. The result is a mapped process tied to real-time and cost, that shows exactly where to simplify, realign policy, and identify changes that lead to predictable approvals without lowering standards.

The Land Use Table intentionally organizes the community into delineated development intensities. However, the distribution of land uses can be a limiting factor to achieving walkable neighborhoods. The uses of a place can change and fluctuate over time, but it is the buildings that should be designed as timeless, with the uses to fill in. Existing policies are promoting use specific building types, which limit the City's adaptability and attractiveness over time. Shifting to nuisance based and building type regulations gets to the core of what existing regulations are trying to achieve in a way that facilitates more adaptable places. Most communities have been utilizing Euclidean zoning. Euclidean zoning separates zoning districts by their type. For example, a bank would have different standards than a bakery.





## **Recommendations**

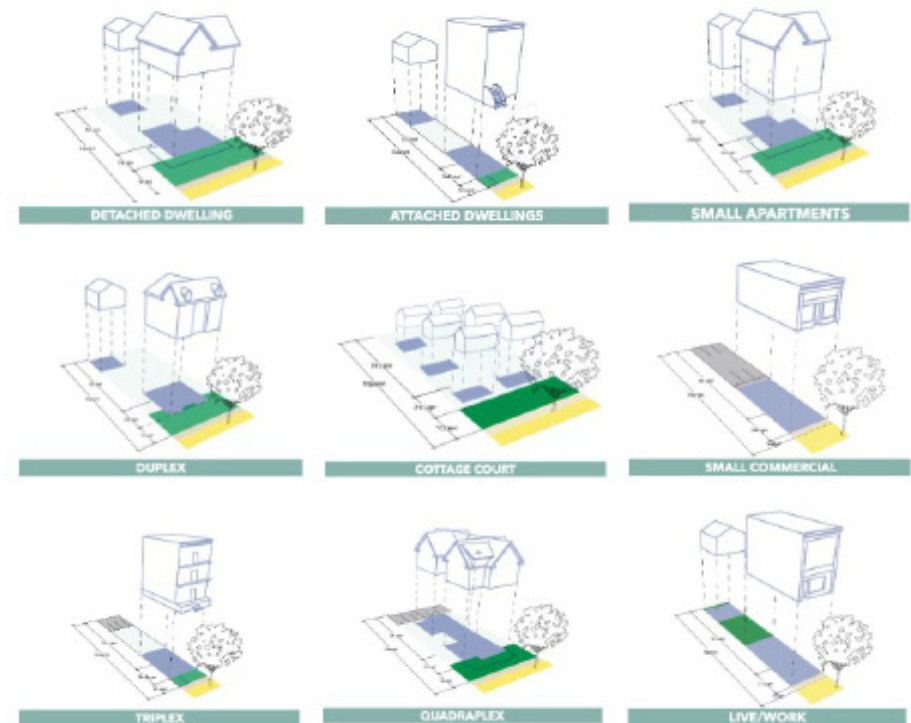
### *Nuisance-Based Regulations*

At its core, a land use table is a policy tool to guide how private uses impact the public sector. Regulating by use type can become a subjective, complicated form of regulation. Regulating how a private space impacts the public focuses on mitigating the impact through quantifiable standards like noise, smell, and sight. Code enforcement can easily measure if properties go beyond these standards. Often uses that would otherwise be disallowed function without complaints because they are not negatively impacting the outside world.

## Focus on Building Types Instead of Use Type

Calibrating the types of buildings by zoning district can effectively carry-out the intent of the zoning. Building types range from detached residential to duplexes, live-work, industrial, and small or large apartment complexes. Instead of regulating the built environment by the use inside the building, building types establish the intensity of the zoning. The administration process enables the City to work from a set of basic descriptions of buildings allowed in each zoning district.

PRIVATE FRONTAGE TYPES	PLACE TYPES									
	P1	P2	P2.5	P3	P3M	P4	P5	CS	EC	
<b>COMMON YARD</b>  Residential buildings are set back from the front property line with an unfenced front yard that is visually continuous with neighboring yards supporting a common landscape.	NP	P	P	P	P	P	NP	P	P	
<b>PORCH WITH OPTIONAL FENCE</b>  Many residential buildings in Castroville have front porches. The build-to-line is setback from the front property line to create room for a wide porch and a fenced-in yard. The optional fence helps maintain a strong street edge and allows the homeowner extra fenced-in yard space. Fence height within first layer may be no more than 4 feet in height above grade/ground level.	NP	P	P	P	P	P	NP	P	P	
<b>STOOP</b>  The main facade of the building is near the frontage line and the elevated stoop engages the sidewalk. The stoop shall be elevated above the sidewalk to ensure privacy within the building. Stairs from the stoop may lead directly to the sidewalk or may be side-loaded. This type is appropriate for residential uses with small setbacks.	NP	P	P	P	NP	P	P	NP	P	
<b>GALLERY</b>  A frontage seen on historic storefronts in Castroville, the facade is aligned close to the frontage line with an attached cantilevered shed or a lightweight colonnade overlapping the sidewalk. This frontage type provides shade for pedestrians on the sidewalk.	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	P	P	P	P	



