

# **SUBCHAPTER E: DESIGN STANDARDS AND MIXED USE**

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## **Austin, Texas**



**ADOPTED: AUGUST 31, 2006  
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**BASED ON THE MAY 2005 TASK FORCE REPORT:  
*Raising the Design Standards in Austin, Texas***

## SUBCHAPTER E: DESIGN STANDARDS AND MIXED USE

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## BACKGROUND

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On February 26, 2004, the Austin City Council directed the City Manager by resolution "...to prepare recommendations for citywide design standards for commercial and retail development. These recommended citywide design standards shall constitute the best practices of the standards adopted by communities around the nation and shall require design standards that reflect Austin's unique historic, landscape and architectural character...."

In order to implement the Council's direction, a specially appointed Task Force met over several months to consider research and input from the public, various stakeholder groups, and individuals. The Task Force sought to understand the preferences of Austin citizens and the design regulations of other cities prior to developing a recommendation.

The Task Force produced, and in May 2005 the City Council adopted, a policy report entitled "*Raising the Design Standards in Austin, Texas.*" The Task Force report identified a number of areas where regulatory improvements are necessary in order to raise the bar of development quality in Austin. The general intent was to develop regulations that will foster a built environment of aesthetic and sustainable value, enhance economic development efforts, promote Austin's unique character and natural environment, and ensure an efficient development review process.

The proposals for new standards were intended to raise the level of quality for all non-residential and mixed-use development, but within a regulatory structure offering options and flexibility, not strict requirements. New development would be subject to a set of minimum site and building design standards, recognizing that all new development, regardless of size, should be subject to minimum standards. The following topics were addressed in the Task Force report:

- Development orientation;
- Parking;
- Land use;
- Signs;
- Stormwater management;
- Connectivity;
- Exterior lighting;
- Screening and compatibility; and
- Building design.

In each of these topic areas, the Task Force report discussed the key issue generally and proposed regulatory language to address the issue. In a few areas, specific ordinance language was proposed, but in most areas the proposed language recommended general approaches rather than actual ordinance language. In some areas, the proposed new standards would be new for Austin, while in other areas the proposed standards would require amendments to the Austin Code.

This Subchapter is intended to implement the Task Force report by establishing a clear, user-friendly, and legally enforceable ordinance that will result in improved development quality in Austin. This Subchapter is officially known as Subchapter E of Chapter 25-2 of the City Code. This Subchapter was adopted on August 31, 2006, and will become effective on January 13, 2007. The Task Force recommends reviewing this Subchapter once it has been in place for one year.

## HOW TO USE THIS SUBCHAPTER

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### **Applicability is Based on Adjacent Roadway and Type of Development**

This Subchapter recognizes that development should reflect and respond to its location within the city. For example, a commercial development in a suburban location can (and often should) look and function differently than a commercial development in downtown Austin. Because roadways provide both access to a site and define the urban design framework of the city, roadway types have been used as an organizing tool to establish many of the new development standards in this Subchapter. This approach is intended to help ensure a cohesive development pattern along Austin's streets and remove some of the inconsistency that arises from having a variety of zoning districts fronting a single roadway.

Because many of the standards in this Subchapter are defined based on roadway type(s) near the property, an important first step in the development process is to determine the roadway types that are adjacent to a site. The size of the site and the type of development (residential, commercial, mixed use, etc.) also need to be considered, since different standards may apply. The applicability chart in Article 1 summarizes the applicability of all the standards in this Subchapter, based on type of adjacent roadways and development activity.

The following different types of roadways are identified in this Subchapter:

**Core Transit Corridors** include roadways that have or will have a sufficient population density, mix of uses, and transit facilities to encourage and support transit use. Existing Core Transit Corridors have been designated and are defined in Article 5 and shown on Figure 1. Examples include South Congress Avenue (north of Stassney Lane) and Anderson Lane (between Burnet Road and Mopac). Additional Core Transit Corridors may be designated in the future through neighborhood planning processes.

**Hill Country Roadways** are those roadways identified in Section 25-2-1103, such as RM 2222 and Southwest Parkway. Standards in this Subchapter that reference the Hill County Roadway designation apply to all properties within 1000 feet of these roadways.

**Highways** include all freeways, parkways, expressways, and frontage roads identified in the Austin Area Metropolitan Transportation Plan, except for Core Transit Corridors.

**Internal Circulation Routes** are public streets or private drives edged by a curb within a development.

**Suburban Roadways** are roads outside the Urban Roadway Boundary, defined below and shown on Figure 2, that are not Core Transit, Hill Country, or Highway Roadways.

