



Planning and Transportation Commission STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE:	May 5, 2025
ITEM TITLE:	Adopt a Resolution recommending the City Council to amend Title 18 of the San Carlos Municipal Code to adopt the Multi-family (RM) and Mixed-use (MU) Objective Design Standards (ODS) and provide staff with feedback on approaches to encourage retail and commercial use along El Camino Real and South of Laurel Street outside the boundary of the Downtown Area Specific Plan.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Planning and Transportation Commission (PTC) adopt a Resolution recommending the City Council to amend Title 18 of the San Carlos Municipal Code to adopt the Multi-family (RM) and Mixed-use (MU) Objective Design Standards (ODS). Staff further requests the PTC provide staff with feedback on approaches to encourage retail and commercial use along El Camino Real and South of Laurel Street outside the boundary of the Downtown Area Specific Plan which will be presented to City Council.

BACKGROUND

Recent changes in state law mandate that local jurisdictions review and approve residential developments comprising two (2) or more units based on objective design standards only. These standards are designed to be measurable and verifiable, eliminating any "gray" areas and leaving no room for interpretation or personal judgement. This distinguishes them from subjective standards that are open to varying interpretations. Additionally, one of the Council's strategic goals is to actively promote and support the streamlined processing of housing projects to boost housing production. Objective Design Standards bring clarity and predictability to the review process by establishing clear, measurable expectations for applicants early in the application process, making the project review process efficient and less time-consuming.

In 2022, the City began working on ODS for single-family development and adopted those objective standards at the end of 2023. Since then, the City has been working on mixed-use and multi-family objective design standards with the assistance of Van Meter Williams Pollack (VMWP), an urban design firm with extensive local experience in developing multi-family and mixed-use objective design standards.

Since the inception of this project, staff conducted extensive public outreach. This included two stakeholder meetings, three community meetings including one with the residents of the Greater East San Carlos neighborhood, a city-wide survey, two Planning and Transportation Study Sessions and one City Council Study Session. A summary of

these outreach efforts and meeting minutes is included as Attachment 2.

The culmination of these extensive outreach efforts and feedback from the City Council (Study Session on February 10, 2025) and Planning and Transportation Commission (Study Session on June 17, 2024, and November 20, 2023) led to the final draft of the objective design standards. If adopted, these standards will be incorporated into the San Carlos Municipal Code. The proposed changes would affect Chapters 18.03 Rules of Measurement, 18.04 Residential Districts, 18.05 Mixed-use Districts, 18.06 Commercial Districts, 18.15 General Site Regulations, 18.18 Landscaping, 18.26 Planning Authorities, 18.27 Common Procedures, 18.29 Design Review and Compliance Review Procedures, 18.30 Use Permits, 18.41 Terms and Definitions, and other code sections as required. The redlined version of the proposed code amendment is included as Attachment 1, Exhibit B: Mixed-Use and Multi-Family Objective Design Standards Proposed Amendments to Title 18.

The proposed RM/MU ODS will be applicable to future residential or mixed-use projects within the Multi-family (RM) or Mixed-Use (MU) zoning districts. Attachment 4: San Carlos Zoning Map shows the location of these ODS-applicable zoning districts in San Carlos.

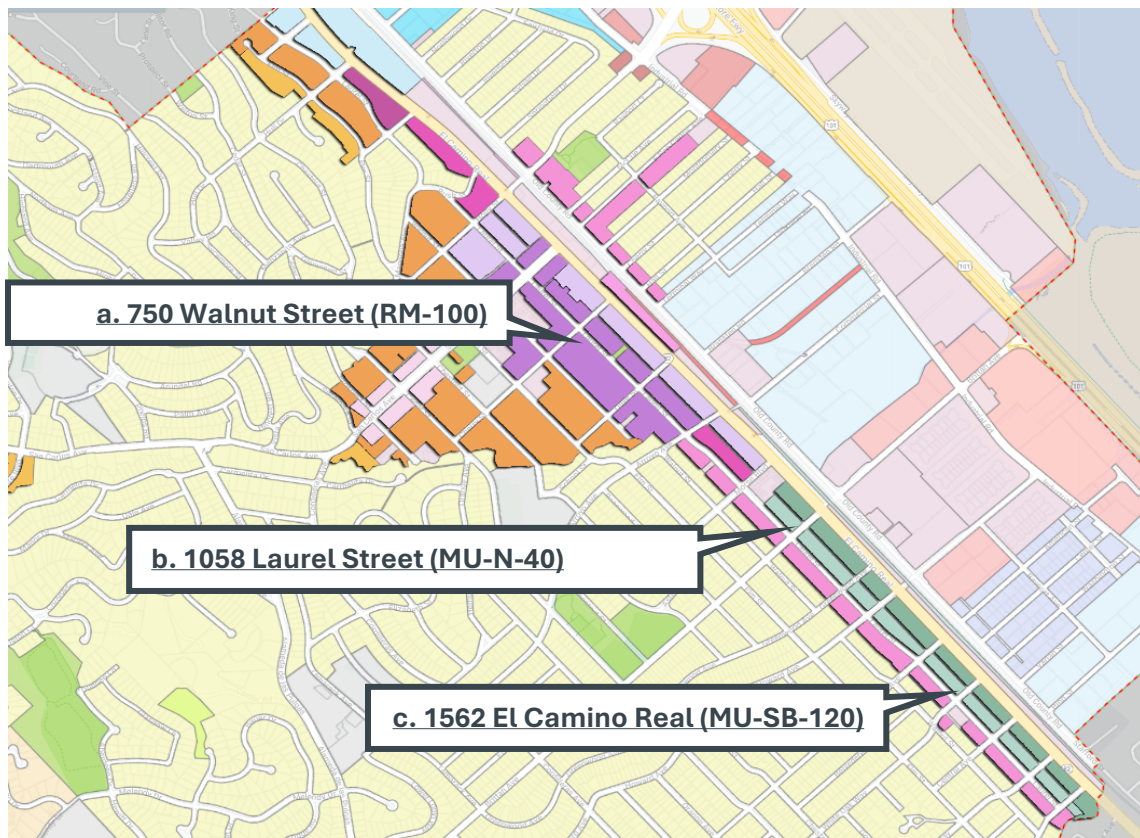
The scope of the RM/MU ODS initiative includes Zoning Code amendments covering the following three topics:

