



October 25, 2023

Dear AIA Members,

You may have recently received or heard about the purple notices from the City of Austin showing up in mailboxes across the city, which indicate proposed changes to the codes governing low and medium-density residential lots. You may also have read or heard from other organizations and neighborhood groups citing a range of revisions not currently part of the resolution and making misleading claims about the impact of what is included.

AIA Austin would like to take the opportunity to help explain what we currently know to be in the proposal to help foster truth and accountability within the community around the HOME Initiative.

Basics of the HOME Initiative

In recent years, many citizens, City Council members, city staff, and community groups have proposed various measures to help address the housing affordability crises that made Austin the most unaffordable city in Texas.

The HOME Initiative, **Home Options for Middle-income Empowerment**, is one suite of proposals put forward primarily by CM Leslie Pool (District 7) and co-sponsored by Mayor Pro Tem Paige Ellis. The resolution to draft amendments passed 9-2 at the 20 June 2023 City Council Meeting. These are modest measures that reflect policies put forth by a range of political orientations at the local and state levels.

While no one ordinance can solve such a massive housing affordability crisis, these proposed code changes will give architects, builders, homeowners, and community organizations new, powerful tools to increase housing projects that reflect the principles of Design for Equitable Communities, Design for Integration, and Design for Well-being in particular.

What is Included

The amendments under consideration in the fall of 2023 comprise only three modifications to the Land Development Code. While we expect the City Council to consider additional aspects of the HOME Initiatives in the first part of next year, the agenda for the first public hearing listed on the notice includes only three changes:

1. **Establish a new Three-Unit Residential Use.** This Use would be permitted on SF-1, SF-2, and SF-3 lots and exempt from Subchapter F (McMansion).
2. **Revise the Uses that allow for two units.** Two-Family Residential Use (which is the LDC terminology for ADUs) would be renamed to Two-Unit Residential Use and made more flexible by removing the detached and separation requirement, primary/secondary designations, STR-specific regulations, and redundant FAR, building cover, and second-story restrictions on the secondary unit. But one unit would still be limited to 1,100 square feet. These modifications provide additional flexibility in planning two units on a lot. For Duplex Use, the minimum lot size would be reduced to 5,750 square feet, and the common partition requirements would be removed. Both Duplex and Two-Unit Residential Uses would be exempt from Subchapter F (McMansion). The other Uses that allow for two units would be made redundant by these changes and deleted.

3. **Remove unrelated adult occupancy restrictions.** The discriminatory LDC Section 25-2-511 would be deleted entirely. The valid health and safety concerns for occupancy would remain governed by the more appropriate mechanisms of Texas Property Code 92.010 and the International Property Maintenance Codes.

What is Not Included

No other modifications are currently under consideration; minimum lot size changes and changes to compatibility setbacks are not included in the current resolution. Related revisions to the site plan process for small projects, known as "Site Plan Lite," are under consideration separately from these three measures. These proposals will not create any new zoning districts and will not rezone any properties.

The proposed regulations will not require subdivision, will not require the creation of additional dwelling units, and will not outlaw or modify the ability to build a single-family house that is currently allowed.

For additional details on the current proposals, see the attached document outlining the modifications. This was provided as backup for the 26 October 2023 joint meeting of the City Council and the Planning Commission. This information is current as of the drafts released on 10 October 2023; it is important to note that the language may change as the process unfolds.

AIA Austin's Position

The AIA Austin Housing Advocacy Committee has been working on modeling the HOME Initiative's potential impacts. We are discussing our analysis with the city and council member staff and collaborating with a wide range of other professional organizations supporting this initiative.

We, along with others in our community, believe that these measures will help Austin's housing affordability crises by opening opportunities to increase the number of housing units in the city. Creating additional dwelling units decreases the cost of each unit for the individual household compared to a single unit on the same lot since the units are smaller and the land cost is spread across multiple households. This, in turn, will make it easier for existing homeowners to retain their properties by lowering the barriers of entry to creating income-generating dwelling units and expanding the ability of residential service providers to serve some of the most vulnerable members of our community. As long as these changes do not allow for larger, more expensive individual houses than currently allowed, these newly available tools will operate within the residential fabric of the city and help to encourage missing middle housing types that have existed in the city in years past.

In summary, these proposals do not negatively impact the residents' health, safety, and welfare. They enable greater opportunity for creative design solutions that can promote Design for Equitable Communities, increasing the diversity and vitality of our neighborhoods.

Sincerely,



Christy Taylor, AIA
AIA Austin President