



## City of Sebastopol Planning Commission Staff Report

Meeting Date: February 11, 2025  
Agenda Item: 7A  
To: Planning Commission  
From: Zoning Ordinance Ad Hoc/John Jay, Associate Planner  
Subject: Zoning Code update discussion and direction  
Recommendation: Receive report, discuss, and provide direction regarding recommendation to City Council.

### **Introduction:**

As we bring forward Housing Element and Zoning Code updates in the spring of this year, now would be a good time to discuss other code improvements. Based on the Planning Commission walking meeting on September 9, 2024, a sub-committee was formed to propose updates to the Zoning Code which would modify the code to allow the development patterns present in our older neighborhoods to be made compliant. Currently, much of the development observed in the older parts of town (see Figure 1) that were on the walk would be considered 'legal non-conforming' lots, meaning they do not comply with the current Zoning Code, but are allowed pursuant to code section 17.160, since the use and construction occurred prior to the adoption of the Sebastopol Zoning Code.

As stated in section 17.04.050 of the Zoning Code '*The Zoning Code is adopted to promote and protect the public health, safety, peace, comfort, convenience and general welfare...*' There was consensus during the walk that legal non-conforming properties observed and discussed on the walk support these goals even though they are out of compliance with the current Zoning Code. As the properties view during the walk increased the availability of housing units to members of the public that would normally not be allowed to date.

### **Discussion:**

These proposals are made with a number of General Plan and Housing Element goals in mind:

- Allow many of the existing lots that are currently 'legal non-conforming' to conform to the Zoning Code.
- Allow for existing neighborhoods to evolve to be similar to the older neighborhoods in town that were developed before zoning codes.
- Allow for new neighborhoods to have a form similar to the older neighborhoods in town that were developed before zoning codes.
- Allow for Main Street and other downtown streets to be developed as they were prior to zoning codes. This would allow buildings to continue the development pattern seen on Main Street between Burnett and McKinley.
- Allow for more 'Missing Middle' housing types to be built throughout town. Buildings like the 3-plex at the corner of North High and Wilton, the 6-plex at South Main and Calder

and the 4-plex at the corner of Calder and Vine. **Missing Middle** housing is a range of multi-unit or clustered housing types which are compatible in scale with single-family homes. These housing types were very common in neighborhoods developed before the 1940s. The adoption of zoning codes since that time makes these housing typologies difficult if not impossible to build today.

- Provide more housing options to accommodate a range of household configurations and income levels as well as mixed-use developments.

These proposed changes support the following General Plan policies:

- Policy LU 1-2: Avoid urban sprawl by concentrating development within the City limits: favor infill development over annexation.
- Policy LU 5-2: Encourage the preservation and conservation of older existing homes
- Policy LU 5-5: Strongly encourage residential development in a balanced and efficient pattern that reduces sprawl, preserves open space and creates convenient connections to other land uses.
- Policy LU 6-1: Promote increased residential densities
- Policy LU 6-2: Promote compact urban form that provides residential opportunities in close proximity to jobs, services and transit.
- Policy LU 6-3: Encourage and support the construction and occupation of very small houses and micro apartments.
- Policy LU 6-4: Provide for a variety of residential products, through the General Plan and Zoning Code, to accommodate the housing needs of all segments of the City's population.
- Policy LU 7-6: Encourage mixed-use developments throughout the city.
- Policy LU 7-9: Encourage local-serving neighborhood retail uses readily accessible to residential areas.
- Policy CD 1-7: Promote a compact urban form and infill development with increased densities to be located in areas that are readily accessible by pedestrians and bicyclists, served by transit and allow for convenient access to daily services.
- Policy CD 2-1: Promote a safe and active environment through an urban form that provides physical and visual connections throughout the Downtown.

- Policy CD 2-5: Encourage, promote and assist with the development of housing opportunities with Downtown that include a mix of income levels and housing types, and to the maximum extent possible explore adaptive re-use opportunities within existing buildings.
- Policy EV 1-8: Encourage local-serving neighborhood retail uses readily accessible to residential areas. The intent of this policy is to encourage small-scale developments, compatible with the immediately surrounding area.