1. **Creation of Objective Design Standards (RM/MU ODS):** Chapters 18.04 and 18.05 have been amended to establish new objective design standards for future residential development within the multi-family and mixed-use zoning districts. These amendments introduce or revise existing standards related to but not limited to, building massing, articulation, materials, colors, and landscaping to ensure they are objective and measurable pursuant to State Law requirements. In light of the City's ongoing efforts to adopt the Northeast Area Specific Plan and the Downtown Area Specific Plan, it is important to note that any future development projects, including residential development, located within an adopted specific plan area will be subject to the regulations established by that specific plan.
2. **Enhancing Housing Feasibility:** A key focus of the proposed amendments was evaluating the feasibility of existing regulations—such as building placement, setbacks, and step-backs—and their potential impact on housing production. In alignment with Housing Element policies *HOU 4.2 Zoning Ordinance Revisions*, *4.4 Objectivity and Streamlining in Development Regulations*, and *4.5 Review of Development Standards to Promote Achieving Maximum Densities*, the City is required to regularly assess and refine development standards to avoid unintended constraints on housing. As part of this effort, subjective language was removed, and standards were tested and refined. For instance, as outlined below, the upper-story step-back requirement was reduced from 10 feet to 6 feet to allow for more flexible design and increased housing capacity.
3. **Test Fits:** To evaluate the impact of existing design and development standards, staff selected three representative sites and conducted housing project feasibility testing. The analysis considered factors such as general cost of construction,

development potential, number of units, and unit sizes. This process helped identify which standards may be acting as constraints to the creation of housing and highlighted areas of the Zoning Code in need of revision. The selected sites were small to medium in size, as smaller parcels often face greater challenges in complying with development and design regulations. Attachment 3 includes details and findings of test fits. The selected sites include:

- a) **750 Walnut Street** – RM-100 zone, 0.19 acres
- b) **1058 Laurel Street** – MU-N-40 zone (adjacent to RS-6 zone), 0.14 acres
- c) **1562 El Camino Real** – MU-SB-120 zone, 0.46 acres

Figure 1: Showing the location of test fit sites



- 4. Establishment of a New Review Process:** Chapters 18.26, 18.27 and 18.29 introduce a new project review pathway called “Compliance Review.” This process relies solely on objective standards, offering a more streamlined and predictable review that aligns with State law. The Compliance Review process supports the City’s Housing Element goal of facilitating residential development through efficient, consistent, and objective evaluation criteria.

ANALYSIS

The City’s proposed RM/MU ODS include numerous zoning amendments that span multiple chapters in the San Carlos Municipal Code. Table 1 provides an overview of the proposed amendments in each chapter. For specific redline text and details, refer to Attachment 1 Exhibit B, which includes the proposed amendments highlighted in red line format indicating text amendments. Additionally, proposed amendments that hold particular significance are elaborated separately in the recommendations below.

Table 1: Summary of Proposed Amendments

SCMC Chapters		Description of Proposed Amendments
1	18.03 (Rules of Measurement)	Clarifying areas that count towards floor area.
2	18.04 (Residential Districts)	Making existing standards objective for multi-family (RM) zones and creating new objective standards.
3	18.05 (Mixed-Use Districts)	Making existing standards objective for multi-family (MU) zones and creating new objective standards.
4	18.06 (Commercial District)	Adding language to be consistent with AB 2011.
5	18.15 (General Site Regulations)	Clarifying projection standards and applicability.
6	18.18 (Landscaping)	Amending standards for consistency with other chapters if needed.
7	18.26 (Planning Authorities)	Amending roles and responsibilities of the Director and Planning and Transportation Commission.

