Altadena Listening Sessions
Session Topic: Land Use and Zoning
The Collaboratory, 540 W. Woodbury Road, Altadena
Saturday, October 17, 9:30am-12:30pm

Meeting Notes

Attendees: 60

Discussion Table 1

Themes & Emphasis of Discussion:

1. **Theme: What type of development does the Altadena Community Standards District (CSD) actually apply to?**
    - It would help Altadena residents understand the types of changes to consider in the CSD if they better understand the different types of development the CSD regulates.
        - Sounds like developments that use state law are exempt from the CSD requirements.
    - There seem to be exceptions to the projects that are actually subject to the CSD.
    - Residents think of the CSD as the last "line of defense" for the projects that are actually subject to its requirements.
    - The County should keep the CSD, but more information is needed to understand what can be changed and where, given that so many projects seem to bypass the CSD.
2. **Theme: Concerns with private water service providers in Altadena.**
    - What is the latest news with the three private water service providers?
    - Are they still issuing will-serve letters? And what does that process look like?
    - We don't want the service providers to increase service rates just because they are not doing financially well.
    - Do the service providers have any plans?
3. **Theme: Concerns with SB-9**
    - SB-9 will complicate traffic and infrastructure concerns in the community.
    - This will result in a lot of added density once you start adding up all the properties that benefit from SB-9 and the ADUs that can be built on those properties.
    - SB-9 was also supposed to be included in SB 1090, but that was taken off the table and SB 1090 only applies to SB 1123.

- SB-9 is an example of policy that removes what the CSD aims to protect in Altadena.

4. **Theme: Desire for Altadena to return as it was, not as a community with massive structures and a lot more density.**
    - If we ease up the CSD for non-rebuilds, then owners are going to want to maximize how much structure they can build.
    - Allow those rebuilding to have exactly what they had or a little more, as long as they are like for like.
    - We want to preserve the view of the mountains. Do not allow homes and structures to be taller.
    - State housing laws take no regard for the context Altadena is living through. Increases in density should be allowed in already built communities close to transit, not communities like Altadena that are trying to recover from a devastating fire and located away from major transit.
    - Some owners are waiting to rebuild so that they can see how big and close their neighbors are building. That way, they can know how to respond with their design/plans.

Discussion Table 2

Themes & Emphasis of Discussion:

1. **Theme: What do you like about Altadena?**
    - Uniqueness,
    - Diversity of Housing Stock,
    - Diversity of Residents,
    - Nature Friendly,
    - Open space, trees, yards.
2. **Theme: What changes would you like to see in the community?**
    - Improved Mariposa Junction
        - Plazas and walkable spaces.
        - Improved streetscape.
        - Programs to support local businesses.
    - Increased federal funding for recovery.
    - Better enforcement for code violators, especially on vacant parcels.
    - Allow flexibility, especially around yards. Property owners should be able to transfer some yard setbacks to another portion of the property.
    - Remove garage requirements.
    - Increased alternative and green energy options.
3. **Theme: What would you like to see related to rebuilding?**
    - Support community groups and their efforts.

- Limits on amount of lot that can be paved.
- More trees, stricter tree requirements.
- Stormwater management techniques.
    - Bioswales, curb cuts for drainage, etc.
- Expand LID requirements and standards for stormwater management.
- Require permits for concrete flatwork.

4. **General Comments**
    - Support rebuild flexibility, especially for home-based businesses, and cottage industries.
        - Noxious uses must not be allowed.
    - Traffic calming.
    - Control and reduce construction signs.
    - Fences and Hedges.
        - Some would like to see regulations removed, others would like a prohibition on 6-foot-tall fences in front yards.

Discussion Table 3

1. **What design aspects of Altadena's residential neighborhoods and/or commercial areas are most important to you? What would be most important for you to preserve about these areas?**
    - Diversity of housing types and sizes. Multi-family interspersed and not concentrated.
    - Retain the trees. "Like-for-like" should include trees.
    - Views of the mountains.
    - Continuity of design in commercial areas, being a result of natural brick. Even though it was a hodgepodge architecturally, there was some cohesion.
    - Admiration for remaining commercial buildings. Suggestion to retain/keep the facades of surviving commercial buildings, even as those buildings expand.
    - Keep community uses, including Post Office.
    - Keep apartment buildings. Desire for a return of rental units and renters. Preference for apartment buildings to house more residents (more 'honest' development) over developer-built homes that maximize square footage but house fewer residents.
2. **If you could change or add one design standard/rule that applies to development in Altadena, what would it be?**
    - Setbacks
        - Get rid of special setbacks.
        - Less variety in setbacks along residential streets.

- Uncovered parking / seeing driveways with cars is comforting for residents. Requiring covered parking results in smaller buildings.
- Increase the front yard landscaping requirement.
- Dislike of generic, 'modern' designs.
- Dislike of SB 1123-type development.
- The impacted parking on residential streets has resulted in an unpleasant/dangerous experience backing out of the driveway.

