



AGENDA REPORT SUMMARY

Meeting Date: July 11, 2023
Subject: Adoption of Mechanical Equipment Ordinance
Prepared by: Nick Zornes, Development Services Director
Reviewed by: Jon Maginot, Assistant City Manager
Approved by: Gabriel Engeland, City Manager

Initiated by:
City Council.

Environmental Review:

Ordinance is exempt from environmental review pursuant to Section 15061(b)(3) of the State Guidelines implementing the California Environmental Quality Act of 1970.

Fiscal Impact:

None.

Attachments:

1. Draft Ordinance with Appendices
2. Example Ordinance Language

Summary:

The draft ordinance proposed accomplishes the goal of eliminating or reducing future noise violations created by mechanical equipment in the side yard setbacks of properties within the City of Los Altos. The proposed ordinance was drafted based upon research conducted by evaluating how other Santa Clara County jurisdictions enforce setback requirements for noise generating mechanical equipment.

Staff Recommendation:

Adoption of an Ordinance of the City Council of the City of Los Altos Adding Chapter 11.14 Mechanical Equipment to Title 11 Miscellaneous Property Regulations of the Los Altos Municipal Code and find that this action is Exempt from Environmental Review Pursuant to Section 15061(b)(3) of the State Guidelines Implementing the California Environmental Quality Act of 1970.

City Manager

GE

Reviewed By:

City Attorney

JH

Finance Director

JD



Subject: Adoption of Mechanical Equipment Ordinance

Background

In May 2022, the City Council requested that staff bring back an ordinance to address noise concerns from mechanical equipment in the side yard setbacks of properties throughout the city. City staff researched what other cities throughout Santa Clara County have in place for mechanical equipment regulations.

Presently, there are no codified setback requirements for mechanical equipment such as air conditioning units within the Los Altos Municipal Code. For several years the City’s Planning Division has “estimated” setback requirements based on internet-based data in an effort to demonstrate compliance of air conditioning units pursuant to the noise limits set in Chapter 6.16 of the Los Altos Municipal Code. The City’s reliance on non-codified setbacks has proven to be ineffective as noise violations still are present regardless of meeting the “estimated” setback requirements to meet compliance with the Noise Ordinance.

Analysis

Mechanical equipment regulations differ greatly from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. However, it is most common that there is a prescribed minimum standard codified into each municipal code.

A sample of mechanical equipment regulations from other Santa Clara County jurisdictions (Attachment 2) shows the wide variety of regulations. Mechanical equipment regulations has a wide range of applications from no setback requirements, to completely prohibited within the required setbacks.

Discussion

The draft ordinance provides standards for mechanical equipment for the Los Altos Municipal Code. Standards include a general definition which encompasses all noise generating mechanical equipment which the planning division has encountered requiring some sort of noise enforcement. The setback requirement for any newly installed mechanical requirement as defined shall adhere to the underlying zoning district. When roof mounted equipment is proposed requirements have been integrated to ensure they are architecturally compatible with the structure in which it is affixed. The proposed ordinance will provide that mechanical equipment installations conform with the noise requirements of the Los Altos Municipal Code.

On June 27, 2023, the City Council introduced and waived further reading of the draft ordinance. At that meeting the City Council incorporated clarification on language used within the ordinance which is non substantive in nature. Additionally, the request to incorporate a diagram was made to depict provisions of the code section. Staff will create a diagram for this section of the code and incorporate it into a published informational handout posted to the City’s website.