

# Objective Design Standards Toolkit

## DRAFT

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# I. Introduction

## Background

California must plan for more than 2.5 million homes in the next eight-year planning cycle (2021-2029), including 8,874 in Santa Monica. This need for additional dwelling units due to the statewide housing shortage has led to the passage of laws such as Senate Bill 35 (Streamlining Approvals), Senate Bill 167 (Removing Barriers), and Senate Bill 330 (Expediting Residential Development), to produce more housing to meet the growing needs of Californians during the ongoing housing crisis. Cities must ensure they are complying with all aspects of State law and not hindering the development of housing, so these new laws have prompted cities across California to review residential development and design standards to make them simpler to understand and easier to implement, resulting in faster permitting timelines to encourage housing production.

Each city has zoning regulations that establish the rules for all development (including residential, commercial, industrial, and other uses), in the form of development standards. These include building height, the number of units allowed per parcel, the distance between buildings and adjacent properties, the amount of open space needed on a site, parking requirements, building design standards, and more. Standards that influence the design of a structure or open space are also typical, including articulation/modulation, roof line variation, transparency, lighting, and parking screening.

To align with the State's needs and goals for housing production, cities and counties are updating and adding to existing regulations and guidelines to create standards that can be "objectively" reviewed by City staff. Objective standards use measurable requirements, simple tables and diagrams, and require no personal or subjective judgment to determine if the standards have been met. This allows for a straightforward administrative process that reduces timelines, adds certainty, and achieves reasonable design goals.

## Project Grant Funding

The City of Santa Monica ("City") is part of a project funded by the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) through the State's Regional Early Action Planning (REAP) Grant Program to document, assess, and modernize multi-unit and mixed-use objective standards and permitting. This project is serving the cities of Montebello, Santa Fe Springs, Santa Monica, and South Pasadena. It will help support a greater understanding of the role of objective standards in increasing housing production in Los Angeles County and throughout California.

SCAG's Regional Council approved the 2020 Sustainable Communities Program (SCP) Housing and Sustainable Development (HSD) Call for Applications in November 2020. The goal of the SCP is to implement the policies and programs of Connect SoCal, the 2020 Regional Transportation Plan and Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS). With the 2019-2020 Budget Act, \$250 million was budgeted to prioritize planning initiatives that would increase housing production to meet the needs of every community throughout the state. The California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) received \$125 million of this funding to establish REAP Grant Program. REAP provides one-time grants to regional entities for planning activities that facilitate compliance in implementing the sixth cycle of the Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA). This includes efforts to accelerate housing production – such as the development of objective standards.

## Toolkit Objectives

The purpose of this toolkit is to develop a menu of objective standards for a selection of mixed-use zones for the City to consider for incorporation into their Zoning Code. This document is intended to be reviewed by city planning staff and decision-makers, and codified as appropriate.

### The standards are designed to:

- Translate existing applicable Zoning Code regulations and design guidelines into clear, objective standards in plain language, supplemented with explanatory graphics, making the standards easy to understand and simple to implement in compliance with Senate Bill 35
- Integrate with the maximum density allowed consistent with Senate Bill 330
- Allow for flexibility to adapt to market fluctuations, trends, and shifting demand
- Focus on zones that apply to the highest volume potential development type and locations
- Inform building form and site planning

### The toolkit is designed to:

- Make it easier for applicants to understand the regulations
- Be the foundation for the development of standards for mixed use projects that support higher levels of design, confirming compliance through an administrative process
- Create greater certainty in the review process and streamline project approvals
- Encourage housing production so the City can meet its state-mandated Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) goals
- Comply with SB35, which requires qualifying projects to be reviewed against objective standards<sup>1</sup>

Standards were developed to be shared across each of the four cities served by the project for mixed-use, multi-unit zones. The standards developed for the two highest priority zones have been tested on prototypical sites to ensure the standards enable intended development, allow for maximum density, and provide the appropriate level of regulation. [Note that basic development standards such as height limits, floor area ratios, and minimum setbacks are not included in this toolkit as they are already in the Zoning Code.]

For the most part, the following standards are designed to scale to different densities and building heights, so the same or similar standards can be used across zoning districts regardless of development intensity. This is an effort to simplify the code and ease understanding for the benefit of applicants, staff, and the public. As this is a toolkit of recommendations, standards selected by the City to propose for inclusion in the Zoning Code may need further refinement from City staff to customize based on the City's unique requirements and approaches, including different measurement definitions and contextual considerations.

