

# **Objective Design Standards for the City of San Luis Obispo**

A Senior Project

presented to

the Faculty of the City and Regional Planning Department

California Polytechnic State University – San Luis Obispo

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Bachelor of science in Urban and Regional planning

By

Ian Madrigal and Wilfrido Amaya

June 11, 2021

## Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Background	3
SB-35	4
AB-2162	5
Applicability	6
Objective Design Standards	6
Building size/massing	6
Building Design	7
Landscaping	7
Lighting	8
Accessory Elements	8
Graphics	8
References	14

## Introduction

The state of California has been facing a housing crisis for several decades (Buhayar & Cannon, 2019). The state, along with other municipalities have been enacting laws to help mitigate the issue such as SB 35 (2017) and AB 2162 (2018). In recent years, cities and other municipalities have been using different methods of integrating missing middle housing into their planning practices. Missing middle housing is defined as being the “range of house-scale buildings with multiple units - compatible in scale and form with detached single-family homes” (missingmiddlehousing.com). There are different methods of implementing missing middle housing, however, in the past years the State of California has passed two bills, SB-35 and AB 2162, which specify the use of objective design standards in a municipality’s building policy, particularly for housing development. Therefore, the City of San Luis Obispo has initiated a process to develop an updated and expanded set of objective design standards for residential development. The intent of this effort is to address recent changes in State law that seek to streamline and increase housing production, focused on making approval processes more routine and predictable for anyone trying to develop housing in San Luis Obispo. While at the same time allowing San Luis Obispo to be architecturally distinctive. Additionally, the Objective Design Standards will protect natural resources and integrate the natural environment into building and site planning wherever appropriate.

## Background

Located at the halfway point between the two largest urban centers in California. The City of San Luis Obispo has a land area of 12.93 square miles and a population of 45,451 based on 2019 census quick fact data. San Luis Obispo is a beautiful and desirable place to live. However, due to the greenbelt surrounding much of the urban land area, there are few directions for the city to continue to grow. Because of this San Luis Obispo must come up with new innovative ways to create homes for future growth.

San Luis Obispo, like other communities in California, have not been able to keep up with demand for new housing. SLO posted an average annual residential growth rate of 0.6 percent between 2015 and 2020 below its 1 percent per year growth cap (Johnson, 2021). Families that once were considered middle incomes find themselves challenged to acquire decent, safe, and affordable housing. This has a profound effect on normally stable middle-income households and threatens the underpinnings of the local economy and critical services. Recently, San Luis Obispo has been making a visible effort to increase residential density and permit new housing units. In the year 2020, the rate doubled to 1.2 percent. SLO leaders expect to see more years like 2020 ahead as projects are built out (Johnson, 2021). New attention is being directed at the lack of housing choices available to families with low and moderate incomes. The city is growing and there is a need for more affordable housing types without compromising the character of San Luis Obispo.

The State of California has identified housing, specifically affordable housing, as an important goal and have adopted policies to accomplish it. The State has passed laws like SB-35 (2017) and AB-2162 (2018) to create more housing options for communities. Additionally, the State has passed Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs), or backyard homes laws to create new housing options. At its March 2, 2020 meeting, San Luis Obispo's City Council formally amended a host of its ADU laws, which previously required owner occupancy on a property with ADUs, among other restrictions. The city estimates it will add 30 to 50 new units per year under the new regulations (Wilson et al., 2020). In concurrence with new laws and city ordinance that support housing San Luis Obispo will need to find ways to finance and support development. Public-private partnerships and incentives will be needed to make these projects possible. To offer more housing types, one new and emerging idea the City of San Luis Obispo hopes to implement is missing middle housing.

## SB-35

In 2017, Governor Brown signed into law Senate Bill 35 (SB 35) as part of a package of bills created to address the State of California's housing shortage. The new law provides a streamlined review process for eligible multifamily projects in cities and counties that have not built their share of housing to accommodate the region's population growth. SB 35 requires cities and counties to streamline review and approval of eligible affordable housing projects by providing a ministerial approval process and exempting such projects from environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). This process does not allow public hearings; only design review or public oversight is allowed, which must be objective and strictly focused on assessing compliance with criteria required for streamlined projects.

The streamlined approval process is an opt-in program for developers who must request streamlined ministerial approval pursuant to SB 35 at the time a permit application is submitted to the City. There are several eligibility criteria to consider when determining if the SB 35 process is available to a particular project. First, a proposed development must meet certain housing type and site requirement criteria. For example, the project site cannot be located in the Coastal Zone (this area is exempt per state law) nor can the project require demolition of housing that has been occupied by tenants within the past ten years. Most proposed developments must include a minimum percentage of units to be affordable to households making at or below 80% of area median income. During construction permitted sites will need to pay prevailing wages and use a skilled and trained workforce. Finally, a proposed project must conform to objective zoning and design standards in effect at the time the development proposal is submitted to the city.

