

OBJECTIVE DESIGN STANDARDS

October 2022

WHAT ARE OBJECTIVE DESIGN STANDARDS?

Objective Design Standards are defined by State law as standards that: “involve no personal or subjective judgement by a public official and are uniformly verifiable by reference to an external and uniform benchmark or criterion available and knowable by both the development applicant or proponent and the public official before submittal”

CA State Senate Bill 330 (Section 66300.7)



JOIN THE CONVERSATION

The City of Santa Barbara invites the community to join in preparing objective design standards by providing input to help shape the design for future residential development. These standards will reflect the community’s design priorities and complement the unique characteristics of Santa Barbara’s neighborhoods.

WHY ARE WE CREATING NEW STANDARDS?

Facilitate New Housing

California and Santa Barbara are experiencing a shortage of affordable housing. To address the housing crisis, the State legislature passed numerous laws in recent years aimed at increasing construction of additional housing units. Objective design standards help communities facilitate new housing by streamlining the design review and entitlement process.

Set Clear Expectations

Subjective design guidelines often contain ambiguous or unclear standards for the review of new development. Applicants and decision makers must interpret vague terminology such as “desirable qualities,” “compatible design,” or “appropriately sensitive”. This level of subjectivity often results in inconsistent interpretations, as well as prolonged review processes that impede the creation of new multi-unit housing and mixed-use development.

Quicker Processing Times

Objective design standards allow applicants to know beforehand what requirements apply to a proposed project before they submit. This makes it possible to provide a predictable outcome for housing developers – and a streamlined review process – while continuing to ensure new projects are sensitive and compatible with existing neighborhoods.

WHERE WILL THESE STANDARDS APPLY?



Objective design standards will apply in multi-unit zones that currently allow two or more residential units (not including accessory dwelling units); and commercial zones that allow residential use. Eligible projects must be either:

1) Multi-unit projects

(defined as 2 or more dwelling units)

2) Mixed-use projects

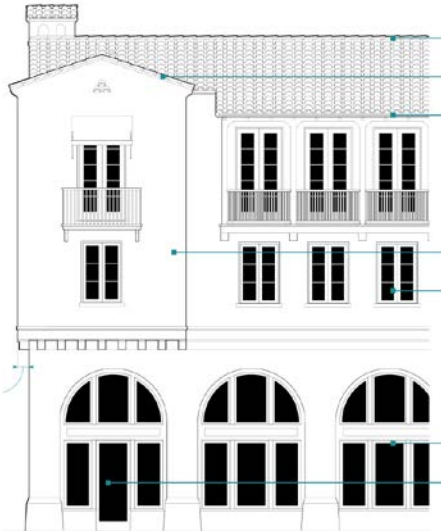
(at least 2/3 floor area designated for residential uses)

3) Streamlined Affordable Housing

(minimum percentage of affordable housing eligible for Senate Bill 35)

New standards will NOT apply to:

Single-unit homes, accessory dwelling units (ADUs), nonresidential-only projects, mobile home parks, or when discretionary approval is required on a project-by-project basis, such as for zoning modifications.



WILL THIS APPLY IN THE COASTAL ZONE?

Yes. However, all new objective standards must be consistent with the Coastal Act and the City's Local Coastal Program (LCP) policies. Objective design standards will be submitted to the Coastal Commission for certification following adoption by the City Council – but will not be applicable in the Coastal Zone until approved by the Coastal Commission.

CAN APPLICANTS PROPOSE A PROJECT THAT DOESN'T USE THESE STANDARDS?

Yes. The new standards are offered as a voluntary “opt-in” program for applicants seeking a streamlined review process. Applicants may propose an alternative design that deviates from objective design standards using the City's current discretionary review and design review process.

IS DESIGN REVIEW ELIMINATED?

No. Design review is still applicable. The City Charter requires design review for all multi-unit or mixed-use projects. For projects that choose to use the program, design review will still be required to evaluate conformance with the new standards, but the streamlined review process will be limited to objective standards.

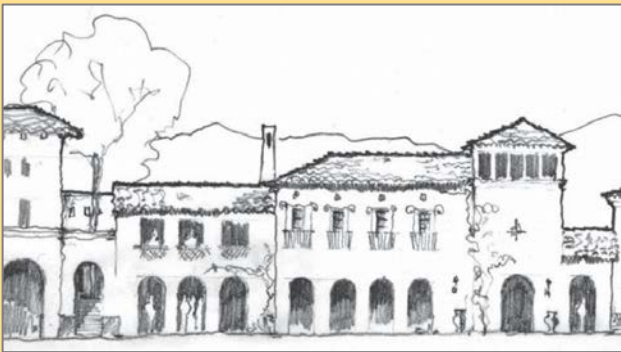


HOW IS A DESIGN GUIDELINE DIFFERENT FROM A DESIGN STANDARD?

