



# Folsom City Council Staff Report

<b>MEETING DATE:</b>	12/9/2025
<b>AGENDA SECTION:</b>	Consent Calendar
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	Ordinance No. 1357 – An Ordinance of the City of Folsom Amending Sections 17.06.030 and 17.06.080 and Adding Section 17.06.045 to Chapter 17.06, “Design Review,” of the Folsom Municipal Code Regarding Objective Development and Design Standards and Establishing a Ministerial Review Process (Second Reading and Adoption)
<b>FROM:</b>	Community Development Department

**RECOMMENDATION / CITY COUNCIL ACTION**

Move to conduct the second reading and adopt Ordinance No. 1357 – An Ordinance of the City of Folsom Amending Sections 17.06.030 and 17.06.080 and Adding Section 17.06.045 to Chapter 17.06, “Design Review,” of the Folsom Municipal Code Regarding Objective Development and Design Standards and to Establish a Ministerial Review Process.

**BACKGROUND / ISSUE**

On November 12, 2025, the City Council moved to adopt Resolution No. 11464, which was a determination that the proposed project is exempt from CEQA, adoption of the proposed Objective Development and Design Standards, and repeal of the City of Folsom Design Guidelines for Multifamily Developments. At that meeting the City Council also introduced and conducted the first reading of Ordinance No. 1357 amending Sections 17.06.030 and 17.06.080 and adding Section 17.06.045 to Chapter 17.06, “Design Review,” of the Folsom Municipal Code regarding Objective Development and Design Standards, affirming the continued use of a discretionary process for design review of residential multi-unit and mixed-use development projects, and establishing a ministerial review process for those multi-unit projects that are entitled to ministerial review under State law. No changes have been made to Ordinance No. 1357 since the first reading.

The 2035 General Plan and the 2021-2029 Housing Element focus Folsom’s future growth in three key areas of the city: along the East Bidwell Corridor, in areas around the Glenn and Iron Point light rail stations, and in the Folsom Plan Area. To identify strategies to increase development

capacity in these key areas to meet the City's share of the Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA), while at the same time promoting attractive, well-designed development, the City hired Opticos Design. Opticos is an architecture and urban planning firm with extensive experience advising cities on housing design and development standards.

Beginning in late 2021, City staff in conjunction with Opticos sought input from the community on the appropriate design, size, scale, massing and height for higher density multi-family development. City staff conducted a design survey, which received approximately 400 responses, and held two community workshops. The result of this work was a set of design recommendations included as part of the Targeted Mixed-Use and Multi-Family Housing Study that was presented to Planning Commission and then to the City Council on July 26, 2022. This was then followed by amendments to the General Plan and Folsom Plan Area Specific Plan to allow for greater density and floor-area-ratios in the targeted areas discussed earlier. These amendments along with an environmental impact report (EIR) were approved by the City Council in August 2024.

City staff and the Opticos team worked to develop a draft set of Objective Development and Design Standards (ODDS) over a period of 12 months. Opticos completed a Public Review Draft, which they provided to the City in September of 2024. City staff then embarked on an outreach effort in late fall 2024/early winter 2025. In general, feedback focused on the scope and detail of standards included in the Public Review Draft. Opticos submitted a second, more streamlined, Public Review Draft of the ODDS in July of 2025, which was taken to the Planning Commission for a workshop on September 17, 2025. Commissioners were complimentary of the ODDS and supportive of the proposed ministerial process for review. Some minor modifications and clarifications were requested by the Commission at the workshop, which were incorporated into the Final Draft ODDS document. The Final Draft ODDS were taken to the Planning Commission for consideration on October 15, 2025, and received a unanimous recommendation for approval by the City Council.

No public comment was received prior to the Planning Commission workshop or consideration dates. But a set of public comments were received by staff leading up to the City Council hearing date due to some erroneous information posted on social media sites indicating that a high-density residential project would be approved with the ODDS, which is not the case. Staff responded to the public commenters with correct information.

On October 28, 2025, staff presented the Objective Development and Design Standards (ODDS) to the City Council along with the proposed changes to the design review section of the Folsom Municipal Code (FMC). While the Council was supportive of the ODDS, there was a desire to see more detailed objective standards for any proposed reductions in required parking. In addition, some Councilmembers expressed concerns over the changes to the FMC that would allow for ministerial review (i.e., director-level review) for all projects that complied with the ODDS. Even though it was acknowledged that ministerial review is required for certain types of multi-family projects (e.g., those that meet SB 35, SB 423, etc.) and that projects subject to discretionary review require the Council to make significant adverse health and safety findings in order to deny a multi-family project, there was concern that a ministerial process would not allow for public awareness

and discussion of a proposed multi-family or mixed-use project. As a result of these concerns, the Council voted to continue the item the Council meeting to November 12<sup>th</sup>. At that meeting, the Council voted unanimously to retain the City’s authority to review residential multi-unit and mixed-use projects through the existing discretionary review process, but to also create a new ministerial process for those projects that qualify for Director-level review under State law.

