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DESIGN GUIDELINES

Introduction



This handbook provides recommendations for addressing the complexities of designing small lot developments to be within conformance of the General Plan. Each guideline should be considered in a proposed project. However, because of the unique nature of each small lot development, not all will be appropriate in every case.

The guidelines are intended to help guide architects, developers, and residents in designing for a more livable city. Incorporating these guidelines into a project's design will encourage more compatible architecture, attractive multi-family residential districts, context-sensitive design, and sustainable environments, and will also contribute to pedestrian activity and place-making.

Tentative tract and parcel maps for small lot subdivisions must be consistent with the City's General Plan and Community Plans in order to be approved. It is important to review all relevant city documents for policies that may affect your small lot design and layout.

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1 Introduction



The Small Lot Ordinance allows for subdivisions in areas zoned for multi-family or commercial uses, permitting the development of this small lot in Echo Park.

The City of Los Angeles has enacted the Small Lot Ordinance (No. 176354) to allow the construction of fee-simple, infill housing on small lots in multi-family and commercial zones. While home ownership options have traditionally been limited to single-family homes on 5,000 square foot lots or condominiums, the passage of the Small Lot Ordinance extends these options to include townhomes, row houses, and other types of infill housing typically only available for rent.

The Ordinance provides a more space-efficient and economically attractive alternative for sites zoned for apartment or condominium uses. In short, the Small Lot Ordinance simplifies the land subdivision process, making it easier for developers to construct creative new fee-simple homes in urban areas.



Small lot homes must be structurally independent with no shared foundations or common walls.

It was envisioned to allow the subdivision of underutilized land in multi-family and commercial areas for the creation of up to 15 lots with detached single-family homes. It was not intended to generate a request for a General Plan amendment and zone change to permit the development. Generally, these homes have smaller lot areas, compact building footprints, and minimal streetfront and setback requirements. They are distinct from condominiums in that the tenants of these compact homes have complete ownership of that lot.

While the Ordinance provides a smart-growth alternative to the suburban single-family home, generally reduces density, and creates new options for home ownership, it also brings a new set of spatial complexities. For instance, challenges brought on by neighborhood context and the proximity of adjacent structures require thoughtful considerations about massing, height, and transitional areas from adjacent properties. *These spatial constraints require innovative design solutions.*

Small Lot Design Guidelines

This handbook provides design guidelines issued by the advisory agency to address these complexities while also promoting the design and creation of small lot housing with neighborhood compatibility for consistency with applicable General and Specific Plans. The Guidelines outline recommendations for site organization and urban form, setbacks and building transitions, parking and driveways, building design and materials, and landscaping and access. The recommendations are not mandatory, but help to guide decision-makers to ensure that a project is compatible with its surroundings. Projects that are not in compliance with the Guidelines may be subject to delays, redesign, and community appeals.

Applying the Guidelines

The Guidelines outlined in this document identify the level of design quality expected for small lot developments. They provide guidance and direction for applying policies contained within the General Plan Framework and the Community Plans. Incorporating these Guidelines into a project's design will encourage more compatible architecture, attractive residential projects, context-sensitive design, opportunities for pedestrian activity, and overall contribute to an enhanced sense of place.

Interested property owners, developers, and designers should first review the zoning of the property before proceeding with the project. The Small Lot Ordinance and Guidelines are only applicable to developments within multi-family and commercial zones. They are also only applicable to modestly-scaled well-designed projects with 47 or less dwelling units. Projects with a greater number of units will need further review prior to accepting the applications for filing.

The Guidelines are intended for use by the Planning Department, as well as other City agencies and department staff, developers, architects, engineers, and community members in evaluating project applications. The Guidelines should also be used in conjunction with relevant policies from the General Plan Framework and Community Plans. In order to ensure the creation of well-designed and context-sensitive small lot homes, the Guidelines listed here will apply to all new small lot applications.

Small lot projects must substantially comply with the Small Lot Design Guidelines in order to receive project approval. However, some leniency and creativity is permitted in implementing these Guidelines. For instance, in cases where special circumstances make complete compliance infeasible or impossible, the project must nonetheless substantially conform to the overarching goals of the Guidelines. Development applications must then demonstrate clear alternatives that achieve the same goals and objectives, and describe to what extent these Guidelines are incorporated into the project design.

In short, the Small Lot Design Guidelines will only be used to condition approved projects, and may not serve as the basis for a project approval or denial. Conditions imposed by the initial decision-maker may be appealed.

OVERARCHING GOALS

To ensure the creation of well-designed and compatible developments that improve the context of the built environment, the Small Lot Design Guidelines promote the following goals:

- 1 Create high-quality indoor and outdoor living environments for all residents.
- 2 Enhance the public realm.
- 3 Provide fee-simple home ownership opportunities for a greater number of people, at a wider range of income levels.
- 4 Provide solutions for infill housing.
- 5 Design and configure housing to be compatible with the existing neighborhood context, especially in sensitive areas. This includes areas contained within Specific Plans, Community Design Overlays (CDOs), and Historic Preservation Overlay Zones (HPOZs).
- 6 Prioritize the livability and market value of a project over strict density.



The Auburn Street small lot development in the Silverlake neighborhood demonstrates the Guideline's overarching goals.