



DISCUSSION ITEMS

Agenda Item # 1

AGENDA REPORT SUMMARY

Meeting Date: June 30, 2020

Subject: Objective Standards-City Council Direction Setting Meeting

Prepared by: Guido F. Persicone, Planning Services Manager

Reviewed by: Jon Biggs, Community Development Director

Approved by: Chris Jordan, City Manager

Attachments:

1. Lisa Wise Consulting (LWC) and Opticos Design Powerpoint Presentation
2. Summary of Interviews with Project Stakeholders

Initiated by:

City Council Goal

Fiscal Impact:

This meeting does not have a fiscal impact on the City as the consultant contract was previously approved by the Council on March 17, 2020.

Environmental Review:

A planning study is statutorily exempt from environmental review per the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Section 15262

Policy Question(s) for Council Consideration:

- Will this effort result in preparation of a development code that will provide adequate and appropriate direction that can be relied on by the community to guide change in Los Altos?

Summary:

- City staff and the consultants (Lisa Wise Consulting and Opticos) would like direction from the City Council regarding the objective standards project so that a detailed annotated objectives standards framework can be presented to the City Council no later than August.

Staff Recommendation:

Review the presented material and provide direction on the major themes identified by the consultant for the objective standards project.



Subject: Objective Standards-City Council Direction Setting Meeting

Purpose

To prepare an objective zoning standard to guide future development in Los Altos.

Background

On March 17, 2020, the City Council authorized a contract with the consultant team (Lisa Wise Consultant and Opticos Design) to prepare objective zoning standards to help guide future development in the City in light of recent changes to state law.¹ While the contract was approved by the City Council, a subcommittee was formed of councilmembers Bruins and Peppers to iron out the project schedule and the final language of the agreement. After two meetings in April, the contract was ready for signature and fully executed by the Community Development Department on April 30, 2020. Since April 30, 2020, the consulting team has conducted a thorough background assessment of relevant multifamily and residential mixed-use objective design standards including but not limited to the General Plan, the Housing Element, the Zoning Code and the Downtown Design Guidelines among other relevant documents and reports.

In addition to reviewing a voluminous amount of background data, on June 10th and June 11th approximately 30 interviews were conducted with key project stakeholders including local architects, city staff, community members and downtown business owners. The key findings of these interviews have been tabulated and summarized in Attachment 2 (Stakeholder Memo).

The purpose of the June 30, 2020 meeting is to provide the City Council the broad themes that have been garnered from a review of the existing Los Altos codes and from comments made by the stakeholders. At the conclusion of this meeting, City staff is seeking direction from the City Council so that an annotated objectives standards framework can be presented to the City Council in August. This document will serve as an outline for the project and will be enhanced as the project moves toward completion in the Fall of 2020. It is recommended that a special City Council meeting just for this project be scheduled in August.

Three Month General Project Timeline



¹ See SB 330, SB 35, AB 1485 and AB 881 for modifications to State law that require more clear zoning standards moving forward.



Subject: Objective Standards-City Council Direction Setting Meeting

Options

- 1) Listen to the presentation from the consultant team and City staff and provide direction on the next steps for the objective standards project.
- 2) Direct that a special meeting of the City Council be scheduled in August.

Advantages: If clear direction is provided the project can be completed by October 2020.

Disadvantages: There is no disadvantage in providing more concise objective zoning standards.

- 3) Continue the item to another City Council meeting

Advantages: There is no advantage to delaying review of this project.

Disadvantages: Completion of the project by October, a City Council priority, could be jeopardized.

Recommendation

The staff recommends Option 1.



Los Altos Objective Design Standards Direction Setting Presentation

City Council Study Session | June 30, 2020



Introduction

City of Los Altos

- Guido Periscone, Planning Services Manager
- Jon Biggs, Community Development Director

Consulting Team

- **LWC**
 - Lisa Wise
 - Monica Szydlik
- **Opticos Design**
 - Drew Finke
 - Erick Bernabe



Agenda

1

Project Overview

2

Stakeholder Interviews

3

Existing Framework

4

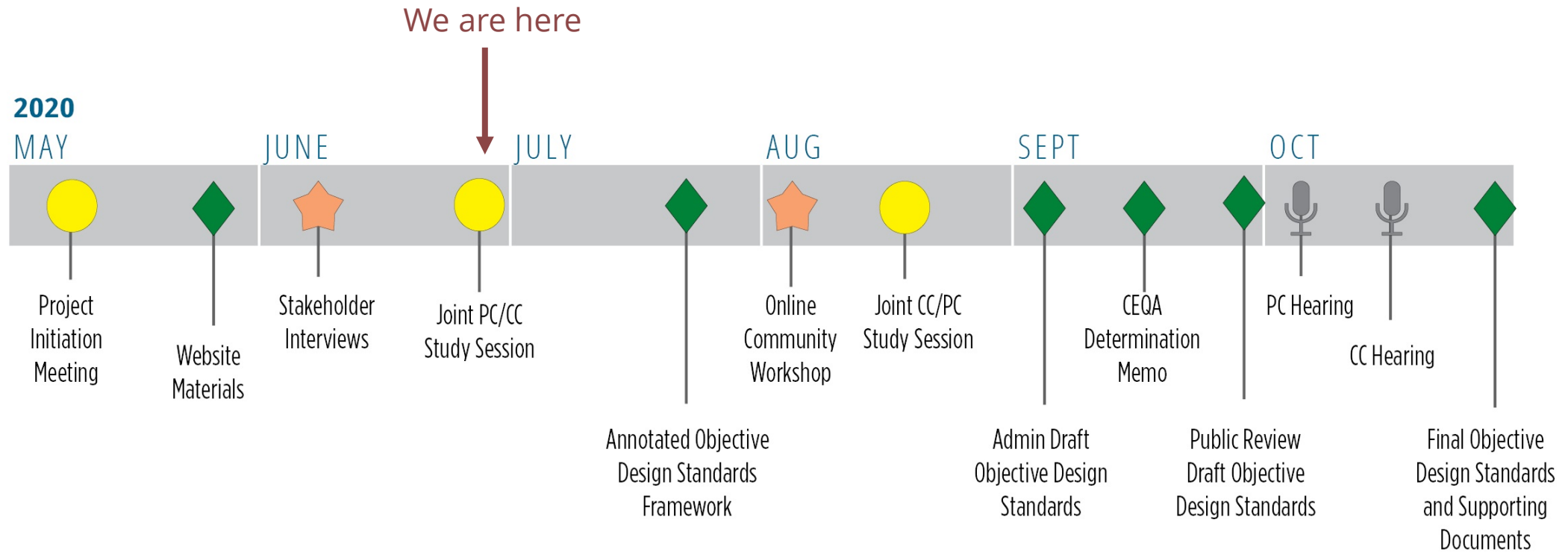
Micro-scale Analysis and Lot Testing

5

Discussion Questions

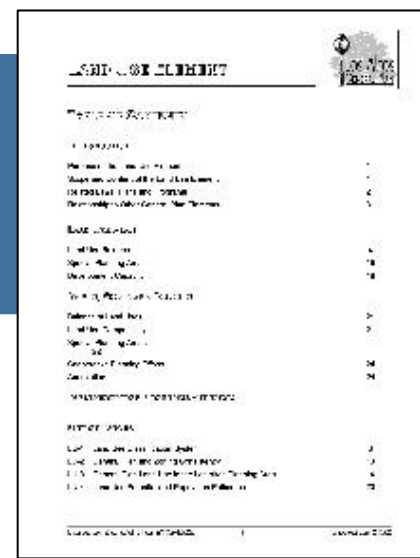


Project Schedule

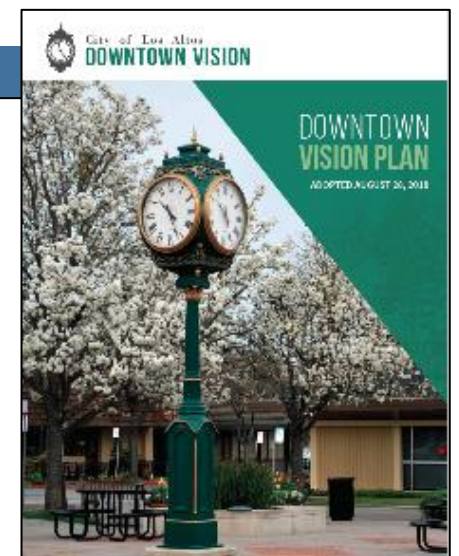
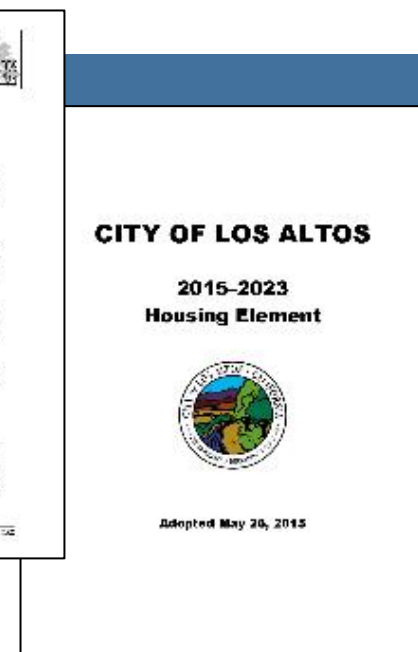


Project Objectives

- **Implement** the City's policies
- **Reflect** the Shared Vision
- **Maintain and enhance** community character
- Create a **legally adequate** regulatory document
- Respond to **economic realities and trends**
- **Facilitate investment** in the community
- Be **user-friendly**



SHE ELEMENT	
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Stakeholder Interviews



Stakeholder Interview – Methodology

- **June 10th, 11th, and 16th**
- **29 individuals**
- **12 questions, 30 minutes**
- **Objectives:**
 - Hear perspective on the existing code
 - What's working and what's not working



Stakeholder Interview – Survey Instrument

General Themes:

- Objectivity, predictability, clarity
- Diagrams, tables, cross-references, “plain English”
- Standards that all work together
- Protect character
- Address transitions
- Charm and livability, but no consensus on “Village Character”

Stakeholder Interview – Survey Instrument

Design Priorities:

1. Building scale and size
2. Building façade design
3. Building setback
4. Parking location and configuration
5. Architectural styles, material, and colors

Good Examples of Built Form in Los Altos



Enchante Hotel



38 3rd Street



New Hillview Community Center



Packard Foundation



100 1st Street



130 Edith Street



5100 El Camino Real



86 3rd Street



Fremont Ave. Townhouses



296 State Street



Cesano Court



240 3rd Street



Existing Framework



Summary of Recent State Law

SB 35 Streamlined approval for projects that provide affordable units.

Applies to the City of Los Altos for proposed developments with at least 50% affordability.

- Urban infill projects, min. 2 residential units
- Projects with a GP and/or Zoning designation that allows residential or mixed-use (min. 2/3 square footage as residential)
- Projects consistent with all objective GP, zoning and design review standards.

SB 330 Prohibits a city from reducing the permitted intensity to below that which was allowed on 01/01/2018 and prohibits non-objective standards.

- All housing developments
- Mixed-use development where min. 2/3 square footage is residential.

AB 1485 Makes requirements for SB 35 streamlined approval easier to meet.

- *Before AB 1485:* Projects with 10 or more units where 10% of the units are affordable to households making below 80% of AMI.
- *After AB 1485:* Projects with 10 or more units where **20% of units are affordable to households making below 120% AMI, with the average income of the units at or below 100% of AMI.**

AB 1763 100% affordable housing projects can be built denser and taller.

