

MEMO

To: Sean Mullin, Town of Los Gatos
From: Lisa Wise Consulting, Inc. (LWC) and Urban Planning Partners (UPP)
Date: December 18, 2025
Re: Community Open House Summary Memo

As part of the community outreach effort for the Update to the Multi-Family and Mixed-Use Objective Design Standards, the Town of Los Gatos held a Community Open House on December 4, 2025 at the Adult Recreation Center, located at 208 E. Main Street. The Open House took place prior to the drafting of the updated standards, with the objective of gathering community input to help inform the upcoming standards. Town staff conducted outreach to publicize the event through a posting on the project webpage; an email sent to a group of local architects, designers, and members of the public that have signed up for notifications from the Town; and through various media and social media resources. A total of seven community members participated.

Shortly after 6:00 pm, the Town and Consultant Team gave a brief presentation to describe the project, objectives, and progress as well as to introduce the format of the Open House. At about 6:30, the group began to circulate at four topical “stations” set up around the room by the Town and the Consultant Team. Each station included two to three detailed presentation boards to focus the conversation and provide graphic context for the topics at hand. Attendees were urged to share their thoughts in a casual, informal style. The four stations were:

- **Station 1: Project Overview.** The boards prompted participants to review project objectives and design topics and to record initial visual preferences.
- **Station 2: High Quality Building and Site Design.** The boards prompted participants to consider exactly what “high-quality design” means in Los Gatos. The presentation boards focused on a range of topics in site design, roof form and articulation, and windows.
- **Station 3: Building Massing and Height Transitions.** The boards prompted participants to identify their priorities for regulating building massing. The presentation boards focused on building length, upper-story step-backs, and options for transitions to lower-intensity residential areas.
- **Station 4: Architectural Character and Details.** The boards prompted participants to consider the details of design—specifically, four different “detail palettes,” details of façade articulation, building entry design, and ranges of building materials and colors—and lend input into which options are the best fit for new development in Los Gatos.

In addition, at each station was a blank flip-chart for recording discussion notes and community feedback. Community participants and planning team members alike noted thoughts and ideas directly on the boards (see p. 5) as well as on flip charts (see p. 9). Below is a summary of the community input.

Summary of Open House Input

Building Placement

- A maximum setback is not seen as critical because it's unlikely a developer would waste that space.

Massing and Articulation

- More articulation is preferred. We should avoid long, straight, unbroken lines, particularly along roof lines and facades.
- Avoid boxy, "chock-a-block" design.
- Building "modules" should break up bulky facades. Modules should be used in combination with step-backs.
- Step-backs for second and third stories are supported, but not with balconies occupying the stepped-back space.
- Support for street-facing step-backs starting at the second story, similar to 1001 Oak Hill in Lafayette.
- Strong preference for courtyards that break up the massing of larger buildings.
- Of the different step-back options presented, there was a preference for a height limit imposed within a certain distance of an abutting residential property line.
- Usable balconies are preferred over Juliet balconies, except on Spanish-style buildings.
- Recessed balconies are preferred over projecting balconies.
- Balconies should consider the safety of pedestrians and passers-by below.
- Preference for an emphasized building base with a material change and a cornice marking the top of the base.
- Privacy should be considered for all new development.

Roof Design

- False mansard roofs are acceptable if they wrap around all sides of the building and do not have a steep slope.
- All sloped roofs should have eaves.
- Flat roofs without a parapet are discouraged.
- Preference for a well-articulated cornice and overhangs.

Windows

- Windows should have charm. This includes details, trim, lintels, porticos, and awnings. Avoid windows that are flush with the building.
- Flat window frames should not be allowed.
- Trim, recessed windows, or lintels are preferred.

- Support for arched windows.
- Window trim should not be stucco.
- Preference for windows with sills.

Entry Design

- Individual Residential Entries
 - o Preference for entries that are emphasized with a recess or projection; however, thin shed-roof overhangs without columns are insufficient and look cheap.
 - o Support for two-story porches.
 - o Entries should be no more than three steps up from the sidewalk.
- Shared Entry Residential
 - o Shared entries below a floating balcony are not supported.
 - o Preference for entries that are articulated with gable-end roofs and columns.
- Commercial Frontages
 - o Preference for seating and planter boxes to define ground floor commercial frontages.
 - o Preference for awnings, recessed entries, and terraces.

