



**STAFF
REPORT**

Community Development Department
 Planning Division
 6360 Fountain Square Dr.
 Citrus Heights, CA 95621
www.citrusheights.net
 (916) 727-4740

Hearing Date: March 22, 2023
File Number: N/A
Application Type: N/A
Assessor's Parcel Number(s): All within the ABSP area
Prepared by: Alison Bermudez, Senior Planner abermudez@citrusheights.net

Project Name: Auburn Boulevard Objective Design Standards

Project Address: Applicable to properties within the Auburn Boulevard Specific Plan Area

Gross Acreage: N/A	Net Acreage: N/A	Net Density: N/A
Current Zoning: N/A	Proposed Zoning: N/A	

Surrounding Zoning:	Surrounding Land Use Designation	Actual Use:
On-site:	Not Applicable	
North:		
South:		
West:		
East:		

Environmental Status:
 Exempt Section 15061(b)(3) Previous Negative Declaration
 Negative Declaration Environmental Impact Report
 Mitigated Negative Declaration Previous Environmental Impact Report

Planning Department Recommendations:
 Recommend approval and forward to the City Council for final action
 Approve with conditions
 Denial

Applicant:	City of Citrus Heights Planning Division	Property Owner:	Varies
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REQUEST

The Planning Division requests the Planning Commission review the Auburn Boulevard Objective Design Standards which provide objective design and development standards for mixed-use and multi-family residential development within the Auburn Boulevard Specific Plan area. The Planning Commission's recommendation will be forwarded to the City Council for final action.

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION

The Planning Division recommends the Planning Commission make the following motions:

Motion 1: Adopt a Resolution to find the Auburn Boulevard Objective Design Standards are exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under Section 15061(b)(3) of the Guidelines which states that a project is exempt from CEQA when the activity is covered by the common sense exemption that CEQA applies only to projects which have the potential for causing a significant impact to the environment.

Motion 2: Recommend the City Council adopt a Resolution adopting the Auburn Boulevard Objective Design Standards that support design and development standards for mixed-use and multi-family residential development within the Auburn Boulevard Specific Plan area.

BACKGROUND

Similar to the rest of the Sacramento Region, Citrus Heights has a significant oversupply of existing properties zoned for, designed for, and built for strip retail centers. Metro Sacramento has double the retail building area (45.3 SF per Capita) compared to the US Average (23.5 SF per Capita) and Citrus Heights has nearly triple (60.3 SF per capita). Further, Citrus Heights saw the greatest decrease in retail rents in the Sacramento Metro Area, declining 16.1% from 2007 to 2019¹.

The glut of retail in the region, competition from e-commerce or nearby communities, and the evolving retail market, has resulted in a significant supply of vacant retail buildings with underused parking areas in Citrus Heights, and in particular Auburn Boulevard. Over the last five years, Auburn Boulevard has seen vacancy rates at nearly 20% resulting in up to 170,000 square feet of vacant retail along the short two-mile suburban corridor.

The oversupply of vacant retail is an opportunity to provide for the increasing demand of housing. Housing is typically seen as a likely fit for replacement of aging commercial corridors. The framework to promote housing along Auburn Boulevard is in already place. The Boulevard Plan (Specific Plan) encourages and supports mixed-use and housing development along the corridor. The Specific Plan anticipated over 600 units of housing within the corridor. Despite having the right development framework and the public investment along Auburn Boulevard, challenges remain.

Citrus Heights is not alone in the challenge of repurposing commercial properties to accommodate housing. Recognizing this challenge applies statewide, the legislature approved AB 2011 and SB 6 which are intended to incentivize conversion of commercially zoned properties into housing.

¹ Sunrise Mall Real Estate Market Analysis (MXD Development Strategists) 2020

AB 2011 - AB 2011 allows housing in Commercial Zones

SB 6 – SB 6 is based on the premise that density is necessary to make retail to residential projects pencil. This law stipulates that in instances where the Zoning Density (20 units per acre per ABSP) and the General Plan Density (40 units per acre for GC), are inconsistent, the higher density shall apply. Given the impact of this law, densities of up to 40 units per acre would be allowed.

