



City of Los Altos Objective Design Standards

Annotated Framework

August 2020

Prepared for:

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Contents

1	Introduction
2	Recommended Approaches3
	Design Controls for CT and CN4
	Design Controls for CD, CD/R3, CRS, and CRS/OAD8
	14.48.020 Vision Statement & Specific Purposes
	14.76.060 Design Review Findings16
	14.78.060 Design Review Findings18
3	Format Options for the Objective Design Standards 21
4	Additional Considerations23
Ap	opendix A-1

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1 Introduction

The Los Altos Objective Design Standards project was initiated in May 2020 by the City of Los Altos. The project is a six-month process to ensure that the Los Altos Zoning Code supports the community's vision for the City, reflects recent trends in development, and is compliant with recent State legislation related to housing.

This report identifies potential needed modifications to standards, design controls, and design review criteria to ensure that design standards for all residential and residential mixed-use development are clear, objective, and lead to more predictable results. The goal of the project is to update or replace existing Zoning Code sections that include subjective design regulations for multi-family and/or residential mixed-use development.

Code Sections with Subjective Design Standards

Change areas are limited to the following sections within Title 14 of the Los Altos Code of Ordinances (see Appendix for the table of contents of the entire Zoning Code and where these Sections are located):

- **Design Controls for CN and CT.** Sections 14.40.150 Design Control (CN) and 14.50.170 Design Control (CT) list subjective design standards applicable to each district. The two sections are similar in content. *See page 4.*
- **Design Controls for CD, CRS, CD/R3, and CRS/OAD.** Sections 14.44.130 Design Control (CD), 14.48.130 Design Control (CRS), 14.52.110 Design Control (CD/R3), and 14.54.130 Design Control (CRS/OAD) list subjective design standards applicable to each district. The four sections are similar in content. *See page 8.*
- **14.48.020 Vision Statement & Specific Purposes (CRS).** This section lists subjective design standards specific to the CRS zone. *See page 12.*
- **14.76.060 Design Review Findings.** This section lists subjective design review findings for projects in the R3-4.5 District. *See page 16.*
- **14.78.060 Design Review Findings.** This section lists subjective design review findings for projects in the R3-1, R3-1.8, R3-3, R3-5, CN, CT, CD, CD/R3, CRS, and CRS/ OD districts. *See page 18.*

This Document

Chapter 2 of this document identifies specific subjective language located in the sections listed above and describes some recommended approaches to creating effective objective design standards. Chapter 3 presents two options for the format and organization of the revised Code, and Chapter 4 lists some additional considerations for Code revisions or clarifications to best support the objective design standards.

Next Steps

The project team anticipates discussing the content and approaches described in this document at the August 18 Planning Commission/City Council study session. The team will hear community and decision-maker priorities, gather feedback on the framework, and receive direction prior to drafting the objective standards.

2 Recommended Approaches

Pages 4 through 20 identify subjective design standards found in the Los Altos Zoning Code. Specific subjective language is highlighted in blue. The diagram below illustrates how the pages in the chapter are organized.



Design Controls for CT and CN

R3-1	R3-1.	8 R3-3	R3-4.5	R3-5	CN	СТ	CD	CD/R	3 CRS	CRS/OAD
Identify	dentifying Subjective Content									
14.40.150 -	Design co	ntrol (CN).								
As pro	ovided in_	<u>Chapter 14.78</u> of thi	s title and as fo	ollows:						
	A. No structure shall be built or altered including exterior changes in color, materials, and signage except upon approval of the city planner for minor changes and architectural and site approval to be obtained as prescribed in <u>Chapter 14.78</u> of this									
	В.	title for major changes. Scale. When the location of this district is to a larger region, a mixture of scales may be appropriate with some elements scaled for appreciation from the street and step-backs							front	
	C.	moving automobile The proportions of kept close to huma	e and others fo building eleme in scale by usin	r appreciation ents, especially g recesses, cou	by pedestrians those at grour urtyards, entrie	nd level, should es, or outdoor s	be ••••••	·····>	Ground floo pedestrian-s elements	r scaled
	D.	The proportions of building elements at a commercial/residential interface shall be designed to protect residential privacy (including but not limited to window placement), daylight, and environmental quality.							side/rear Privacy/	
	E.	Rooftop mechanica architecturally from	al equipment m n public view.	ust be within t	he height limit:	and screened			Line of sight	
	F.	 F. Firewalls. Consideration should be given to the aesthetic treatment of firewalls including increased side yard setback, contouring the firewall to the building, use of noncombustible roofing materials, and creative use of architectural features in the firewall. 								ign

Creating Objective Design Standards

Upper-story front step-backs. Upper story step-backs on the front facade of a building can establish a mix of scales that preserves a human-scale at the building frontage near the pedestrian realm while permitting increased building height and intensity toward the center of the site. The result can lead to a variety of building scales within a single project. Example standards:

- The building envelope shall be limited by an X-degree inclined plane that begins X feet above the front setback line. *The specified distance above the front setback line may be a function of the abutting right-of-way width, the average exsiting streetwall height, or other factors.*
- All portions of the building above the second story must be set back a minimum of X feet from the front facade.

Alternately, an upper-story front step-back may apply to only a portion (x percent) of the building frontage or the lot width, to allow for variation in street-facing volumes.

Upper-story side and rear step-backs. Upper story step-backs along the side and rear property lines can help establish appropriate transitions between different districts and/or uses. These step-backs can preserve access to sunlight, ensure privacy between neighbors, and maintain a lower scale adjacent to lower-intensity uses. It is recommend that upper-story step-backs be regulated separately from building setbacks, or yards. Example standards:

• Where adjacent to a single-family residential district, the second story of all structures shall be located with an X-degree plane beginning at side property line.

- Where adjacent to a single-family residential district, a minimum of X percent of the second story side facade shall be stepped back from the ground floor side facade a minimum of X feet.
- For every X feet in height, the structure shall step back at least X feet on the side(s) of the structure that abut a single-family residential district.



Pedestrian-scaled building entrances. Standards that ensure a human-scaled streetfacing entrance design maximum ground floor ceiling height; required entry features and dimension ranges. Example standard:

• Accent elements a maximum of 12 feet in height shall be used to demarcate building frontages, building entrances, and common open space areas. A minimum X element(s) from the following list must be incorporated into ground floor building design: awning, canopy, overhang, trellises, arches, columns, etc.

Alternately, building entries may be selected from a "menu" of designs, each with prescribed design elements and dimensions. Entries may include porch, stoop, dooryard, terrace, shopfront, forecourt, courtyard, etc. Standards for each frontage limit encroachments into the required yards, and establish height, width, and floor elevation ranges.



Images (right) and diagrams (next page) can help illustrate the various desired elements of entrance design.



Building Setback Line

ROW

Pedestrian-scaled ground floor design. Design standards may address the design of a structure's ground floor separately from the upper floors. Elements that contribute to a comfortable pedestrian environment include limits to the size of two-story elements (columns, bay windows, etc.), architectural elements that establish a rhythm across all street-facing ground floor facades, and elements that soften the foundation of a building where the ground floor elevation is raised. Example standards:

- Ground floor building design must include a minimum X element(s) from the following • list to add visual variety and interest to building facades and enhance the connection between public and private realms: eaves, cornices, trellises, overhangs, exposed structural elements such as rafters, recessed windows, columns, bay windows, etc.
- Structural bays must be a maximum X feet in width and must be visually distinguishable • through recesses a minimum X inches in depth.



Diagrams in plan can specify the required degree of articulation across a street-facing facade.



Images can help illustrate the various desired elements of ground floor design.

Privacy/Line of Sight. Standards may require that windows and balconies be offset to avoid direct sight lines into and from neighboring properties. Standards may also require additional a minimum distance between a primary living space (bedroom or living room) and a neighboring structure. This may have the effect of requiring variation and articulation along side facades. Example standards:

- Primary interior living spaces (bedroom and living areas) must be offset a minimum X feet from a facing neighboring primary interior space on the same story.
- A minimum X feet must be maintained between any primary interior living space (bedroom and living area) and an existing neighboring primary living space on the same story.



Firewall Design. Design standards can require that firewalls be designed as integral parts of the building and site design to minimize negative aesthetic impacts. As firewalls typically incorporate parapets and end-of-wall details as part of the wall's fire safety design, these elements and any exposed wall surfaces should be expressive of the overall building design.

