



# Los Altos Objective Design Standards Annotated Framework Presentation

City Council/Planning Commission Study Session | September 9, 2020

# Agenda

**1**

**Recap of Project Basics**

**2**

**Process and Direction**

**3**

**Overview of Annotated Framework**

**4**

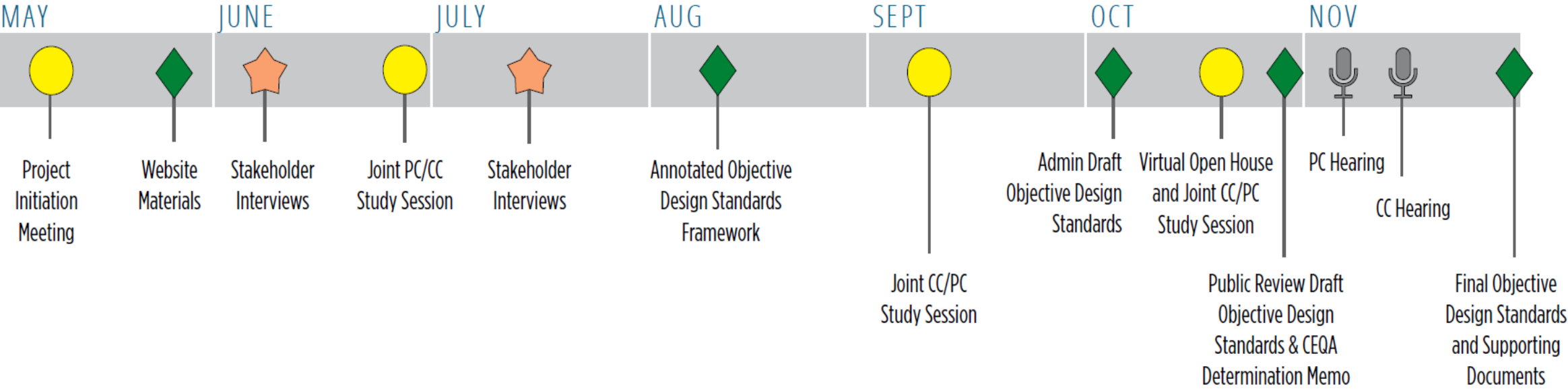
**Discussion**

# Project Schedule

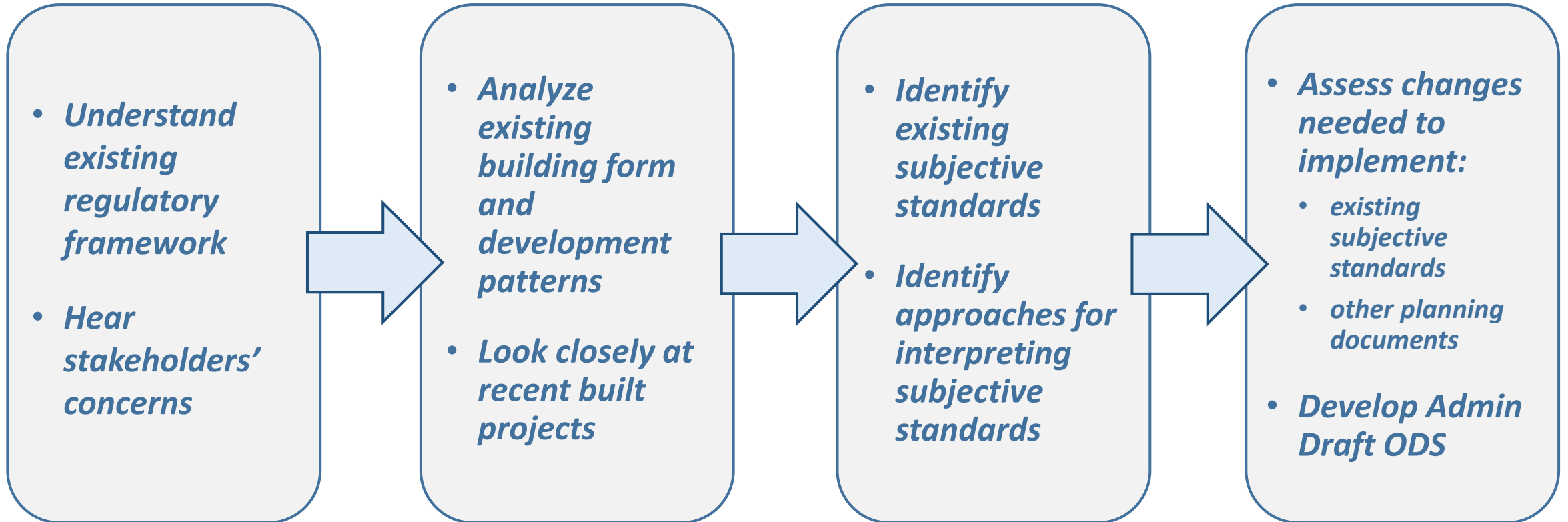
We are here



2020



# Process and Direction

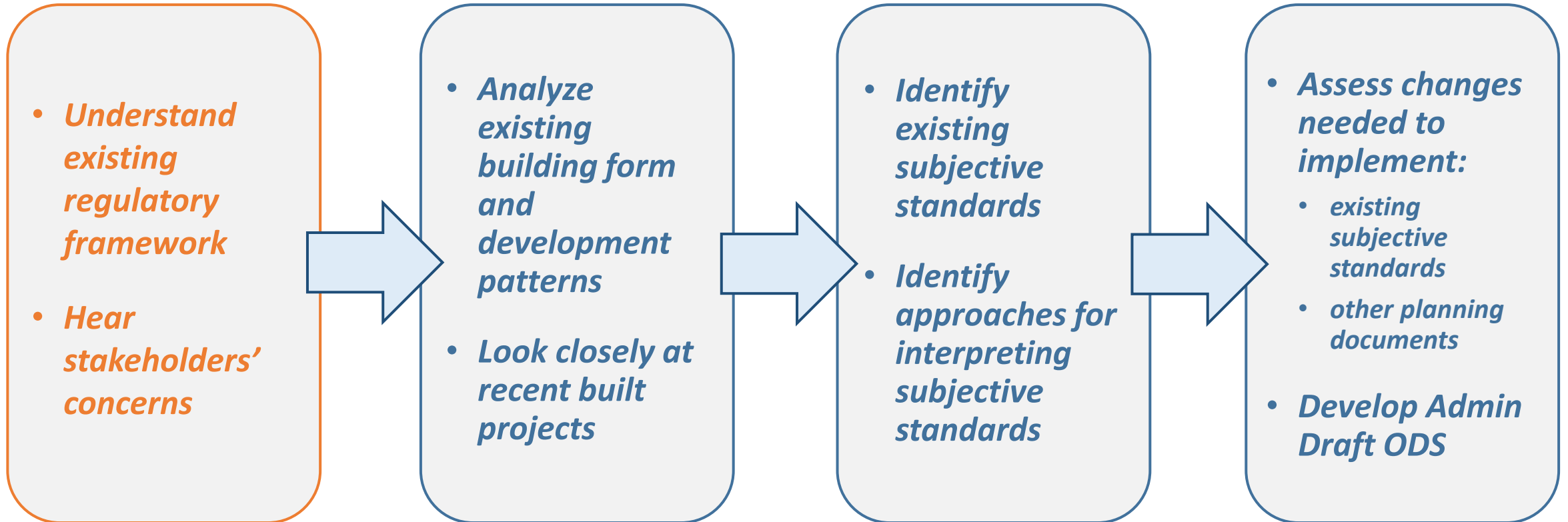


**RECAP**

**TONIGHT**

**NEXT STEPS**

# Process and Direction














# Objective Design Standards

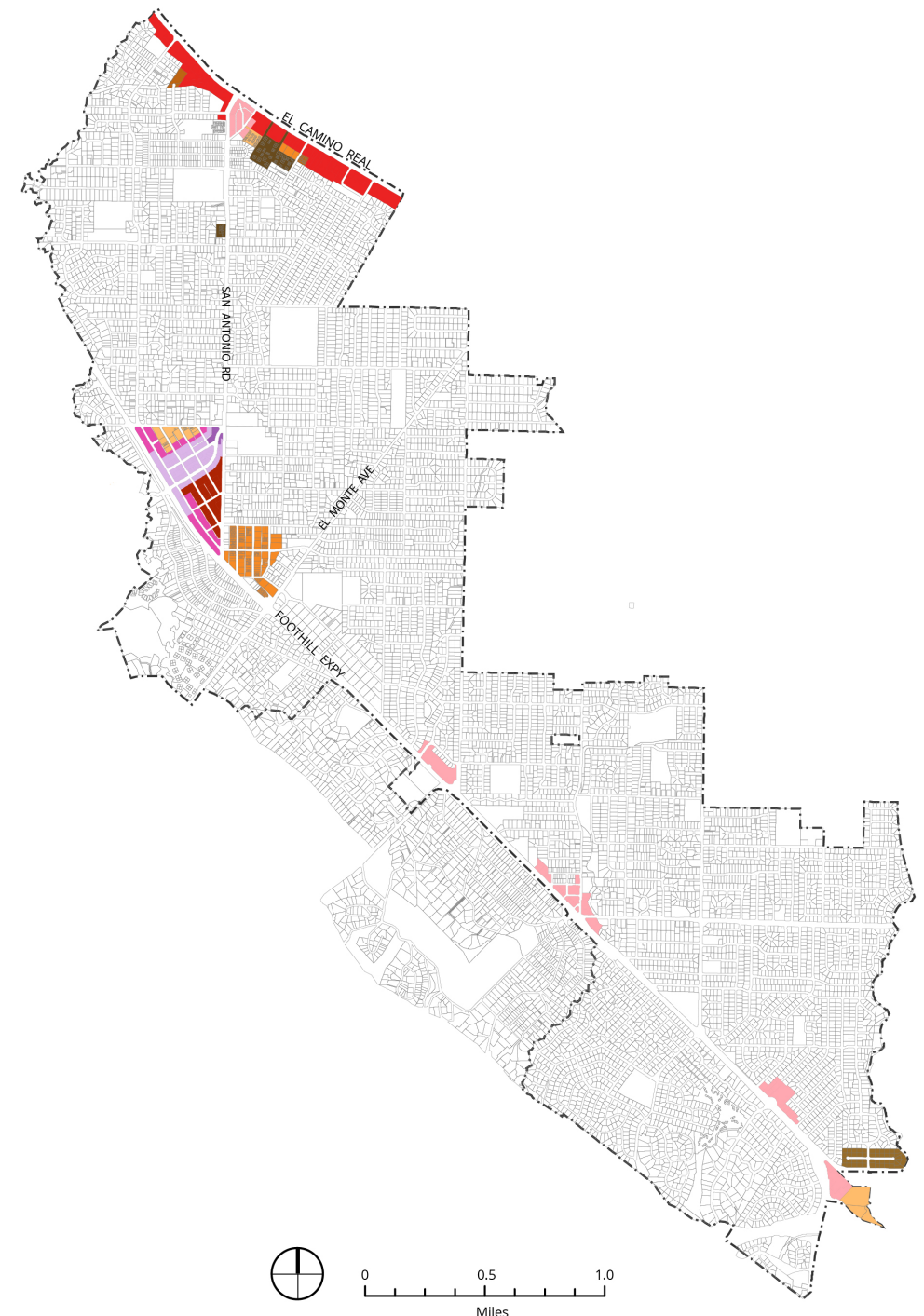
- Update and amend Zoning Code to include objective design standards for multi-family and residential mixed-use development
- Compliance with state law
- Ministerial or by-right approval process
- Better outcomes:
  - Excellence in design
  - Sensitive site planning
  - Neighborhood compatibility
  - Predictable and high-quality design



# Where will they apply?

Zone	# Parcels	Acres
 Multiple-Family (R3-1) - 38 du/ac	66	16.1
 Multiple-Family (R3-1.8) - 24.2 du/ac	218	23.5
 Multiple-Family (R3-3) - 14.5 du/ac	15	2.8
 Multiple-Family (R3-4.5) - 9.7 du/ac	48	11.5
 Multiple-Family (R3-5) - 8.7 du/ac	100	11.6
 Commercial Neighborhood (CN)	88	35.0
 Commercial Thoroughfare (CT)	44	44.8
 Commercial Downtown (CD)	40	12.7
 Commercial Downtown/ Multiple-Family (CD/R3)	65	12.3
 Commercial Retail Sales (CRS)	105	19.0
 Commercial Retail Sales/Office (CRS/OAD)	7	1.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>796</b>	<b>190.3</b>