- Increases density bonus to 80%
- Provides four incentives/concessions
- Reduces parking requirements



Development Standards

Objective Design Standards

- Measurable, easy to interpret/quantify
- Facilitates review and approval process

Subjective Design Standards

- Unpredictable
- Costly to interpret
- Can slow down/inhibit project approval
- ***SB 330 prohibits non-objective standards***



Zoning Districts

ZONING DESIGNATIONS

Residential

- Single-Family (R1-H)
- Single-Family (R1-10)
- Single-Family (R1-20)
- Single-Family (R1-40)
- Multiple-Family (R3-1)
- Multiple Family (R3-1.8)
- Multiple-Family (R3-3)
- Multiple-Family (R3-4.5)
- Multiple-Family (R3-5)

Commercial/Office

- Commercial Neighborhood (CN)
- Commercial Thoroughfare (CT)
- Commercial Downtown (CD)
- Commercial Downtown/
Multiple-Family (CD/R3)
- Commercial Retail Sales (CRS)
- Commercial Retail Sales/
Office (CRS/OAD)
- Office/Administrative (OA)

Planned

- Planned Community (PC)
- Planned Unit Development (PUD)

Public/Community Facilities

- Public & Community Facilities (PCF)
- Public & Community Facilities/
Single-Family (PCF/R1-10)

Overlay

- Single-Story Overlay (R1-S)
- Loyola Corners Specific Plan (LCSP)

Map Features

- City Boundary
- Sphere of Influence
- Railroad
- Creek

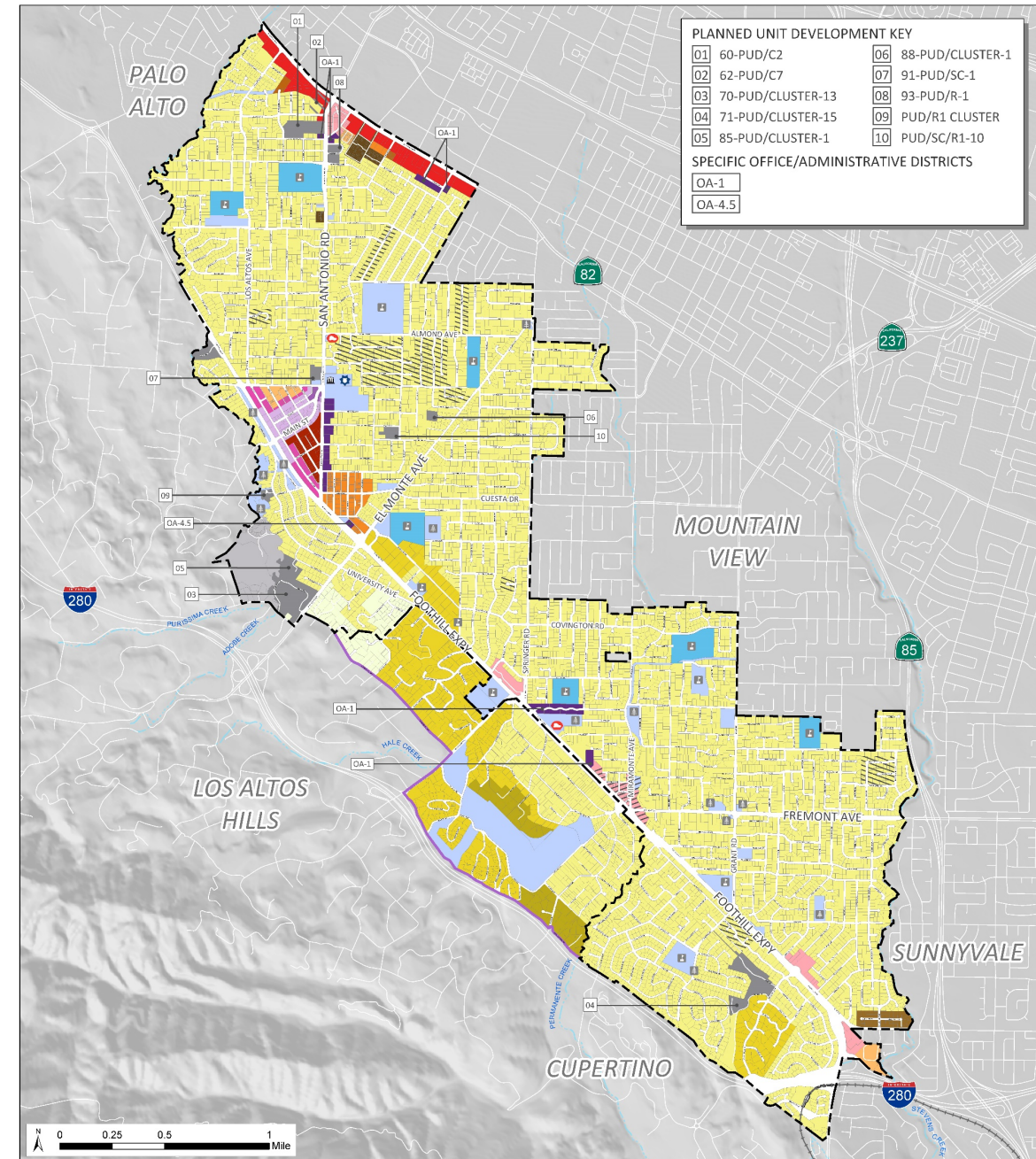
Public Facilities

- School
- Park
- Fire Station
- Police Station
- City Hall

* Creek corridors and Montclair Park shown as approximate.

Sources:
City of Los Altos
Santa Clara County
RRM Design Group
10.26.18

CITY OF LOS ALTOS ZONING MAP



Zoning Districts

ZONING DESIGNATIONS

Residential

- Single-Family (R1-H)
- Single-Family (R1-10)
- Single-Family (R1-20)
- Single-Family (R1-40)
- Multiple-Family (R3-1)
- Multiple Family (R3-1.8)
- Multiple-Family (R3-3)
- Multiple-Family (R3-4.5)
- Multiple-Family (R3-5)

Multi-Family Districts

Commercial/Office

- Commercial Neighborhood (CN)
- Commercial Thoroughfare (CT)
- Commercial Downtown (CD)
- Commercial Downtown/Multiple-Family (CD/R3)
- Commercial Retail Sales (CRS)
- Commercial Retail Sales/Office (CRS/OAD)
- Office/Administrative (OA)

Planned

- Planned Community (PC)
- Planned Unit Development (PUD)

Districts that support residential mixed-use development

Public/Community Facilities

- Public & Community Facilities (PCF)
- Public & Community Facilities/Single-Family (PCF/R1-10)

Overlay

- Single-Story Overlay (R1-S)
- Loyola Corners Specific Plan (LCSP)

Map Features

- City Boundary
- Sphere of Influence
- Railroad
- Creek

Applicable overlay

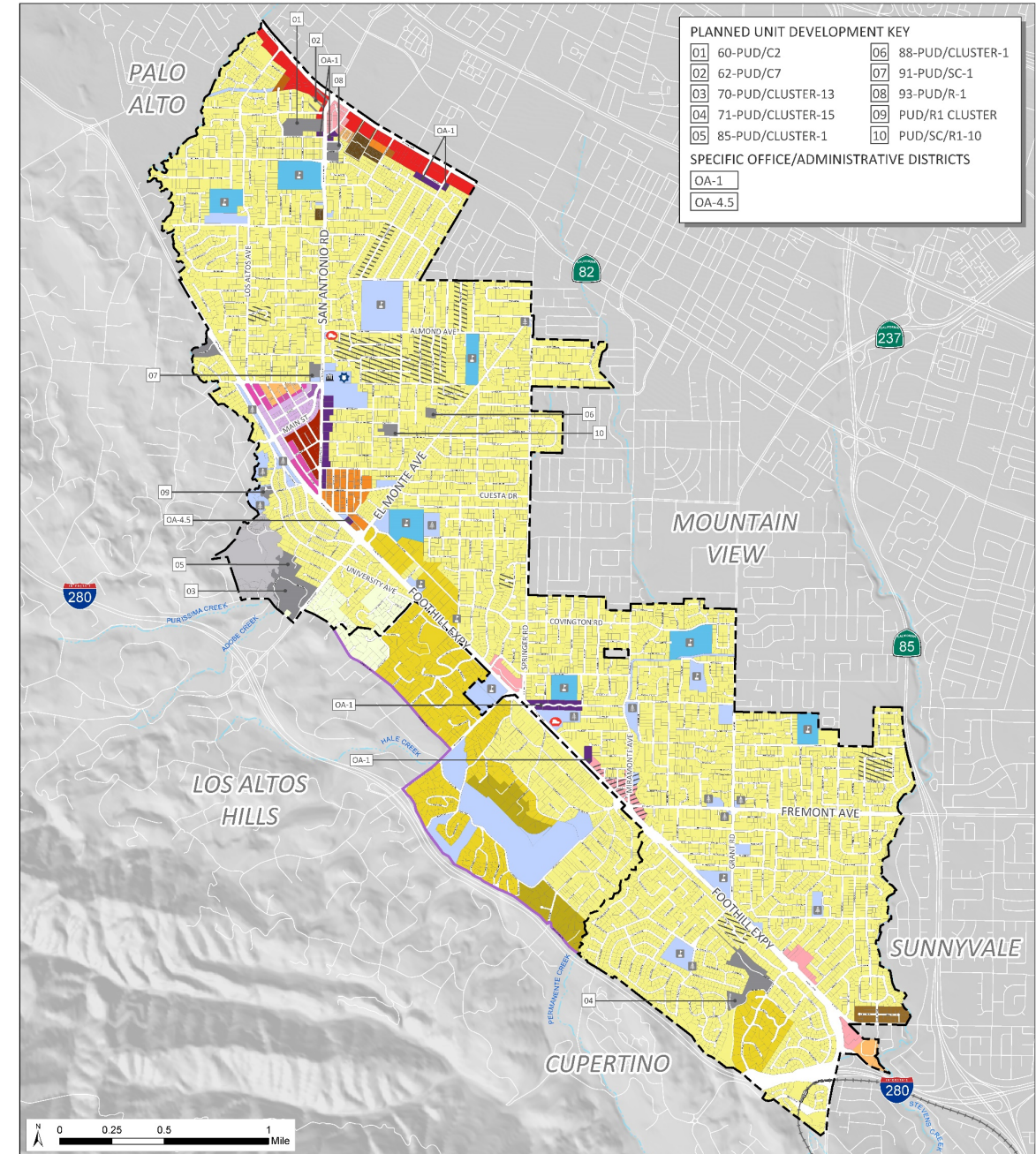
Public Facilities












- School
- Park
- Fire Station
- Police Station
- City Hall

* Creek corridors and Montclair Park shown as approximate.

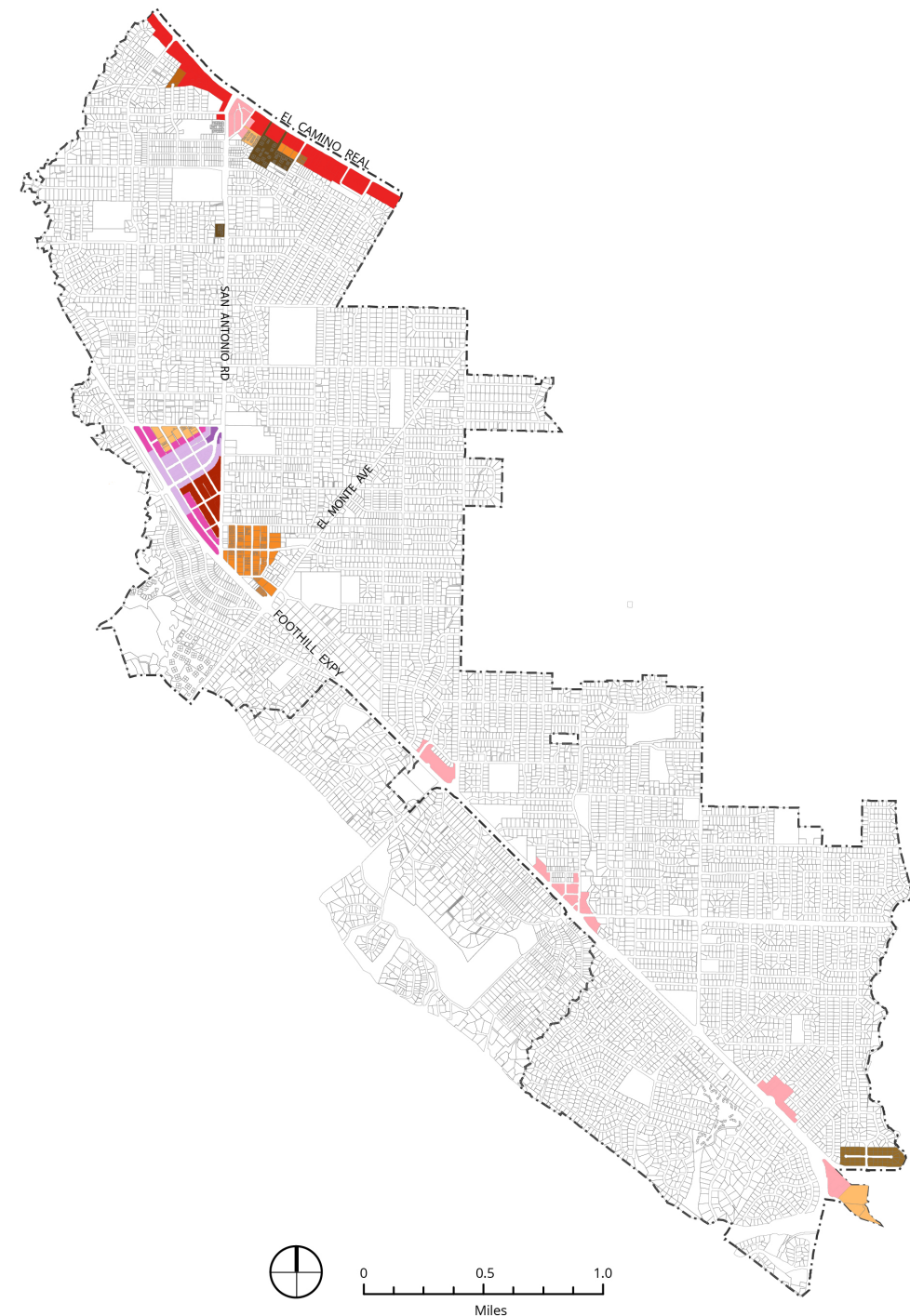
Sources:
City of Los Altos
Santa Clara County
RRM Design Group
10.26.18