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<sup>1</sup> Senate Bill 9 also requires use of objective standards for related project reviews in single-family zones; separate from this SCAG project focused on multi-unit/mixed-use zones.

## Informing the Toolkit

The project included a high-level technical analysis of existing policy documents, development standards and regulations, design guidelines, permit procedures, and recently approved projects and submitted applications under review to understand:

- How the City currently processes applications and how long the process typically takes; and
- How standards are being interpreted and applied during the permitting and entitlement process.

This analysis included a review of the General Plan Land Use and Housing elements and associated policies, the City's Zoning Code and specific plans, as well as a handful of representative housing development projects. It resulted in initial findings and recommendations to inform the standards developed for the toolkit and other related actions for City consideration.

## Public Engagement

The City undertook an engagement process to provide information to community members about the objective development standards and streamlined permitting project, and gather input to inform the creation of the recommended standards in the toolkit. The following outreach events were held to engage the public, stakeholders, and decision-makers in ways that result in meaningful participation.

- **Public Workshops:** Two community workshops focused on building an understanding of objective standards and providing the public with an opportunity to give feedback on draft materials. The first workshop was held on August 22, 2022. The second is to be scheduled.
- **Architectural Review Board Study Session:** This event was held on September 19, 2022, to inform the City's decision-makers at the Architectural Review Board about the project and relevant State laws to collaborate on locally appropriate solutions to increase capacity potential and accelerate housing production.
- **Final Project Presentations:** The final presentations to the Planning Commission and City Council will be held in Fall 2023, providing background, analysis, and a summary of the proposed objective standards and other project deliverables.

## II. Concepts for Objective Design Standards

### Build-to Line & Setbacks

#### Standards

**Build-to line:** Buildings with nonresidential uses on the ground floor and not facing a residential district shall be constructed no farther than 10 feet from the street-facing property line(s) for 70 percent of linear street frontage.

1. Residential units on the ground floor shall be set back a minimum of 8 feet from the street-facing property line.
2. For parcels 60 feet or narrower, this requirement may be reduced to 60 percent for the provision of entry courtyards, plazas, small parks, outdoor dining and display areas, or other uncovered areas, provided that the buildings are built to the edge of the courtyard, plaza, small park, or dining area.

### Ground Floor

#### Standards

#### **Nonresidential & Residential Common Space Uses**

**Ground floor uses:** Uses on the ground floor along boulevards shall have a minimum average depth of 35 feet, but in no case be less than 20 feet.

**Elevation:** The finished ground floor level shall not exceed 18 inches lower or higher than the finished grade of the adjacent sidewalk.

1. On parcels with a grade change of 10% or more along the length of the parcel line adjacent to the commercial boulevard, a maximum of 60 feet of commercial frontage may be up to 36 inches higher or lower than the finished grade of the adjacent sidewalk, and the remainder shall not exceed 24 inches higher or lower than the finished grade of the adjacent sidewalk.

**Transparency:** A minimum of 50% of each street-facing façade shall be transparent and include windows, doors, and other openings, measured between 2.5 and 8 feet above finished grade.

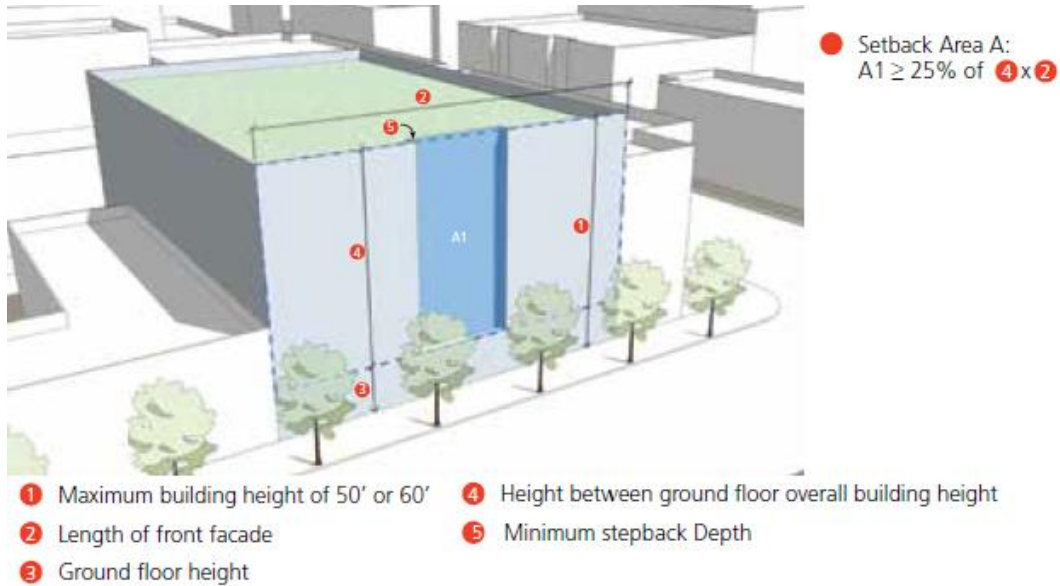
1. Openings fulfilling this requirement shall have transparent glazing or openings that provide views into work areas, display areas, sales areas, lobbies, or similar active spaces, or into windows displaying merchandise or other items other than signs. Such displays shall be at least 3 feet deep.
2. **Vertical elements:** Frontages shall be designed to be divided into bays that are 30-feet wide or less by pilasters, columns, window patterns, or other vertical elements.