The city prepared these Objective Design Standards for Streamlined Housing Projects for use by applicants and staff in determining if a SB 35 project is consistent with objective design review standards. These Design Standards were originally sourced from the City's design guidelines with the aim to incorporate the goals and intent as much as possible, while also

complying with the intent of SB 35 to facilitate and expedite the construction of multi-unit projects.

## **AB-2162**

As a compliment to SB-35, California governor, Jerry Brown signed into law, AB-2162. The purpose of the bill was to create affordable housing projects for the homeless population in the state of California. Under AB-2162, the new legislation will expedite the approval of new housing if a certain percentage is reserved for “supportive housing”.

AB-2162 defines “supportive housing” as an affordable residency with no limitation on the length of stay for occupants who experience homelessness, mental health issues, substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, or other chronic health conditions.

AB 2162 requires supportive housing to be a “use by right” in zones where either multifamily or mixed uses are permitted, so long as the proposed housing development meets the criteria outlined below. A “use by right” means that the local government’s review may not require a conditional use permit, planned unit development permit, or other discretionary local government review and the approval would not constitute a “project” for purposes of CEQA.

To qualify as a “use by right” under AB 2162, a supportive housing development application must satisfy all the following requirements:

- Units in the development are subject to a 55-year recorded affordability restriction.
- Every unit, except the managers’ unit, must be dedicated to lower income households, and the development must receive public funding to ensure affordability.
- The greater of 12 units or 25% of all units in the development, or all units if the development is under 12 units, are restricted to residents in supportive housing.
- The development must contain a specific amount of nonresidential floor area dedicated to supportive services
- Units must include a bathroom and a kitchen or other cooking facilities, including, at a minimum, a stovetop, sink, and refrigerator; and
- The developer must submit a plan for providing supportive services, identifying the entity that will provide services, specific services that will be available, proposed funding for the services, and proposed staffing levels.

Local agencies must approve supportive housing developments that comply with these requirements through a ministerial, non-discretionary review process. Local agencies must decide on a proposed supportive housing project within 60 days after the application is deemed complete, if the development contains 50 or fewer units, or within 120 days if the development contains more than 50 units.

## Applicability

The following standards are to be applicable to all future residential developments within the boundaries of the City of San Luis Obispo. The Objective Design Standards apply to housing development projects which include (1) Buildings that contain residential units; (2) Groups of attached townhomes (row houses), regardless of whether multiple townhomes occupy the same lot, or each townhome occupies a separate lot; (3) Mixed-use buildings that include at least two-thirds of the square footage designated for residential use; and (4) Transitional housing or supportive housing.

## Objective Design Standards

The intent of Objective Design Standards is to provide developers with a clear understanding of the City's expectations for multi-family residential project design. Objective design standards are written as requirements, rather than guidelines; therefore, all multi-family residential projects must comply with each standard. Importantly, objective design standards regulate site and structure design only. Projects must also comply with all applicable building permit requirements and development standards. Multi-family residential projects that do not meet these objective design standards may be approved through the City's discretionary design review process.

### A.) Building Size/ Massing:

*Purpose:* Massing influences the sense of space which the building encloses and helps to define both the interior space and the exterior shape of the building. Which should help to enhance the quality and character of the neighborhood.

1. Residential projects shall remain architecturally consistent with the surrounding buildings in the neighborhood.
2. Residential projects located across the street from single-family neighborhoods shall orient the buildings to the street with individual entries, patio areas and landscaping facing the single-family homes.
3. Residential buildings, if larger than 1000sqft or multi-family (R-3 or R-4), must be designed to create the appearance of smaller buildings on the same site:
  - a. Vary height by at least two feet (2') over a portion of the main building.
  - b. Vary roof forms through changes in type, height, pitch, or orientation.
  - c. Use recesses (e.g., courtyards, entryways, alcoves, deep door and window openings) and projections (e.g., stairs, towers, balconies) to create a sense of depth.

4. The side and rear walls of any structure within 10 feet of a required setback shall not be more than two stories higher or lower than the directly adjacent existing residential structure. Structures that exceed this height requirement shall stepback upper floors so that the wall plane does not fall within 10 feet of a required setback adjacent to existing residential.

