

SLO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE HOUSING TASK FORCE HEIGHT FOR HOUSING

SAN LUIS
OBISPO
CHAMBER
of
COMMERCE

PURPOSE AND VISION

The purpose of the Chamber's analysis on current height regulations within the City of San Luis Obispo's General Plan was to define what conditions exist to support the creation of more compact housing in both the urban and outer areas of the city. While, taller buildings are typically located within the city's downtown core, it should be recognized that with the inclusion of housing, other areas of the city can be suitable for greater density and height than currently exists.

The group's work focused on taking a deep dive into the city's General Plan, the recently adopted Land Use and Circulation Element, the 2014-19 Housing Element and the existing Downtown Concept Plan which is currently undergoing its own update. The group also researched best practices with professionals in other communities, engaged developers and planners to learn "real life" experiences about their efforts under existing regulations to create housing in San Luis Obispo and identified policy objectives that are clearly outlined in existing regulations that, if met, ultimately create opportunities to develop housing that answers to the overall community sentiment that more is needed.

While a height limit of 50' for new buildings is defined, there are allowances that can be met and utilized in order to:

- *Create new residential units at various price points for various income levels*
- *Maximize areas ideally suited to accommodate combinations of commercial, professional and residential spaces*
- *Craft public-private partnerships that will leverage resources and benefit the community's social fabric*
- *Access funding opportunities that are available through local nonprofits such as Peoples' Self-Help Housing, the Housing Authority of the City of SLO and the SLO County Housing Trust Fund*
- *Provide more housing options to relieve pressures on the buyer / rental market and our city's transportation infrastructure*
- *Meet the city's objectives as defined in its Climate Action Plan and 2015-7 Major City Goals*

Through this work, the Housing Task Force subgroup was inspired to take an illustration created in 2007 by a previous Chamber task force and update it. This graphic demonstrates what height limits exist that financially impact the viability of any given project. In addition, in recent years, proposed projects have been stalled or scrapped due to advisory bodies taking action outside of their purview, making project certainty precariously uncertain and ultimately resulting in the city not meeting its numerous stated objectives year after year (as described above).

This "height for housing" tool is intended to clearly outline what our city's current regulations allow in order to maximize housing development opportunities – which some voices in the community will say is not allowed – but actually is. It's also a means to demonstrate how, if approached smartly and perhaps innovatively – we can meet many communitywide goals.

The Chamber recommends the following:

Chamber Staff and Volunteers advocate for a change to existing zoning regulations during City Downtown Concept Plan Update and forthcoming Zoning Code Update (Q1 2017).

- *50' Building Height by Right in exchange for:*
- *600 SF max unit size (affordable by size)*
- *In addition to required affordable housing, 20% of units in project must be no greater than 600 SF*
- *Must be sold as owner occupied*
- *Must be sold to SLO County residents*
- *Small units will receive a proportionate reduction in City development fees based on size*
- *Discretionary review would apply to all other aspects of project review except for building height.*
- *Would apply to Downtown District only*

Should this initial criteria be met at an administrative use permit level:

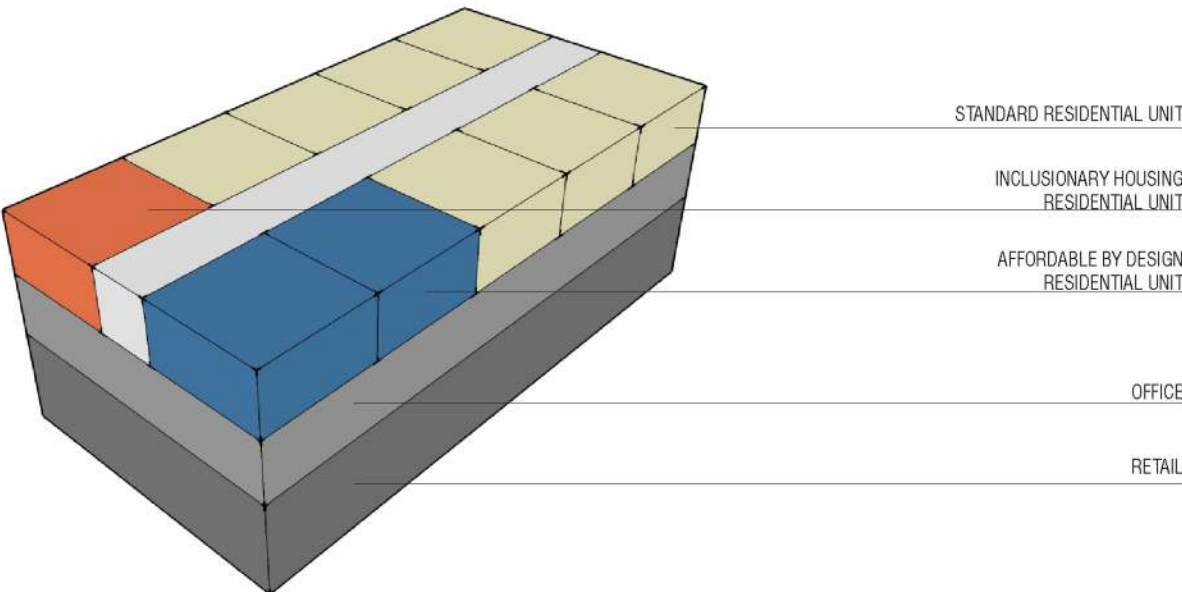
- *The project goes to the necessary advisory bodies having already been approved for a proposed height*