= 5.7% of developable area of Los Altos



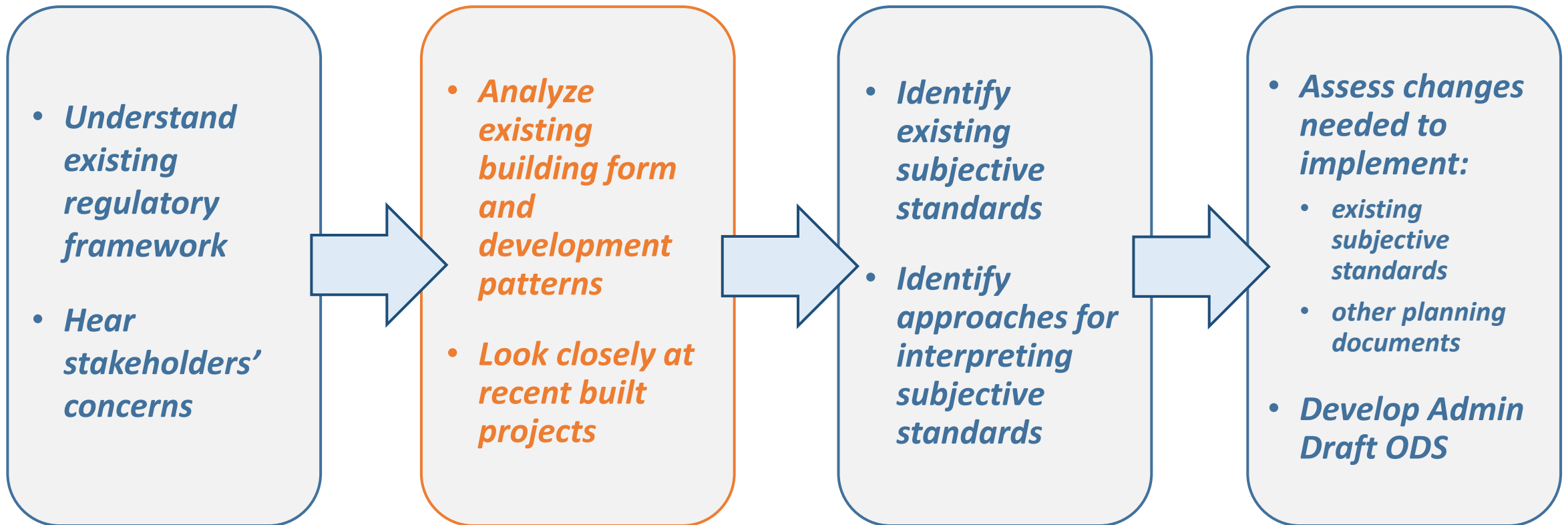
# Stakeholder Interviews – What We Heard

- Diagrams, tables, cross-references, “plain English”
- Standards that all work together
- Address transitions
- Protect character, charm and livability, but no consensus on “Village Character”
- Clarity
  - *Open space*: Define what counts
  - *Height encroachments*: Clarify limits and reasons for limits
  - *Ground floor elevation*: Must work with the street frontage
  - *Parking*: Tension between parking, height, and visibility from the right-of-way. Revisit parking standards/programs.
- Approval
  - Objectivity, predictability, clarity
  - Need a clear path to approval
  - Exceptions/concessions should not come at the expense of General Plan goals





# Process and Direction

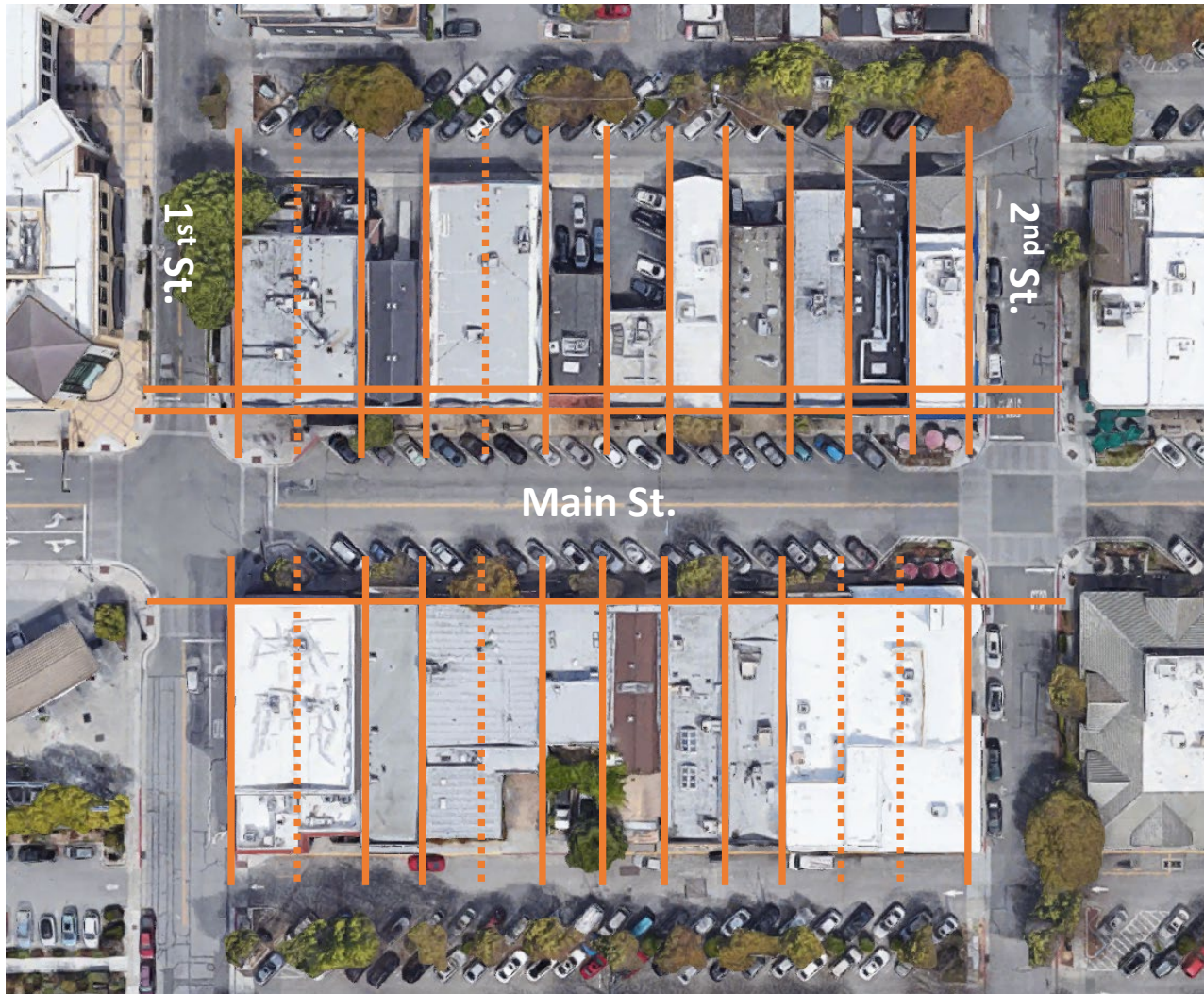


# “You Can’t Regulate What You Can’t Identify”

When we understand the design elements that **make Downtown unique**, we can create **regulations that require those design elements** in development projects.

