ORDINANCE NO. 2085

AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY OF SANTA CLARA, CALIFORNIA, TO ESTABLISH CITYWIDE OBJECTIVE STANDARDS FOR MULTI-FAMILY AND MIXED-USE RESIDENTIAL PROJECTS BY ADDING A NEW CHAPTER 18.27 TO TITLE 18 ("ZONING") OF "THE CODE OF THE CITY OF SANTA CLARA, CALIFORNIA"

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY OF SANTA CLARA AS FOLLOWS:

WHEREAS, Senate Bill 35 (2017) allows eligible multifamily and residential mixed-use development proposals meeting certain affordability requirements to utilize a streamlined ministerial approval process, provided that the projects comply with "objective zoning standards, objective subdivision standards, and objective design review standards" as provided in California Government Code Sections 65913.4;

WHEREAS, the Housing Accountability Act, Government Code Section 65589.5, limits a public agency's authority to disapprove certain housing development project that comply with applicable, objective general plan and zoning standards and criteria in effect as of the application completeness date;

WHEREAS, Senate Bill 330 (2019), also known as the "Housing Crisis Act," limits cities' authority to enact subjective design standards, and provides that eligible residential projects are only subject to applicable, objective general plan and zoning standards in effect at the time an application is deemed complete;

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WHEREAS, "objective zoning standards, objective subdivision standards, and objective design review standards" is defined as: "standards that involve no personal or subjective judgment by a public official and are uniformly verifiable by reference to an external and uniform benchmark or criterion available and knowable by both the development applicant or proponent and the public official before submittal" under Government Code Section 65913.14(a)(5);

WHEREAS, the City now intends to adopt objective standards that would apply to multifamily and residential mixed-use projects subject to SB 35, SB 330, the Housing Accountability Act, or any other applicable state law; and

WHEREAS, as an implementing action of the 2010 – 2035 General Plan, the proposed city-wide objective standards for multi-family and mixed-use residential projects ordinance falls within the scope of the January 31, 2023 Addendum to the 2010 – 2035 General Plan EIR.

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NOW THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER ORDAINED BY THE CITY OF SANTA CLARA AS FOLLOWS:

SECTION 1: That the Table of Contents of Article 2, "Zones, Allowable Uses, and Development Standards", of Title 18, "Zoning", of "The Code of the City of Santa Clara, California" ("SCCC") is hereby amended to read as follows:

Article 2 – Zones, Allowable Uses, and Development Standards

July 2025

Title 18 – Zoning Code

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 18.10 – Residential Zones (R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, UC, UV, HD Flex)2-Error! Bookmark not defined.

18.10.010 – Purposes of Residential Zones ---------- 2-**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
18.10.020 – Land Uses and Permit Requirements ---------- 2-**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
18.10.030 – Residential Development Standards ---------- 2-**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
18.10.040 – Other Applicable Regulations ---------- 2-**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 18.12 – Commercial Zones (C-C, C-N, C-R)------2-Error! Bookmark not defined.

18.12.010 – Purpose of Commercial Zones ---------- 2-**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
18.12.020 – Commercial Land Uses and Permit Requirements ---------- 2-**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
18.12.030 – Commercial Development Standards ---------- 2-**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
18.12.040 – Other Applicable Regulations ---------- 2-**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 18.14 – Mixed Use Zones (MU-NC, MU-CC, MU-RC, MU-MD, MU-VHD)2-Error! Bookmark not defined.

18.14.010 – Purpose of Mixed Use Zones ---------- 2-**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
18.14.020 – Mixed Use Land Uses and Permit Requirements ---------- 2-**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
18.14.030 – Mixed Use Development Standards ---------- 2-**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
18.14.040 – Other Applicable Regulations ---------- 2-**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 18.16 – Office and Industrial Zones (LO-RD, HO-RD, LI, HI)2-Error! Bookmark not defined.

18.16.010 – Purpose of Office and Industrial Zones ---------- 2-**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
18.16.020 – Office and Industrial Land Uses and Permit Requirements - 2-**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
18.16.030 – Office and Industrial Development Standards ---------- 2-**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
18.16.040 – Other Applicable Regulations ---------- 2-**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 18.18 – Special Purpose Zones (OS, PQP) ------2-Error! Bookmark not defined.

18.18.010 – Purpose of Special Purpose Zones ---------- 2-**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
18.18.020 – Special Purpose Land Uses and Permit Requirements ------ 2-**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
18.18.030 – Special Purpose Development Standards ---------- 2-**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
18.18.040 – Other Applicable Regulations ---------- 2-**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 18.20 – Planned Development Zone (PD) -------- 2-Error! Bookmark not defined.
18.20.010 – Purpose of Planned Development Zones ---------- 2-**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
18.20.020 – Planned Development Zone Land Uses and Permit Requirements2-**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
18.20.030 – Planned Development Zone Standards ---------- 2-**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 18.22 – Lawrence Station Area Plan Zoning District (LSAP)2-Error! Bookmark not defined.
18.22.010 – Application ---------- 2-**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
18.22.020 – Intent ---------- 2-**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
18.22.030 – Allowable Uses ---------- 2-**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
18.22.040 – Development Standards---------- 2-**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
18.22.050 – Parking Requirements ---------- 2-**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
18.22.060 – Additional Development Standards---------- 2-**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 18.24 – Two-Unit Dwelling Residential Development and Urban Lot Splits ----------2 -Error! Bookmark not defined.
18.24.010 – Purpose ---------- 2-**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
18.24.020 – Applicability---------- 2-**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
18.24.030 – Construction of multiple units in single-family zones ---------- 2-**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
18.24.040 – Development Standards applicable to all lots with two units 2-**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
18.24.050 – Development Standards within R-1 building envelope-------- 2-**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter 18.26 – Downtown Form-Based Code ---------- 2-Error! Bookmark not defined.

