

**TOWN OF SAN ANSELMO
STAFF REPORT
November 13, 2020**

For the Meeting of November 16, 2020

TO: Planning Commission

FROM: Elise Semonian, Planning Director

SUBJECT: Review and discuss October 23, 2020 Administrative Draft Objective Design and Development Standards (the “Toolkit”) and provide direction to staff

RECOMMENDATION

That the Planning Commission provide direction to staff.

BACKGROUND

In order to facilitate the development of housing, there are several state laws that require the Town to approve multifamily housing projects that meet objective Town standards.¹ The Town has no objective standards related to design. Therefore, the Town must currently approve certain housing projects that meet the Town’s basic development regulations (parking, height, floor area ratio, etc.) and the Town cannot consider the project design. Therefore, the Town Council has adopted a goal to develop objective design standards for multifamily projects.

In 2019, the Town was awarded a \$160,000 grant under Senate Bill 2 (SB 2), the “Building Homes and Jobs Act” to work on a collaborative effort with other Marin jurisdictions to create objective development and design standards for multifamily projects, develop an accessory dwelling unit website and materials, and an inclusionary housing study. Opticos Design (“Opticos”) was selected as the consultant for the design standards project. The County of Marin provides staff to administer the projects and grant reporting.²

In 2019, Planning Department staff hosted a booth at Country Fair Days to introduce the objective design standards project to the public. The Town was scheduled to have an in person workshop on the design standards on March 11, 2020, but it was cancelled due to COVID 19. A survey of design preferences was conducted from April to July 24, 2020 and 291 responses were received from San Anselmo (see responses, Attachment 4, and San Anselmo specific responses starting on Page 95). On [June 15, 2020 \(Item 5\)](#) the Planning Commission heard an introduction to the

¹ See California Government Code Section [65589.5](#) and [65913.4](#)

² [August 19, 2019 \(Item 6\)](#) Planning Commission recommended the SB 2 application and [August 27, 2019 \(Item 10\)](#) the Town Council approved SB2 application for the collaborative project.

project by Opticos, when they described their review of existing conditions and “Place Types” in San Anselmo.

Opticos has provided the Town with an *Administrative Draft of the Marin County Objective Design and Development Standards Toolkit* (the “Toolkit”) for review. This is the first draft of the Toolkit for review by all participating jurisdictions and it has not yet been customized for San Anselmo. Staff would like to receive preliminary feedback from the Planning Commission on the Toolkit before Opticos proceeds with customizing it for the Town. Staff must provide comments on the Toolkit by November 20, 2020.

Housing Element Update

The Town will need to update its General Plan Housing Element for the housing element cycle ending January 31, 2031, by January 31, 2023.³ The Town must plan to accommodate at least its share of the Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA). Under the methodology that is under consideration by the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG), the Town’s share of the RHNA could be 744 housing units, about half of which would be for very low to low income households.⁴ The Town is expected to know the final RHNA allocation by January 2021.

Estimated San Anselmo RHNA Under Draft Methodology (November 2020)

Very Low Income (<50% of Area Median Income)	Low Income (50-80% of Area Median Income)	Moderate Income (80-120% of Area Median Income)	Above Moderate Income (>120% of Area Median Income)	Total
130	226	108	280	744

Currently, the highest allowable density allowed in the Town is 20 units per acre. Since the objective design standards regulate building size and form, they can allow the Town to increase density without sacrificing community character, which may assist in meeting the Town Housing Element requirements.

DISCUSSION

The Toolkit is a “kit of parts” organized around eight zoning districts (see pages 20 to 23) and standards that address a range of sites and physical conditions. The zones range from low intensity Edge Neighborhoods up to High Intensity Core Neighborhoods and Main Streets. Each zone is coordinated with the Place Types and Building Types Atlas.

Ultimately, all of the text will be customized for San Anselmo. Some text is in cyan color where the Town will need to insert text or choose one of two or more options for that particular content.

³ Current estimate by State Department of Housing and Community Development, but the date may change.

⁴ The Town’s current RHNA is 106 units.

Opticos has placed notes in the margins or immediately next to specific information that they would like the Town to consider.

Staff recommendations

Overall, staff is pleased with the Toolkit. Staff has some specific suggestions as follows:

Preamble. Refine language in document to be more custom for San Anselmo. Omit “employment centers,” “big box retail,” and “industrial center” language. Consider using terms that are consistent with the Town General Plan (“Hillside” vs. “Rural” and “Neighborhood Commercial” and “General Commercial” vs. “Main Street”) either by modifying the toolkit or by making the General Plan consistent with the standards.

Chapter 1 Introduction Table x.01.020.A Applicability must be revised to indicate Senate Bill 35 does apply to certain market rate housing projects.

Chapter 2 Establishment of Zones

A Zone Map has not been developed. In general, staff envisions the “Main Street” and “Core Neighborhood Medium” zones applying to the existing commercial districts and the “Suburban Neighborhood” zones applying to existing multifamily districts. Staff will develop a detailed map so that interested parties can determine the building types that could be allowed on sites.