This will result in the following:

- *More certainty for those proposing to make a long term investment in San Luis Obispo*
- *Decreased delays in seeing projects to the finish line*
- *Less use of city resources due to longer processing times*
- *More housing*

With an affordable and workforce housing crisis in San Luis Obispo, we must find ways to approve quality housing projects (affordable to our employees that meet our General Plan objectives) in a timeframe that minimize risk to home builders. This height policy will simply facilitate the plan we already have in place and address a well-known barrier to the construction of the housing we need. The public will still have ample ability to comment on projects and the advisory bodies will be able to more directly focus on project review within their purview as developers are bringing projects forward.

FOUR STORY BUILDING



BENEFITS OF HEIGHT FOR HOUSING

Achieves General Plan and Housing Element Objectives

- To keep Downtown's sense of place and appeal for walking, it should remain compact and be the City's most intensely developed area.
- Achieves desirable design amenities not available outside of downtown, and creates higher building density, by placing compact urban form where it belongs- in the downtown core.
- New structures can complement existing historical buildings with higher first floor ceiling heights allowing for expansive and light filled retail areas.
- Encourages innovative and synergistic uses for non-ground floor spaces, such as viewing decks, providing enhanced viewing areas of the surrounding open space.
- Provides additional housing options in the downtown core, encouraging multi modal transportation options and fewer vehicle trips.
- Establishes, enhances, and upgrades public spaces.

Discourages Sprawl

- Taller buildings allow higher building density, providing additional diversified housing options within the City's core, reducing the need for sprawl.
- Innovative mixed use design that provides for housing in the downtown area calls for compact urban form with taller buildings that can accommodate these uses.
- Compact development in the downtown core adds to the sense of place while reducing traffic and vehicle congestion that comes from urban sprawl.

Foster Economic Vitality

- Taller buildings provide the best and highest use of limited space within the downtown core, providing for a vital and economically vibrant downtown.
- Multi use possibilities such as dining, entertainment, commercial, shopping, civic, professional, and residential are enhanced with taller buildings creating a more diverse and adaptable economic infrastructure.
- Mixed use in the downtown creates a more vibrant, livable downtown neighborhood

Creates a Sustainable City

- Compact development can be more efficient with regard to natural resources and existing infrastructure.
- Increased residential density and taller structures (particularly mixed-use projects) in the downtown reduce traffic and vehicle congestion and therefore reduce greenhouse gas emissions and support more efficient public transportation and ridesharing modalities.
- See LUE Policy 10.4: "The City shall encourage projects which provide for and enhance active and environmentally sustainable modes of transportation, such as pedestrian movement, bicycle access, and transit services."

Thoughtful Evolution

- Carefully considered taller buildings ensure that downtown continues to evolve while remaining the community's urban center serving as the cultural, social, entertainment, and political center of the city.



PAST AND PRESENT EXAMPLES OF TALLER BUILDINGS IN DOWNTOWN SAN LUIS OBISPO



THE PACBELL BUILDING
872 MORRO STREET
54'- 81' HIGH



THE ANDERSON HOTEL
955 MONTEREY STREET
65'- 90' HIGH



THE WINEMAN HOTEL
849 HIGUERA STREET
40' HIGH



MASONIC TEMPLE
859 MARSH STREET
55' HIGH



CITY OFFICES AND PARKING GARAGE
919 PALM STREET
54'- 77' HIGH



THE MIX
1308 MONTEREY STREET
46' HIGH



COUNTY GOVERNMENT CENTER
1055 MONTEREY STREET
65' HIGH



JP ANDREWS BUILDING
998 MONTEREY STREET
40' HIGH



HOTEL RAMONA
ESSEX & MARSH
50' HIGH



ANDREWS HOTEL
MONTEREY & OSOS
50' - 80' HIGH

SUMMARY OF CURRENT CITY POLICIES

GENERAL PLAN—LAND USE POLICIES

4.2. Downtown Residential - Downtown is not only a commercial district, but also a neighborhood.

4.2.1. Existing and New Dwellings

- A. Existing residential uses within and around the commercial core should be protected, and new ones should be developed.
- B. Dwellings should be provided for a variety of households.
- D. All new, large commercial projects should include residential uses.

4.19. Sense of Place- To keep the commercial core's sense of place and appeal for walking, it should remain compact and be the City's most intensely developed area.