"Chapter 18.27 – Objective Design Standards for City-wide Multi-Family and Residential Mixed-Use Projects

---------- 2-Error! Bookmark not defined.**1**
18.27.010 – Introduction ---------- 2-71
18.27.020 – Site Design ---------- 2-74
18.27.030 – Building Design ---------- 2-76
18.27.040 – Pedestrian Level Design ---------- 2-83"

SECTION 2: That a new Chapter 18.27, “Objective Design Standards for City-wide Multi-Family and Residential Mixed-Use Projects”, is added to Article 2, “Zones, Allowable Uses, and Development Standards”, of Title 18, “Zoning”, of the SCCC and will read as shown on Attachment 1 (“Proposed Zoning Code Amendment”).

SECTION 3: Savings clause. The changes provided for in this ordinance shall not affect any offense or act committed or done or any penalty or forfeiture incurred, or any right established or accruing before the effective date of this ordinance; nor shall it affect any prosecution, suit or proceeding pending or any judgment rendered prior to the effective

date of this ordinance. All fee schedules shall remain in force until superseded by the fee schedules adopted by the City Council.

Section 4: Effective date: This ordinance shall take effect thirty (30) days after its final adoption; however, prior to its final adoption it shall be published in accordance with the requirements of Section 808 and 812 of "The Charter of the City of Santa Clara, California."

PASSED FOR THE PURPOSE OF PUBLICATION this 24th day of February, 2026, by the following vote:

AYES:	COUNCILORS:	Chahal, Cox, Gonzalez, Jain, and Park, and Mayor Gillmor
NOES:	COUNCILORS:	None
ABSENT:	COUNCILORS:	Hardy
ABSTAINED:	COUNCILORS:	None

ATTEST:

NORA PIMENTEL, MMC
ASSISTANT CITY CLERK
CITY OF SANTA CLARA

Attachments incorporated by reference:
1. Proposed Zoning Code Amendment

Chapter 18.27 – Objective Design Standards for City-wide Multi-Family and Residential Mixed-Use Projects

Sections:

18.27.010 – Introduction
18.27.020 – Site Design
18.27.030 – Building Design
18.27.040 – Pedestrian Level Design

18.27.010 – Introduction

A. Intent.

1. The Objective Design Standards identify specific design elements that are required for all multi-family residential and residential mixed-use projects. The intent of the Objective Design Standards is to allow flexibility and creativity in design while providing a clear set of standards and expectations for applicable projects. The Objective Design Standards in this document are a compilation of adopted Objective Design Standards from the City's Specific Plans and Focus Areas.

2. Residential multi-family and mixed-use development in the City of Santa Clara is regulated by the General Plan, Zoning Ordinance, Specific Plans, and other applicable regulatory documents. Compliance with these regulations is supported by a design review process established in Santa Clara City Code (SCCC) Chapter 18.120.

3. The City's Objective Design Standards are intended to be consistent with Government Code Section 65913.4 and 66300(a)(7) as they do not "involve personal or subjective judgment by a public official" and they "are uniformly verifiable by reference to an external and uniform benchmark or criterion".

4. The Objective Design Standards will do the following:

a. Provide clear, objective, and measurable standards for multi-family and residential mixed-use projects throughout the city;

b. Streamline project review of housing, in accordance with State law;

c. Ensure buildings are appropriate to their surroundings and environment;

d. Promote thoughtful, context-sensitive site design;

e. Maintain and enhance Santa Clara's built environment through quality architectural design; and

f. Promote a pedestrian scale urban environment that enriches the quality of life of its citizens.

B. Applicability.

1. The Objective Design Standards are applicable to new multi-family development and residential mixed-use development, and additions to existing multi-family or residential mixed-use development.

2. For modifications to existing residential mixed-use developments where no additional square footage is proposed, these standards and guidelines shall only apply to the use being modified (e.g., a ground floor retail storefront remodel will not trigger any architectural changes to residential units).

3. These standards are additive to the zoning development standards specified in SCCC Chapter 18.10 (Residential Zones) and SCCC Chapter 18.14 (Mixed-Use Zones). Development pursuant to any California state law that references objective design standards, including but not limited to Government Code Section 65589.5 (Housing Accountability Act) and Section 65913.4 must abide by these standards.

4. These objective design standards are intended to supplement, and not repeal, any existing objective standards applicable to a precise plan or specific plan area. In the event of any conflict between standards, the precise/specific plan standards shall control.

5. The specific applicability of these objective design standards will be determined by the multi-family or residential mixed-use product type (such as townhouses, podium/wrap-style buildings) that is proposed. The following table breaks down the applicability of the standards.

Table 2-19
Objective Design Standards Applicability

Design Standard	Product Type	
	Townhouse	Podium/Wrap-Style
Site Design		
Site Access (Parking)	--	•
Site Access (Loading Zone)	--	•
Site Access (Driveways)	--	•
Site Organization (Public Realm Extension)	•	•
Site Access (Corner Building Orientation)	--	•
Building Design		
Massing (Building Length)	--	•
Massing (Massing Increment Dimensional Standards).	•	•
Massing (Massing Increment Design)	•	•
Massing (Massing Increments as Distinct Buildings)	--	•
Massing (Distinct Buildings)	--	•
Façade Design (Facade Composition)	--	•
Façade Design (Base, Middle and Top)	•	•
Façade Design (Façade Fenestration)	•	•
Façade Design (Parking Structure Façade Standards)	--	•
Access & Entrance Design (Building Orientation)	•	•
Access & Entrance Design (Primary Entrances)	•	•
Access & Entrance Design (Frequency of Entries)	--	•
Access & Entrance Design (Vehicular Access)	--	•

