

January 13, 2026

TO: Staff

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

**SUBDIVISION AND ZONING ORDINANCE INTERPRETATION NO. 2025-07 – DISASTER RECOVERY:  
APPLICABILITY OF SETBACK DISTRICT STANDARDS ON DISASTER REBUILD PROJECTS IN ALTADENA**

**PURPOSE**

This memorandum provides guidance on applying the standards in County Code Section [22.320.090.E.2 \(Altadena Front Yard Setback Districts\)](#) and the procedures for their application to disaster rebuild projects within the Altadena Community Standards District (CSD).

**BACKGROUND**

The Altadena CSD identifies three front yard Setback Districts (County Code Section 22.320.090.E.2 and Figures 22.320.090-D, 22.320.090-E, and 22.320.090-F). A front yard Setback District is a defined residential district of contiguous properties with R-1 (Single-Family Residences) Zoning that must comply with specified front yard setbacks that differs from the countywide front yard setback requirements outlined in Title 22 of the County Code.

Separately, the Altadena CSD (County Code Section 22.320.090 D.1) 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. Given the significant number of residential structures destroyed within the R-1 Zone by the Eaton Fire, applying the CSD standard to fire disaster rebuilds is impractical. The Eaton Fire Interim Ordinance establishes guidance and flexibility for applying front yard setback requirements to disaster rebuilds (22.258.030.D.1). However, neither the Altadena CSD nor the Eaton Fire Interim Ordinance apply these considerations to fire disaster rebuilds within the three Setback Districts in Altadena.

While the Eaton Fire of January 2025 impacted lots in all three Setback Districts in Altadena, Setback Districts 2 and 3 sustained the most damage. About half of the structures in Setback District 2 and more than 80 percent of the structures in Setback District 3 were lost or damaged. Two homes were

lost and four homes experienced minor damage in Setback District 1. The Altadena CSD references Section 22.72.040 related to these Setback Districts, which indicates that “[e]very lot in a Setback District shall conform to the building setbacks established by this Chapter, except where a subject lot adjoins another lot that fronts on the same highway, parkway, or street that has a lesser setback or yard, the building setback shall be the average of the building setbacks or yards of the adjacent lots on both sides of the subject lot.” Given the number of residential structures destroyed within the Setback Districts, applying this policy to fire disaster rebuilds within those districts is impractical and could lead to outcomes that are inconsistent with the intent of the CSD.

Research conducted by LA County Planning staff indicates that the Setback Districts in Altadena are associated with Covenants, Conditions, and Restrictions (“CC&Rs”) that were enacted as part of the historic development of these areas 1914 and 1941. As land was sold off and developed via Tract Maps, CC&Rs recorded on these properties established specific setback requirements that dictated the historic development patterns, including expansive front yard setbacks ranging from 30’ to 100’ in depth. Although most of the CC&Rs had expiration dates ranging from 25 to 50 years after their creation, it appears that the establishment of the Setback Districts replicated the CC&Rs. As a result, the Setback Districts can be seen as artifacts of a previous regulatory framework that did not contemplate the destruction and rebuilding of whole blocks.

Setback District 3 includes Mount Lowe Drive, a one-hundred-and-forty-foot-wide street that was once the part of the Mount Lowe Railway. The railway operated from approximately 1893 until its abandonment in 1938. The street median was eventually developed into Mount Lowe Park, which features a landscaped streambed, walking trails and two historic markers, one dedicated to railway engineer David MacPherson, and a National Register historic marker for the railway. In this instance, Setback District 3 and Mount Lowe Drive’s front yard setback requirements recorded in the CC&Rs contribute to the unique characteristics and history of this street. The unusual street width and front yard setback requirements create a unique neighborhood element that is a result of the original tract map and railway location.

## **INTERPRETATION**

The following interpretation applies to lots that are within the three legacy Setback Districts in Altadena, as illustrated by County Code Figures 22.320.090-D, 22.320.090-E, and 22.320.090-F

Because of the historical and outdated nature of the Setback Districts in Altadena that predate yard requirements and related development standards in the County Code, special consideration is required when reviewing fire disaster rebuild projects on properties that are found within Setback Districts 1, 2, and 3 in Altadena. Pursuant to [County Code Chapter 22.234 \(Interpretations\)](#), the Director of Regional Planning is issuing the following interpretation:

Notwithstanding County Code Section 22.258.030.D.1, if a damaged or destroyed structure in Setback Districts 1, 2, and 3 in Altadena had a previous front yard setback greater than 20 feet, the like-for-like replacement structure may have a smaller front yard setback, provided that the proposed setback is at least 20 feet, and that the like-for-like replacement structure otherwise complies with the setback requirements and all applicable requirements for like-for-like replacement structures, in accordance with 22.258.030 D.2. Additionally, if a damaged or destroyed structure in Setback Districts 1, 2, and 3 in Altadena had a previous front yard setback less than 20 feet, the like-for-like replacement structure may have the same front yard setback or a front yard setback that is larger than the previous front yard setback but less than 20 feet, provided the like-for-like replacement structure otherwise complies with the setback requirements and all applicable requirements for like-for-like replacement structures, in accordance with 22.258.030 D.3.

Please note that this interpretation does not apply to the following properties:

- Properties outside of Setback Districts 1, 2, and 3,
- Properties with unexpired and applicable deed recorded CC&Rs requiring a minimum front yard setback that is greater than the yard requirements found in the County Code,
- Properties fronting Mount Lowe Drive between Mount Curve Ave and Maiden Lane within Setback District 3.
- Properties identified as “No Damage” on the Los Angeles County Damage Inspection Database (“DINS”), including those within the Eaton Fire damage area.

### **APPLICABILITY**

This interpretation applies to any rebuild project application submitted after the date of this memorandum and may be applied to any project application that was previously submitted that may benefit from this interpretation, as determined by the applicant and/or the County. This interpretation does not apply to properties that meet any of the criteria listed above. This memorandum will remain in effect until such time that Title 22 is amended to clarify these provisions.

If you have any questions regarding this memorandum, please contact Clark Taylor in the Community Studies East Section at [ctaylor@planning.lacounty.gov](mailto:ctaylor@planning.lacounty.gov).

AJB: CC: ER: JH: CRT