***Housing Element Policies:***

- Policy A-3: Encourage a variety of housing types such as multi-family units, mixed use housing, ADU and JADUs, single-family attached (townhouses), and other typologies that make housing more affordable.

There are several Zoning Code standards that could be improved to achieve the goals and policies identified above.

- Minimum lot sizes
- Setbacks
- Minimum parking requirements
- Maximum density allowances
- Standards that allow only a single-family home to be built on a residentially zoned lot
- Open space requirements
- Lack of provisions to allow for small neighborhood-serving commercial uses in residential neighborhoods.

**Proposals:**

- Use Objective Design Standards that were developed for future SB 35 projects to be used for development throughout the city. Currently, the *Objective Design Standards* only apply to SB 330, Affordable Fair Housing and Accountability Act, and SB 35 projects and do not include the single-family (R1-R4) zoning districts.
- Reduce setback requirements to be more like what exists in our older neighborhoods. Setbacks should be a fixed number and not a percent of lot width and depth. The proposed setbacks below would supersede the setbacks in the Objective Design Standards.
  - Front Yard – 8’
  - Side Yard – 3’
  - Street Side Yard – 3’
  - Rear Yard – 10’
  - Garage/Carport Facing Street – 20’
  - Mechanical Equipment – 3’
- Allow missing middle housing to be developed in all R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, CO and CG districts. These types are described in the Objective Design Standards.

- R3 should allow single-family, side-by-side duplex, stacked duplex, stacked triplex, stacked fourplex, and cottage courts
- R4, R5, R6 and R7 should allow those allowed in R3 plus small multi-plex, medium multiplex, townhouse, side courtyard, neighborhood courtyard and pocket neighborhood Missing Middle housing types
- Consider using the building envelope to control the size of buildings rather than density and setbacks. This is the approach used in the Objective Design Standards where the maximum size of a building is defined. This would prevent the merging of multiple lots to create large multi-family buildings. Building massing would be controlled by the Objective Design Standards.
- Eliminate minimum lot sizes. Lot size would be defined by building type as defined in Objective Design Standards.
- Eliminate open space requirements for multi-family projects.
- Eliminate maximum lot coverage requirements or provide for a sliding-scale maximum lot coverage that would encourage more units. A single-family house would have the lowest maximum lot coverage and each additional unit added to a property, up to a defined maximum, would allow for a higher maximum lot coverage.
- Eliminate minimum parking requirements, everywhere, for every use.
- Allow small neighborhood-serving commercial uses like corner markets, cafes and home-based businesses.
- Consider allowing a cluster or planned development approach

**AREA OF TOWN CONSIDERED  
GENERALLY CONSIDERED 'PRE-ZONING CODE'  
Figure 1**





## IMAGES OF SOME OF THE PLACES DISCUSSED DURING THE WALK

1.



High/Wilton Triplex – does not comply with the following zoning requirements

- Downtown zoning district requires mixed-use
- Not enough off-street parking

2.



Main Street

- Redevelopment of existing Main Street buildings is difficult primarily because of parking requirements

3.



Calder/Main Apartment Building – does not comply with the following zoning requirements

- Mixed-use required
- Exceeds maximum density
- Not enough parking spaces

4.



Calder/Vine 4-Plex – does not comply with the following zoning requirements

- Exceeds allowable number of units
- Does not comply with side yard setback requirement
- Not enough off-street parking spaces



5.



Calder/High – single-family home – does not meet the following zoning requirements

- Street side yard setback
- Does not meet minimum lot size requirements

6.



High/Willow – Single-Family Home – does not comply with the following zoning requirements

- Lot size less than minimum allowed
- Front, street side and rear setbacks less than allowed



**Recommendation:**

The City Council will be having a meeting in the coming months to set priorities and goals for the coming year. The goal of tonight's Commission meeting would be to advance a summary of our discussion of these proposed Zoning Code reforms to the council so that they include them on their list of priorities for this year.

The changes the Planning Commission agrees with will be assembled into a zoning amendment package, along with the required Housing Element zoning amendments so that all proposed amendments to the Zoning Code could take place with a single ordinance.

**Attachments:**

Setback Exhibit





