

Objective Design Standards

To help address the state’s ongoing housing crisis, several legislative bills have been passed by the state legislature requiring jurisdictions to offer a permit review process for housing development projects that is streamlined, predictable and consistent. Among other things, Senate Bills (SB) 35 ([IB-135](#)) and 330 ([IB-132](#)) require jurisdictions to only apply objective development standards when processing certain housing development types.

In response, the city has adopted objective design standards (ODS) that correspond with the new streamlined permitting review process for new multifamily housing and mixed-use development projects, while ensuring these projects reflect Carlsbad’s unique community character. This info-bulletin provides an overview of these standards.



BACKGROUND

Establishing ODS for multifamily housing and mixed-use development projects is one of several programs identified in the [2021-2029 Housing Element](#). Pursuant to Program 1.11, the City Council approved on August 29, 2023, two separate standards for objective design: one for the historic Village & Barrio neighborhoods; and the other for the rest of the city. Through these standards, the city seeks to achieve the following goals:

Compatibility with Community Character

Provide clear design direction to ensure development will enhance an area’s unique community character and sense of place.

Strengthen Local Design Regulations

Implement objective design standards that are clear and legally enforceable.

Documents Referenced

- Government Code Section; [65913.4](#)
- Government Code Section; [65589.5](#)
- Village & Barrio ODS; [Webpage](#)
- Village & Barrio ODS; [Standards](#)
- Village & Barrio ODS Processing; [Guide](#)
- Village and Barrio ODS; [Checklist](#)
- Village and Barrio Master Plan; [Webpage](#)
- Citywide Objective Design Standards; [Webpage](#)
- Citywide Objective Design Standards; [Manual](#)
- Citywide ODS Processing; [Guide](#)
- Citywide ODS; [Checklist](#)
- Senate Bill-35 (SB-35); [IB-135](#)
- Senate Bill-330 (SB-330); [IB-132](#)
- Density Bonus; [IB-112](#)
- Housing Element Update; [Webpage](#)

Reduce Project Costs and Provide Predictability

Standards that reduce project costs and long review timelines by providing developers, plan reviewers and the community clear direction that create predictability.

Encourage Residential Construction

Time and cost savings provided by predictable plan review and permit streamlining can help to reduce construction costs and increase project feasibility, increasing the likelihood that both affordable and market rate housing units are added to the market.

OBJECTIVE VS. SUBJECTIVE STANDARDS

Objective standards provide clear, measurable, and specific direction for how to apply development criteria. They should be so clear that everyone will interpret them the same way. Refer to Govt. Code [§66300\(a\)\(7\)](#) for the full definition. In contrast, subjective standards (or guidelines) are vague, unmeasurable and include language that may mean different things to different people.

APPLICABILITY

Eligible Projects

ODS apply to multifamily housing and mixed-use development projects that include two or more attached residential units, including the following project types:

- Townhomes
- Duplexes
- Condominiums
- Apartment complexes
- Mixed-use development projects

Ineligible Projects

The new ODS standards do not apply to the following project types:

- Previously approved multifamily housing or mixed-use projects (unless modifications are proposed).
- Projects that are in process and the application was deemed complete on or before October 12, 2023.
- Single-family homes.
- Accessory dwelling units (ADUs).
- Multifamily or mixed-use projects requiring General Plan or zoning amendment.
- Non-residential developments such as commercial, industrial or office sites.



PROJECT PROCESSING OPTIONS

Under recent state mandates, certain multifamily housing and mixed-use development projects must be processed through a new expedited review process in which objective design standards are used when implementing.

The following table provides three different processing options and required criteria for each.

PROCESSING OPTIONS	PROJECT TYPE CRITERIA
Ministerial Approval Process (City Planner Approval)	Min. two attached residential units
	Mixed-use project with at least two-thirds sq. ft. of residential uses
	50% affordable residential units
	Fair labor practices required
	See SB-35 IB for more criteria info
Limited Discretionary Approval Process (5 max. public hearings)	Min. two attached residential units
	Mixed-use project with at least two-thirds sq. ft. of residential uses
	See SB-330 IB for more criteria info
Standard Review Process	Min. two attached residential units
	Mixed-use development consisting of residential units.

OBJECTIVE DESIGN STANDARDS

Citywide Standards

When developing the citywide design standards, the city converted several subjective development guidelines to objective standards. Examples include the following changes:

Prior Subjective Standard

Fences and walls can serve many functions including noise reduction, security, identity, enclosure, privacy, etc. It is intended that the available fencing types be combined for appearances, interest and provide variety. Using a combination of open and solid styles is encouraged.

