

City of Hesperia

STAFF REPORT



DATE: October 21, 2025

TO: Mayor and Council Members

FROM: Rachel Molina, City Manager

BY: Nathan R. Freeman, Director of Development Services
Ryan Leonard, Principal Planner

SUBJECT: Draft Objective Design Standards for Multi-Family and Mixed-Use Development

RECOMMENDED ACTION

The Planning Commission recommends that the City Council introduce and place on first reading Ordinance No. 2025-06 approving Development Code Amendment (DCA25-00002) and Specific Plan Amendment (SPLA25-00002) to incorporate Objective Design Standards (ODS) for multi-family and mixed-use residential projects by reference into the Hesperia Municipal Code and the Main Street and Freeway Corridor Specific Plan (MSFCSP) and to make other modifications to the Development Standards to ensure consistency.

BACKGROUND

Historically, the City has regulated the design of multi-family development through a discretionary process. Multi-family projects have been subject to a Site Plan Review application, reviewed by the Development Review Committee (DRC) and acted upon during a publicly noticed DRC hearing. Similarly, mixed-use projects have required a Conditional Use Permit, reviewed by the DRC and acted upon by the Planning Commission at a noticed hearing.

Over the past several years, the State of California has enacted numerous housing bills aimed at increasing housing supply and reducing barriers to production. These laws require that certain eligible residential projects be reviewed ministerially (i.e. administratively), without discretionary review or a public hearing. Generally, these provisions apply to multi-family developments with three or more units and mixed-use projects where at least two-thirds of the floor area is residential.

State law allows cities to impose objective development and design standards on eligible housing projects. Objective standards are measurable, verifiable, and free from subjective interpretation. The City's existing development standards, such as building setbacks to property lines and height limits, do not involve discretion or subjective judgment and are considered objective. However, the City's Design Guidelines, currently contained in the Municipal Code and Main Street Freeway Corridor Specific Plan (MSFCSP) use terms such as "should" or "encourage," which are discretionary in nature and therefore cannot be applied to ministerial projects.

In response to recent state housing law(s), the City contracted with PlaceWorks, Inc. to prepare Objective Design Standards (ODS) that support the City's updated Housing Element and 2025 General Plan Update. The ODS are intended to streamline the approval of multi-family and mixed-use development projects while providing a framework for clear, enforceable and predictable design requirements.

To prepare the ODS, City staff, in coordination with PlaceWorks, conducted two workshops with the Planning Commission on May 23, 2024, and August 14, 2025. During these workshops, the Commission reviewed the draft ODS, discussed its provisions, and provided direction and feedback to staff.

On September 11, 2025, the Planning Commission voted 4-0 (with Commissioner Abreo absent) to forward this item to the City Council with a recommendation for approval. During the hearing, no one spoke in favor or opposition to the project.

ISSUES/ANALYSIS

The ODS have been created as a stand-alone document, incorporated by reference into the City's Development Code and MSFCSP (Attachment 2). The ODS provide the development community, design professionals, general public, and City personnel with objective criteria for eligible new multi-family and mixed-use residential development in the City. These criteria include, for example, objective standards related to site planning, building form, landscaping, and architectural design, based on clear and measurable requirements rather than subjective interpretation. Importantly, the ODS were drawn heavily from the City's existing Design Guidelines, ensuring continuity with established community character while also complying with state law.

With this document, applicants, developers, and City staff have a clear and concise reference for the City's minimum design expectations. These standards are written as minimum standards for site and structure design but also offer various recommendations and guidelines for quality and character. However, this document does not replace the City's existing development standards. Proposed projects must also comply with all applicable building permit requirements, zoning code requirements, and other development standards found in the Development Code.

Applicability: The standards apply to new construction for multi-family and mixed-use developments. The standards do not apply to the new construction of single-family dwellings, or renovations and routine maintenance of residential developments.

Opt-Out Provision: Applicants may request to opt out of ODS compliance in favor of review under the City's existing Design Guidelines. However, by opting out, projects forfeit the protections of the Housing Accountability Act and are subject to discretionary review, a public hearing, and potential denial.

Structure of the ODS: The ODS is divided into the following chapters:

Chapter 1-Purpose and Administration

This Chapter of the ODS establishes the purpose of ODS, applicability, administration, and provisions for deviations. Generally, the ODS will apply to new construction for multi-family and mixed-use developments. The standards do not apply to the new construction of single-family dwellings, or renovations and routine maintenance of residential developments.

This chapter also describes how the ODS interface with Specific Plans, clarifying that Specific Plan standards take precedence in cases of conflict. Procedures for requesting deviations and provisions for opting out of the ODS in favor of discretionary review under the City's existing Design Guidelines are also included.

Chapter 2-Site Planning

This chapter establishes standards for the overall layout of a development. It addresses building orientation toward public streets, clustering of buildings to create neighborhood-scale environments, pedestrian and vehicular circulation, driveway placement, and parking location. The standards emphasize safe and attractive pedestrian connections, integration of buildings with public rights-of-way, careful siting of parking areas to reduce visual impact and compatibility with surrounding development.

Chapter 3-Open Space

This chapter expands upon the City's existing Municipal Code requirements for private and common open space by providing greater clarity and refinement. While the Development Code currently requires that multi-family projects provide a minimum amount of open space per unit, the ODS further expands upon those requirements by distinguishing between major amenities (such as pools, clubhouses, rooftop terraces, or community gardens) and minor amenities (such as barbeque areas, dog runs, or playgrounds).

The standards require that new projects not only meet minimum square footage thresholds but also provide a specific number and mix of amenities based on the total number of dwelling units proposed. For example, larger developments must incorporate at least one major amenity in addition to multiple minor amenities. The purpose of these standards is to ensure that open spaces are functional, appropriately sized, and meaningfully designed for recreation and social interaction.