That will ensure that new development **reproduces the desired built form and character of Downtown.**

# Downtown: Building Placement and Width



## Pattern (CRS)

- Width of downtown buildings are multiples of 25’.
- 25’ and 50’ widths are most common.
- Front setback range is narrow

## Objective Zoning Tools

- Building massing articulation/structural bays
- Percent of building within “Façade zone”

# Downtown: Parking Not Visible from Street



## Pattern (CRS, CD, CD/R3)

- Off-street parking is located behind buildings, underground or in semi-underground garages not visible from the street

## Objective Zoning Tools

- Ground finished floor elevation
- Screening
- Parking design/access
- Curb cut frequency and location

# Downtown: "Shopfront" Building Frontages



## Pattern

- Ground level façades have high degree of transparency
- Facades often incorporate an awning or transom feature

## Objective Zoning Tools

- Frontage standards
- Ground level transparency
- Encroachment standards

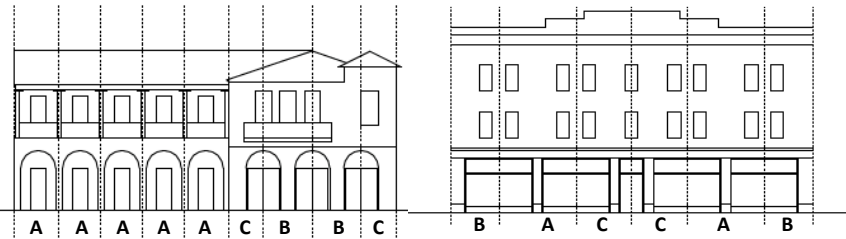
# Downtown: Façade Composition



100 1<sup>st</sup> St.



270 3<sup>rd</sup> St.



Example Façade Compositions

## Characteristic

- Proper placement of façade elements help to clarify and organize the streetscape

## Objective Zoning Tools

- Building massing articulation
- Window design
- Blank walls
- Ground floor pedestrian-scaled elements
- Roofline/roof design



# Downtown: Use and Combination of Materials

Brick, stucco, vertical siding, roof tile



Main St. & 1st St.

Stone, stucco, horizontal siding.



86 3rd St.

Stucco, heavy timber, shingles



State St. & 2nd St.

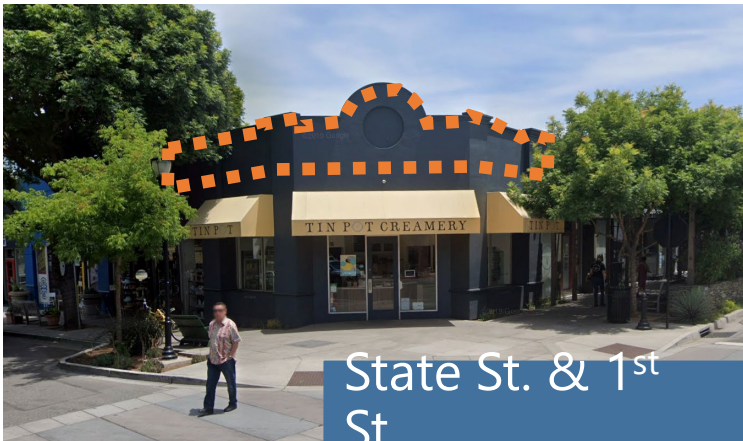
## Characteristic

- Based on their properties, various materials have their own appropriate uses in architecture
- Natural and local materials help to communicate the character of a place
- Materials can evoke a particular architectural style
- Materials can create aesthetic diversity

## Objective Zoning Tools

- Material standards

# Downtown: Building “Top” Design



## Pattern

- Parapets can help to reduce the perceived scale of a building by providing visual interest along the roofline
- Mansard roofs can provide a scale and design that is more residential in nature
- Parapets can define the “building top”

## Objective Zoning Tools

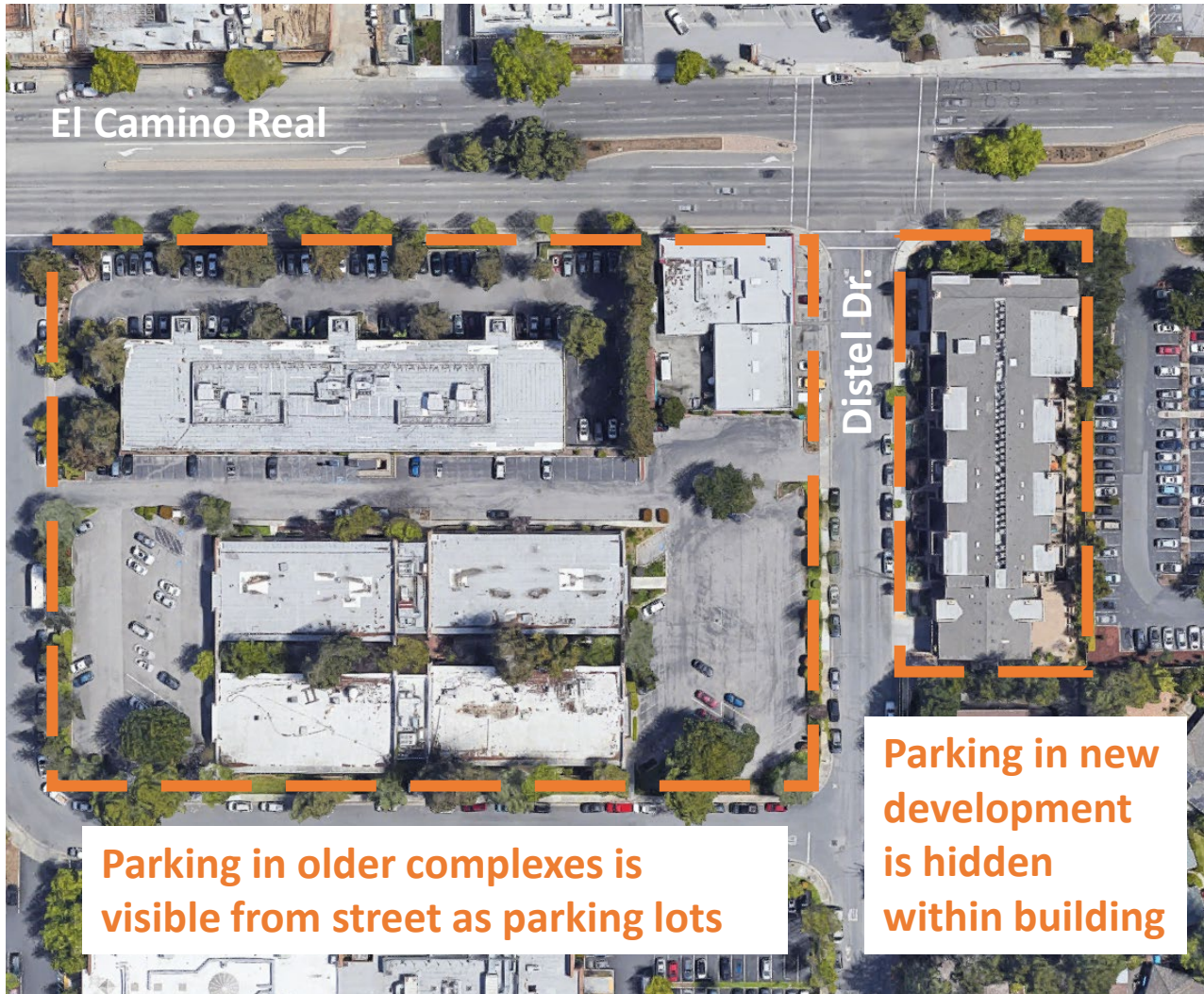
- Tripartite design standards
- Parapet design standards
- ½ story standards