Design Standard	Product Type	
	Townhouse	Podium/Wrap-Style
Materials (Primary Materials)	•	•
Pedestrian Level Design		
Ground Floor Treatment - Retail (Facade Transparency and Ground Floor Retail)	--	•
Ground Floor Treatment - Residential(Ground Floor Access)	--	•
Ground Floor Treatment - Residential (Stoops)	--	•
Ground Floor Treatment – Live/Work (Entrances)	--	•
Open Space Design (Podium Style Buildings)	--	•
Open Space Design (Pathways)	--	•
Open Space Design (Special Paving)	•	•
Open Space Design (Public Art)	--	•
Open Space Design (Refuse & Recycling Receptacles)	•	•
Alley & Service Access (Lighting)	--	•
Alley & Service Access (Alleys)	•	•

C. Glossary. The definitions below are only applicable within these Objective Design Standards, and do not apply elsewhere in the Santa Clara City Code.

1. **Podium-Style Building.** A development project that involves a horizontal separation between an upper building and a lower, or podium, building. The lower building typically is constructed out of concrete; the upper building (some three to five stories tall) is made of wood.

2. **Primary Materials.** Any wall finish material or color that occupies more than 50 percent of the façade.

3. **Product Type**. The proposed multi-family or residential mixed-use building type, including townhouses, podium style buildings, and wrap-style buildings.

4. **Special Paving.** A distinct impermeable material such as natural stone paver, unit concrete pavers, brick, textured and colored concrete.

5. **Townhouses.** Attached side-by-side or stacked units that generally have front doors on one side and garages on the back side. Most townhouses have two-car garages, either two spaces wide or two tandem spaces (end to end). The front doors look onto a public street, private drive, or common open space, while the garages are usually lined up along an alley with garage doors on both sides. This development type typically includes tuck-under garage parking and additional surface parking spaces for visitors.

6. **Wrap-Style Building.** A development project that typically consists of a central above-grade concrete parking structure surrounded or “wrapped” by 4 – 7 stories of wood or steel construction.

D. Organization of Objective Design Standards. The Objective Design Standards are organized into three design components: site design, building design, and pedestrian level design.

1. **Site Design.** These standards apply to the site layout to foster multimodal connectivity and create cohesive neighborhoods.

2. **Building Design.** These standards apply to the architectural features such as massing, fenestration, and articulation.

3. **Pedestrian Level Design.** These standards apply to the ground floor frontage to promote pedestrian activity and human-scale development.

18.27.020 – Site Design

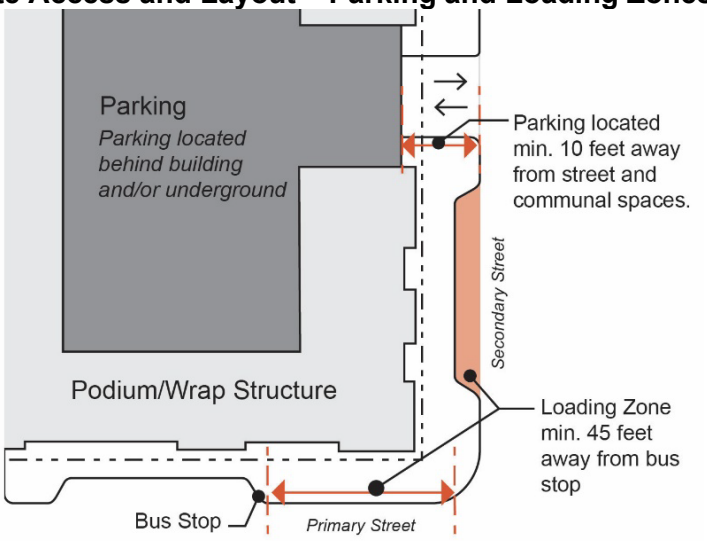
A. **Purpose and Goals.** This section provides site design standards to create more pedestrian-friendly functional communities through expanded pedestrian access, convenient multi-modal connections, and human-scaled block sizes.

B. **Site Access and Layout.**

1. **Parking.** Parking shall be located at least 10 feet away from streets and other public and communal spaces so that it is not visible. Parking shall be located behind buildings, underground, or at the interior of the block except where there is ground floor retail.

2. **Loading Zones.** Locate loading zones and rideshare pick-up / drop-off areas at least 45 feet away from bus stops.

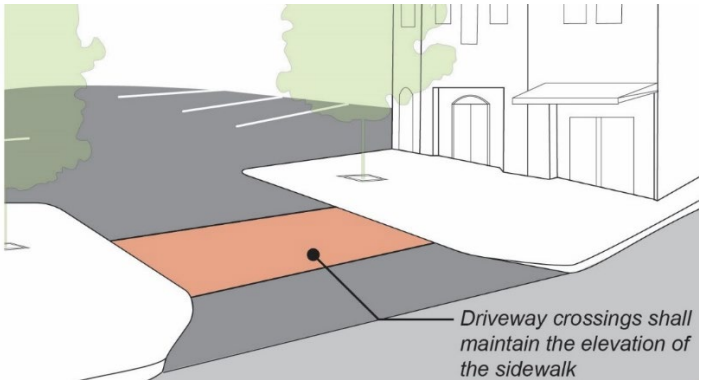
Figure 2-5
Site Access and Layout – Parking and Loading Zones



3. **Driveways and Access**. Driveway access shall be designed to clearly prioritize pedestrians, according to the following requirements:

a. Driveway crossings shall maintain the elevation of the sidewalk.

