



# Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning

*Planning for the Challenges Ahead*



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## REPORT TO THE REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

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DATE ISSUED: April 11, 2019

MEETING DATE: April 24, 2019 AGENDA 9  
ITEM:

PROJECT NUMBER: 2018-000331

PROJECT NAME: La Crescenta-Montrose Community Standards  
District Amendment

PLAN NUMBER(S): ADV RPPL2016000546  
ENV RPPL2016002236

SUPERVISORIAL DISTRICT: 5

PROJECT LOCATION: La Crescenta-Montrose

PROJECT PLANNER: James Drevno, Regional Planner  
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### **RECOMMENDATION**

The Department of Regional Planning staff (“Staff”) recommends the Regional Planning Commission **ADOPT** the resolution recommending approval of the La Crescenta - Montrose Community Standards District Amendment (Project No. 2018-000331, Advance Planning No. RPPL2016000546, and Environmental Assessment No. RPPL2016002236) to the Board of Supervisors.

Staff recommends the following motion:

**I MOVE THAT THE REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION CLOSE THE PUBLIC HEARING AND FIND THAT THE NEGATIVE DECLARATION WAS PREPARED PURSUANT TO THE STATE AND LOCAL CEQA GUIDELINE AND RECOMMEND TO THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS THE ADOPTION OF THE NEGATIVE DECLARATION (ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT NO. RPPL2016002236).**

**I ALSO MOVE THAT THE REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION ADOPT THE ATTACHED RESOLUTION RECOMMENDING APPROVAL OF THE LA CRESCENTA-MONTROSE COMMUNITY STANDARDS DISTRICT AMENDMENT (PROJECT NO. 2018-000331, ADVANCE PLANNING NO. RPPL2016000546) TO THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS.**

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

### **A. Project**

The project proposes to amend the Los Angeles County Zoning Code Title 22, Chapter 22.328 (formerly Section 22.44.139) updating the La Crescenta-Montrose Community Standards District Ordinance (CSD). The La Crescenta - Montrose CSD Ordinance was originally established in 2007 and amended in 2009 to ensure new development is compatible with the existing residential character of the unincorporated community of La Crescenta-Montrose (Community) and to improve the appearance of the Foothill Boulevard commercial corridor.

Since the adoption of the amendment to the CSD in 2009, Staff and members of the community received feedback that CSD provisions were hard to enforce and the CSD needed to be updated to provide clear, prescriptive standards. At the request of the Crescenta Valley Town Council, Staff worked with the Land Use Subcommittee to find solutions to clarify the provisions in the CSD, remove ambiguous and unenforceable language, and ensure compliance with the CSD's provisions on good design and pedestrian orientation. On February 3, 2016, Staff provided an overview of these efforts to the Regional Planning Commission, at which time, the Commission adopted a motion instructing Staff to prepare an ordinance updating the CSD.

The CSD Amendment focuses primarily on updating regulations for the commercial zones along Foothill Boulevard. For the R-3 zone, the provisions remain largely intact with minor, clarifying adjustments to the existing standards. The update also includes a complete overhaul of the CSD's organization. The CSD has been reorganized to make it easier to use and to make the applicability of the provisions clear. Additional graphics and photographs have been provided to clearly illustrate the standards.

### R-3 ZONES

The proposed changes for the R-3 Zone consist of minor changes to the existing standards as noted below. The proposed changes are intended to provide adequate buffering between single and two-family residences and R-3 development.

- **Applicability.** CSD standards for the R-3 Zone do not apply to single and two-family residences.
- **Yard and Landscaping Requirements.** Additional landscaping is required for R-3 properties that adjoin single or two-family residences. Front, side and rear yard requirements are further clarified.

- **Building Height.** Language added to clarify that structures over 25 feet are required to be stepped back up to a maximum height of 35 feet.
- **Roofs.** Pitched roof requirements are further clarified to ensure that the entire roof structure is sloped, not just the roofline. Roof top and roof mounted equipment are required to be screened.