### **POLICY / RULE**

Under Section 2.12 of the City Charter, amendments to the Folsom Municipal Code (FMC) require review and approval by the City Council. Further, FMC Chapter 17.68 – Amendments governs the process for the City to amend FMC Title 17 – Zoning. The Planning Commission must hold public hearings on proposed amendments and make a recommendation to the City Council. The City Council then may consider the amendments at a public hearing.

### **ANALYSIS**

Increasingly, State laws are aimed at reducing the extent of discretionary review of multi-family and mixed-use housing projects. Recently adopted Senate Bill 330 (2019) and Senate Bill 8 (2021) require that jurisdictions conduct design review for all residential projects using only objective design standards. These housing laws define an “objective” standard as one that involves no personal or subjective judgement by a public official and that is uniformly verifiable by reference to an external and uniform benchmark or criterion available and knowable by both the development applicant and the public official prior to submittal.

Since design is so critical to whether a project enhances an area or detracts from it, developing quality objective development and design standards is important to ensuring appropriate design of new projects. Thus, staff developed the ODDS to ensure that quality design remains central to new residential and mixed-use development within the Regulated Area. Applicants whose projects are within the Regulated Area but do not comply with the ODDS can choose to go through a discretionary review process to the Planning Commission, such as the Planned Development Permit. Projects requesting Density Bonus incentives or waivers per FMC Chapter 17.102 may also deviate from the ODDS.

### **Overview**

The Objective Development and Design Standards (ODDS) would regulate the physical form and character of multi-unit residential and residential mixed-use development so that new development advances in a manner compatible with existing community character while enhancing walkability and human-scaled urban design. The ODDS address building form, the relationship between buildings and the public realm, the scale and mass of buildings in relation to one another, and—for larger sites—the scale and character of streets and blocks.

### **Applicability**

The ODDS would only be applicable to sites within a designated “Regulated Area,” which corresponds to three General Plan Overlay Designations approved by the City Council in 2024: the East Bidwell Corridor (EBC) Overlay, Folsom Boulevard Transit-Oriented Development

(TOD) Overlay, and the Folsom Plan Area Specific Plan Town Center (TC) Overlay Combining District. This is for two reasons. First, when adopting these overlay areas that permitted higher densities than elsewhere in the city, the City Council directed staff to follow up with design standards that would ensure quality design and integration of new projects into surrounding communities even with increased density. Second, these overlay areas are the most likely to see high-density residential development or redevelopment and so are most in need of a defensible set of design standards. Should these ODDS be successfully implemented in the Regulated Area, staff may request that the Planning Commission and City Council consider city-wide ODDS for residential and mixed-use development in the future.

### **Proposed FMC Title 17 Amendments**

On November 12<sup>th</sup>, the City Council approved Resolution No. 11464, which adopted the ODDS as a stand-alone document, outside of the Folsom Municipal Code (FMC), both to allow it to include explanatory graphics and to allow for more streamlined amendments when advisable. At that meeting the City Council also introduced and conducted the first reading of Ordinance No. 1357 amending Sections 17.06.030 and 17.06.080 and adding Section 17.06.045 to Chapter 17.06, “Design Review,” of the Folsom Municipal Code regarding Objective Development and Design Standards, affirming the continued use of a discretionary process for design review of residential multi-unit and mixed-use development projects, and establishing a ministerial review process for those multi-unit projects that are entitled to ministerial review under State law.

Staff do not propose to modify Zoning Districts as part of this effort, instead utilizing the General Plan Land Use Overlay Designation approved by the City Council in 2024 to delineate the areas in which the ODDS are applicable.

### **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

Adoption of the ODDS is expected to have a neutral financial impact on City funds and positive financial impact for development applicants with projects that qualify for ministerial review under State law.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

Under Section 15061(b)(3) “Review for Exemption” of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines, the proposed code amendment is process related and administrative in nature and therefore will not have a significant effect on the environment. As a result, the project is exempt from environmental review under CEQA.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

1. Ordinance No. 1357 – An Ordinance of The City of Folsom Amending Sections 17.06.030 and 17.06.080 and Adding Section 17.06.045 to Chapter 17.06, “Design Review,” of the Folsom Municipal Code Regarding Objective Development and Design Standards and Establishing a Ministerial Review Process

Submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Pam Johns", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

---

PAM JOHNS  
Community Development Director