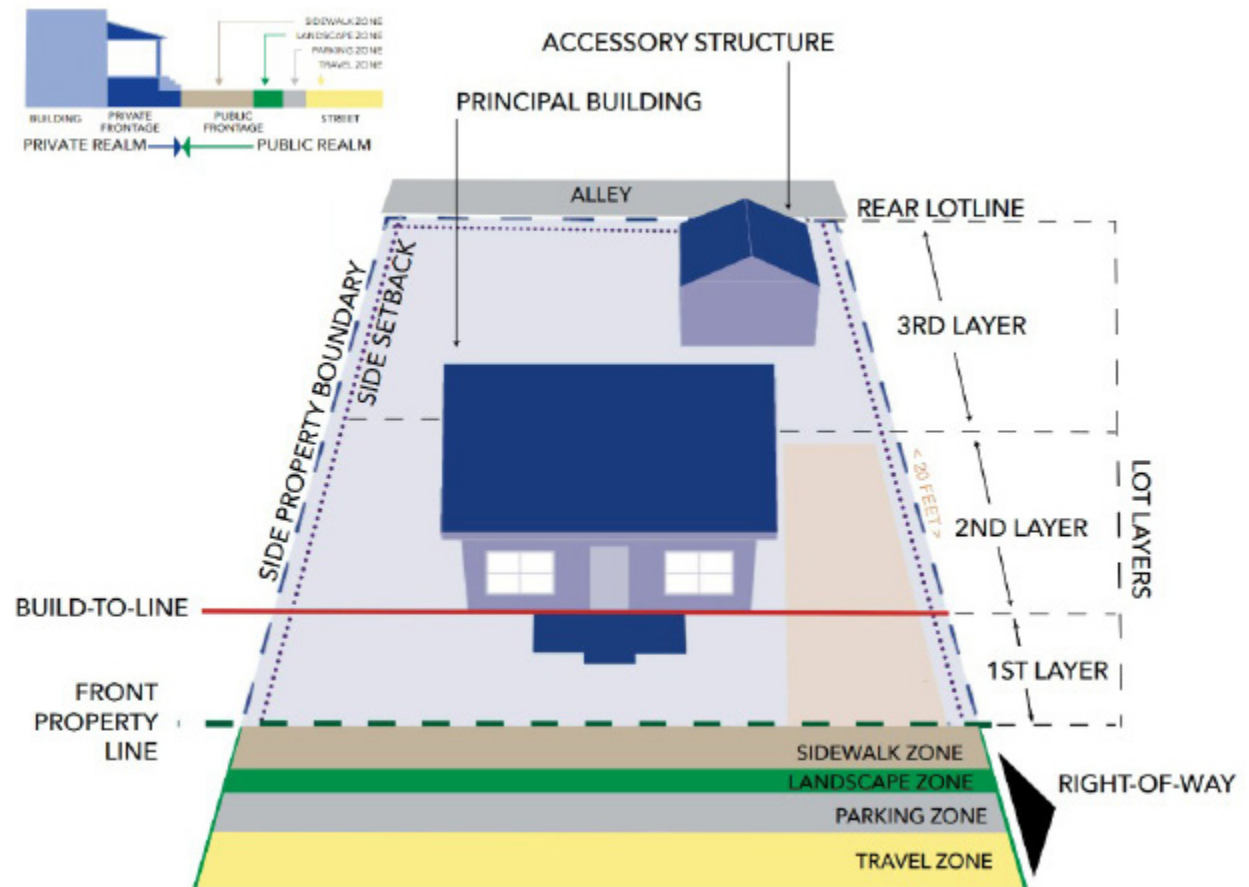
## **Flexible Building Envelope**

The subdivision and zoning standards layered together require fixed boxes within a box. The size lot minimum for the land is the first box and then the minimum front setback, side setback, rear setback, and maximum coverage regulate the next fixed box. Furthermore it creates a monoculture of housing types and a fixed pattern. These standards work against each other and often leave owners with a buildable footprint that is smaller than intended. Building placement should be guided by the natural landscape and life-safety, not by arbitrary geometric standards that restrict otherwise workable sites. Using a maximum lot coverage and a range of setbacks allows the building to move around on the land providing owners more flexibility.

## **Consider Percentage of Facade Buildout**

The third adjustment is to shift from simple setbacks to a percentage of façade buildout along the frontage to maintain attention on how the building engages the public realm. The proportion of frontage that is actually built defines the street's sense of enclosure, activity, and comfort. Too little frontage creates gaps and weakens the block. A calibrated percentage ensures that new homes or buildings contribute to a legible street edge without forcing a single building type or configuration. It directs the code toward the part of development that residents experience most. It determines how the place feels from the sidewalk rather than regulating every dimension of the lot.

Building placement, lot coverage, and the percentage of facade at buildout are alternative approaches to development reducing arbitrary rules to allow neighborhoods to become more authentic. These standards are similar to existing regulations, but they are more oriented to the form of the structure rather than the function or use inside the structure.



Example: Typical lot structure using a form over function model

### Rightsizing Signage

During the listening sessions, concerns with the sign ordinance were raised. While the topics varied, the overall theme included issues with document organization and arbitrary standards.

The review revealed the chapter has a logical foundation, while several standards would benefit from context-based recalibration. Sign ordinances are complex, contextual documents that require specific standards for different places. Furthermore, every community has different preferences; therefore, signs that work in one community might not work in the other.

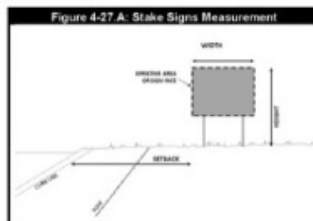
The primary issue is that signage does not align with a place's scale and sight conditions. Signs along U.S. Highway 59 are misplaced and too small to adequately serve their purpose. Similarly, signs along Sugar Land's major arterial roads are hidden behind landscaping or are unable to encapsulate all tenants properly.

Multiple standards (area, spacing, materials, measurement method) are split across articles and figures, inviting errors and case-by-case negotiations. Sugar Land should centralize and contextualize the existing framework to Sugar Land's standards through a targeted project.

