



TOWN OF ALPINE

STAFF REPORT

To: Mayor and Town Council

From: Planning & Zoning Administrator

Date: March 23, 2026

Re: Evaluation and Recommended Updates to Planned Unit Development (PUD) and Annexation Processes

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this staff report is to evaluate the Town's current Planned Unit Development (PUD) process as outlined in the Land Use and Development Code (LUDC), identify operational deficiencies, and recommend updates to better align the process with industry standards, improve administrative efficiency, and reduce unnecessary burdens on applicants while maintaining appropriate development oversight.

This report also evaluates the necessity of requiring the PUD process as part of annexation into the Town and whether a more appropriate and efficient alternative review mechanism should be implemented.

II. BACKGROUND AND CURRENT CONDITIONS

The Town's current LUDC requires:

- A PUD concept plan for all annexations; and
- A full PUD process for any development greater than one (1) acre

In practice, this structure has resulted in the PUD process being applied broadly, including at the annexation stage, regardless of project complexity or whether flexibility from underlying zoning is necessary.

However, the requirement for both a PUD concept plan at annexation and a full PUD process for parcels greater than one (1) acre has existed in the code for several years. Based on recent application history and discussions, it appears these requirements may not have been consistently enforced.



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Additionally, the current code provides limited clarity regarding what constitutes a “PUD concept plan,” as the requirements are vague and undefined. Similarly, the PUD process itself does not clearly articulate:

- The purpose of utilizing a PUD, or
- The appropriate criteria and considerations for evaluating a PUD proposal

As a result, the current framework contributes to inconsistent application, confusion among applicants, and difficulty in administration.

III. IDENTIFIED ISSUES WITH CURRENT PUD PROCESS

1. The Current PUD Process is Structurally Flawed

The existing code treats the PUD as a required procedural step rather than as a planning and zoning tool. This is particularly evident in its application to annexations.

As a result:

- The PUD is used prematurely, before a project is sufficiently defined
- It functions as a checklist-driven approval process rather than a zoning tool
- It blurs the distinction between early-stage planning and binding regulatory approval

2. The Process is Overly Cumbersome for Smaller or Early-Stage Projects

Requiring a full PUD:

- At annexation, and
- For all developments over one (1) acre

creates unnecessary burdens, including:

- Requiring detailed submittals before a project is fully conceptualized
- Increased costs and timelines for applicants
- Administrative inefficiencies for staff
- Frustration for property owners and developers

At the annexation stage in particular, applicants are often asked to:



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Commit to a detailed, ordinance-level development framework before sufficient planning and engineering have occurred.

3. The Current Process Does Not Reflect Typical PUD Practices

In most municipalities, a PUD is:

- Optional or situational, not universally required
- Used when a project seeks flexibility or deviation from base zoning
- Applied after initial planning has occurred—not at annexation

By contrast, Alpine’s current framework:

- Requires a PUD at annexation
- Applies PUD broadly regardless of need
- Does not clearly tie its use to flexibility, complexity, or public benefit

IV. DEFINITION AND PURPOSE OF A PUD

A **Planned Unit Development (PUD)** is a zoning and development tool that allows land to be developed under a coordinated, site-specific plan that may modify or replace the standards of the underlying zoning district.

Once approved, a PUD:

- Is adopted by ordinance
- Becomes binding on the property
- Functions as a **zoning change or zoning overlay**
- Establishes customized standards for land use, density, layout, design, and infrastructure

The purpose of the PUD process is to promote flexible, innovative, and high-quality development that:

- Improves site design and character
- Promotes efficient use of land and infrastructure



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- Encourages affordable housing opportunities
 - Preserves open space and natural features
 - Ensures compatibility with surrounding properties
 - Maintains consistency with the Town's Master Plan
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V. HOW A PUD FUNCTIONS IN PRACTICE

A PUD is not simply a plan—it is a **regulatory mechanism**.

- A PUD = **binding zoning adopted by ordinance**
- A Conceptual or Master Plan = **guidance unless formalized**

Because of this, requiring a PUD at annexation effectively requires:

A zoning decision before the Town and the applicant have sufficient information to support that decision.

This sequencing is inconsistent with how PUDs are typically used and contributes to confusion and inefficiency.

VI. WHEN A PUD IS APPROPRIATE IN ALPINE

A PUD is most appropriate when a project:

- Seeks flexibility from base zoning standards
- Is large-scale, mixed-use, or phased
- Requires coordinated infrastructure planning
- Proposes creative or non-standard site design
- Provides identifiable public benefits

Importantly, these conditions typically arise **after annexation and initial planning**, not at the annexation stage itself.

