



## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

### **A. Project**

The proposed Ordinance will amend Los Angeles County Code (“County Code”) Title 22 (Planning and Zoning) (“Title 22”) to incorporate development standards applicable to residential projects, including mixed-use projects that include a residential component, throughout the unincorporated County. The development standards are intended to improve the design of residential projects, to ensure residential projects are designed in a manner that integrates them into existing neighborhood contexts, and to ensure that residential projects are designed to foster walkable, livable, and healthy neighborhoods that enhance the comfort of residents and the experience of the public.

The Ordinance’s primary aim is to ensure a baseline level of design quality while offering design flexibility and options for property owners, architects, and designers. In many instances, a development standard can be met by implementing one of several identified options. The Ordinance provides clear and easily implementable design standards based on building typology, use, and scale. The standards build upon existing adopted policies to improve residential projects by promoting a high-quality built environment, responding to community and environmental contexts, and equitably supporting all mobility types.

The project includes a User Guide (Appendix E) and additional implementation resources to facilitate the approval process for applicants and Staff.

### **B. Project Background**

The Ordinance is a response to various state laws that direct how local jurisdictions can approve residential projects. One such law, SB 35, required the County to approve residential projects that met certain criteria through a ministerial process. The County’s By-Right Housing Ordinance implements the requirements of this law at the County level by allowing many residential projects to be approved through a ministerial process. Another such law, SB 330, further directed how local jurisdictions can approve residential projects. For example, this law requires that local jurisdictions can only subject residential projects to objective design standards.

Taken together, these state laws and the County’s implementing ordinances significantly reduced Staff’s discretion when reviewing residential projects. Therefore, amending Title 22 to require that residential projects comply with specific, objective development standards, as defined by the state, is the only way to empower Staff to ensure that a residential project is well designed.

### **C. Major Elements and Key Components**

The Ordinance applies to new single-family residences (“SFRs”) and additions to existing SFRs, new multi-family residences with more than one housing unit (“MFRs”) and additions to existing MFRs, and new mixed-use projects that include a residential component. The Ordinance does not apply to interior remodels that do not add square

footage or change the building footprint, rebuilds of existing buildings, non-conforming uses, and mobile and manufactured homes.

The development standards include flexibility and a range of design options to avoid a “one size fits all” approach and acknowledge the wide variety of environments in the unincorporated County. The Ordinance categorizes residential projects into three building typologies and applies standards accordingly. These building typologies are:

1. **Single-unit buildings.** Developments with a single housing unit and its associated structures.
2. **Multi-unit (private entry) buildings.** Developments with multiple housing units where residents can access each unit directly.
3. **Multi-unit (common entry) or mixed-use buildings.** Developments with multiple housing units where most of the units do not have private entries and are typically accessed through internal lobbies and hallways.

The development standards are grouped into the following categories:

1. **Building site and access.** Standards intended to enhance the walkable environment along public streets and in residential neighborhoods by ensuring that pedestrians, cyclists, and other non-motorists are provided with safe and pleasant access to residential buildings.
2. **Front yards and building orientation.** Standards intended to enhance the walkable environment along streets and in residential neighborhoods through private property site design.
3. **Ground floor treatments.** Standards intended to ensure that primary entryways to a building are oriented toward the public right-of-way, which encourages pedestrian activity to and from the building.
4. **Building articulation.** Standards intended to ensure that the design of a residential project is considerate of its surroundings in all directions by breaking up large and otherwise featureless spaces, masses, or volumes on all building facades with architectural detailing and modulations.
5. **Balconies and patios.** Standards intended to provide usable private open space for residents to ensure ample light and fresh air, encourage socialization, and add dimensional variety to building facades.
6. **Building façade details.** Standards intended to ensure that buildings are designed holistically on all sides to create a cohesive architectural idea and enhance the surrounding neighborhood in all directions by equally considering the use of materials on all sides of a building instead of just considering the use of materials on the building frontage.
7. **Landscaping, walls, fences, and screening.** Standards intended to ensure developments utilize landscaping, walls, and fences that are designed to be in harmony with adjacent lower-intensity/small scale uses, soften the appearance of

large massing along the street, allow for both privacy and visibility, and increase a development's resiliency to wildfire, heat, drought, and floods.