#### Sec. 4-27. - Stake Signs.

##### A. Manner of Measurement.

1. *Size.* The size of a Sign is determined by its Effective Area. For Stake Signs, the Effective Area includes the entire Structure on which Signs are placed or mounted. (See Figure 4-27.A)
2. *Setback.* The Setback is measured perpendicularly from the curblineline to the closest point of the Sign.
3. *Height.* The Height of a Sign is measured from the natural ground level at the base of the Sign to the highest point of the Sign.
4. *Width.* The width of a Sign is measured along a line drawn from the outermost edges of the Sign, parallel to the ground.
5. *Illustrations.*



##### B. Stake Signs.

1. *Size.* A Stake Sign may not have an Effective Area in excess of 9 square feet or a Height in excess of 4 feet.
2. *Location.* A Stake Sign may not be located within the Right-of-Way of a public Street or within a railroad Right-of-Way.
3. *Materials.* Stake Signs may include materials such as wood or metal stakes with a wood, plastic or metal Sign Face.
4. *Number.* No more than 2 Stake Signs are permitted on a nonresidential property at any time. Stake Signs may not be located within 25 feet of another Sign on the same Premises or on an adjacent Premises. However, every property is permitted at least 1 Stake Sign.
5. *Permit.* A Sign permit is not required for the placement or use of a Stake Sign. A Stake Sign that advertises a particular event or happening must be removed within 3 days after the conclusion of the event by the owner of the Premises on which it is located.

An example of existing standards

Below is an example of a user friendly, sign code that centralizes standards for each sign type by place type zoning classification. Signs can be organized in a way that better matches the context of the place they are serving. This alignment brings logical order to the sign size and standards.

**DESCRIPTION:** Lettering applied directly on the valance or other vertical portion of an awning.



SIGN TYPES	PLACE TYPES										
	P1	P2	P2C	P2.5	P3	P3M	P4	P5	C5	EC	
ADDRESS	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	
ATTACHED / NAMEPLATE	NP	NP	P	NP	NP	NP	NP	P	P	P	
DISPLAY BOX	NP	NP	P	NP	NP	NP	NP	P	P	P	
AWNING	NP	NP	P	NP	NP	NP	NP	P	P	P	
WINDOW	NP	NP	P	NP	NP	NP	P	P	P	P	
BAND	NP	NP	P	NP	NP	NP	NP	P	P	P	
BLADE / HANGING	NP	NP	P	NP	NP	NP	P	P	P	P	
MARQUEE	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	P	NP	P	
SIDEWALK	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	P	P	P	P	
YARD	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	P	NP	P	
ROOF	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	
BANNERS	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	P	P	P	
MONUMENT	NP	NP	P	NP	NP	NP	NP	P	P	P	
POLE	NP	NP	P	NP	NP	NP	NP	P	NP	P	

P = PERMITTED NP = NOT PERMITTED

#### AWNING SIGN SPECIFIC STANDARDS

- (1) Awning signage shall be limited to no more than seventy (70) percent of valance of the awning or the vertical portion of a dome awning.
- (2) The height of the valance shall not exceed twelve (12) inches.
- (3) Awning signs shall contain only the business name, logo, and/or street address.
- (4) The following variations of awnings, with or without sign bands, are permitted: (a) fixed or retractable; awnings; (b) shed awnings; (c) dome awnings.
- (5) Other awning types may be permitted by warrant.
- (6) Signage shall be limited to the valance of the awning or the vertical portion of a dome awning.
- (7) No portion of an awning shall be lower than eight (8) foot clearance.
- (8) Awnings shall be a minimum of four (4) feet in depth.
- (9) Awnings shall not extend beyond the width of the building or tenant space, nor encroach above the roof line or the story above.
- (10) Letters, numbers, and graphics shall cover no more than seventy (70) percent of the valance area.
- (11) Awning signs shall not be internally illuminated or backlit.

#### SPECIFICATIONS

QUANTITY	1 per window maximum.	DEPTH/PROJECTION	4 feet minimum.
AREA	N/A	CLEARANCE	8 feet minimum.
WIDTH	70% of the width of face maximum.	LETTER HEIGHT	5 - 12 inches.
HEIGHT	N/A	DISTANCE FROM CURB	2 feet minimum.
VALANCE HEIGHT	12 inch maximum.	ADDITIONAL	See 5.10.7 & 5.10.4

Legacy buildings and sites rarely line up cleanly with today's rules. When a code treats nonconformities as only a use or a structure and requires all improvements at once to regain compliance, it slows re-occupancy, tenant churn, and small reinvestment. The opportunity is to turn cliffs into ramps with clear paths that move older places toward substantial compliance while staying viable now.

## **Current Issues**

No "nonconforming site" category. The code recognizes nonconforming uses, structures, and lots, but not sites. Legacy conditions—internal drives, screening, trees, lighting, pedestrian/walkway geometry, access management, and similar elements—have no dedicated, administrative path to be legalized and improved during reactivation or re-tenanting. CO gatekeeping for landscaping. Landscaping must meet current standards before a certificate of occupancy; relief is typically a temporary CO agreement. This creates pass/fail moments instead of a published, proportional upgrade path for older properties.

Lighting upgrades only when new fixtures are installed. Article-based lighting rules apply mainly to new luminaires; older glare/spill conditions can persist through tenant changes because there's no proportional retrofit trigger for legacy sites. Walkways/trees/screening are "new work" targets, not legacy paths. Detailed standards exist, but they apply when a site plan or development permit is in play. There is no stepwise re-occupancy lane to bring these items toward compliance on existing sites.

No definition of "substantial compliance." Without a codified yardstick or checklist, outcomes depend on one-off negotiations and vary case-to-case.

