

Community Member Interviews

THE CITY OF EL PASO DE ROBLES is currently engaged in updating its Zoning Code. The purpose of this update is to revise the citywide zoning regulations to eliminate conflicts and provide clear, user-friendly development regulations; comply with recent legislation and case law; and modernize the Zoning Code to reflect best practices, flexibility, and innovation and streamline housing entitlement processes. As part of this initial phase of analysis, the City's consultant (MIG, Inc.) interviewed several community members (residents, developers, and architects) who have experience and familiarity with the City's Zoning Code. Code Enforcement staff was interviewed as well. Interviews took place over the course of five days and provided insights into the code's strengths and weaknesses. All interviews were conducted by video conference, and notes were taken using a digital whiteboard.

Key insights and comments/recommendations shared by interviewees are summarized below.

Development Standards

- The City's Zoning Code needs clearer definitions for certain development standards such as open spaces, heights, and density to minimize conflicting interpretations. Codify existing interpretations to provide consistency and more certainty for applicants.
- Improvements could be made to the user experience regarding finding parcel and zoning information. San Luis Obispo County's Land Use View mapping tool is a good example of a user-friendly tool.

Process, Fees, and Infrastructure

- The planning process is generally straightforward and streamlined. Staff is very responsive and helpful, willing to be involved and available early on in the development process. This moves projects quickly compared to experiences in nearby jurisdictions.
- Because of inconsistencies in how various departments/agencies (CalFire) interpretation regulations, some projects may have more difficulty in getting approved. (Commenter was not specific regarding which standards this applied to.)
- Fees are mostly fair, although some need to be simplified and clarified.
- Development in the outskirts and eastside of the city may be constrained by a lack of sewer and storm drainage facilities.

Market Trends

- For single-family homes, people are looking for a fourth bedroom for a home office.
- Housing affordability is a key objective, and zoning regulations should provide for affordability by design.
- Fractional density and efforts to incentivize affordability by design are also appreciated, especially on infill parcels.

Uptown Specific Plan

- The Specific Plan needs better clarity regarding density and overlay zones.
- Design regulations need to be broadened to provide better guidance on various project types.

Code Enforcement

- Interpretations could be codified for clarity, including allowing for parking on gravel and locations in setbacks, basketball hoops at curbs, and RV parking.
- Certain common Municipal Code violations could be lessened to infractions.

Objective Design Standards

- When establishing objective design standards, it is important that the standards have been applied to previous projects to minimize the potential for litigation.
- The objective design standards need to ensure design is not compromised when facilitating accelerated housing production.
- Minimize issues with interpretation when developing objective design standards.
- Objective design standards that are feasible and consistent are likely to encourage good design.

Paso Robles Stakeholder Interviews

Zoning Code Update

August 12 - 19, 2021

DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS

parking		open space		height		density	
City has easy straightforward requirements for parking i.e. one space per residential unit etc.	Affordable unit provisions useful tool for getting parking reduction	City is fairly flexible when it comes to defining what is open space	Current open space standards confusing, excessive	Need a clear definition of ceiling height; is it at the structural plate, roof box? Ceiling height definition varies city by city.	No real ideal for plate height of first floor. Major tenants like a high plate to do various things. 16 ft it seems ideal. 13 ft is quite low. Small businesses seem to work in smaller places.	It is difficult to find the density in the zoning code/specific plan. Need to look in general plan to find this.	Fractional density seems appropriate since market usually demands smaller units. Density per unit encourages bigger units. SLO has fractional density and works as a good example.
Parking becomes complex when people want to do lot splits and similar things	Feel that parking requirements are excessive, but DRC seems supportive of reducing parking on a case-by-case basis. Would prefer to see something more codified for parking reductions	Open space has been challenging as it seems excessive, ie you can build to a certain density bonus but then you need to provide open space, so this counteracts each other, constraints space		The current 40/3 story height limit is a constraint.	Maximum building heights that are less than 10ft are restrictive. Building heights generally depend on what the lowest or client want to need. More flexibility in height the better.	Challenges with balancing density and parking/open space requirements	Density was not codified in the Uptown SP, example of developer running into issues where they needed to analyze what density was actually feasible.
				Prefer height rather than stories			