## B.) Building Design

*Purpose:* A building's design and form contribute to San Luis Obispo's sense of place and can positively or negatively affect the existing built environment around a new development. This section covers the details of building design materials, colors, and other exterior features.

1. All residential buildings must harbor a minimum of two architectural features like balconies, cantilevers, dormers, bay windows, patios, and individualized entries.
2. Trim surrounds shall be provided at all exterior window and door openings. In lieu of exterior window trim, windows can be recessed from wall plane by a minimum of three inches.
3. Affordable units and market rate units in the same development shall be constructed of the same or similar exterior materials and details such that the units are not distinguishable.
4. Blank walls (facades without doors, windows, landscaping treatments shall be less than 30 feet in length along sidewalks, pedestrian walks, or publicly accessible outdoor space areas.
5. The primary wall material shall be wood, stone, brick, stucco, fiber cement or other cementitious material, or composite wood or stone. T1-11 siding and other siding that use plywood (with the exception of board and batten) are prohibited.
6. All multi-story residential buildings must maintain similar theme for each level.

## C.) Landscaping

*Purpose:* Landscaping is an integral part of a project's design and can enhance the City's natural beauty. Beyond aesthetics, sustainable landscapes are an asset for climate resilience.

Additionally, landscaping helps create a harmonious relationship between the dwelling and the land.

1. Utilize native California or drought tolerant plants and tree species that are appropriate for San Luis Obispo
2. Landscaping shall be in all outdoor areas that are not specifically used for parking, driveways, walkways, patios, or other outdoor amenities
3. Paved areas shall not exceed 50% of the required setback area.

4. Construct fences of Wood, Metal, and Stone. Chain link fencing materials are prohibited.

#### D.) Lighting

*Purpose:* Lighting is the foundation of architectural buildings. It can change the perception of space, the shape, textures of materials and improve their aesthetic features. It also plays an important role in ensuring the comfortability of occupants.

1. All structures, entries, parking areas, refuse enclosures, active outdoor/landscape areas, and pedestrian pathways shall include dusk to dawn lighting for safety and security.
2. Lighting shall be recessed or hooded, downward directed, and located to illuminate only the intended area.

#### D.) Accessory Elements

1. Using building practices that use sustainable construction methods to reduce or eliminate waste or pollution.
2. All major appliances will need to be electrified to help reduce overall emissions footprint.
3. Common useable open space is required for all multifamily projects with more than 10 units
4. Developments with more than 10 units shall provide a play area with at least two structured play modules (e.g., slide and sand box, or tunnel and climber) and a picnic table adjacent to the play area as one of the required active outdoor amenities

## Graphics

The following graphics are a visual representation of what is possible with the cities Objective Design Standards. The development envelope that was chosen for representation is located on 140 Highland Drive. Which is currently a vacant lot located within the Foothill Neighborhood. This specific parcel was chosen specifically because of its vacancy and location in the middle of a single-family residential neighborhood. Out of the neighborhoods in the City of San Luis Obispo, Foothill Neighborhood is one of the younger neighborhoods and has been seeing more and more development in the recent years. Hence why Highland Dr. Is perfect for new housing due to its proximity to buses and the major arterial, Foothill Blvd. The parcel is currently zoned for R-1, single-family and is being sold for \$607,000 on the market.

#### **Site Plan**



(Figure 1. Site Plan of duplex)



(Figure 2. Site Plan of triplex)

The current lot is approximately 0.36 acres in size. Surrounding the lot are two single family residential homes, with an elementary school across the street. One of the main goals was to not take up as much space on the lot to be in compliance with FAR. As seen, the buildings were sized in order to allow space both in front and in the rear. The duplex (figure 1) is about 1000 sqft, with two stories. The triplex (figure 2) is much smaller at 800 sqft, and is only one story. The purpose was to give a visual representation of the possible sizes and show what can be done in terms of size and massing under the new policies.

### ***Renderings***



(Figure 3. Rendering of duplex)

This first rendering (Figure 3) is of a possible duplex design. The materials are common to what would be found in certain single-family residential architecture. It also harbors components typically found in those style of homes, like the covered porch and paned windows. Yet, there is a strong hint of contemporary design with the slanted roof and minimalistic use of the exterior materials. There are small garages on the side for parking and can keep up to 2 cars. The units themselves are with two stories and is for there to be 2-3 bedrooms and 1 - 1.5 bathrooms. The homes are larger to show the largest possible sizes that are welcome in order to give some variability in choice of design.



