



Planning Commission

November 12, 2025

**Item 3: RTC25-996,
Objective Design Standards
Study Session**

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Agenda

- Background
 - Definition
 - Why have Objective Design Standards (“ODS”)
- ODS Applicability
- Drafting & Implementation Plan
 - Phase I (Using existing ODS from Planning Documents)
 - Phase II (Creating new ODS to fill gaps in standards)
- Draft Document
- Discussion
- Conclusion

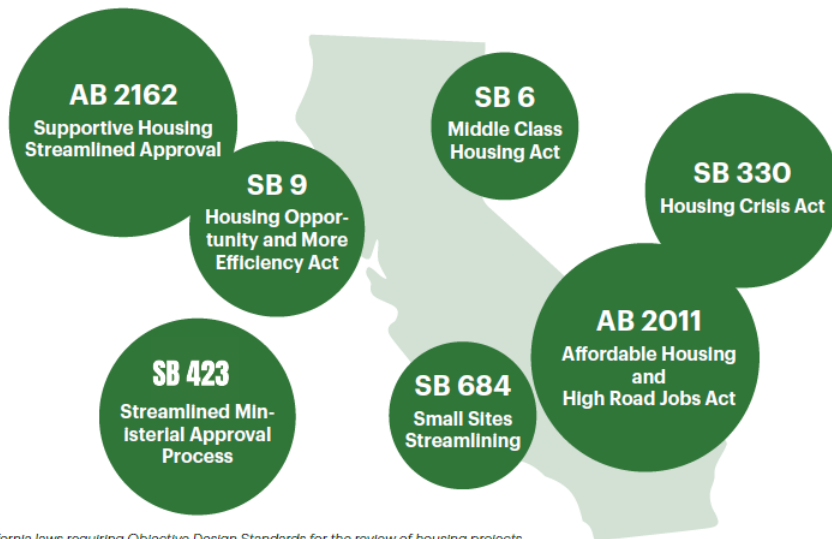


Background

- **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



Drafting & Implementation Plan

- **Phase I (Using Existing Standards)**
 - Identify existing standards from Specific Plans & Downtown Precise Plan
 - These standards are already vetted by community & decision makers
 - Draft a collective set of standards that work cohesively
 - Identify gaps in the standards
 - Incorporate standards as a Zoning Code Update for citywide implementation
- **Phase II (Incorporating New Standards to Fill in Gaps)**
 - Draft new standards with help from a consultant (RFP)
 - Conduct community outreach aligned with City's Outreach Policy
 - Incorporate new standards through Zoning Code Update, augmenting the Phase I standards



Draft Document

- **The draft 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



Draft Document

- The draft objective design standards are organized into three main sections:
 - Site Design, Building Design and Pedestrian Level Design

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Draft Document

3 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.

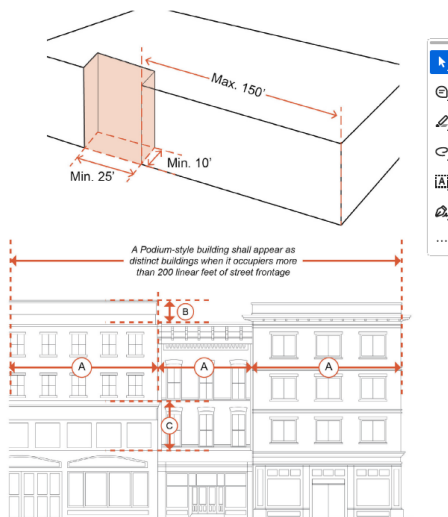
II. Massing

1. 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)

2. 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



- The Draft references the Specific Plan where the standard originated for reference.
- Once adopted, the organization of the document will change to reflect the Zoning Code organization and references will be removed.



Discussion

- Any questions on the Objective Design Standards
- Have you identified gaps in the standards (gaps will be incorporated in Phase II).



Conclusion

- **Next Steps**
 - Incorporate Commission's feedback into the ODS - **November**
 - Return to Planning Commission for City Council Recommendation on a Zoning Code Update- **December**
 - Bring the Commission's recommendation to City Council for adoption - **January**



City of Santa Clara

The Center of What's Possible