other

Generally city is good about consistently updating the code and reaching out to stakeholders about updates	City is good at allowing growth and managing it well	Ensure there is consistency and compatibility with zoning	FBC requires another level of entitlement	Most cities try to regulate the type of signs; city could be better at regulating the typology and what is appropriate/allowed. Currently, not clear.	Drought resistant landscaping works well	Accurate zoning map hard to find	Airport development regulations are confusing and it's not clear what development is allowed.	City needs more high density and multi-family zoned areas	Overlay zones are confusing and complicated
It is better to measure storage in cubic feet rather than sf. makes it more practical and compact	Providing some level of storage is appealing if it is economically advantageous; i.e. increasing revenue or reducing turnover	For the most part FBC has been useful	Paso Robles is developer friendly	Smaller requirements are easy to forget to include in project, such as storage, open space, etc. since they are not very clearly shown in the code	The current articulation standards are nuts, as are the roofline requirements.	ADU guidelines and setbacks not very clearly stated	Simplify use table	Tackle critical needs first to ensure adequate supply and affordability, so issues related to climate change probably not a big priority (i.e. solar panels)	Signage has generally not been difficult to navigate

FEES

Larger commercial projects have significant transportation impact fees	Process of paying kit fox fees is complicated and would like to see this streamlined. The kit fox process also takes a long time and sometimes causes project delays.
Fees are fair for water and sewer. However, better clarity on city utilities as sometimes there is discretion on utilities like fiberoptics.	

INFRASTRUCTURE

Eastside and outskirts of the city is lacking some sewer services which act as a constraint to development in that area	Utility code requirements for fire (for large facilities) appear to be more than what the city can provide	Projects near highway corridors are difficult due to Caltrans coordination and slow response times
Lack of storm drain facilities and public facilities for storm in extremities of the city	Stormwater conveyance master plan for entire city would help solve issues with stormwater on projects	Utilities for SFR can be hard to coordinate or infrastructure improvements that are required on an SFR, are costly as well. These requirements don't exist for an ADU.
Managing development around oak trees needs better clarity address, preferably early on in the process	Kit fox fees can be a constraint on SFRs as it is not always clear whether they can be removed to accommodate a project. This also poses delays as departments can take months to make a determination.	

MARKET TRENDS

People purchasing SFR are looking for a fourth bedroom or home office	7000 or 1000 sf house especially near downtown core not as desired. People are looking for a lower maintenance property.
Accessory building do not fare well for storage; require higher maintenance. Storage is better within the building.	Affordability is highly sought after as well as 1 and 2 bedrooms with some open space and washer/dryer. Parking does not appear to be a significant issue/need.

UPTOWN SPECIFIC PLAN

Uptown Specific Plan has straightforward regulations	Difficult to understand what overlays may exist in the Uptown SP
There are certain projects that do not quite fit within the Uptown SP. The aesthetics are not broad enough, so no clear guidance on how to approach these types of projects	More forward thinking on mixed-use or other types of projects, i.e. how to design a hydrogen fuel cell station
Good strategy is to maintain the Uptown SP on the westside	

INNOVATIVE IDEAS

SLO County Land Use View tool makes it very easy to identify zoning and regulations and other basic parcel info. Would like to see something like this in Paso Robles.	Tool that is easy to use for identifying various development impact fees, could be included in the mapping tool
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OTHER

Difficult to get financing for mixed-use projects, but interest are more educated on the risks related to mixed-use development. Lenders are better at understanding that mixed-use projects have the potential to be safer.	Concerns over State control vs local control
The city needs to have an improved user interface on the website.	The City does not have enough properties zoned for multi-family development.
Neighborhood walkability has been an issue that needs to continue to be tackled	Providing solar power is not a design constraint; it is a financial constraint.