Chapter 4-Mass and Scale

This chapter regulates building form and proportions to prevent monotonous design and improve neighborhood compatibility. Standards require façade modulation, variation in rooflines, articulation of long building elevations, and transitional massing adjacent to single-family neighborhoods. Corner buildings must include enhanced design features, such as distinctive roof forms or additional glazing, to create focal points and reinforce neighborhood character.

Chapter 5-Materials and Details

This chapter governs the quality and application of building materials, colors, and finishes. Standards require the use of durable materials applied uniformly on all visible building elevations, with clear transitions between material types. Entrances, windows, and architectural details must be designed to create a cohesive and human-scaled appearance.

Chapter 6-Utilities, Services, Lighting, and Fences

This chapter addresses functional but often overlooked components of site design. Standards require trash enclosures, loading areas, and mechanical equipment to be fully screened and integrated into the overall site plan. Exterior lighting must provide safety while minimizing glare and spillover onto adjacent properties. Perimeter walls and fences must be designed for compatibility with building architecture and surrounding neighborhoods.

Chapter 7-Mixed-Use Standards

This chapter provides specialized standards for both vertical and horizontal mixed-use projects. It emphasizes the integration of residential and commercial uses by requiring active ground-floor design, transparent storefronts, pedestrian-oriented entries, and clear separation of residential and commercial parking areas. The standards ensure that mixed-use projects function effectively, activate the street environment, and contribute positively to the City's economic and social vitality.

Chapter 8-Definitions

This chapter provides clear definitions of terms and phrases used throughout the ODS. By clarifying key terminology, the definitions help avoid ambiguity and ensure that both applicants and staff interpret the standards consistently.

Objective Design Standards Checklist

Provides a user-friendly compliance checklist to be submitted with project applications. Applicants must certify that their projects meet each applicable objective standard, and staff will use the checklist to verify consistency during the review process.

Development Code Amendment (DCA25-00002) and Specific Plan Amendment (SPLA25-00002)

In addition to adopting the ODS, staff is proposing a series of modifications to the City's Development Code and the MSFCSP. These amendments are necessary to incorporate the ODS as a stand-alone regulatory document by reference, to align the City's zoning regulations with the recently adopted 2025 General Plan Update, and to ensure consistency with State housing law requirements. The proposed amendments are summarized below. A redline strikeout version of the changes is provided in Attachment 3.

- Updates to 16.12.460 to clarify that multi-family developments consisting of three or more units may be approved through an Administrative Review without public notice. This process applies when land use decisions are based upon objective standards or policies previously adopted by the City. Under this procedure, the Development Review Committee serves as the reviewing authority and may render a decision without providing notice to surrounding property owners or other interested parties.
- Updates to Section 16.16.320 of the Development Code to reflect that 15-30 dwelling units per acre are allowed in the Multiple Family (R3) zone consistent with the 2025 General Plan Update.
- Updates to Section 16.16.320 of the Development Code to reflect that multi-family development or mixed-use development up to 30 dwelling units per acre is an allowed use in the General Commercial (C2) zone consistent with the 2025 General Plan Update. In addition, pursuant to State law, group homes for six or fewer persons are permitted.
- Revised Section 16.16.120 to increase the maximum building height in the R3 zone from 35 feet to 45 feet to accommodate higher density developments.
- Revised Chapter 7 of the Main Street and Freeway Corridor Specific Plan to increase the maximum density from 25 to 30 units per acre. Revised language in the Multiple Family (R3) zone increases the maximum density of residential development from 15 dwelling units per acre to 30 dwelling units per acre. The zone is also amended to allow 100 percent residential development and to permit group homes for six or fewer persons. The development of

residential uses is allowed by right east of the 15 freeway; and conditionally permitted as either a standalone or as a mixed-use development west of the 15 freeway, south of El Centro Road.

- Various sections were updated to remove typos, outdated references, and clarify language where necessary.

CITY GOAL SUPPORTED BY THIS ITEM

Future Development - Facilitate balanced growth to ensure cohesive community development and pursue economic development.

ENVIRONMENTAL

Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines, the adoption of the Objective Design Standards and associated Development Code Amendment DCA25-00002, and Specific Plan Amendment SPLA25-00002 which will supplement development standards as it relates to design, and do not affect permitted uses or density/intensity, are exempt per Section 15061(b)(3), because it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the activity in question may have a significant effect on the environment. In addition, the proposed Objective Design Standards and associated Development Code Amendment and Specific Plan Amendment do not require additional review under CEQA pursuant to Section 15168(c)(2) as they are consistent with the Addendum to the 2010 General Plan EIR prepared for the 2025 General Plan Update certified on June 12, 2025, and would not result in new impacts. The adoption of the Objective Design Standards implements the adopted General Plan Housing Element (Program 14); as the creation of Objective Design Standards and no further environmental analysis is required.

CONCLUSION

Adoption of the ODS, together with the related Development Code and Specific Plan amendments, is a key step to implementing the 2025 General Plan Update and fulfilling required programs in the Housing Element. These actions establish clear, measurable, and legally defensible criteria for multi-family and mixed-use residential development, ensuring compliance with state housing law while reinforcing the City's longstanding commitment to high-quality design. The ODS replace subjective guidelines with objective standards that provide predictability for applicants, efficiency in project review, and assurance that new development will enhance community character and livability in Hesperia.

ALTERNATIVE(S)

1. Provide alternative direction to staff.

ATTACHMENT(S)

1. Ordinance No. 2025-06
2. Exhibit A- Objective Design Standards for Multi-family and Mixed-Use Development
3. Objective Design Standards Checklist
4. Exhibit B- Development Code Amendment DCA25-00002 and Specific Plan Amendment SPLA25-00002