



**AUSTIN**CODE  
DEPARTMENT

# ANNUAL REPORT | 2017

BUILDING A GREATER  
AUSTIN TOGETHER





**EDUCATION**



**COLLABORATION**



**ENFORCEMENT**


# VISION

Building a Greater Austin Together through Code Education,  
Collaboration and Enforcement.

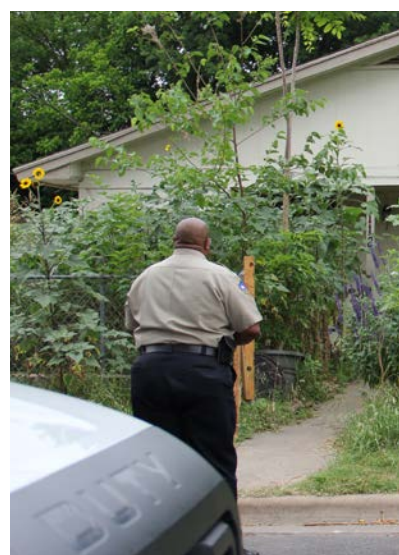
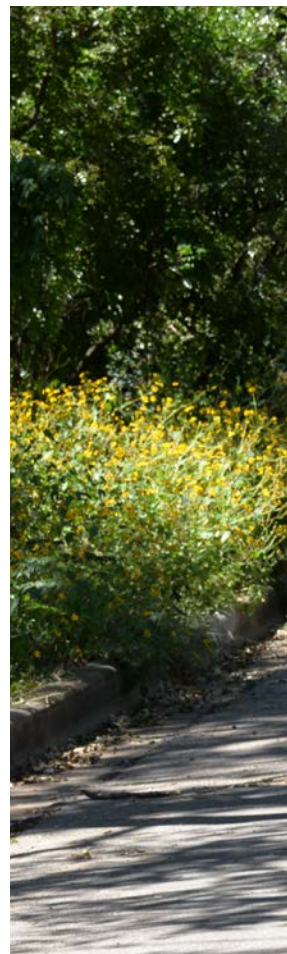
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# MISSION

The mission of the Austin Code Department is to provide effective community education and fair and equitable enforcement of local property maintenance, land use and nuisance codes in order to gain and maintain compliance, so that Austin will be safe and livable.

















# ELAINE HART

FORMER INTERIM CITY MANAGER,  
CITY OF AUSTIN

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I am pleased that the Austin Code Department, under the leadership of newly-appointed director Cora D. Wright, is bringing to life a forward looking vision for the department.

The Austin Code Department plays a critical role in our work to keep our Austin safe for residents and visitors alike. On any given day, Austin Code employees might investigate the structural integrity of a home or apartment, hotel or motel; issue licenses for properties to provide short-term rentals for visitors; or ensure that home additions or garage conversions have the proper permits.

The Austin Code Department also helps ensure that stages and music venues are structurally sound and safe for the thousands of music lovers who attend our annual music festivals and special events.

The department is taking steps to better engage and educate property owners and tenants, is extending the hours of enforcement, and improving licensing and registration programs. The Austin Code Department's new direction will help us as a city to better manage the increased expectations of our residents. I want to thank the Austin Code Department employees for their work and dedication, and I look forward to their continued successes for the City of Austin.

A handwritten signature of Elaine Hart in white ink, written in a cursive style.

**Elaine Hart**

*Interim City Manager, City of Austin*

**“WE LISTENED AND ADVOCATED FOR WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO OUR COMMUNITY, THEN GAINED COMMUNITY AND COUNCIL SUPPORT...”**





# CORA D. WRIGHT

DIRECTOR, AUSTIN CODE DEPARTMENT

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It is with great pride and accomplishment that I present to you, on behalf of the dedicated staff of the Austin Code Department, our 2017 Annual Report.

This annual report highlights the exceptional year-long work completed by our staff in partnership with the community to help make Austin a safe and enjoyable place to live, work, play and vacation! As you read this report, I hope you will gain insight into the breadth and depth of all the services the department provides to our great city.

Our collective efforts last year centered on four priorities— **Priority 1:** We continued to respond to the increasing code enforcement demands of our city. The number of calls for service in 2017 rose to an all-time high— 24,308 by year end; **Priority 2:** We took a hard and strategic look at our capacity to keep pace with the increasing calls for service by examining code enforcement trends across the city and re-evaluating our core business scope and goals; **Priority 3:** We reset our vision, organizational performance expectations and accountabilities, then aligned our organization for higher performance; and finally, **Priority 4:** We listened and advocated for what is important to our community, then gained community and Council support to begin closing critical service and funding gaps.

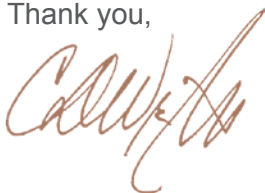
Now that the internal organizational scan is complete and now that we have reset the organization for higher performance, the department is in a better position than ever before to make strategic, data-driven decisions that are designed to improve community response and overall organizational performance. We are now firmly on a path to a new way forward.

As the new Austin Code director appointed in September 2017— I am humbled and proud to have been given the opportunity to serve. I pledge to continue the quest for excellent code enforcement services to all of Austin! I am immensely grateful to the Austin Code staff who worked tirelessly, our city leaders and most especially to the community who gave of their time, insights and talents to support and partner with us in FY 2017.

I look forward to a greater year of service in 2018. Thanks to you, I project that 2018 will be a year (beginning April 2018) of expanded capacity to improve customer service through new code education tools and resources, proactive community partnerships and initiatives, extended code enforcement hours—evenings and Saturdays, greater capacity for license, registration and enforcement of short-term rentals, repeat offender properties, rooming and boarding houses, and equally important, improved capability to move cases progressively through the enforcement process.

Together, we can and will continue our work to make Austin a safe place to live, work, play and vacation!

Thank you,



**Cora D. Wright**

Director, Austin Code Department





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A NEW WAY  
FORWARD

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# SUCCESS STORIES

“TOGETHER WE MAKE THE COMMUNITY BETTER”

## City Reaches Settlement In Housing Case

***“Thank you for taking such a strong and persistent stand on the Orchard Plaza conditions. Thanks to the hard work by your staff, enforcement on substandard conditions is being taken seriously and affordability was preserved. We appreciate the work you do to make sure affordable housing is also safe and decent.”***

***- Thank you note sent to Director Cora D. Wright and signed by Austin Women in Housing and Juliana Gonzales, Executive Director of the Austin Tenants Council.***

This high-profile case worked by the Austin Code Department and the Neighborhood Housing and Community Development Office spanned several years before it came to a successful conclusion. In November, the Austin City Council voted unanimously in support of a settlement between the city and the apartment complex owners. The settlement will compensate the city \$150,000, and at the same time secure affordable housing units for the community in the future.

Due to imminent, life-threatening safety hazards identified by Austin Code, the City Council also approved \$600,000 in relocation funds to assist 15 households. The settlement was well-received by the community, thus identifying it as a 2017 success story.







