



June 13, 2024

Joel Paulson, Community Development Director
Community Development Department, Town of Los Gatos
110 E. Main Street,
Los Gatos, CA 95030

RE: Los Gatos Objective Design Standards Updates

Dear Joel Paulson,

M-Group is pleased to provide a proposal for services to prepare additional targeted Objective Design Standards for the Town of Los Gatos. The project would result in an expanded set of criteria to augment the Town's existing Objective Design Standards.

BACKGROUND

Based on our phone call following the Town Council meeting on May 7th, 2024 (May 7th meeting), M-Group reviewed both that Council meeting and the Joint Town Council and Planning Commission Study Session (Joint Study Session) that had taken place September 12th, 2023.

M-Group understands the direction from the Town Council to staff at the May 7th meeting to seek a proposal to develop standards that regulate views, ensure high quality building design, and regulate architectural styles. Let me first provide a summary of these issues before describing how we would approach this project. Attached to this letter is a scope of work and budget that would implement an M-Group approach.

View Standards

During the May 7th meeting, the Council identified standards in Grover Beach and Pismo Beach as being exemplary of their expectations for potential view standards. However, our research found neither jurisdiction has adopted objective regulations of views or viewsheds.

- The City of Grover Beach Development Code Section 2.30.050.G includes a discussion of protecting viewsheds, however, the standards are not objective.
- The Pismo Beach Development Standards do not regulate views but refer to a View Consideration Overlay Zone in Chapter 17.096 of the Municipal Code that includes regulations of viewsheds, however the regulations are not objective.

During the Joint Study Session, Barbara Kautz noted that she would not recommend regulating views due to the difficulty in considering them objectively. M-Group does not have experience developing view or viewshed standards and we agree with Ms. Kautz that objective standards for views would be difficult to prepare and implement. We do not recommend that the Town attempt to develop objective design standards that target views or viewsheds, especially given the lack of objective case studies.

Architectural Style

At the May 7th meeting, the Council identified standards in Palo Alto and San Bruno as exemplary of potential regulations for architectural style.

- The City of Palo Alto Objective Design Standards do not include specific regulation of architectural styles and notes the standards are “not intended to convey required architectural style. Rather, the objective design standards aim to accommodate a variety of styles.”
- The City of San Bruno does not have objective design standards but has adopted Residential Design Guidelines (for single-family homes) that discuss a variety of architectural styles, noting the “guidelines are not intended to establish or dictate a specific style” and that “a wide range of architectural styles is acceptable.”

Objective standards for architectural style are most often seen in greenfield or new town development, where the developer has direct control over the number of total buildings and the number of defined architectural styles. Additionally, they are usually applied to a single-family typology and would not necessarily translate to a multi-family building, which will be a number of stories taller than single-family and with a much larger footprint and mass.

M-Group does not have experience preparing objective standards for architectural styles, especially at a multi-family scale. To be able to develop such standards, architectural styles would need to be defined, as well as the scale of development the styles are intended for, which was noted by the Council. This could prove difficult for a town such as Los Gatos, where decades of development have resulted in an eclectic range of styles, in many cases well-executed in terms of attention to detail, quality of materials, and construction craft. Arriving at a list of qualified architectural styles for multi-family buildings could prove to be difficult and time-consuming for the Town.

High Quality Building Design

During the May 7th meeting, the Council identified standards in Santa Cruz as exemplary of potential high quality building design objective standards.

- The City of Santa Cruz Objective Development Standards, found in Section 24.12.185 of the Municipal Code include regulation of building materials including a minimum number of materials that may be used in the building facade, prohibitions on vinyl windows, requirements for materials on exterior corners, and regulations for living walls. The standards are objective and can guide the development of similar objective standards for Los Gatos.

Additionally at the May 7th meeting, the Council discussed that high quality building design might be regulated objectively by keying on the most notable features of a building's design, such as windows and building materials. We agree that those features are among the most noticeable parts of the building façade and therefore heavily impact its overall appearance. Regulations discussed in existing objective design standard case studies, paired with additional direction from Town decision makers can guide the development of regulations



concerning exterior materials, window features, and additional design components that contribute to the quality of a building's design.