#### FOOTHILL BOULEVARD COMMERCIAL ZONES

On Foothill Boulevard, three subareas are combined into one subarea to streamline the code sections and reduce redundant regulations. New standards are proposed to improve the aesthetics of the commercial corridor, promote a pedestrian-friendly environment, mitigate the interface between residential and commercial uses, and preserve and enhance the community's characteristics. The new standards include updates to building design, parking lot design, wall and fence design, landscaping, yard setbacks, and signage. A broad summary of the changes is provided below.

- **Subareas.** The three sub-areas (1) Foothill Blvd. West Town Area, (2) Foothill Blvd. Mid-Town Area, and (3) Foothill Blvd. East Town Area are consolidated into one Foothill Boulevard subarea to eliminate redundancy and standardize development standards across all segments of Foothill Boulevard.
- **Conditional Use Permit (CUP) Applicability.** Additional land uses, such as automobile-related uses, vehicle sales, and smoke shops have been added to uses subject to CUPs.
- **Parking.** Addition of shared parking standards to allow for shared parking agreements. Relaxation of parking requirements for cafes, restaurants, coffee shops and other dining related uses between Ramsdell Avenue and Raymond Avenue to increase commercial growth opportunities on smaller parcels.
- **Building Design.** Adjustments to building massing and facade regulations to allow additional pedestrian access, update community specific design elements, and improve the interface between buildings and the public rights-of-way.
- **Architectural Features.** Replacement of the existing architectural styles requirement with a menu of design options, including architectural features, design elements, and frontage types.
- **Walls and Fences.** Additional wall, fencing, and screening regulations to improve compatibility between commercially-zoned properties and adjacent residential properties.
- **Signs.** Reorganization of existing sign regulations to present the regulations using graphics, illustrations, and tables to facilitate compliance.

#### **B. Project Background**

Originally adopted in 2007, and amended in 2009, the La Crescenta-Montrose CSD Ordinance encompasses the unincorporated areas of the La Crescenta-Montrose Community. CSDs are established to implement specific development standards, in the form of a supplemental district, to address special attributes of the community.

Since the original adoption, implementation of the CSD has proven difficult because of vague language and a lack of clear, prescriptive standards. This led to multiple interpretations of the standards by staff and applicants. It also caused confusion for applicants to effectively design their projects to meet the standards in the CSD.

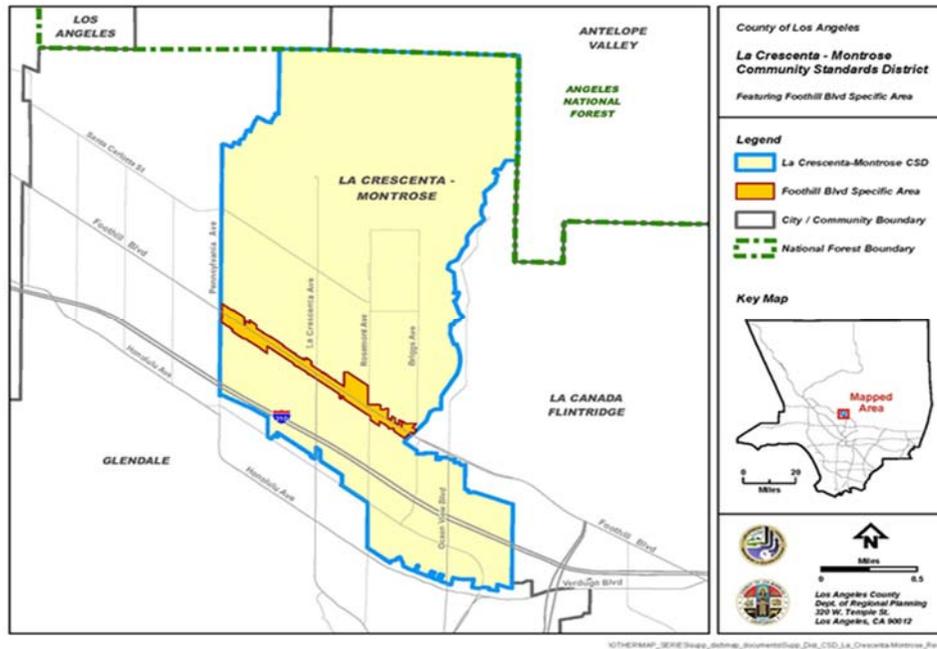
The project was presented to the Regional Planning Commission on February 3, 2016 to initiate the CSD amendment process. At the request of the Crescenta Valley Town Council, Staff worked with the Land Use Subcommittee to update the CSD to make it more implementable and achieve the changes and improvements intended by the community. Staff facilitated an internal CSD Working Group, composed of planners from various sections, including zoning enforcement, zoning permits, front counter and field office. The workgroup met monthly to draft and edit new proposed standards. Multiple meetings were convened between Staff and the Crescenta Valley Town Council Land Use Committee to review the document and provide feedback.

