



City Council
February 24, 2026

Item #6 RTC 26-79
Zoning Code Update to Add
Objective Design Standards

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Objective Design Standards



City of Santa Clara
The Culture of Values Pledge

Agenda

- Request
- Background
- Objective
- Applicability
- Implementation Plan
- The Standards
 - Changes since Study Session
- Public Outreach
- CEQA Evaluation
- Recommendation

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Request

Action to waive first reading and introduce the Citywide Objective Design Standards for Multi-Family and Residential Mixed-Use Projects Ordinance updating the Santa Clara Zoning Code.

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Background

Why have Objective Design Standards?



California laws requiring Objective Design Standards for the review of housing projects

- ODS are predictable, user-friendly, enforceable, enabled by the State as a toolkit to **preserve local control** and provides the standards that can implement the City's urban design vision.
- Retain local control and community character
- Further Santa Clara Housing Element Policy A-3: "Utilize objective design standards to streamline the housing development process."

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Objective Design Standards



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Background

What is an Objective Design Standard?

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 the public official before submittal” (*Government Code Section 65913.4 & 66300(a)(7)*)

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Objective Design Standards



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Objective

The objective design standards will do the following:

- Provide **clear, objective, and measurable** standards for multi-family and residential mixed-use projects citywide
- **Streamline** project review of housing, in accordance with state law
- Ensure buildings are **appropriate** to their surroundings and environment
- Promote thoughtful, **context-sensitive site design**
- Maintain and enhance Santa Clara’s built environment through **quality architectural design**; and
- Promote a **pedestrian scale** urban environment that enriches the quality of life of its citizens

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Objective Design Standards

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Applicability

What projects are subject to objective design standards?



Townhouses



Wrap – Style
Multi-Family/Residential
Mixed-Use



Podium – Style
Multi-Family/Residential
Mixed-Use

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Implementation Plan

Phase I : Using Existing Standards

- Identified existing standards from Specific Plans & Downtown Precise Plan
 - These standards are already vetted by the community & decision makers
 - These were adopted for areas where we anticipated development, however we are seeing development proposals for areas outside of the specific plans.
 - Based on state law, we need to have these standards in place before applications are submitted for areas outside of the specific plan and precise plan areas to be applicable.
- Picked a collective set of standards that work cohesively and are achievable
- Phase II: Gaps were identified in the standards to work on
- Phase II: Conduct robust developer and community outreach

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The Standards

The objective design standards are organized into three main sections:

- Site Design
- Building Design
- Pedestrian Level Design

Chapter 18.27 – Objective Design Standards for City-wide Multi-Family and Residential Mixed-Use Projects

18.27.010 – Introduction	2-71
18.27.020 – Site Design	2-74
18.27.030 – Building Design	2-76
18.27.040 – Pedestrian Level Design	2-83*

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The Standards

Examples:

D. Open Space Design

1. Podium – Style Building
 - a. Podium – Style buildings shall have outdoor spaces, such as on-site plazas, interior courtyards, patios, terraces and gardens.
 - b. Podium – Style buildings shall have privately owned public open space of at least 15 feet wide and 900 square feet in size.

Figure 2-19
Open Space Design – Podium – Style Buildings

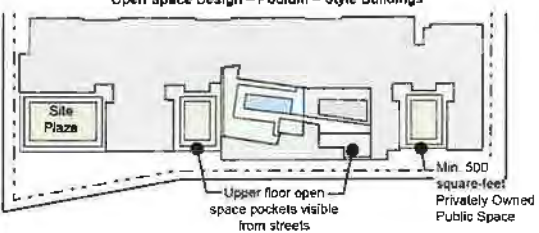
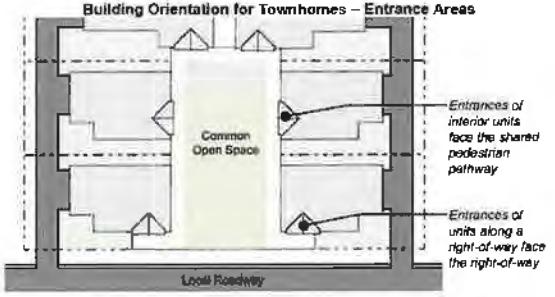


Figure 2-15
Building Orientation for Townhomes – Entrance Areas



2. Primary Entrances. Primary entrances shall feature at least two of the following:
 - a. Architectural features, such as a prominent tower feature or a peaked roof form, and/or a variation in building color/materials
 - b. Recess or projection
 - c. Pedestrian weather protection (i.e. canopy, overhang, or arcade)
 - d. Streetscape including outdoor patio, integral planters, or wing walls that incorporate landscaped areas and/or places for sitting

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Changes Since November 12, 2025 Planning Commission Study Session

The format was updated to follow the SCCC format style.
References describing the origin of the standard has been removed.

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I. Purpose and Goals
This section contains standards to ensure that buildings are designed to be functional, well-integrated, and aesthetically pleasing, and that they contribute to the overall character and quality of the community.

II. Massing
Building length is defined as the maximum length of a building measured parallel to the street frontage. The maximum building length shall be determined by the maximum lot width, less the required setbacks, and shall not exceed the maximum building length specified in the table below.

Building Type	Maximum Building Length (feet)
Single-Family Detached	35
Single-Family Attached	40
Multi-Family Detached	45
Multi-Family Attached	50
Commercial	60
Industrial	75
Office	80
Public	90
Religious	100
Healthcare	110
Education	120
Government	130
Other	140

18.27.030 - Building Design

A. Purpose and Goals. This section provides architectural design standards to create functional and welcoming human-scaled buildings that blend well with their surroundings and support active streets and public spaces.

B. Massing

- Building Length.** To create a more interesting and walkable public realm, individual buildings shall be no longer than 150 feet in length, except as follows. For those buildings that are longer than 150 feet in length, a building notch shall be provided on the portion starting at the street level and extending to the roof, for the entire height of the facade, to break up the massing. The building notch shall have a minimum dimension of 25 feet in width and 10 feet in depth.

**Figure 2-8
Massing - Building Length**

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Planning Commission Feedback

- November 11, 2025 Planning Commission Study Session
- January 14, 2026 Planning Commission Public Hearing, approve
- Gaps identified by the Planning Commission were the following:
 - More Prescriptive Architectural Standards by Building Type (Multiplex, Courtyard, Mid-Rise, & etc.)
 - Enhance Open Space Standards
 - More Transitional Zone Standards between Building Type
- This feedback will be incorporated into Phase II of the workplan

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Public Outreach

- A newspaper notice was published in the February 11, 2026, issue of the Santa Clara Weekly describing the proposed adoption of the Citywide Objective Design Standards. One comment has been received.
- Public contact was made by posting the City Council agenda on the City's official-notice bulletin board outside City Hall Council Chambers.

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CEQA Evaluation

- The adoption of the Citywide Objective Design Standards is an implementation action of the 2023 Housing Element for which the City prepared an Addendum to the 2010-2035 General Plan Environmental Impact Report (EIR).
- The Addendum indicated that the adoption of the Housing Element, and its implementing actions, would not result in environmental impacts beyond those described in the General Plan Update EIR.
- The recommended actions for adoption of the Objective Design Standards fall within the scope of the adopted Addendum.

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Recommendation

Staff recommends that City Council:

1. Determining the project to be consistent with the January 31, 2023 Addendum for the 2023 Housing Element pursuant to CEQA.
2. Waive First Reading and Introduce the Citywide Objective Design Standards Ordinance.

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