CITY OF LOS ALTOS ZONING MAP



Zone	# Parcels	Acres
 Multiple-Family (R3-1) - 38 du/ac	66	16.1
 Multiple-Family (R3-1.8) - 24.2 du/ac	218	23.5
 Multiple-Family (R3-3) - 14.5 du/ac	15	2.8
 Multiple-Family (R3-4.5) - 9.7 du/ac	48	11.5
 Multiple-Family (R3-5) - 8.7 du/ac	100	11.6
 Commercial Neighborhood (CN)	88	35.0
 Commercial Thoroughfare (CT)	44	44.8
 Commercial Downtown (CD)	40	12.7
 Commercial Downtown/ Multiple-Family (CD/R3)	65	12.3
 Commercial Retail Sales (CRS)	105	19.0
 Commercial Retail Sales/Office (CRS/OAD)	7	1.3
Total	796	190.3

= 5.7% of developable area of Los Altos



Multiple-Family District Standards

- Max. density shall be constructed unless:
 - The project would be detrimental to the health, safety, comfort, convenience, prosperity, or welfare of the persons residing or working in the vicinity; or
 - A less dense project would enhance opportunities for affordable housing.
- Max. FAR (*R3-4.5 only*)
- Max. Site Coverage
- Min. Setbacks (*front/side/rear; abutting specified rights-of-way or districts*)
- Max. Height (*stories or feet, whichever is less*)
- Min. Parking



Commercial/Office District Standards

- Max. Density (*CT only*)
- Max. FAR (*parts of CN only*)
- Min. Setbacks (*front/side/rear; abutting specified rights-of-way or districts*)
- Max. Height (*feet, overall and ground floor interior*)
- Min. Parking
- Required Conditions/Performance Standards - not all impacts are quantified (e.g., general screening standards, screening for refuse collection, lighting)
- Rear Yard Buffer – “an appropriate buffer shall be provided”
- Off-Street parking – locate to “reduce the visual impact”



Commercial/Office District Standards

Design Controls (located within base district code sections):

- ...a mixture of scales may be appropriate (CN, CT)
- proportions of building elements...should be kept close to human scale (all)
- proportions of building elements shall be designed to protect residential privacy, daylight, and environmental quality (CN, CT only)
- Consideration should be given...to the implementation of goals and objectives of the Downtown Urban Design Plan. Evaluation of design approval shall consider one of more of the following factors: (CD, CRS, CD/R3, CRS/OAD)
- strong shadow and visual interest (CD, CRS, CD/R3)



Design Review Findings (Section 14.76.060)

Applies to the R3-4.5 district.

- ...keeping with the general appearance of neighboring developed areas
- ...will minimize the perception of excessive bulk
- ...insure the compatibility of the development with its design concept and the character of adjacent buildings



Design Review Findings (Section 14.78.060)

Applies to the remaining 10 districts.

- ...has architectural integrity and an appropriate relationship with other structures in the areas in terms of height, bulk and design.
- ...articulated to relate to the human scale
- ...elevations have variation and depth and avoid large blank wall surfaces
- ...materials, finishes, and colors have been used in a manner that serves to reduce the perceived appearance of height, bulk and mass, and are harmonious with other structures in the immediate area.
- Landscaping is generous and inviting...includes substantial street tree canopy...



Downtown Vision

- Vision for each Downtown District
- Building width and depth
- Front setback (First Street only)
- Building height
- Horizontal massing/scale/architectural standards
- Entry locations
- Placemaking



Figure 4: Vision Plan Area

Downtown Vision

Building Height: 35 or 40 ft residential;
45 ft office/hotel; 35 or 45 ft mixed-use

- *Code: 30 or 35 ft for most of Downtown*

Front Setbacks: 10 ft along 1st Street

- *Code: 0, 2, or 10 ft based on location/zone*

Uses: “Entertainment,” “Downtown vitality,”
“Retail and residential above ground floor,”
“Market-rate and affordable residential uses”

- *Code: CUP required for commercial recreation, mixed-use and housing above the ground floor*

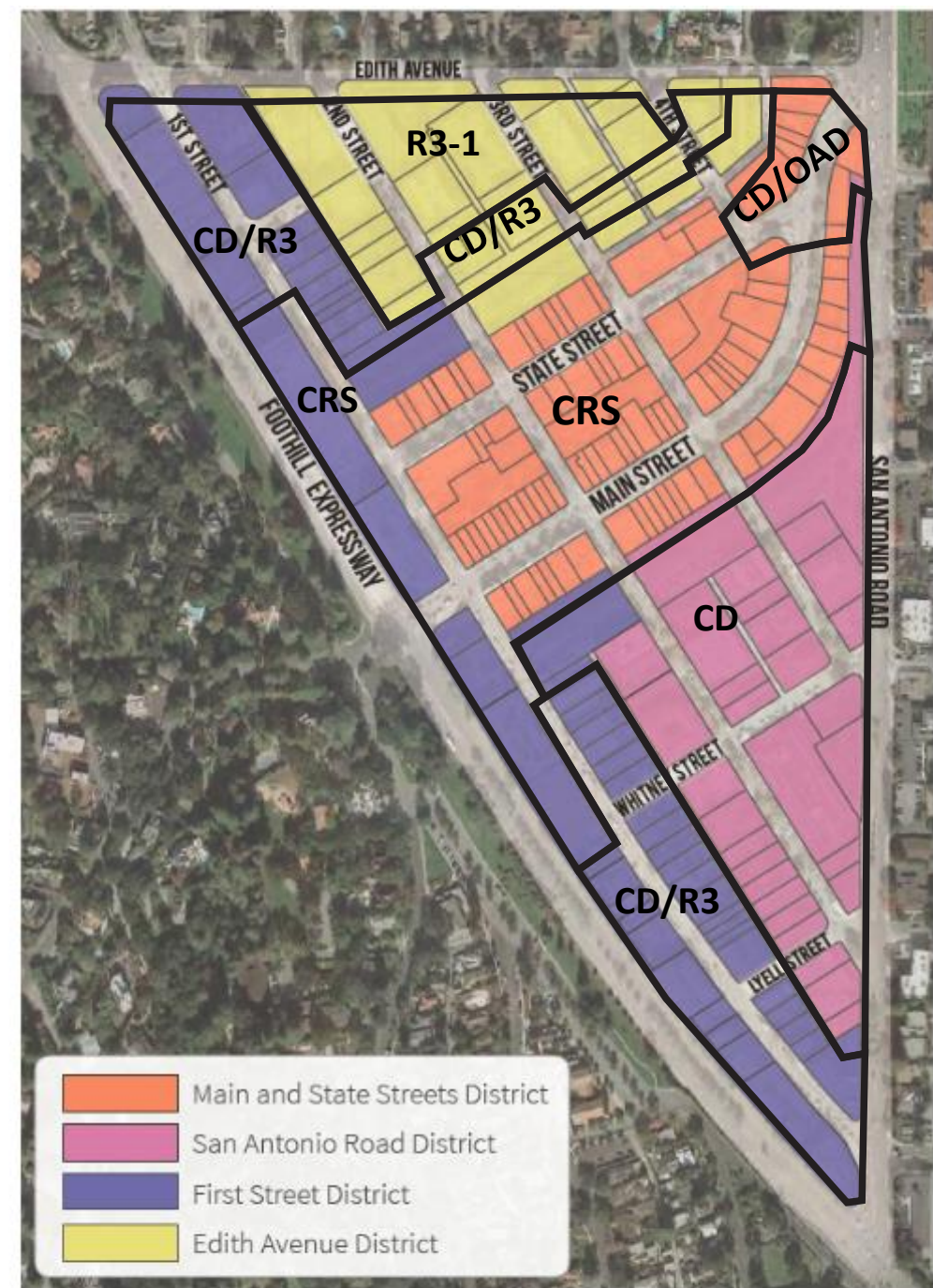
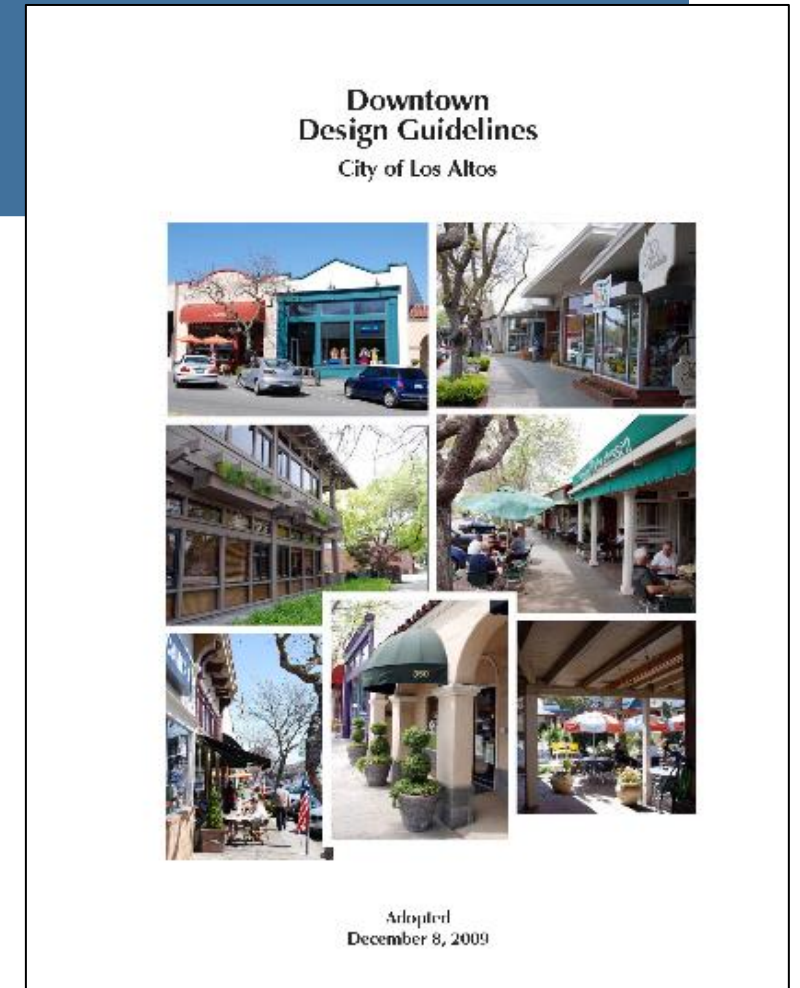


Figure 4: Vision Plan Area

Downtown Design Guidelines

- **Apply to all design review applications for new construction, additions, exterior facade changes, landscaping, signage.**
- **The guidelines are in addition to and subordinate to the zoning regulations. They address:**
 - Design of on-site open space and connectivity
 - Landscape design
 - Reduction of pedestrian/vehicle conflict
 - Screening design and location
 - Building module length and massing
 - Façade design
 - Entry design



Los Altos Code vs. ITE Parking Rates

Land Use	Los Altos Code Requirements	ITE (weekday peak hour avg)	ITE (weekend peak hour avg)
Retail	2 to 5 spaces/ksf	shopping ctr: 1.95/ksf	shopping ctr: 2.91/ksf (Sat), 1.89/ksf (Sun)
Multifamily Residential	2 spaces/unit + 1 visitor space/4 units	1.21/unit	1.31/unit (Saturday) 1.66/unit (Sunday)
Office	3.33 spaces/ksf	2.39/ksf	0.28/ksf (Saturday)
Restaurants	1 per 3 employees + 1 per every 3 seats	0.33/seat	0.34/seat



Current Code Flexibility

- **Multiple-family affordable housing (14.28)**
 - Projects may receive waiver for part of their on-site parking requirements by constructing at least 10% very low-, low-, or moderate-income units.
 - Larger waiver for 20% or 30%
- **Exceptions for Public Benefit (14.44.180, 14.48.180, 14.52.160, 14.54.180)**
 - To implement downtown design plan, exception may be given to provision on-site parking.
- **Residential uses in commercial districts (14.74.080)**
 - Mixed use projects may substitute nonresidential parking spaces in lieu of dedicated visitor spaces.
- **Common Parking Facilities (14.74.140)**
 - Parking requirements may be in common facility if spaces allocated for each permitted use
 - Location must be within 300' of proposed use



Other Best Practice Code Provision

- **Transportation Demand Management**
 - Allow reductions in requirements for programs that reduce single occupant vehicle trips and parking demand or provide funding for infrastructure and programs to increase use of non-driving transportation modes
 - Implementation may be through transportation management association (TMA)
- **Account for On-Street Parking**
 - Allow parking analysis to account for availability of on-street parking in assessing adequacy of supply
- **Shared Parking**
 - Allow uses to meet requirement by “sharing” available existing off-site parking
 - Accounts for differences in peak hour parking needs for each land use
 - More efficiently utilize existing supply



Multimodal Transportation

- **Multimodal Transportation Review (14.78.090)**
 - Development review includes assessment of bicycle, pedestrian, parking, traffic impacts on public streets, and/or public transportation
 - Review by Complete Streets Commission
- **Potential Additional Multimodal Considerations**
 - Requirements or incentives associated with provision of short-term and long-term bicycle parking, provision of lockers and showers