Design Controls for CD, CD/R3, CRS, and CRS/OAD

R3-1		R3-1.8	R3-3	R3-4.5	R3-5	CN	СТ	CD	CD/R	3 CRS	CRS/OAD	
Identi	fyir	ng Sub	ojective (Content								
А.	No s signa <u>Cha</u> p	tructure s age in the oter 14.78	shall be built o CD District ex of this title.	or altered inclu xcept upon ap	uding exterior proval of the	changes in co city planner o	blor, materials r as prescribe	, and d in				
В.	Redu	uction of a	apparent size	and bulk:								
	1.	As a gen	eral principle,	, building surfa	aces should be	e relieved with	n a change of	wall		Facade relief/	,	
	r	Every bu	uilding over se	venty-five (75)	feet wide sho	ould have its r	perceived beig	ht and		projections		
	۷.	bulk redi	uced by dividi hange of plan	ing the buildin	g mass into si	maller-scale c	omponents by	/: ••••	····>>	Building mass articulation	sing	
		ii. Ap	rojection or re	ecess;								
		iii. Var	rying cornice o	or roof lines;								
		iv. Oth	ner similar me	eans.								
	3.	The prop	portions of bu	ilding element	ts, especially t	hose at grour	nd level, shoul	d be	····>	Ground floor		
		kept clos	se to human s	cale by using i	recesses, cour	rtyards, entrie	s, or outdoor	spaces		pedestrian-sc elements	aled	
		along the frontage	e perimeter of	f the building	to define the i	underlying fift	y (50) foot fro	nt lot		elements		
	4.	Rooftop	equipment sh	nall be conceal	ed from view	and/or integr	ated within th	e				
		architect	ture of the bui	ilding.								
	5.	Windows shadow	s should be in detail; the mir	iset generously nimum inset s	y from the bu hall be three i	ilding wall to o inches.	create shade a	and	····>>	Window desig	şn	
C.	The	primary a	iccess for all b	uildings shall	be directly to	the street.						
D.	Cons	ideration	n should be giv	ven to the rela	tionship of th	e project and	its location in	the				
	dow	ntown to	the implemer	ntation of goal	s and objectiv	es of the dow	ntown urban	design				
	plan	. Evaluatio	on of design a	approved shall	consider one	or more of th	ne following fa	ictors:				
	1.	The proj	ect location as	s an entry, edg	ge, or core site	2;						
	2. The ability to contribute to the creation of open space on-site or in designated areas;											
	3. Enhancement of the pedestrian environment through the use of pathways, plantings, pedestrian											
		trees, pa	wing, benches	s or other ame	nities;					amenities		
	4.	Building	facade impro	vements inclu	ding, paint, si	gnage, service	e areas, windo	ws and				
		other fea	atures;					•••	····>	Parking desig	n/	
	5.	On-site o	or off-site parl	king improven	nents;				1			
	6.	Public or	r private lands	scape improve	ments.			•••	····>>	Landscaping		

Creating Objective Design Standards

Building massing articulation. While basic development standards regulate building height and setbacks, design standards prevent monolithic structures by further regulating massing elements. Standards can limit the size of volumes adjacent to lower-intensity uses, limit the perceived building width increment, and increase visual interest. Building massing standards can complement or take the place of upper story step-back standards.





Images and axonometric diagrams can be useful in describing required building massing articulation. A single diagram (left) and accompanying table can ensure that dimensions work on typical lot sizes and describe feasible building forms.

Tripartite design. Traditional tripartite design, where buildings exhibit an identifiable base, middle, and top, is effective in visually breaking up the mass of a building, reducing its perceived bulk, and regulating design and placement of half-stories. Design standards related to tripartite design can offer a menu of appropriate forms for the top of the building. Example standards include:

- All street-facing building facades shall be composed of a clearly distinguishable base, middle, and top. Non-traditional designs may incorporate other means of façade composition.
- Horizontal articulation may consist of a differentiated base, a roof cornice line, an eave and gables overhang, or other element that frames the middle section of the building.
- Buildings or portions of buildings that are over four stories shall provide articulation for the top story of the building. This may be accomplished through a change in color, change in material, a cornice/belt course at the bottom of the uppermost floor, a top story step-back, a mansard roof, or similar measures.



Images and sketches can illustrate options for appropriate building "tops."



Facade relief/projections. Standards may require relief on a smaller scale, to be applied to each upper-story street-facing building volume or surface. These include balconies, columns, structural bays, cornices, belt courses, and other architectural features that provide shadows, ad visual interest, and signal habitation. Example standards:

- Wall projections and recesses must be minimum X" in depth for buildings between X and X feet in width, and minimum X" in depth for buildings X feet or greater in width.
- Vertical architectural elements (pilasters, columns, piers, other structural elements) must extend a min. X feet in height and project a min. of X inches from the building face.
- Corner lots shall include architectural variations (bay windows, wraparound porches, projections, etc.) on both street frontages. Architectural enhancements shall be provided for a minimum of 50% of the side street frontage elevation.
- Awnings shall be of a durable, commercial grade fabric, canvas or similar material having a matte finish. Canopies can be constructed of wood or other natural materials in keeping with materials used historically in the Downtown.

Table 3.2.020.A Massing and Facade Articulation Standards Overview					
Requirement	Building leng	th along adjacent	sidewalk1		
	< 75'	75' to 100'	>100'	>150'	
3.2.030 (Tripartite Facade Articulation)	No	Yes	Yes	No	
3.2.040 (Massing and Composition)	No	No	Yes	Yes	
3.2.050 (Corner Elements)	No	No	No	Yes	
3.2.060 (Windows and Openings)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
3.2.070 (Historic Resource Adjacency Standards)	Required wher	e adjacent to identi	ified historic res	ource	
¹ As measured along street.					

Window and door design. Window and door design is integral to architectural style. Windows should be regulated to reflect the different components of the building (e.g., ground floor lobbies, stair towers, corners, office suites, or residential units). Example standards:

- Recess doors and windows a minimum of X inches from the wall. Recess window glass • a minimum of X inches from the exterior wall surface to add relief to the wall surface.
- Trim surrounds shall be provided at all exterior window and door openings. Trim shall be substantial, visible, and at least X-inch in depth around all upper-story windows and non-commercial ground floor buildings.
- Residential buildings with multiple frontages facing streets, pedestrian paths, or ٠ shared open spaces shall incorporate operable windows on at least two frontages.
- Upper-story windows must be vertically oriented. Classical proportions are recommended proportions (e.g. 2:1, 3:2, or 4:3).

Blank walls. Horizontal wall surfaces without apertures or articulation increase the perceived mass of a building. Example standards to reduce blank walls:

• No building facade may extend in a continuous plane for more than X feet without a window, door, or store front opening.



When regulations for building articulation and facade relief may vary based on building width and location, they may be presented in tabular format.

Diagrams can illustrate

proportions and recesses

required window

Common open space and pedestrian amenities.

Design standards can ensure that common open spaces are visible, accessible, and usable. Example standards:

- Required landscape buffers and driveways shall not count as required common open space.
- Required common one space may be provided by one or more of the following: plaza, pocket park/ plaza, square, playground, community gardens, greenways, and neighborhood parks. All spaces must be ADA accessible and must incorporate seating and lighting.
- Separation between common and private open space may be provided with low walls, plant materials, or fences a maximum of X" in height. Where private open space is adjacent to a public accessway, a fence up to X' is allowed provided the top X" is a minimum X% transparent.



Landscaping and paving. Objective standards can ensure that required buffer areas remain landscaped; that selected species are local, low water usage, drought-tolerant, or add color or shade to the streetscape; and that plantings complement the architectural design of the primary structure.

- Landscaping must be placed on each side of a driveway at grade or in raised planters.
- Low walls and/or hedges must screen the parking along the sidewalk. When walls are used, the materials and design must be compatible with and not obscure the architectural style of the building.
- A minimum X% percent of on-site paving material must be pervious/permeable.

Parking design and access. Currently, the Los Altos Code does not establish setbacks for on-site parking areas, either surface or structured. The Code can ensure that surface parking areas and structured parking is designed and screened to limit visibility from the right-of-way. Example standards:

- Where ground-level structured parking is provided, the parking area must be 1) "lined" with uses or 2) designed such that the foor elevation is a minimum X vertical feet below the elevation of the adjacent sidewalk.
- Fences and walls around parking areas shall not present a solid unbroken surface. Walls or fences greater than X feet in length shall include design features such as trellis or grillwork with climbing plants, landscaping, and/or textured treatments over x% of the total wall area at minimum.
- Fences and walls around parking areas shall be decorative iron, masonry, rock, wood, or similar permanent material and not be more than X% solid.
- Controlled entrances to parking facilities (gates, doors, etc.) shall be located a minimum X feet from the back of sidewalk.
- A clearly defined, lighted and landscaped pedestrian route shall be provided between all parking areas and primary pedestrian entrance.
- New development on abutting lots shall be designed to allow cross-access for internal pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular circulation systems. Easements shall be used to assist in defining maintenance and utility responsibilities.