Limited, narrow deviations. Existing deviation tools (e.g., older premises for landscaping) are helpful but issue-specific and don't operate as a coordinated, site-wide mechanism at reactivation.

## Opportunities to Improve Nonconforming Regulations

### Create a Nonconforming Site track

Define nonconforming site to include legally established properties whose site improvements (internal drives, screening, trees, lighting, pedestrian connections, access, stormwater controls, and related elements) don't meet current standards.

Allow continuation so long as the site does not increase its degree of nonconformity for the elements that are out of compliance.

Publish an administrative checklist/menu of proportional fixes (e.g., front landscape screen, required tree rhythm on at least one frontage, shielding/aiming of existing luminaries, ADA restripe, building-to-sidewalk connection, driveway consolidation) that staff can approve and condition.

### Set up a Reoccupancy Plan

At tenant change or site reactivation, accept an administratively approvable plan that sequences progress to substantial compliance, using the temporary CO agreement model from landscaping as the template for conditioning approvals to real, time-bound improvements

**Sample Language**

Below is language that creates a clear lane for nonconforming sites in addition to lots, structures, and signs, defines “substantial compliance,” and sets an administrative re-occupancy plan that sequences proportional improvements at tenant change or reactivation. The language is neutral, free of outside references and section calls, and is written to drop into the existing nonconformities article or to stand alone as a short amendment so legacy conditions can be legalized, prevent increases in nonconformity, and move older properties toward current standards without forcing full compliance all at once.

*Nonconforming Lots*

Legal nonconforming lots may continue for all lawful purposes until the nonconforming status is abandoned as defined herein. No division or reconfiguration of a legal nonconforming lot may occur if it would increase the degree of nonconformity of the lot.

*Nonconforming Sites*

A nonconforming site is a legally occupied property whose site improvements do not meet one or more provisions of this code, including but not limited to parking location, landscaping, lighting, screening, pedestrian walkways, access management, or stormwater controls.

Nonconforming sites may continue so long as the nonconforming status is not abandoned and no action increases the degree of nonconformity. Routine maintenance and repairs that do not increase nonconformity are allowed.

## *Nonconforming Structures*

A nonconforming structure is a legally established building or structure that does not meet one or more current standards, such as building to line, height, design, or performance standards.

Maintenance and repair are permitted. Alterations and additions are permitted if they do not increase the degree of nonconformity and meet all other applicable standards. Repairs and replacements for life safety, accessibility, or energy efficiency do not count toward any improvement cap.

## *Nonconforming Signs*

A permitted sign that existed lawfully before the adoption of this code and does not meet current standards is a legal nonconforming sign. Maintenance and like for like copy or component replacement are allowed. Alterations that increase size, height, or illumination intensity are not allowed unless brought into compliance.

## Ranges Rather than Absolute Values

A key reason the code produces nonconformities is from its inflexibility. This inflexibility stems from using fixed thresholds like minimum requirements instead of more flexible ranges. Ranges not only decrease non-compliance but also increase the variability in the form, arrangement, and types of buildings possible. This allows the code to be adaptable to different product offerings and avoids the need to use PDs. A code that offers options rather than obstacles.

## **Planned Developments (PDs) and Overlapping Planning**

PDs are documents that regulate land with a custom set of rules. Over time, the historical intent can get lost as the properties develop. Staff and applicants see conflicting rules on the same tracts and must reconcile which document governs day to day.

Over the years Sugar Land has relied on PDs to facilitate development across the City. Majority of the PDs vary from the existing zoning standards focus on custom use-tables, setback and buffer adjustments, and added landscape or façade standards layered onto existing districts rather than fundamental shifts in Sugar Land's zoning requirements.

Permitted Use Table Adjustments - Adding, removing, or conditioning individual uses from the existing district.

Site Layout and Dimensional Tweaks - Redefining dimensional standards like front setbacks, height caps, buffers, and minor modifications to parking ratios or access details.

Design and Landscaping Enhancements - Additional aesthetic controls like material palettes, facade enhancements, more or larger tree standards, etc.

## **Unlocking the Good Work**

While PDs do allow for more flexibility, they are not delivering transformative results worthy of the administrative burden. The PDs outcomes are within the same conventional pattern as typical base zoning—separate uses, large setbacks, and internal private drives. Their flexibility comes not from a new zoning model but from repeatedly tailoring the same base districts through case-by-case amendments.

This approach works in the short term, but it also signals a missed opportunity: New zoning districts that are catered to meet the demands being triggered by the PDs.

A key reason the code produces nonconformities is its reliance on rigid, one-size-fits-all standards. Most PDs in Sugar Land exist precisely because those fixed thresholds do not allow for natural variation in site design or product type. Each PD effectively serves as a case study proving that greater flexibility within the base code is both workable and desirable. Introducing ranges rather than absolutes would reduce the need for project by project exceptions while encouraging diversity in form and layout. This approach mirrors what the PDs have been used to accomplish, but through a simpler, more predictable system. Embedding that flexibility directly into new and updated zoning districts would allow Sugar Land to maintain its orderly framework while fostering the adaptability that development trends now demand.

If the idea is for PDs to be used as a way to get true enhancements to existing zoning, then a recommendation would be to have a menu of minimum enhancements that policymakers determine are the most valued additional improvements for the community. That way, there are clear expectations of what the community is demanding as part of a more engaged process.

Once new flexible, zoning districts are established to relieve the typical triggers for PDs. Then the use of them can be dramatically reduced. PDs are valuable tools for various specialized developments that do not fit the typical standards of the base zoning districts and should be reserved for those specific individual cases.



