


March 20, 2025

To: Staff

From: Amy J. Bodek, AICP 
Director of Regional Planning

SUBDIVISION AND ZONING ORDINANCE INTERPRETATION MEMO NO. 2025-02 – ALTADENA COMMUNITY STANDARDS DISTRICT AND FIRE REBUILDS

PURPOSE

This memorandum provides guidance on the required front yard setback for fire disaster rebuilds in the R-1 Zone within the Altadena Community Standards District (CSD).

BACKGROUND

Title 22 ([County Code Table 22.18.040-A](#)) states that the minimum front yard setback in the R-1 Zone is 20 feet. However, the Altadena CSD ([County Code Section 22.306.070.A.1.b](#)) states that the minimum front yard setback in the R-1 Zone cannot be less than the smallest front yard setback of a legally established residence on the same side of the street on the same block, but in no case less than 20 feet. The intent of this CSD standard is to preserve the character of built-out blocks with existing front yard setbacks larger than the standard 20 feet. On built-out blocks, considering the smallest front yard setback of a residence on the same side of the street on the same block accounts for outliers, i.e., residences with exceptionally large front yard setbacks.

Given the significant number of residential structures destroyed by the Eaton Fire in Altadena, applying this CSD standard to fire disaster rebuilds is impractical and will lead to outcomes that are inconsistent with its intent. For example:

- If no homes on one side of a street on a block survived, the first fire disaster rebuild will establish the minimum front yard setback for all future rebuilds on the same side of the street on the same block. In this scenario, staff cannot effectively counsel the public on front yard setback requirements because this information may change depending on which fire disaster rebuild is approved or built first.
- If one or two homes on the same side of the street on the same block survived, the minimum setback requirement for fire disaster rebuilds will be greatly impacted by the front yard setback(s) of the surviving home(s), especially if they are exceptionally large.

INTERPRETATION

Given the circumstances, and to allow for predictable and consistent outcomes, the minimum front yard setback for fire disaster rebuilds in the R-1 Zone within the Altadena CSD is 20 feet. This requirement does not apply to like-for-like fire disaster rebuilds with non-conforming front yard setbacks of less than 20 feet, which may keep their pre-fire setback.

If a property owner proposes a fire disaster rebuild and wants to increase or reduce the pre-fire front yard setback while retaining other non-conforming pre-fire setbacks, they may do so and keep a like-for-like status, provided that the rebuild complies with all other requirements for a like-for-like replacement in Title 22 ([County Code Chapter 22.256](#)) and:

- If the pre-fire front yard setback was less than 20 feet, the front yard setback is larger than the pre-fire front yard setback; or
- If the pre-fire front yard setback was greater than 20 feet, the front yard setback is at least 20 feet

APPLICABILITY

This memorandum applies to fire disaster rebuild applications in the R-1 Zone within the Altadena CSD.

If you have any questions regarding this policy, please contact Mitch Glaser mglaser@planning.lacounty.gov.

AJB:CC:ER:lj