Building Materials

- Materials should be mixed; should be used to break up facades and prevent monotony
- Too much variation without any rhyme or reason can look chaotic. For example, townhouses should have material and color changes that correspond to the different units.
- Preference for siding, shakes, brick, and stone.
- Board-form concrete should be used only on a small portion of the building.
- There should be a maximum percentage of stucco allowed on any one façade; too much stucco can create boring facades.
- Metal panels, reflective materials, glass curtain walls, and corrugated metal should not be allowed.

Building Colors

- Muted, earthy, natural colors are preferred. Color palettes should cohere with those of neighboring buildings.
- Bright, saturated colors are not a good fit in Los Gatos.
- No blinding white.

Style and Character

- New development should be consistent with the small-town, cottage-style, Craftsman vibe of Los Gatos.
- Avoid any new development that is “too Modern.”

- Preference for Neoclassical and Italianate styles. Spanish and modern Craftsman/Farmhouse also liked. When Spanish style is used, there shouldn't be repeating bays.
- Contemporary style and agricultural-looking buildings (corrugated siding, minimal windows, shallow eaves) are not liked/not appropriate.
- Support for courtyard-style buildings.
- Avoid big buildings; strong preference for "compact design."
- Developers are often willing to listen to neighbors and refine proposals accordingly.

Parking

- Although we're a small town, people do drive and need parking.
- Parking should be underground, hidden from view, and/or located to the rear of buildings. Safeway is good example.
- Surface parking should be screened from view from the right-of-way with landscaping and two access driveways should be provided where possible.

Landscaping

- More trees and shrubbery.
- Preferences for an expanded sidewalk, and not just in the Downtown.

Public Art

- Murals and public art is a priority. The new Whole Foods is a good example.

Open Space

- Small open spaces, parklets, and shared public spaces should be encouraged/required. Consider seating, barbeque areas, etc. The Newton building is a good example.
- Common open spaces should not be allowed where they can overlook a single-family yard.

Safety/Evacuation

- The Town should consider evacuation strategies when approving any new development.

Infrastructure

- Los Gatos does not have the civil infrastructure to support much/any new residential development.

Affordability

- The project should consider that additional design requirements may impact affordability.
- The Town should be able to negotiate to reduce the burden on developers to produce more affordable housing.

Presentation Boards with Feedback (11 total)

UPDATED OBJECTIVE DESIGN STANDARDS
FOR MULTI-FAMILY AND MIXED-USE RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

Station 1: Project Overview

Project Background

OBJECTIVES

The Multi-Family and Mixed-Use Objective Design Standards (ODS) Update Project is an effort to update the Town's existing ODS by refining design standards to respond to Town Council and community feedback.

PROJECT TIMELINE

Project Milestone	Site Plan and Developer Plans	Final Design	Permitting Review	Construction Start	Construction Completion	Final Inspection	Occupancy	Handover
Start	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov
End								

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF OBJECTIVE DESIGN STANDARDS FOR RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT?

State law, specifically SB330 (the Housing Crisis Act of 2019), requires a ministerial review pathway for residential projects. Objective design standards (ODS) can be used as approval criteria for this ministerial pathway. ODS:

- Should be easy to understand, feasible to implement, consistent with the General Plan and Municipal Code, and reflective of community character.
- Remove the uncertainty of discretionary review. If an applicant follows the standards, no design review is required.
- Lead to predictable results. Because the standards are known and quantifiable, the community can anticipate how new development will look.

THE TOWN'S EXISTING OBJECTIVE DESIGN STANDARDS

The existing Objective Design Standards for Qualifying Multi-Family and Mixed-Use Residential Development were adopted on January 31, 2023. The document includes two sections:

- Site Design, including site layout and building placement; vehicular access and parking; and outdoor areas and amenities.
- Building design, including building form and massing; façade articulation; materials; and roof design.

WHAT IS THE FOCUS OF THE UPDATES TO THE STANDARDS?

After about two years of use, Town Staff and the Los Gatos community have found that the existing design standards have room for improvement in how they address and regulate new development—specifically:

- **High-Quality Building Design**
 - Façade articulation, pedestrian orientation, and visual interest.
 - Building materials and colors that convey a sense of quality and durability and that are consistent with existing buildings.
 - Usable open spaces that complement the building and create a comfortable public realm.
- **Height Transitions**
 - Ensuring smooth transitions to adjacent lower-density neighborhoods.
- **Architectural Character and Details**
 - Integrity in building composition and details.
 - Elements of the base, middle and top of the building; roofline design; and ground floor design.