Objective Standard Replacement

Fences and walls shall be constructed of materials such as wood, wrought iron, or masonry and shall be a different color than the exterior wall of the building(s). Chain link fencing is prohibited. Where fences and walls of different materials or finishes intersect, an architectural transition or break (such as a pier, post, column, or pilaster) shall be provided.

Prior Subjective Standard

Visual interest should be created by using varied and recessed dwelling unit entryway treatments for units.

Objective Standard Replacement

Residential entrances located on the ground floor shall include one or more of the following:

- Entrance Types. Allowable unit entrance forms include porch, stoop, patio, terrace, forecourt, and courtyard.
- Weather Protection. Entrances shall have either a projected sheltering element or be recessed from the main facade; the projection or recess shall have a minimum depth of 24 inches.

Refer to the city's [website](#) for more information on the citywide standards.

Village & Barrio Standards

Unlike the citywide objective design standards, the Village and Barrio objective design standards includes a palette of seven architectural styles that are reflective of the eclectic mix of authentic architectural styles found within the Village and Barrio neighborhoods, as listed below. Refer to the city's [website](#) for more information on the Village and Barrio standards.

Spanish Revival



Craftsman



American Mercantile



Victorian



Colonial Revival/ Cape Cod



Traditional Modern



California Contemporary

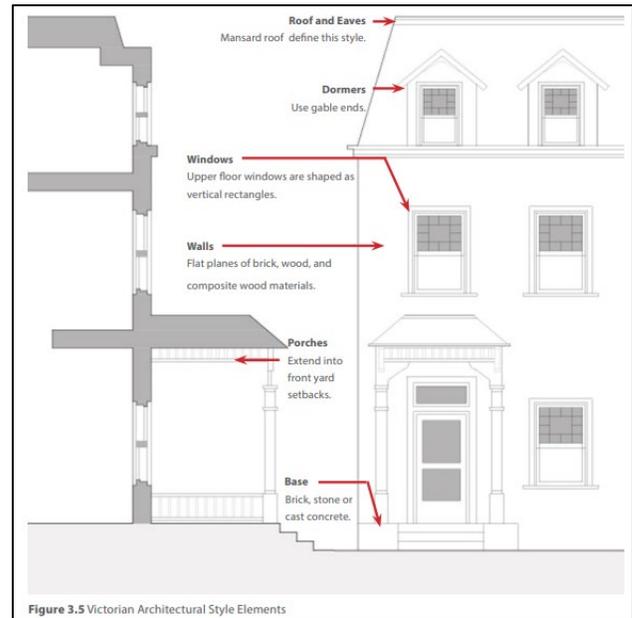


Figure 3.5 Victorian Architectural Style Elements

APPLICATION PROCESS

Preliminary Review Application Process

Early consultation with the city is strongly recommended since codes, standards, and housing requirements may apply to your project that affect the scope of a project.

Although it is not required, staff recommends applicants informally discuss their preliminary review application with staff (P-14) to obtain input PRIOR to submitting a Preliminary Housing Development Pre-Application for SB-35 or SB-330 projects (P-32). Refer to Info-Bulletin IB-114 for more information on the preliminary review process

Complete Application Review Process

After choosing a processing option as discussed above, a complete development permit application must be submitted to proceed. All application forms can be found on the Planning Application and Forms webpage located [here](#).

Waivers Requests

To ensure eligible projects are built using standards that are feasible and appropriate and to provide developers some flexibility in applying standards, the city is allowing applicants to waive up to four individual standards provided the following waiver finding are met:

- The proposed project meets the intent of the design standard under consideration, or a

- similar design standard(s) is implemented in substitution.
- The project meets the allowed density with the proposed waiver(s).
- For Village and Barrio Master Plan area only - The proposed project is consistent with the distinctive architectural style selected.

Note: The waiver process is an optional process; only compliance with objective standards is required pursuant to state law. The City of Carlsbad is not required to grant waivers if the city determines the findings cannot be met.

Application Resources

- For more information on how to process your application using the Village and Barrio Objective Design Standards, please review the Village and Barrio Objective Design Standards Processing Guide [here](#).
- For more information on how to process your application using the Citywide Objective Design Standards, please review the Citywide Objective Design Standards Processing Guide [here](#).

DENSITY BONUS PROJECTS

Projects proposing a density bonus, must comply with the City’s Density Bonus Ordinance and state’s Density Bonus law (see [IB-112](#)). **NOTE:** The concessions, incentive & waiver process pursuant to density bonus law is a separate process from the objective design standards waiver process.

If a density bonus concession, incentive, or waiver is for an objective design standard, it can be counted as a waiver under the objective design standards waiver process (up to four).

YOUR OPTIONS FOR SERVICE

To schedule an appointment or to learn more about this process, please contact the Planning Division at 760-602-4610 or via email at Planning@carlsbadca.gov