Figure 2-6
Site Access and Layout – Driveway Crossing



b. Driveway aprons shall not extend into the pedestrian clear walkway where cross slopes are limited to a maximum of two percent steeper driveway slopes are permitted in the furnishing and edge zones of the streets.

c. The dimensions and design of parking entry and exit points shall be coordinated with the requirements for stormwater treatment areas and street trees.

d. Greenways or open spaces shall have a maximum of one curb cut per frontage.

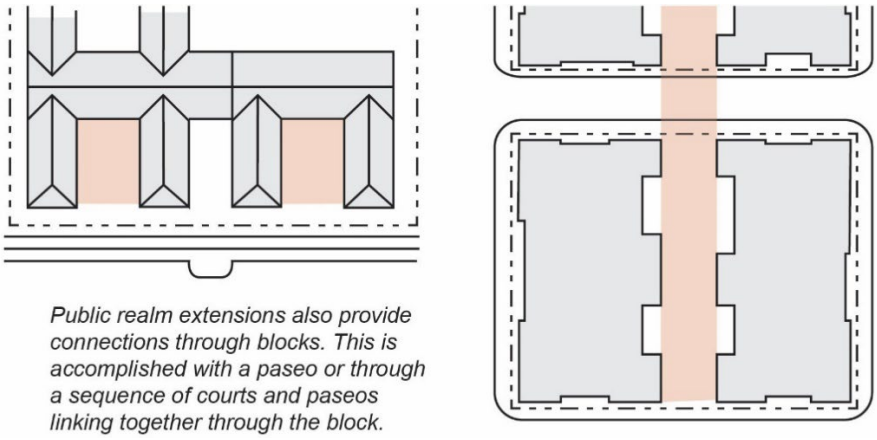
C. Site Organization, Planning, and Design.

1. **Public Realm Extensions.** While most buildings and ground-floor units will front onto and take their primary access from the adjacent Public Realm right-of-way, some buildings and ground-floor units may take this primary access from shared private spaces and connections that function as extensions of the public realm into a site. Such spaces comprise a "Semi-Public Realm" and serve as transitions between fully public and fully private spaces. Public Realm Extensions are subject to the following standards:

a. **Connectivity.** Public realm extensions also provide connections through blocks. This is accomplished with a paseo or through a sequence of courts and paseos linking together through the block. Where non-vehicular paths are used, full and unrestricted public access shall be provided throughout the route.

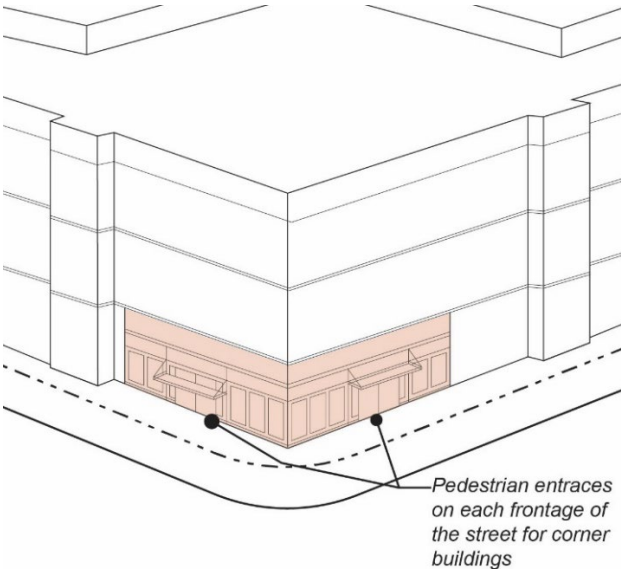
b. **Design.** No wall or fence enclosing a public realm extension may exceed three (3) feet in height.

Figure 2-7
Public Realm Extensions



2. **Corner Building Orientation**. Ensure that corner buildings actively address both streets by having pedestrian entrances on each frontage.

Figure 2-8
Corner Building Orientation



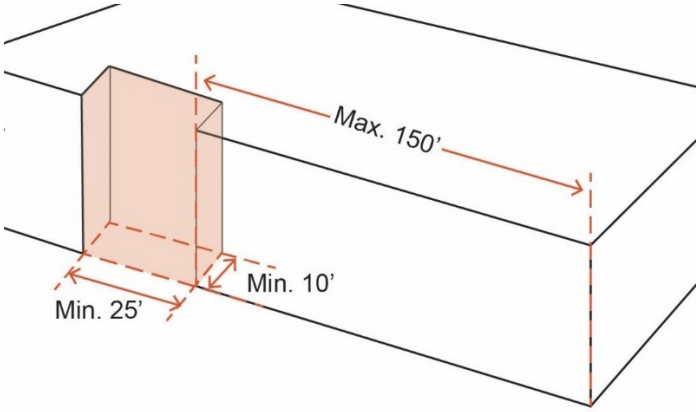
18.27.030 – Building Design

A. **Purpose and Goals.** This section provides architectural design standards to create functional and welcoming human-scaled buildings that blend well with their surroundings and support active streets and public spaces.

B. **Massing.**

1. **Building Length.** To create a more interesting and walkable public realm, individual buildings shall be no longer than 150 feet in length, except as follows. For those buildings that are longer than 150 feet in length, a building notch shall be provided on the podium starting at the street level and extending to the roof, for the entire height of the façade, to break up the massing. The building notch shall have a minimum dimension of 25 feet in width and 10 feet in depth.