8	18.27 (Common Procedures)	Amending roles and responsibilities related to Compliance Review.
9	18.29 (Design Review and Compliance Review Procedures)	Revising thresholds and findings, introducing new procedures for deviation/exception from ODS requirement, major and minor modifications.
10	18.30 (Use Permits)	Clarifying applicability of use permits.
11	18.41 (Terms and Definitions)	Adding new definitions such as major modification, minor modification, podium, etc.

In addition to creating design standards related to the exterior appearance of a proposed development, Staff is also recommending amendments to certain existing development standards that affect the feasibility of housing production.

Objective Design Standards Recommendations

Floor Area Ratio (FAR)

1. Eliminate maximum FAR for the residential component of projects.

General Plan Housing Element Policy HOU 4.5 commits the City to continuously review existing development standards that may pose a challenge for the creation of housing. Previous feedback from developers indicated that FAR limits layered on to the existing development standards may present a challenge for projects to achieve minimum and maximum densities, especially for narrow sites, and for projects that include family-sized (3-bedroom) units.

The consultant team evaluated three existing sites based on current development standards, including setbacks, upper-story step-backs, and maximum height (Attachment 3). The analysis found that most sites had difficulty with developing to the maximum FAR permitted due to other required standards, such as building placement or setbacks and upper-story step-backs. The analysis also found that achieving maximum densities within the allowable FAR limits would lead to very small unit sizes.

In another testing scenario, the FAR limit was reached at five stories, even though six stories were permitted, effectively limiting the potential for additional residential units or density. This suggested that using FAR is a limiting regulation and unnecessarily restricts housing development within an allowable building envelope.

If FAR limits are eliminated, other form-based standards such as maximum height, setbacks, and step-backs would be the primary controlling factor for the mass and size of a structure. Well-designed buildings with strong massing and articulation controls (height, step-backs, window design) typically make FAR requirements unnecessary. Emphasizing aesthetics rather than floor area leads to better design that fits in with a neighborhood and removes FAR as a constraint.

2. Establish minimum and maximum FAR requirements for the commercial component of mixed-use projects.

In the past, applicants have proposed minimal commercial floor areas (e.g., 800-900 sq. ft.) in primarily residential projects to be classified as “mixed-use” and therefore, benefit from relaxed standards in a mixed-use district. Such small commercial spaces are often unusable or infeasible for tenants due to their size and/or dimensions and become difficult to lease and remain vacant.

Contrarily, requiring a maximum commercial floor area ratio cap in mixed-use buildings will prioritize housing within the allowable building envelope while maintaining viable commercial uses. Setting a maximum commercial FAR helps maintain a balanced mix of commercial and residential use in a mixed-use development. It prevents commercial uses from occupying the entire building envelope, only to have residential units stacked above using State Density Bonus height concessions. A commercial FAR cap encourages projects to stay within the overall height and massing limits, rather than allowing commercial space to fully build out its FAR and then add unlimited residential on top.

Areas within a building that are allocated for residential use would not be subject to FAR limits. Only non-residential commercial areas within a mixed-use building would be subject to the proposed minimum and maximum FAR limits.

Commercial-only development would remain a permitted use in all mixed-use districts and would be subject to current FAR standards for commercial development.

Step-back Requirements

3. Reduce the upper story step-backs from 10 feet to 6 feet.

Currently, upper-story step-backs apply to the third story and above, requiring a 10-foot step-back from each story below. Step-backs occur when the upper floors of a building are pushed back from the floor below and differ from step-backs which are required distance the building must be from the edge of the property line.

Based on the test fit analyses, the existing 10-foot upper-story step-back requirement on all sides of a building is excessive for residential development, especially when combined with other setback regulations. These step-back requirements can result in the loss of additional housing units and usable space on each floor and encourage only small-sized residential units precluding a desirable mix of both small and family-size units within a residential development.

The proposed reduction from a 10-foot step-back to a 6-foot step-back for a third story and above would create more usable space for additional housing units, thereby eliminating one constraint on housing production. No changes are proposed to existing exceptions that allow upper stories to align with lower story at required step-backs along Laurel Street, San Carlos Avenue and El Camino Real.

Visually, the difference between a 10-foot and a 6-foot step-back is minimal, while the added floor area can be utilized for balconies, usable space, or additional housing units.

This change would balance aesthetic considerations with the need to optimize housing opportunities. See Figure 2 and 3.

Figure 2: Diagram showing existing step-back at 10'-0 from the story below.