Micro-scale Analysis

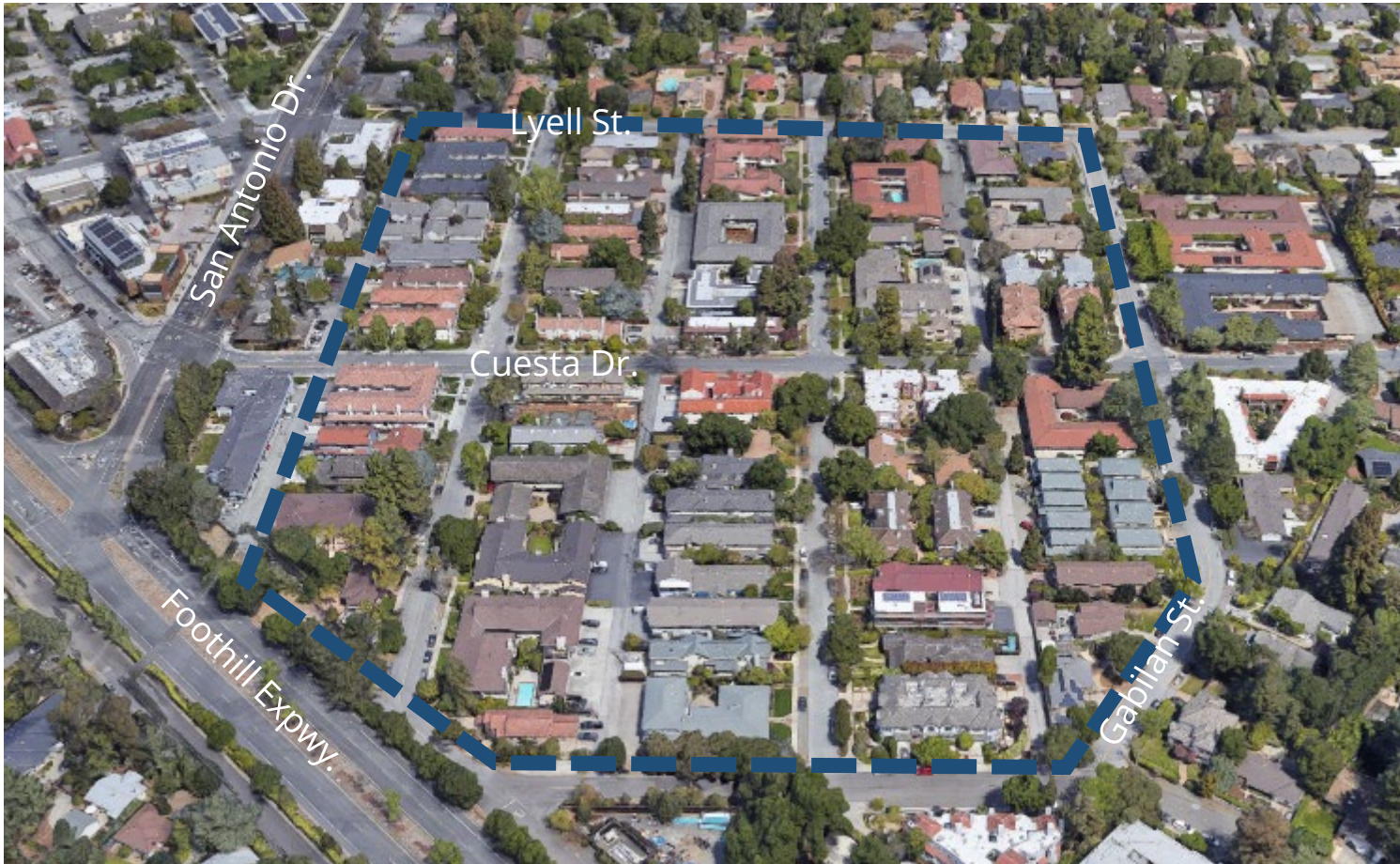


Why Micro-scale Analysis?

- **Identify patterns in Los Altos neighborhoods and buildings**
 - Understand design elements that are present across Los Altos
 - Understand building types that are present across Los Altos
- **Find patterns, not models**
 - Not looking to exactly replicate examples
 - Examples show range of outcomes possible under code
 - Patterns can help to inform new/adjusted code standards
- **Understand context**
 - Architectural style is not regulated by the code, but understanding styles applicable to Los Altos can help inform the standards that are regulated by the code



Multifamily Neighborhood – consistent pattern



Summary of Existing Conditions

Detached buildings

50'-75' lot widths

Building Types: Apartments, Courtyard Apartments, Townhouse Courts, Detached Houses

Consistent setbacks

1-2 stories

Stoop and porch frontages

Downtown Main Street – consistent pattern



Summary of Existing Conditions

Attached buildings

25'-70' lot widths

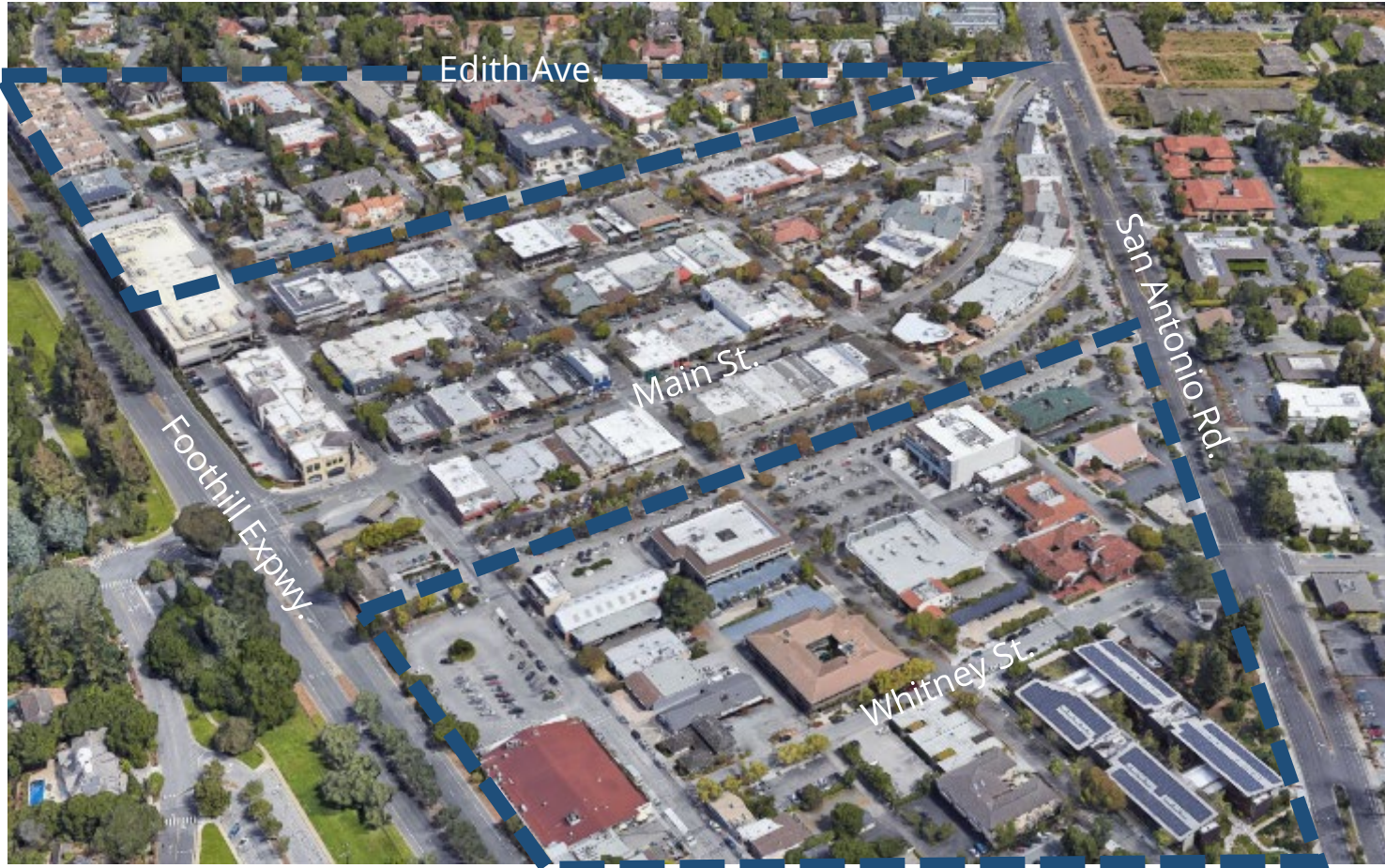
Building Types: Attached commercial block buildings

Consistent setbacks

1-3 stories

Shopfront frontages

Other Downtown Areas – inconsistent pattern



Summary of Existing Conditions

Attached and detached buildings

Variable lot widths

Building Types: Large and small apartments, Large and small commercial blocks, detached houses

Variable setbacks

1-4 stories

Shopfront, dooryard, stoop and forecourt frontages

Loyola Corners – mix of patterns



Summary of Existing Conditions

Attached and detached buildings

25'-70' lots along Fremont Ave, variable lot widths elsewhere

Building Types: Commercial blocks, small apartments, detached houses

Consistent along Fremont Ave, variable setbacks elsewhere

1-2 stories

Shopfront, gallery frontages along Fremont, stoop and porch frontages elsewhere



El Camino Real — inconsistent pattern



Along E.C.R. — inconsistent

- Freestanding commercial buildings, shopping centers, multi-story mixed-use apartment buildings

"Behind" E.C.R. — more consistent

- Small apartment buildings and townhouses oriented to interior walkways and parking lots

Lot Testing



Why Lot Testing?

- **“Test Drive” code standards on real lots in Los Altos**
 - Understand which standards limit development potential.
 - Understand the cumulative impact of all standards that apply to a lot.
- **How were the sample lots identified?**
 - Opportunity Sites identified in Housing Element.
 - Capture the range of zones/standards that will be examined as part of this overall process.
 - Look at lot sizes/dimensions that are not represented in recent development projects – does the code work for these lots?



Lot Testing Sites

Multifamily — R3-1
102 2nd Street

**Commercial Downtown/
Multifamily — CD/R3**
101-121 1st Street

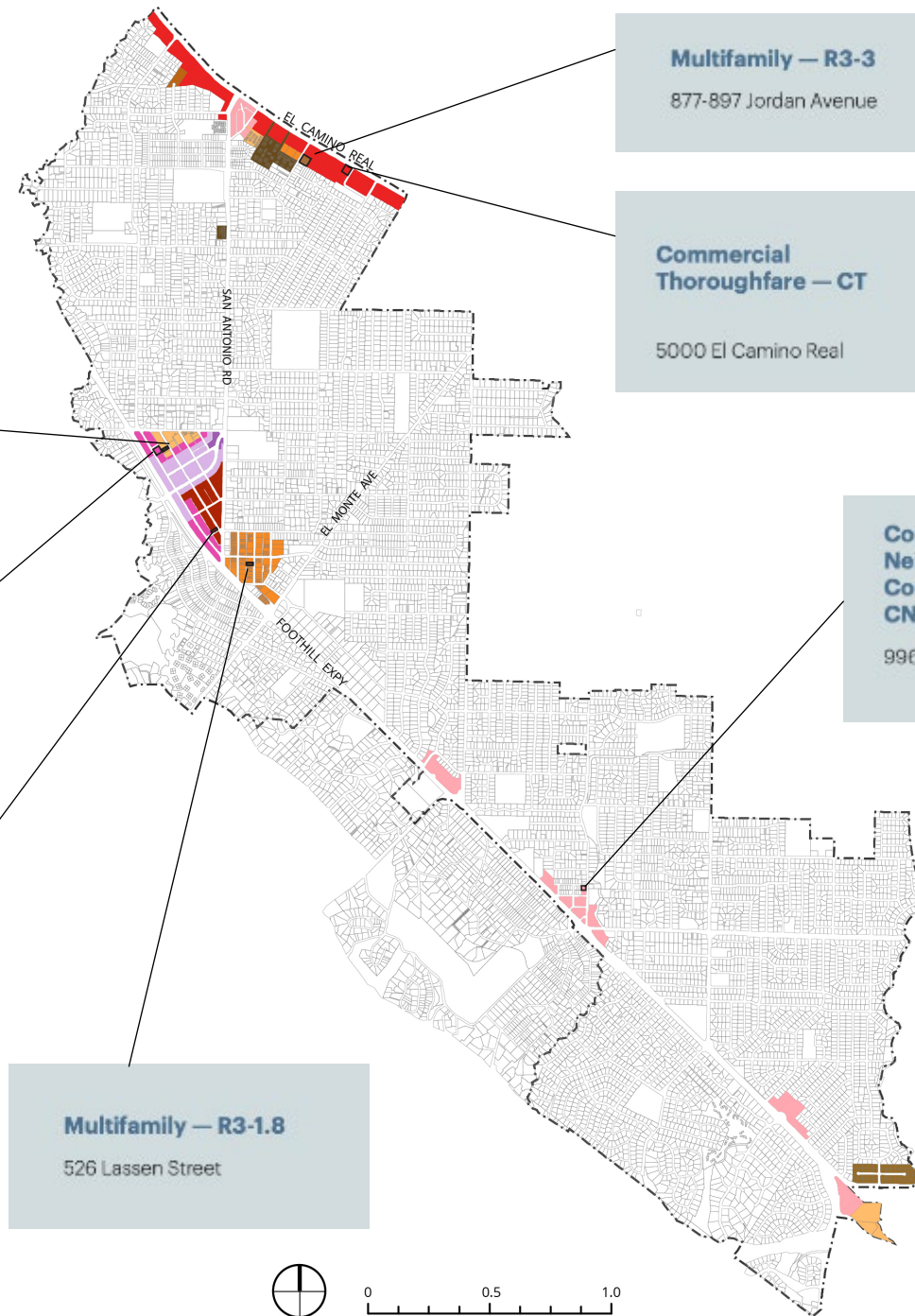
**Commercial Downtown
— CD**
394 2nd Street

