

S.M.A.R.T. Housing

The Nuts and Bolts

A Publication about the City of Austin's S.M.A.R.T. Housing Policy

This year, the City of Austin adopted its S.M.A.R.T. Housing Policy. This policy promotes Safe, Mixed-Income, Accessible, Reasonably-Priced, and Transit-Oriented Housing Development.

In addition to providing certain fee waivers, the S.M.A.R.T. Housing policy provides for expedited review of zoning variance requests, site plans, subdivision plats, and building permit applications. The Neighborhood Housing and Community Development Office, and other City reviewers, check applications for compliance with policy and income eligibility criteria. If the project meets the S.M.A.R.T. Housing standards at the pre-submittal stage, then the project will be eligible for expedited review, certain fee waivers, and one working day response on inspections, once the building permits are issued.

Expedited review requires applicants to contact registered neighborhood associations and secure support or a list of neighborhood concerns prior to filing applications. Pre-submittal meetings follow these discussions with the surrounding neighborhood organizations, and major regulatory issues are identified and addressed before plans are submitted for expedited review.

All new multi-family S.M.A.R.T. Housing projects require accessibility review of building and site plans by NHCD's third party reviewer. Austin Energy reviews all S.M.A.R.T. Housing plans for compliance with Green Building requirements, and NHCD reviews plans for compliance with transit-oriented and visitability standards.

The Development Review and Inspection Department (DRID) conducts zoning reviews, and all City review departments verify compliance with other applicable

land use and building standards.

Although S.M.A.R.T. Housing projects receive expedited review, they do not necessarily receive expedited approval.

The S.M.A.R.T. Housing review process provides developers and non-profit organizations information about potential problems before they have spent significant dollars on either acquisition or design. It also involves verification that the property is not in the flood plain or over former landfill sites before a zoning change request will be processed. This is different from conventional zoning change requests.

In addition, S.M.A.R.T. Housing identifies zoning changes that could result in housing being placed too close to sites with industrial uses; housing being placed near railroads or five-lane roads where noise mitigation may be required; or housing that would be located too close to natural gas or petroleum pipelines. This S.M.A.R.T. Housing review process may eventually result in Land Development Code or building code amendments that enhance safety standards. These new standards could also be incorporated in land use recommendations developed as part of the Neighborhood Planning process.

S.M.A.R.T. Housing and Smart Growth : The Difference.

Smart Growth encourages residential and commercial development and redevelopment outside the City's Drinking Water Protection Zone by reducing fees and providing other incentives to projects that meet Smart Growth criteria. S.M.A.R.T. Housing provides for certain fee waivers and expedited review and inspection for all projects within the City limits that meet applicable criteria.