8. **Vehicle parking facilities.** Standards intended to foster a pedestrian oriented environment between the street and the building and to maintain and enhance the visual character of residential neighborhoods by minimizing the visual dominance of parking areas.

#### **D. Relationship to Community-Specific Zoning Requirements.**

This Ordinance applies throughout the unincorporated County. However, if a development standard in the Ordinance conflicts with community-specific zoning requirements, such as Community Standards Districts and Specific Plans, the community-specific zoning requirements will prevail. Additionally, future community-specific planning efforts can rely upon the Ordinance's development standards to address design-related development issues.

### **ANALYSIS**

#### **A. Draft Ordinance**

The public review draft of the Ordinance was published on the project website (<https://planning.lacounty.gov/Residentialdesign/documents>) on January 26, 2023.

#### **B. General Plan Consistency**

The project supports numerous policies in the General Plan aimed at creating development that is compatible with the existing character of neighborhoods. The following policies of the General Plan are applicable to the project:

- *Policy LU 9.1: Promote community health for all neighborhoods.*
- *Policy LU 10.3: Consider the built environment of the surrounding area and location in the design and scale of new or remodeled buildings, architectural styles, and reflect appropriate features such as massing, materials, color, detailing or ornament.*
- *Policy LU 10.4: Promote environmentally-sensitive and sustainable design.*
- *Policy LU 10.6: Encourage pedestrian activity through the following:*
  - *Designing the main entrance of buildings to front the street;*
  - *Incorporating landscaping features;*
  - *Limiting masonry walls and parking lots along commercial corridors and other public spaces;*
  - *Incorporating street furniture, signage, and public events and activities; and*
  - *Using wayfinding strategies to highlight community points of interest.*
- *Policy LU 10.9: Encourage land uses and design that stimulate positive and productive human relations and foster the achievement of community goals.*

- *Policy LU 11.1: Encourage new development to employ sustainable energy practices, such as utilizing passive solar techniques and/or active solar technologies.*
- *Policy AQ 3.6: Support rooftop solar facilities on new and existing buildings.*

The Ordinance's proposed development standards support the General Plan's goals and policies and will align with the countywide goals aimed at ensuring new development is compatible with the character of existing communities. The Ordinance contains development standards intended to guide future residential projects in a manner that simultaneously promotes thoughtful and compatible design and fosters walkable, livable, and healthy neighborhoods that enhance the comfort of residents and the experience of the public, while also providing sufficient flexibility so property owners may still incorporate personal style into a project. The Ordinance promotes pedestrian activity, community health, sustainable building design, and encourages land use design that stimulates community interaction by requiring residential projects to de-emphasize automobiles as the sole and primary means of mobility and make walking and other non-automotive mobility modes more convenient.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS**

Staff recommends that this project is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15061(b)(3) and is consistent with the finding by the State Secretary for Natural Resources or by local guidelines that this activity is covered by the common-sense exemption that CEQA applies only to projects which have the potential for causing a significant effect on the environment (Exhibit D – Environmental Determination).

The proposed Ordinance does not trigger or prompt the construction or alteration of facilities nor does it alter the intended land uses and development intensities planned for at any location by the General Plan, its component Area, Community, and Specific Plans, or by Title 22. These regulations do not create a change in land use or density for any of the properties located within the unincorporated County. Future development subject to the Ordinance has either already been evaluated under CEQA at the Plan level or will undergo CEQA review as part of a discretionary review process at the project-specific level consistent with CEQA requirements. Therefore, the proposed Ordinance will not have a significant effect on the environment and Staff recommends that the project is exempt from CEQA.

### **OUREACH AND ENGAGEMENT**

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

The project was reviewed and cleared for public hearing by the Department of Public Works in September 2022 and by the Fire Department and the Department of Public Health in February 2023.



## 2. Project Outreach and Engagement

Staff conducted the following outreach and engagement activities:

### **Design Professionals Roundtable**

In April 2022, following development of an initial draft of the Ordinance, Staff convened a roundtable of design professionals to solicit input from end users.

### **RPC Presentation**

On November 9, 2022, Staff presented an overview of the Ordinance to the RPC to solicit feedback on the project scope and objectives.

### **Countywide Virtual Meetings**

In November 2022, Staff hosted three countywide virtual meetings for community members. Two of the meetings focused on general information regarding the Ordinance and the third was focused on rural communities and any unique concerns that they may have had regarding the Ordinance. The meetings were recorded and the meeting materials were made available on the project website for public access.