## Cross Creek Apartment Complex

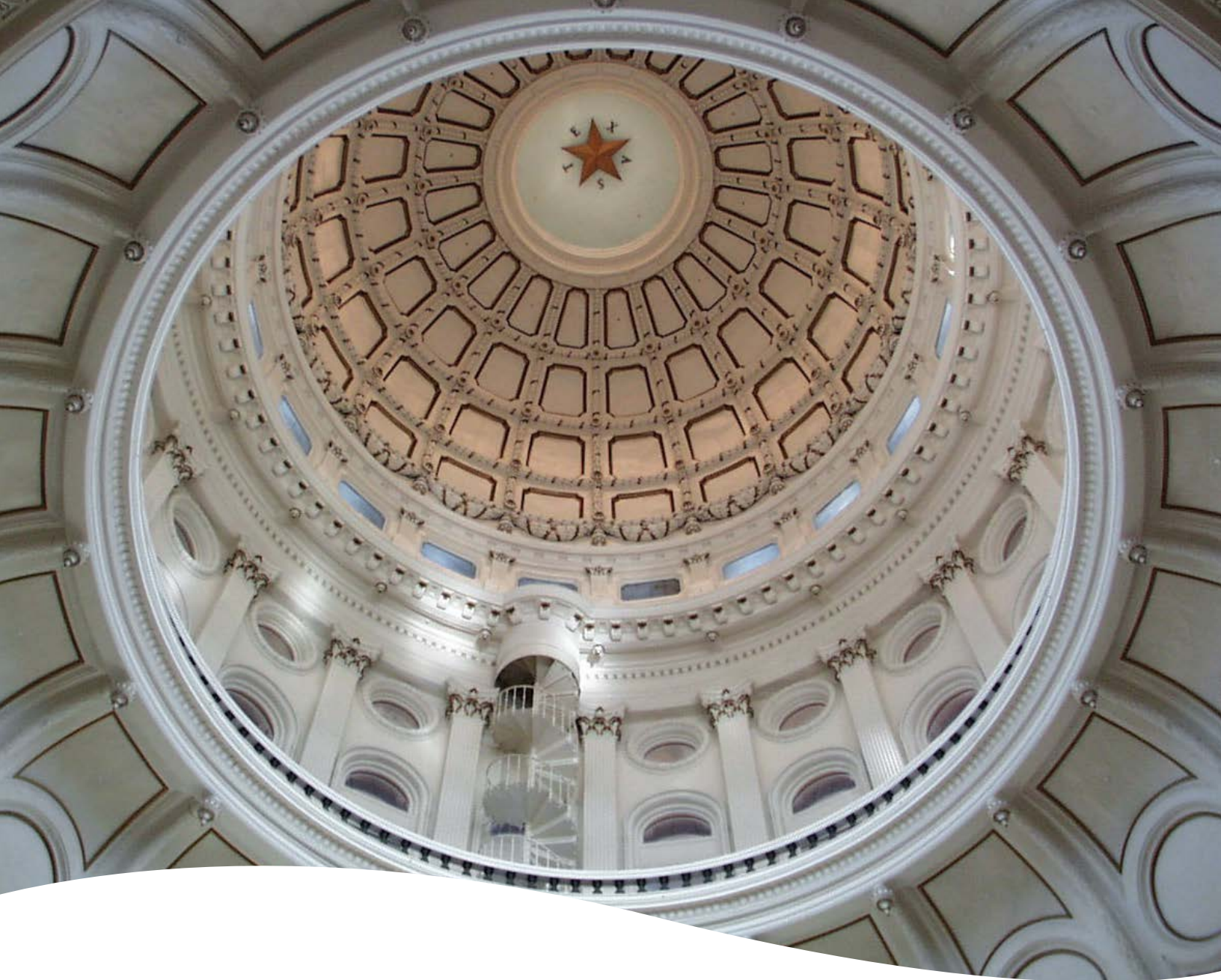
*“The City challenged a landlord who was subjecting tenants to sub-standard living conditions and we are satisfied that this settlement is in the best interests of both taxpayers and residents. We give notice to rogue landlords across the city that we will continue to take robust action against those who exploit vulnerable people and seek to profit from the provision of poor housing.”*

### - City of Austin

This legal victory is testament to the commitment of the Austin Code Department to make Austin a more livable city. Cross Creek Apartments, built in 1976 in North Central Austin, had a long history of issues related to tenant health and safety. The 20-building complex has about 200 apartment units. Many of the residents are low-income, and because of concerns over their immigration status, many tenants were reluctant to complain, some for fear of retaliation by owners. The complex landed on the department’s Repeat Offender Program (ROP) in November 2014. There were multiple resident complaints about lack of hot water, exposed wiring, deteriorating siding, broken gutters, deteriorated handrails, broken landings, uneven walkways and broken windows.

After a three-year struggle with the property owners, collaboration with other city departments and non-profits, and litigation, the conditions for the families there are now improving. The city sued the owners in December 2015 and a judge ordered them to make repairs. Because the complex offered affordable housing, the city gave the owners \$2 million in funding to help with repairs, but there was little evidence the repairs were made. The Austin City Council recently approved a legal settlement with the owners of the Cross Creek Apartment Complex for outstanding fines and failure to make repairs to the complex. The settlement required the owners to sell the property, make repairs, and return the \$2 million plus interest to the City. In addition, the tenants will be refunded a portion of their rent money and rent caps will be established at the property.





## **District Court Rules in Favor of Short-Term Rental Ordinance**

In June 2016, seven individual plaintiffs, represented by the Texas Public Policy Foundation, along with the State of Texas, sued the City under numerous legal theories in an attempt to invalidate the City's entire short-term rental ordinance, as well as specific provisions concerning the phase-out of some Type-2 short-term rentals and certain restrictions of property use.

On November 21, 2017, Travis County District Court Judge Sulak ruled in favor of the City, and dismissed the challenge. The case is now on appeal at the Third Court of Appeals.

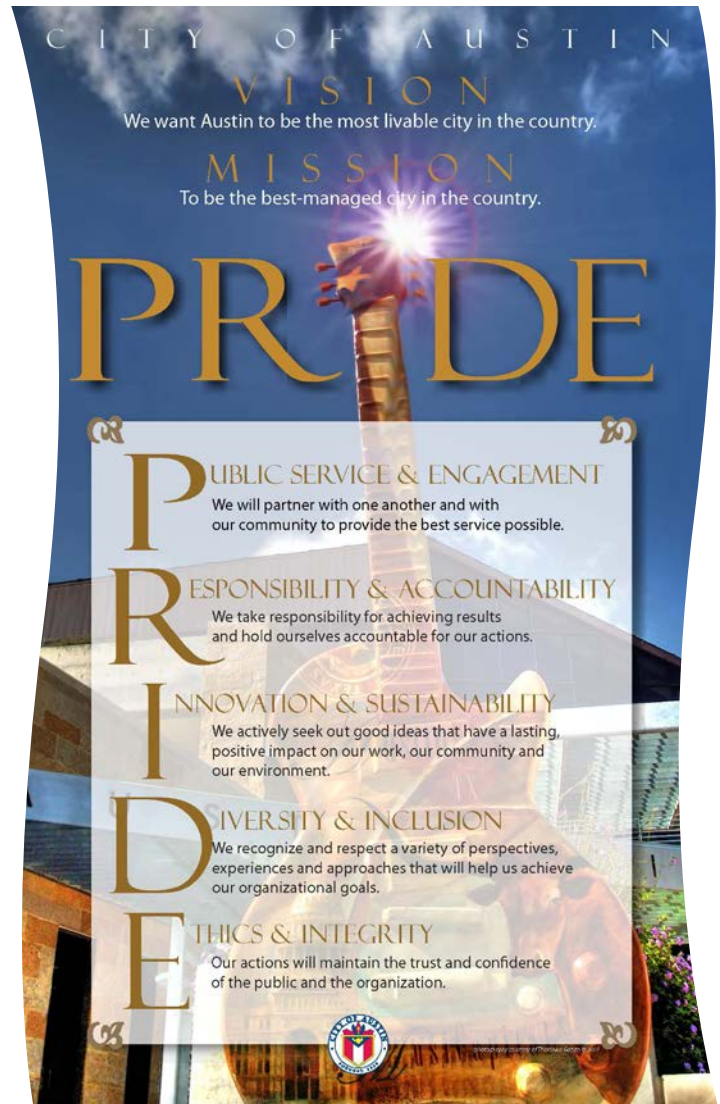


## Exemplary Service to Neighbors

A case that began with unsightly, objectionable material on a property and a fence height violation became an excellent example of commitment to service to the people and community of Austin. The property owner was unable to address the violation due to a number of obstacles. Because of its complexity, there was a need to approach the case from outside the box, but within the guidelines of the department.

Per Austin Code policy, notices were issued with the required remedies and timeline. This routine process can often create undue stress to the recipient, which was true in this case. What elevated this case to a higher level was the compassion, concern and exceptional communication shown by Code Supervisor Michael Reeves to the property owner.

His method and timely responses earned him the trust of the property owner. Supervisor Reeves' solution was to link a volunteer group to make the necessary corrections for the property to achieve compliance. Additionally, he was able to coordinate a time that allowed the owner to meet his other responsibilities. These actions went above and beyond the routine requirements of Code Enforcement.



## The Power of Community

Austin Code coordinated a property enhancement project to assist a local World War II Veteran in bringing his property into compliance. Various volunteer groups and local businesses that included Home Depot, the Austin Police Department Explorer Program, and the City of Austin Veterans Program participated.

Sixty people participated in this 48-hour project. After the citizen's home was brought into compliance, he was invited to join other veterans to attend an Honor Flight Austin visit to the war memorials in Washington D.C.

# CITY OF AUSTIN STRATEGIC PLAN

“ BEING SAFE IN OUR HOME, AT WORK, AND  
IN OUR COMMUNITY ”

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The City of Austin is developing a citywide strategic plan to guide the City for the next three to five years. The Austin Code Department participated in strategy workshops, surveys and touchpoint meetings in 2017 to help shape the City of Austin’s strategic direction.