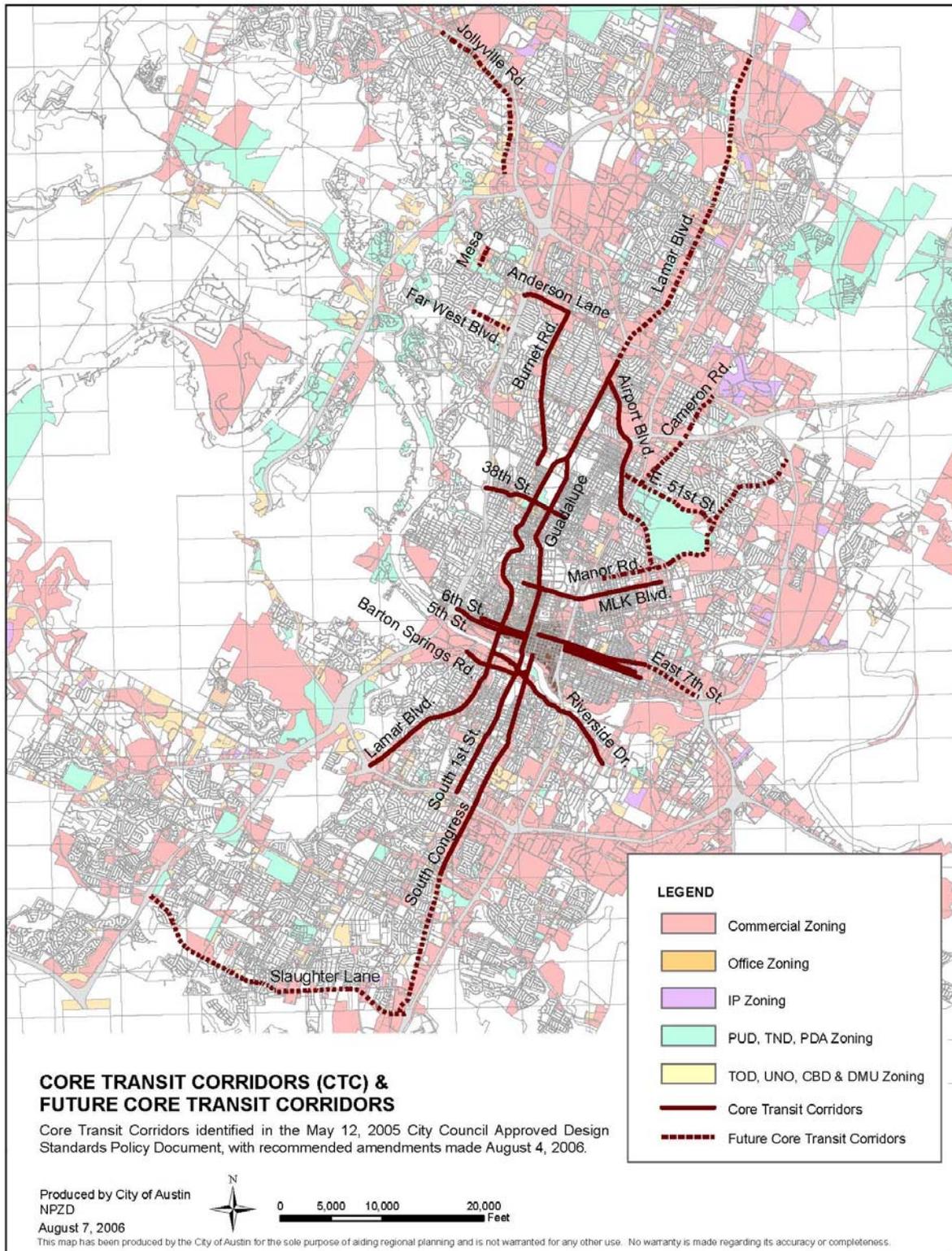


Figure 1: Core Transit Corridors Map

**Urban Roadways** are roads other than those designated as Core Transit Corridors and Highways located within the following boundaries, as shown on Figure 2:

- 183 from Burnet to Hwy 71
- Hwy 71 from 183 to Loop 1
- Loop 1 from Hwy 71 to Lake Austin
- Lake Austin from Loop 1 to Exposition
- Exposition from Lake Austin to 35th
- 35th from Exposition to Loop 1
- Loop 1 from 38th to RM 2222
- RM2222 from Loop 1 to Mesa
- Mesa from RM 2222 to Spicewood Springs Road
- Spicewood Springs Road from Mesa to 360
- 360 from Spicewood Springs Road to Great Hills Trail
- Great Hills Trail from 360 to 183
- 183 from Great Hills Trail to Braker
- Braker from 183 to Burnet
- Burnet from Braker to 183