### **Castaic Town Council Meeting**

In February 2023, Staff presented the Ordinance to the Castaic Town Council and answered questions from stakeholders.

### **Building Industry Association of Southern California (BIA)**

In March 2023, Staff presented the Ordinance to the BIA and answered questions from stakeholders.

### **Office Hours**

During December 2022 and January, February, and March 2023, Staff hosted office hours every Monday from 1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. for anyone who wanted to learn more about the Ordinance.

### **Email Notifications**

In November 2022 and January 2023, email notifications regarding the Ordinance were sent to all community members who signed up for project notification and to all community members on LA County Planning's New Ordinances & Code Amendments notification list.

### **Social Media**

In November 2022 and February 2023, the Ordinance and the office hours described above were promoted on LA County Planning's social media channels to broaden outreach.

### **Postcard Mailing**

On February 23, 2023, postcards were mailed to 233 contacts on LA County Planning's Zoned District Courtesy List and CEQA Notification List.

### **3. Public Comments**

1. The Crescenta Valley Town Council, in a letter dated February 21, 2023, indicated that the Ordinance does not reflect the needs of the community and is overly complicated. Staff attempted to meet with the Crescenta Valley Town Council to discuss their comments but were unable to connect to schedule a meeting.
2. The Agua Dulce Town Council, in a letter dated February 27, 2023, expressed concerns that the Ordinance is not compatible with the County's unincorporated rural communities. The letter identified several areas where further clarification was needed or modification to development standards was desired to acknowledge rural living. For example, the Agua Dulce Town Council wanted to ensure that a specific architectural style would be permissible. However, the Ordinance does not regulate, either through prohibition or prescription, the architectural style or language used for residential buildings.

To address these concerns, Staff subsequently modified the portions of the Ordinance applicable to single-family residences. Staff revised the Ordinance to allow the requirement to provide a direct pedestrian pathway from an adjoining street or sidewalk to the front entrance of the building to be met through a vehicle driveway if the primary building is located more than 100 feet from the front property line. Staff removed the pedestrian access exception for Pearblossom Highway so that the standard would consistently apply county-wide. Staff revised the Ordinance to limit the required area of landscaping on a lot to 5,000 square feet and to allow areas with existing landscaping and vegetation to be included in the 5,000-square-foot required area. Staff revised the Ordinance to allow the use of chain link fencing in conjunction with an approved facility for animal containment. Staff also revised the Ordinance's screening requirement for mechanical equipment and utilities to exempt water tanks, mechanical equipment, and utilities that are not visible from the front property line.

3. The Acton Town Council, in a letter dated February 27, 2023, expressed concerns that the Ordinance approached design from a "one size fits all" perspective. However, as noted above, in many instances the Ordinance's requirements can be met by selecting one of several options provided. This approach is intended to provide owners, architects, and designers with flexibility to design a project that suits their needs while still meeting the Ordinance's intent of ensuring high-quality design.

The letter also highlighted a standard prohibiting a specific stucco finish on buildings. Staff subsequently modified the Ordinance to allow this specific stucco finish on SFRs located greater than 50 feet from the front lot line.

The Agua Dulce Town Council and the Acton Town Council raised many similar comments. Therefore, Staff revised the Ordinance to clarify standards regarding pedestrian pathways, landscaping requirements, and chain link fencing allowances, as described above.

To address additional comments provided by the Acton Town Council, Staff subsequently modified other portions of the Ordinance applicable to single-family residences. Staff revised the Ordinance to clarify that the development standards apply to projects fronting both public and private streets and to clarify that surface lots are considered to be uncovered surface parking. Staff revised the Ordinance to exempt buildings situated more than 50 feet from the front property line from the stucco sand finish minimum requirements. In addition, Staff revised the Ordinance to exempt properties fronting an existing unimproved street or private drive from street tree planting requirements.

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Report

Reviewed By:



Kevin A. Finkel, AICP, Supervising Planner

Report

Approved By:



Mitch Glaser, AICP, Assistant Deputy Director

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LIST OF ATTACHED EXHIBITS	
EXHIBIT A	Ordinance
EXHIBIT B	Project Summary
EXHIBIT C	Draft Resolution
EXHIBIT D	Environmental Determination
EXHIBIT E	User Guide
EXHIBIT F	Public Correspondence