### **PROJECT LOCATION**

The unincorporated community of La Crescenta – Montrose is located in the Fifth Supervisorial District at the foothill of the Angeles National Forest. The community is located within the West San Gabriel Valley Planning Area as designated by the General Plan. The community is surrounded to the north by Angeles National Forest, to the south and west by the City of Glendale, and to the east by the City of La Cañada-Flintridge. I-210 and SR-2 freeways provide access to the community.

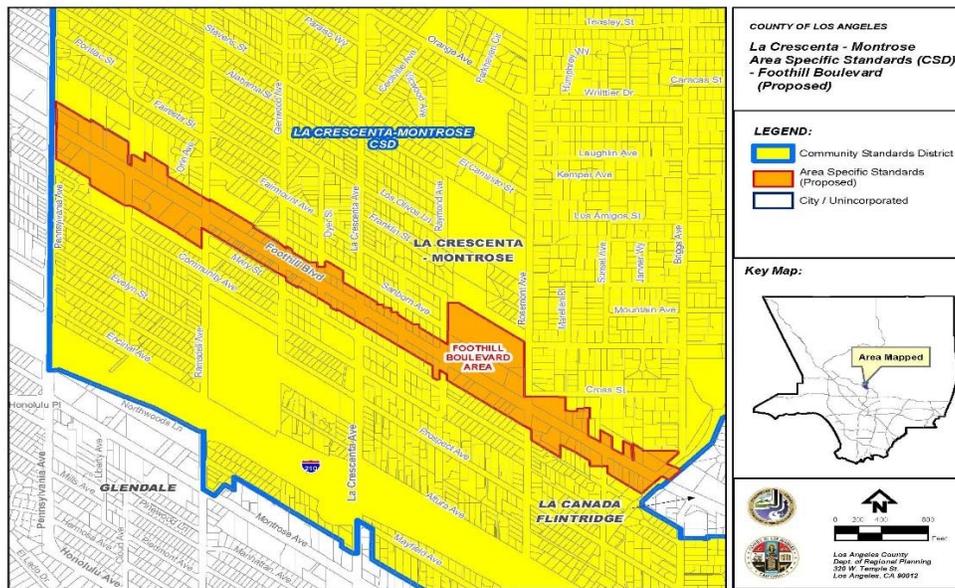
#### *Community Standards District Map (Below):*

The CSD applies to the community of La Crescenta – Montrose as shown in the map below. The community's boundary and the boundary of the CSD is denoted by a blue line. Within the CSD, the Foothill Boulevard Area is shown in orange. In the existing CSD, the Foothill Boulevard is separated into three subareas, each with separate design and architectural standards. The CSD update combines the subareas into one Foothill Boulevard Area with standards that apply equally along the commercial corridor.



*Foothill Boulevard Area Map (Below)*

The Foothill Boulevard Area consists of commercially zoned property along Foothill Boulevard. The standards for this Area are intended to improve the aesthetics of the Foothill Boulevard corridor and improve the interface between pedestrians in the right-of-way and private commercial properties. These standards are also intended to enhance the foothill community characteristics of La Crescenta-Montrose and provide a unifying look and feel for the community's commercial center.