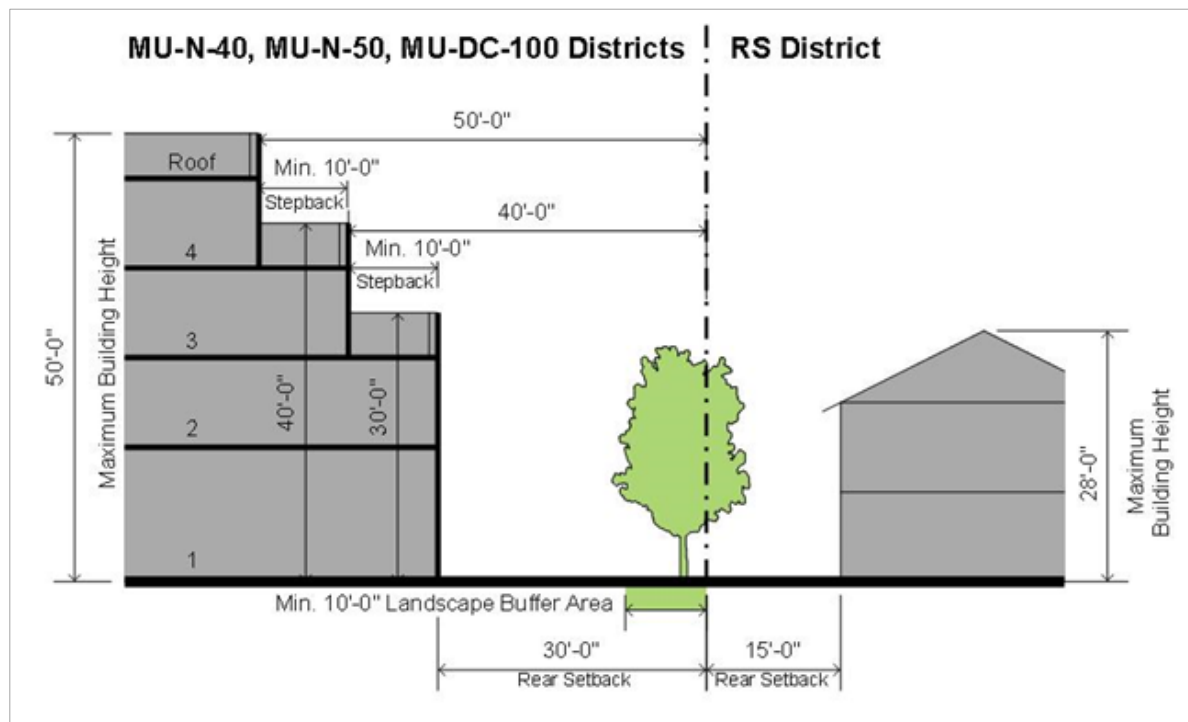
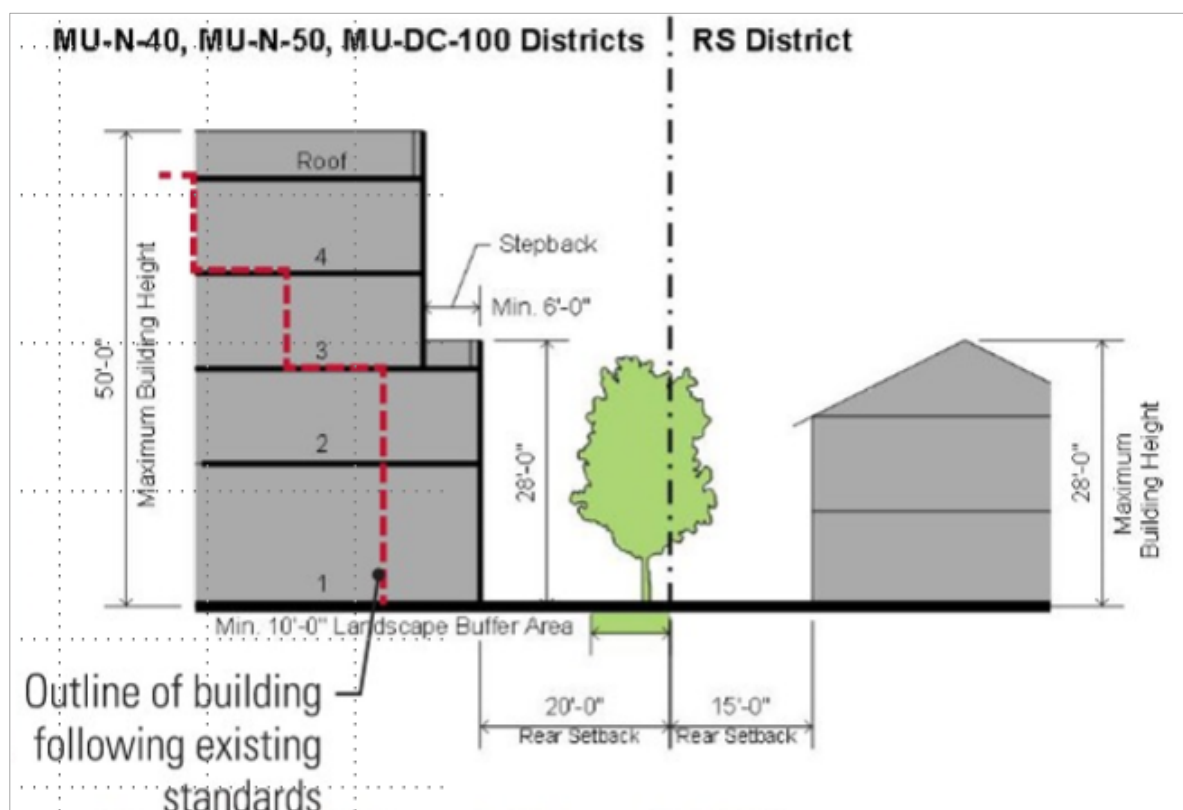


