

JURISDICTION

The three jurisdictions are Full Purpose, Limited Purpose, and ETJ (Extraterritorial Jurisdiction), following are descriptions of each from the City of Austin provided [here](#).

- Full Purpose – in these areas, the City provides full municipal services, assesses taxes, and enforces City ordinances and regulations.
- Limited Purpose – in these areas, the City’s ordinances and regulations pertaining to land development and the environment, and sometimes health and safety, are extended. The city collects no taxes in limited purpose areas and does not provide municipal services (like police protection).
- ETJ – these are unincorporated areas of land within five miles of the city’s boundary that are not within the city limits or the ETJ of another city, it is land that is **only** allowed to be annexed by the city to which it belongs. For example, if a property is in the Austin ETJ, the land may only be annexed into Austin full/limited purpose in the future. The ETJ enables the city to extend regulations to adjacent land where development can affect quality of life within the city, which help to ensure that subdivisions that may be annexed in the future meet minimum standards for things like road access, lot size, etc. Public services are provided by the County or special districts and no city taxes are collected in the ETJ.

Annexation can benefit current property owners by providing more centralized services and voting rights, but for a potential buyer, the transfer of a property’s jurisdiction from county to city may result in complications when it comes to the necessary services (like water and wastewater) if they are not careful.

ZONING

Full and limited jurisdictions are divided into zoning districts that establish the types of land uses that are permitted. Different zones set different development standards on building height, setbacks, layout, floor-to-area ratio, and other requirements. Once you know what zone a property is in, you can find a lot of information in the [Land Development Code](#) about land use, including residential, commercial, and civic permitted and conditional uses. Below are the different types of use that a property/building could fall under.

- Permitted use – a use authorized as a matter of right when conducted in accordance with the requirement of the code
- Conditional use – a use allowed in some zoning districts under certain conditions, this use must be authorized solely on a discretionary basis by the Planning Commission or the City Council
- Legal use – a use that is permitted by the Land Development Code
- Non-conforming use – a use of the property/building that does not conform with current applicable use regulations, but complied with use regulations in effect when the use was first established
- Non-complying use – a use of the *bulk* of the property/building that does not comply with applicable site development regulations for the zoning district in which it is located, but did comply with regulations at the time of its construction
- Illegal use – a use that is not permitted by right or as a conditional use

The City of Austin Zoning Guide has the permitted and conditional uses for each of the different base zoning districts. There are 39 base zoning districts and a few different combining districts. The Austin base zones are shown in the table below.

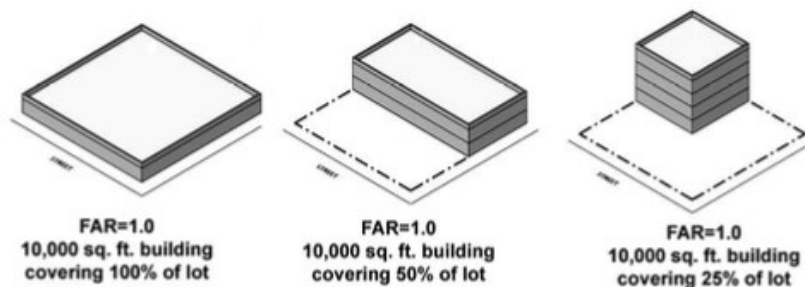
Table 1. Base Zoning Districts

Residential		Commercial	
LA	Lake Austin Residence	NO	Neighborhood Office
RR	Rural Residence	LO	Limited Office
SF-1	Single Family—Large Lot	GO	General Office
SF-2	Single Family—Standard Lot	CR	Commercial Recreation
SF-3	Family Residence	LR	Neighborhood Commercial
SF-4A	Single Family—Small Lot	GR	Community Commercial
SF-4B	Single Family—Condominium	L	Lake Commercial
SF-5	Urban Family Residence	CBD	Central Business District
SF-6	Townhouse & Condominium	DMU	Downtown Mixed Use
MF-1	Multifamily—Limited Density	W/LO	Warehouse/limited Office
MF-2	Multifamily—Low Density	CS	General Commercial Services
MF-3	Multifamily—Medium Density	CS-1	Commercial-Liquor Sales
MF-4	Multifamily—Moderate Density	CH	Commercial Highway Serv
MF-5	Multifamily—High Density	Special Purpose	
MF-6	Multifamily—Highest Density	DR	Development Reserve
MH	Mobile Home Residence	AV	Aviation Services
Industrial		AG	Agricultural
IP	Industrial Park	P	Public
LI	Limited Industrial Services	PUD	Planned Unit Development
MI	Major Industry	TN	Traditional Neighborhood
R&D	Research & Development		

