

# Objective Design Standards

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Town of Los Gatos, CA

## Joint Town Council/Planning Commission Study Session

A Joint Study Session on the Revised Los Gatos Objective Design Standards for Multi-Family and Mixed-Use Objective Design Standards (ODS) was held at the Los Gatos Town Hall on Tuesday, March 17, 2026. The objective of the Study Session was for the Town Council, Planning Commission, and community to provide the consultant, Lisa Wise Consulting, Inc., with input and direction prior to the preparation of the Administrative Draft Revised Objective Standards. Below is a summary of the takeaways from the Study Session discussion.

### 1. General

- a. Some preference for point system, but a menu of options is OK as alternative. The most important thing is that requirements are clear and can be verified by staff-level, ministerial review.
- b. Regulating views may become a later phase or a separate project
- c. Health and safety: Town Attorney clarifies that evidence is needed before a design standard can be considered a threat to public health and safety

### 2. Site Design

- a. Open space and landscaping
  - i. Open spaces should be meaningful and usable
  - ii. Elevated open space is OK
  - iii. Forecourts are appropriate for larger sites. But for smaller buildings and sites, they detract.
  - iv. Genuine Automotive is a good example of a bioswale becoming usable space; Los Gatos Lodge is not
- b. Require community/common buildings

### 3. Height Transitions

- a. Stepping when adjacent to smaller buildings – but be careful how
- b. Step-backs aren't needed on public-facing elevations; only along shared property line
- c. Strong preference for requiring a maximum height within a set distance of a single-family residence.
  - i. Support for a step-back in height at 40 ft from an interior property line. This is similar to the Palo Alto strategy (limits above X ft within 50 feet of property line.)

- ii. Consider a 2-story differential:
  - 1. Limit to 3 story height when abutting 1 story
  - 2. Limit to 4 story height when abutting 2 story
  - 3. Limit to 5 story height when abutting 3 story

#### **4. Apartments/Stacked Flats**

##### a. Massing

- i. Privacy, bulk, and mass are most important – see Palo Alto for privacy reference
- ii. Massing break-ups shouldn't be random.
  - 1. Forecourt is good because of the rest of the building. Yes to forecourts on large properties only
  - 2. Façade breakups "every X feet" is too much/too prescriptive
  - 3. Too much change/articulation is chaotic.
- iii. Along major rights-of-way
  - 1. Elevations facing major rights-of-way (especially Los Gatos Blvd) should not be subject to additional standards
  - 2. It is important to prohibit long blank walls –need deliberate, clear standards to prevent this
  - 3. Need interaction and permeability between sidewalk and building
  - 4. The primary entrance, or at least a primary entrance, must be located along Los Gatos Blvd
  - 5. Café Dio on E Main, however, has the primary entry on Church St, which is the secondary street. Because it's Downtown, this feels appropriate, but is not advised elsewhere.
- iv. Massing facing all rights-of-way are the priority. Support for the three massing options provided (forecourt; max façade width; upper story step-back for X%)

##### b. Materials

- i. Too many different materials is chaotic
- ii. Don't prohibit materials, as this limits imagination
- iii. Materials should be required to be fire-resistant (we're in the WUI)
- iv. Regulate quality over type – quality, durability, fireproofing, etc.

#### **5. Townhomes**

##### a. Massing

- i. Too much change is chaotic.

- ii. Townhomes mostly look okay, the concern is more about large multi-family projects
- b. Materials
  - i. Colors could change each townhouse if they're the same form, or form could change each townhouse if they're the same color, but not both

## **6. Roof Design**

- a. Yes, require eaves, but don't be too prescriptive
- b. Yes, require cornice or overhang on flat roofs

## **7. Windows**

- a. Yes, require trim, recesses, or lintels, but there's no need to provide specific measurements

## **8. Entry Design**

- a. Be flexible, not prescriptive

## **9. Colors**

- a. Color should not be regulated, as doing so can become a slippery slope
- b. Defer to designers' creativity
- c. Support for primary, secondary, and accent colors

## **10. Parking**

- a. Vehicular access: no streets that are so short that you have to back out of it
- b. As few curb cuts as possible on major rights-of-way
- c. Preference for alleys
- d. GP2040 envisions connectivity in the back, connecting parking lots in the rear
- e. Boulevard Specific Plan calls for walkability

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