# Downtown: Findings

- Design features that reduce perceived and actual size of buildings
- Continuity of “street wall”
- Wide range of features and proportions lend the ground floor a “human-scale”
- Rhythm to street-facing volumes
- Range of elements that make the design “come together”

# El Camino Real: Varied Parking Location



## Characteristic

- The location and visibility of off-street parking is highly variable between older and newer buildings

## Objective Zoning Tools

- Parking location/access

# El Camino Real: Front Setback

Distel Dr. + El Camino Real



Coronado Apartments



Distel Cir. + El Camino Real

## Characteristic

- Buildings are set back from the sidewalk, but the character of the setback is inconsistent—with some used as landscape and others for parking

## Objective Zoning Tools

- Frontage standards
- Height step-backs

# El Camino Real: Variety of Frontage Conditions



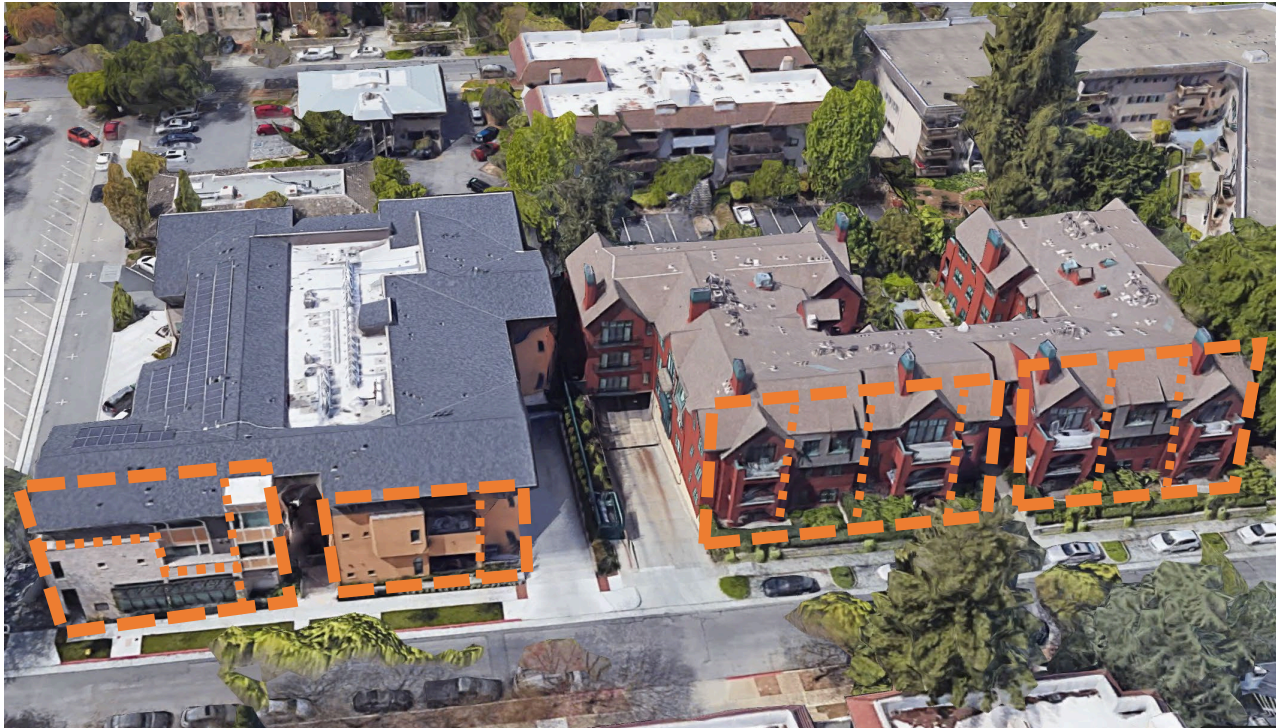
## Characteristic

- A mix of ground-level uses and frontage types creates an eclectic public realm, with little consistency between parcels

## Objective Zoning Tools

- Frontage standards
- Ground level height (floor and ceiling)

# El Camino Real: Building Width and Articulation



## Characteristic

- A maximum width for building volumes or divisions of larger façades can keep them from overwhelming the streetscape

## Objective Zoning Tools

- Building massing/articulation
- Design standards for main body + wings
- Façade articulation standards

# El Camino Real: Findings

- Range of front setback conditions/design
- Parking and on-site circulation: impact on the front and rear of the property
- Identifying a more consistent “pedestrian scale”
- Architecture: desired styles, integrity.