3. **Which (if any) design standards/rules have made it difficult for you (or for folks you know) to rebuild?**
   - The direction in which the front door can face.
   - One resident noted that their neighbor constructed a covered parking area, with the new structure and eaves built to the property line. Their understanding is that it may have been approved as part of a like-for-like review because of remnant [carport] poles that survived the fire.
   - One resident noted that their neighbor constructed a wall with no windows, in response to an out-of-scale neighboring development. The large development is discouraging residents from rebuilding.
4. **What types of design standards/rules would help Altadena beyond immediate recovery?**
   - A new rule to notify next-door neighbors of proposed development, because of issues with encroachments into side setbacks.
   - Allow multi-family per new State laws. Don't fight those rules.
5. **Would you like Altadena to have more opportunities for micro-businesses or hybrid live-work spaces beyond the commercial corridors? If so, where? What types of uses should/should not be allowed?**
   - Not sure more should be allowed. Home-based businesses should not generate additional traffic, especially with no customer parking.
6. **Other Comments**
   - Allow for more multi-family residential on Figueroa/Altadena.
   - Expand commercial on Fair Oaks/Lincoln, in addition to Lake/Mariposa
   - Standards for developers should be different from standards for residents.

Discussion Table 4

Themes & Emphasis of Discussion:

1. **Theme: Preserving neighborhood character while allowing rebuilding flexibility**

- Setbacks, building façades, landscaping, and established tree patterns were identified as important elements of Altadena's neighborhood character.
- Concern that increased rebuilding flexibility could change neighborhood character, particularly when two-story homes are constructed alongside historically single-story neighborhoods.
- Some participants preferred development standards that focus on building scale and massing rather than regulating specific architectural designs.

2. **Theme: Flexibility in residential parking and housing types**
    - Allow greater flexibility for tandem parking to accommodate multiple parking spaces.
    - Support allowing uncovered parking, recognizing that residents do not always use garages for vehicle parking.
    - While flexibility for uncovered parking is desirable, vehicles should not be parked on lawns.
    - Courtyard housing and bungalow courts were identified as desirable residential development types.
3. **Theme: Improving commercial corridors and design standards**
    - Fair Oaks Avenue was identified as needing revitalization and a stronger commercial identity, particularly in comparison to the Lake Avenue and Mariposa junction.
    - Consider additional architectural design standards for commercial areas to improve their appearance and character.
    - Review commercial signage standards, including billboards, with greater attention to materials, scale, and architectural details.
    - Explore opportunities to incorporate art and other design elements into commercial corridors.
4. **Theme: Infrastructure improvements and accessibility**
    - Participants expressed a need for infrastructure improvements to support Altadena's recovery and long-term development.
    - Questions about how residents and agencies can advocate for improvements to ensure ADA-compliant pedestrian infrastructure, especially along steep hillside grades.
    - Request for greater County commitment to infrastructure improvements, including right-of-way maintenance and street repaving.
    - Encourage collaboration between public agencies, private entities, and community members to support rebuilding and infrastructure improvements.
    - Improve walkability, bicycle accessibility, multimodal transportation options, and street lighting.
5. **Theme: Landscaping, environmental protection, and scenic views**

- Support additional street trees, tree replacement, and landscaping requirements, including plans for long term maintenance.
- Incorporate fire hardening measures, water retention, and hillside protection into future development standards.
- Consider park-like buffers along the wildland urban interface (WUI) in the foothill areas to support community protection.
- Preserve scenic views and vistas while addressing vegetation regrowth and ongoing landscape maintenance.
- Explore how County Planning efforts can support the protection and maintenance of scenic corridors, including Lake Avenue.

6. **Theme: Questions on development standards, approval processes, and State law**
    - Questions regarding the timeline for the Interim Ordinance and how long its provisions will remain in effect.
    - Concerns about uncertainty in the development plan review and approval process.
    - Request for clarification regarding property lines and setback requirements.
    - Questions about the County's ability to address or modify development requirements established under State law.

Discussion Table 5

1. **What design aspects of Altadena's residential neighborhoods and/or commercial areas are most important to you? What would be most important for you to preserve about these areas?**
    - Maintain SFRs, with a maximum of 2 homes in residential areas.
    - Keep mountains views, an essential part of the community.
    - CSD should be used to both letter and spirit for the community.
    - More trees on blocks and properties.
2. **If you could change or add one design standard/rule that applies to development in Altadena, what would it be?**
    - Previously, if additions and changes were being made to a residence, the owner would have to canvass the neighborhood for support. Is this still done now? Was it a formal requirement, or just courtesy notice? CUP and Variance projects require formal public hearing and notice.
3. **What types of design standards/rules would help Altadena beyond immediate recovery?**
    - Issue with how to measure building heights, sidewalk at one level and property grade above it.
    - Comment on fence heights- Don't want taller fences/hedges that will result in 'canyonization' like in Beverly Hills. Having openness and visibility to the streets protects the community more than security by taller fences.