Ground floor pedestrian-scale elements. See page 5-6.

Diagrams can be effective in demonstrating the placement and dimensions of on-site open space.

14.48.020 Vision Statement & Specific Purposes

R3-1	R3-	·1.8	R3-3	R3-4.5	R3-5	CN	СТ	CD	CD/	′R3	CRS	CRS/OAD
Identify	Identifying Subjective Content											
14.48.020 - Vis	14.48.020 - Vision statement and specific purposes (CRS).											
The city attract busir	The city shall retain and enhance the downtown Los Altos village atmosphere and shall seek to attract businesses to the village. The primary characteristics of the desired village atmosphere include:											
	A.	A mix comm busine	of uses emphas unity residents esses;	sizing retail bus and visitors, a	inesses and se nd with housing	rvices that mee g located above	et the needs of eground floor	••••		Com	natibility	,
	В.	Buildir quality and hi	ngs and streets y design, preser istorical interes	cape elements nt a diversity of t of the village;	that enhance t appearances,	he pedestrian e and contribute	experience, refl to the architec	ect tural	>	conto space amei	ext; Open e/pedestr nities;	ian
	C.	An attr interac	An attractive, pedestrian-oriented shopping environment that encourages social interaction, with substantial landscaping and open space, and adequate public Parking design/ access						۱/			
	D.	Busine and su	Business and specialty stores that will attract customers from the local community and surrounding region: and									
	E.	E. Encouragement of activities that enhance and extend commercial vitality, including nighttime activities.										
In addit	ion to t	he visio	on statement, th	ne specific purp	oses for the CF	RS District are a	as follows:			Crow	nd floor	
	A.	Promo	ote the impleme	entation of the	downtown urb	an design plan	;	•••	····>	pede	strian-sca	aled
	В.	Encou at the	rage pedestriar ground level;	n-scale design a	ind minimize b	lank walls and	other dead spa	ces		elem walls	ents; Blaı S	nk
	C.	Contin buildir establi	nue the pattern ng designs that ished, either by	and scale estal express the un building struct	olished by exist derlying twent ture or by arch	ting buildings b y-five (25) foot itectural desigr	by requiring frontages origin n;	nally	••••>	Build artic	ling mass ulation	ing
	D.	Create	e continuous bu	uilding frontage	without major	interruption b	y disallowing	· · · ·	>	Perce	ent of bui	Iding
	_	drivew	vays and parkin	g lots on shopp	oing street fron	tages;				at se	tback line	e/
	E. F.	Allow latitude for creative design and architectural variety within limits established; within a facade zone Provide pedestrian amenities such as paseos, outdoor public spaces and outdoor Curb cut frequency/ Instring Instring							e zone iency/			
	G.	Establ	ish a sense of e	entry into the d	owntown;			•••	>	Entri	es/gatew	avs
	Н.	Encou	rage historic pr	eservation for	those buildings	listed on the c	tity's historic	•••	>	Histo	oric prese	rvation
		resour	rces inventory;							mote		
	I.	Encou and	rage the upgra	ding of building	exteriors, sigr	ıs, passageway	s, and rear entr	ies;				
	J.	Encou	rage the use of	solar, photovo	ltaic, and other	r energy consei	rving devices.	•••	····>	Susta desig	ainability gn	in

Creating Objective Design Standards

Compatibility with the height/scale/design of neighboring structures. The Code should identify and address the unique CRS neighborhood context by identifying elements that best express the neighborhood aesthetic and requiring new development to conform in specific ways. This may include height to eave/peak, colors and materials, building entrance type, maximum building width, and bay windows/oriels, among other elements. The image below identifies some characteristics typical of the CRS district.



Percent of building within a facade zone. Establishing a "facade zone" can ensure or protect a continuous street wall along a street frontage. Standards may be written to apply to a minimum percentage of the lot frontage or building frontage, and may be shown in plan, as illustrated in the following diagram:



Property Line	Facade Zone	
Building Setback Line	Buildable Area	
Building within Facade 2	lone	
Front	min. 70% lot buildable width (excludes re- quired setbacks)	•
Street Side	min. 50% buildable lot depth (excludes	F

Curb cut frequency. Standards for frequency and location of curb cuts are related to and should work together with facade zone and parking access standards. Wide and closely spaced curb cuts can reduce the supply of on-street parking and can interrupt the flow and safety of pedestrian traffic. In general, downtown areas and areas along walkable corridors should maintain continuous frontages with vehicular access located on side streets and shared wherever possible.

Design standards can limit width, placement, and spacing of curb cuts, with standards specific to district and/or corridor.



Examples of upper-story corner elements.

Downtown Gateways. Design at gateway areas is important in reinforcing a sense of entry to the Downtown and a strong sense of identity. Design standards can ensure that the four Downtown gateway intersections, as identified in the Downtown Design Guidelines, are punctuated with strong architectural elements at corners as well as building frontage, streetscape, and signage elements that invite pedestrian traffic. Example standards:

- A minimum X element(s) from the following list must be incorporated into corner building design at gateway intersections: tower elements, sloped roof structures, special uses with outdoor plazas, special landscape features, enhanced on-site lighting, or increased architectural details.
- Ground-floor design at gateway intersections must address both street frontages either through 1) entrances that are visible and directly accessible from both streets; 2) building transparency beyond the required minimum for the first X feet of building frontage from the corner; or 3) a usable public space with pedestrian-scaled features on the non-entrance street.



4	li ₁ 4	l	
1		-	

Plan and elevation diagrams of Corner Elements

C. Standards/General Character	
Square	A
Octagonal	B
Chamfer	G
Corner elements shall incorporate at least 1 story and r extend from the ground story through the top story.	nay

Corner elements may exceed the maximum height of the zone by up to 10' for a horizontal area up to 20' x 20'. Corner elements shall be recessed or projected from the main facade by at least 3'.

Historic preservation. For any Downtown, historic preservation is a key part of retaining character. Design standards can specify preservation measures for properties listed on the city's historic resources inventory. Example standards:

- Additions to buildings with historic designation shall be identifiable from original construction. Additions shall employ similar or complementing materials and colors and shall exhibit similar opening proportions, facade rhythms and horizontal elements as the original.
- Where the original structure includes transom windows, every effort shall be made to retain this traditional storefront feature. If the ceiling inside the structure has been lowered, the ceiling shall be stepped up to meet the transom so that light will penetrate building interior.
- Deteriorated architectural features shall be repaired rather than replaced wherever possible. If replacement is necessary, new materials shall match the original in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities. If the original was painted, the substitute materials shall be painted as well.
- Original siding materials shall not be covered over, cladded, or replaced with a different material.
- Original architectural elements such as cornices, moldings, and trim shall not be removed. Necessary replacement of these elements shall be similar in color, material, and form to the original.
- Proportions of existing door and window openings and the pattern of existing window sash shall be maintained in replacement work or additions.

Sustainability in design. Conservation and protection of natural resources is an increasingly essential part of building design, and standards can ensure that green building practices are integral to and enhance building design in the Downtown. Example design standards:

- All new construction shall incorporate including landscaping, building orientation, design of fenestration and other design elements to passively cool a building; energy-efficient HVAC; and energy efficient lighting
- Energy generation devices must blend in with the building color.
- Provide native on-site landscaping that minimizes heat gain, is drought-resistant, and requires minimal irrigation by:
 - » Planting deciduous trees on the south side of buildings.
 - » Installing vegetation on exposed east and west facing walls.
 - » Planting groundcovers that prevent ground reflection and keep the surfaces cool.

Ground floor pedestrian-scaled elements. See page 5-6.

Tripartite design. See page 9.

Building massing articulation. See page 9.

Blank walls. See page 10.

Open space/pedestrian amenities. See page 11.

Landscaping/paving. See page 11.

Parking design/access. See page 11.