VII. WHEN A PUD IS NOT NECESSARY



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A PUD is generally not necessary when:

- A project complies with existing zoning standards
- Development is straightforward or limited in scope
- No deviations or negotiated standards are proposed
- The project is still in early conceptual stages, such as during annexation

In these cases, requiring a PUD—particularly at annexation—creates unnecessary process without corresponding benefit.

VIII. ROLE OF A MASTER PLAN IN THE PUD PROCESS

A **Master Plan** should serve as the foundational document for any PUD application.

The Master Plan:

- Establishes the overall development vision
- Identifies land use patterns, density, and layout
- Coordinates infrastructure and circulation systems
- Defines phasing and long-term development strategy

Within a PUD, the Master Plan:

- Provides the framework for site-specific zoning standards
- Ensures coordinated development over time
- Serves as a long-term reference for compliance

This level of detail is appropriate at the **PUD stage**, but not at the annexation stage.

IX. “CONCEPTUAL PLAN” AKA MASTER PLAN – APPROPRIATE TOOL FOR ANNEXATION

A **Master Plan** (Conceptual Plan) is a preliminary, high-level plan used to illustrate the general layout and intent of a proposed development prior to detailed design.

It is:



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- Illustrative, not regulatory
- Intended for early-stage evaluation
- Appropriate for determining annexation feasibility

A Conceptual Plan provides the Town with sufficient information to evaluate:

- General land use and density
- Layout and access
- Infrastructure approach
- Consistency with the Town's Master Plan without requiring a binding zoning commitment.

X. RECOMMENDED UPDATE TO ANNEXATION REQUIREMENTS

Staff recommends eliminating the requirement for a PUD Concept Plan at annexation and replacing it with a:

Master Plan Submittal Requirement, including:

- A **Conceptual Site Plan** illustrating general layout and land use
- A **Conceptual Narrative** describing:
 - Proposed development
 - General density and land use
 - Infrastructure approach
 - Consistency with the Town's Master Plan
 - Phasing and long-term development strategy

Rationale

This change:

- Aligns the level of review with the stage of development



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- Eliminates premature zoning decisions
- Reduces unnecessary burden on applicants
- Improves clarity and predictability
- Reflects common municipal best practices

Following annexation, projects would then proceed to:

- PUD (if flexibility or negotiated standards are requested), or
 - Standard development review processes
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XI. ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATION – UPDATE TO PUD PROCESS (NON-ANNEXATION)

In addition to removing the requirement for a PUD at annexation, staff recommends updating the PUD process itself to better align with its intended purpose as a flexible zoning and development tool.

Identified Need for Update

The current PUD provisions:

- Do not clearly define when a PUD should be used
- Do not clearly distinguish between conceptual planning and regulatory approval
- Lack clear evaluation criteria for decision-makers
- Function more as a procedural requirement than a zoning tool

Recommended Updates to the PUD Process

Staff recommends amending the LUDC to:

1. Clarify Applicability

Establish that a PUD is:

- **Optional or required only when flexibility from base zoning is requested, or**
- Applicable to:
 - Large-scale developments
 - Mixed-use projects



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- Phased or master-planned developments

Remove the blanket requirement based solely on parcel size.

2. Establish Clear Approval Criteria

Include defined criteria for evaluating PUD applications, such as:

- Consistency with the Town's Master Plan
- Quality of site design and layout
- Compatibility with surrounding land uses
- Efficiency of infrastructure and service delivery
- Provision of public benefits
- Preservation of natural features and open space

3. Require a Structured PUD Development Plan

Replace vague submittal requirements with a clearly defined package including:

- Master Plan (site framework)
- PUD Development Standards (binding regulations)
- Narrative explaining:
 - Deviations from zoning
 - Public benefits
 - Phasing and implementation

4. Improve Process Clarity

Clearly outline:

- Application steps
- Review sequence (P&Z → Council)
- Public hearing requirements
- Ordinance adoption process

5. Define a PUD Amendment and Revision Process

Establish clear procedures for modifying an approved PUD, including:

- **Minor Amendments** (administrative or staff-level approval for small changes that do not alter the overall development intent, density, or layout)



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- **Major Amendments** (requiring Planning & Zoning and Town Council review and approval by ordinance for substantive changes)

The code should clearly define:

- What constitutes a minor vs. major amendment
- Required submittal materials for amendments
- Review procedures and approval authority
- Whether additional public hearings are required

This ensures flexibility for projects over time while maintaining transparency, consistency, and regulatory integrity.