On April 5, 2017, the Council affirmed the vision and six outcomes to guide the City. In working toward this long-term vision and the City’s aspiration of being one of the most unique, thriving, livable cities in the country, the City Council chose to pursue the following strategic outcomes:

- 1. Economic Opportunity and Affordability:** Having economic opportunities and resources that enable us to thrive in our community.
- 2. Mobility:** Getting us where we want to go, when we want to get there, safely and cost-effectively.
- 3. Safety:** Being safe in our home, at work, and in our community.
- 4. Health and Environment:** Enjoying a sustainable environment and a healthy life, physically and mentally.
- 5. Cultural and Learning Opportunities:** Being enriched by Austin’s unique civic, cultural, ethnic, and learning opportunities.
- 6. Government that Works:** Believing that city government works effectively and collaboratively for all of us—that it is equitable, ethical and innovative.

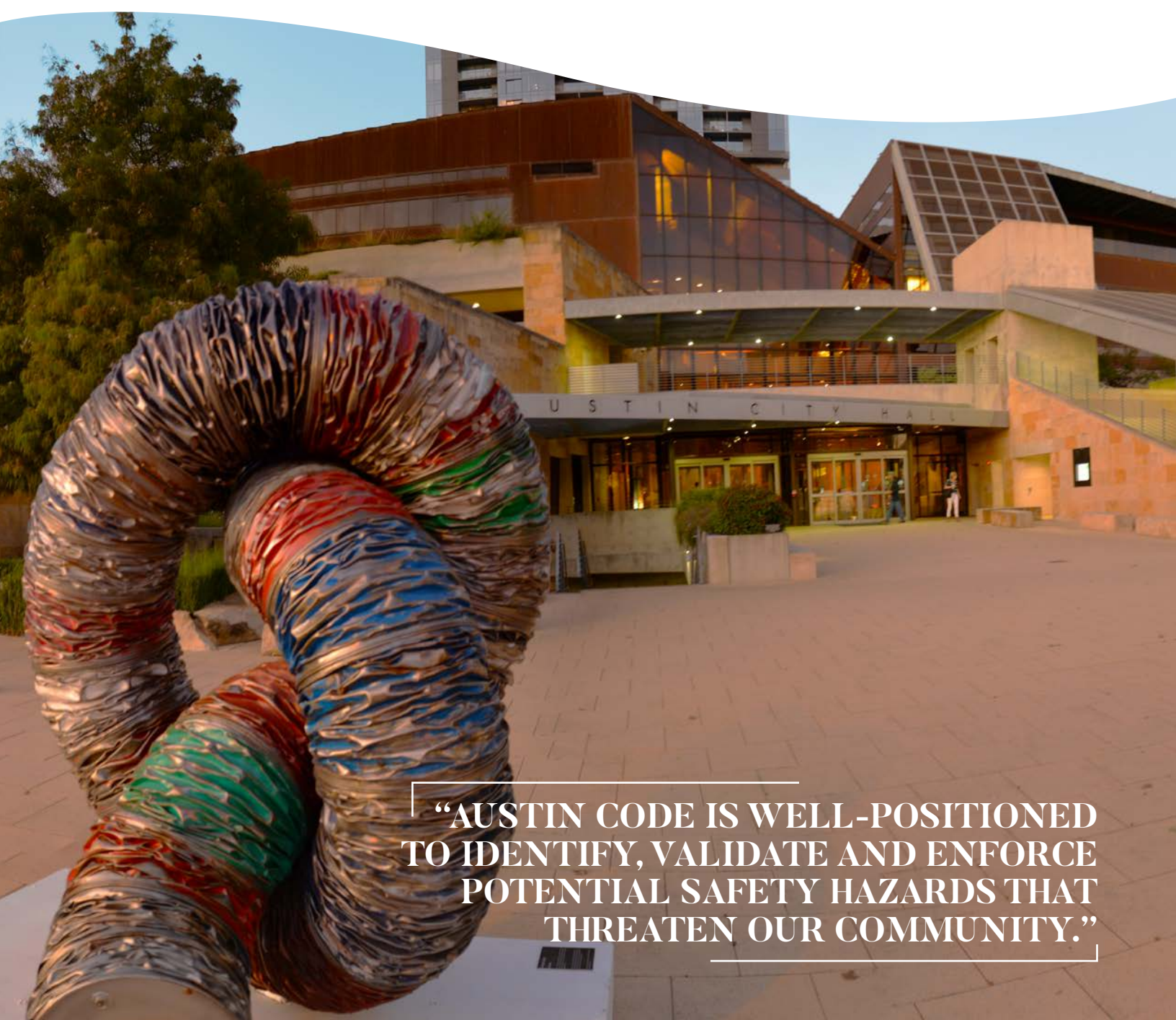




The Austin Code Department is part of the safety outcome of the strategic plan, to be unveiled and presented to Austin City Council in 2018.

In the next three to five years, in alignment with City Council and with direction from the City Manager, the Austin Code Department will focus its efforts to advance the safety outcomes by working with other public safety departments to address challenges in the areas of: prevention and preparedness for emergencies, quality and reliability of critical infrastructure and utilities services, success of emergency response, community compliance with laws and regulations (actual and perceived) and administration of justice.

Given the safety challenges faced by the City of Austin and the established indicators of success, the Austin Code Department is well-positioned to identify, validate and enforce potential safety hazards that threaten our community.



**“AUSTIN CODE IS WELL-POSITIONED TO IDENTIFY, VALIDATE AND ENFORCE POTENTIAL SAFETY HAZARDS THAT THREATEN OUR COMMUNITY.”**

# GOALS

“ TOGETHER , WE MAKE THE COMMUNITY BETTER ”

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- **Improve community awareness and basic understanding of local code requirements.**
  - Improve citizen satisfaction with enforcement of local code.
  - Improve safe, healthy, and legal uses of Austin lands and properties.
- **Improve the rate of voluntary compliance of confirmed violation cases for substandard and dangerous structures at single-family properties.**
  - Improve the rate of voluntary compliance of confirmed violation cases for substandard and dangerous structures at multi-family properties.
  - Improve the rate of voluntary compliance of confirmed violation cases for nuisance abatement.
  - Improve the rate of compliance by obtaining a license of confirmed violation cases for operating without a license.
  - Improve the voluntary compliance of confirmed violation cases at commercial properties.
- **Provide fair, equitable, and expedited enforcement of City codes.**
  - Improve the rate of compliance of confirmed violation cases that were escalated to judicial proceedings.







# GROWTH

“IMPACTING QUALITY OF LIFE”

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The vision of the City of Austin is to be the most livable city in the country. The role of the Austin Code Department is to enforce the city code in an effort to achieve this high standard.

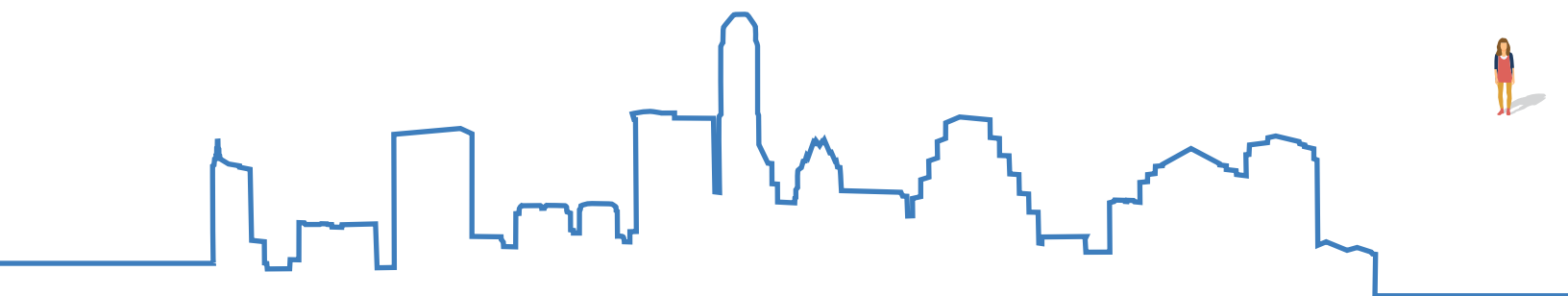
With a strong economy and rapidly-growing urban area, Austin attracts considerable development interest, with growth rates higher than two percent annually. As the city of Austin has grown over the years, the Austin Code regulatory needs have grown, too. For example, the city has witnessed growth in the number of construction and demolition permits approved each year.