Table 2. Some of the Combining Zoning Districts

Code	District name
-CO	Conditional Overlay Combining District
-H	Historic Combining District
-MU	Mixed Use Combining District
-NP	Neighborhood Plan Combining District
-PDA	Planned Development Area
-V	Vertical Mixed Use Building

The base zoning districts establish regulations including minimum lot size, minimum lot width, max impervious coverage, max height allowances, and required setbacks. Also defined is the number of dwelling units or buildings per unit of land, known as the **Density**, and the Floor-Area ratio (**FAR**) which represents the ratio of total building floor area in relation to the area of the lot. On a 10,000 sqft lot with a FAR of 1.0, the building floor area cannot exceed 10,000 sqft.



There are twelve established Zoning Principles for the City of Austin that exist as a guide to preserve the compatibility of land uses, linked [here](#).

BUILDING COVERAGE

The percentage of the lot area that is covered by building area, including the total horizontal area when viewed in plan. This number can be found in the zoning guide under the relevant zone, shown below.

For example, below is the Site Development Standards for the SF-3 (Single-family 3) base zone, with the maximum building coverage highlighted. For both SF-2 and SF-3 the maximum building coverage is 40%, meaning that up to 40% of the total lot square footage can have building on it. Page linked [here](#).

Site Development Standards

Lot		Massing	
Minimum Lot Size	5,750 sq ft	Maximum Height	35 ft
Minimum Lot Width	50 ft	Minimum Setbacks	
Maximum Units Per Lot	1	Front yard	25 ft
Maximum Building Coverage	40%	Street side yard	15 ft
Maximum Impervious Cover	45%	Interior side yard	5 ft
		Rear yard	10 ft

IMPERVIOUS COVERAGE

The percentage of allowable lot area that is covered by any structure, surface, or improvement that reduces/prevents the absorption of storm water into land. Roads, sidewalks, driveways, parking lots, swimming pools, and buildings are considered impervious cover, while grass, lawns and other vegetation are not. This percentage is determined by the zoning district and the watershed regulations the property falls under. Further definition by the City of Austin of what exactly counts towards the total impervious coverage ratio can be found [here](#) in the Land Development Code.

For example, below is the Site Development Standards for the SF-3 (Single-family 3) base zone, with the maximum impervious coverage highlighted. For both SF-2 and SF-3 the maximum impervious coverage is 45%, meaning that up to 45% of the total lot square footage can reduce/prevent water absorption on it. Page linked [here](#).

Site Development Standards

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Minimum Lot Size	5,750 sq ft	Maximum Height	35 ft
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SETBACKS

The mandatory clear distances between a lot line and a building where nothing can be built. The zone districts specify front, rear, and side setbacks.

- The front yard setback is the distance between the front lot line and the *closest* front exterior wall or building façade of the principal residential structure on the lot.
- The rear yard setback is the distance between the rear lot line and the *closest* rear exterior wall or building façade of the principal residential structure on the lot, *but* the minimum rear yard setback of a second dwelling unit may be reduced to five feet when the rear lot line is adjacent to an alley.
- The side yard setback is the distance between the side lot line and the *closest* side exterior wall or building façade of the principal residential structure on the lot. If a lot is a corner lot, there will be a street side yard setback that is greater than the interior side yard setback that applies where the lot sits next to another lot rather than a street. Both of these regulations will be provided with the Site Development Standards.

Below is the Site Development Standards for the SF-3 (Single-family 3) base zone, with the minimum setbacks highlighted under massing. Page linked [here](#).

Site Development Standards

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LAND STATUS DETERMINATION

Knowing the land status of a property is important because legal lot status gives specific property rights to the piece of land, particularly when it comes to future development. Applying for Land Status Determination is sometimes necessary if the owner of the lot needs to have the property recognized as a legal lot for the city/county whose jurisdiction it falls into in order to do what they want to do on it. We check for land status determination because there are some rules and regulations that do not apply to pieces of land that were made legal before certain years, which can make it easier to develop.