6. Align PUD with Its Intended Function

Reinforce in the code that a PUD:

- Is a **zoning tool**, not just an application process
- Establishes **site-specific development standards**
- Should only be used when it provides clear benefit over standard zoning

Rationale

Updating the PUD process independently of annexation will:

- Improve clarity for applicants, staff, and decision-makers
- Reduce unnecessary use of the PUD process
- Ensure PUDs are used strategically where appropriate
- Provide a clear path for **future amendments and project evolution**
- Strengthen the Town's ability to evaluate and negotiate development proposals
- Align Alpine's code with modern planning practices

XII. ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATION – ADDITION OF A MASTER PLAN PROCESS FOR DEVELOPMENTS THAT ARE LARGE OR COMPLEX THAT DO NOT MEET THE REQUIRMENTS REQUIRED FOR THE PUD PROCESS (NON-ANNEXATION)



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In addition to refining the PUD process, staff recommends establishing a formal **Master Plan (Conceptual Plan) review process** within the LUDC for developments that are large, phased, or complex in nature but do not warrant the use of a Planned Unit Development (PUD).

Identified Need for Addition

The current LUDC does not provide a clear mechanism for reviewing projects that:

- Are larger in scale or involve multiple phases
- Require coordination of infrastructure and site layout
- Benefit from a comprehensive planning framework
- Do not seek deviations from underlying zoning standards

As a result, such projects are either:

- Forced into the PUD process unnecessarily, or
- Reviewed through standard processes that do not adequately capture the full scope of development

This gap contributes to inefficiencies, inconsistent review, and missed opportunities for coordinated planning.

Recommended Addition of a Master Plan Process

Staff recommends amending the LUDC to establish a **Master Plan review process** as an intermediate planning tool between standard development review and the PUD process.

1. Clarify Applicability

Establish that a Master Plan is required or may be required for:

- Large-scale developments
- Multi-phase projects
- Mixed-use developments that comply with base zoning
- Developments requiring coordinated infrastructure planning
- Projects where the Town determines a comprehensive understanding of layout and long-term development is necessary



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Clarify that a Master Plan:

- Does not replace zoning
- Does not function as a regulatory approval
- Is not required for small or straightforward developments

2. Define Purpose and Function

Clearly establish that a Master Plan:

- Is a **conceptual and planning-level document**
- Illustrates overall development intent, layout, and phasing
- Provides a framework for future subdivision, site plan, or building permit review
- Ensures consistency with the Town's Master Plan

Reinforce that a Master Plan:

- Is **illustrative, not regulatory**
- Does not create vested rights or binding development standards

3. Establish Submittal Requirements

Require a clearly defined Master Plan package that may include:

- Conceptual site plan showing:
 - Land use layout
 - Lot configuration (if applicable)
 - Circulation and access
- General density and development intensity
- Infrastructure and utility approach
- Phasing plan (if applicable)
- Narrative describing:
 - Project intent
 - Consistency with the Town's Master Plan
 - General development strategy

4. Define Review Process

Clearly outline:

- Application and submittal procedures
- Staff review process



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- Whether review is administrative or requires Planning & Zoning Commission input
- Opportunities for feedback prior to formal development applications

The process should be:

- Predictable and streamlined
- Focused on planning-level evaluation rather than detailed engineering

5. Establish Relationship to Subsequent Approvals

Clarify that:

- A Master Plan serves as a **guiding document** for future applications
- Subsequent approvals (subdivision, site plan, building permits, or PUD) must be generally consistent with the approved Master Plan
- Modifications to the Master Plan may be allowed administratively if changes remain consistent with the overall development intent

6. Align with Overall Development Framework

Reinforce that the addition of a Master Plan process will:

- Provide a clear pathway for evaluating large or complex developments
- Reduce unnecessary reliance on the PUD process
- Improve coordination of infrastructure and land use planning
- Enhance clarity for applicants, staff, and decision-makers
- Align Alpine's development review framework with common municipal planning practices

Rationale

Establishing a Master Plan process will:

- Fill a critical gap between standard development review and the PUD process
- Allow the Town to evaluate the "big picture" of development without requiring premature zoning decisions
- Improve administrative efficiency and consistency
- Provide applicants with a clearer and more appropriate pathway for project review
- Support higher-quality, coordinated development outcomes



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XIII. CONCLUSION

The Town's current requirement to apply the PUD process at annexation and broadly across development projects is not functioning as intended and creates unnecessary complexity.

Refining the PUD process will ensure it functions as an effective and intentional planning tool, rather than a broadly applied procedural requirement, while also establishing a clear and predictable framework for future modifications to approved developments.

Refining the process to:

- Use PUDs as a **targeted zoning tool**,
- Require a **Master Plan at annexation instead of a PUD**, and
- Establish a Master Plan review process for large or complex non-annexation developments,

will:

- Improve administrative efficiency
- Reduce confusion and frustration
- Better align review requirements with the scale and complexity of development
- Reduce unnecessary reliance on the PUD process
- Better align with how development actually occurs
- Position the Town to achieve higher-quality development outcomes