In 2002, Property Abatement Cases, Structure Condition issues, and Land Use Violations were handled by other departments. In 2009, to address the growth in these responsibilities, the Code Compliance Department was formed. Since that time, what is now known as the Austin Code Department has gone through various changes to meet increased community expectations and the growing demand for our services.

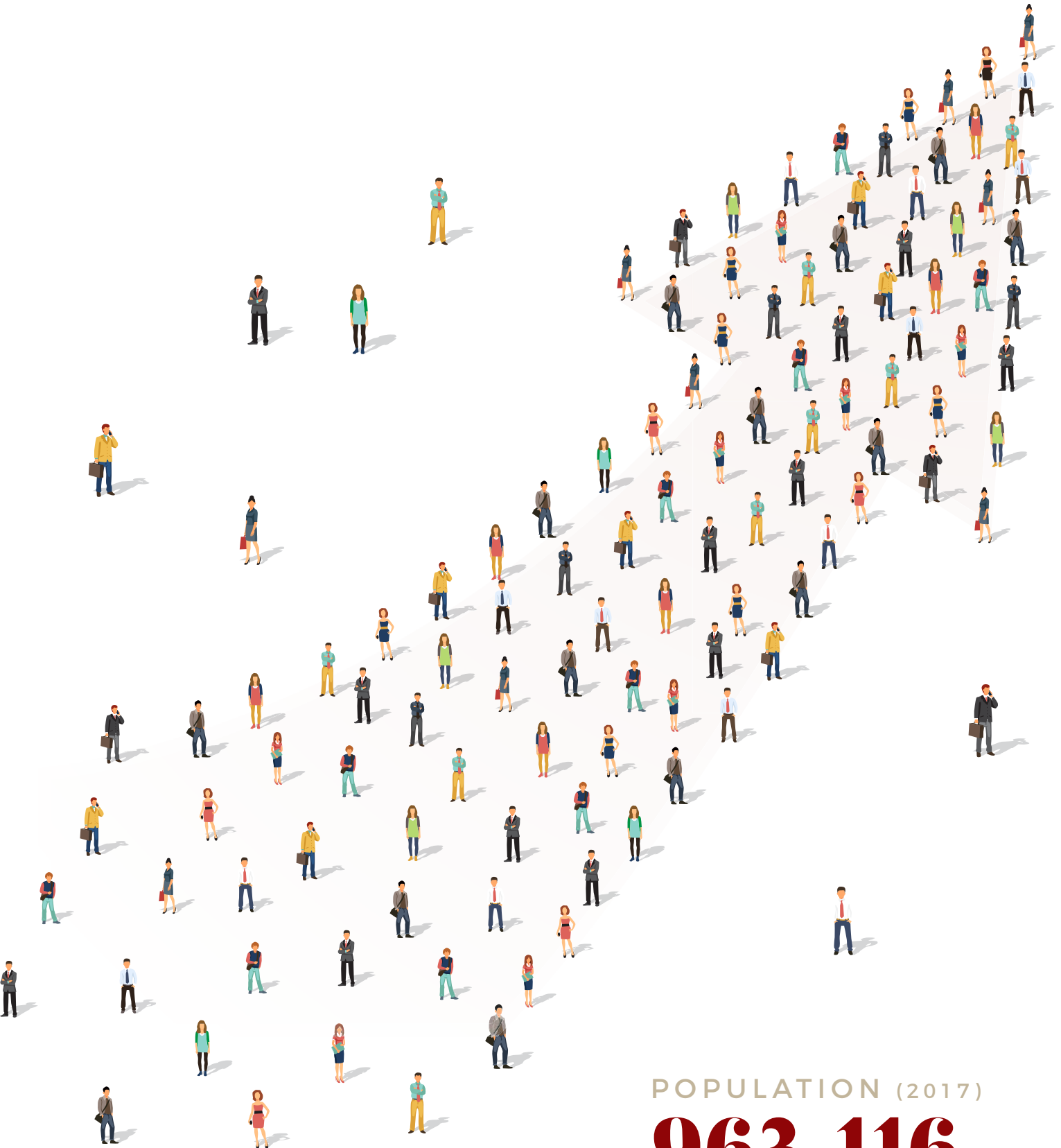
In 2017, the incoming director conducted an organizational scan of Austin Code Department with an in-depth review of the department's policies, procedures and processes. In order to help the city anticipate and manage Austin's exponential growth, the department is now taking a significant step toward an enhanced vision of “a new way forward” for Austin Code Department. This includes:

- **A reset of performance metrics**
- **An organizational and resource realignment**
- **Use of strategic enforcement practices and tools**
- **Improved fiscal stewardship and accountability**
- **The closure of critical service and funding gaps**

All of this is designed to make Austin the most livable city in the country. And, because Austin continues to grow in terms of size, population and community needs, there is confidence that the Austin Code Department will continue to grow and change, too.



GROWTH



POPULATION (2017)

**963,116**



“ LET US CONTINUE TO WORK  
TOGETHER TO IGNITE THE AUSTIN CODE  
DEPARTMENT VISION... ”







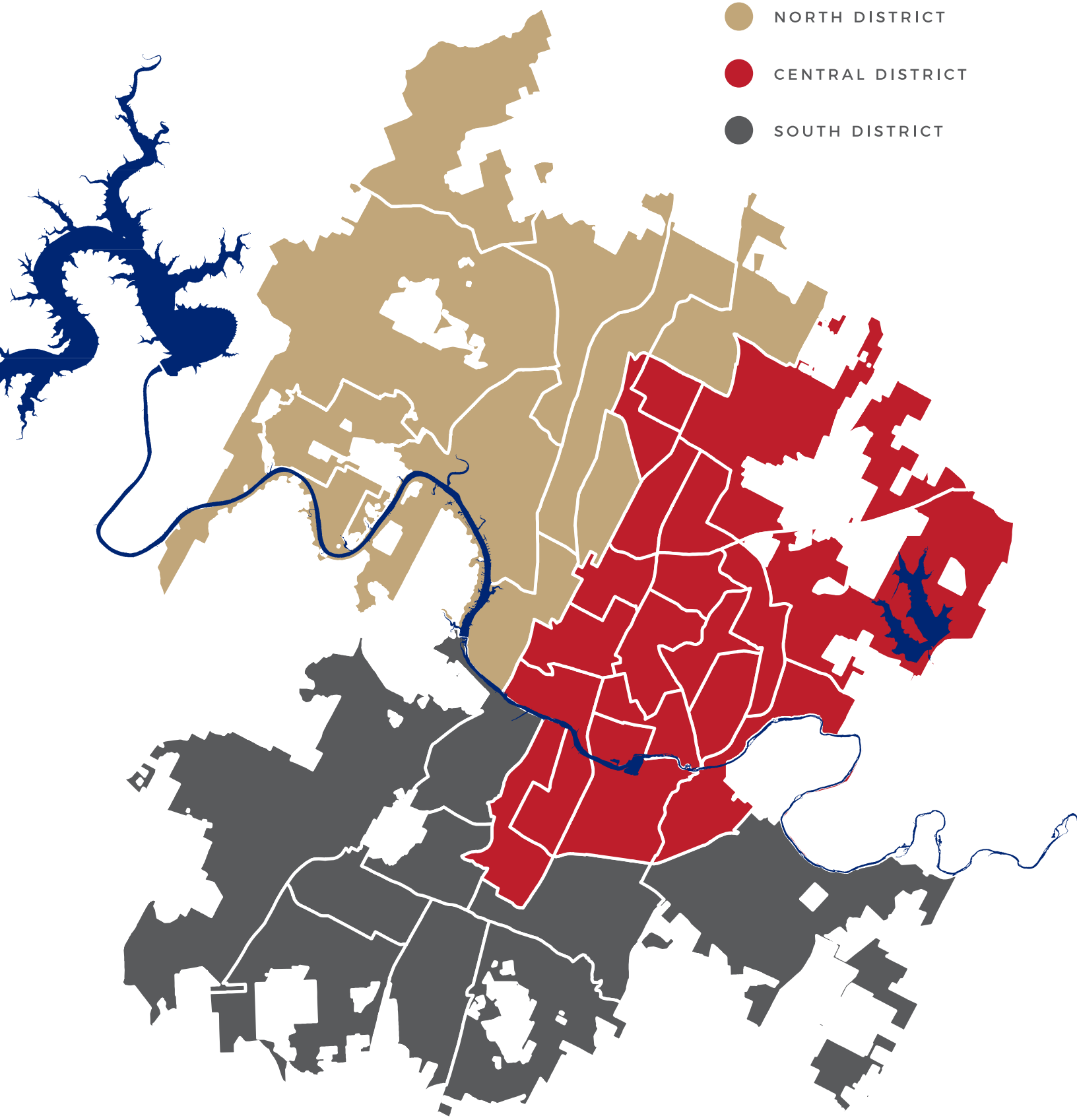
... OF BUILDING A BETTER AUSTIN,  
TOGETHER, THROUGH CODE EDUCATION,  
COLLABORATION AND ENFORCEMENT.”