# Process and Direction

- *Hear stakeholders' concerns*
- *Understand impacts and on-the-ground implications of State Density Bonus Law*

- *Analyze existing building form and development patterns*
- *Look closely at recent built projects*

- *Identify existing subjective standards*
- *Identify approaches for interpreting subjective standards*

- *Assess changes needed to implement:*
  - *existing subjective standards*
  - *other planning documents*
- *Develop Admin Draft ODS*

# Annotated Framework

**Analyzes the Code's subjective standards in light of community feedback and the team's observations about Los Altos form and character.**

LWC

City of Los Altos  
Objective Design Standards

Annotated Framework

August 2020  
**Draft**

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# Identifies Sections with Subjective Standards

- Design controls for CN and CT
- Design Controls for CD, CRS, CD/R3, and CRS/OAD
- Vision Statement and Specific Purposes for CRS
- Design Review Findings for R3-4.5
- Design Review Findings for R3-1, R3-1.8, R3-3, R3-5, CN, CT, CD, CD/R3, CRS, and CRS/OD

# Identifies Subjective Language

- **Design controls for CN and CT** →
- Design Controls for CD, CRS, CD/R3, and CRS/OAD
- Vision Statement and Specific Purposes for CRS
- Design Review Findings for R3-4.5
- Design Review Findings for R3-1, R3-1.8, R3-3, R3-5, CN, CT, CD, CD/R3, CRS, and CRS/OD

14.40.150 - Design control (CN).

As provided in Chapter 14.78 of this title and as follows:

- A. No structure shall be built or altered including exterior changes in color, materials, and signage except upon approval of the city planner for minor changes and architectural and site approval to be obtained as prescribed in Chapter 14.78 of this title for major changes.
- B. **Scale.** When the location of this district is to a larger region, a mixture of scales may be appropriate with some elements scaled for appreciation from the street and moving automobile and others for appreciation by pedestrians.
- C. The proportions of building elements, especially those at ground level, should be kept close to human scale by using recesses, courtyards, entries, or outdoor spaces.
- D. The proportions of building elements at a commercial/residential interface shall be designed to protect residential privacy (including but not limited to window placement), daylight, and environmental quality.
- E. Rooftop mechanical equipment must be within the height limit and screened architecturally from public view.
- F. **Firewalls.** Consideration should be given to the aesthetic treatment of firewalls including increased side yard setback, contouring the firewall to the building, use of noncombustible roofing materials, and creative use of architectural features in the firewall.

# Example: Scale

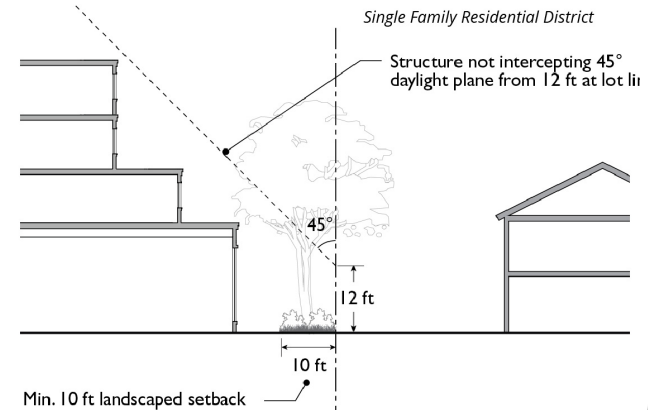
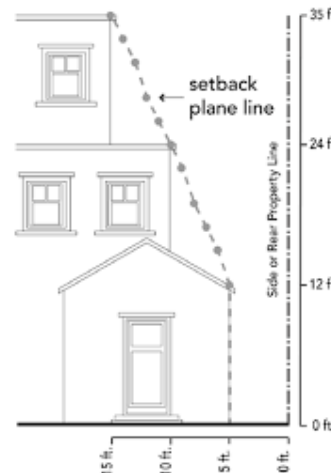
## Design Control standard (CN, CT):

**Scale.** Because of the relationship of this district to a larger region, a mixture of scales may be appropriate with some elements scaled for appreciation from the street and moving automobile and others for appreciation by pedestrians.

## Potential Objective Design Standard:

### Upper-story front step-backs.

- The building envelope shall be limited by an X-degree inclined plane that begins 14 feet above the front setback line.
- All portions of the building above the second story must be set back a minimum of X feet from the front facade.



# Example: Frontage

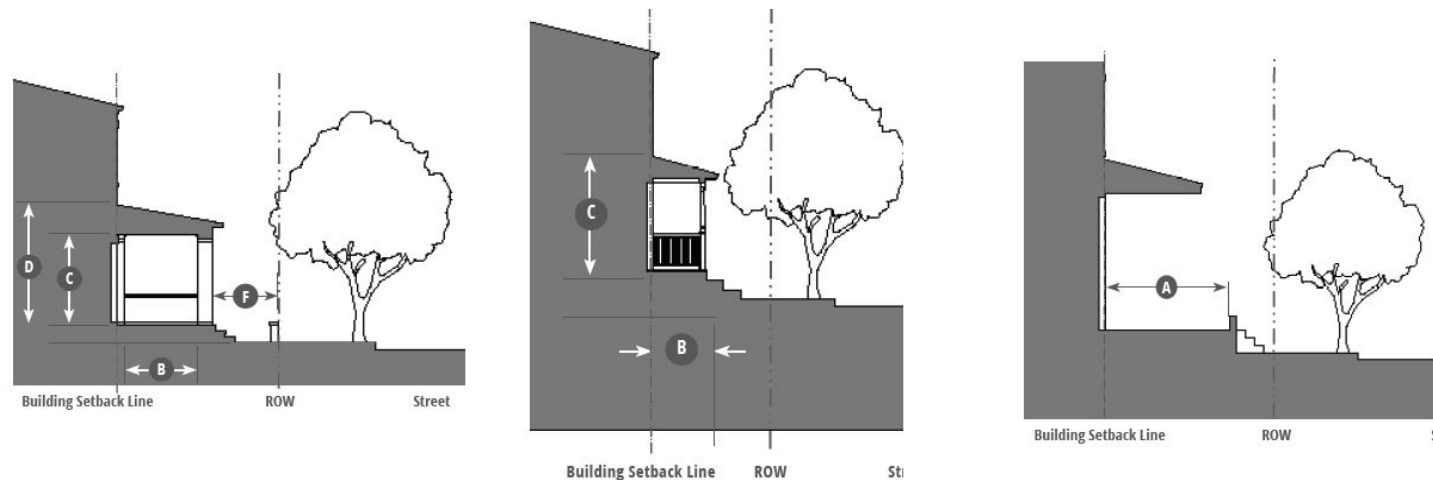
## Design Control standard (CN, CT):

The proportions of building elements, especially those at ground level, should be kept close to human scale by using recesses, courtyards, entries, or outdoor spaces.