The City of Santa Barbara's multiple design guidelines were developed to ensure high design standards are maintained in development and construction. Given that the State's requirement for objective design standards does not provide for personal interpretation of the standards, the City's subjective guidelines must be replaced with objective standards. Guidelines and standards are distinguished by their level of enforceability. In general, objective standards are regulatory requirements (e.g., "shall" or "must"), and guidelines are recommendations (e.g., "should" or "may").

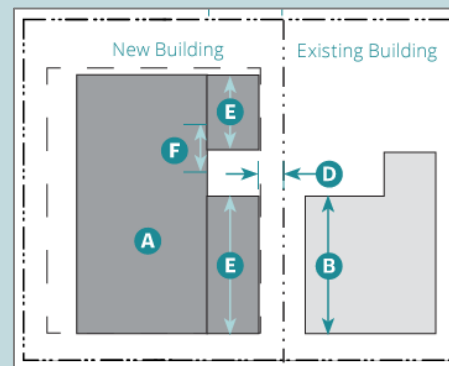
Subjective Language

"The design review process should involve an evaluation of the compatibility of proposed developments with Santa Barbara's distinctive architectural character, the overall neighborhood, and adjacent developments. Architects and designers must demonstrate thoughtful planning and consideration as to the degree of compatibility that their proposed projects exhibit."



Objective Language

"Within 30 feet of the side or rear property line, the new building massing shall not exceed 30 feet in height and a maximum footprint length of the largest adjacent building. This massing allows for multiple volumes of this or smaller size. Behind the 30 foot height/massing, the building is allowed up to the maximum height allowed (45 feet)."



HOW WILL THE NEW STANDARDS BE DEVELOPED?

In the Summer of 2021, the City used grant funds to hire **Opticos Design** to work with staff on the new standards. Opticos Design conducted interviews and a [community character analysis](#) of the existing patterns of development.

1 Existing Conditions

Opticos Design prepared an evaluation of the existing physical character of the project area, a study of current zoning standards, and a list of existing architectural styles by neighborhood

2 Work Group Meetings

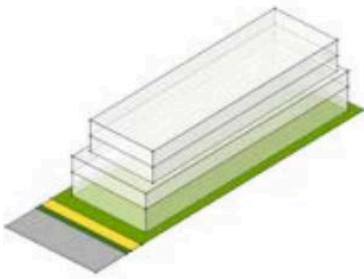
A Work Group consisting of members of the City's design review bodies, Planning Commission, and local American Institute of Architects meet to guide the project and provide input on the design ideas

3 Public Engagement

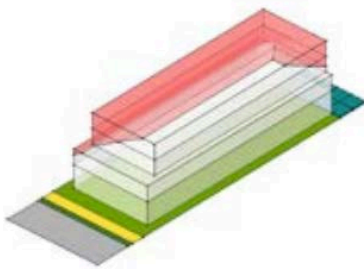
The draft document will be circulated for public input. There will also be community outreach including surveys, videos, and public hearings as part of the City's adoption process

Zoning Envelope

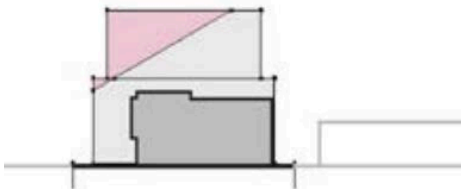
Setbacks and maximum height

**Zoning Envelope**

Open yard and solar access height limitation

**Comparison**

Zoning envelope and approved project



WHAT DESIGN ELEMENTS NEED TO BECOME OBJECTIVE STANDARDS?

Historically, the City has relied on a combination of **zoning standards**, which define the maximum building envelope, and **design guidelines**, which establish the building size, form, and style, to ensure new projects will be compatible with the community's aesthetic standards.

To replace the City's subjective design guidelines, new objective design and development standards will be consolidated into a single document that will regulate the form of buildings at a sufficient level of detail so the community can be confident that what will be built will be appropriate.

KEY DESIGN TOPICS

- **Building Envelope:** Lot Size, Height, Setbacks or Stepbacks
- **Site Design & Massing:** Transitions from Adjacent Properties, Maximum Building Length, Orientation, Parking Type and Location
- **Building Design & Articulation:** Frontage Types, Ground Floor, Entries, Façade/Plane Break, Roof Forms, Open Space, Building Type
- **Building & Landscape Details:** Materials, Color, Awnings, Screening and Fencing, Exterior Lighting, Signage, Landscaping
- **Architectural Styles:** Craftsman, Mediterranean, Contemporary

WHAT TYPE OF HOUSING SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED?

Growing demand for a walkable way of living requires a greater variety of housing choices. Conventional zoning often creates barriers to enable a full range of housing types, especially smaller, house-scale, buildings with multiple units – such as duplexes, fourplexes, and cottage courts. To remove these barriers and encourage diverse housing options, the new objective standards will take a form-based approach.