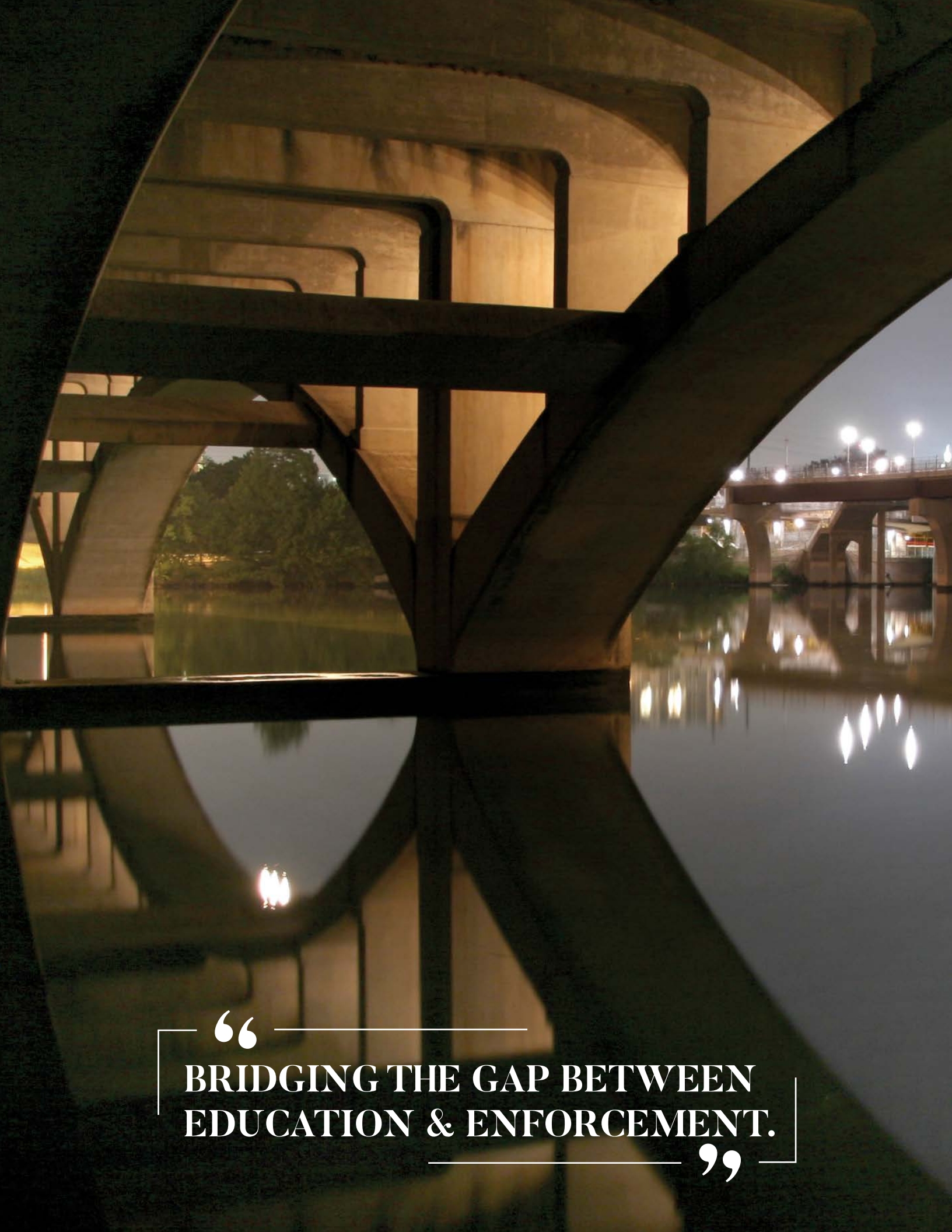
- Cora D. Wright  
*Director, Austin Code Department*



# SERVICE AREAS

“IN 2017 CODE DISTRICTS REALIGNED TO ENHANCE SERVICE DELIVERY”





“  
BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN  
EDUCATION & ENFORCEMENT.  
”



# BUDGET OVERVIEW

## “ PRESERVING AUSTIN’S QUALITY OF LIFE ”

The Fiscal Year 2017-18 budget is projecting revenue of \$23 million and expenditures of \$23 million. The Austin Code Department is an enterprise fund. Enterprise funds account for operations that are financed and operated in a manner similar to private business enterprises. Costs are financed or recovered through user charges. The department receives revenues from the Clean Community Fee, License and Registration fees, penalties and other fees. In Fiscal Year 2017, Austin Code received \$18 million in revenue. The Clean Community Fee represents 92 percent of Austin Code’s total revenue.

The department uses the revenues received to fund the **department programs** in the areas of investigations and compliance, involuntary code enforcement and support services. In Fiscal Year 2017, Austin Code Department expenditures totaled \$18.5 million.

- The **Investigations and Compliance** program investigates code complaints, ensures license and registration requirements are administered, and educates and facilitates voluntary compliance.
- The **Involuntary Code Enforcement** program resolves local property maintenance, land use and nuisance code violations committed by non-compliant property owners through involuntary enforcement. This program also provides administrative support to the Building and Standards Commission, Administrative Hearing process, as well as support for cases that are referred to Municipal Court and District Court.
- The **Support Services** program provides administrative and managerial support to the department in order to produce more effective services.