In addition to laws encouraging housing in commercial zones at higher densities, the state has made a suite of laws related to expedited review of housing projects and limited discretion to objective standards (defined later in the report). Senate Bill 35 (SB 35) and Assembly Bill 2162 (AB 2162), respectively adopted in 2018 and 2019 to respond to the State’s affordable housing crisis. Both SB 35 and AB 2162 require cities to provide a streamlined review process for qualified affordable housing projects. In 2019, changes to the Housing Accountability Act² (SB 330, AB 1485) further limited a jurisdictions ability to deny or reduce the density of housing projects that meet objective standards, while expanding SB 35 eligibility and protections under the Housing Accountability Act (HAA).

Under these changes to State law, jurisdictions without a ministerial approval process have little say in the design of developments processed under the protections of the HAA. Key to the establishment of this process is the replacement of subjective design guidelines and discretionary review with objective standards and ministerial approval.

A key component of housing legislation is the applicability of what is called “objective design standards.” State law defines objective standards as those that “*involve no personal or subjective judgement 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 and public official prior to submittal.*”

Below is an example of a typical design standard and how it would be rewritten as an objective design standard:

Design Standard	Rewritten to be an Objective Design Standard
<i>Architectural facades should be rich in detailing add to the character of the neighborhood</i>	<i>Minimum of two different building materials shall be used on each building elevation (e.g., stone, wood, masonry, or metal).</i>

To address the City’s need to establish objective design and development standards for eligible residential projects, the City contracted with Opticos Design, a consulting firm who specializes in urban design with a focus on creating walkable communities and diverse housing choices. This partnership was tasked to evaluate best strategies for design, density, and the feasibility for multi-family and mixed-use development along Auburn Boulevard with a goal to develop implementation tools in the form of objective design and development standards (ODDS) needed not only to be compliant with state law but to forward the City’s goals of implementing the Auburn Boulevard Specific Plan (ABSP) and increasing housing choices.

The project was kicked-off with a stakeholder workshop made up of City staff, Opticos team, property owners and a representative from the Auburn Boulevard Business Association (ABBA). To provide a foundation for discussion, a number of area maps/photos and the area’s demographics were shared with

² Government Code Section 65589.5

the group. To provide context for discussion, the workshop attendees reviewed three selected opportunity sites. These opportunity sites were used to show design examples of how these site could be converted into housing. The design examples depicted varying building height and massing, street frontages and a variety of building finishes. Following an in-depth discussion, the stakeholders provided feedback and identified preferred design choices which were used as a foundation for the creation of the ODDS. Attachment 3 is a recap of the workshop including the opportunity sites and the stakeholder group results.

The Auburn Boulevard Objective Design Standards (Attachment 2) was developed to support the design principals of the Auburn Boulevard Corridor and provide ODDS for mixed-use residential and multi-family residential developments within the Auburn Boulevard Specific Plan area (ABSP). While the state law applies to all property within the City, this program is specific to properties that fall within the ABSP. A Citywide policy will be presented later this summer.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

As discussed earlier, the state limits the City’s discretionary review of housing development projects. Therefore, it is critical to adopt ODDS that help ensure that residential projects in Citrus Heights conform to the City’s minimum design expectations while being objective.

In addition to complying with state law, there are several benefits to developing and implementing objective design standards. These benefits are discussed below:

- **Increase consistent decision making:** Objective design standards help increase consistency in decision making. With no interpretation or personal preference, developers will receive consistent direction from project to project and year to year, even when there is staff turnover.
- **Minimize applicant delays:** Objective design standards will provide development and design professionals with clear and concise language that help minimize delays, associated with the need to redesign a project to meet City expectations.
- **Better utilize staff resources:** Just as important as minimizing costly delays to developers, objective design standards that are easy to comprehend and implement reduce the amount of time that staff must work with an applicant to design a project that meets the City’s expectations. This allows staff to approve or recommend approval of projects in a timelier manner, thereby enabling staff to have more time for accommodating other customer’s needs.
- **Promote Good Design:** Community design is an important component of the General Plan which has goals that promote well-designed pedestrian spaces, compatibility with the surroundings and attractive and functional corridors.