Figure 3: Diagram showing proposed step-back at 6'-0 from third story onwards



Setback Requirements

4. Reduce the rear setback in the mixed-use districts from 30 feet to 20 feet for parcels adjoining RS districts and require robust landscaping standards within the rear setback.

Properties that are zoned Mixed-Use are required to have a 30-foot rear setback when the rear of the property is adjacent to a single-family zoning district (RS zone). This requirement can preclude the development of permissible three-story buildings along E. San Carlos Avenue and can render sites infeasible for full development potential under the Municipal Code. The majority of mixed-use sites that are adjacent to single-family residential zoning are located within the MU-N-40: Neighborhood Mixed-Use zoning district.

Site testing in the MU-N-40 district revealed that the existing 30-foot rear setback for properties adjacent to single-family zones is a constraint, specifically for narrow and small lots. This revealed that the 30-foot rear setback requirement limits development, forcing the use of very small, possibly, infeasible units to achieve desired densities.

Staff had previously recommended a reduced setback of 15'; however, at its February 10, 2025, Study Session, the Council recommended 20' instead to allow for more distance from existing single-family homes. During community outreach efforts, some

homeowners also suggested enhanced landscaping requirements to mitigate visual impacts. These landscape requirements have been incorporated into the draft ODS.

Three-dimensional photo simulations were prepared to visualize the impact of a 20' rear setback compared to a 30' setback. It was found that 20'-0 setback will have a minimal visual impact on the neighboring properties. Existing maximum height standards are not proposed to be changed for any of the districts.

Depending on the building configuration, reducing the rear setback from 30 feet to 20 feet, in addition to reducing step-backs (see step-back recommendation above) could increase the building area by 15%, allowing for additional residential units. Attachment 3 includes findings from the test fit analysis.

Conditional Use Permit Requirements for Ground Floor Residential

5. Remove CUP requirement and allow residential uses by right on the ground floor along El Camino Real and introduce active ground floor uses.

Residential uses currently require a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) to occupy ground-floor spaces in mixed-use districts along El Camino Real. A CUP is a discretionary permit, which involves subjective standards.

The Housing Accountability Act (HAA) applies to all projects with two (2) or more residential units. The HAA limits the amount of discretion the City has when reviewing housing development projects in zones where residential uses are allowed. Specifically, the City cannot deny a housing project or impose conditions that reduce the density of a project, except in very limited, specific situations. The City can, however, require compliance with its ODS. Further, the State Density Bonus Law also allows applicants to request waivers or concessions to modify underlying development standards and permitted ground floor uses through State Density Bonus Law. Applicants may request to use these waivers and/or concessions to override CUP requirements or other zoning standards to accommodate housing or additional residential units.

Instead of requiring a CUP to allow a ground floor residential use, it is recommended to require specific “active uses” and building transparency standards for the ground floor use. This would allow residential units on the ground floor, provided they are either located behind active uses or, if placed along a thoroughfare, meet a minimum of 50% ground floor transparency requirements. These active portions of a residential use could be residential units, residential lobby, gyms, or work-from-home spaces, to name a few. These activation standards would encourage diverse uses that support overall project feasibility and still contribute to an active ground floor atmosphere consistent with the goals of a mixed-use district. Similar strategies have been implemented successfully in cities such as Sunnyvale and San Mateo activating ground-floor spaces and enhancing mixed-use district vibrancy. Figures 4 and 5 illustrate proposed design from a recently approved multi-family residential project in San Carlos, which proposes similar active uses along the ground floor.

Figure 4: Showing ground floor residential units proposed along El Camino Real. Project: 11 El Camino Real



Figure 5: Showing a corner residential lobby acting as an active ground floor use proposed along El Camino Real. Project: 11 El Camino Real.



