

“CODE ENFORCEMENT—A NEW WAY FORWARD...”

Cora D. Wright, Director, Presenter

Austin Code Department



The critical role that code enforcement agencies play in serving and protecting life-safety and the quality of life of property owners, tenants, businesses and entire cities has long been misunderstood and undervalued— and we are at fault! How in the world did we get here? Where are we going? What’s the future outlook?

It’s time to “*Tell our Story*”—time to re-position our agencies and re-focus our aim. This session is designed for strategic code enforcement leaders at all levels, including code enforcement officers who want to understand the value of their work toward building safer and greater cities! The session will highlight the *Austin, Texas—A New Way Forward* business model for building a strategic and high-performing code enforcement agency.



Cora D. Wright, Director
Austin Code Department—Austin, Texas

Serving the great city of *Austin*, Texas, the 11th largest city in the United States with an estimated population at 931,830 is nothing short of an honor. I've been privileged to commit well over 30 years of progressive service including executive leadership as Neighborhood Services Division Director under city-county inter-local agreement for the delivery of comprehensive public health and human service operations throughout 25 co-located city-county community facilities. Also served as the Assistant Director of Neighborhood Planning and Zoning with oversight of Neighborhood Service Planning and Housing and Zoning Enforcement divisions.

I served as the Assistant Director of the Austin Parks and Recreation Department in a number of capacities including executive oversight of Financial Services, Management Services and Internal Review.

Creation and oversight of the Office of Performance Management and Public-Private Partnerships offices which leveraged millions of dollars toward park development, cultural and recreational programming. Executive leadership over Grant and Contract Administration, Office of Special Events, Museums and Cultural Services, Park Planning and PARD Capital Improvement Program divisions. Two of many notable accomplishments include guiding the department toward achieving national park accreditation—the first in the state of Texas, and serving as Co-Chair of the city manager's African American Quality of Life-Cultural Committee.

The Director of Austin Code Department is an integral member the city's public safety team in collaboration with chiefs of fire, police, emergency medical services, emergency management services, municipal court and the medical director. Our collaborative focus is to fulfil the City of Austin Strategic Direction 2023—Safety Strategic Outcome: *“Being safe in our homes, at work, and in our community.”* As Austin Code Director, I conducted an organizational-wide scan resulting in recommendations to Council on how to transform Austin Code into a high-performing and responsive organization. Ultimately, Austin Code was shifted and re-focused to provide code education, collaboration and enforcement of local property maintenance, land use and environmental codes. By end of year one, following organizational re-alignment and re-focused performance standards and accountabilities at all levels of the organization, the department successfully achieved a \$3M (15%) increase to its operational budget and acquired 27.0 (23% increase) additional staff positions. By year two, Austin Code established code education as a priority, launched new programs, improved inspector response times, standardized compliance periods, instituted progressive enforcement standards, exponentially increased revenue through collection of fines and penalties, reset standards for case escalation to quasi-judicial and judicial enforcement resulting in an exceptionally high % of commission, administrative hearing and district court cases ruled in the City's favor.

My professional mission statement reflects the driving force behind my every professional appointment. *“I am committed to organizational excellence, operational transparency and strong public accountability which serve as motivating forces for strategic and results-oriented performance.”*

Director Wright is a graduate of the NFBPA Executive Leadership Institute and holds a Bachelor of Science Degree from Texas Woman's University at Denton and a Master of Education Degree from the University of Texas at Austin.