Figure 2-9
Massing – Building Length



2. Massing Increment Dimensional Standards.

Table 2-20
Massing Increment Dimensional Standards

Objective Design Standard		Dimensions
A	Massing Increment (max.)	150 feet
B	Façade Height Difference between Massing Increments (min.)	10% of Lesser Façade Height
C	Building Base Height Difference between Massing Increments	3 feet

3. Distinct Buildings Using Massing Increment Design. A Podium- Style Building shall appear as distinct buildings when it occupies more than 200 linear feet of street frontage. At a minimum, it shall appear as three (3) distinct buildings using massing increment design:

a. There shall be differences in facade materials and color between Distinct Buildings.

b. There shall be differences in the type and composition of facade openings and architectural elements between distinct buildings.

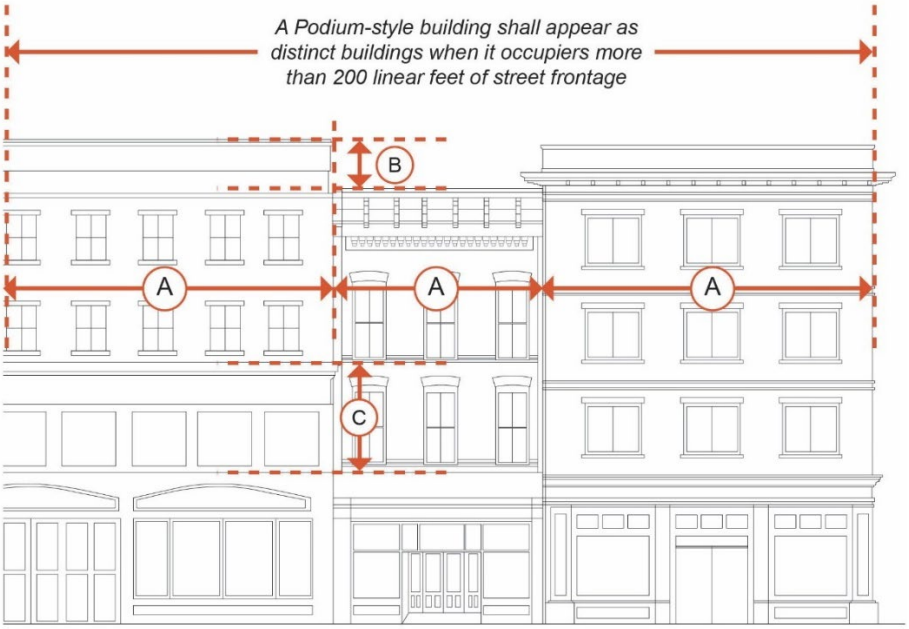
c. The building base heights of adjacent Distinct Buildings shall differ by an entire floor.

d. A Massing Increment Design shall only be repeated up to a maximum of three (3) times on the same project elevation.

(1) Repeated Massing Increments shall not be immediately adjacent to each other.

(2) Forecourts may provide separation between repeated Massing Increment Designs.

Figure 2-10
Massing Increment Design and Dimensional Standards



C. Façade Design.

1. Façade Composition. Facade elements shall be organized by a grid. Patterns of openings within each individual facade or Building Increment shall be organized into a grid per the standards below.

a. **Horizontal Alignment of Elements.** Rooflines, openings, and materials within each facade or facade module must align horizontally and be consistent in style across the entire width.

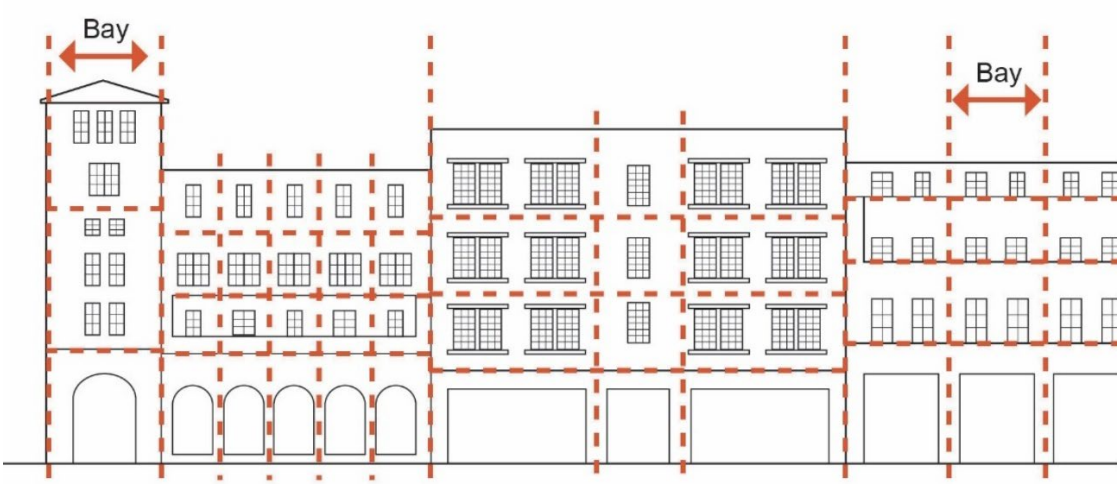
b. **Vertical Alignment of Openings into Bays.** The entirety of a building's façade or massing increments shall be clearly divided into vertical bays, subject to the following:

(1) Façade bays shall extend from the ground to the top of the façade and are defined by vertical structure (solid portions of wall, piers, etc.) which extends from the ground to the top of the façade.

(2) Each bay must be stacked within bays as illustrated in the figure below. Openings shall be arranged symmetrically within bays.

(3) Each bay shall be at minimum 15 feet wide.

Figure 2-11
Façade Composition



Facade elements shall be organized by a grid. Rooflines, openings, and other materials must align horizontally. Facade elements or massing increments shall be divided into vertical bays.