(Figure 4. Rendering of triplex)

This second rendering (figure 4) is what a possible triplex design under the proposed policies could look like. The element which defines this style of architecture are reminiscent of surrounding elements in other residential homes in the neighborhood. The home does have a

unique character to it, with rounded windows, but still keep to traditional elements like the decorated front door. There is a balance of color and material which are allowed under the new policies. The purpose is to be unique but not stand out too much from the other houses. As for the units, they are only one story and are for 1-2 bedrooms with 1 - 1.5 bathrooms.

**Location Perspective**



(Figure 5. Location rendering of duplex)



(Figure 6. Location rendering of triplex)

Overall, the two buildings were specifically designed in order to not look out of place. Hence why one of the main factors of the buildings was the massing. Yet, it was still important to design homes which were different than the homes that are typically found in the neighborhood. In order to keep true to the spirit of the policies and goals of the city, the duplexes and triplexes are made to scale for both the pedestrians and the surrounding buildings. Although the two designs vary in size and massing, they are not too big, nor too small, and have an appropriate setback for plants, gardens, and driveways.

## References

- Buhayar, N., & Cannon, C. (2019, November 6). *How California Became America's Housing Market Nightmare*. Bloomberg.com. <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2019-california-housing-crisis/>.
- Healy, M. (2020, February 17). *SLO Co. must plan nearly 11,000 housing units over the next 10 years, more than half to be affordable*. KSBY. <https://www.ksby.com/news/price-of-paradise/slo-co-must-plan-nearly-11-000-housing-units-over-the-next-10-years-more-than-half-to-be-affordable>.
- Johnson, P. (2021, May 16). *Building out: The city of SLO has enough housing under construction to reach its growth cap ahead of schedule*. New Times San Luis Obispo. <https://www.newtimeslo.com/sanluisobispo/building-out-the-city-of-slo-has-enough-housing-under-construction-to-reach-its-growth-cap-ahead-of-schedule/Content?oid=10949205>.
- Johnson, P. (2021, May 16). *Building out: The city of SLO has enough housing under construction to reach its growth cap ahead of schedule*. New Times San Luis Obispo. <https://www.newtimeslo.com/sanluisobispo/building-out-the-city-of-slo-has-enough-housing-under-construction-to-reach-its-growth-cap-ahead-of-schedule/Content?oid=10949205>.
- Wilson, N., Vaughn, M., & Holden, L. (2020, March 5). *Want to build a 'granny unit'? Here's how new rules affect SLO County homeowners*. The Tribune. <https://www.sanluisobispo.com/article240104713.html>.
- Healy, M. (2020, February 17). *SLO Co. must plan nearly 11,000 housing units over the next 10 years, more than half to be*. KSBY. <https://www.ksby.com/news/price-of-paradise/slo-co-must-plan-nearly-11-000-housing-units-over-the-next-10-years-more-than-half-to-be-affordable>.
- Bill Text*. Bill Text - SB-35 Planning and zoning: affordable housing: streamlined approval process. (n.d.). [https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=201720180SB35](https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201720180SB35).
- Bill Text*. Bill Text - AB-2162 Planning and zoning: housing development: supportive housing. (n.d.). [https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=201720180AB2162](https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201720180AB2162).
- Nemeth, M. (2021, February 28). *Gov. Brown signs bill to streamline approval of housing for homeless*. California Apartment Association. <https://caanet.org/gov-brown-signs-bill-to-streamline-approval-of-housing-for-homeless/>.

City of Gilroy. (2021). *Objective Design Standards*. Site ID Seal.

<http://www.cityofgilroy.org/905/Objective-Design-Standards>.

City of Santa Rosa . (2019). 20-39.030 Objective residential design standards.

[https://qcode.us/codes/santarosa/view.php?topic=20-3-20\\_39-20\\_39\\_030&frames=on](https://qcode.us/codes/santarosa/view.php?topic=20-3-20_39-20_39_030&frames=on).

City of Windsor. (202AD). *Multi-Family Residential Objective Design Standard: Windsor, CA - Official Website*. Multi-Family Residential Objective Design Standard | Windsor, CA - Official Website. <https://www.townofwindsor.com/1266/Multi-Family-Residential-Objective-Desig>.

City of Santa Barbara. (2021). *Objective Design Standards for Streamlined Housing Projects (SB 35)Planning Central*. Santa Barbara - Objective Design Standards for Streamlined Housing Projects (SB 35).

<https://www.santabarbaraca.gov/services/planning/completedefforts/sb35.asp>.

*Diverse choices for walkable neighborhood living*. Missing Middle Housing. (2021, May 6).

<https://missingmiddlehousing.com/>.