Images courtesy: KTGy and SummerHill Apartment Communities

Particularly for this recommendation, staff is further recommending that the portions of El Camino Real within the boundaries of the Downtown Specific Plan be excluded as the Downtown Specific Plan is expected to be adopted by the City Council in September

2025. Residential and mixed-use regulations for the portions of El Camino Real within the Downtown Area boundaries will be addressed within the Downtown Specific Plan.

One area of discussion with the City Council on February 10, 2025, Study Session centered on strategies to encourage retail and commercial activity along El Camino Real and northern Laurel Street (outside the boundaries of the Downtown Specific Plan area). While this topic falls outside the formal scope of the Objective Design Standards project, staff explored several potential strategies that could be pursued independently, including:

1. Requiring commercial or retail uses at key nodes along El Camino Real
2. Identifying priority retail/commercial uses for the City and streamlining their approval processes
3. Offering incentives for retail/commercial development, such as waiving certain standards

Staff will be seeking feedback from the Planning and Transportation Commission on these or other related strategies. This information will be shared with the City Council at which time Staff will request direction.

For detailed minutes from the City Council Study Session, refer to Attachment 2. To view the meeting and staff report, visit: www.cityofsancarlos.org/agenda

Compliance Review Process

6. Proposed Compliance Review process for ODS projects

Currently, a review of proposed multi-family and mixed-use development is conducted by the Planning and Transportation Commission as part of their design review authority. Staff recommend replacing this process with a new compliance review process using only objective criteria in conformance with state law.

State law mandates evaluations of projects with two or more residential units to be evaluated based solely on objective standards. To align with these requirements, a new review process, termed "Compliance Review" or ministerial review, is proposed for multi-family and mixed-use projects that meet established objective criteria. The following details outline the proposed Compliance Review process.

Proposed Compliance Review Process:

- **Projects with four (4) or fewer residential units:** Compliance Review performed at staff level with no public hearing.
- **Projects with five (5) or more units:** Compliance Review performed by the Planning and Transportation Commission for requested entitlements, with evaluations based solely on objective criteria, not discretionary findings.

Partial Discretionary Review:

If any project seeks deviations from objective standards, meaning that the proposal is unable to or chooses not to meet the Objective Design Standards, the City shall conduct discretionary review based on design review criteria and findings for those specific deviations only. In line with this recommendation, staff recommends the introduction of:

- **Minor Deviations:** Adjustments to window trim, roof design and other criteria as deemed minor by the Director, which have minimal visual impact, to be reviewed by the Community Development Director, unless already under review by the Planning and Transportation Commission due to the number of units. Design review will be conducted only for the requested deviation criteria. The Director may decide to refer to a minor deviation request to the Planning and Transportation Commission if deemed necessary.
- **Major Deviations:** Changes such as massing or articulation and other major criteria as deemed by the Director, to be reviewed by the Planning and Transportation Commission, but only for the requested deviation. Projects that are requesting both minor and major deviations would be reviewed by the PTC.

Discretionary Review:

Commercial projects and projects requiring entitlements that are subjective (e.g., Planned Developments, Variances, or those not requiring Objective Standards) will continue to undergo discretionary review by the Planning and Transportation Commission or the City Council, as outlined in the Municipal Code.

Following adoption of the new ODS, staff will create a Compliance Review information packet specifically for mixed-use and multi-family projects, including pre-submittal guidelines, to support applicants in navigating the updated process. A similar process has already been implemented successfully for single-family projects.

FINDINGS

In order to recommend approval to the City Council of any proposed Zoning Ordinance amendments, the PTC must meet required findings, as outlined in [SCMC Section 18.35.080](#) staff finds that the proposed amendments are consistent with the *General Plan* and with the purpose of the Zoning Title, as detailed below.

18.35.080 A. Zoning Ordinance Text Amendment Findings.

1. The proposed ordinance amendments are consistent with the General Plan.

The recently updated 2023-2031 Housing Element includes the following goal and actions:

- **Goal HOU-4** states: “Remove or mitigate governmental constraints inhibiting the provision of adequate, affordable housing throughout San Carlos.”

- **Action HOU-4.2 Zoning Ordinance Revisions** - *“Continue to allow ground floor residential uses in the MU-D100, MU-SC-120, and MU-SB-100 zones. Evaluate, as part of the new Downtown Specific Plan process, additional areas (on side streets and outside of the Downtown Core) where ground-floor residential uses may also be allowed.”*
- **Action HOU 4.4 Objectivity and Streamlining in Development Regulations** – This action specifies actions to prepare Objective Design Standards for residential developments by reviewing the Zoning Ordinance and crafting revisions that support objective design standards consistent with the Housing Accountability Act to facilitate high-quality residential development.
- **Action HOU 4.5 Review of Development Standards to Promote Achieving Maximum Densities** - *“Throughout the planning period, periodically evaluate development standards to ensure that projects are able to achieve maximum densities. Make revisions if review indicates that current standards pose a potential or actual constraint on achieving maximum densities.”*

Basis for Finding: The proposed amendments include revisions to the Design Review and Compliance Review Procedures, Common Procedures, and Review Authorities chapters of the Zoning Title to help enhance the efficiency of the review procedures for future multi-family and mixed-use development. These changes aim to streamline the project review process, ultimately facilitating the faster generation of housing. As such, adoption of the proposed Ordinance amendments will facilitate an efficient application process and high-quality residential development in San Carlos and comply with State objectives and law.

