



Folsom City Council Staff Report

MEETING DATE:	10/28/2025
AGENDA SECTION:	Public Hearing
SUBJECT:	Objective Development and Design Standards for Multi-Unit and Mixed-Use Residential Development for General Plan Mixed-Use and Residential Overlay Areas i. Resolution No. 11464 – A Resolution Determining that the Proposed Project is Exempt from CEQA, Adopting Proposed Objective Development and Design Standards for General Plan Mixed-Use and Residential Overlay Areas, and Repealing the City of Folsom Design Guidelines for Multifamily Developments ii. Ordinance No. 1357 – An Ordinance of the City of Folsom Amending Section 17.06.030 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 (Introduction and First Reading)
FROM:	Community Development Department

RECOMMENDATION / CITY COUNCIL ACTION

Adopt Resolution No. 11464 - A Resolution Determining that the Proposed Project is Exempt from CEQA, Adopting Proposed Objective Development and Design Standards for General Plan Mixed-Use and Residential Overlay Areas, and Repealing the City of Folsom Design Guidelines for Multifamily Developments.

Conduct the first reading of Ordinance No. 1357 – An Ordinance of the City of Folsom Amending Section 17.06.030 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

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, and the comment letters received as of the writing of this report are included as Attachment 4 to this report.

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.

Objective Development and Design Standards Organization

The ODDS are divided into seven chapters as follows:

- Chapter 1 - Introduction. This chapter outlines the purpose and applicability of the ODDS, their relationship with existing regulatory documents, and procedures for review.
- Chapter 2 - Development Standards. This chapter includes site development standards and general development standards for projects subject to the ODDS.
- Chapter 3 – Massing and Articulation. This chapter provides additional standards for building massing and articulation that further refine the building design requirements of Chapter 2.
- Chapter 4 – Large Site Standards. This chapter provides additional standards for large development sites to create a pattern of walkable development.
- Chapter 5 – Exceptions to Standards. This chapter establishes criteria for allowing deviations from standards for specific situations without discretionary review.
- Chapter 6 – Definitions. This chapter provides definitions for specialized terms and phrases used in the ODDS.
- Chapter 7 – Measurement Methods. This chapter describes the measurement methods that should be used for site and building elements to ensure compliance with the ODDS.

A more detailed overview of the ODDS was provided to support a workshop held with the City Planning Commission on September 17, 2025. Materials from that session can be found at this link:

<https://www.folsom.ca.us/government/community-development/planning-services/planning-commission> .

Proposed FMC Title 17 Amendments

Staff propose adopting 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. Staff propose amending FMC Chapter 17.06 (Design Review) and adding an additional section, Section 17.06.045 (Objective Development and Design Standards), to reference the ODDS and provide guidance on the applicability of the ODDS and the process for project review. Of note, proposed Section 17.06.045 specifies that multifamily and residential mixed-use project within the Regulated Area would be subject to a Director-level Ministerial Design Review. This is consistent with State policy direction to move residential project reviews to ministerial or nondiscretionary processes to streamline review.

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.

Repeal City of Folsom Design Guidelines for Multifamily Developments

Staff propose repealing the City of Folsom Design Guidelines for Multifamily Developments, adopted by the City Council on May 26, 1998 (Resolution No. 5734) and revised in April 2004 (Resolution No. 7275). The existing document includes subjective, general guidelines that leave

room for interpretation and so can no longer be used to review residential development, given changes to state law aimed at addressing the housing crisis in California. The document also includes guidelines that contradict development standards for multifamily development in FMC Title 17.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Staff anticipate that adoption of the ODDS will lead to fewer residential projects in the Regulated Area going through discretionary entitlement process that requires review by the City's Planning Commission. This will reduce staff processing time as well as review costs for development applicants. As part of a processing fee update package being brought forward later this year, a reduced fee will be proposed that will align with the cost for processing a ministerial design review at the Director level. Should the proposed fee be adopted, adoption of the ODDS is expected to have a neutral financial impact on City funds and positive financial impact for development applicants.

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. Resolution No. 11464 – A Resolution Determining that the Proposed Project is Exempt from CEQA, Adopting Proposed Objective Development and Design Standards for General Plan Mixed-Use and Residential Overlay Areas, and Repealing the City of Folsom Design Guidelines for Multifamily Developments
 - Exhibit A – Final Draft Objective Development and Design Standards, dated October 8, 2025
 - Exhibit B – City of Folsom Design Guidelines for Multifamily Developments, dated April 2004
2. Ordinance No. 1357 – An Ordinance of The City of Folsom Amending Section 17.06.030 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
3. Folsom Municipal Code Chapter 17.06 "Design Review" – Strikethrough
4. Public Comments Received

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