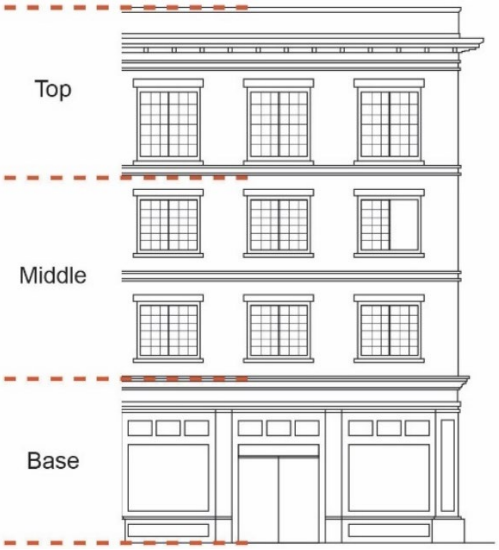
2. Base, Middle and Top. Buildings shall have a Base, Middle, and Top.

a. The Building's Base floor shall be differentiated from the rest of the façade whether through a change in material, change in type of opening, belt course, or a combination of these elements.

b. The Building's Middle floor(s) features shall be repetitive, with only up to three variations in façade elements between each floor

c. The Building's Top floor shall feature some form of capping element, such as a cornice, enhanced ornamentation, or a decorative parapet. In larger buildings, the upper most floor shall be visually incorporated into the building's top design.

Figure 2-12
Base, Middle, and Top



3. Facade Fenestration.

a. **Fenestration Area.** Façade shall be designed with fenestration – openings on the façade, including windows and doors – in the amounts listed in subparagraph b below.

b. Fenestration amount is calculated as a percentage of openings – including all windows and doors on the façade – to an area of façade. Each portion of the façade grid must have a fenestration percentage which falls within the range identified by Table 2-21.

Table 2-21
Fenestration Areas

Fenestration Areas	Dimensions
Base of Building	40% - 95%
Middle & Top of Building	25% - 70%

Figure 2-13
Fenestration Area

c. **General to Base, Middle, and Top.** Window jams shall be set in a minimum of four (4) inches from the main façade plane. Trim/ moldings on the façade do not count toward this recess depth.

d. **Specific to the Top.** Upper-floor wall openings shall be square or taller than they are wide. Individual vertically proportioned windows can be grouped side by side to form a horizontal ensemble of windows.

4. Parking Structure Façade Standards.

a. **Façade Design.** Parking Structure Facades shall be designed to fit into the urban context in one of the two following ways:

(1) The Façades meet the Massing Standard of this document.

(2) Facades designed as art walls, murals, or screens that incorporate decorative, graphic, or sculptural elements. Such facades are subject to recommendations from the Cultural Arts Commission and the Historical & Landmarks Commission, followed by Community Development Director or their designee approval, based on the following Required Finding:

a. Façade design is using durable, element-resistant, materials and techniques.

b. **Future-Proof Parking.** Parking Garages shall be designed to accommodate conversions to other uses and shall have at least one of the following features:

(1) Level floor, apart from necessary ramps.

(2) Floors with 10 feet minimum clear height from floor to ceiling.

(3) Cut-outs for planned shafts in decks and other structural members to accommodate future utilities (heating, cooling, venting, etc.).

D. Access and Entrance Design.

1. Building Orientation. Buildings shall be oriented to ensure the primary facades and entrance areas of all buildings face the street, open spaces, or other pedestrian-oriented circulation areas.

Figure 2-14
Building Orientation for Podium/Wrap-Style Buildings – Entrance Areas

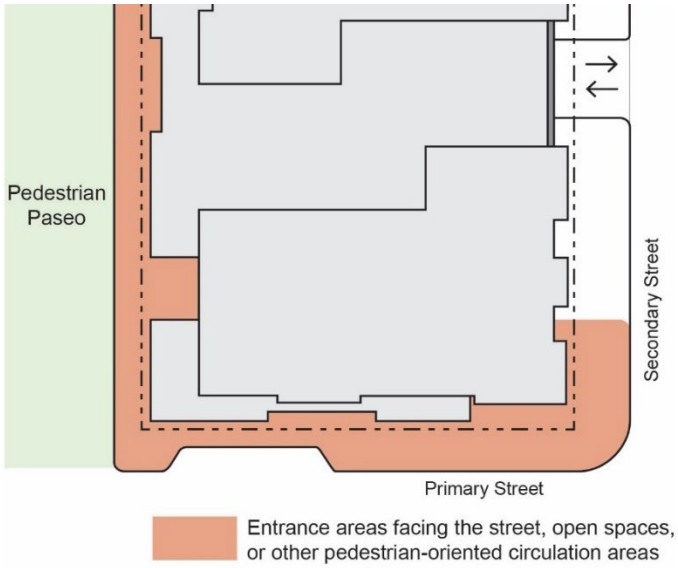
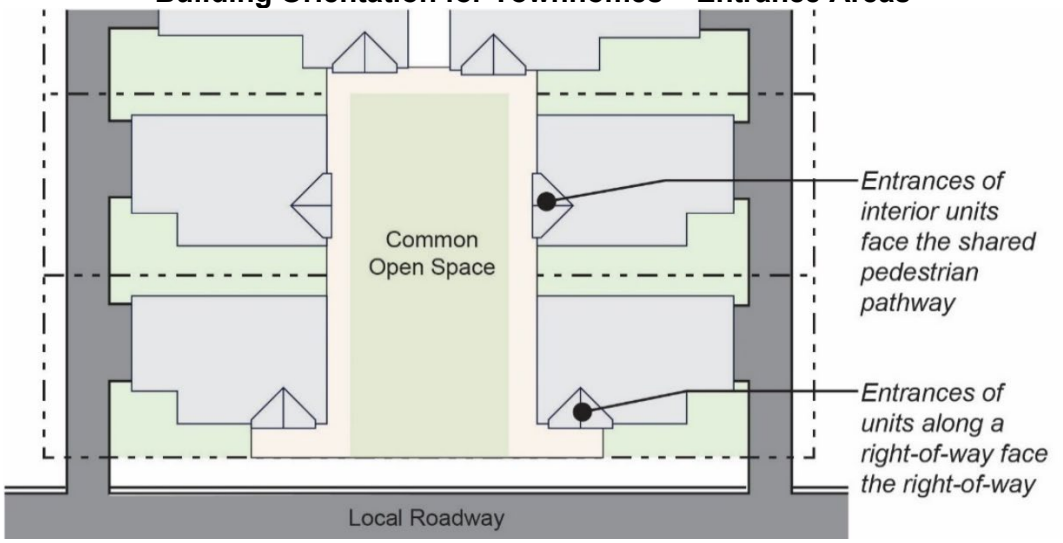