## **ANALYSIS**

### **A. Draft Plan/Ordinance Updates**

Since the release of the CSD for public review, a change was made to the Yard Setback (22.328.080 D.3) standards. The public release draft allows outdoor dining, exterior furniture or pedestrian circulation, in lieu of required landscaping, in the front and side yard setbacks. This has been revised to allow up to 5% of landscaping to be replaced with outdoor amenities, requiring the other 10% to be landscaped. This change was made to better balance the need for outdoor amenities with the need for landscaping.

The revised language reads as follows:

Yard Setbacks. Outdoor dining, exterior furniture, or pedestrian circulation areas may be provided in lieu of up to 1/3 of the required 15 percent net area landscaping in the front and side yard setbacks if such setbacks are provided in order to meet the landscaping requirement.

### **B. Land Use Compatibility**

The project area consists of the approximately 3.43 square mile La Crescenta-Montrose community. The Community is located within the West San Gabriel Valley Planning Area of the General Plan.

The La Crescenta-Montrose CSD supports the Los Angeles County General Plan (General Plan) implementation program LU-9 requiring community design guidelines. According to the General Plan, these design guidelines are intended to preserve and enhance the character-defining features of unincorporated communities.

The General Plan identifies Foothill Boulevard as a corridor-type opportunity area that provides restaurants, services, and retail to community residents. The General Plan also identifies Foothill Boulevard as an opportunity area for active transportation improvements and corridor design enhancements.

The community of La Crescenta-Montrose mostly consists of single-family residential development with some multi-family development. R-3 zones are largely clustered in the southeastern portion of the community, south of I-210 Freeway, with some R-3 zoned parcels located behind commercial zones fronting Foothill Boulevard. Commercial properties are located in the southern portion of the community and are primarily concentrated along the Foothill Boulevard commercial corridor.

The design standards proposed in the CSD are intended to improve the interface between the right-of-way and private buildings, as well as the interface between R-3

properties, commercial properties, and single and two-family residences. The CSD update is applicable to R-3 Zones and all commercial zones along Foothill Boulevard.

For R-3 zones, revised standards require additional façade treatments and roof forms to improve the design of new structures and make them compatible with the character of the existing community.

New design standards for commercial zones along Foothill Boulevard are proposed to improve pedestrian walkability and active transportation. Properties along the Foothill Boulevard corridor vary in size with parcels between Ramsdell Avenue and Raymond Avenue being smaller than others along the corridor. Specific exceptions related to standards such as parking and setbacks were made for this segment of Foothill Boulevard with the intent of balancing strong design practices with additional development options.

### **C. Neighborhood Impact (Need/Convenience Assessment)**

The proposed CSD Amendment intends to make the regulations easier to understand and implement, to improve enforcement of the standards, and help realize the aesthetic and pedestrian-oriented development desired by the community. For ease of implementation, the CSD has been reorganized to clarify the applicability of the standards. Ambiguous language has been revised to provide additional clarity. Graphics and photographs have been added to better illustrate the regulations. The overall goal of the CSD Amendment is to help realize development that supports the community's desired changes, especially on Foothill Boulevard. These standards are intended to improve the appearance of Foothill Boulevard, provide for additional pedestrian activity, and provide design elements that complement the foothill community character of La Crescenta-Montrose. The CSD provisions also buffer single-family and two-family residences from adjacent multi-family development, and buffer residential uses from adjacent commercial uses.

### **D. Design Compatibility**

The community of La Crescenta – Montrose is a foothill community that lies between the San Rafael Hills to the southeast, the Verdugo Hills to the south and southwest, and the Angeles National Forest to the north. Although the Community is built out, it is surrounded by hills and large areas of natural open space. La Crescenta-Montrose is largely residential with commercial uses concentrated along the Foothill Boulevard corridor. To preserve the existing residential character, the CSD standards apply only to the R-3 Zone and commercial zones along Foothill Blvd.

Most of the proposed changes to the CSD provisions are related to design, such as façade and frontage requirements, and architectural treatments to improve the appearance of existing and new development.