An example of a best practice in an existing within PDs (Telfair Central Residential PD)

## **New and Updated Zoning Districts**

Throughout this process, it has been identified that the City of Sugar Land is seeking ways to diversify its housing and commercial options. Allowing for more flexible standards that can attract new residents, increase fiscal resilience, and help maintain competitiveness in the region. The current development regulations limit housing types and generate the same built patterns as all the surrounding communities. Yet, even within these limitations, the City and its development partners are actively experimenting with more pedestrian-oriented formats, particularly within the Imperial, Telfair, and Lake Pointe districts. These areas demonstrate a sincere effort to create mixed, walkable environments through plazas, trails, tighter street grids, and enhanced frontage design, even if those goals are being achieved through PD workarounds rather than built-in standards.

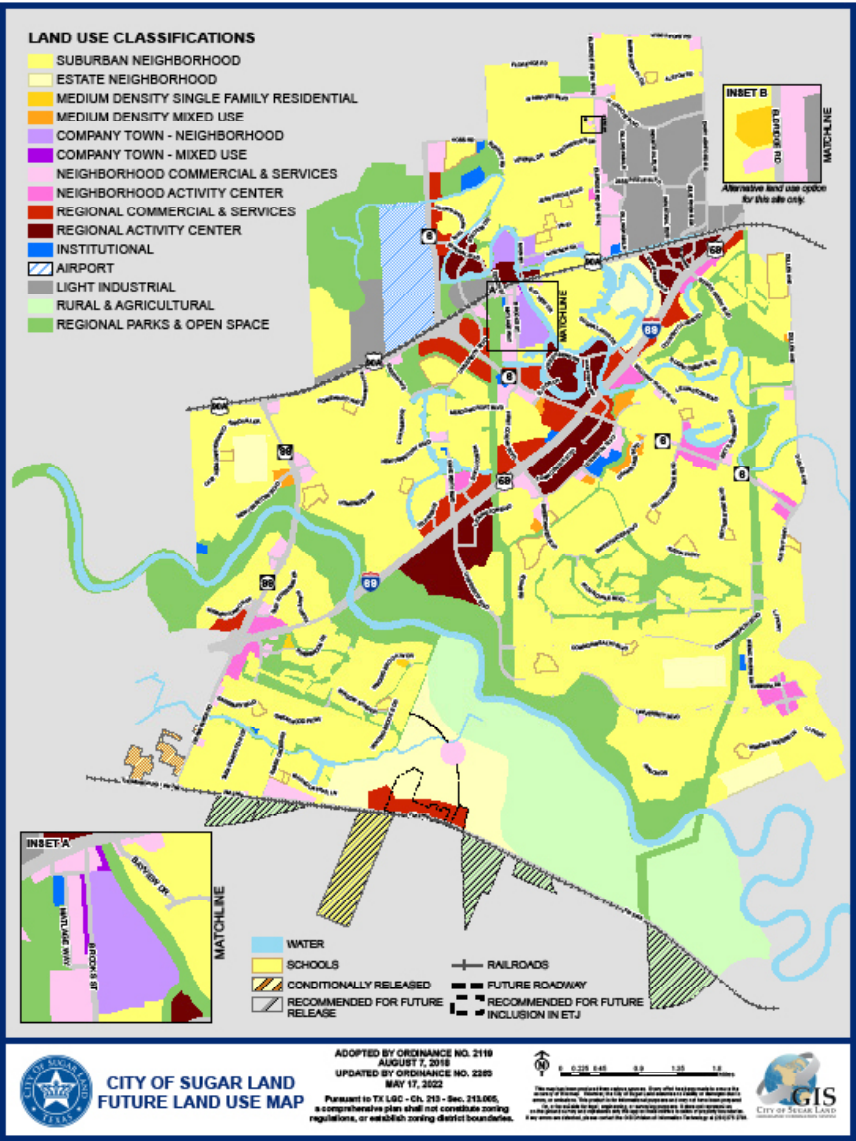
This ongoing experimentation highlights both progress and opportunity. The challenge is not a lack of intent but a lack of tools: the existing code simply was not built to produce these kinds of districts. Implementing new and updated zoning standards, alongside more flexible ranges for setbacks, coverage, and building types, would allow these efforts to occur naturally—without the administrative weight of repeated PDs. This approach lets existing zoning classifications remain targeted for their original purpose, while introducing new, adaptable districts capable of supporting the pedestrian-scaled, mixed-use environments that the City is already working toward.

## **New District Zones**

These new districts are intended to cater to the context they are intended to serve, carrying in intensity and allowed building types. They can be used as a tool to cultivate identifiable centers throughout Sugar Land. The following sections outline some potential zoning districts.

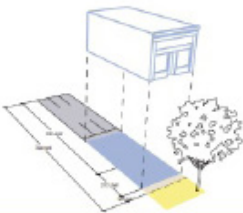
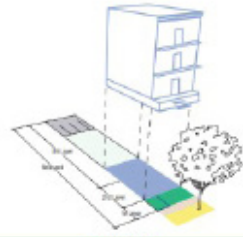
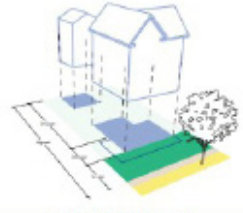
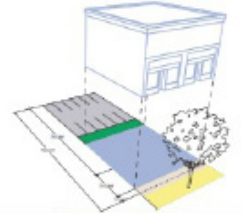
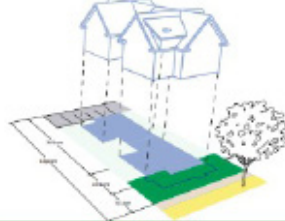

The comprehensive plan was used as a reference to established the appropriate land use classifications for each zoning district.

The calibration of the appropriate development intensities can be established and mapped to coincide with the goals of the plan.



