

Sustaining & Preserving Austin's Creative Ecosystem

Cultural space permitting & code compliance support recommendations

The following recommendations seek to clarify, streamline, and lend transparency to the permitting and occupancy processes for cultural space in Austin, TX. These five recommendations are a set. The implementation of these five recommendations in unison would create an ecosystem of infrastructural support for cultural spaces who have historically struggled to navigate Austin's opaque and costly development services and code compliance processes. These recommendations will help diminish some of the barriers to information and compliance that currently exist for cultural spaces in Austin. The implementation of these recommendations will not solve the larger affordability issues that threaten cultural spaces and many others in Austin. However, unexpected costs and lost time due to permitting and code compliance confusion can and do threaten the existence of cultural spaces.

1. Designate an employee in an EDD division as a case manager or "go-to" coordinator for all arts and cultural space-related issues.

This person would be a human point of contact for new and existing cultural spaces dealing with issues related to building code, zoning, occupancy, and development. They would assertively advocate and coordinate on behalf of cultural spaces within the City of Austin's land use and building code ecosystem. This person would coordinate the other key players and coordination efforts outlined in the recommendations below.

2. Contract a code expeditor through the City to advise cultural spaces on code and occupancy-related issues.

This expeditor would provide accurate code, zoning, and permitting information and advice to arts and cultural spaces. By providing this as a contracted service, the City would remove the financial and time barriers and lack of access to accurate information about land use and building code and other occupancy-related considerations, which will save cultural spaces valuable time, money, and resources. This expeditor would also be a point of contact with the cultural space coordinator in EDD (Recommendation #1), on hand to answer and inform at each step of the process. The Cultural Arts Division might consider reallocating funds from the Capacity Building Program to pay for this contracted service.

3. Designate a "point person" for cultural space needs at each of the following departments: Development Services, Austin Code, and Planning and Zoning.

This person would be the "go-to" specialist within their department for needs and considerations having to do with cultural space in Austin. This does not need to be a new staff member. In order for this person to be meaningfully supported, top down buy-in and commitment from each department would need to be ensured.

SPACE

4. Hold a regularly scheduled interdepartmental meeting to coordinate ongoing and emergent issues related to supporting cultural spaces in Austin.

This meeting would be organized by the EDD cultural space coordinator, with active and assertive participation by the Development Services, Code, and Planning and Zoning cultural space “point people” (Recommendation #3).

5. Assertively pursue process transparency and clarity for cultural spaces navigating City of Austin building code, zoning, occupancy, and development pipelines.

Pursue transparency and accountability in the above recommendations and beyond. Ensure that City staff in the field who will come into contact with cultural spaces are aware of these contact points for cultural spaces, and that they can and do provide accurate information and direction so that these spaces can reach these services and points of contact quickly and successfully.