A summary of the design-oriented development standards focused on the Foothill Boulevard Area is provided below. The standards for Foothill Boulevard are organized into three primary sections: 1) General Development Standards that apply to all development, including existing development; 2) Building Design Standards that apply to new buildings; and 3) Signs.

### **General Development Standards**

The section on General Development Standards for Foothill Blvd applies to new and existing development and to improvements where more than 50 percent of the existing exterior walls are cumulatively removed, demolished, or rebuilt.

#### Landscaping

A minimum of 15 percent of the net lot area is required to be landscaped, but pedestrian activating uses, such as outdoor dining and exterior furniture, can replace up to 5% of landscaping (i.e. 1/3 of the 15 percent) in the front and side yard setbacks. This provides a balance between landscaping and pedestrian activating areas. In addition, the planting of trees in the rear yard are required to provide a buffer between commercial and residential uses.

#### Building and Structure Height

Commercially zoned properties on Foothill Boulevard that are adjacent to residential zones are subject to height limits. Height is limited to 35 feet for all commercially zoned properties on Foothill blvd, but height at the adjoining lot line of residential zones is further limited to be stepped back to a 45-degree angle up to the maximum height of 35 feet. . These standards focus building massing to the frontage of Foothill Boulevard and away from residential uses to improve the interface between commercial and residential areas.

#### Ground Floor Transparency

Commercial properties are required to provide ground-floor windows to allow pedestrian views into structures to provide visual interest and promote pedestrian activity.

#### Retaining Walls

Design standards require certain retaining walls to be stepped-back every several feet to allow for a gradual elevation change between properties. The stepped back areas are required to be landscaped to break up an over-height hillside retaining wall.

#### Parking

Landscaping is required for parking lots and parking structures. New shared parking standards provide additional flexibility for businesses on Foothill Boulevard.

#### Building Base Design

Building base is defined as the floor at ground level. Standards for building base elements are provided as a menu of options, including the choice to use natural La Crescenta Rock, exterior furniture, bicycle racks, or outdoor dining tables along the

façade facing Foothill Boulevard. These provisions are intended to allow for faster aesthetic and pedestrian friendly street-level improvements for existing development.

### **Building Design Standards**

The Building Design Standards section applies to all new buildings and structures within the Foothill Boulevard Area.

#### Façade Composition

The CSD differentiates façade composition into Building Top, Building Middle, and Building Base to ensure the thoughtful design and composition of new multi-story buildings. The Building Top, which includes the roof is required to provide ornamentation such as molding, cornice, or parapet. The Building Middle is required to be articulated through consistent treatments such as windows, lintels, and columns. The Building Base, where most of the pedestrian interactions and commerce take place is required to provide pedestrian amenities.

#### Architectural Elements

New primary structures are also required to comply with architectural and design elements, such as terraces, forecourts, backcourts, arcades, and galleries.

#### Entrances

Building entrance requirements are designed to not only be inviting and easily accessible to pedestrians, but to also enhance the visual interest of Foothill Boulevard.

#### Articulation, Wall Surfaces, and Wall Openings

Walls are required to be articulated by utilizing a variety of materials, textures, and colors. Buildings are also required to provide ground floor transparency and windows to invite interaction.

### **Signs**

The proposed changes to this section include the addition of supporting diagrams and reference charts to show how sign height and width limits would apply. Few adjustments to sign regulations, including the height and width of wall business signs were made to balance the overall design aesthetics of a commercial property with readability. A Master Sign Program section is provided to allow for more unified sign design outcomes for multi-tenant commercial properties.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS**

An Initial Study has been prepared to analyze the potential effects resulting from the proposed amendments to the existing CSD, including revisions to the existing provisions, new standards, and adjustments to the subarea map. The adoption of the proposed amendments will not directly create any environmental impact nor directly result in any construction. The changes clarify and reorganize the existing CSD. Proposed new development standards do not result in the intensification of development, but provide

additional guidelines on the visual form intended by the CSD. In addition, the revisions increase the compatibility between single-family and two-family residences with new multifamily and commercial development. They also buffer low intensity residential uses from more intensive adjacent uses. The proposed changes are also aimed at increasing the pedestrian-friendliness of the commercial areas through pedestrian-oriented entrances, accessible landscaped areas, and reduced paving, which will lessen potential environmental impacts to the Community. The project does not propose or authorize any development. All future proposed development will continue to require review and permitting by the County and will be reviewed on a project-by-project basis to determine the potential for project-specific impacts, in compliance with CEQA, as necessary. Therefore, the Initial Study determined that the project will have less than significant impact on the environment.

