

# Glossary of Planning Terms

City of Houston Planning & Development Department



PLANNING &  
DEVELOPMENT  
DEPARTMENT

## **Blockface**

One side of a street, usually between two intersections. Think of it as all the homes or lots on one side of a street.

## **Building Line / Setback**

The invisible line that buildings can't cross. It keeps houses a certain distance from the street or property line to make neighborhoods look orderly and safe.

## **Development**

When land is built on or improved; for example, adding new homes, stores, sidewalks, or parks.

## **Minimum Lot Size**

The smallest piece of land that can be developed or sold separately. This rule helps keep the look and feel of a neighborhood consistent.

## **Plat / Platting**

A map showing how land is divided into lots. Platting is the process of officially submitting this with the City.

## **Replat**

Changing the way land is divided; like combining two lots into one or splitting one lot into two.

## **Zoning** (*Note: Houston does not have traditional zoning*)

Zoning usually means rules about what can be built where (homes, businesses, etc.). While Houston doesn't have formal zoning, we use development rules and programs to shape how areas grow.

## **Variance**

A special request to do something different from the normal rules; like building closer to the street or having a smaller lot than usually allowed. Planning Commission decides if it gets approved.

## **Public Hearing**

A meeting where residents can speak about a proposed project, rule change, or variance request.

## **Survey (Land Survey)**

A detailed map that shows where your property lines are. It's usually prepared by a licensed surveyor and helps figure out lot size and boundaries.

## **MUR (Mixed-Use Reserve)**

A type of lot that allows both residential and commercial use. That means you could have homes and small businesses on the same piece of land.

## **ADU (Accessory Dwelling Unit)**

A smaller, second home built on the same lot as a main house. Think: a garage apartment, backyard cottage, or mother-in-law suite. It can be rented out or used for family.

### **Unrestricted Reserve**

A piece of land with no special limits on how it can be used. The owner can use it for homes, businesses, or other purposes, depending on City rules and other approvals.

### **Restricted Reserve**

A piece of land with rules about how it can be used, or example, only for drainage, green space, or recreation. These restrictions are recorded and limit the future development.

### **POD**

POD is your go-to planner for the day. Someone you can call or email if you need help understanding planning rules or processes. In our department we have one dedicated for: Development Services, Permitting Center, Historic Preservation Office, Community and Regional Planning, and GIS.

### **GIS**

The team that creates and maintains Houston's official digital maps and location data. They manage everything from addresses, flood zones, emergency service boundaries, and more. 📞 **832-393-6555**

### **Development Services Division**

The team that reviews site plans, plats, and ensures developments meet City standards for lot size, setbacks, parking, landscaping, etc. 📞 **832-393-6624**

### **Permitting Center**

The central place to get your building permits, inspections, and licenses—all under one roof. They help you apply, review plans, and schedule inspections. 📞 **832-394-8849**

### **Historic Preservation Office**

Part of Planning & Development, this office protects historic structures and neighborhoods. They manage requests for designations, Certificates of Appropriateness, and guide property owners on preservation. 📞 **832-393-6556**

### **Community and Regional Planning**

This team looks at the big-picture planning: long-term neighborhood support, parking rules, lot sizes, street naming, and public engagement for Planning Department initiatives. 📞 **832-393-6637**