CODE ENFORCEMENT

Freestanding basketball hoops blocking sidewalks are an issue; example of random issues that come up	Issues with RV ordinance 1238035; Subsection D is not enforceable as written. Need permit to park RVs.	RV campers are very popular in the city, vocal community
\$800 infraction without warning for RV parking on street, seems harsh. Instead use infraction to educate people on ordinance	Something more appropriate would be you can't park for more than 72 hours; would match existing parking code	Under 907 section E, parking somewhere other than pavement. Prefer more clarity that parking is allowed on a prepared surface regardless of material.
Blight issues main code enforcement issues regarding zoning/ residential areas	Hoarding issues but there isn't anything regulating this issue	Backyard is filled to fence line; usage of drones not allowed because muni code violations are misdemeanor
Would rather see common muni code violations be lessened to infractions	Fire marshal does periodic review of multi-family buildings	

OBJECTIVE DESIGN STANDARDS

Important to establish parameters to ensure good projects get built. Balancing good design with economics of housing production.	Balance meeting state affordable housing mandates and good design. Design sometimes gets compromised since projects can get approved by-right through affordable housing bonuses	Example of compromised design: Project doesn't get approved by CC b/c design is not to code. Tells developer to re-design and reduce more affordable housing. Affordable housing tag is set met, but build something that isn't good design
ODS are sometimes difficult to meet concerned they may lead to hedgepodge design	Community views themselves as a rural area; generally, this is the look and feel of the city	Downtown has a small town vibe, but something very modern in that area would not quite fit
When establishing ODS it is important that these standards have been applied to previous projects so it holds up against litigation	Developers want an aesthetically pleasing product, so ODS should be feasible and consistent to encourage good design	Density can become incentivized by each project due to its own requirements or other requirements applicable. Concern: ODS may lead to occasional requirements that will create difficulty due to adding on additional costs.
Achieve congruent neighborhoods with general themes for aesthetic	Standards requiring three different types of materials will cause building difficulties; breaking up walls would be easier	Four-sided architecture is quite subjective and requires very clear definitions and illustrations
Might run into issues with interpretation regarding standards	Will need each ODS to be evaluated by relevant stakeholders, departments, and committees	The HCOC should weigh in on the ODS contents

PROCESSES

4-6 months CUP is typically quicker than other nearby cities. i.e. in SLO took two years to entitle a similar project	CC decisions in the discretionary process can be unpredictable in terms of whether a projects makes it through, even with a bulk proof code	Paso Robles is great for supporting private development due to staff that is easy to work with. Very clear path of communication between departments and clients that help advance projects.	DRC provides helpful comments/suggestion and are flexible in saying it does not absolutely have to be done a certain way	Applications are easy and straightforward	Applications are fairly concise and short	Seldom need to go past staff level review for small projects/SFR	Building SFRs are fairly straightforward and seldom run into issues	Streamline planning and engineering departments/process	Generally, staff is available early on in the development process, which helps move things along, user friendly. Absconders might be easier to navigate than Paso Robles	Inconsistency with how some projects get approved. Same technical falls in similar departmentage codes, such as CALIFIRE, it keeps the code in different ways so then a later some projects get approved at.
Need a bit more teeth in some ordinances. Don't staff review planners can be better about certain aspects of a project based on standards have in place. This leads to inconsistency in design amongst different projects	check in with g on zoning ordinance changes listed in housing element	Review process is straightforward	Challenge in consistently learning changing regulations that add to the knowledge needed to navigate the process, such as for ADUs	Paso Robles is easy to work with and to download information. Smooth process, in regards to ADUs	Building Liaison Committee has helped streamline and speed up building permit process	Planning department appears to take a bit longer with approvals in comparison to the building department	Ensure that zoning code is very quick and easy to access and find on city website	Staff interpretation sometimes does not quite match with certain legal technicalities of ordinances	Net acre application unclear where it is applied before development or post. Gross acre is preferable.	Homeowner knowledge can also sometime pose a challenge during the process, particularly for complex projects