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UPDATED OBJECTIVE DESIGN STANDARDS
FOR MULTI-FAMILY AND MIXED-USE RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

Station 1: Project Overview

Selected Design Topics

SITE DESIGN

Vehicular Access: Internal circulation within off-street lots.

Pedestrian Access: Pedestrian connectivity throughout site and within parking areas.

Landscaping and Screening: Residential buffers and limits on surface for visibility.

Parking Structure Access and Visibility: Minimizing conflicts between drivers and pedestrians.

Private, Common and Public Open Spaces: Size, dimensions, and distribution of landscaped areas, private recreation spaces, and community recreation spaces.

Building Placement and Setback Design: Placement of buildings relative to property lines and design of areas between building and property line.

BUILDING DESIGN

Roof Design: Roof form, slope, features, and materials.

Building and Entry Design:

- Differentiation of the base, middle and top through façade recesses/projections, balconies, entry design, material transitions, top story height.
- Balcony location and residential privacy.
- Recessed or covered building entries.

Parking Structure Design: Access, façade treatment, visibility.

Massing and Scale: Options for breaking up massing/reducing perceived scale of multi-story buildings.

Façade Articulation:

- Variation in street-facing planes through awnings/canopies, windows, balconies, trellises, material changes, window boxes/planters, and mousing/corbelled cornices.
- Building material and color palettes.
- Recessed garages doors.
- Transparency of ground-floor commercial uses.
- Equal façade treatment on all building elevations.

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UPDATED OBJECTIVE DESIGN STANDARDS
FOR MULTI-FAMILY AND MIXED-USE RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

Station 1: Project Overview

Visual Preferences

THE IMAGES BELOW SHOW A RANGE OF BUILDING AND SITE DESIGNS. WHICH DESIGNS ARE MOST PREFERRED FOR LOS GATOS? NO REPRESENTATION AT ALL.

Handwritten feedback notes include:

- "I like the way the building is integrated with the landscape." (Red circle)
- "I like the way the building is integrated with the landscape." (Blue circle)
- "I like the way the building is integrated with the landscape." (Green circle)
- "I like the way the building is integrated with the landscape." (Red circle)
- "I like the way the building is integrated with the landscape." (Blue circle)
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UPDATED OBJECTIVE DESIGN STANDARDS FOR MULTI-FAMILY AND MIXED-USE RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

Station 2: High-Quality Building and Site Design

Building Placement, Site Design, and Parking

WHAT DESIGN ELEMENTS AND FEATURES WILL HELP CREATE ATTRACTIVE, ENDURING, AND PEDESTRIAN-FRIENDLY SITES?

BUILDING PLACEMENT

- Establish a maximum setback for all or a portion of the building to create a consistent street wall along the sidewalk.
- Or allow for varied building placement.

DESIGN OF STREET-FACING SETBACKS

- Landscaping (trees, shrubs, planter boxes)
- Expanded sidewalks
- Amenities (seating, drinking water)
- Continuation of design features along retail-oriented side streets

DESIGN OF THE SITE PERIMETER

- Allowed number/frequency of curb cuts along primary, secondary streets
- Perforation/vehicle separation
- Screening of internal drive aisles
- Screening of surface parking areas
- Screening of structured parking portions of buildings

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UPDATED OBJECTIVE DESIGN STANDARDS FOR MULTI-FAMILY AND MIXED-USE RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

Station 2: High-Quality Building and Site Design

Roof Form and Articulation

WHAT ROOF DESIGNS BEST REFLECT LOS GATOS' CHARACTER, PATTERNS, AND STYLE?

ROOF TYPES AND DETAILS

ROOF DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

- Maximum linear dimension allowed without a change in roof form or height?
- Desired limitations on incorporating multiple roof forms in one building (e.g., cornice and hipped)?
- Requirement for variations in roof form to correspond with massing and facade articulation?

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UPDATED OBJECTIVE DESIGN STANDARDS FOR MULTI-FAMILY AND MIXED-USE RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

Station 2: High-Quality Building and Site Design

Windows

WHAT WINDOW FEATURES WILL HELP CREATE WELL-DESIGNED, ENDURING, AND HIGH-QUALITY BUILDINGS?

WINDOW TREATMENT TO AVOID

WINDOW TREATMENT TO ENCOURAGE

WHAT WE'VE HEARD

- Windows should have articulation - 12" or recessed or minimal trim may appear too quiet.
- Windows and facades should have depth, not flat surfaces.
- Upper-story windows should be taller.