14.76.060 Design Review Findings

R3-1	R3-1.	8 R3-3	R3-4.5	R3-5	CN	СТ	CD	CD/R3	CRS	CRS/OAD
Identif	ying s	Subjective	Content							
14.76.060 - L	Design re	view findings.								
In app findings:	proving a	n application for de	sign review, th	e approving a	uthority shall ı	make the follow	wing			
	А. В.	The proposed stru The height, elevat structure or additi residential structu	ucture or altera ions and place ion, when cons ires on adjace	ation complies ment on the s sidered with re nt lots, will avo	with all provis ite of the prop eference to the oid unreasonal	sions of this ch osed main or a nature and lo ple interference	apter; accessory cation of e with	·····>	Upper story step-backs; of building a line/within zone"	side/rear Percent at setback "facade
		views and privacy, imposed by partic	, and will consi ular building s	der the topog ite conditions;	raphic and geo	ologic constrair	nts	·····>	Privacy/Line	e of sight
	C.	The natural landso and soil removal; general appearan	cape will be pr grade changes ce of neighbor	eserved insofa shall be minii ing developed	ar as practicab mized and will l areas;	le by minimizir be in keeping	ng tree with the ••	·····>	Grading	
	D.	The orientation of to the immediate	the proposed neighborhood	main or acces will minimize	ssory structure the perceptior	or addition in of excessive l	relation bulk;			
	E.	General architectural considerations, including the character, size, scale and quality Compatibility/ of the design, the architectural relationship with the site and other buildings,							ty/	
		building materials the compatibility of adjacent buildings	and similar el of the develop s; and	ements have k ment with its c	been incorpora design concept	ated in order to and the chara	o insure acter of	·····>	Building ma	terials
	F.	The proposed strustic with minimal protection. A step	uctures have b grading, minin ped foundatio	een designed nal impervious n shall genera	to follow the n cover and ma lly be required	atural contour ximum erosio where the ave	rs of the n •• erage	·····>>	Grading	

slope beneath the proposed structure is ten (10) percent or greater.

(Ord. No. 2012-381, § 1, 5-22-2012; Ord. No. 2016-423, § 3, 9-27-2016)

Creating Objective Design Standards

Compatibility with the height/scale/design of neighboring structures. The Code should identify and address the unique R3-4.5 neighborhood context by identifying elements that best express the neighborhood aesthetic and requiring new development to conform in specific ways. This may include height to eave/peak, colors and materials, building entrance type, maximum building width, bay windows, and landscaping, among other elements.



Building materials. The range of acceptable building materials may be listed in the Code. Additional standards may regulate the use of particular materials. Example standards:

- Materials may include wood, concrete, brick, glass, metals, stucco, stone, tile, and brushed steel.
- At least two materials shall be used on any building frontage (excluding roof and foundation) in addition to glazing and railings. Any one material must comprise at least 20% of the building frontage.
- Buildings X stories or taller with frontage along a street or a shared open space must incorporate a material change between the first floor and upper floors along at least X% of any building façade width.
- Sustainable building materials such as recycled, renewable, sustainable, and nontoxic/ low-VOC (volatile organic compound) materials shall be used for a minimum X percent of the building envelope.



Grading. Standards beyond those of Appendix J of the California Building Code may be specified to preserve existing topography in the R3-4.5 district by reducing the amount of cut/fill allowed without a permit. In addition, site regulations may require terracing and plantings that reflect the shape of the natural terrain.



Upper-story side step-backs. See page 4.

Ground floor pedestrian-scale elements. See page 5-6.

Privacy. See page 7.

Percent of building at setback line. See page 14.

14.78.060 Design Review Findings

R3-1	R3-1	.8 R3-3	R3-4.5	R3-5	CN	СТ	CD	CD/R3	CRS	CRS/OAD
Identify	ying S	Subjective C	ontent							
14.78.060 - E	Design re	view findings.								
In app developme following f	oroving ap ent direct findings:	oplications for design or or their designee,	review approv planning comr	al under this ch nission and the	napter, the com city council sh	nmunity all make the				
	A.	The proposal meets specific plan, design district or area.	the goals, poli guidelines and	cies and objecti l ordinance des	ives of the gene sign criteria ado	eral plan and ar opted for the sp	ny vecific			
	В.	The proposal has ar other structures in t	chitectural inte	grity <mark>and has</mark> a area in terms o	n appropriate f height, bulk a	relationship wit nd design.	h •••••	≽ Cor cor	npatibility text	/
	C.	Building mass is art vertically. Building e surfaces. Residentia signal habitation, su	uilding mass is articulated to relate to the human scale, both horizontally and ertically. Building elevations have variation and depth and avoid large blank wall urfaces. Residential or mixed-use residential projects incorporate elements that impal babitation, such as identifiable entrances, stairs, porches, bays, and balagoing							
	D.	Exterior materials a durability, and mate base, body, parapet colors have been us of height, bulk and i immediate area.	nd finishes con erials are used o s, bays, arcade ed in a manner mass, and are h	vey high quality effectively to de s and structura that serves to narmonious wit	y, integrity, per efine building e l elements. Ma reduce the per h other structu	manence and lements such a terials, finishes, rceived appeara irres in the	s and ince	····>> Bui and ma Cor cor	lding mate l colors; Bu ssing artico ntext/ npatibility	rials iilding ulation;
	E.	Landscaping is gene designed to comple the building architer substantial street tr frontage.	erous and inviti ment the build cture and the s ee canopy, eith	ng, and landsca ing and parking urrounding stre er in the public	ape and hardsc g areas, and to eetscape. Land c right-of-way o	ape features ar be integrated w scaping include r within the pro	e vith s ject	···≽ Lar	dscaping	
	F.	Signage is designed materials, colors an	to complemen d proportions.	t the building a	rchitecture in t	erms of style,				
	G.	Mechanical equipm be consistent with t	ent is screened he building arc	from public vie hitecture in for	ew and the scre m, material and	eening is design d detailing.	ed to			
	Н.	Service, trash and u structures that are o detailing.	tility areas are s	screened from the building ar	public view, or chitecture in m	are enclosed in aterials and	•••••	····> Scr	eening	

Creating Objective Design Standards

Compatibility with the height/scale/design of neighboring structures. The Code should identify and address the neighborhood context for each unique district by identifying elements that best express the neighborhood aesthetic and requiring new development to conform in specific ways. This may include height to eave/peak, colors and materials, building entrance type, maximum building width, and bay windows/oriels, among other elements.



Double hung windows with

Building colors. Color can add visual interest, evoke a particular architectural style, or appear garish or distracting. Design standards for building color may include:

- Not more than four colors shall be applied to the building façade: 1 primary color and 2-3 trim or accent colors.
- At least three exterior colors shall be used. Elements that count toward this requirement include cladding material, trim/accent colors, and visually significant colors for doors, balconies, and similar elements. Primary colors shall be used as accent colors only.

Screening. Site design standards can ensure that the entire site exhibits the aesthetic quality of the primary structure by screening unsightly elements and ensuring that screening materials are high-quality and complement the building design. Example standards include:

- No outdoor storage shall be allowed between the primary building and the sidewalk or street, and all outdoor storage must be screened.
- Appropriate screening shall be provided through a combination of fencing, landscaping, and building placement. Walls or fences in public view must be constructed with attractive, durable materials. New or used materials in good condition may be utilized. Concrete, wood, and metal may be used in combination with each other and landscaping to provide an attractive street frontage and to enhance the view from the public way.
- Barbed wire, chain-link, and razorwire are not permitted.



Diagrams in section are effective in illustrating how to determine how to measure visibility and the required height of screening elements.

Architectural integrity. Los Altos is not defined by a single architectural style; rather, many styles are seen throughout the city. Design standards can support that diversity of styles while ensuring that individual buildings strive to express a single recognizable style. Requiring adherence to a single style for all aspects of building design and detail can prevent pastiche or muddled building design. Example standard:

• Where an existing structure exhibits a particular style, the following building elements should be reflective of that style: roof design, materials, finish texture, colors, doowway design, and window design.

Building massing articulation. See page 9.

Facade relief/projections. See page 10.

Landscaping. See page 11.

Building materials. See page 17.

3 Format Options for the Objective Design Standards

Option A: Minimal Change

Option A for the format of the objective design standards entails no change to the overall document organization. The Design Control section within each base zone chapter would be updated to replace existing subjective standards with objective standards. The revised Design Control sections would also include existing applicable Design Review Findings, written to be objective, based on the recommendations in Chapter 2 and input from City Council.