Consistency

The Booklet provides a number of ODDS which support a many goals/policies of the City’s General Plan, specifically the following goals/policies of the Housing Element portion of the General Plan:

Goal/Policy #	Summary
25.3	<i>Facilitate mixed-use development and redevelopment in appropriate areas</i>
25.4	<i>Support a variety of housing opportunities on vacant or under-utilized lands</i>
26.2.A	<i>Promote the develop of mixed-use housing including clustered, live/work and above-retail uses in appropriate zones</i>

The Auburn Boulevard Objective Design Standards also support a number of concepts, goals, and principles of the ABSP including land use principal (LUP12) which states “Integrate infill housing into Auburn Boulevard’s commercial frontages and adjacent neighborhoods.”

Applicability

The Auburn Boulevard Objective Design Standards will be applicable to certain kinds of new housing developments - specifically projects submitted under SB 35 Streamlining or projects submitted under the HAA. Applications submitted utilizing these streamlined timelines are processed ministerially (i.e. “over the counter”) and therefore will be required to meet the ODDS provided in the Booklet. Subsequently, an applicant may choose to design a project outside the ODDS but they would not be afforded the permit streamlining timeline. Projects processed outside permit streamlining would be subject to the design review and density standards of the ABSP as well as may require CEQA review and be subject to a public hearing.

Overview of Zones

To accommodate the varied physical environment along the Auburn Boulevard Corridor, the Booklet applies varied ODDS based upon the properties location within a “zone.” As shown in the map below, the plan area is broken into two zones- a Neighborhood Zone and a Main Street Zone.

Figure 2.02.A: Auburn Boulevard Regulating Plan

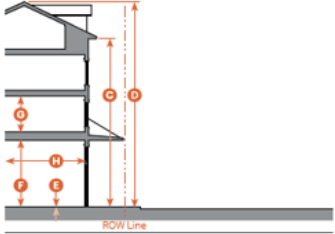
- Key
-  T4 Neighborhood
 -  T4 Main Street
 -  Four story height overlay
 -  Open sub-zone



The Neighborhood Zone, the less urban of the two zones, is applicable to areas which could create a more walkable neighborhood environment and are within close proximity to neighborhood-serving retail and services. As shown in yellow on the map, the Neighborhood Zone is mapped in two areas: a northern area between Twin Oaks Avenue and Rollingwood Boulevard, and a southern portion between Rusch Park and Sylvan Corners. This area would support varied housing choices including duplexes, tri/fourplexes, and townhouses with building heights of up to three stories.

The Main Street Zone is applicable to the more urbanized areas of the Auburn Boulevard Corridor and areas more appropriate for medium to-large building footprints. The Main Street zone has been mapped in three places along Auburn Boulevard in order to promote mixed-use and commercial activity centers along the corridor where retail and service activity can be concentrated, leaving the remainder of the corridor to transition to a neighborhood environment over time. As shown in purple on the map, the Main Street Zone can be found in three areas: Sylvan Corners, the area surrounding Grand Oaks shopping Center, and the large commercial area at the northern end of the Auburn Boulevard Corridor. A range of uses, building types and building heights are allowed within this zone including up to three stories in height near Sylvan Corners and the Grand Oaks Plaza areas, and up to four stories in the area nearest the I-80/Auburn Boulevard interchange.

The standards within each of the two Zones provide the granular details for design elements needed to implement ODDS. Below is an example of how ODDS for building placement and building façade is illustrated in the Booklet for each of the two zones. This demonstrates the standards are not subjective but are objective.

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Density

The land use designation for the properties within the ABSP is General Commercial (GC) and allows for a density of up to 40 units per acre. This density is supported in the ODDS with the allowance of the increased building height from two stores to three stores with one zone allowing up to four stories.

While the City applies the density at a “maximum” rate of 40 units per acre, some of the newest state mandates (AB 2011, SB 6) require qualified housing projects to use this a “minimum” density and in some cases, allow bonus densities to exceed the maximum density. Like SB 35, projects proposing to capture the maximum density or receive a density bonus, have to meet other project obligations such as prevailing wage and housing affordability.