BUDGET OVERVIEW



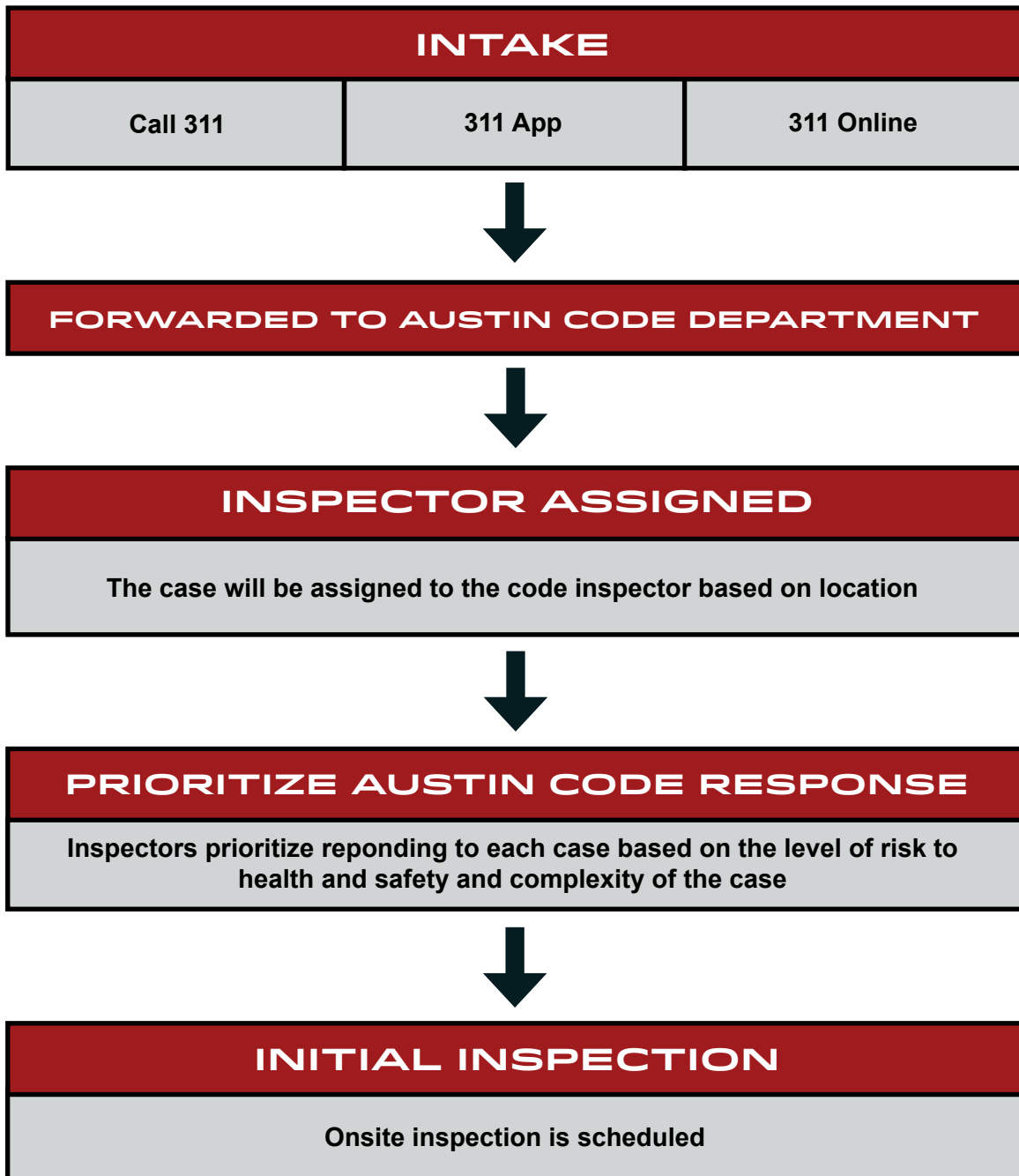
REVENUE  
**\$23 MILLION**

EXPENDITURES  
**\$23 MILLION**

FULL-TIME  
EMPLOYEES  
**146**

# CODE REQUEST PROCESS

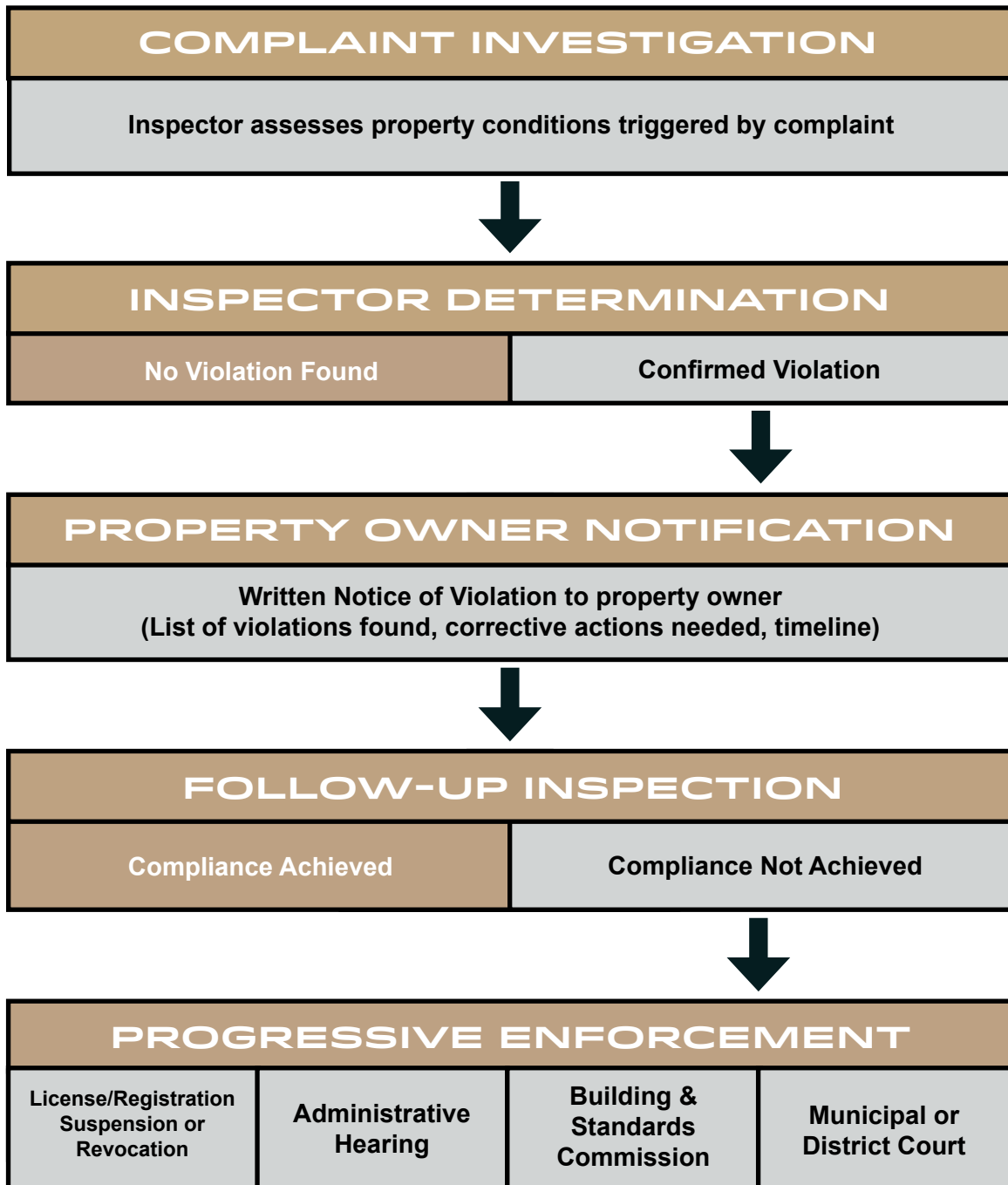
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# PATH TO RESOLUTION

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# CODE BY THE NUMBERS

“ ANNUAL PERFORMANCE MEASURES ”

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## 2018 KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

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In 2017, the Austin Code Department shifted the Key Performance Indicators to refocus our efforts on outcome-based measures. The following is an introduction to new Key Performance Indicators that will become the department's 2018 community report card:

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- **Percentage of citizen satisfaction with enforcement of local code.**
- **Percentage of substandard and dangerous structure confirmed violation cases at single-family properties resolved voluntarily.**
- **Percentage of substandard and dangerous structure confirmed violation cases at multi-family properties resolved voluntarily.**
- **Percentage of nuisance abatement confirmed violation cases resolved voluntarily.**
- **Percentage of operating without a license confirmed violation cases resolved voluntarily.**
- **Percentage of confirmed violation cases at commercial properties resolved voluntarily.**
- **Percentage of confirmed violation cases escalated to quasi-judicial proceedings that have met compliance.**

2017 CALLS FOR SERVICE FROM AUSTIN 3-1-1

**24,308**



**10,518**

CODE VIOLATIONS FOUND  
(MULTIPLE VIOLATIONS PER PROPERTY)

**5,620**

NOTICES OF VIOLATIONS  
(INDIVIDUAL PROPERTIES)