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UPDATED OBJECTIVE DESIGN STANDARDS
FOR MULTI-FAMILY AND MIXED-USE RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

Station 4: Architectural Character and Details

Facade Design and Entrances WHAT FEATURES HELP CREATE ATTRACTIVE AND PEDESTRIAN-FRIENDLY BUILDINGS AND SITES?

FACADE ARTICULATION

WHAT FEATURES HELP CREATE ATTRACTIVE AND PEDESTRIAN-FRIENDLY BUILDINGS AND SITES?

CONSIDER USING ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES SUCH AS: CORNICES, BALCONIES, CHIMNEYS, ETC. TO BREAK UP A FACADE. BALCONIES, PORCHES, AND TERRACES ARE ALSO EFFECTIVE.

GROUND FLOOR COMMERCIAL FRONTAGES

CONSIDER USING COMMERCIAL FRONTAGES TO ADD VISUAL INTEREST AND CHARACTER TO THE STREET. COMMERCIAL FRONTAGES SHOULD BE PROMINENT AND EASY TO IDENTIFY.

SHARED RESIDENTIAL ENTRIES

INDIVIDUAL RESIDENTIAL ENTRIES

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UPDATED OBJECTIVE DESIGN STANDARDS
FOR MULTI-FAMILY AND MIXED-USE RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

Station 4: Architectural Character and Details

Building Materials and Colors WHAT MATERIALS AND COLORS REFLECT LOS GATOS CHARACTER AND CONTRIBUTE TO COHESIVE DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS AND STYLE?

WHAT WE'VE HEARD

Facade materials should reflect the community's existing character.

Preferences for fire-safe, durable, high-quality materials.

Support for a varied mix of materials, including:

- High-quality masonry (brick, tile, etc.)
- Wood
- Stone or wood-look materials (e.g., fiber cement siding)

No preference for non-wood siding (e.g., vinyl, etc.)

Strong preference for muted, natural, earth-tone colors.