## Potential Objective Design Standard:

### Pedestrian-scaled building entrances.

- Accent elements a maximum of 12 feet in height shall be used to demarcate building frontages, building entrances, and common open space areas.
- A minimum X element(s) from the following list must be incorporated into ground floor building design: awning, canopy, overhang, trellises, arches, columns, etc.



# Example: Frontage

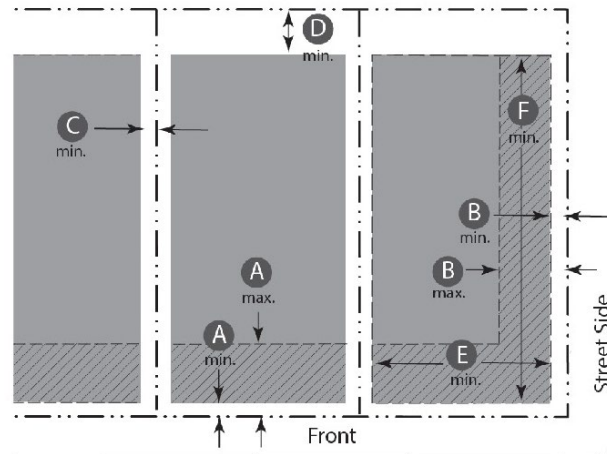
## Vision Statement & Specific Purposes:

D. Create continuous building frontage without major interruption by disallowing driveways and parking lots on shopping street frontages;

## Potential Objective Design Standard:

▶ **Percent of building within a façade zone.**

Establishing a "façade zone" can ensure or protect a continuous street wall along a street frontage. Standards may be written to apply to a minimum percentage of the lot frontage or building frontage, and may be shown in plan, as illustrated in the following diagram:



### KEY

- Property Line
- Building Setback Line
- ▨ Façade Zone
- Buildable Area

### Building within Façade Zone

Front	min. 70% lot buildable width (excludes required setbacks)	<b>E</b>
Street Side	min. 50% buildable lot depth (excludes required setbacks)	<b>F</b>



# Example: Privacy/Line of Sight

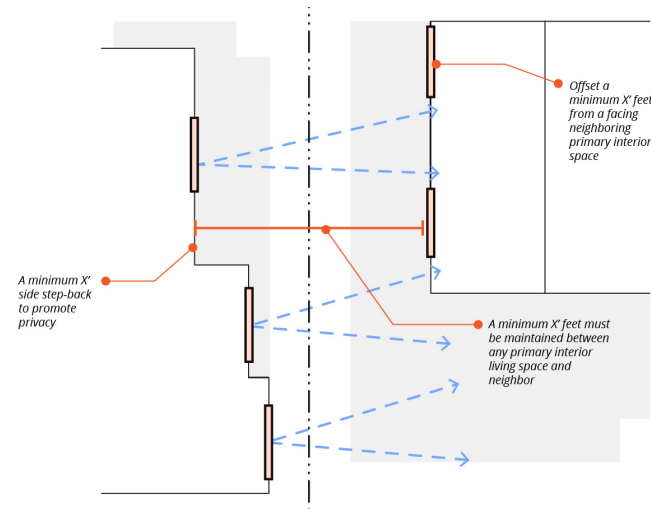
## Design Control standard (CN, CT):

The proportions of building elements at a commercial/residential interface shall be designed to protect residential privacy (including but not limited to window placement), daylight, and environmental quality.

## Potential Objective Design Standard:

### Privacy/Line of Sight.

- Primary interior living spaces (bedroom and living areas) must be offset a minimum X feet from a facing neighboring primary interior space on the same story.
- A minimum X feet must be maintained between any primary interior living space (bedroom and living area) and an existing neighboring primary living space on the same story.



# Example: Building Massing Articulation

## Design Control standards for CD, CD/R3, CRS, and CRS/OAD:

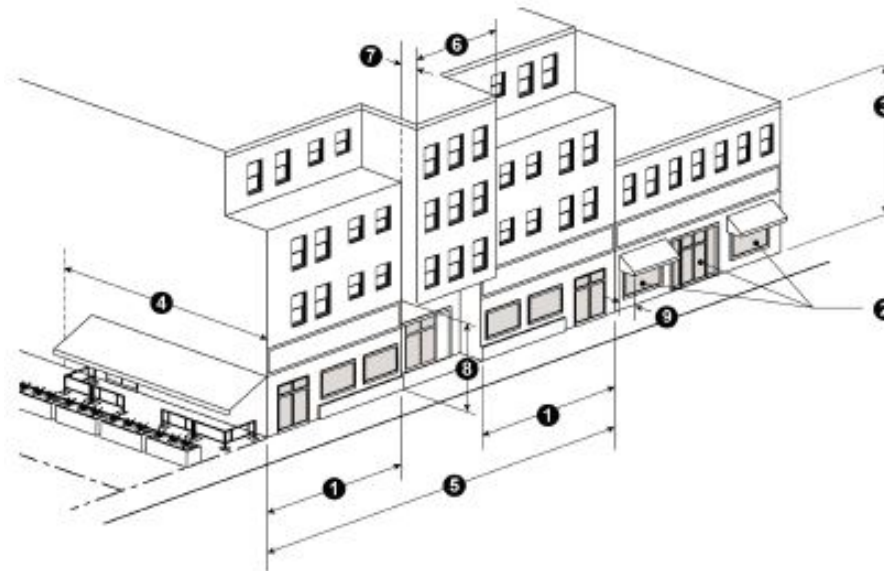
Every building over seventy-five (75) feet wide should have its perceived height and bulk reduced by dividing the building mass into **smaller-scale components** by:

- A change of plane;
- A projection or recess;
- Varying cornice or roof lines;
- Other similar means.

## Potential Objective Design Standard:

### Building massing articulation.

Standards can limit the size of volumes adjacent to lower-intensity uses, prevent monolithic structures, and increase visual interest. Building massing standards may complement or take the place of upper story step-back standards..



# Example: Building Massing Articulation

## Design Control standards for CD, CD/R3, CRS, and CRS/OAD:

As a general principle, building surfaces should be relieved with a change of wall plane that provides strong shadow and visual interest.



## Potential Objective Design Standard: Façade relief/ projections.

- Vertical architectural elements (pilasters, columns, piers, other structural elements) must extend a min. X feet in height and project a min. of X inches from the building face.