The proposed amendments update the Rules of Measurement by clarifying which areas are included or excluded from floor area ratio calculations for residential development. Proposed amendments also revise standards for building setbacks and transitional step-backs to better support projects in achieving maximum densities. These changes are informed by testing on three representative housing sites, with the analysis considering factors such as construction costs, development potential, number of units, and unit sizes. This process identified standards that may be limiting housing production and highlighted sections of the Municipal Code in need of revision that are included within the proposed amendment.

The 2030 General Plan Land Use Element also includes the following goals, policies and actions:

- **Goal LU-8, “Ensure excellence in all development design.”** The policies identified within the *General Plan* to achieve this goal that are consistent with the multi-family and mixed-use objective design standards project includes:
 - **Policy LU-8.1 “Require all development to feature high quality design that enhances the visual character of San Carlos”,**

- **Action LU-8.1** *“Adopt a form-based zoning code to emphasize building placement, the framing of public space and promoting a pedestrian-oriented environment.”*
- **Policy LU-8.2** *“Ensure that new development is sensitive to the character of adjacent structures and the immediate neighborhood”;*
- **Policy LU-8.4** *“Promote pedestrian-scaled design through site planning, building design, finish details and landscaping for all types of development by requiring height and locational transitions between buildings of varied levels that are sensitive to the interrelationships of surrounding uses and structures, especially residential.”*
 - **Action LU-8.4** *“Develop objective design standards consistent with State law and amend the Zoning Ordinance and create a Planning Division submittal information checklist and application to require materials that accurately and sufficiently demonstrate a project’s compliance with new objective design standards.”*
- **Policy LU-8.5** *“Optimize architectural quality by encouraging the use of quality materials, particularly as accents and authentic detailing, such as balconies and window trims”;*
- **Policy LU-8.7** *“Require new residential development to provide outdoor areas and landscaping or native vegetation, or tree canopy to enhance the surroundings”;*
- **Policy LU-8.10** *“On all sides of buildings, require the incorporation of quality architectural design elements for all building façades and stepping back upper floors in order to reduce bulk and mass and to break up monotonous wall lines”;*
- **Policy LU-8.11** *“Discourage abrupt changes in building scale. A gradual transition between low-rise to mid-rise buildings should be achieved by using the low rise buildings at the edge of the project site. Consider the relationship of buildings to the street, to one another and to adjacent structures and land uses, especially single-family residential.”*
- **Policy LU-8.12** *“Require residential building entrances to be related to the street”;*
- **Policy LU-8.13** *“Require parking areas associated with development to be located and designed to minimize visual impact to the greatest extent feasible. This may include locating parking behind buildings street frontage, below grade, or screening through the use of natural landscaping”;*

- **Policy LU-8.19** *“Residential structures shall be designed to be compatible with existing structures in the vicinity, avoid obstructing views from adjacent structures or views of community importance, avoid interference with the right or ability to use solar energy and be consistent with the community design principles”.*
- **Policy LU-8.20** *“Require all new residential multi- family residential, commercial and industrial projects subject to design review by the appropriate decision- making body for compliance with site planning, architecture, signing and landscaping criteria prior to approval, as permitted by State law.”*

Basis of Finding: The proposed amendments address the neighborhood character through objectively regulating architectural design elements while being consistent with the *General Plan* goals and policies as specified within the *General Plan Land Use Element Actions*. The proposed zoning amendments addresses the neighborhood character through objectively regulating architectural design elements such building materials and colors, building massing, articulation, required landscaping, corner treatments, among other design features while being consistent with the *General Plan* goals, policies and actions.

2. The ordinance amendment is consistent with the purpose of the Zoning Title to promote the growth of the City in an orderly manner and to promote and protect the public health, safety, peace, comfort and general welfare.