SMALL LOT AMNESTY

Small lot amnesty permits construction or major renovation of existing single-family homes on already existing legally-created lots that do not meet current minimum lot standards. There are many legally subdivided lots in older parts of the city that don't meet current code standards and are therefore sitting vacant or the homes on the lots are deteriorating because major changes are not allowed. To qualify the lot must have:

- A minimum area of 2500 square feet
- A minimum width of 25 feet

The Austin Land Development Code states that an existing, legally-created lot less than 5750 square feet that does not comply with current zoning regulations cannot be legally developed, this is where it gets confusing for most people. You can reach out to us through our website if you have more specific questions about small lot amnesty and if your lot may qualify.

PLATTED PROPERTY

Platting is the way in which an area of land is divided, it takes place during the subdivision process. A recorded plat indicates lot boundaries and sizes, some easements, and building lines. A plat is different from a survey in that plats can encompass more than one lot, they typically show fewer details than surveys (which can include easements, improvements, right-of-way, floodplains, topography, trees, etc.), and they are drawn in order to be recorded at the courthouse for public use while surveys are usually just for the property owner's personal use. Without the platting system, there would be no legal documentation of the development of a property, so the platting of land helps to control the growth of cities in a way.

A good way to know if a lot is platted is to see if there is a legal description for it, if there is then the lot is indeed platted and you may be able to find it in your city/county archives. If your land is not platted it could be a problem for future development plans because the Texas Local Government Code and Austin's Land Development Code require that land that is subdivided must be platted and recorded ([here](#)), with a few exceptions ([here](#)).

FLOODPLAIN

A floodplain is the area adjacent to a river, creek, lake, stream, or other open waterway that is subject to flooding when there is a significant rain. FEMA has floodplain maps and some counties have GIS maps that can show whether a property you've entered the address for lies in a floodplain or an area of flood risk. Main things to know:

- 100-year floodplain – for a property to be in the 100-year floodplain, that means that there is a 1-in-100 chance in any given year that the property will flood. The Land Development Code (LDC) **restricts** the encroachment of proposed buildings and parking areas within the 100-year floodplain.
- 25-year floodplain – for a property to be in the 25-year floodplain, that means that there is a 1-in-25 chance in any given year that the property will flood. The Land Development Code (LDC) **prohibits** the encroachment of proposed buildings and parking areas within the 25-year floodplain.
- Floodplain maps are subject to change, often due to changes in land use like increased building activity or changes in the waterways, so it is possible for existing buildings to be in the 100-yr floodplain even if they were not originally built within it.
- LDC requires that a final plat, subdivision construction plan, or site plan may not be approved unless the proposed development will not adversely affect other properties by causing flooding, and that any proposed development must do the utmost to preserve the natural and traditional character of the land within the floodplain.

All this to say, if your property falls within the 25-year floodplain there is basically no possible construction for you to make in the areas that the floodplain falls, except what is laid out in [LDC 25-7-96](#). If your property falls within the 100-year floodplain construction is possible, but there are some standards that must be met! Typically the proposed structure will need to be elevated above the base flood elevation and there must be proof that there will be no adverse impact to upstream properties, the exceptions for development in the 100-yr floodplain can be found in [LDC 25-7-93](#).

EDWARDS AQUIFER

The Edwards Aquifer is one of the most productive aquifers in the US and serves as the primary source of drinking water for many people in central Texas, because of this there are certain regulations in place to protect the water quantity and quality. [Here](#) is a brief outline of the rules and whether they apply to you provided by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ).

There are three zones in the area surrounding the aquifer, the recharge zone, the contributing zone, and the transition zone, each with its own regulations.

- The recharge zone – the area where water infiltrates into the aquifer through surface level openings in the geologic layers, this is the most sensitive area because surface water that is contaminated can easily enter the aquifer. The construction of buildings, roads, or any other activity that could alter/disturb recharge characteristics of a site will be subject to regulations because this is the most environmentally sensitive area.
 - For example, properties in the recharge zone of Edwards Aquifer are allowed substantially less total impervious coverage. On a lot zoned for SF-3, which would normally have a 45% allowance for impervious cover, if it falls in the Barton Springs watershed regulation area this allowance is cut to 15%.
- The contributing zone – this includes all watersheds that feed runoff into rivers and streams that flow over the recharge zone. Land in the contributing zone doesn't really have any extra regulations like that in the recharge zone when it comes to development.
- The transition zone – these areas have geologic features, like fault lines, that could present possible methods for contaminated surface water to reach the aquifer and lies between the contributing zone and the recharge zone typically.