The Urban Center District is intended to provide services, retail, and entertainment for Sugar Land and have a region draw. The district provides a broad range of development types but particularly includes the most intense building types for the denser developments in the City. Standards should be calibrated to provide an urban district that fits with the broader context of Sugar Land. To best ensure the success of this type of district, it would be recommended to differentiate places for automotive uses.

### Potential Building Types

		
<p><b>SMALL COMMERCIAL</b></p>	<p><b>TRIPLEX</b></p>	<p><b>SMALL APARTMENTS</b></p>
<p>An individual commercial building on its own lot. Generally organized in a collection of buildings rather than a standalone structure and with a rear yard to accommodate parking, outdoor areas, and services accessed from a rear alley or service drive.</p>	<p>A single detached structure with three dwelling units on one lot with shared or individual entries from the street. They appear like a medium-sized house placed close to the front property line and may include a rear yard or edge yard.</p>	<p>A detached building of multiple dwelling units arranged side by side and/or stacked, typically with a shared entry from the street. It has the appearance of a medium to large house arranged with edge yards, side yard, courtyard, or rear yard.</p>
		
<p><b>LARGE COMMERCIAL</b></p>	<p><b>QUADRAPLEX</b></p>	<p><b>LARGE APARTMENTS</b></p>
<p>An individual building that may occupy multiple lots. The building is typically disposed on the lot with a rear yard to accommodate parking (if off-street parking is provided), outdoor areas, and services accessed from a rear alley or service drive.</p>	<p>A single detached structure with four dwelling units with shared or individual entries from the street or path. It resembles a medium-sized house placed close to the front property line and may include a rear yard or edge yard.</p>	<p>A block-scale building that includes multiple dwelling units. This building type is disposed on the lot(s) with a rear yard or courtyard set at or near the front property line and provides a continuous building frontage along the street. Active ground floor uses, such as live/work are encouraged.</p>



Sample site plan- Simplicity.design

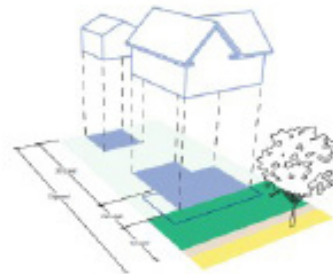
The Neighborhood district should support new housing types that can serve as a transition from large lot homes to more urban housing.

Urban Center District  
Possible Locations:  
Regional Activity  
Centers, Regional  
Commercial & Services

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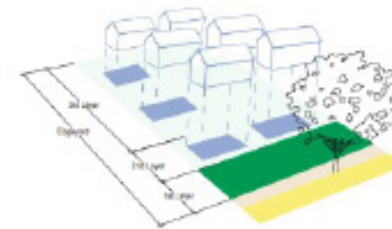
Neighborhood District  
Possible Locations:  
Neighborhood Activity  
Centers, Regional  
Commercial & Services

### Potential Building Types



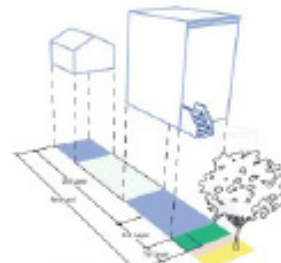
**DETACHED DWELLING**

Detached homes are the most common type of dwelling in Taylor. Typically configured with an edge yard placed close to the street on small to medium lots. A HUD code manufactured house is permitted in specific Place Type zoning districts.



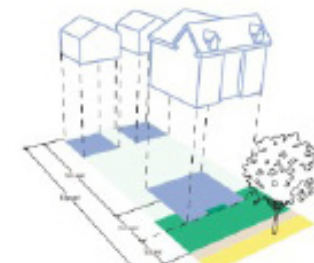
**COTTAGE COURTYARD**

A group of small, detached houses arranged around a shared court visible from the street. For the purposes of platting, cottage lots may have legal frontage onto a courtyard with a public access easement from the street.



**ATTACHED DWELLINGS**

A small-to-medium sized attached home with 2 to 16 multi-story units placed side-by-side and close to the front property line. This building type is often referred to as a townhouse. This building type is typically disposed on the lot with a side yard or rear yard.

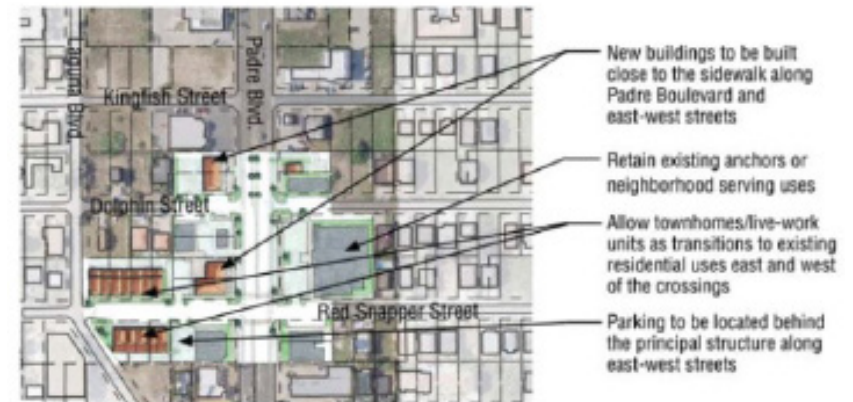
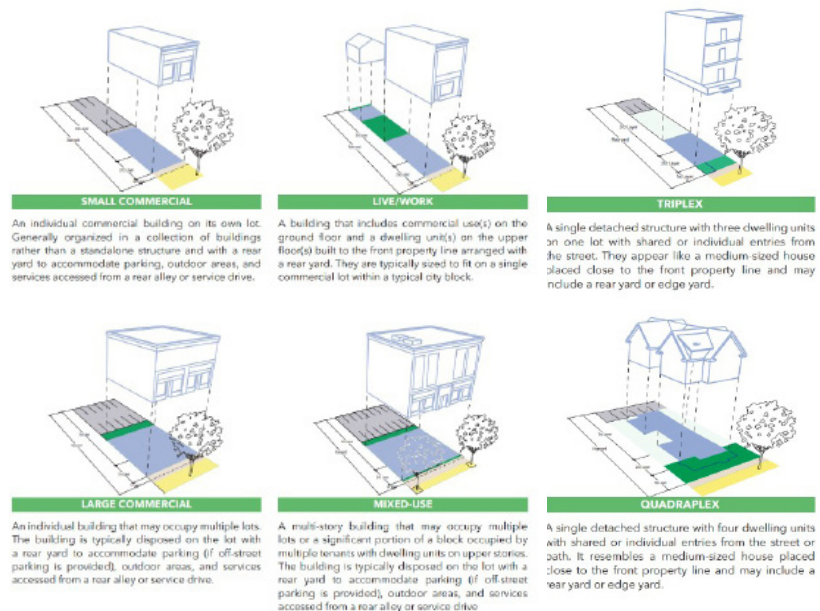


