



What Is Compatibility and Why Does It Matter?

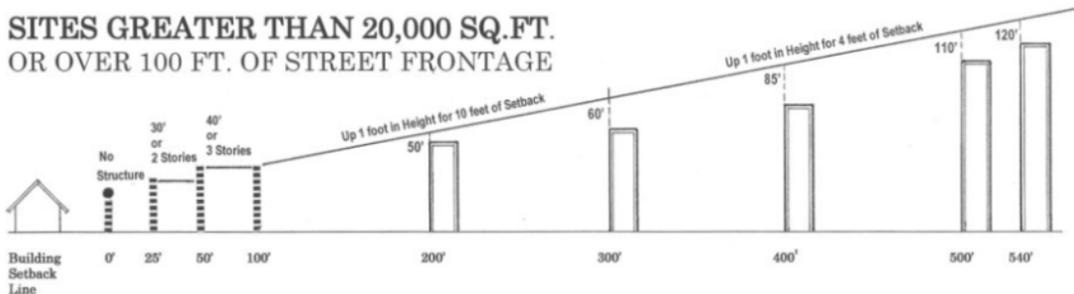
Com·pat·i·bil·i·ty: a state in which two things are able to exist or occur together without problems or conflict:

In 1986, the City of Austin adopted “[compatibility standards](#)” to ensure that new commercial or multi-family development did not tower above existing neighborhood single-family homes by limiting their maximum achievable height with modest setback buffers.

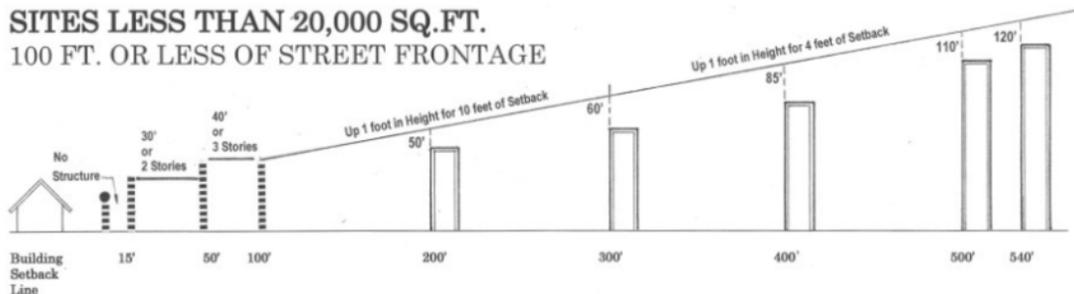
Below are the required compatibility standards under current city code. For all homes, a sixty foot building (six stories) has to be at least a football field away, or 300 feet; buildings 120 feet or higher must be at least 540 feet away, or one-tenth of a mile. The setback between the home and other structures varies based on whether the lot is 20,000 sq. ft or greater (a little less than ½ an acre).

COMPATIBILITY: HEIGHT + SETBACKS

SITES GREATER THAN 20,000 SQ.FT. OR OVER 100 FT. OF STREET FRONTAGE



SITES LESS THAN 20,000 SQ.FT. 100 FT. OR LESS OF STREET FRONTAGE



Notes:

Compatibility Standards are applicable to all property adjoining or across the street from a lot zoned or used as a SF-5 or more restrictive or within 540 feet from a lot zoned SF-5 or more restrictive.

Compatibility includes:

- (1) Height (2) Setback Provisions (3) Scale & Clustering (4) Buffering (5) Recognition of passive uses within flood plain (6) Design of Signs (7) Noise of Mechanical Equipment (8) Lighting (9) Parking & Driveways.

The standards not only regulate height and setbacks but also mass and form to be more compatible with surrounding smaller structures (for example not having a very long, tall unbroken building wall). These compatibility standards are triggered by zoning of SF-5 or more restrictive, i.e., townhomes or single family homes. CodeNEXT, the failed redevelopment plan for Austin, proposed reducing any height limitation, no matter how tall the building to a mere 50 feet from the home, creating incompatibility in the uses of the new structure and the existing homes.

In response to a recent [draft ordinance](#) for a “VMU-2” category which would allow 30 feet of additional height for a small increase in affordable housing, the Mayor and Council Member [Vela proposed amendments](#) exempting those increased heights from compatibility standards. City staff jumped on the bandwagon with a [presentation](#) claiming that compatibility standards constrained access to the height increases supported by real estate development interests. Their arguments ignored the fact that almost 750 acres of currently-zoned VMU properties (twice the size of downtown and larger than the Mueller development) are unconstrained by compatibility standards.

And speaking of Mueller – the “urbanist” neighborhood with “[a wide range of housing choices in order to create a new community of socially and economically diverse residents.](#)” the [illustrative plan](#) for the community illustrates baked in compatibility, with separation and setback for heights and types of housing.

Which brings us to the term supported by some members of city council and local real estate developers:

In·com·pat·i·bil·i·ty: the condition of two things being so different in nature as to be incapable of coexisting.

Incompatibility will create default transition zones, eroding existing communities in favor of increased developer profits, yet produce little affordable housing. It monetizes land for speculators at the expense of communities.