This is an important feature of the area that cannot be ignored as it impacts possible development, changing what is and isn't allowed to happen when constructing and renovating in certain areas. For further information about Edwards Aquifer you can visit their website [here](#) or the TCEQ page [here](#).

WATERSHED

A watershed is the land area that channels rainfall and snowmelt (if it snows) to creeks, streams, and rivers and eventually to outflow points like reservoirs, bays, and the ocean. Watersheds can be small or large, some encompassing thousands of square miles. There are many small watersheds just in the Austin area, including: Barton Creek, Lake Travis, Onion Creek, Cedar Creek, Lake Austin, Lady Bird Lake, Walnut Creek, and many more! Knowing what watershed your property falls in can be very helpful when it comes to developing because there may be

certain regulations that do or do not apply to you based on your watershed and your watershed regulation area.

WATERSHED REGULATION AREA

A watershed regulation area is the zone in which your property falls in the watershed, it can impact allowed total impervious coverage, waterway setbacks, and water quality controls that must be taken. The possible zones are:

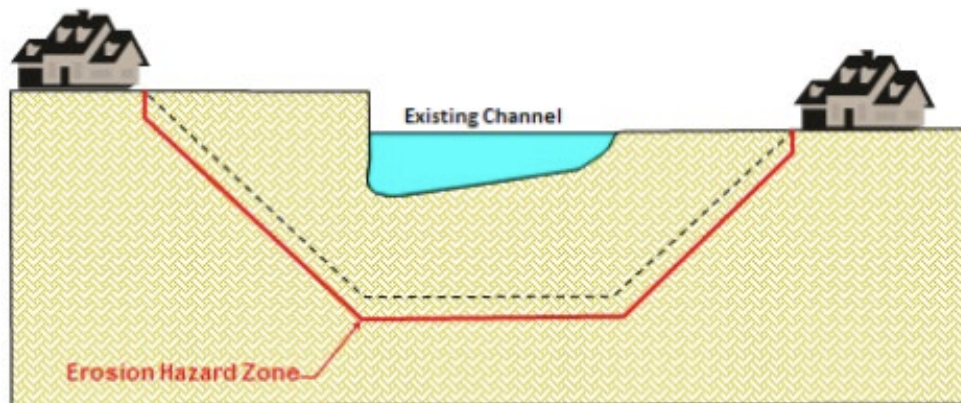
- Urban
- Suburban
- Water Supply Suburban
- Water Supply Rural
- Barton Springs Zone
- A table with the City of Austin Watershed Protection Ordinance Regulations passed in 2013 is [here](#), it gives guidance for the rules and regulations that apply to a property in each of the different zones

Watershed regulation areas exist to improve creek and floodplain protection and inform property owners of what they need to do to be responsible land owners.

EROSION HAZARD ZONE

An Erosion Hazard Zone (EHZ) is an area where stream channel erosion is likely to result in damage to or loss of property, buildings, infrastructure, utilities or other valued resources. It provides a boundary outside of which all development should be located on a property, with few exceptions. It is possible to undertake stream stabilization or restoration measures upon approval

Erosion Hazard Zone Concept

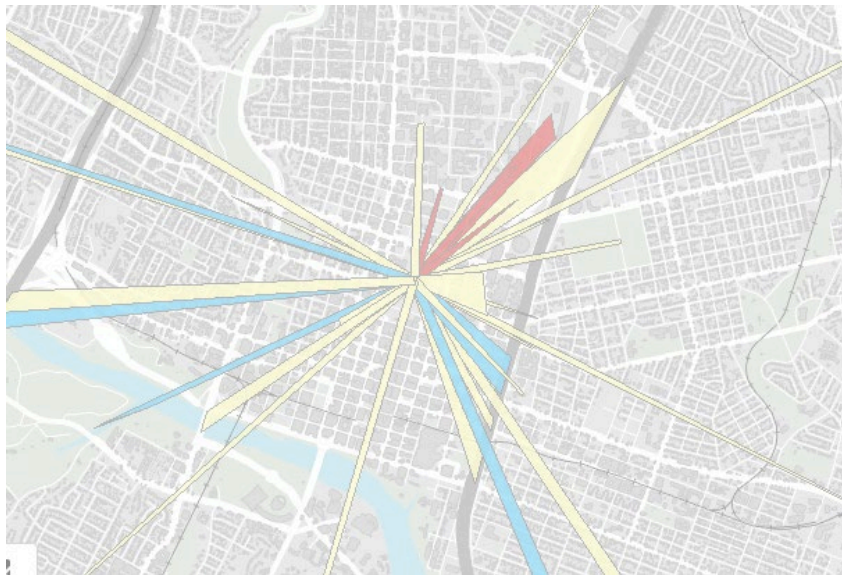


from the City to stabilize an EHZ and make construction in it possible, but the process is lengthy and it would generally be easier to just build outside of the defined zone. Below is an illustration of the concept of the Erosion Hazard Zone in relation to an existing channel.