**DUPLEX**

A detached structure that consists of two dwelling units arranged side-by-side or stacked in one structure. This building type has the appearance of a small-to-medium house and may include an edge yard or rear yard. At least one front door faces the street or path from which it takes primary access.

The Transition Zone District is intended to manage transitional intensities from high to low density areas. The district should allow small to medium-scale buildings and neighborhood-serving non-residential uses. The Transition district fits in all Future Land Use areas as it serves as a step-down from high to lower development intensities. The district is intended to be for areas next to commercial corridors and centers, generally no deeper than one to two blocks deep, or in select areas, as a step between the more intense commercial areas and Suburban Neighborhoods. Standards calibrate building height, massing, and frontage so new developments match the scale and character of adjacent developments while still permitting more intense housing types.

## Potential Building Types



Illustrations from South Padre Island of Neighborhood Transition Zone. Work by Gateway Planning Group.

## Examples In Other Cities

### *Dallas- Residential Transition District (RTN)*

Dallas uses the RTN district as a thin residential band between its walkable mixed-use form districts and existing single-family neighborhoods. Single-family and duplex housing that serves as a land-use transition from the more intense districts to established single-family areas, and is explicitly labeled as a low-intensity district with a limited set of development types and up to two units per lot.

### *Kerrville- Residential Transition (RT) District*

Kerrville's RT district sits between residential neighborhoods and commercial properties. It is not just a buffer; it is a house-form business district at the edge of neighborhoods, where some lots remain residential, and others convert to small offices or similar uses in a residential shell.

### *South Padre Island- Neighborhood Transition Character Zone*

South Padre Island's Neighborhood Transition Zone's purpose is to provide a range of smaller-scale commercial (retail, office, live-work) and residential uses off the commercial corridors. The code stresses small building scale and compatibility with adjoining neighborhoods, with specific standards that keep height and massing modest.

### *Comparative Differences*

- » Dallas-style option - "Quiet residential buffer"
  - Primarily missing-middle housing, not active mixed-use.
  - Cap at 1-2 units per lot and keep it strictly residential, similar to RTN's "single-family and duplex"
- » Kerrville- style option - "House-form business edge."
  - Allow small offices and low-impact businesses in buildings that must look like houses
  - Map it where commercial corridors back onto neighborhoods but the City wants to soften that edge with house-scale conversion rather than big boxes or strip retail.
- » South Padre-style option - "Small-scale mixed-use neighborhood belt"
  - Embrace a full mix of smaller-scale commercial and residential uses, including retail, office, and live-work, not just house-form office.
  - Use stricter form standards to keep it compatible, while allowing more active ground-floor uses than the other two models.

# Conclusion

As the City evolves, approaches must adapt to changing realities and market conditions to ensure continued success. The recommendations outlined within the Code Diagnosis present options for the City of Sugar Land to use to make informed adjustments. The Optimal Path Snapshot found on page two is a logical and orderly way to approach these changes without overwhelming the policymakers or the development community with modifications.

The Code Diagnosis is not intended to predetermine outcomes or prescribe a single course of action. Rather, it is designed to clarify how existing standards function in practice, where they align with current community goals, and where they introduce friction or unintended consequences. Its value lies in creating a shared understanding of the trade-offs embedded in today's regulations and making those trade-offs visible to decision makers.

As Sugar Land approaches full build-out and shifts toward redevelopment and infill development, the development codes will need to adjust accordingly. Clear standards and predictable processes will be essential to supporting development reinvestment, reducing staff burden, and allowing the City to respond to changing market conditions without relying on continual exceptions or overlays.

The findings within provide a foundation for informed, incremental code evolution, one that supports Sugar Land's long-term resilience while remaining grounded in the community's established character and administrative realities.

Good luck Sugar Land on this important journey.

-Simplecity Design Code-Writing Team



# **Sugar Land Development Code Diagnosis**

## **Appendix 1: Listening Session Summary**

This appendix summarizes what was heard during four topic based Listening Sessions conducted as part of the Sugar Land Development Code Diagnosis. The sessions were intentionally separated by audience so that each group could speak candidly from their role in the development process. The four sessions focused on

- Community Builders
- Development Community
- City Staff
- Planning and Zoning Commission

The notes below are organized as four separate summaries, one per session, and reflect discussion themes and specific examples raised by participants.

## Listening Session 1: Community Builders

Community Builders described development regulations as a practical barrier that shows up most clearly in the Sugar Land Business Park context, where private standards and City standards overlap.