Multifamily — R3-1.8
526 Lassen Street

Multifamily — R3-3
877-897 Jordan Avenue

**Commercial
Thoroughfare — CT**
5000 El Camino Real

**Commercial
Neighborhood/Loyola
Corners Specific Plan —
CN/LCSP**
996 Lorraine Avenue



Lot Testing Sites

Multifamily — R3-3

877-897 Jordan Avenue



Multifamily — R3-1.8

526 Lassen Street



Multifamily — R3-1

102 2nd Street



Commercial Neighborhood/Loyola Corners Specific Plan — CN/LCSP

996 Lorraine Avenue



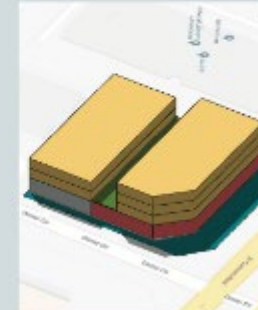
Commercial Downtown — CD

394 2nd Street



Commercial Thoroughfare — CT

5000 El Camino Real



Commercial Downtown/Multifamily — CD/R3

101-121 1st Street



Multifamily R3-3 — 877 Jordan Ave.



Notes on Context

- Transition between ECR and R1 neighborhood
- Building frontages between 40'-70' along Jordan Ave.

Multifamily R3-3 — 877 Jordan Ave.



Figure 3.1.1 Site Plan

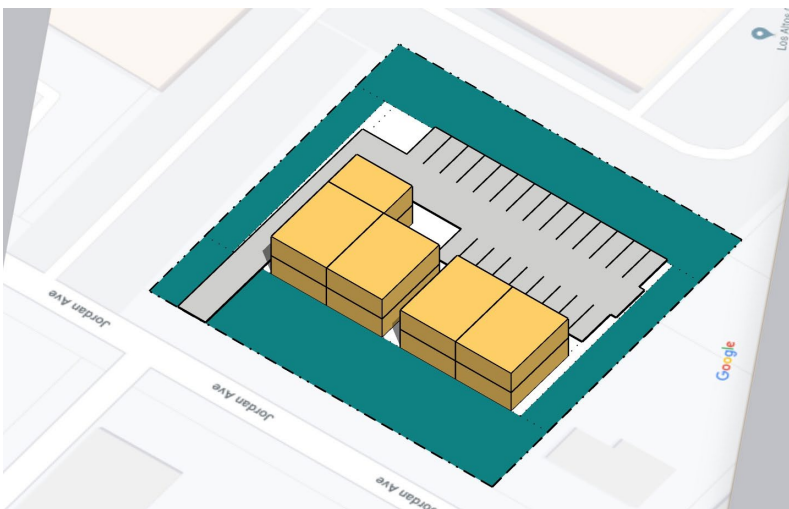


Figure 3.1.2 Perspective View




Program

- 10 residential units (8-1 BR, 2-studio)
- 26 parking spaces

Notes

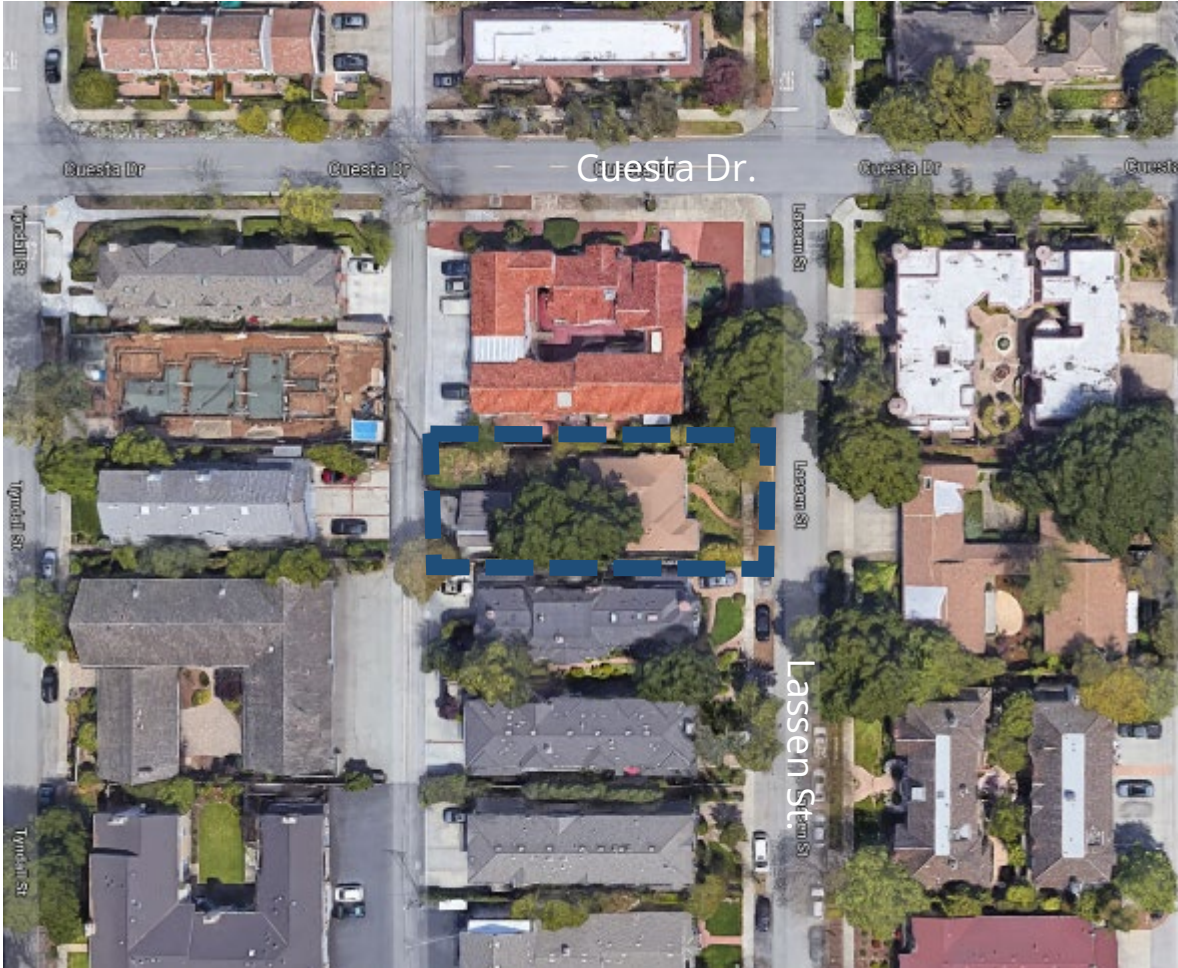
- Density is limiting factor
- Parking standards promote large 1 bedroom or studio units — 2+ bedroom units require more parking

Key

-  Residential
-  Setbacks
-  Parking



Multifamily R3-1.8 — 526 Lassen St.



Notes on Context

- 25' lot increment (25' and 50' wide lots)
- Parking mostly accessed from alley
- Some buildings with no more than 1 garage door on front façade (nothing in code prevents more)
- All lots have alley access



Multifamily R3-1.8 — 526 Lassen St.

Program

- 2 residential units (1 BR)
- 4 parking spaces

Notes

- Parking is limiting factor
- Difficult to meet max. density on small lot due to parking standards
- Parking standards promote large 1 bedroom or studio units — 2+ bedroom units require more parking

Key

- Residential
- Setbacks
- Parking



Figure 3.2.1 Site Plan

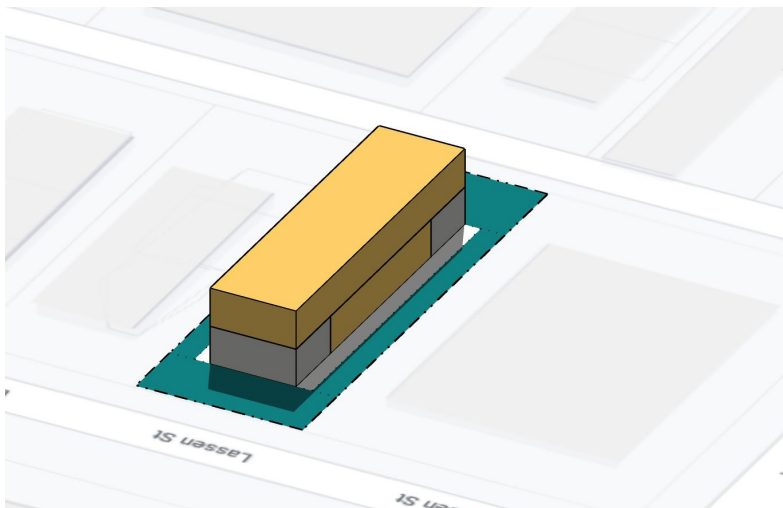
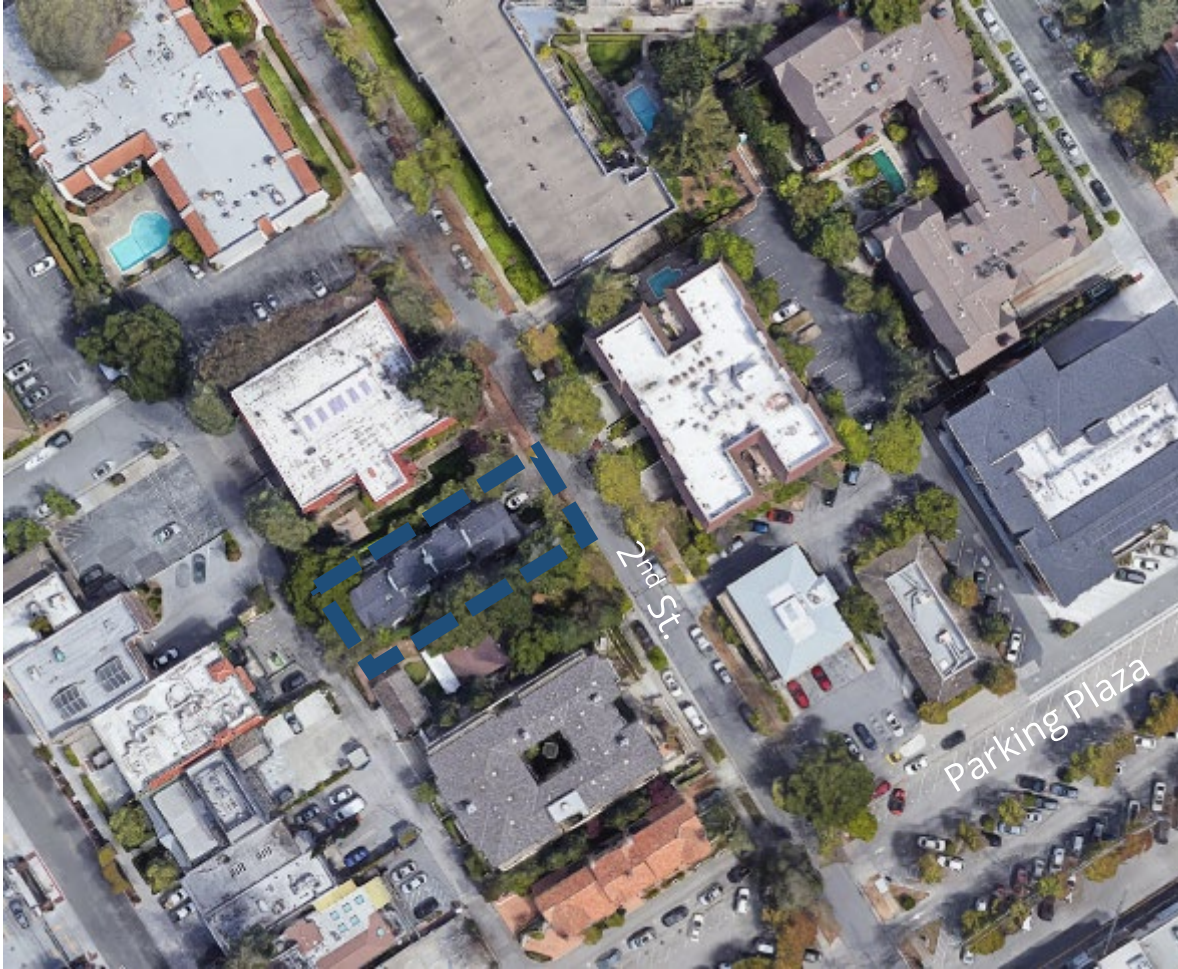


Figure 3.2.2 Perspective View

Multifamily R3-1 — 102 2nd St.