## Modulation & Stepbacks

### Standards

**Street stepbacks above ground floor:** The minimum required stepback above the ground floor shall be 25 percent of the front façade area.

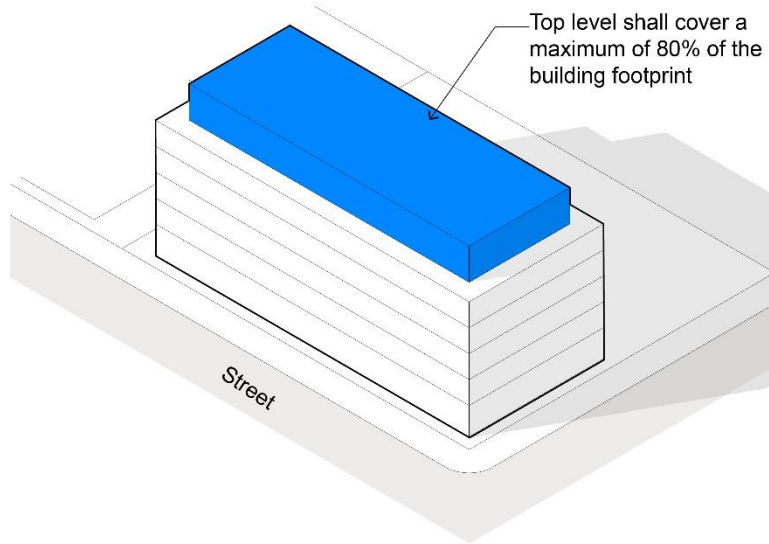
1. Stepbacks shall be a minimum of 5 feet and are not required to be open to the sky.
2. Projections into the required stepbacks are permitted pursuant to 9.10.120(A).



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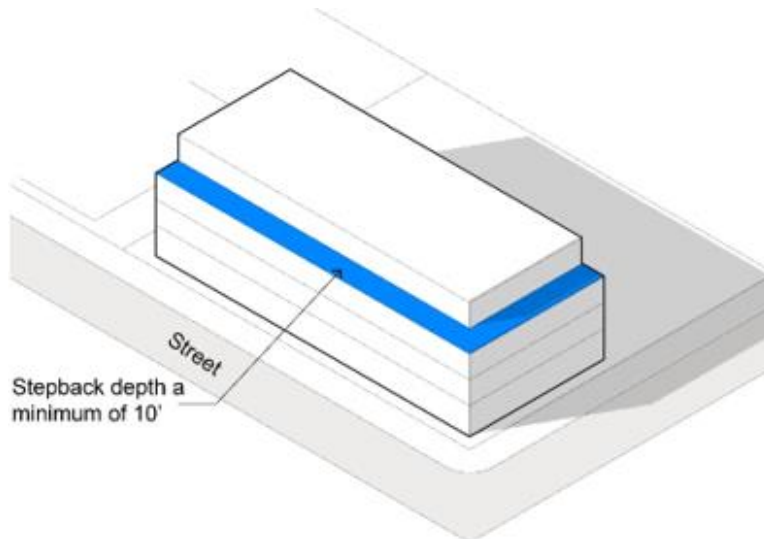
**Roofline variation:** The upper-most level shall use one of the following:

**Building footprint:** For buildings over 55 feet in height, the upper-most level shall cover a maximum of 80 percent of the building footprint.