Staff recommends that a Negative Declaration is the appropriate environmental documentation under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the County environmental guidelines. The Initial Study (Exhibit F – Environmental Determination) concludes that there is no evidence that the project may have a significant impact on the environment.

## **OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT**

### **A. County Department Comments and Recommendations**

The following departments were consulted:

- Department of Public Works
- Department of Parks and Recreation
- Department of Public Health
- Fire Department

Departments of Public Health, Parks and Recreation, and Fire had no comments on the project. The Department of Public Works provided comments related to driveway width, street furniture, corner cut-offs, retaining walls, signs. Staff provided additional information on these provisions and made revisions necessary to ensure these provisions are compatible with Public Works' requirements. The public review draft reflects these changes.

### **B. Project Outreach and Engagement**

Staff worked closely with the Land Use Committee of the Crescenta Valley Town Council (CVTC) to ensure that the proposed standards of this CSD are in line with the community's vision for R-3 zones and the Foothill Boulevard commercial corridor.

On May 30, 2018, a community meeting was held to update the community about the proposed standards in the CSD Amendment. The community meeting was held in an open-house style to provide direct and straightforward information to community

members about how specific zones would be impacted. Since the community meeting, no substantial changes to the intent of the standards in the proposed CSD Amendment were made. After the community meeting, CVTC Land Use Committee and Staff held several more meetings to maximize the readability and ease of use of the CSD. Additional images and diagrams were generated to provide examples of the intent of the standards.

On October 18, 2018, Staff attended the monthly CVTC meeting to provide an update on the progress to clarify and reorganize CSD. On January 3, 2019, Staff also attended the CVTC Land Use Committee meeting to discuss parking standards.

A Staff level workgroup was convened consisting of representatives of Zoning Permits East, Zoning Enforcement, the Land Development Coordinating Center, and Field Offices. The workgroup met on a bimonthly basis since September 2018 to review and discuss proposed changes. Zoning Enforcement Staff provided valuable insight as to current enforcement activities in the area and how the proposed standards can be clarified to mitigate potential inconsistencies. Zoning Permits and Land Development Coordinating Center Staff provided input as to how the proposed standards would affect specific parcels along Foothill Boulevard and in R-3 zones. They also provided valuable input on the potential impact of the proposed standards. The proposed CSD draft reflects input of the CVTC Land Use Committee and the ultimate consensus of the workgroup.

### **C. Public Comments**

The Public was notified of the upcoming public hearing via a postcard notice that was sent to approximately 5,600 addresses. The project was also advertised in the San Gabriel Valley Tribune.

- Two members of the public contacted the Department inquiring about the public hearing notice received, as well as the project itself. Both members of the public are residents of La Crescenta-Montrose and were informed about the project scope and where they can review the draft documents. Both residents did not signify support nor opposition to the project.
- The Crescenta Valley Town Council and its Land Use Committee, in a letter dated April 4, 2019, recommends approval of the CSD update.
- Two additional letters were received in support of the project.
- One letter was received in opposition to the project.

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Report  
Reviewed By:   
Mi Kim, Supervising Regional Planner

Report  
Approved By:  for APDD  
Deputy Director

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**LIST OF ATTACHED EXHIBITS**

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|-----------|---|
| EXHIBIT A | Project Summary Sheet                         |
| EXHIBIT B | CSD Update Ordinance                          |
| EXHIBIT C | Environmental Determination and Initial Study |
| EXHIBIT D | Resolution                                    |
| EXHIBIT E | GIS Maps                                      |
| EXHIBIT F | Agency Correspondence                         |
| EXHIBIT G | Public Correspondence                         |