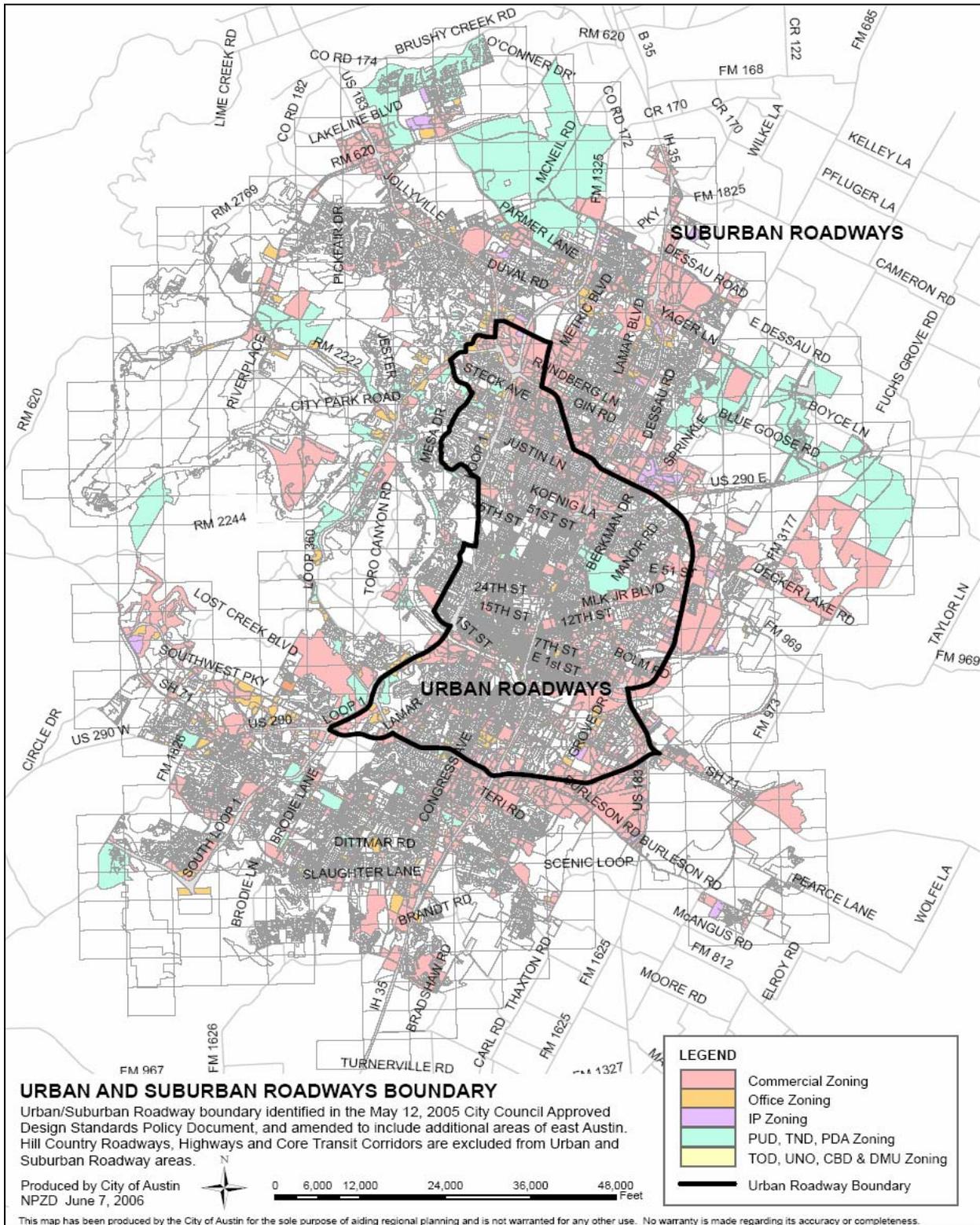


Figure 2: Urban/Suburban Roadways Map

## How This Subchapter is Organized

This Subchapter is divided into five Articles.

**Article 1** includes **General Provisions** that should be reviewed for all development and redevelopment projects. Most importantly, a chart summarizes the applicability of the various standards based on roadway types and development types.

To allow flexibility in administering this Subchapter, this Article includes a “minor modification” provision that allows for City staff to approve small deviations from otherwise applicable standards in order to protect natural or historic features or to address unique site conditions.