Figure 2-15
Building Orientation for Townhomes – Entrance Areas



2. **Primary Entrances**. Primary entrances shall feature at least two of the following:

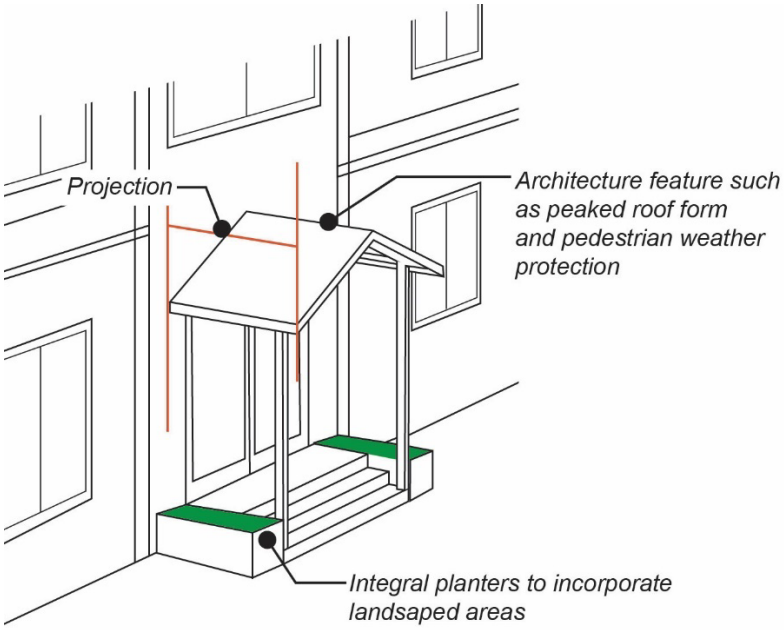
   a. Architectural features, such as a prominent tower feature or a peaked roof form, and/or a variation in building color/materials.

   b. Recess or projection.

   c. Pedestrian weather protection (i.e. canopy, overhand, or arcade).

   d. Streetscape including outdoor patio, integral planters, or wing walls that incorporate landscaped areas and/or places for sitting.

Figure 2-16
Primary Entrances



3. **Frequency of Entries (Podium/Wrap-Style).** The quantity of building entrances on a street has a drastic effect on the perceived liveliness of a street. The frequency of entrances is regulated by Table 2-22.

Table 2-22
Frequency of Entries (Podium/Wrap-Style)

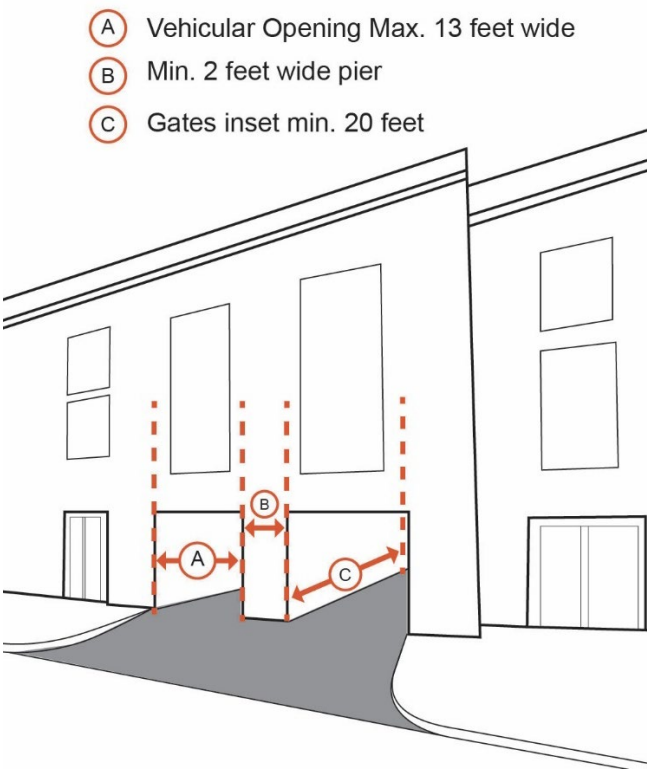
Façade Area	Residential	Mixed-Use
Frequency of Building Entries (max. distance between entries)	100 feet	75 feet

4. **Vehicular Access.**

   a. Vehicular access openings hall be no more than 13 feet wide. Where adjacent openings are necessary to provide entries or exits, they shall be separated by a pier (a portion of wall) of at least two (2) feet in width.

   b. Gates which open to allow cars to enter (excluding security doors that are shut when the garage is not accessible) shall be inset from the façade by a minimum of 20 feet, to allow cars to await entry without blocking the sidewalk.