The General Plan 2030 Land Use Element includes the following goal:

- **Goal LU-9** stating, *“Protect and enhance all residential neighborhoods”,*
 - **Policy LU-9.1** *“Maintain and enhance neighborhoods to be safe and attractive.”*
 - **Policy LU-9.5** *“Mitigation measures shall be utilized to the greatest extent feasible for neighborhoods surrounding new proposed development. Require buffering, transitional standards, screening, or other measures for new and expanded multifamily residential, mixed use, and/or commercial/industrial developments adjacent to single-family residential neighborhoods to minimize impacts and compatibility conflicts.”*

Basis for Finding: The proposed Ordinance amendments propose to objectively regulate, as required by State Law, building materials, massing, articulation, landscaping, and parking design consistent with the General Plan policies. The proposed amendments also adjust the transitional standards between multi-family and single-family residential districts to create enough buffer areas that minimize impacts and compatibility conflicts.

The proposed amendments are consistent with and implement the Goals, Policies and Actions of the 2030 General Plan and as such promote the growth of the city in an orderly manner and promote and protect the public health, safety, peace, comfort and general welfare.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

The public outreach strategy was developed collaboratively by City staff and the consultant team, with a focus on engaging key stakeholders—including local architects, developers, and community members. Staff also partnered closely with the City's Communications Division to share meeting information, draft recommendations, and project updates across various platforms.

Outreach efforts included a series of community meetings, workshops, and stakeholder sessions designed to gather input and share progress throughout the project. Full details and materials from each event are available on the project website at www.cityofsancarlos/designstandards under the "Past Meetings" section. Specifically, the following meetings and workshops were held as summarized below and included as Attachment 2:

1. City Council Study Session – February 10, 2025
2. Community Open House – January 30, 2025
3. Community Meeting – November 13, 2024
4. PTC Study Session #2 – June 17, 2024
5. Stakeholder Meeting – May 21, 2024
6. PTC Study Session #1 – November 20, 2023
7. Community Workshop – April 26, 2023
8. Citywide Survey – March 10, 2023
9. Community Workshop – October 19, 2022
10. Stakeholder Meeting – October 6, 2022

Additional outreach included a booth at the 2024 Art and Wine Festival, multiple Council newsletters, regular webpage updates, and social media engagement.

NEXT STEPS

Staff requests the Commission's authorization to rectify any clerical errors, clarify graphics if necessary, and make clarifications, additions, or deletions to the language, before presenting the proposal to the City Council. This request aims to ensure that staff can address any minor revisions without having to return to the Commission solely for a recommendation.

Should the Planning and Transportation Commission recommend the City Council adopt the ordinance, staff would present the draft ordinance for an introduction and first reading in Spring/Summer 2025. At this time, the Council will consider the Commission's recommendation and decide whether to adopt the recommendations as proposed.

Following the first reading of the Ordinance, a second City Council hearing would then be scheduled in Fall 2025. If adopted, the proposed amendments would become effective 30 days later.

As the proposed changes are significant and have not yet been tested in real-life scenarios, staff will closely evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of the new ODS. If areas of improvement are identified, staff will return to the Commission with recommended revisions. These items could involve clarifying specific code sections, adding definitions, or introducing criteria to facilitate the interpretation and implementation of the review processes.

PUBLIC NOTICE

This Planning and Transportation Commission meeting was notified in accordance with State Law and published to the newspaper on April 15, 2025 (Attachment 5). This item was advertised through various media (social media, website, and email lists). To date, no public comments have been received.

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION

The proposed zoning amendments are within the scope of activities identified in the San Carlos 2030 General Plan Program Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and 2023 Housing Element EIR, eliminating the need for additional environmental review. Therefore, no additional environmental review is required pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 21166 and California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Section 15060(c)(2) "Preliminary Review" and Section 15061(b)(3) "Common Sense Exemption". In addition, Government Code Section 65852.21(j) and 66411.7(n) concludes that an Ordinance adopted to implement Senate Bill 9 is not a project under CEQA.

MOTION

I move that the Planning and Transportation Commission adopt a Resolution recommending that the City Council introduce an Ordinance to amend the San Carlos Municipal Code Section 18.03 (Rules of Measurement), 18.04 (Residential Districts), 18.05 (Mixed-use Districts), 18.06 (Commercial Districts), 18.18 (Landscaping), 18.26 (Planning Authorities), 18.27 (Common Procedures), 18.29 (Design Review and Objective Design Standards Compliance Review), 18.30 (Use Permits), 18.40 (Use Classification), and 18.41 (Terms and Definitions) to create Objective Design Standards for future residential development within the Mixed-use and Multi-family zoning districts and provide staff with feedback on approaches to encourage retail and commercial use along El Camino Real and South of Laurel Street outside the boundary of the Downtown Area Specific Plan.

Respectfully submitted by:

Rucha Dande, Principal Planner

ATTACHMENT(S):

1. Resolution
 - Exhibit A: Draft Ordinance
 - Exhibit B: Proposed Ordinance Amendments with Exhibit A
2. Community Outreach Summary and Meeting Minutes
3. Test Fit Analysis
4. San Carlos Zoning Map Showing ODS-applicable Zoning Districts
5. Public Notice