Form-based codes (FBCs) are an alternative to conventional zoning that differ mostly by focusing on the form of the buildings as they shape the public space, rather than focusing on land use. The new FBC will be incorporated as a stand-alone Title of the City's Municipal Code.

OVERVIEW OF GUIDING LEGISLATION

Legislative Solutions to the Housing Crisis

Recent State Legislation requires subjective design guidelines be replaced with objective standards to facilitate housing production and housing choice for certain eligible housing projects.

Housing Crisis Act (SB 330, 2019)

SB 330 allows a housing developer to submit a preliminary application to “freeze” the fees and standards that apply to a project before a full application submittal is assembled. Local agencies cannot disapprove an eligible housing development project if the project is consistent with objective standards unless there is a significant health and safety impact.

Affordable Housing Streamlined Approval Process (SB 35, 2017)

SB 35 creates an opt-in program for developers that allows a streamlined ministerial approval process for certain projects. Eligible developments must include a specified level of affordability. The process created by SB 35 relies on objective design standards.

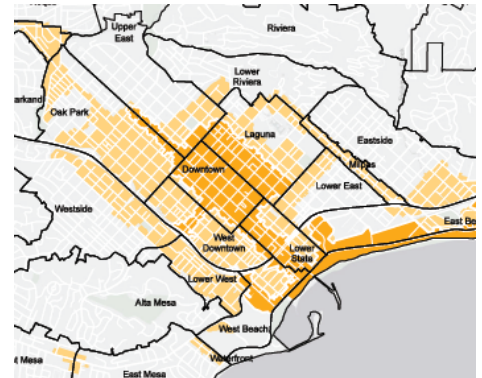
LIMITED ROLE OF PUBLIC HEARINGS

SB 330 and SB 35 both place additional limitations on public hearings.

- **SB 330** prohibits an agency from conducting more than **five public hearings** if a proposed housing development project complies with the applicable, objective standards in effect at the time an application is deemed complete. The City must consider the project for approval at any of the five hearings.
- **SB 35** explicitly requires cities and counties to provide a streamlined ministerial approval process for eligible affordable housing projects – it allows **one public oversight hearing** strictly focused on assessing compliance with criteria required for streamlined projects.

CEQA STREAMLINING

Projects eligible for streamlining under **SB 330** are not considered ministerial by statute and may require technical studies to provide substantial evidence that there are no environmental impacts. Projects eligible for the streamlining provisions of **SB 35** are considered ministerial and are not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).



RESOURCES

Housing and Community Development (HCD)

HCD develops policies, provides resources, and conducts research and analysis of California’s housing needs. Technical guidelines for both SB 35 and SB 330 are provided online at www.hcd.ca.gov

SB 35 Design Standards

In 2021, City Council adopted the City’s first objective design standards for SB 35 projects. When the new Objective Design Standards are adopted, they will be available for SB 35 projects. For more information:

SantaBarbaraCA.gov/SB35

Objective Design Standards

Learn more about the City’s new Objective Design Standards project and subscribe for bulletin updates online at:

SantaBarbaraCA.gov/SBDS

HOW LONG WILL THIS PROJECT LAST?

In early 2021, the City was awarded a State grant to fund this project. City staff are currently collaborating with the consultant on draft standards and meeting with the Work Group for input on specific topic areas. Final standards are expected to be presented for adoption by the **Summer of 2023**.

WHO IS AFFECTED BY THIS PROJECT?

The lack of affordable housing and diverse housing choices affects **everyone**—particularly in walkable communities like Santa Barbara.

Housing advocates and developers want a streamlined review process that decreases the cost and delivery rate of housing. Residents and environmental groups want standards that result in quality design in line with community expectations. Architects and advisory boards want to promote creativity and avoid producing monotonous or undesirable development.

To meet the City's Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA), over 8,000 new residential units are needed over the next 8 years. Community feedback is invited on these standards to discuss ways in which these standards can contribute to a range of compatible, appropriate housing options.

DOES THIS REPLACE EXISTING ZONING?

No, objective standards will not replace existing zoning or change the use allowed. These standards will serve as a supplement to the Zoning Ordinance, applied to multi-unit housing projects that meet State-mandated criteria.

WHAT IF THE CITY DOES NOT ADOPT?

If the City does not adopt objective design standards, the City is limited to considering existing, limited, objective standards in the Zoning Ordinance. The City has no objective standards specific to the form and architectural style of buildings and would not be able to apply any subjective design guidelines.

HOW CAN I PROVIDE INPUT?

Sign up online at SantaBarbaraCA.gov/SBDS for the Objective Design Standards bulletin to stay informed of meeting dates and draft work products. For additional questions please email the City's Housing Initiatives Staff at SBDS@SantaBarbaraCA.gov