The format and organization of the revised Design Control sections would be similar to the "Creating Objective Design Standards" sections in Chapter 2 of this document. Since each chapter would include its own set of design controls specific to each base zone, this option would lead to some repetition of design standards across chapters.

The existing Design Review Findings chapters would remain as-is and would continue to apply to projects that are subject to design review.

Option B: New Design Control Chapter

In Option B, all design control sections would be deleted from their respective base district sections and a single new Design Control Chapter would be inserted into the Code. This chapter would include content from all applicable exiting Design Controls sections and the Design Review Findings chapters, written to be objective based on the recommendations in Chapter 2 and input from City Council.. The new chapter would be organized as follows:

Chapter 14.64 - Design Controls

Section 14.64.010 - Building Envelope. Provides objective design standards relating to upper-story step-backs, percent of building at setback line, privacy/line of sight, and views.

Section 14.64.020 - Building Design. Provides objective design standards relating to ground floor pedestrian-scaled elements, building entrances, corner treatment, architectural integrity, design of the roof/roof line, design of firewalls, and sustainability in design.

Section 14.64.030 - Facade Design. Provides objective design standards relating to facade/ projections, tripartite design, visibility of structural bays, window design, restrictions on blank walls, and building materials and colors.

Section 14.64.040 - Site Design. Provides objective design standards relating to topography/grading, paving, landscaping, curb curt frequency and location, open spaces/ pedestrian amenities, parking design/access, and site circulation.

Section 14.64.050 - Context and Compatibility. Provides objective design standards relating to compatibility with height, scale, and design of neighboring structures.

Option B reduces repetition of design standards that apply to more than one zone. As in Option A, Design Review Findings would remain as-is and would continue to apply to projects that are subject to design review.

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4 Additional Considerations

This section discusses additional Code sections and standards that may warrant clarification and/or revisions. While not subjective design standards, these topics impact overall building envelope and design. Once the objective design standards are in place, the City may want to revisit these regulations to improve and strengthen the regulatory structure.

Density Bonus

The State Density Bonus Law offers a way for developers to obtain more favorable development requirements in exchange for building or donating land for affordable or senior units. Section 14.28 of the Los Altos Code implements this law.

A State mandate (CA Government Code Section 65915-65918), the Density Bonus Law allows up to 35% increase in project density and 80% increase in density for projects that are completely affordable. The law also requires local jurisdiction to provide "incentives or "concessions" to projects that qualify for a density bonus. Concessions are defined as modification of site development standards; approval of mixed-use zoning; or other regulatory incentives that result in cost reductions. The number of required incentives is based on the percentage of affordable units and the concessions are to be proposed by the project applicant and granted by the City.

The use of the density bonus in Los Altos has typically led to concessions for increased height and increased height encroachments for elevator towers. However, due to the fact that there is no density listed in the Code for any C zone except CT, there are no clear-cut rules for applying the permitted density bonus, and subsequently, the number of concessions to be granted. The City may find benefit in establishing a procedure for determining the base maximum density in C zones.

Setbacks

The Los Altos Code provides objective standards for building setbacks (front, side, street side, and rear) in each base zone. In some conditions, more sensitive application in, or adjacent to, certain uses, districts or areas may be warranted to better accommodate adjacencies/ transitions and to better support related design standards. Some examples include:

- Front setback in the CT district is minimum 25 feet. Given the deep lots facing El Camino Real, this permits a wide range of street frontage conditions, including landscaped buffers, on-site parking areas, and usable open space areas. A maximum setback, together with the minimum 50% landscaping requirements, may create a more consistent street frontage condition.
- Setbacks along 1st Street vary based on zone. Minimum front setbacks standards include 2 ft (CD), 10 ft (residential uses in CD/R3), and no setback "with the exception of landscaping" (CRS). The corridor may benefit from standards that impose a consistent setback.
- The CD/R3 zone does not require a side setback, except when abutting a street or parking plaza. The City may explore requiring a building setback where abutting a residential district..

Encroachments

The Los Altos Code Section 14.66.240 lists structures permitted to encroach above building height limits and the amount each is permitted to encroach. This includes elevator structures, roof details, and mechanical and telecommunications structures. The City may revise these standards to better reflect the practical needs of each while balancing the visual impact of each from the right of way.

Landscaping and Open Space Standards

Open space regulations for the CT district specify required private and common open space. In addition, some building setback requirements in the CD, CD/R3, CRS and CRS/ OAD districts include provisions for required landscaping. While objective standards will be written to address the design of landscaping and open space, the related sections in the base zone chapters may warrant clarifications regarding how these spaces are calculated.

Parking Standards

Standards for off-street parking are provided in Chapter 14.74 of the Code, with additional standards for related to downtown design in the base zone chapters of the CD, CRS, CD/R3, and CRS/OAD districts. Revisions or clarifications may include minimum stall dimension; separate requirements for compact spaces; standards for shared paring areas; and/or an inlieu program. In addition, required landscape buffers in the downtown should be checked for consistency with design standards for setbacks and landscaping.

Public Benefits

Projects in the CD, CRS, CD/R3, and CRS/OAD districts are eligible for exceptions from development regulations in exchange for the provision of a public benefit to the downtown. As noted in *Exceptions for Public Benefit* code section in each base zone chapter, exceptions may include, but are not limited to, setbacks, height of structure, and other development standards (language varies by zone). The nature and extent of these exceptions may impact overall building envelope and design and may warrant clarification/definition.

Appendix

Following is the complete Table of Contents of the Los Altos Zoning Code. Highlighted sections (bold and blue dashes) are those that include or refer to subjective design standards.

Chapter 14.02 - General Provisions and Definitions	14.08.090 - Height of structures (R1-H).
Article 1 General	14.08.100 - Daylight plane (R1-H).
14.02.010 - Short title.	14.08.110 - Basements (R1-H).
14.02.020 - Purpose.	14.08.120 - Outdoor kitchens, barbeques, fireplaces and swim-
14.02.030 - Nature.	ming pools.
14.02.040 - Interpretation.	14.08.130 - Design control (R1-H).
14.02.050 - General provisions and definitions.	14.08.140 - Off-street parking (R1-H).
14.02.060 - Statement of annexation policy.	14.08.150 - Signs (R1-H).
Article 2 Definitions	14.08.160 - Fences (R1-H).
14.02.070 - Definitions.	14.08.170 - Nonconforming use regulations (R1-H).
Chapter 14.04 - Zoning Districts Designated	14.08.180 - Accessory structures.
14.04.010 - Districts.	Chapter 14.10 - R1-20 Single-Family District
14.04.020 - Boundaries.	14.10.120 - Outdoor kitchens, barbeques, fireplaces and swim- ming pools.
Chapter 14.06 - R1-10 Single-Family District	14.10.010 - R1-20 District.
14.06.010 - R1-10 District.	14.10.020 - Permitted uses (R1-20).
14.06.020 - Permitted uses (R1-10).	14.10.030 - Conditional uses (R1-20).
14.06.030 - Conditional uses (R1-10).	14.10.040 - Site area (R1-20).
14.06.040 - Site area (R1-10).	14.10.050 - Site frontage, width and depth (R1-20).
14.06.050 - Site frontage, width and depth (R1-10).	14.10.060 - Coverage (R1-20).
14.06.060 - Coverage (R1-10).	14.10.070 - Floor area ratio (R1-20).
14.06.070 - Floor area ratio (R1-10).	14.10.080 - Setbacks (R1-20).
14.06.080 - Setbacks (R1-10).	14.10.090 - Height of structures (R1-20).
14.06.090 - Height of structures (R1-10).	14.10.100 - Daylight plane (R1-20).
14.06.100 - Daylight plane (R1-10).	14.10.110 - Basements (R1-20).
14.06.110 - Basements (R1-10).	14.10.120 - Outdoor kitchens, barbeques, fireplaces and swim- ming pools.
ming pools.	14.10.130 - Design control (R1-20).
14.06.130 - Design control (R1-10).	14.10.140 - Off-street parking (R1-20).
14.06.140 - Off-street parking (R1-10).	14.10.150 - Signs (R1-20).
14.06.150 - Signs (R1-10).	14.10.160 - Fences (R1-20).
14.06.160 - Fences (R1-10).	14.10.170 - Nonconforming use regulations (R1-20).
14.06.170 - Nonconforming use regulations (R1-10).	14.10.180 - Accessory structures.
14.06.180 - Accessory structures.	Chapter 14.12 - R1-40 Single-Family District
Chapter 14.08 - R1-H Single-Family District	14.12.010 - R1-40 District.
14.08.010 - R1-H District.	14.12.020 - Permitted uses (R1-40).
14.08.020 - Permitted uses (R1-H).	14.12.030 - Conditional uses (R1-40).
14.08.030 - Conditional uses (R1-H).	14.12.040 - Site area (R1-40).
14.08.040 - Site area (R1-H).	14.12.050 - Site frontage, width and depth (R1-40).
14.08.050 - Site frontage, width and depth (R1-H).	14.12.060 - Coverage (R1-40).
14.08.060 - Coverage (R1-H).	14.12.070 - Floor area ratio (R1-40).
14.08.070 - Floor area ratio (R1-H).	14.12.080 - Setbacks (R1-40).
14.08.080 - Setbacks (R1-H).	14.12.090 - Height of structures (R1-40).

