



**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
PLANNING DIVISION**

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PLANNING COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

Agenda Date: July 22, 2025

SUBJECT

Study Session: Sample Objective Design Standards

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

That the Planning Commission provide feedback and recommendations regarding a sample group of objective design standards for new multifamily and residential mixed-use development. The sample standards, which are included as Attachment 1, were developed in response to Commissioner feedback during the May 13, 2025 Planning Commission meeting.

DISCUSSION:

Background:

Cupertino is preparing new residential design standards, known as objective design standards (ODS), to conform to changes in State housing law. Staff and the project consultant, PlaceWorks, conducted a Planning Commission Study Session for the ODS project on May 13, 2025. The Study Session covered:

- Relevant legal background
- The definition of ODS
- Differences between discretionary and ministerial review
- Regulatory limits of ODS, which do not regulate land use, density, or zoning
- Current Cupertino design policies, guidelines, and standards
- Local flexibility in the ODS process
- Typical ODS content and approaches

Commissioners were presented with a series of discussion questions regarding design priorities for Cupertino. Commissioners offered feedback on current housing design trends, including design components considered of concern to residents and those considered beneficial to local quality of life.

Commissioners also provided input on the level of specificity preferred for the future ODS. The consensus of the Commission was that the City's ODS should not be overly

prescriptive in order to prevent a visually homogeneous pattern of future residential development.

Analysis:

The ODS project team selected five housing design priorities expressed by Commissioners during the May 13, 2025 meeting. These five design priorities are not intended to represent a comprehensive list of Commissioner priorities or feedback from the meeting, a full summary of which is included as Attachment 2. Instead, they have been selected to demonstrate how ODS can be tailored to support the direction of local housing design. The selected priorities are:

1. Ensuring that new buildings are sensitive to the surrounding lower-density residential neighborhoods.
2. Ensuring that new surface parking, vehicle loading areas and utilities are sensitive to surrounding lower-density residential sites.
3. Minimizing the potential privacy impacts of new multifamily development on adjacent development, particularly lower-density neighborhoods.
4. Preventing a transition to a local “concrete jungle,” or heat island, with an inadequate number of trees and greenery enhancing the City’s appearance and improving the pedestrian experience for residents and visitors alike.
5. Activating retail visitation and walkability.

PlaceWorks then developed Sample Objective Design Standards to support each of the selected priorities. The goals of this exercise are to:

- Demonstrate to Commissioners and the public how ODS can be applied and adapted to various design priorities. The standards do not represent the full range of possible design approaches to each priority.
- Allow Commissioners and the public to review various ODS approaches and formats, including language, level of specificity and various graphics and illustrations.
- Introduce the ways in which ODS may be organized into topical sections.

Organization of Sample ODS:

Attachment 1 is a sample of potential standards that would be dispersed throughout the complete ODS document, which is different from the typical approach where ODS documents are organized into topical sections and subsections. In this instance, the standards in Attachment 1 are organized based on Planning Commission priorities. In order to demonstrate how the sample standards could be organized in a final ODS document, the standards under each priority are organized under typical ODS topics.

This approach shows that, for example, standards developed in response to commissioners' prioritization of context-sensitive buildings may fall under three subsections addressing "Building Form" within the ODS document, specifically:

1. Façade Articulation
2. Context and Scale
3. Equipment Screening

Limits of Sample ODS:

The sample objective design standards and topical organization in Exhibit 1 are for review and discussion purposes and are not intended as a "draft ODS" submission. The visual format and organization of the document, colors and branding, sectional headers, **numbering of individual standards and internal references are intended to demonstrate how a potential document** could look and be organized. These features are adaptable to change as the ODS project progresses in response to staff, Planning Commission, City Council and public comments.

Planning Commission Questions:

Following a visual presentation by PlaceWorks, Commissioners will be asked to provide the following feedback on the sample standards:

1. To what degree are the standards themselves consistent with your expectations regarding content, level of prescriptiveness and design topics?
2. How well do the sample standards and graphics demonstrate that diverse design priorities can be fulfilled with objective standards?
3. Describe your response to the overall layout, visual organization and packaging of the sample ODS.
 - a. What components would you retain?
 - b. What components would you change, remove or add?
4. What direction, requests and/or concerns would you like to see reflected in the Administrative Draft ODS document?

Environmental Review

This study session and the resulting Planning Commission recommendations will not cause a direct or indirect physical change to the environment. As such, they do not

constitute a CEQA “project” pursuant to CEQA Guidelines § 21065 – Project. No environmental review is required.

Other Department/Agency Review

None required.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

This Planning Commission Meeting follows two public outreach events conducted as part of the ODS Project:

1. *Open House*: City staff and PlaceWorks conducted a hybrid in-person/virtual Housing Design Preference Open House on February 10, 2025, at Cupertino Community Hall. The goals of the meeting were to introduce residents to the ODS process and conduct a design preference open house.
2. *PC Study Session*: City staff and PlaceWorks conducted the aforementioned Planning Commission ODS Study Session on May 13, 2025.

NEXT STEPS

City staff and PlaceWorks will complete a full Administrative Draft Objective Design Standards document for consideration by Planning Commission and City Council, with expected public review and adoption of the final ODS by late 2025.

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Reviewed by:	Piu Ghosh, Planning Manager
Approved for Submission by:	Luke Connolly, Assistant Director of Community Development

ATTACHMENTS

1. Sample Multifamily and Residential Mixed-Use Objective Design Standards
2. Planning Commission Design Priorities Summary, per May 15, 2025 Meeting