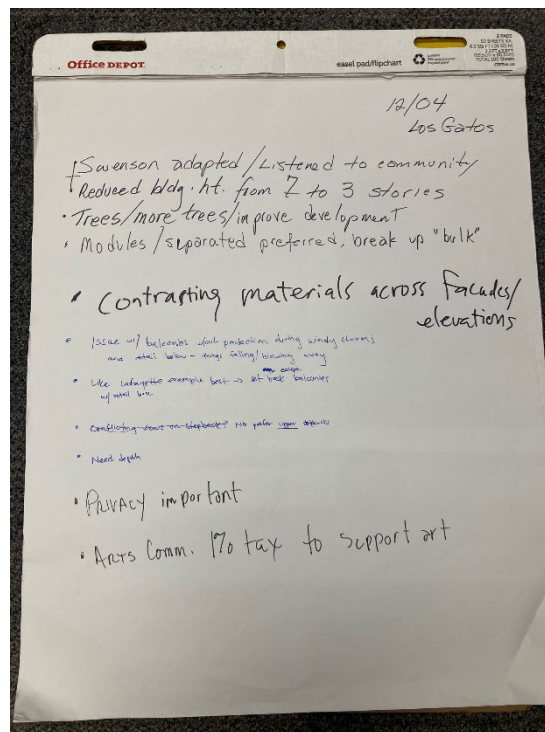
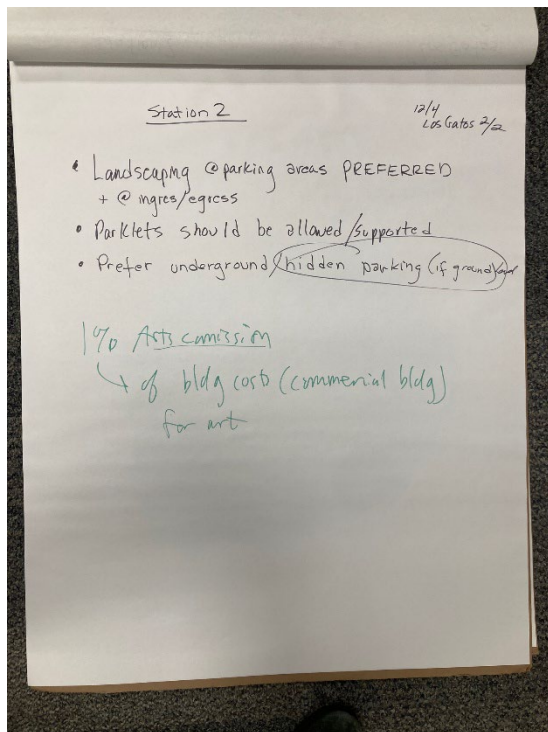
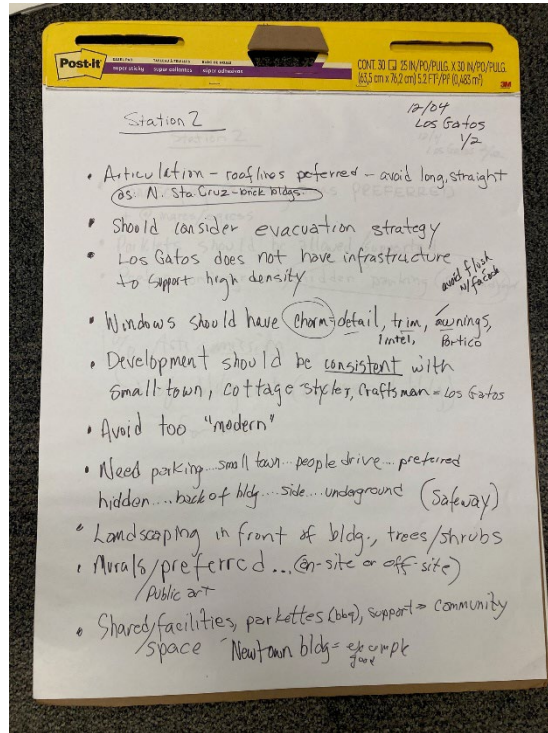
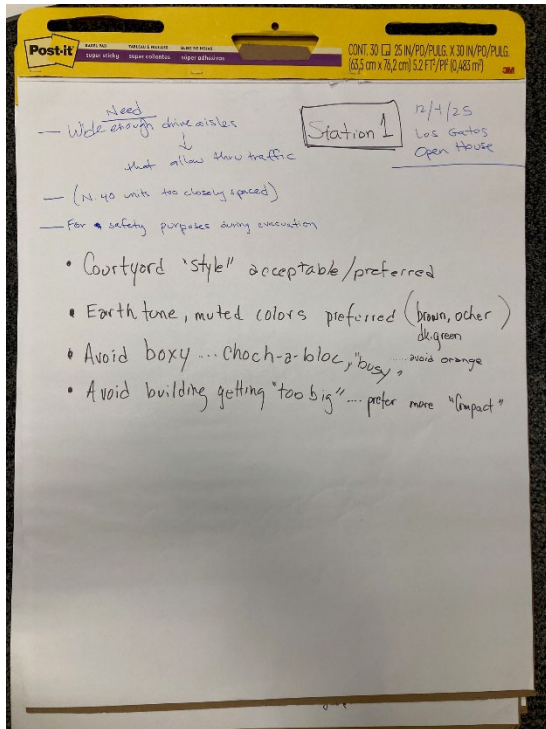
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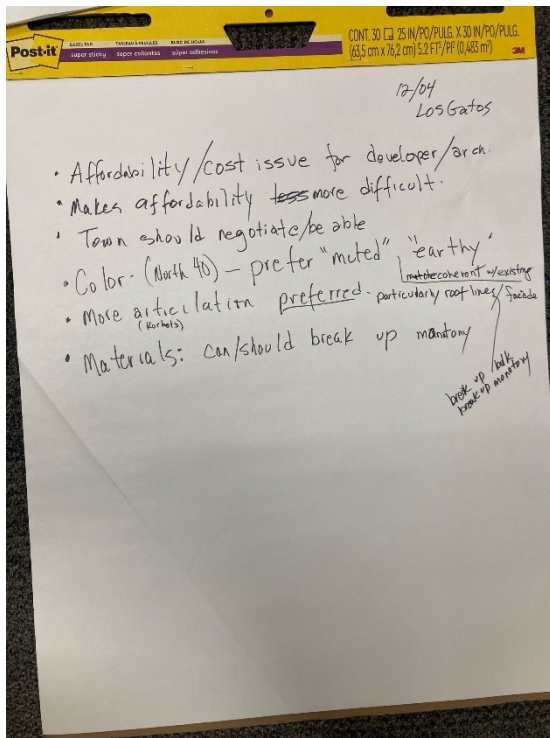
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LWC

Flip Chart Pages





12/04
Los Gatos

- Affordability/cost issue for developer/arch.
- Makes affordability ~~less~~ more difficult.
- Town should negotiate/be able
- Color (North 45) - prefer "muted" "earthy"
in the context of existing
- More articulation preferred: particularly roof lines facade
(verticals)
- Materials: can/should break up monotony

break up with
break up monotony