14.12.100 - Daylight plane (R1-40).

14.12.110 - Basements (R1-40).

14.12.120 - Outdoor kitchens, barbeques, fireplaces and swimming pools.

14.12.130 - Design control (R1-40).

14.12.140 - Off-street parking (R1-40).

14.12.150 - Signs (R1-40).

14.12.160 - Fences (R1-40).

14.12.170 - Nonconforming use regulations (R1-40).

14.12.180 - Accessory structures.

Chapter 14.13 - Single-Story Single-Family Overlay District

14.13.010 - R1-S overlay districts (R1-S).

14.13.020 - Application (R1-S).

14.13.030 - Eligibility (R1-S).

14.13.040 - Expiration (R1-S).

14.13.050 - Development standards (R1-S).

14.13.060 - Implementation of approved two-story residential design review applications.

14.13.070 - Processing of two-story residential design review applications.

14.13.080 - Replacement of an existing two-story structure.

Chapter 14.14 - Accessory Dwelling Units

- 14.14.010. Purpose.
- 14.14.020. Definitions.
- 14.14.030. Effect of conforming accessory dwelling unit.
- 14.14.040. Locations permitted.
- 14.14.050. Permit procedures.
- 14.14.060. Standards.

Chapter 14.15 - Accessory Structures in R-District

- 14.15.010 Purpose.
- 14.15.020 Size, height and placement.
- 14.15.030 Rear yard coverage.
- 14.15.040 Daylight plane.
- 14.15.050 Distance between structures.
- 14.15.060 Coverage Exception for Open Accessory Structures.

Chapter 14.16 - R3-4.5 Multiple-Family District

- 14.16.010 R3-4.5 Districts.
 14.16.020 Specific Purpose
 14.16.030 Permitted uses (R3-4.5).
 14.16.040 Site area (R3-4.5).
 14.16.050 Coverage(R3-4.5).
 14.16.060 Floor Area Ratio (R3-4.5).
- 14.16.070 Unit Size.
- 14.10.070 Offit Size.
- 14.16.080 Setbacks (R3-4.5).
- 14.16.090 Height of Structures (R3-4.5).

14.16.100 - Design Control (R3-4.5).

14.16.110 - Off-street Parking (R3-4.5). 14.16.120 - Signs (R3-4.5). 14.16.140 - Fences (R3-4.5).

14.16.150 - Nonconforming use regulations (R3-4.5).

14.16.160 - Accessory structures.

Chapter 14.18 - R3-5 Multiple-Family District

- 14.18.010 R3-5 District.
 14.18.020 Permitted uses (R3-5).
 14.18.030 Maximum Density Development Requirement.
 14.18.040 Site area (R3-5).
 14.18.050 Coverage (R3-5).
 14.18.060 Front yard (R3-5).
- 14.18.070 Side yards (R3-5).
- 14.18.080 Rear yard (R3-5).
- 14.18.090 Distances between structures (R3-5).
- 14.18.100 Off-street parking (R3-5).

14.18.110 - Height of structures (R3-5).

14.18.120 - Design Control (R3-5).

- 14.18.130 Signs (R3-5).
- 14.18.140 Fences (R3-5).
- 14.18.150 Nonconforming use regulations (R3-5).
- 14.18.160 Accessory structures.

Chapter 14.20 - R3-3 Multiple-Family District

14.20.010 - R3-3 District.
14.20.020 - Permitted uses (R3-3).
14.20.030 - Maximum Density Development Requirement.
14.20.040 - Site area (R3-3).
14.20.050 - Coverage (R3-3).
14.20.060 - Front yard (R3-3).
14.20.070 - Side yards (R3-3).
14.20.080 - Rear yard (R3-3).
14.20.090 - Distances between structures (R3-3).
14.20.100 - Off-street parking (R3-3).
14.20.110 - Height of structures (R3-3).

14.20.120 - Design Control (R3-3).

- 14.20.130 Signs (R3-3).
- 14.20.140 Fences (R3-3).
- 14.20.150 Nonconforming use regulations (R3-3).

14.20.160 - Accessory structures.

Chapter 14.22 - R3-1.8 Multiple-Family District

14.22.010 - R3-1.8 District. 14.22.020 - Permitted uses (R3-1.8). 14.22.030 - Maximum Density Development Requirement.
14.22.040 - Site area (R3-1.8).
14.22.050 - Coverage (R3-1.8).
14.22.060 - Front yard (R3-1.8).
14.22.070 - Side yards (R3-1.8).
14.22.080 - Rear yard (R3-1.8).
14.22.090 - Off-street parking (R3-1.8).
14.22.100 - Height of structures (R3-1.8).
14.22.110 - Design Control (R3-1.8).
1.8).

14.22.120 - Exceptions (R3-1.8).
14.22.130 - Signs (R3-1.8).
14.22.140 - Fences (R3-1.8).
14.22.150 - Nonconforming use regulations (R3-1.8).
14.22.160 - Accessory structures.

Chapter 14.24 - R3-1 Multiple-Family District

14.24.010 - R3-1 Districts.
14.24.020 - Permitted uses (R3-1).
14.24.030 - Maximum Density Development Requirement.
14.24.040 - Site area (R3-1).
14.24.050 - Coverage (R3-1).
14.24.060 - Front yard (R3-1).
14.24.070 - Side yards (R3-1).
14.24.080 - Rear yard (R3-1).
14.24.090 - Off-street parking (R3-1).
14.24.100 - Height of structures (R3-1).
14.24.120 - Signs (R3-1).
14.24.120 - Signs (R3-1).

14.24.130 - Fences (R3-1).

14.24.140 - Nonconforming use regulations (R3-1).

14.24.150 - Conditional uses (R3-1).

114.24.160 - Accessory structures.

Chapter 14.26 - Conversions to Community Housing

14.26.010 - Purposes.

14.26.020 - Definitions.

14.26.030 - Declaration of rental housing shortage and findings.

14.26.040 - Determination of vacancy rate and surplus.

14.26.050 - Filing of tentative maps.

14.26.060 - Development standards.

14.26.070 - Tenant protection provisions.

Chapter 14.28 - Multiple-Family Affordable Housing

14.28.010 - Purpose.

14.28.020 - Applicability.

14.28.030 - Standards.

14.28.040 - Density bonuses.

Chapter 14.30 - Short-Term Rental Prohibition

14.30.010 - Purpose and intent.

14.30.020 - Definitions.

14.30.030 - Short-term rentals prohibited.

Chapter 14.34 - OA Office-Administrative District

14.34.010 - OA Districts. 14.34.020 - Specific purposes (OA).

14.34.030 - Required conditions (OA).

14.34.040 - Permitted uses (OA).

14.34.050 - Conditional uses (OA).

14.34.060 - Coverage (OA).

14.34.070 - Front yard (OA).

14.34.080 - Side yards (OA).

14.34.090 - Rear yard (OA).

14.34.100 - Site area (OA).

14.34.110 - Off-street parking (OA).

14.34.120 - Off-street loading and refuse collection (OA).

14.34.130 - Height of structures (OA).

14.34.140 - Design control (OA).

14.34.150 - Nonconforming use regulations (OA).

Chapter 14.36 - OA-1/OA-4.5 Office-Administrative District

14.36.010 - OA-A and OA-4.5 Districts.

14.36.020 - Specific purposes (OA-1, Altos Oaks Avenue).

14.36.030 - Required conditions (OA-1 and OA-4.5).

14.36.040 - Permitted uses (OA-1 and OA-4.5).

14.36.050 - Conditional uses (OA-1 and OA-4.5).

14.36.060 - Sit area (OA-1 and OA-4.5).