- How to deal with subterranean level garage counting toward stories/building height?
- Building into hillsides- appears 2-story on one side, but 3-story on the other side.
- Irregular lot building placement- appeal/variance procedures available.
- Comment- Example of Tubbs Fire (2017)
    - 80% rebuilt in 3 years helped retain community commerce and successful recovery.
    - Speed of rebuild will affect recovery success, spending too long without action can have negative impacts.

4. **What types of design standards/rules would help Altadena beyond immediate recovery?**
    - Survey results imply differences in wants/needs between west & east Altadena- could breakdown further into smaller community subsections that have different standards for each?
        - Different views on fencing/walls- contained security vs. open visibility, preventing isolation.
    - Roof pitch can contribute a lot to the neighborhood feeling. Recommend including a design standard for SFR or apartments/MFR to address this.
    - Process for more consistency and transparency for community to have input on review standards to make sure everyone is going through the same process, open communication.
        - Systemic changes to County processes needed? How to go about?
    - Learning/Education- DRP community meetings must cover a lot (Introductions, Planning 101, etc) before getting to the main discussion topic. Recommend having cohorts for learning planning terms at the same level so there is better understanding.
        - Many of same people show up to all meetings. There is a need to increase reach too. Community organizations can help facilitate and meet people where they are to connect more groups (have planning at existing events/gatherings).
        - Block Captains, ATC, Faith groups, cultural groups.
        - Top-down listening sessions with the same people will only get the same input.

Discussion Table 6

1. **What design aspects of Altadena's residential neighborhoods and/or commercial areas are most important to you? What would be most important for you to preserve about these areas?**
    - Walkability/biking and landscaping for residential and commercial areas.
        - Preserve landscaping requirements and bring back the pre-fire trees and greenery.
        - Improve safe walking with more sidewalks where people want them, because there isn't community-wide agreement on adding sidewalks where they don't currently exist.

        - Safe biking and walking routes with better site lines for safety on busy streets.
        - Better pedestrian and biking infrastructure for safety and access.
        - Install more traffic calming infrastructure because speeding is an issue on wide streets.
    - Height Requirements in CSD:
        - Keep it as it is.
        - The increased height of rebuilds has impacted the ability of neighbors with smaller homes to put back their solar panels.

2. **If you could change or add one design standard/rule that applies to development in Altadena, what would it be?**
    - Basements:
        - Change language in the CSD to exclude basements from the limit on the number of stories. In the CSD now, a cellar doesn't count, but a basement does. They are the same thing. Please clarify that in CSD.
    - Stepbacks:
        - Stepback requirement need to be changed to allow homes with sloped roofs. The current standard has resulted in awkward designs. A 45-degree slope would be more acceptable and is a common standard.
    - Side Setback:
        - Maintain the current standards because of Zone 0 which doesn't allow any greenery within 5' of a structure.
3. **If you could change or add one design standard/rule that applies to development in Altadena, what would it be?**
    - Residential Design Standards:
        - Remove the requirement for the extra pedestrian path to the front door. This is difficult for sloped lots to include and in general people want a walkway from their driveway and adding another walkway requirement is an extra cost that's wasted. It also takes away from landscaping.
        - Fire sprinkler requirements for structures or portions of structures beyond 150' from street. *(This is required by Fire Dept. not DRP).*
4. **What types of design standards/rules would help Altadena beyond immediate recovery?**
    - Commercial Areas:
        - Support for fine-grained development that is facilitated through requirements and standards. This will help small, independent retail return.
        - Parking – Need more public public parking lots, so that small commercial properties don't have to supply parking and can develop more of the lot.
        - Bring a grocery store, like Sprouts, to the empty Rite-Aid.
    - Modification Allowances:

        - The Modification A process is a huge benefit over the previous processes.
        - Have seen the Modification A process most used for the stepback standard and setback issues.
    - Revise the Residential Design Guidelines:
        - Remove requirements that result in added costs that do not benefit the homeowners and are generally a waste of resources and money.
    - Fire Safety:
        - The reduced garage setback and garage conversion allowance is an issue for fire safety.
5. **Would you like Altadena to have more opportunities for micro-businesses or hybrid live-work spaces beyond the commercial corridors? If so, where? What types of uses should/should not be allowed?**
    - Accessory Commercial Units (ACUs) can benefit Altadena:
        - The ACU idea would be great for smaller home businesses.
        - Reduces business costs for small/home businesses.
        - Supports home-based business as the economic engine of Altadena.
        - With limited space available and high costs, helps small/micro businesses stay afloat or get started.
    - Requirements for ACUs:
        - It would be good to have uses listed that are allowed or not allowed in ACUs, so we can include small/micro businesses that wouldn't impact residential areas.
        - Think about parking and off-street parking. We don't want this to result in lots of cars on the street which impacts hazard safety and emergency access. Perhaps a residential permit requirement?