Figure 2-17
Vehicular Access Design



5. Materials.

a. **Primary Materials.** Untreated plastics, unfinished metal, corrugated fiberglass and non-architectural grade plywood shall not be used as primary materials.

18.27.040 – Pedestrian Level Design

A. Purpose. This section provides standards to enhance the character of new development's street frontage to promote pedestrian activity.

B. Ground Floor Retail and Active Uses.

1. Ground Floor Retail. Ground floor retail uses shall be at the same grade as the adjacent sidewalk.

2. Façade Transparency. Facades of all commercial structures shall incorporate transparent features (clear glass on windows and doors) over a minimum percentage of the surface area at ground-level.

a. Retail uses: a minimum of 75% shall be transparent.

b. Other uses: a minimum of 35% shall be transparent.

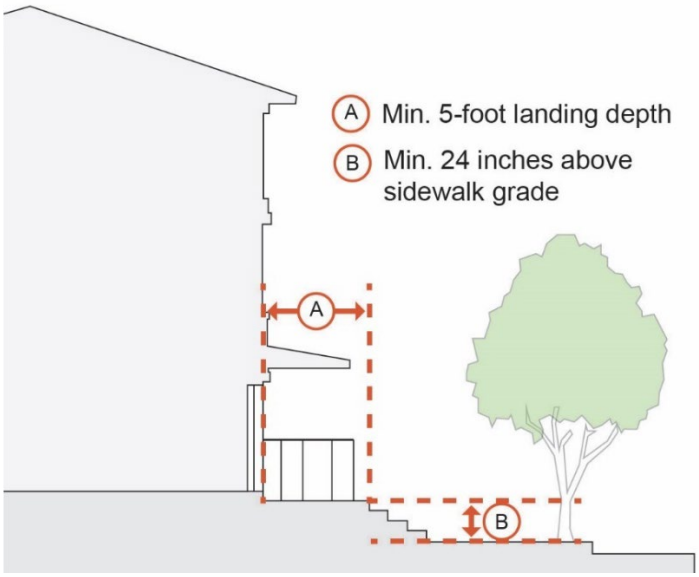
3. Ground Floor Residential.

a. **Ground Floor Access.** Where residential units are located at the ground floor, at least 50% of units on each frontage must be individually accessed from the sidewalk via stoops, side yards or other means.

b. **Stoops.** Stoops shall have a minimum five (5)-foot landing depth with room for a table and chairs to provide an opportunity for residents to engage in the social life of the street.

c. Stoops that face public rights of way shall be set at least 24 inches above sidewalk grade.

Figure 2-18
Ground Floor Residential – Stoop Design



C. Ground Floor Live/Work.

1. Entrances. Because live/work units are meant to be public facing, they shall be entered at-grade and are not required to be elevated above sidewalk level.

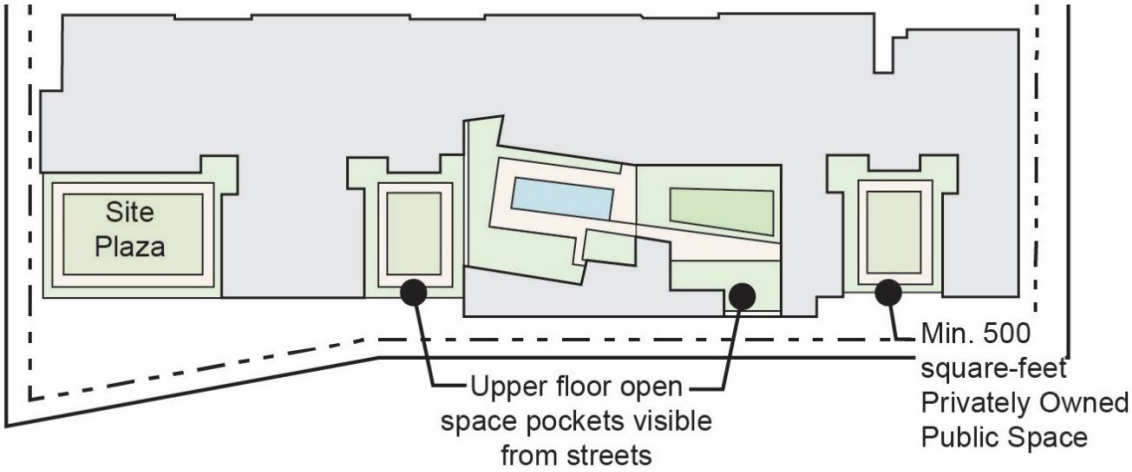
D. Open Space Design.

1. Podium – Style Building.

a. Podium – Style buildings shall have outdoor spaces, such as on-site plazas, interior courtyards, patios, terraces and gardens.

b. Podium – Style buildings shall have privately owned public open space of at least 15 feet wide and 500 square feet in size.

Figure 2-19
Open Space Design – Podium – Style Buildings



2. Pathways. Pedestrian paths through the site shall be at least five (5) feet wide.

3. **Special Paving.** Special Paving shall be used for the following areas:

   a. Pedestrian crossing (mid-block, raised pedestrian crossings/speed tables, etc.).

4. **Public Art.** Outdoor plazas and semi-public courtyards shall have public art elements such as sculptures, fountains, and art pieces.

5. **Refuse & Recycling Receptacles.** Provide a maximum of one receptacle every 200 feet along streets if proposing more than 10 units. Additional receptacles should be provided only if a private sponsor provides continued maintenance.

   a. Provide one receptacle at each corner of intersections.

E. Alleys and Service Access.

1. **Lighting.** Provide lighting in alleyways for safety.