Neighborhood Compatibility

Ensuring new housing along the corridor is compatible with the adjacent neighborhoods is a critical component incorporated into the Auburn Boulevard ODDS. The ODDS regulates this compatibility through carefully calibrated standards for physical characteristics like where buildings are placed on lots, what kinds of buildings can be built in different zones, and how wide and deep those buildings can be. These standards ensure that new buildings relate to the existing surrounding neighborhood while intentionally creating a new Neighborhood zone and a new Main Street zone that yield compatible but distinct environments.

The chart below provides an overview of a few of the differences and an analysis of those differences.

Standard from ODDS	T4 Neighborhood Zone	T4 Main Street Zone	Analysis
Front Setback (Sections 2.04.E and 2.05.E)	On Auburn Blvd: 15 ft min., 25 ft max. On all other streets: 5' min., 15' max.	On Auburn Blvd: 10 ft min., 20 ft max. On all other streets: 5' min., 10' max.	This standard provides a range of allowed setbacks for each zone. In the Neighborhood zone, buildings are set back further from the street, while in the Main Street zone, buildings are required to be slightly closer to the street. In both cases, there is a minimum 5 ft setback to leave room for elements like stoops or shopfronts. For buildings facing Auburn Boulevard, the setbacks are deepened by 10 ft for each zone. This was written to address the existing character of Auburn Boulevard as a high-speed corridor environment. In a Neighborhood, this extra space could provide a deeper front yard to buffer the front porch from the roadway and place the house further back from the traffic noise. In a Main Street zone, this extra space could be paved like an extension of the sidewalk so that people have a comfortable walking path with more distance from fast-moving traffic.
Side Setback (Sections 2.04.E and 2.05.E)	5 ft min.	0 ft min.	This standard ensures that buildings in the Neighborhood zone will be placed on their lots with at least 5 ft of open space on each side. This side setback maintains the character of a neighborhood where houses are detached, and

			<p>buildings have access to light and air from all four sides.</p> <p>In the Main Street zone, the 0 ft minimum side setback enables buildings to be built all the way to the side lot lines, and potentially attach to the adjacent buildings. This enables the kind of built environment that is common to main streets, where multiple buildings are attached to each other to create a varied block face.</p> <p>Note that these setbacks are minimums; a property owner could choose to provide a greater side setback if desired.</p>
Rear Setback (Sections 2.04.E and 2.05.E)	20 ft min. if adjacent to existing residential parcel; 15 ft min. otherwise	20 ft min. if adjacent to existing residential parcel; 15 ft min. otherwise	Where new development will be adjacent to existing residential development, the ODDS requires a greater rear setback. This provides an additional buffer between existing residential structures and new buildings, minimizing detrimental impacts to light and air in existing homes' backyards. (Sections 2.04.E and 2.05.E)
Allowed Building Types (Sections 2.04.C and 2.05.C)	Stacked Duplex, Triplex/Fourplex, Multiplex, Townhouse, Live/Work (in open sub-zone only), Courtyard Building, and Stacked Flat	Multiplex, Townhouse, Live/Work, Courtyard Building, Stacked Flat, and Main Street Building	<p>Buildings with small-to-medium footprints are allowed in the Neighborhood zone and relate to the scale of the predominantly single-family houses in adjacent neighborhoods. These building types place multiple units in buildings that appear like large houses.</p> <p>Buildings with medium-to-large footprints are allowed in the Main Street zone. These building types provide additional intensity and represent an incremental step up in scale from the Neighborhood zone. This building form helps to create a Main Street environment that feels distinct from but compatible with the Neighborhood zone.</p>
Building Width (Sections 4.04.C-4.11.C)	Ranges from 36 ft max. to 100 ft max. depending on building type	Ranges from 60 ft max. to 200 ft max. depending on building type	<p>Building width is a critical metric to control buildings' perceived bulk. The ODDS regulates building width through standards for building types; each building type has a maximum width associated with it. For example, a duplex has a maximum width of 36 ft while a multiplex has a maximum width of 60 ft.</p> <p>While there is overlap in the range of building widths allowed in the Neighborhood zone and the Main Street zone, the buildings in the Neighborhood zone tend to be less wide and similar to the scale of a house. Buildings in the Main Street zone tend to be wider than a house,</p>