CORRIDORS

There are three corridor types in the City of Austin that could implement regulations on developments: Imagine Austin, Core Austin Transit, and Capitol View.

- Imagine Austin is the city's 30-yr plan for the future that lays out how the city can grow, covering the expected land use and development as well as quality of life issues beyond the traditional scope of municipal comprehensive plans. The Imagine Austin corridor relates to the transportation network of the city, how it will grow in size and in transportation types while reducing sprawls and congestion. To be in the Imagine Austin corridor just means the property will be subject to the regulations put in place in the Imagine Austin plan relating to transportation.
- Core Austin Transit includes the transportation connections into, out of, through, and within Downtown Austin. To be in the Core Austin Transit corridor is to be within a certain radius of the downtown area, and possibly subject to regulations that align with the Austin Core Transportation (ACT) Plan that can be read about [here](#).
- Capitol View corridors have been around since 1931 when the City of Austin enacted an ordinance limiting the height of new buildings with the aim of preserving the visual preeminence of the Texas State Capitol building. There are different lines emanating out from the Capitol that are the different corridors, shown below, that have different regulations that need to be researched specifically if your property falls into on:



EASEMENTS

Easements are sections of land dedicated for a specific purpose like water or waste water or access. Certain types of easements *can* be built over or under as long as there is no material interference with the easement itself, but usually it is best to just avoid disturbing an easement.

Easements are typically granted to utility companies that run power and water lines and they are laid out on subdivision maps. A survey done for a property should also so easement locations.

Easements types:

- Right-of-way for street or alley
- Public Utility
- Drainage
- Access for public use or service vehicle and equipment use
- Recreational use
- Conservation
- Franchise cable communication use
- Other special use

NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

There are 53 different neighborhoods that have been adopted by the City of Austin as of today. Neighborhood planning is really just a way for citizens to take an active role in the planning process and decide how their neighborhoods will move into the future. The different neighborhoods already in existence have recommendations for development in the neighborhood and contact teams that can be reached with specific questions. Linked [here](#) is the Austin government webpage for neighborhood plans with a table that covers each neighborhood and all its connected documents.

RESIDENTIAL DESIGN STANDARDS

The residential design standards, also known as the “McMansion” regulations, were put into place to minimize the impact of new construction, remodels, and additions to existing buildings on properties in residential neighborhoods recognized by the City of Austin. They define acceptable building area and different lot regulations for properties that fall in the area. A comprehensive guide can be found [here](#) in Austin’s Land Development Code under article 2.

ACCESSORY DWELLING UNIT

An accessory dwelling unit, or ADU for short, is a secondary dwelling unit built on the same lot as the primary house. There are certain City of Austin regulations for where and under what circumstances exactly ADUs are allowed to be built, you can read more about them here [link to our webpage ADU article].

ADU REDUCED PARKING

There are areas in the City of Austin where, if an ADU is permitted to be built on your lot, the required amount of parking that must be provided for the ADU is reduced from one to zero. These areas are properties within a quarter-mile of an Imagine Austin Corridor.

PERMITS

You need a permit for most things when it comes to land development; building, plumbing, electrical, demolition, trees(!), etc. It’s not a difficult process, but it can be confusing and take a long time if it’s not done correctly. Permits are just how the City of Austin and Travis County keep track of what is going on in properties in the city limits. Austin Build + Connect is a great resource for finding permits and development information, it has a public search function where you can find basically the whole history of a property, linked [here](#).

Work you don't need a permit for includes:

- single story detached accessory structures with floor area not greater than 120 sqft
- fences under 7ft high
- retaining walls under 4ft in height (from the bottom of the footing to the top of the wall)
- finishing work like painting, papering, tiling, etc.
- [other exempt work](#) under section 105.2

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