M-GROUP APPROACH

Because M-Group does not have experience developing objective standards for views or viewsheds, nor for architectural styles at multi-family building scale, we are unable to respond to those parts of the Council's request. However, we propose to build off the Town's existing Objective Design Standards and develop additional standards that address Council priorities and focus on two key components.

Building Design and Architectural Features

Using the guidance provided by the Council at the May 7th meeting, M-Group would work in collaboration with an appointed working Group to prepare objective standards that focus on strategic façade and massing details. Using case studies noted by Council, such as the Santa Cruz, Palo Alto objective standards and subjective San Bruno Design Guidelines, together with additional M-Group case study communities research, we would prepare standards that are objectively measurable while advancing the subjective phrase "high quality."

Building Massing and Height

Additionally, we propose to reexamine the massing assumptions in the Town's existing Objective Design Standards given the significantly increased density allowances under AB 1287, the 2024 density bonus law. The massing and upper floor setback assumptions would be updated to provide the Town with objective standards that facilitate ministerial review of projects significantly taller than the town might have previously seen under the existing density bonus law included in Government Code Section 65915-65918.

We hope you will take these issues and the M-Group approach into consideration in your review of our proposed scope of work, attached to this letter. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

TOM FORD, AICP

Principal

tford@m-group.us

510.473.3078



SCOPE OF WORK

TASK 1: BACKGROUND ISSUES

M-Group will prepare background research, including but not limited to case study documents identified by the Town Council and Town staff. The background research will detail issues of high-quality building design, including potential regulations for window detailing, façade features, and building materials. The research will include projects previously worked on by the M-Group team, such as the [Town of Hillsborough Residential Design Guidelines](#), which, while subjective in approach, provide potential avenues into the development of objective standards for issues of design technique and quality of materials.

TASK 2: WORKING GROUP MEETING #1

M-Group will facilitate a meeting with a working group made up of Town decision makers or appointees to discuss design and development issues in line with Council priorities and which could potentially be developed for the expanded objective design standards.

TASK 3: DRAFT OBJECTIVE DESIGN STANDARDS

Based on the discussion with working group members, M-Group will prepare a set of draft objective design standards for development issues that target design quality and building massing.

TASK 4: WORKING GROUP MEETING #2

M-Group will facilitate a second working group meeting to discuss and critique the draft objective design standards.

TASK 5: REVISED DRAFT OBJECTIVE DESIGN STANDARDS

M-Group will revise the draft objective standards based on the discussion and comments received from working group members at the meeting in Task 4.

TASK 6: PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING #1

M-Group will attend a meeting of the Los Gatos Planning Commission to discuss and receive comments on the revised draft objective design standards. Planning Commission members will receive the document in advance of the meeting.

TASK 7: INCORPORATION OF PLANNING COMMISSION COMMENTS

M-Group will revise the draft objective standards to address comments and direction received from the Planning Commission in Task 6.



TASK 8: PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING #2

M-Group will attend a second Planning Commission meeting to discuss the revised draft objective design standards, including comments made by the Commission at their meeting in Task 6. Planning Commission members will receive the document in advance of the meeting.

TASK 9: PUBLIC REVIEW DRAFT OBJECTIVE DESIGN STANDARDS

In coordination with Town staff, M-Group will incorporate Planning Commission comments and prepare a Public Review Draft of the Objective Design Standards for Town Council consideration.

TASK 10: TOWN COUNCIL HEARING

M-Group will attend a Town Council meeting at which the Council will consider the Objective Design Standards for adoption.

BUDGET

The cost estimate for the tasks detailed in the Scope of Work are shown in the table below.

TASK	COST
Task 1: Background Issues	\$5,920
Task 2: Working Group Meeting #1	\$6,320
Task 3: Draft Object Design Standards	\$20,580
Task 4: Working Group Meeting #2	\$7,240
Task 5: Revised Draft Objective Design Standards	\$14,860
Task 6: Planning Commission Meeting #1	\$5,000
Task 7: Incorporation of Planning Commission Comments	\$6,180
Task 8: Planning Commission Meeting #2	\$5,000
Task 9: Public Review Draft Objective Design Standards	\$6,840
Task 10: Town Council Hearing	\$5,000
TASK TOTAL	\$82,940
Project Contingency (10%)	\$8,294
TOTAL NOT TO EXCEED	\$91,234