Notes on Context

- Variety of lot width dimensions
- Variety of buildings sizes and types
- All lots have alley access, but not all parking accessed via alley



Multifamily R3-1 — 102 2nd St.

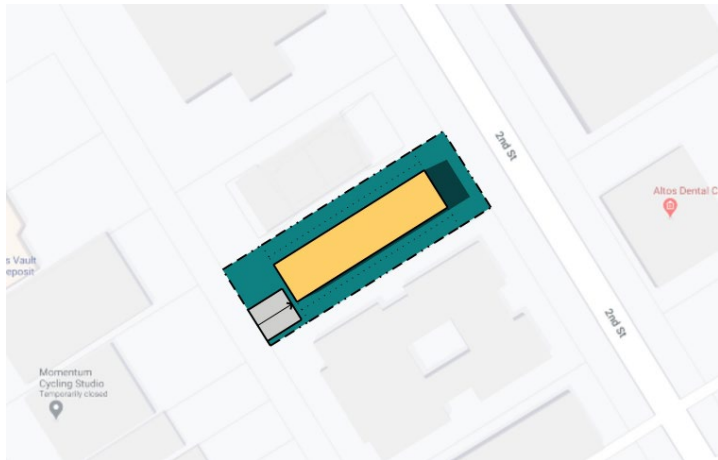


Figure 3.3.1 Site Plan

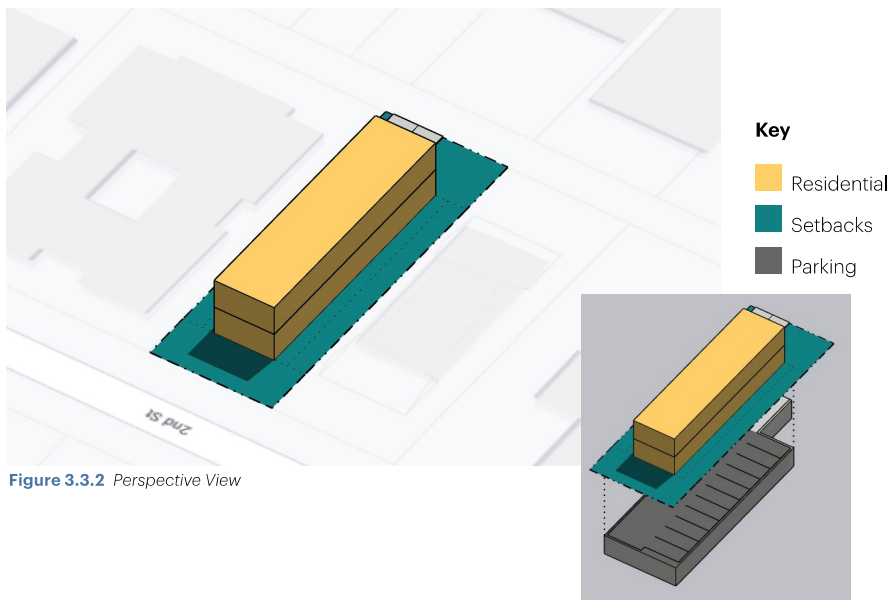


Figure 3.3.2 Perspective View

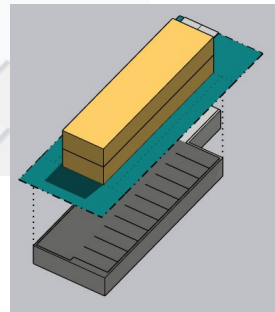


Figure 3.3.2 Underground Parking.

Program

- 5 residential units (3-1BR, 2-2BR)
- 11 parking spaces

Notes

- Parking is limiting factor
- Parking standards promote large 1 bedroom or studio units — 2+ bedroom units require more parking
- Underground parking at this scale is likely not financially feasible



Comm. Neighborhood CN/LCSP— 996 Loraine



Notes on Context

- Transition between CN area and R1 area
- Surrounded by primarily house-scale buildings
- Surrounding buildings have stoop and porch frontages
- 20' setbacks on Loraine Ave.



Comm. Neighborhood CN/LCSP— 996 Loraine

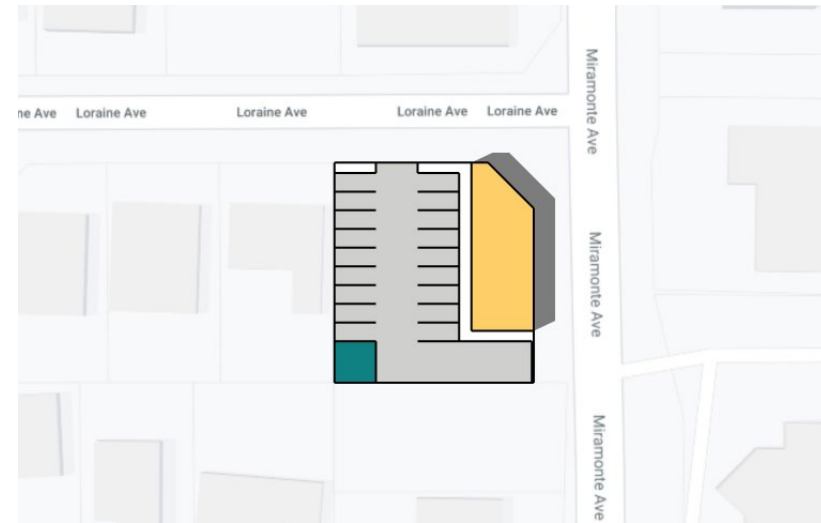


Figure 3.4.1 Site Plan

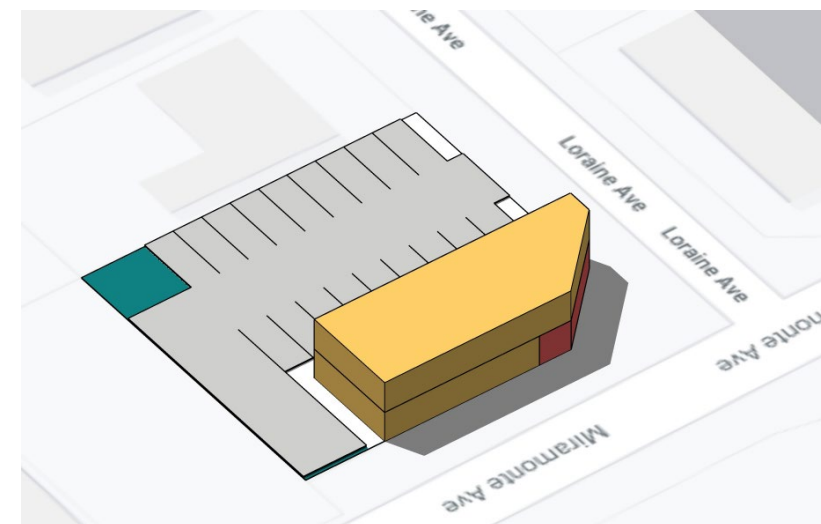


Figure 3.4.2 Perspective View



Program

- 4 residential units (3-1 BR, 1-studio)
- 700 s.f. commercial
- 18 parking spaces

Notes

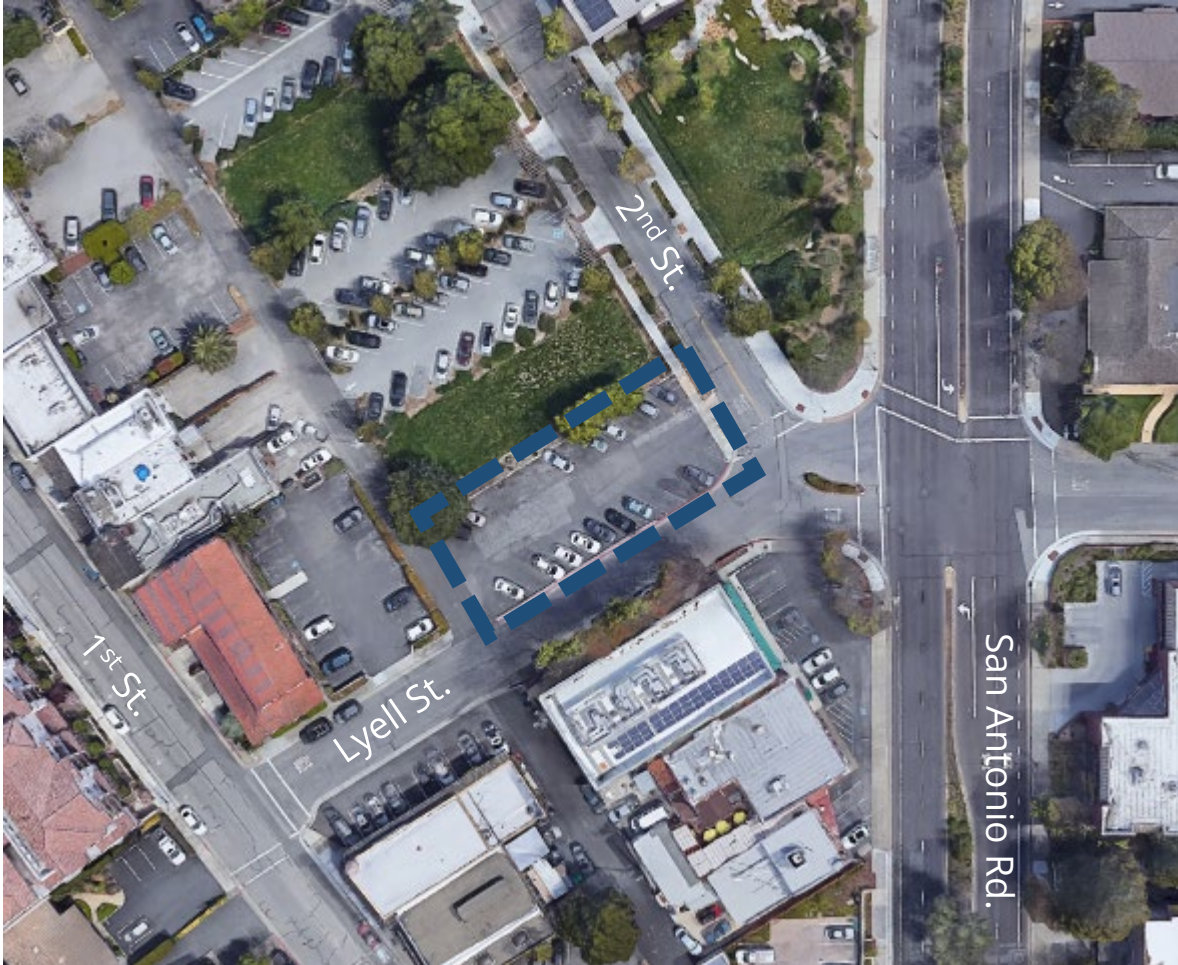
- Located within Loyola Corners Specific Plan — lot would not be developable if not for relaxed setback standards in S.P.
- Parking is limiting factor

Key

- | | |
|---|--|
|  Residential |  Setbacks |
|  Commercial |  Parking |



Commercial Downtown CD — 394 2nd St.



Notes on Context

- Adjacent to CD-R.3 and OA zones
- Attached “Main Street” style buildings on 1st and Lyell with shopfront frontages
- Various building types and scales on 2nd Street



Commercial Downtown CD — 394 2nd St.

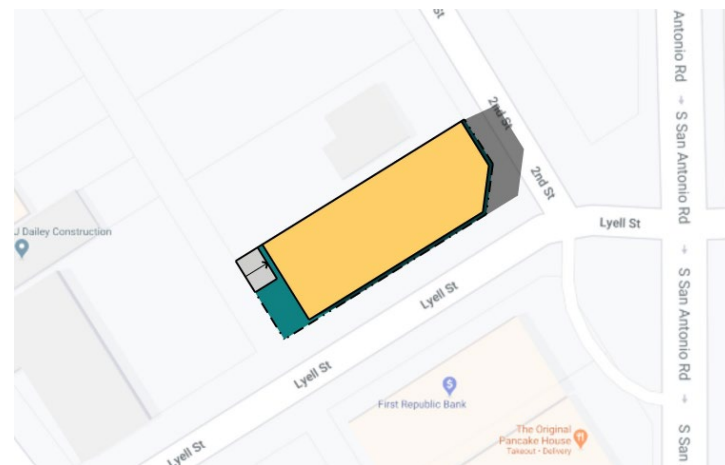


Figure 3.5.1 Site Plan



Figure 3.5.2 Perspective View

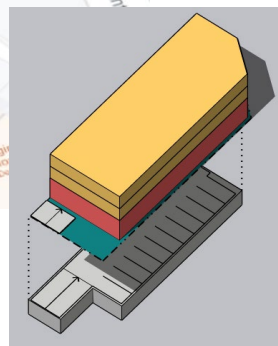


Figure 3.5.2 Underground Parking.

