

Memorandum



CITY OF DALLAS

DATE March 14, 2025

TO Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

SUBJECT **Elm Thicket Resolution & Floral Farms/Lakewood Implementation**

This memorandum provides an update on the outstanding Elm Thicket-Northpark compliance efforts and highlights how the lessons learned from that event have resulted in improvements in internal processes to prevent similar occurrences in the future. The improved process is now being applied to ensure a smooth and accurate implementation of the Floral Farms Area Authorized Hearing and the Lakewood Conservation District-2 Expansion.

Elm Thicket Compliance Update

Between late 2022 and early 2024, permitting oversights in the Elm Thicket-Northpark neighborhood occurred following the adoption of revised zoning regulations under PD 67. In total, 34 permits were issued to applicants not in full compliance with the updated height, lot coverage, and roof design standards. These errors resulted from:

- Gaps in interdepartmental communication regarding ordinance implementation.
- Delays in integrating new zoning provisions into permit review systems and workflows.
- Insufficient training for plan reviewers on the amended regulations.

In early 2024, concerns raised by Elm Thicket-Northpark residents prompted PDD to conduct an internal investigation into issued permits within the neighborhood. This initial review uncovered specific inconsistencies between the permits and the recently amended PD 67 zoning provisions. Recognizing a potential systemic issue, PDD launched a comprehensive audit of all permits issued after the ordinance went into effect.

PDD has continued working with property owners to bring outstanding cases into compliance. As of today, one property remains out of compliance. A variance request has been filed and is scheduled to be heard by Board of Adjustment Panel A on May 20th.

Process Improvements

The lessons learned from Elm Thicket have resulted in major process improvements, which are now being applied to the Floral Farms Authorized Hearing and the Lakewood CD-2 Expansion to prevent similar oversights. These enhancements ensure a structured, transparent, and well-coordinated approach to zoning implementation across all departments.

1. Improved Departmental Coordination & Communication

- The merger of Planning & Urban Design and Development Services into the Planning and Development Department (PDD) has worked to improve internal communication and toward streamlining zoning and permitting workflows.

- Ordinance approvals, agendas, and City Council actions are distributed more efficiently and timely to all relevant teams decreasing delays in zoning implementation.

2. Delayed Implementation Timeline

- Unlike Elm Thicket, where zoning changes took immediate effect, the Lakewood CD-2 Expansion includes a delayed effective date of March 31, 2025 (approved by City Council on February 26, 2025).
- For larger-area cases with multi-layered design standards, the buffer period allows departments to finalize, publish, and ensure accessibility of zoning updates before enforcement begins, while also giving staff time to update GIS mapping, provide training, and communicate changes to both internal teams and external stakeholders.

3. Technology Enhancements & GIS Integrations

- GIS updates now provide direct access to zoning files, reducing reliance on separate databases.
- GIS zoning flags have been introduced for zoning changes and have already been implemented for Floral Farms and Lakewood CD-2 Expansion. These flags alert reviewers to new provisions and direct them to specific Chief Planners for clarification or questions.
- Internal zoning sites now provide bi-weekly ordinance updates, notifying PDD staff of upcoming regulatory changes before they take effect.

4. DallasNow Land Management System

- *DallasNow*, the City's new land management system launching in early May, will unify all of PDD's operations into a single system, allowing seamless tracking from a zoning request's origination (such as an authorized hearing) to permit review and ultimately to construction inspections.
- This system will improve workflow visibility both internally and to the public, reducing miscommunication and allowing real-time tracking of zoning applications, engineering reviews, permitting processes, and inspections.

5. Continued Staff Training and Quality Control

- Training for plan reviewers has been enhanced to ensure zoning changes are understood and properly applied.
- New quality control checks have been introduced to ensure compliance reviews align with newly adopted provisions before permits are issued.

These measures reflect PDD's commitment to more effective zoning implementation, improved transparency, and stronger internal controls. The Floral Farms area and Lakewood's CD-2 Expansion serve more closely as a model for how PDD will approach future zoning updates, ensuring clear communication, proper training, and an accurate transition process for both staff and the public.

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Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact Emily Liu, Director of Planning and Development, at yu.liu@dallas.gov.

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