The Article also encourages creativity and innovative design by allowing an applicant to propose an alternative approach to meeting the standards of the Subchapter through the “alternative equivalent compliance” provision.

**Article 2** includes **Site Development Standards** intended to ensure that buildings relate appropriately to surrounding developments and streets, promote efficient pedestrian and vehicle circulation, and provide adequate parking in safe and appropriate locations, while creating a unique and identifiable image for development in Austin. In particular, standards in this Article address the following:

- Relationship of buildings to streets and walkways (based on roadway type);
- Connectivity (based on roadway type);
- Parking reductions;
- Exterior lighting;
- Screening of equipment and utilities; and
- Private common open space and pedestrian amenities.

**Article 3** includes **Building Design Standards** intended to address the physical appearance of buildings subject to this Subchapter. Included are:

- General requirements for glazing and shading to ensure that buildings facades are pedestrian-friendly; and
- Additional options to improve building design. An applicant may choose which of these options to meet from a flexible, point-based menu. All buildings subject to this section must reach a minimum number of points, with additional points required for certain building types (e.g., buildings with trademarked design features, large buildings or long facades, and buildings using a large percentage of certain building materials.)

**Article 4** includes standards and incentives for **Mixed Use** development. This Article includes descriptions and standards for the Mixed Use Combining District and the Vertical Mixed Use Overlay district. This Article also includes standards and incentives for the development of Vertical Mixed Use (VMU) buildings.

**Article 5** includes **Definitions** for terms used in this Subchapter.

## 2.5. EXTERIOR LIGHTING

### 2.5.1. Applicability

The following table summarizes the applicability of this section:

Standard	Applies if the Principal Street Is:	Applies to the Following:
2.5: Exterior Lighting	All roadway types	All zoning districts

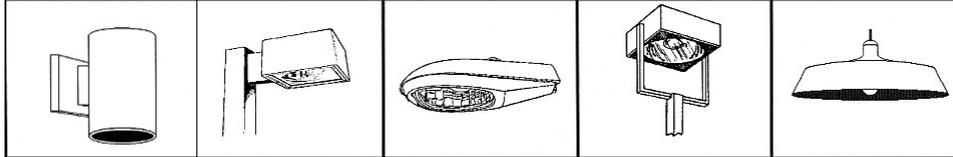
### 2.5.2. Standards

#### A. Submission of Plans and Evidence of Compliance

All site plan applications shall include a description of all lighting fixtures not affixed to buildings, both proposed and those that will remain on the site, as well as any existing or proposed fixtures to be located in adjacent right-of-ways after completion of the project. For new fixtures, the description may include, but is not limited to, catalog cuts and illustrations by manufacturers (including sections where required), that demonstrate compliance with the standards of this Subchapter. For lighting fixtures affixed to buildings, such information shall be provided as part of the building permit application.

**B. Fully Shielded and Full Cut-off Light Fixtures Required**

The following outdoor lighting applications shall be illuminated by fixtures that are both fully-shielded and full cut-off: (See Figure 42.)



**Figure 42:** Examples of fully-shielded light fixtures

1. Public street and pedestrian lighting;
2. Parking lots;
3. Pathways;
4. Recreational areas;
5. Billboards;
6. Product display area lighting; and
7. Building overhangs and open canopies.

**C. Lighting of Building Façades**

1. Buildings and structures shall be illuminated by fixtures that are both fully-shielded and full cut-off. Building façade lighting may only be used to highlight specific architectural features such as principal entrances and towers. This provision shall not apply to buildings in the downtown that are at least 120 feet tall, so long as such buildings contain no trademarked design features (not including signage) located over 120 feet above ground level.
2. Uniform floodlighting of building facades shall be permitted only through the alternative equivalent compliance review process.

**D. Directional Luminaires**

Directional luminaires may be used to illuminate signs and flagpoles. Such luminaires shall be installed and aimed so that they illuminate only the specific object or area and do not shine directly onto neighboring properties, roadways, or distribute excessive light skyward.

**E. Lamp or Fixture Substitution**

Should any outdoor light fixture or the type of light source therein be changed after site plan or building plan approval has been granted, a change request must

be submitted to the Director for approval, together with adequate information to assure compliance with this Subchapter, which must be received prior to substitution.

**F. Non-Conforming Lighting**

All outdoor lighting fixtures lawfully installed prior to and operable on the effective date of this Subchapter are exempt from all requirements of this Subchapter until January 1, 2015, at which time they shall become subject to this Subchapter, and shall be considered non-conforming if they do not comply with the requirements of this Subchapter.