### What we heard

- The group debated whether parking standards should be market driven or City regulated, with mixed views and concerns about both under parking and over parking in spec development, and the risk of large underused lots becoming blighted.
- Over parking was tied to drainage and environmental impacts because of excess impervious surface.
- Landscaping and trees were viewed as part of Sugar Land's visual identity, but practical issues were raised, including roots damaging sidewalks, small tree wells that are difficult to maintain, and trees obstructing business signage. Root barriers and clear trimming expectations were specifically discussed.
- Mobility concerns included congestion near key growth areas and business parks, constraints created by railroads, and skepticism that some lane reductions for bike facilities were matched by observed bike use.
- Stormwater detention requirements were described as costly for redevelopment and particularly challenging when new requirements do not account for prior MUD drainage agreements.
- Building and fire code requirements were raised as a feasibility issue in certain redevelopment situations, including the cost of four hour firewalls for additions.

## Listening Session 2: Development Community

The Development Community focused on predictability, corridor context, and the cumulative cost of layered standards and processes.

What we heard

- Sign visibility from highways was emphasized as a critical economic development issue, especially for attracting major retailers. Participants cited challenges with size restrictions and setbacks that reduce visibility from highway corridors.
- Participants repeatedly asked for corridor based sign standards and “mathematical” rules that are objective and consistent, with concerns that subjective review creates legal and administrative problems.
- The group discussed tradeoffs to manage sign clutter, including examples of billboard reduction ratios such as a “4 to 1 swap” concept used elsewhere.
- Housing discussions centered on limited zoning variety and repetitive outcomes, including references to typical setbacks and a desire for new zoning classifications that allow more diverse housing forms.
- HOAs and private covenants were described as a major limiter on housing flexibility, including ADUs.
- PDs were described as a frequent workaround for restrictive standards, adding process complexity even when the requested changes are relatively routine.

### **Listening Session 3: City Staff**

Staff framed the session as a candid diagnostic of how the code and process work in practice, including areas where policy goals and administrative tools are misaligned.

#### What we heard

- Staff raised conflicts around landscaping, signage, and lighting, including concerns about nonconforming signage, complex sign codes, and challenges legalizing legacy nonconforming conditions.
- A core theme was that the current code blends nonconforming use, site, and structure issues together, and staff discussed separating these categories and creating clearer pathways for phased compliance.
- Landscaping discussion focused on real world implementation, including contractor challenges meeting size and species requirements, value engineering leading to smaller trees, debate on street tree caliper sizes, and the need for better tree well and sidewalk design to prevent damage.
- Housing and zoning discussion included interest in an urban infill housing district to allow more diverse options, and acknowledgement that HOA and POA deed restrictions can block flexibility.
- Staff identified multiple regulatory layers, including subdivision plans, zoning, and land plans, as a source of confusion and asked for a process mapping exercise from zoning through certificate of occupancy to find gaps and overlaps.
- Staff noted strong internal communication and coordination as a positive baseline to build on.

## **Listening Session 4: Planning and Zoning Commission**

Planning and Zoning Commission focused on how to translate redevelopment lessons into City-wide standards without diluting community expectations, and how to manage corridor context through clearer tools.

### What we heard

- Commissioners discussed Lake Point PD as a unique zoning framework and raised the question of whether selected standards could be integrated into the base code to reduce reliance on the PD process. The general consensus was that Lake Point is a special case, and there were concerns about applying relaxed standards City-wide.
- Connectivity was a recurring theme, including cross connectivity to avoid congestion from single egress subdivisions, linear trails that leverage natural amenities, and the importance of pedestrian infrastructure such as sidewalks, street trees, and pedestrian scale lighting.
- Housing and density were discussed in terms of demographic shifts and the need for long term adaptability while maintaining community character.
- Parking regulations were described as an inhibitor to development, with discussion of options such as parking maximums, removing minimums, and context sensitive parking. Commissioners also discussed placing parking to the side or rear to improve streetscape outcomes.
- Additional topics included economic development conditions in business parks, future infrastructure needs related to technology such as autonomous vehicles, and interest in small scale neighborhood mixed use such as shop houses, paired with visual preference surveys before implementing new zoning categories.



**Planning & Zoning Commission Agenda Request  
May 28, 2026**

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**Agenda Request No:** VI.A.

**Agenda of:** Planning & Zoning Commission Meeting

**Initiated by:** Charlotte Graves, Agenda & Public Meeting Coordinator

**Presented by:** Sapana Patel, Commissioner

**Responsible Department:** Admin

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**Agenda Caption:**

Planning and Zoning Commission Liaison Report

- City Council Meeting May 19, 2026

**Recommended Action:**

**Executive Summary:**

**Budget**

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**Expenditure Required:** NA

**Current Budget:** NA

**Additional Funding:** NA

**Funding Source:** NA

**Account Number (ORG-OBJ-Project):** NA

**Attachments**

None



## **Planning & Zoning Commission Agenda Request** **May 28, 2026**

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**Agenda Request No:** VI.B.

**Agenda of:** Planning & Zoning Commission Meeting

**Initiated by:** Charlotte Graves, Agenda & Public Meeting Coordinator

**Presented by:** Lisa Kocich-Meyer, Director of Planning & Development Services

**Responsible Department:** Admin

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**Agenda Caption:**

City Staff Report

- Calendar of Scheduled Meetings and Events

**Recommended Action:**

**Executive Summary:**

**Budget**

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**Expenditure Required:** NA

**Current Budget:** NA

**Additional Funding:** NA

**Funding Source:** NA

**Account Number (ORG-OBJ-Project):** NA

**Attachments**

None