14.36.070 - Coverage (OA-1 and OA-4.5).

14.36.080 - Floor area ratio (OA-1 and OA-4.5).

14.36.090 - Front yard (OA-1 and OA-4.5).

14.36.100 - Side yards (OA-1 and OA-4.5).

14.36.110 - Rear yard (OA-1 and OA-4.5).

14.36.120 - Off-street parking (OA-1 and OA-4.5).

14.36.130 - Height of structures (OA-1 and OA-4.5).

14.36.140 - Screening and landscaping (OA-1 and OA-4.5).

14.36.150 - Design control (OA-1 and OA-4.5).

14.36.160 - Signs (OA-1 and OA-4.5).

14.36.170 - Fences (OA-1 and OA-4.5).

14.36.180 - Nonconforming use regulations (OA-1 and OA-4.5).

Chapter 14.40 - CN Commercial Neighborhood District

14.40.010 - CN District.

14.40.020 - Specific purposes (CN).

14.40.030 - Permitted uses (CN).

14.40.040 - Conditional uses (CN).

14.40.050 - Limited conditional uses (CN).

14.40.060 - Required conditions (CN).

14.40.070 - Floor area ratio (CN).
14.40.080 - Front yard (CN).
14.40.090 - Side yards (CN).
14.40.100 - Rear yard (CN).
14.40.110 - Off-street parking (CN).
14.40.120 - Common parking facilities (CN).
14.40.130 - Off-street loading.
14.40.140 - Height of structures (CN).
14.40.140 - Height of Structures (CN).
14.40.160 - Signs (CN).

14.40.170 - Fences (CN).

14.40.180 - Nonconforming use regulations (CN).

Chapter 14.42 - LC/SPZ Loyola Corners Specific Plan Zone District

14.42.010 - LC/SPZ District.

14.42.020 - Specific purposes (LC/SPZ).

14.42.030 - Limited permitted uses (LC/SPZ).

14.42.040 - Conditional expansion.

14.42.050 - Off-street parking (LC/SPZ).

Chapter 14.44 - CD Commercial Downtown District*

14.44.010 - CD District.

- 14.44.020 Specific purposes (CD).
- 14.44.030 Permitted uses (CD).
- 14.44.040 Conditional uses (CD).
- 14.44.050 Required conditions (CD).
- 14.44.060 Front yard (CD).
- 14.44.070 Side yards (CD).
- 14.44.080 Rear yard (CD).
- 14.44.090 Off-street parking (CD).

14.44.100 - Common parking facilities (CD).

14.44.110 - Off-street loading and refuse collection (CD).

14.44.120 - Height of structures (CD).

14.44.130 - Design Control (CD).

14.44.140 - Nonconforming use regulations (CD).

- 14.44.150 Signs (CD).
- 14.44.160 Fences (CD).

14.44.170 - Restoration of nonconforming structures (CD).

14.44.180 - Exceptions for public benefit (CD).

Chapter 14.48 - CRS Commercial Retail Sales District*

14.48.010 - CRS District.

14.48.020 - Vision Statement and Specific Purposes (CRS).

14.48.030 - Permitted uses (CRS).

14.48.040 - Conditional uses and structures (CRS).

14.48.050 - Required conditions (CRS).
14.48.060 - Front yard (CRS).
14.48.070 - Side yards (CRS).
14.48.080 - Rear yard (CRS).
14.48.090 - Off-street parking (CRS).
14.48.100 - Common parking facilities (CRS).
14.48.110 - Off-street loading and refuse collection (CRS).
14.48.120 - Height of structures (CRS).

14.48.130 - Design Control (CRS).

14.48.140 - Nonconforming use regulations (CRS).
14.48.150 - Signs (CRS).
14.48.160 - Fences (CRS).
14.48.170 - Restoration of nonconforming structures (CRS).
14.48.180 - Exceptions for public benefit (CRS).

Chapter 14.50 - CT Commercial Thoroughfare District*

14.50.010 - CT District.
14.50.020 - Specific purposes (CT).
14.50.030 - Permitted uses (CT).
14.50.040 - Conditional uses (CT).
14.50.050 - Limited conditional uses (CT).
14.50.060 - Required conditions (CT).
14.50.070 - Site area (CT).
14.50.080 - Residential density (CT).
14.50.090 - Front yard (CT).
14.50.100 - Side yards (CT).
14.50.110 - Rear yard (CT).
14.50.120 - Off-street parking (CT).
14.50.130 - Off-street loading (CT).

- 14.50.140 Height of structures (CT).
- 14.50.150 Open space (CT).

14.50.160 - Rooftop uses (CT).

14.50.170 - Design Control (CT).

14.50.180 - Off-street loading for residential (CT).

- 14.50.190 Signs (CT).
- 14.50.200 Fences (CT).

14.50.210 - Nonconforming use regulations (CT).

Chapter 14.52 - CD/R3 Commercial Downtown/Multiple Family District

14.52.010 - CD/R3 District. 14.52.020 - Specific purposes (CD/R3).

- 14.52.030 Permitted uses (CD/R3).
- 14.52.040 Conditional uses (CD/R3).
- 14.52.050 Required conditions (CD/R3).
- 14.52.060 Required building setbacks (CD/R3).
- 14.52.070 Off-street parking (CD/R3).
- 14.52.080 Common parking facilities (CD/R3).

14.52.090 - Off-street loading and refuse collection (CD/R3).14.52.100 - Height of structures (CD/R3).

14.52.110 - Design Control (CD/R3).

14.52.120 - Nonconforming use regulations (CD/R3).

14.52.130 - Signs (CD/R3).

14.52.140 - Fences (CD/R3).

14.52.150 - Restoration of nonconforming structures (CD/R3).

14.52.160 - Exceptions for public benefit (CD/R3).

Chapter 14.54 - CRS/OAD Commercial Retail Sales/Office-Administrative District

14.54.010 - CRS/OAD District.

14.54.020 - Specific purposes (CRS/OAD).

- 14.54.030 Permitted uses (CRS/OAD).
- 14.54.040 Conditional uses and structures (CRS/OAD).
- 14.54.050 Required conditions (CRS/OAD).
- 14.54.060 Front yard (CRS/OAD).
- 14.54.070 Side yards (CRS/OAD).
- 14.54.080 Rear yard (CRS/OAD).
- 14.54.090 Off-street parking (CRS/OAD).
- 14.54.100 Common parking facilities (CRS/OAD).
- 14.54.110 Off-street loading and refuse collection (CRS/OAD).
- 14.54.120 Height of structures (CRS/OAD).

14.54.130 - Design Control (CRS/ OAD).

- 14.54.140 Nonconforming use regulations (CRS/OAD).
- 14.54.150 Signs (CRS/OAD).
- 14.54.160 Fences (CRS/OAD).
- 14.54.170 Restoration of nonconforming structures (CRS/OAD).
- 14.54.180 Exceptions for public benefit (CRS/OAD).

Chapter 14.56 - PC Planned Community District

- 14.56.010 PC District.
- 14.56.020 Purpose (PC).
- 14.56.030 Amendments (PC).
- 14.56.040 Site area (PC).
- 14.56.050 Permitted uses (PC).
- 14.56.060 Density (PC).

14.56.070 - Development standards (PC).

14.56.080 - Required conditions (PC).

14.56.090 - Planning commission and council approval required (PC).

14.56.100 - Applications—Master plans and development plans (PC).

- 14.56.110 Staff reviews (PC).
- 14.56.120 Hearings—Notices (PC).
- 14.56.130 Planning commission action (PC).
- 14.56.140 Council action (PC).
- 14.56.150 Plan approval (PC).

14.56.160 - Expiration (PC). 14.56.170 - Plan modifications (PC).

14.56.180 - Signs (PC).

Chapter 14.58 - PCF Public and Community

- Facilities District
 - 14.58.010 PCF District.
 - 14.58.020 Permitted uses (PCF).
 - 14.58.030 Conditional uses (PCF).

14.58.040 - Required conditions for leased public school sites (PCF).

- 14.58.050 Site area (PCF).
- 14.58.060 Coverage (PCF).
- 14.58.070 Front yard (PCF).
- 14.58.080 Side yards (PCF).
- 14.58.090 Rear yard (PCF).
- 14.58.100 Landscaped strips (PCF).
- 14.58.110 Off-street parking and loading (PCF).
- 14.58.120 Height of structures (PCF).
- 14.58.130 Design control (PCF).
- 14.58.140 Signs (PCF).
- 14.58.150 Fences (PCF).