4.20.2. Upper Floor Dwellings - Existing residential uses shall be preserved and new ones encouraged above the street level. This new housing will include a range of options and affordability levels.

4.20.4. Building Height

New buildings shall fit within the context and scale of existing development, shall respect views from, or sunlight to, publicly-owned gathering places such as Mission Plaza, and should be stepped back above the second or third level to maintain a street façade that is consistent with the historic pattern of development. Generally, new buildings should not exceed 50 feet in height. Tall buildings (50-75 feet) shall be designed to achieve multiple policy objectives, including design amenities, housing and retail land uses, such as:

- A. Publicly accessible, open viewing spaces at the upper levels
- B. Housing affordability in excess of the Inclusionary Housing Requirement
- C. Energy efficiency beyond State mandated requirements
- D. Adaptive reuse of a historical resource in a manner consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation
- E. High residential density (e.g. above 24 units per acre) achieved by a concentration of smaller dwelling units
- F. Street level features such as a public plaza, public seating and/or public art
- G. Provide midblock or other significant pedestrian connections
- H. Increased retail floor area, including multi-story retail
- I. Directly implements specific and identifiable City objectives, as set forth in the General Plan, the Conceptual Plan for the City's Center, the Downtown Strategic Plan and other key policy documents
- J. Receiving Transfer of Development Credits for open space protection or historic preservation
- K. Proximity of housing to convenient transit connections

4.28. Allowing Efficiency Units and Variable Density in Downtown - The city shall modify zoning regulations to allow efficiency units and variable density in the Downtown Core.

ZONING - DOWNTOWN DISTRICT

C. Maximum height: Fifty feet. Additional building height up to seventy-five feet may be approved as provided under subsections (C)(1), (2), (3) and (4) of this section.

1. Performance Standards for Buildings Taller Than Fifty Feet (All Required).

The project must include housing at a minimum residential density unit value of twenty-four units per acre. The average floor area of dwellings within the project shall be one thousand two hundred square feet or less. (Group housing projects must show that the proposed building meets or exceeds the population density that would otherwise be achieved by this standard.)

2. The architectural review commission (ARC) may approve building height up to sixty feet if the ARC determines that the project includes at least two objectives from subsection (C)(3) of this section, with no two being from the same lettered subsection.

The planning commission may approve a use permit allowing maximum building height of seventy-five feet upon determining that at least two of the following policy objectives (with no two being from the same lettered subsection) are met, and at least one affordable and workforce housing objective must be chosen.

3. Policy Objectives

Affordable and Workforce Housing - The project provides affordable housing, per city standards, at the rate of five percent for low-income households, or ten percent for moderate-income households, as a percentage of the total number of housing units built (no in-lieu fee option).

ii. The project qualifies for, and utilizes, a density bonus per the city's affordable housing incentives (Chapter 17.90).

iii. The project includes residential density greater than or equal to thirty-six units per acre and the average floor area of units is one thousand square feet or less. (Group housing projects must show that the proposed building meets or exceeds the population density that would otherwise be achieved by this objective.)

4. Application Requirements

Planning applications submitted for new buildings over fifty feet tall shall include the following additional items to assist the city in the analysis and decision-making process: a. Viewshed analysis b. Solar shading analysis c. Parking demand management - trip reduction programs d. Three-dimensional digital model e. Solid waste management plan f. Solid waste management plan g. Green Building Plan h. Emergency services access plan i. Public safety plan j. Utilities infrastructure analysis j. Building code analysis

THREE STORY BUILDING

75' HEIGHT ALLOWED BY CITY COUNCIL
WITH ADDITIONAL PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

60' HEIGHT ALLOWED BY PLANNING COMMISSION
WITH PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

11' ROOF
9' CEILING

13' FLOOR
10' CEILING

RESIDENTIAL

OFFICE

20' FLOOR
16' CEILING

14' WINDOW W/ TRANSOMS
10' AWNING

RETAIL

Setback per
Downtown
Design
Guidelines

In exchange for minimum housing standards as listed below, a building height of 50 feet will be allowed by-right in the downtown core.

All other City requirements and regulations will remain in effect.

50' HEIGHT BY RIGHT

- small residential units maximum floor area of 600 SF
- 20% of small residential units must be provided above and beyond the required inclusionary code.
- Must be sold as owner occupied
- Must be sold to SLO County residents
- All small units shall pay reduced fees (i.e. a 600 SF unit would pay half the fees of a 1,200 SF unit.)

Modern buildings require larger interstitial spaces between the ceiling and floors than our historical buildings did; larger structural members, water, sewer, communications, fire suppression and especially mechanical systems are housed in these spaces.

Tall windows at the street level are traditional in the historic core. The lower portion allows for the clear viewing of the merchandise while the upper transoms allow for natural ventilation. The tall windows also allow for natural light to penetrate deeper into a building. Ventilation and natural light are key elements making buildings more inviting and user friendly.