**- OR -**

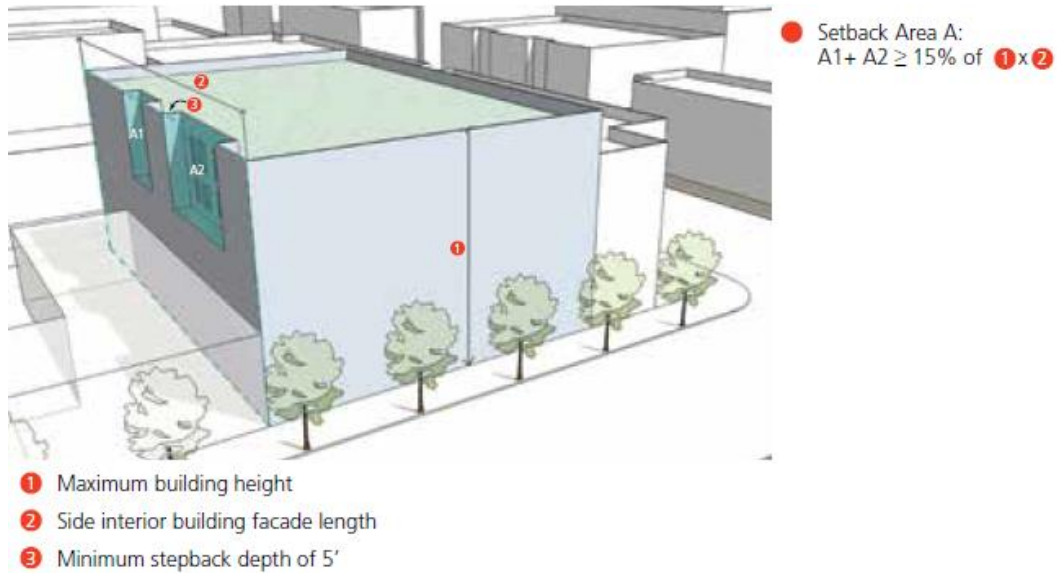
**Street setback:** For buildings over 55 feet in height, the upper-most level shall be stepped back a minimum of 10 feet from street-facing building façades.





*Adjacent to Mixed-Use Zoning Districts:*

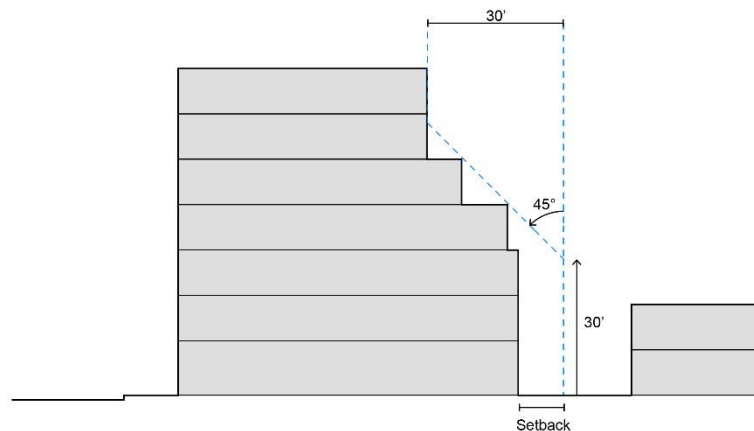
**Side interior setbacks:** A minimum of 15 percent of the exposed side interior building façade area above 39 feet shall be stepped back a minimum of 5 feet from the side property line.



*Adjacent to Residential zoning districts:*

**Daylight plane:** Buildings shall not extend above a plane starting at **20 OR 30** feet in height directly above the parcel line abutting any residentially-zoned parcel, or where there is an alley, the centerline of the alley, and from that point, extending in at a 30-degree angle from vertical toward the interior of the site for 30 feet measured horizontally.

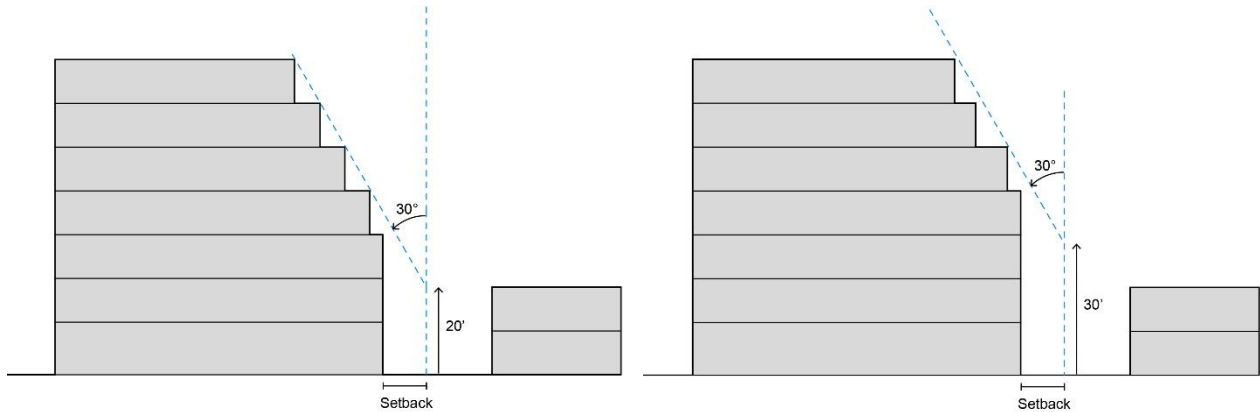
1. The 30-foot height measurement shall be taken from the same reference grade as determined for the subject site pursuant to Section 9.04.050.
2. Uses allowed within the setback include balconies, terraces, shade structures, and similar open space features.