		<p>and provide a consistent street edge that helps produce the character of a main street environment. Any building in either zone with a width of 75 ft or greater is subject to additional Massing and Façade Articulation Standards (discussed below).</p>
<p>Massing and Façade Articulation Standards (Chapter 5)</p>	<p>Buildings with façade length of 75' or greater are subject to Massing and Composition standards (Section 5.03); buildings with façade length of 100 ft or greater are additionally subject to Tripartite Façade Articulation standards (Section 5.04), Architectural Recessions standards (Section 5.05), and Windows and Openings standards (Section 5.06).</p>	<p>These standards are applied to buildings in both zones that trigger these standards when they reach a certain width. They help ensure that wider buildings are visually subdivided into smaller masses to relate to the scale of the existing adjacent neighborhoods, and that wider buildings have visual breaks and visual interest (such as parts of the building stepping back) to avoid a monolithic appearance.</p>

Application Processing

The intention of many of the legislative actions enacted over the past few years has been to speed up housing production. Therefore, majority of these mandates legislatively dictate a shortened application processing timeline for housing applications meeting the requirements of the mandate. For example, if an SB 35 applicant meets the state requirements for location and affordability, they are provided a shortened review process (as few as 90 days) and would not be subject to any design review approval by the Planning Commission or City Council. Staff would utilize the objective standards to evaluate project design for consistency. Projects that meet these standards would be approved at a staff level without any hearing pursuant to the law.

An overview of the application review process is provided within the Booklet (pages 14-16). As shown by the flow charts, processing timelines vary depending on if the application is being submitted under SB 35 or under protection of the HAA. Staff works closely with the development community to identify the proper actions necessary.

CONCLUSION

The ODDS Booklet provides applicants and developers with a clear understanding of the City’s rules for mixed-use and multi-family residential projects proposed within the ABSP. The ODDS are written as requirements, rather than guidelines; therefore, all mixed-use and multi-family residential projects applying under Housing Accountability Act (HAA) protections shall comply with each standard. Importantly, objective design standards regulate site and structure design only. Projects must also comply with all other applicable requirement such as building and fire codes, noise regulations, and other utility service requirements such as water, sewer.

The prepared Booklet will support a mixed-use and multi-family residential ODDS for these types of housing developments within the ABSP area. Such standards are critical to help ensure that residential projects conform to the City’s minimum design expectations. There are several benefits to the adoption of objective design standards, including but not limited to promoting good design principles that have the intent to create attractive and safe neighborhoods with human-scaled buildings that create a sense of place and are compatible with and enhance the surrounding area. Other notable benefits include

providing clear and consistent standards that help increase consistency in decision making and minimize delays in the planning entitlement process.

NEXT STEPS

The draft document has been circulated for review and posted on the City’s website. Any comments received as of the writing of this report have been incorporated into the document. Since the Booklet will serve as policy for the implementation of the ABSP, City Council adoption is required. Should the Planning Commission or any other member of the public have additional comments, they will be considered when the Booklet is presented to the City Council in April.

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION

Staff recommends the Planning Commission adopt a Resolution to find the Auburn Boulevard Objective Design Standards is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under Section 15061(b)(3) of the Guidelines which states that a project is exempt from CEQA when the activity is covered by the common sense exemption that CEQA applies only to projects which have the potential for causing a significant impact to the environment. Where it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the activity in question may have a significant effect on the environment, the activity is not subject to CEQA.

RECOMMENDATION

The Planning Division recommends the Planning Commission make the following motions:

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Motion 2: Recommend the City Council adopt a Resolution adopting the Auburn Boulevard Objective Design Standards that supports development standards for mixed-use and multi-family residential development within the Auburn Boulevard Specific Plan area.

Attachments:

1. Resolution
2. Auburn Blvd Policy Booklet
3. Stakeholder Workshop Comments
4. [Link to ABSP](#)
5. [Link to General Plan](#)
6. FAQ's