Chapter 14.60 - PCF/R1-10 Public and Community Facilities/Single-Family District

- 14.60.010 PCF/R1-10 Districts.
- 14.60.020 Permitted uses (PCF/R1-10).
- 14.60.030 Conditional uses (PCF/R1-10).

14.60.040 - Required conditions for leased public school sites (PCF/R1-10).

14.60.050 - Development standards (PCF/R1-10).

Chapter 14.62 - PUD Planned Unit Developments

14.62.010 - Planned unit developments (PUD). 14.62.020 - Purpose (PUD). 14.62.030 - Districts (PUD). 14.62.040 - Permitted uses (PUD). 14.62.050 - Site area (PUD). 14.62.060 - Standards (PUD). 14.62.070 - Height of structures adjacent to single-family districts (PUD). 14.62.080 - Density (PUD). 14.62.090 - Yard spaces (PUD). 14.62.100 - Distances between structures (PUD). 14.62.110 - Screening and landscaping (PUD). 14.62.120 - Required conditions (PUD). 14.62.130 - Procedure for official development plan approval for PUD/R, PUD/OA, and PUD/C Districts (PUD). 14.62.140 - Council action (PUD). 14.62.150 - Plan approval (PUD). 14.62.160 - Plan modification (PUD). 14.62.170 - Design control (PUD). 14.62.180 - Signs (PUD). 14.62.190 - Fences (PUD).

14.62.200 - Cluster permits (PUD).

14.62.210 - Senior citizen housing regulations (PUD/SC).

Chapter 14.66 - General Standards and Exceptions

14.66.020 - Conformity with district regulations.

14.66.030 - Nonconforming lots.

14.66.040 - Nonconforming structures.

14.66.050 - Nonconforming structures—Continuation.

14.66.060 - Nonconforming structures—Repairs, alterations, and additions.

14.66.070 - Nonconforming structures—Damaged—Restoration. 14.66.080 - RESERVED.

14.66.090 - Nonconforming uses—Continuation.

14.66.100 - Nonconforming uses—Repairs, alterations, and additions.

14.66.110 - Nonconforming uses—Abandonment/discontinuance.

14.66.120 - Nonconforming uses—Restoration of damaged structures.

14.66.130 - Yard spaces.

14.66.140 - Off-street parking and loading spaces.

14.66.150 - Reduction of off-street parking and loading spaces.

14.66.160 - Standards for off-street parking spaces.

14.66.170 - Standards for off-street loading spaces.

14.66.180 - Maintenance of landscaped areas.

14.66.190 - Reserved.

14.66.200 - Yard requirements-Measurement.

14.66.210 - Yard requirements—Exceptions.

14.66.220 - Reserved.

14.66.230 - Height limitations-Measurement.

- 14.66.240 Height limitations—Exceptions.
- 14.66.250 Public utility lines and poles.

14.66.260 - Storage in yards.

14.66.270 - Temporary uses.

14.66.271 - Voter approval required for sale, transfer, or re-designation of city owned "parks" and "other open space" lands.

Chapter 14.68 - Signs on Private Property

- 14.68.010 Title, authority, scope.
- 14.68.020 Purpose.
- 14.68.030 Basic principles.

14.68.040 - Definitions.

14.68.050 - Sign permits; other sign-related decisions; appeals.

14.68.060 - Signs exempt from sign permit requirement.

- 14.68.070 Prohibited signs.
- 14.68.080 General provisions.
- 14.68.090 Permanent signs in commercial and office districts.

14.68.100 - Permanent signs in certain commercial districts.

14.68.110 - Permanent signs in CT commercial districts.

14.68.120 - Permanent signs in office districts.

14.68.130 - Master sign programs.

14.68.140 - Temporary signs in commercial and office districts.

14.68.150 - Permanent and temporary signs in residential and public and community facilities districts, and residential uses in mixed use districts.

14.68.160 - Construction and maintenance of signs.

14.68.170 - Nonconforming signs.

14.68.180 - Enforcement, abatement and removal of signs.

14.68.190 - Severance.

Chapter 14.70 - Community Facilities

- 14.70.010 Conditional uses.
- 14.70.020 Site area.
- 14.70.030 Coverage.
- 14.70.040 Front yard.
- 14.70.050 Side yards.
- 14.70.060 Rear yard.
- 14.70.070 Landscaped strips.
- 14.70.080 Off-street parking and loading.
- 14.70.090 Height of structures.
- 14.70.100 Design control.
- 14.70.110 Signs.
- 14.70.120 Fences.

Chapter 14.72 - Fence Regulations

- 14.72.010 Short title.
- 14.72.020 Maximum fence heights.
- 14.72.030 Barbed wire and electrified fences.
- 14.72.040 Public nuisances.
- 14.72.050 Fencing of private swimming pools.

Chapter 14.74 - Off-Street Parking and Loading

- 14.74.010 R-1 District requirements.
- 14.74.020 Reserved.
- 14.74.030 R3-5 District requirements.
- 14.74.040 R3-4.5 District requirements.
- 14.74.050 R3-3 District requirements.
- 14.74.060 R3-1.8 District requirements.
- 14.74.070 R3-1 District requirements.
- 14.74.080 Residential uses in CN, CD, CD/R3, CRS/OAD, CRS and CT Districts.

14.74.090 - Reserved.

14.74.100 - Office uses in CRS/OAD, OA, CN, CD, CD/R3, CRS and CT Districts.

14.74.110 - Commercial uses in CRS/OAD, OA, CN, CD, CD/R3, CRS and CT Districts.

14.74.120 - Community facilities.

- 14.74.130 Plant nurseries.
- 14.74.140 Other uses.
- 14.74.150 Mixed use development.
- 14.74.160 Off-street loading spaces.
- 14.74.170 Common parking facilities.
- 14.74.180 Off-street parking and loading spaces.
- 14.74.190 Reduction of off-street parking and loading spaces.

14.74.200 - Development standards for off-street parking and truck loading spaces.

Chapter 14.76 - Design Review—Single-Family Districts

14.76.010 - Purpose.

14.76.020 - Single-family residential design guidelines.

14.76.030 - Requirement for administrative design review.

14.76.040 - Requirement for design review commission design review.

14.76.050 - Initial application review.

14.76.060 - Design Review Findings.

14.76.070 - Variance findings.

14.76.080 - Notification.

14.76.090 - Expiration of design review and/or variance approval—Extensions.

14.76.100 - Appeals.

Chapter 14.78 - Design and Transportation Review—Multiple-Family, Public and Community Facilities, Office and Administrative, and Commercial Districts

14.78.010 - Purpose.

14.78.020 - Requirement for administrative design review.

14.78.030 - Requirement for public hearing design review.

14.78.040 - Recommendation for pre-application study session design review.

14.78.050 - Initial application review.

14.78.060 - Design Review Findings.

14.78.070 - Variances.

14.78.080 - Expiration of design review and/or variance approval—Extensions.

14.78.090 - Requirement for transportation review.

14.78.100 - Appeals.

Chapter 14.80 - Use Permits

14.80.010 - Conditional uses.

14.80.020 - Initial application review.

14.80.030 - Hearings—Notices.

14.80.040 - Hearings-Procedure.

14.80.045 - Hearings—Procedures for office and commercial districts.

14.80.050 - Hearings—Procedures for personal wireless communication facilities.

14.80.060 - Commission and council action.

14.80.070 - Council action.

14.80.080 - Revocation.

14.80.090 - New applications.

14.80.100 - Expiration of use permit approval-Extensions.

14.80.110 - Modification of a use permit.

Chapter 14.82 - Medical and Adult-Use Cannabis Regulations

14.82.10 - Legislative findings and statement of purpose.
14.82.020 - Medical and adult-use commercial cannabis uses.
14.82.030 - Cultivation of cannabis for personal use.
14.82.040 - Public nuisance.
14.82.050 - Violations.

Chapter 14.84 - Certificates of Occupancy

14.84.010 - Certificates required. 14.84.020 - Applications.

14.84.030 - Issuance.

Chapter 14.86 - Zoning Amendments

14.86.010 - Purpose.

14.86.020 - Initiation.

14.86.030 - Applications-Fees.

14.86.040 - Hearings-Notices.

14.86.050 - Hearings—Procedure.

14.86.060 - Commission action.

14.86.070 - Commission action—Appeals.

14.86.080 - Council action.

14.86.090 - New applications.

Chapter 14.88 - Zoning Map Amendments

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