=OR=

**Daylight plane:** Buildings shall not extend above a plane starting at **20 OR 30** feet in height directly above the parcel line abutting any residentially-zoned parcel, or where there is an alley, the centerline of the alley, and from that point, extending in at a 30-degree angle from vertical toward the interior of the site.

1. The **20 OR 30**-foot height measurement shall be taken from the same reference grade as determined for the subject site pursuant to Section 9.04.050.
2. Uses allowed within the stepback include balconies, terraces, shade structures, and similar open space features.



**Maximum unbroken primary façade length:**

1. All new or modified buildings shall orient the primary façade to the front Property Line. Secondary façades orient to the side or rear yards.
2. Corner buildings shall have a primary façade fronting each sidewalk.
3. For façades that are greater than 150', a break of 10 percent of the façade length, with a 5-foot minimum depth, is required. This dimension can be broken into two breaks, provided each break is greater than 5 feet in width. The break must extend from above the ground for 50 percent of the height of the project. The break is not required to be continuous.

**Corner treatments:** On corner lots where each façade is at least 75 feet, buildings shall incorporate at least two of the following elements within 50 feet of the building corner along the primary frontage:

- a) Building entrance;
- b) Change in height of at least 5 feet for a minimum area of 10 feet by 10 feet;
- c) Wrap-around windows;
- d) Change of material or texture with a change of plane of at least 2 feet;
- e) Publicly-accessible open space or outdoor dining with a minimum area of 250 sq ft.

## Open Space

### Ground Floor Pathways (Concept for Bergamot Area Plan Districts)

**Minimum area:** Projects shall provide ground-floor pathways, as specified below based on parcel size, to allow for pedestrian circulation through the site. Pathways shall connect to adjacent sidewalks, common spaces, and, where feasible, to adjacent parcels.

Parcel Size	Required Area
0-39,999 square feet	8%
40,000-79,000 square feet	10%
80,000 square feet or greater	12%

**Dimensions:** Ground Floor Pathways shall have a minimum average width of 20 feet, but in no case be less than 15 feet. At least 80 percent of this area shall be open to the sky.

**Roadways:** Ground Floor Pathways may be bisected by vehicular roadways, but any area used by vehicles shall not be counted towards required area or dimensions.

**Landscaping:** A minimum of 25 percent of Ground Floor Pathways shall be landscaped area with a minimum dimension of 30 inches in each direction.

**Trees:** A minimum of one 24-inch box tree for every 500 square feet of Ground Floor Pathways shall be planted within the Ground Floor Open Space. At least 50 percent shall be shade trees.

**Hardscape:** A maximum of 25 percent Ground Floor Pathways may be paved in standard concrete, with the remainder using enhanced paving such as brick, natural stone, unit concrete pavers, textured/colored concrete, or similar.

**Seating:** A minimum of 1 seat per 250 square feet of Ground Floor Pathways shall be provided. Benches shall be calculated as 1 seat per 24 linear inches.

**Hours:** Ground Floor Pathways shall be open from sunrise to sunset or during the building’s normal hours of operation, whichever is longer.

### Landscaping

**Setback areas adjoining streets:** All visible portions of a required setback, not used for vehicular or pedestrian access to the building, shall consist of hardscape, planting areas, and/or pedestrian amenities like entry courtyards, plazas, entries, outdoor eating and display areas, or other uncovered areas designed and accessible for public use.

**Interior and rear setback areas:** Interior side and rear setback areas shall be fully landscaped except for areas used for pedestrian circulation (4 feet maximum width), private open space, and to the extent necessary, areas that provide parking access.