**95**

REGISTERED REPEAT  
OFFENDER PROPERTIES

**452**

CASES ESCALATED TO  
QUASI-JUDICIAL / JUDICIAL ENFORCEMENT

**159**

ADMINISTRATIVE HEARING

**84**

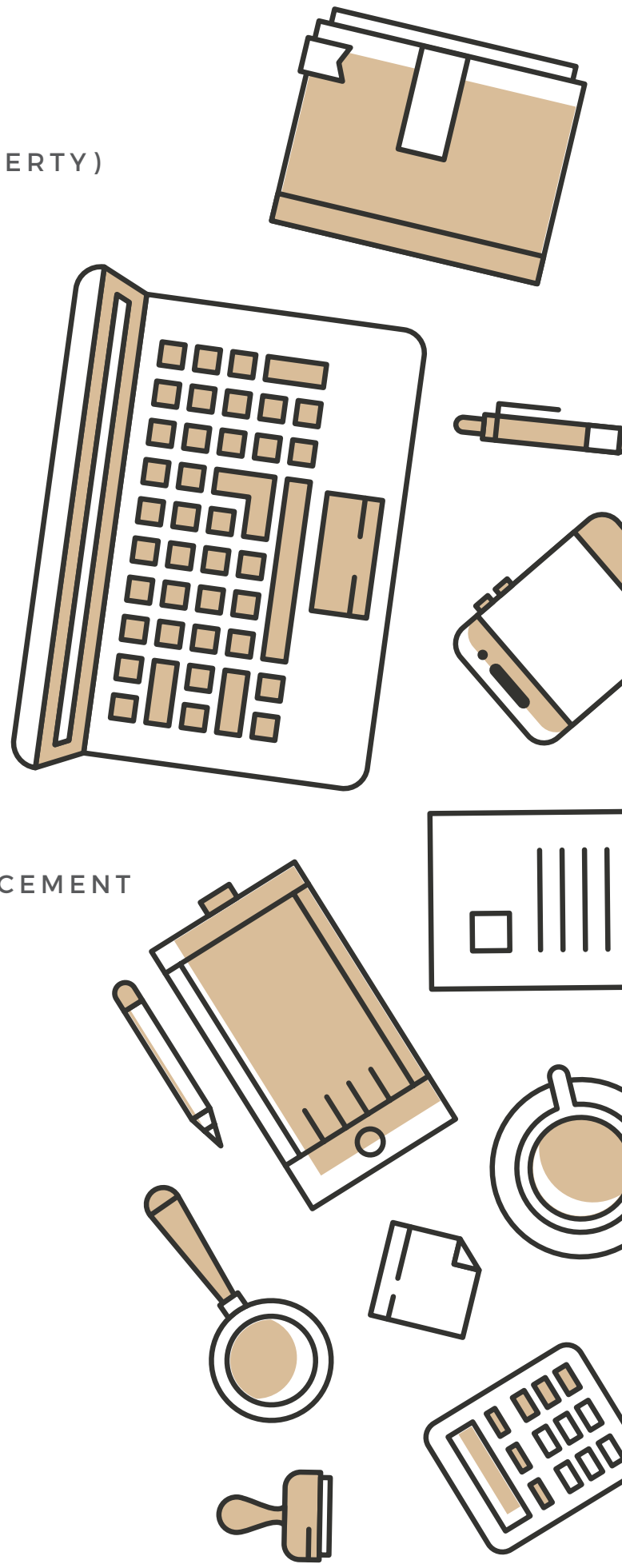
BUILDING AND  
STANDARDS COMMISSION

**207**

MUNICIPAL COURT

**2**

DISTRICT COURT



**AUSTIN CODE DEPARTMENT  
IS COMMITTED TO PROVIDING  
EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY  
EDUCATION...**





A person's silhouette is visible on the left side of the frame, standing on a sidewalk and looking towards a grassy area. In the middle ground, there is a concrete foundation with a circular opening, and a fence runs across the background. The scene is outdoors with trees and foliage visible in the upper and right portions of the image.

**...TO IMPROVE COMMUNITY  
AWARENESS AND BASIC  
UNDERSTANDING OF LOCAL CODE  
REQUIREMENTS.**



# SPECIAL EVENTS

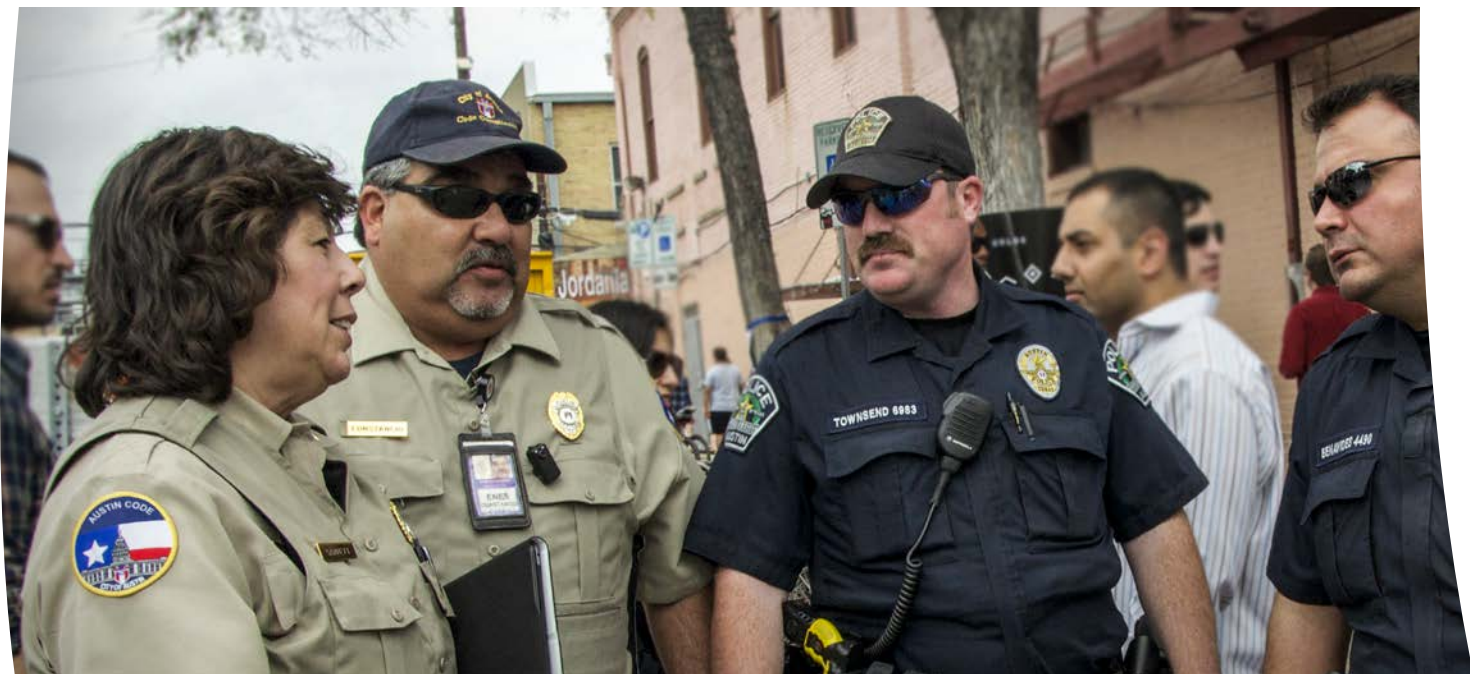
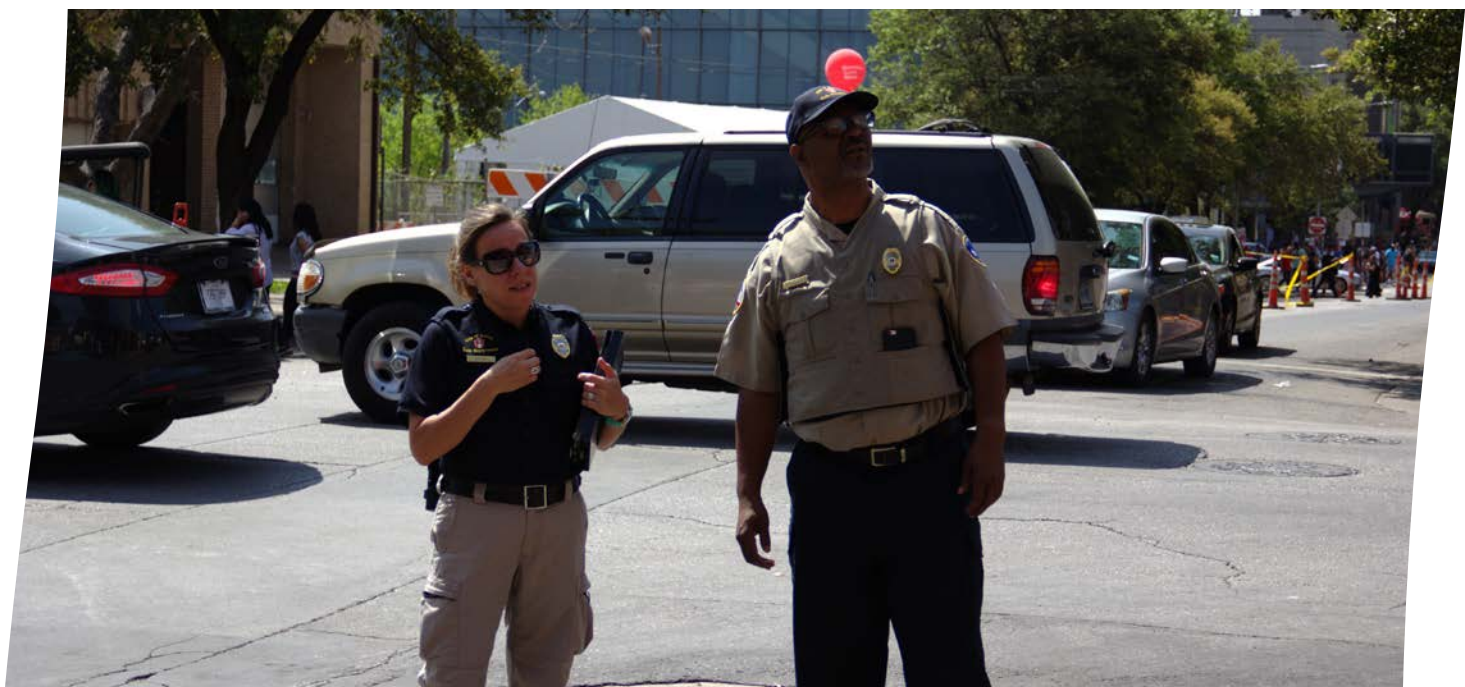
“COLLABORATING TO PROTECT AUSTIN RESIDENTS AND GUESTS”

The City of Austin is the Live Music Capital of the World, and behind the scenes of major music conferences and festivals, our Code Officers make sure people stay safe.