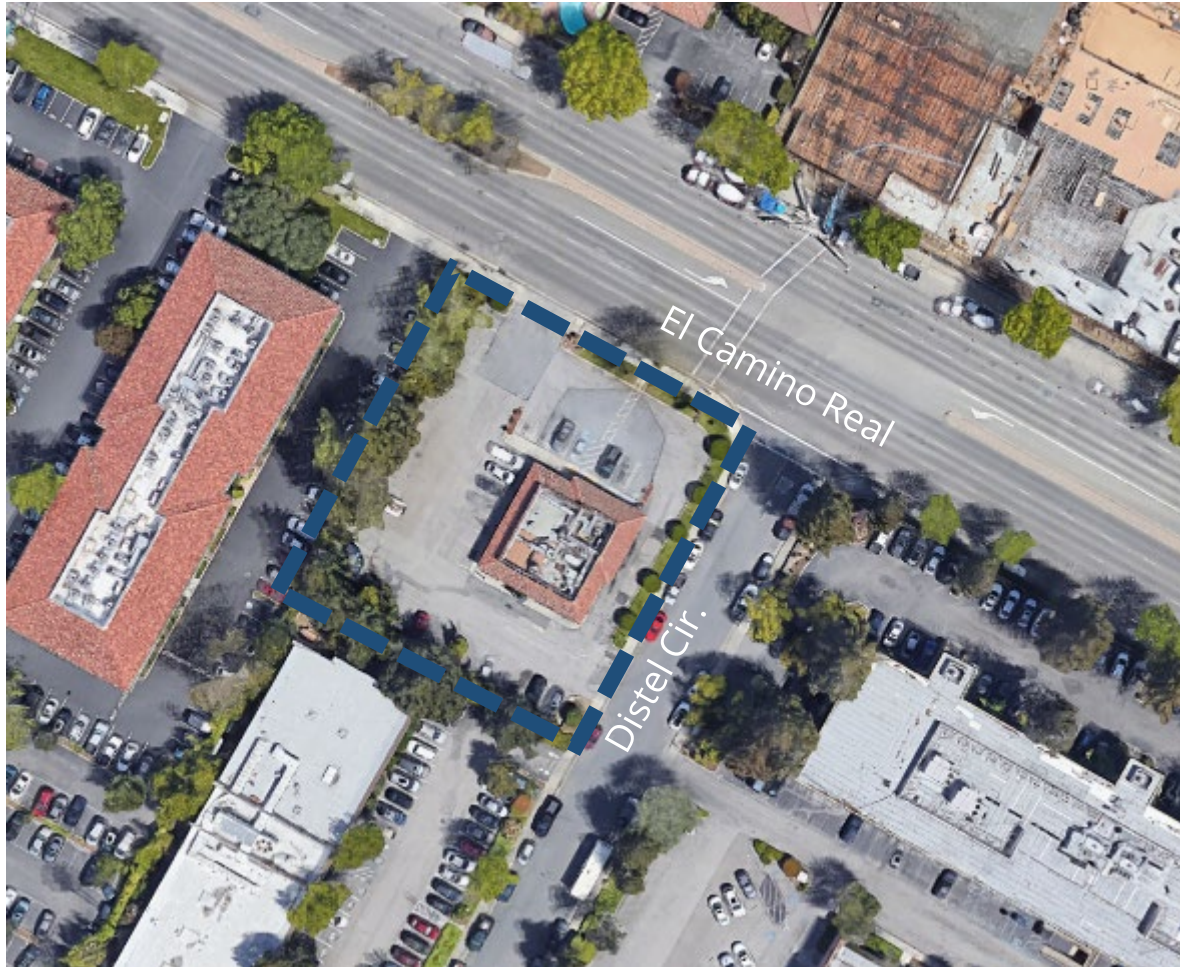
Program

- 5 residential units (5-1 BR)
- 12 parking spaces

Notes

- Parking is limiting factor
- Parking standards promote large 1 bedroom or studio units — 2+ bedroom units require more parking
- Very large unit size necessary to maximize FAR

Commercial Thoroughfare CT — 5000 E.C.R.



Notes on Context

- Various setbacks along E.C.R.
- Various building types and sizes along E.C.R.
- New buildings along E.C.R. have mix of shopfront frontages and residential frontages
- Design of 25' front yard along E.C.R. is inconsistent



Commercial Thoroughfare CT — 5000 E.C.R.

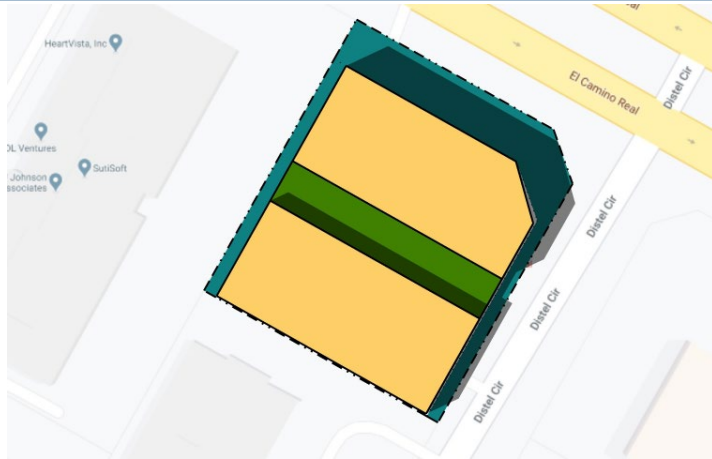


Figure 3.6.1 Site Plan

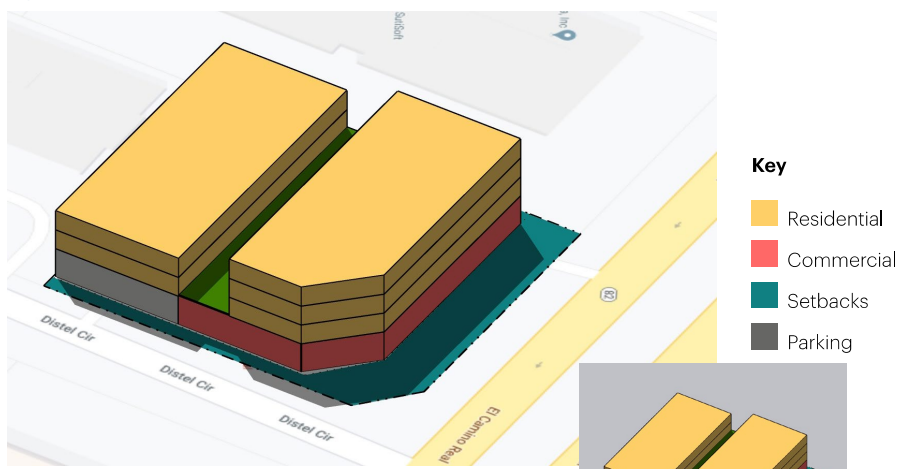


Figure 3.6.2 Perspective View

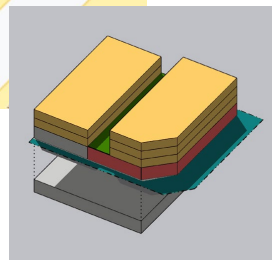


Figure 3.3.2 Underground Parking.

Program

- 38 residential units (30-1BR, 8-studio)
- 200 s.f. commercial
- 83 parking spaces

Notes

- Parking is limiting factor
- Parking standards promote large 1 bedroom or studio units — 2+ bedroom units require more parking

Comm. Downtown/MF CD/R3— 101-121 1st St.



Notes on Context

- 25'-50' wide buildings on north side of 1st St.
- Variable building width along south side of 1st St.
- Shopfront frontages on north side of 1st St.
- Variable or no building frontages along south side of 1st St.



Comm. Downtown/MF CD/R3— 101-121 1st St.

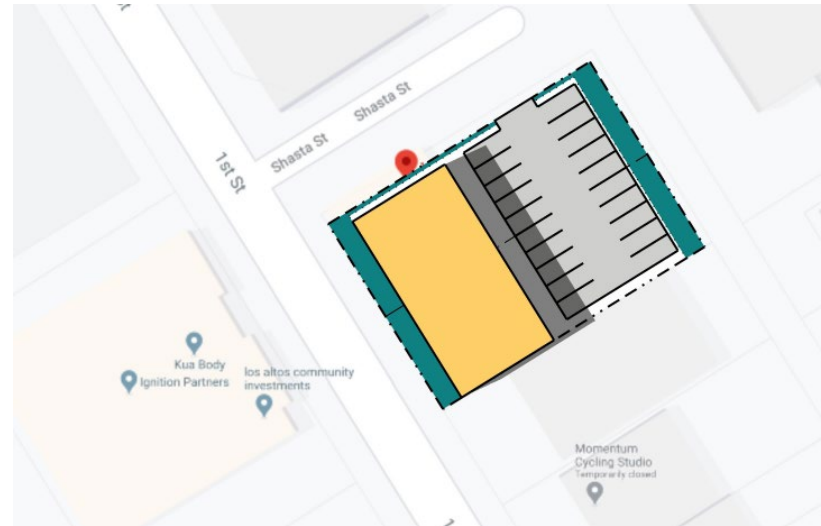


Figure 3.7.1 Site Plan

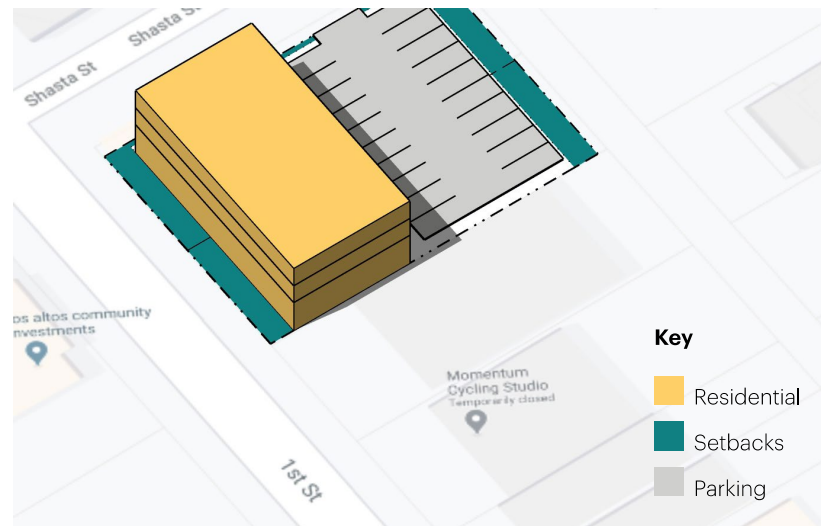


Figure 3.7.2 Perspective View

Program

- 11 residential units (3-1BR, 1-studio)
- 20 parking spaces

Notes

- Parking is limiting factor –interior lots that need driveway would be more limited
- Parking standards promote large 1 bedroom or studio units
- Very large unit size necessary to maximize FAR

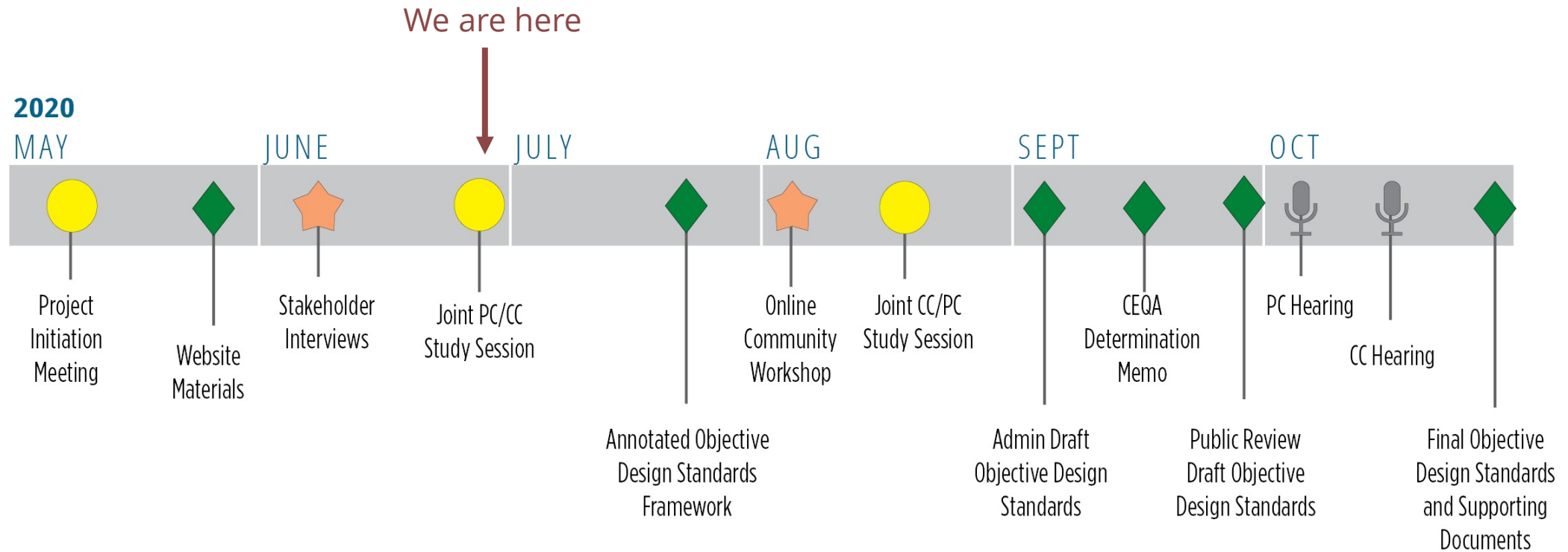


Discussion Questions

1. Concerns about any particular subjective standards/how they may translate to objective standards?
2. Existing patterns to build into the Code? To avoid in the Code?
3. Vision Plan as guidance for Code update?
4. Desired character of Los Altos side of El Camino Real corridor?
5. Expand on any of the general themes from the stakeholder interviews?
6. Concerns/priorities for any particular areas?