Chapter 3 Zones

Opticos Design has prepared a recommendation of which zones the Town should consider and which zones the Town will not need (See Attachment 2):

Neighborhoods

Multi-Unit Small T3SN

Multi-Unit Medium T4CN.M (allows 3.5-4 story structures as drafted)

Corridors

Residential T4SN.S

Residential Mixed-Use Small T4SN.S/T4SN.S-O

Residential Mixed-Use Medium T4CN.M/T4CN.M-O

Commercial Mixed-Use Small T4SMS.S/T4SMS.S-O

Centers

Village Center T4SMS.S

Main Street 2 T4CMS (allows 3.5-4 story structures as drafted)

All of the standards are coordinated through the zones. So, determining which zones the Town will need will help focus on the other supplemental standards (e.g., Building Types, Frontage Types, and Signage Types) the Town will need.

Staff believes the Town should consider including the T3 Edge Neighborhood. In the future, the State may require the Town to allow fourplex units in single family residential neighborhoods, subject only to objective standards.⁵ Incorporating these standards would help the Town to be prepared in the event it needs objective standards for single family residential neighborhoods in the future.

Staff would like the districts that allow taller structures (Main Street 2 T4CMS and Multi-Unit Medium T4CN.M) to advance into the Town draft for further discussion by the public. The Town may wish to include these districts in the future after considering the next Housing Element.

Note that the following zones that allow up to 7 story buildings are not recommended for San Anselmo and only Novato: T3 Core Neighborhood T5CN and T5 Core Main Street T5CMS.

Setbacks. The Toolkit appears to be more restrictive than existing regulations, which may make it difficult to build on narrow multifamily lots, which are common in the Town.

Height Limits. The Town currently limits flatland lots to two stories and a 30 foot overall height limit. Staff recommends maintaining this standard in the guidelines. The Town needs incentives for the development of deed restricted affordable housing units. Projects that include affordable housing could ask for concessions/incentives to go up to 2.5-3 stories and to taller overall height.

Other Standards

Staff has requested guidelines for side elevations. It may be important to have standards for side and rear elevations to address aesthetics (avoiding large walls of one material) privacy, access to light and relationship to adjacent buildings.

Chapter 4 Use Table

The Use Table conflicts with the Town Land Use Regulations Table 3A. Staff does not recommend discussing the use table at the Planning Commission meeting. Staff would like to give more thought to how the various residential uses on page 60 of the Toolkit would fit in with the Town's current zoning districts.

Chapter 5 General to Design Sites

Screening. The proposed screening standards are more restrictive than the Town's current standards, which allow front yard fences up to 8 feet tall. The Planning Commission should consider if the existing screening regulations should be allowed for multifamily and commercial sites.

Landscaping and Parking Screening. Ross Valley Fire Department does not allow certain vegetation within 5 feet of a building and the guidelines should be consistent with their standards.

⁵ The State has already considered three bills in 2019-2020 that would have require this, Senate Bill 1120 (Atkins) and SB 50 (Wiener) and SB 902 (Wiener), but none have been adopted.

Slope Standards. Staff needs to compare the Toolkit slope regulation with current standards. Staff is not requesting comment on the slope standards at this time.

General Staff Questions

Staff will speak with the consultants regarding these questions.

Should the existing standards remain for commercial uses in commercial zoning districts?

If commercial uses are allowed less restrictive standards it may result in construction of fewer housing units. However, how would staff apply the form based standards to, for example, a gas station?

How will the Town apply the regulations to modification of existing structures? Most sites in Town are already developed. How will staff apply these standards to an addition to an existing structure that does not meet the standards?

Parking

The proposed standards require fewer spaces than existing standards (standards require at most 1.5 parking spaces per unit and Town requires 2 parking spaces for units with 3 or more bedrooms). However, the standards are consistent with State housing law and encourage development of housing within walking distance of shopping, schools and transit. Non-residential standards are much lower than existing standards (1 space for 2,000 sq. ft. where Town requires 7 spaces for 2,000 sq. ft.). Reduced parking requirements support the building types proposed, which do not have large visible parking areas, podium parking and garages.

Chapter 9 Specific to Signage Types

Staff recommends omitting the Changeable Copy and Marquee signs.

Chapter 11 Administration

Staff recommends Public Body Review Option 2

Views

Opticos is working on objective view protection standards for review and discussion at a future meeting.

NEXT STEPS

Staff must provide comments on the October 23 Toolkit by November 20, 2020. We expect to receive the first draft of San Anselmo guidelines in early 2020. In the meantime, staff will work on proposed zone mapping. Prior to the first meeting to review a Town-specific draft, staff intends to notify affected property owners by mail and provide noticing in the Town email and social media, with ample time to review the draft.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elise Semonian". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Elise Semonian
Planning Director

Attachment 1 – Administrative Draft October 23, 2020 Marin County Objective Design and
Development Standards Toolkit

Attachment 2 – Zones by Jurisdiction

Attachment 3 – Architectural Style Documentation

Attachment 4 – Site Testing San Anselmo

Attachment 5 – Community Survey Results