Table 3.2.020.A Massing and Façade Articulation Standards Overview

Requirement	Building length along adjacent sidewalk <sup>1</sup>			
	< 75'	75' to 100'	>100'	>150'
3.2.030 (Tripartite Façade Articulation)	No	Yes	Yes	No
3.2.040 (Massing and Composition)	No	No	Yes	Yes
3.2.050 (Corner Elements)	No	No	No	Yes
3.2.060 (Windows and Openings)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
3.2.070 (Historic Resource Adjacency Standards)	Required where adjacent to identified historic resource			

<sup>1</sup> As measured along street.



# Options for Format/Integration into Code

- **Option A: Minimal changes.** Design control section within each relevant base zone chapter is updated and expanded. Applicable Design Review findings incorporated as appropriate.
  - *Pros:* Organization stays the same.
  - *Cons:* Some repetition of standards across chapters; bulkier code.
- **Option B: A Single New Design Control chapter.** All design control sections removed and replaced with a single Design Control chapter. Applicable Design Review findings incorporated as appropriate.
  - *Pros:* Consolidates similar sections.
  - *Cons:* May required subheadings to differences between zones
- **Other?**

# Additional Considerations

- **Objective Standards**
  - Setbacks
  - Encroachments
  - Open space
  - Parking
- **Public Benefits**
  - Define menu
  - Define requirements for each potential benefit
- **State Density Bonus Law**

# State Density Bonus Law in Los Altos

- **City Attorney to add text/slides as needed**



# DB in Zones with No Specified Density Limit

The Los Altos Code specifies no maximum residential density limit for zones CN, CD, CD/R3, CRS, and CRS/OAD.

This is not uncommon. In dense, mixed-use, and downtown areas, development is often regulated through controls on physical form (setback, height, architectural standards, etc.). However, this poses a challenge when to interpreting and implementing the State Density Bonus Law.

Three approaches include:

- 1. Density Bonuses Implicitly Defined**
- 2. Expand Density Bonus to Development Standards**
- 3. Density Bonuses through Concessions and Waivers**

# Concessions/Waivers – CD/R3 Zone

376 1<sup>st</sup> Street



- Height encroachment
- Building height
- Front setback

385-389 1<sup>st</sup> Street



- Height encroachment
- Building height

444-450 1<sup>st</sup> Street



- Building height

# Concessions/Waivers – CT Zone

4880 El Camino Real



- Building height

4898 El Camino Real (21 units)



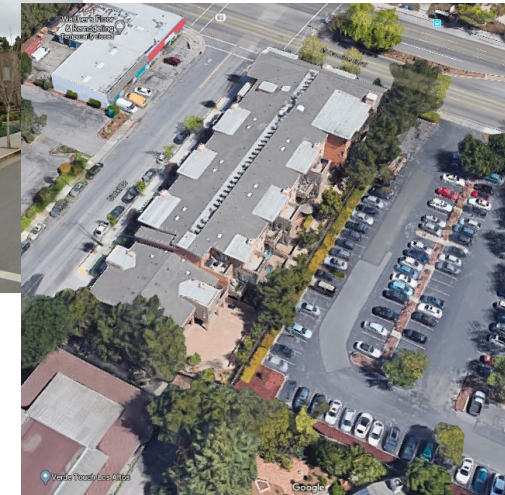
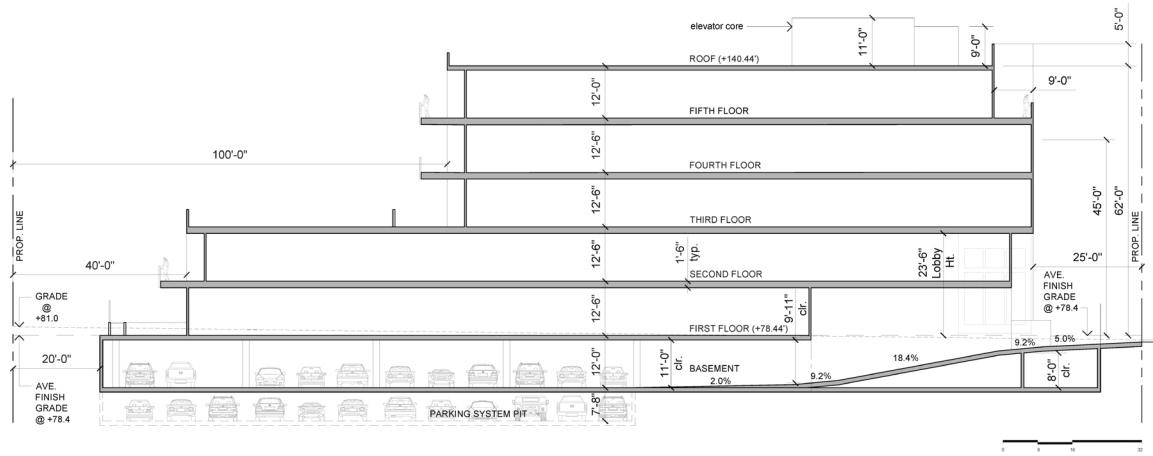
- Height encroachment
- Building height
- Front setback

5150 El Camino Real



- Building height
- Parking stall width
- Front yard landscaping

# Comparison: 4880 and 5100 El Camino Real



## 4880 El Camino Real

- Density: 47 du/ac
  - 100% BMR
- Height: 62 ft (45 ft max)
- Front Yard: 25 ft
- Rear Yard: 20 ft (0 min)
- Side Yard: 7 ft interior

## 5100 El Camino Real

- Density: 36 du/ac
  - 8% BMR
- Height: 35 ft (45 ft max)
- Front Yard: 25 ft
- Rear Yard: 10 ft (0 ft min)
- Side Yard: 12 street, 9 interior

# Process and Direction

- *Hear stakeholders' concerns*
- *Understand impacts and on-the-ground implications of State Density Bonus Law*

- *Analyze existing building form and development patterns*
- *Look closely at recent built projects*

- *Identify existing subjective standards*
- *Identify approaches for interpreting subjective standards*

- *Assess changes needed to implement:*
  - *existing subjective standards*
  - *other planning documents*
- *Develop Admin Draft ODS*



# Discussion Questions

1. Overall direction of planning effort
2. Specific patterns/elements of built form that will inform standards: massing, frontages, details, etc.
3. Preferred document organization
4. Images/graphics: format, style
5. Next meeting





**Thank you!**