During large-scale special events hosted in Austin, Texas, the Austin Code Department is a major part of a safety team known as Public Assembly Code Enforcement (PACE). The PACE team includes Austin Police, Austin Fire and Austin Code. Code officers team with other public safety departments to assess event safety and emergency planning, and monitor and inspect event activity during the authorized event. In addition, they enforce event related codes that apply to erected temporary structures, safe entry and exit of music and assembly venues, work without permit, unauthorized pop-up venues and assemblies, illegal and unsafe signage and advertising, to name a few.





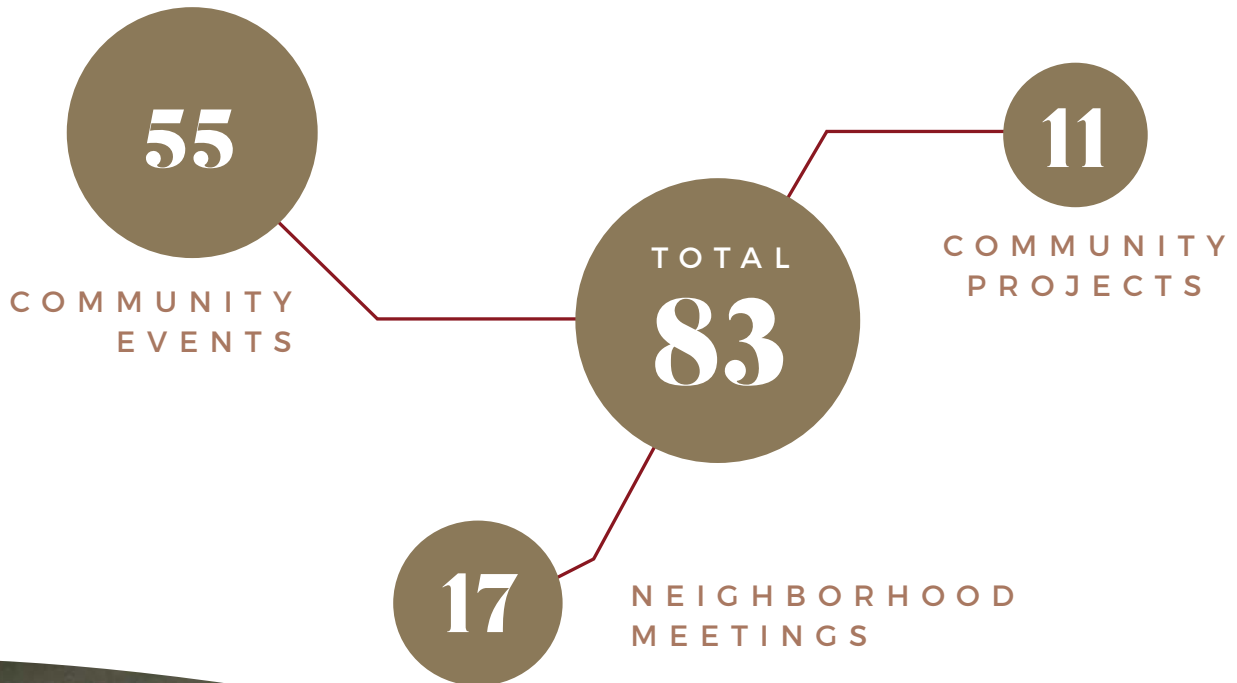




# CODE IN THE COMMUNITY

“BRINGING NEIGHBORHOODS TOGETHER”

The Austin Code Department participates in a number of community events each year that range from neighborhood association meetings, to health and safety fairs, career days at area schools, City Council member Town Hall meetings, and neighborhood cleanups. These events serve to fulfill the Austin Code goal of collaboration and code education in the communities served.



“ VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY ”

“

The Colony Park/Lakeside community has the pleasure of working with the Austin Code Department. Our Representative Dedic Knox and his supervisor, Elaine Garrett, work closely with our community, attending neighborhood meetings and other functions on a regular basis. Twice yearly, Dedic and Elaine, along with other City of Austin Departments, participate in a ride along with community members.

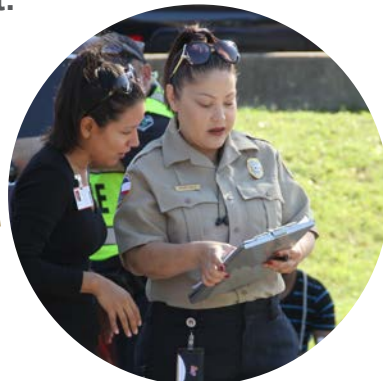
**- BARBARA SCOTT**

*Colony Park Neighborhood Association*



“

I would like to recognize two members of Code, Todd Wilcox and Hilda Martinez. I first met Mr. Wilcox when the balcony walkways collapsed at the Woodridge Apartments. I met Ms. Martinez when the tenants at Cross Creek Apartments lacked hot water. In my opinion, Mr. Wilcox and Ms. Martinez are very good examples of what public servants should be: people who do their jobs and serve us, the residents of Austin. Their attitudes, compassion and diligence in reaching out to our residents who are in substandard housing conditions are excellent.



**- RUBY ROA**

*Austin Women in Housing*



# BUILDING & STANDARDS COMMISSION

“PRESERVING AUSTIN’S QUALITY OF LIFE”

The Building and Standards Commission (BSC) was established to hear cases concerning alleged violations of the City of Austin housing and dangerous buildings regulations.

The BSC “shall have the powers and duties and comply with the procedures established by Texas Local Government, Chapter 54, Subchapter C (Quasi-Judicial Enforcement of Health and Safety Ordinances), Texas Local Government Code Chapter 214 (Municipal Regulation of Housing and Other Structures), Subchapter A (Dangerous Structures), and City Code Chapter 25-12, Article 9 (International Property Maintenance Code). See Section 2-1-122 of the Austin City Code”.

## Meetings:

Fourth Wednesday of the month at 6:30pm  
Austin City Hall | Boards and Commission, Room 1101



# CURRENT MEMBERSHIP

**Charles Cloutman, *Chair***

Nominated by: Council Member Ann Kitchen

**Jessica Mangrum, *Vice Chair***

Nominated by: Council Member Alison Alter

**Pablo Avila\***

Nominated by: Council Member Delia Garza

**Andrea Freiburger**

Nominated by: Council Member Kathie Tovo

**John Green\***

Nominated by: Council Member Greg Casar

**Michael King**

Nominated by: Council Member Jimmy Flannigan

**Melissa Orren**

Nominated by: Council Member Leslie Pool

**Natalya Sheddan**

Nominated by: Mayor Steve Adler

**Brian Talley**

Nominated by: Council Member Ellen Troxclair

**Wordy Thompson**

Nominated by: Council Member Sabino Renteria



\* NOT PICTURED ABOVE





## RICK RAMIREZ

INTERIM ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

“Austin Code professionals are entrusted with the responsibility of keeping our wonderful City safe. We do this by providing responsive quality services.”

## ANGELA MEANS

INTERIM ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

“At Austin Code, we take pride in providing quality services, after all, that is what the public expects from us. Preserving Austin’s quality of life is not just a slogan, it’s what we do.”



## ELAINE GARRETT

INTERIM ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

“Austin Code will continue to seek every opportunity to enhance our customer service, increase our visibility in the community and work with our stakeholders to improve residents’ quality of life.”









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# A NEW WAY FORWARD

“BUILDING A GREATER AUSTIN TOGETHER”

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“

Again, I want to for the record say that this administration, this directorship has made huge strides in straightening things up, in focusing on the issues at hand, and taking the bull by the horns. I'm very impressed, for the record. A breath of air, I think, has found the room and it's nice to see, it's nice to have. So, kudos. Great job.

**- CHARLES CLOUTMAN, CHAIRMAN**  
*BUILDING AND STANDARDS COMMISSION*

”

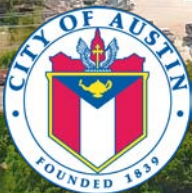






**AUSTIN**CODE  
DEPARTMENT

This report was produced by the Austin Code Department Code Education and Outreach Division.  
View the report online at: **[AustinTexas.gov/Code](https://austintexas.gov/code)**



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