Project Schedule





Thank you!



MEMO

To: Guido Persicone, Planning Services Manager
From: Lisa Wise and Monica Szydlik, LWC
Date: June 23, 2020
Subject: Los Altos Objective Design Standards: Stakeholder Interview Summary

INTRODUCTION

As part of a robust community outreach effort that includes a project website, community workshop, and two joint City Council/Planning Commission Study Sessions, the City of Los Altos directed LWC to conduct one-on-one interviews with key stakeholders. The stakeholders included residents, architects, developers, business owners and operators and members of special interest groups. The personal interviews are intended to provide an insider's perspective of the multifamily and mixed-use design standards.

The City identified 29 individuals as potential interviewees. All 29 responded to the request for an interview, and 28 agreed to participate in the interviews. All 28 interviews were conducted June 10, 11 and 16 via Google Hangouts web-based teleconference platform or via telephone. Most of the interviews were finished comfortably in the allotted 30-minute timeframe.

Interviews were limited to 30 minutes out of respect for respondents' time and to limit informant fatigue. Respondents were informed that the next opportunity to participate in the project is a June 30th City Council/ Planning Commission Study Session and that they would be notified with the meeting information.

The interviews followed a list of 12 questions developed by LWC and reviewed and approved by the City (see below). All of the interviews were initiated with a greeting and a brief: 1) introduction to the project, 2) description of intent of the interviews, 3) number of questions (12) and expected time commitment (20-25 minutes) and 4) assurance of confidentiality.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Generally, respondents were friendly, generous with information, and appreciative of the opportunity to be involved. All interviewees agreed to answer additional questions or comments and continue to work with the team, on the project, if needed. These are indicators that the respondents valued the process and that the responses were candid and accurate. Following are summaries of responses to each question.

Question 1: What industry, interest group (property owner, business operator, advocate, non-profit, organization, neighborhood, concerned/interested citizen) do you represent or belong to?

Almost all the respondents identified themselves primarily as "Residents." Several respondents went on to identify themselves as affordable housing advocates, members of non-profit organization, or representatives of a neighborhood group, advocacy group or commission. About one-third of interviewees (a total of nine) also identified themselves as an architect, designer, or developer. Several respondents identified themselves as a business operator or property owner.

Question 2: How familiar are you with Los Altos Zoning Code? (Very, Somewhat, Not at all)

About half of respondents claimed to be "somewhat" familiar with the Los Altos Zoning Code or with certain sections. Slightly fewer were respondents were "very" familiar with the code, and only three claimed no familiarity with the code.

Question 3: What do you find particularly beneficial or effective about the current zoning/ design regulations?

Generally, respondents felt "not much" or "nothing" was particularly beneficial or effective about the current code and design regulations. A few respondents identified the code as "generally clear" or "straightforward," and some identified the standards for parklets, personal services, and landscaping in the Downtown as positives. A few respondents found the code to be effective in establishing districts and promoting low impact development. A couple respondents mentioned the code's existing building height standards, noting that the community supports the existing low height limits.

Question 4: In your opinion, what parts of the code need to be changed or improved?

This question elicited strong feedback. Most respondents cited the need for clear, quantitative, objective design standards, noting that the code's subjective and qualitative provisions lead to drawn-out and unpredictable design review processes where the City Council ends up "too far down in the details" of a design. Respondents also noted that there are inconsistencies between the code's provisions and staff's expectations, which makes the review process even more onerous and less predictable.

Several respondents cited vague or misguided standards misguided and rules of measurement, including rules of measurement for building height; floor-to-ceiling height standards that do not work well with building height standards; and unnecessarily wide parking stall dimensions; infeasible standards for landscaping/permeable surfaces in front setbacks; side yard setbacks

that become difficult on narrow lots; and standards that allow inconsistent building setbacks. Some argued that FAR may be a better tool than density for regulating building size in Los Altos and may incentivize smaller units. One stakeholder noted standards for ground floor commercial uses should be more flexible in terms of minimum square feet and in terms of permitted uses, noting that the demand for active ground-floor uses is lower than the code would suggest.

Feedback on building height standards varied. While some insistent that the code should support the community's desire for low building height, many respondents voiced support for higher building heights, particularly if standards for façade articulation and design soften/offset the impact of increased height and preserve a human-scale feeling at the street frontage.

A common theme was a need for the code to address “transitions” and “buffers” between taller and more intense corridor development and abutting residential neighborhoods (particularly the between El Camino Real and Foothill corridors and R-1 residential neighborhoods to the rear). Respondents want to see the objective standards address transitions in height, enhanced bicycle and pedestrian and access at the rear of large parcels along corridors, and appropriate buffers and setbacks between incompatible uses.

Many respondents expressed concerned about the effect of increased density on surrounding neighborhoods in terms of height and traffic. Some would like to see the code better reflect an overall vision for circulation, revised parking standards, and an in-lieu parking program.

A few respondents suggested that the City should hire an expert or ombudsman to work with developers and neighbors to assure developments are compliant with the code and consistent with the community vision.

Question 5: In your opinion, do the zoning/design regulations encourage development that expresses the character of the neighborhood or area?

Generally, respondents felt that the code does not encourage the type of development that expresses the community character. A few admitted that there was no consistent “community character” or “village character;” rather, there is an eclectic mix of styles in Los Altos. Some argued that standards do not support good architecture, leading to less variety of architectural styles in Los Altos over time.

Several respondents felt that it is going to be increasingly difficult for Los Altos to get it right as they are pressured by State mandates on housing development. Many respondents stated that they were okay with having eclectic architectural styles and contemporary development as long as Los Altos to maintains its charm and quaintness.

Question 6: In your opinion, are there specific buildings that represent the Los Altos aesthetic?

In order of frequency, responses included the following buildings:

- Packard Foundation Building (342 2nd Street)
- 100 First Street
- Enchante Boutique Hotel (1 Main Street)
- The Chartwell Building (38 3rd Street)
- 296 State Street
- 153 2nd Street
- 130 Edith Street
- 86 3rd Street
- 1 First Street
- 240 3rd Street
- US Bank (Main & State) (300 Main Street)
- Active Adult Living/ Parc Regent at San Antonio and Edith (1 W Edith Ave)
- 366 Main Street
- Townhouses at Foothill/El Monte/Lassen (141 Fremont Ave)
- The new Community Center on Hillview (97 Hillview)
- 440 Cesano Ct, Palo Alto

Some respondents also noted buildings that they felt were at odds with the Los Altos aesthetic. These included 5150 El Camino Real, the Safeway on State and First streets, The Village at San Antonio, and 40 Main Street.

Question 7: What role do you feel the following play in establishing/ maintaining the Los Altos character? Please rate 5 being the highest/most and 1 the least/lowest? *Scale and size of building; Building setback; Building façade design; Architectural styles, materials, and colors; Landscaping and streetscape; Location and configuration of parking*

Most respondents felt that scale and size of building and landscaping/streetscaping are the most important or play the biggest role in establishing and maintaining the Los Altos character, with an average rating of 4.5. Building façade design received an average score of 4.4, Building setback, 4.3, and Location and configuration parking, 4.2.

Building styles, materials, and colors were considered to be the least important in establishing/maintaining Los Altos character, with an average rating of 3.3. Many respondents claimed that any “architectural style” can work for Los Altos if it is done well, demonstrates a quality building-street interface, and incorporates good landscape design.



Question 8: What changes would you like to see to the format of the development regulations to make them easier to use?

Most respondents suggested the current code is wordy, hard to use and inconsistent. Generally, respondents would like to see standards that are clearer, more transparent, and objective. Some respondents called for a streamlined, more modern, and less time-consuming permitting process with a tiered approach and/or checklists.

In terms of the document itself, interviewees also mentioned the need for a more user-friendly code that is written in “plain English” and that incorporates more tables and diagrams. Participants emphasize the need for more consistency in and across districts, better use of cross-references for simplicity, and an interface that offers good search capability. Interviewees suggested looking at the Menlo Park code and the Santa Cruz code as good models of streamlined and easy-to-use documents. One stakeholder suggested creating a user’s guide to accompany the code.

Question 9: What is your opinion of the Downtown Design Guidelines?

Many respondents were unfamiliar with the Downtown Design Guidelines and unable comment on its importance or value. Reviews from those who were familiar were mixed, some citing the document as important and others less enthusiastic. Some respondents consider the document to be too vague, not reflective of the City’s evolution, and underused. However, few respondents mentioned that the DTDG was a good representation of the community’s voice, helped defined the Downtown character, should be codified, and is an overall important document.

Question 10: What is your opinion of the Downtown Vision Plan?

Most respondents expressed no opinion on the Downtown Vision Plan. Of those who had an opinion, many complimented the Plan effort as having done a good job of community outreach and considered the Plan to be a valuable guide to create vibrancy, encourage better parking alternatives, and facilitate a mix of uses. While a few respondents felt that the document should be better reflected in the code, the consensus was that the document is too interpretive, subjective, and would be hard to implement.

Question 11: If we have additional questions, may be contact you?

As mentioned above, every person that participated in the interviews agreed to answer more questions or provide more information to the project team. Many saying, “call me any time”, or “call or email me for anything you need”.

Question 12: Are there other issues we have not covered that you feel are important for us to consider?

Respondents raised the following additional issues:

- The need for more affordable housing
- The need for flexibility in permitted uses downtown, on the ground floor as well as upper stories
- Walkability and bikability in general
- The disconnect between the code, buyer preferences, and the city council's decisions
- The desire to preserve the downtown aesthetic by limiting large development to the other parts of the City
- How an increase in density may affect the sewer system, traffic and parking, and services
- The importance of incorporating native and drought-tolerant species into landscape design

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Introduction

- **Purpose of project:** Update, modernize and streamline the existing Los Altos Zoning Code, design guidelines, and other regulations that are applicable to impacted zoning districts; revise code to be legally compliant, objective, and easy to use; improve timeliness and better assure desired outcomes of development projects; address housing needs and assure better design, implement community vision and needs, and protect historic resources.
- **Objective of the interviews:** Help the consultant team understand the highest priority development issues from the perspective of the community and inform the community of the project timeline and opportunities for participation.
- **Structure of the interview:** Establish the respondent's: 1) background and familiarity with existing code, 2) views or opinion of the code in general, 3) opinion on specific elements of design, 4) perspective by neighborhood/district, 5) familiarity and evaluation of the current Downtown Design Guidelines and 6) recommendations on how to improve the current development regulations, 7) final question and opportunity to include anything that the respondent feels is important but may have been missed.
- **Confidentiality:** Participation in this survey is completely voluntary. Respondents stop the interview at any point. Information gathered in the survey will be handled with the utmost confidentiality. Results of the survey will only be released in aggregate form where no comment(s) can be equated with any individual. Further, no names or other personally identifiable information will be shared with the City or made otherwise public in reports, memos, emails, in spoken conversations or other project communication.



Questions

1. What industry, interest group (property owner, business owner/operator, advocate, non-profit, organization, neighborhood, concerned/interested citizen) do you represent or belong to?

2. How familiar are you with Los Altos Zoning Code?

- Very__
- Somewhat__
- Not at all__

3. What do you find particularly beneficial or effective about the current zoning/design regulations?

4. In your opinion, what parts of the code need to be changed or improved?

5. In your opinion, do the zoning/design regulations encourage development that expresses the character of the neighborhood or area?

6. In your opinion, are there specific buildings that represent the Los Altos aesthetic?

7. What role do you feel the following play in establishing/ maintaining the Los Altos character? Please rate 5 being the highest/most and 1 the least/lowest.

- Scale and size of building ____
- Building setback ____
- Building façade design ____
- Architectural styles, materials, and colors ____
- Landscaping and streetscape ____
- Location and configuration of parking ____



8. What changes would you like to see to the format of the development regulations to make them easier to use?

9. What is your opinion of the Downtown Design Guidelines?

10. What is your opinion of the Downtown Vision Plan?

11. If we have additional questions, may be contact you?

12. Are there other issues we have not covered that you feel are important for us to consider?