



Planning Commission

January 14, 2026

**Item 3: RTC25-1602,
Objective Design Standards
Phase I**

Alex Tellez, Assistant Planner



Agenda

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



Request

Provide a recommendation to the City Council to adopt the Citywide Objective Design Standards for Multi-Family and Residential Mixed-Use Projects as Chapter 18.27 of the Santa Clara City Code (“SCCC”).

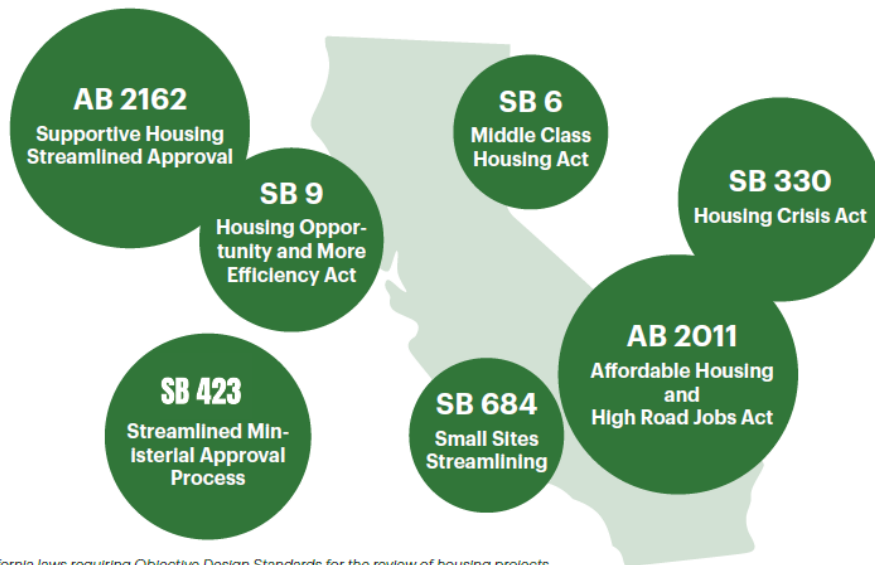


Background

- **Definition**
 - 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)*)
- **Santa Clara Housing Element Policy**
 - Policy A-3: Utilize objective design standards to streamline the housing development process.

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.

Applicability

What projects are subject to objective design standards?



Townhouses



Wrap – Style
Multi-Family/Residential
Mixed-Use



Podium – Style
Multi-Family/Residential
Mixed-Use



Implementation Plan

Phase I of II (Using Existing Standards)

- Identify 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
- Gaps were identified in the standards to work on in Phase II



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



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

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|
| | 2-71 |
| 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" |

Changes Since 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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Building Design

I. 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.

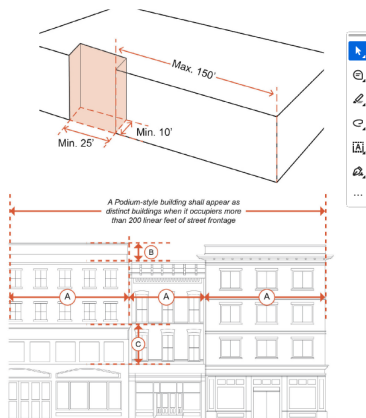
II. Massing

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

- Massing Increment Dimensional Standards

Table 2: Massing Increment Dimensional Standards

| Objective Design Standard | Dimensions |
|---|-----------------------------|
| A. Massing Increment (max.) | 150 feet |
| B. Facade Height Difference between Massing Increments (min.) | 10% of Lesser Facade Height |
| C. Building Base Height Difference between Massing Increments | 3 feet |



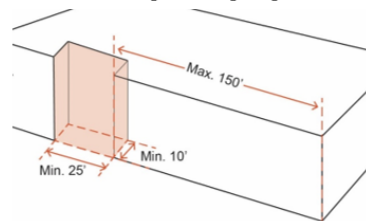
18.27.030 – Building Design

- 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.

- 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 podium starting at the street level and extending to the roof, for the entire height of the façade, to break up the massing. The building notch shall have a minimum dimension of 25 feet in width and 10 feet in depth.

Figure 2-9
Massing – Building Length





Public Outreach

- A newspaper notice was published in the December 23, 2025, issue of the Santa Clara Weekly describing the proposed adoption of the Citywide Objective Design Standards. No comments were received.
- Public contact was made by posting the Planning Commission agenda on the City's official-notice bulletin board outside City Hall Council Chambers.



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. At the conclusion of the public hearing on January 26, 2023, the Planning Commission voted to recommend that the City Council approve the Addendum, and on January 31, 2023, the City Council adopted the Addendum. The recommended actions all fall within the scope of the adopted Addendum.



Recommendation

Staff recommends the Planning Commission recommend approval to the City Council:

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



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