

# Plan Implementation

## Subdivisions



City Hall \* 200 N. Spring Street, Room 721 \* Los Angeles, CA90012



January 29, 2014

TO: All Interested Parties

FROM: Michael J. LoGrande   
Advisory Agency

SUBJECT: **ADVISORY AGENCY POLICY  
SMALL LOT ORDINANCE**

### Introduction

Established in 2005 in LAMC Section 12.22-C,27, the Small Lot Ordinance allows for the subdivision of underutilized land in multi-family and commercial areas into fee-simple homes. Intended as infill development and a smart-growth alternative to traditional, suburban style single-family subdivisions, small lot homes would have smaller lot areas with compact building footprints and reduced yard setbacks, street frontages, passageways between buildings, and open space.

As such, small lot subdivisions create a unique set of design challenges and spatial complexities with regards to massing, height, circulation, and transitional areas from adjacent properties. Small Lot Design Guidelines provide an opportunity to address these complexities while also promoting the design and creation of small lot housing with neighborhood compatibility for consistency with applicable General and Specific Plans and addressing site organization and urban form, setbacks and building transitions, parking and driveways, building design and materials, and landscaping and access.

### Small Lot Design Guidelines – Advisory Agency Policy

All small lot subdivisions filed after February 1, 2014 must comply with or meet the intent of the attached 2014 Small Lot Design Guidelines through either methods listed in the Guidelines or through alternative methods that achieve the same objective. This Advisory Agency Policy and the attached Small Lot Design Guidelines replace and supersede the Advisory Agency's prior policies dated January 10, 2006 and November 15, 2006.

In cases where site characteristics, existing improvements, or special circumstances make substantial adherence with the Small Lot Design Guidelines impractical, substantial compliance may not be possible; in which case, small lot subdivisions must meet the intent of the Small Lot Design Guidelines, as stated above. The Small Lot Design Guidelines will be used to condition a project and not as the basis approving or denying a project. Conditions imposed by the initial decision maker may be appealed. The Small Lot Design Guidelines shall be used in conjunction with any other adopted



design guidelines, as applicable, and shall not supersede any adopted Specific Plan Design Review Board procedures.

#### Authority of the Advisory Agency

The Advisory Agency's authority to adopt this policy is based on the Subdivision Map Act (and LAMC 17.03) and the General Plan. The Map Act requires that the Advisory Agency must find in the affirmative that the proposed tract or parcel map, and its design and improvement, will be consistent with the applicable General and Specific Plans and that the site will be physically suitable for the proposed type of development. Where the "design" of the tract or parcel map refers to the configuration and layout of the proposed lots, easements and/or access and "improvements" to the infrastructure facilities serving the subdivision, such as roadways and sidewalks, the Map Act requires that the proposed map also be consistent with the General Plan.

The Small Lot Design Guidelines allow the Advisory Agency to implement the purposes, intent, and provisions of the General Plan and its various elements, and effectively provide the Advisory Agency with the tools to make the consistency findings with the General Plan for the purposes of approving a small lot subdivision. The Guidelines, in turn, are in conformance with the City's General Plan Framework - Chapter 5, Urban Form and Neighborhood Design - which encourages the "enhance[ment of] the liveability of all neighborhoods by upgrading the quality of development and improving the quality of the public realm" and the "formulat[ion] and adopt[ion of] building and site design standards and guidelines to raise the quality of design Citywide".

The Small Lot Design Guidelines shall only apply to subdivisions that are subject to the Small Lot Ordinance (LAMC 12.22-C,27).

#### Mixed-Use Small Lot Subdivisions

The Small Lot Ordinance states that "parcels of land may be subdivided into lots which may contain one, two or three dwelling units" for the purpose of a small lot subdivision. The Planning Department has historically interpreted this statute as allowing residential uses as part of a small lot subdivision while inherently excluding any commercial uses as part of a tract or parcel map for the purposes of creating "small lots." However, the Ordinance does not explicitly prohibit commercial uses as part of a small lot subdivision even when the underlying zone permits commercial uses. This policy will allow for the creation of a mixed-use development as part of a small lot subdivision, in that:

*A small lot subdivision may allow for a mixed-use building on a lot that combines a commercial use on the ground floor and upper level residence that is effectuated by the recordation of a tract or parcel map, as long as the underlying zone permits the commercial use, pursuant to LAMC Section 13.09-B,3. – Definitions of a Mixed Use Project.*

*Mixed-use small lot projects must comply with all other applicable regulations governing the site with regards to parking, signage, access, and FAR limitations in*

*the LAMC. Joint Living & Work Quarters, as defined in LAMC 12.03, shall not be considered a Mixed-Use Project for the purpose of a small lot subdivision.*

Small lot developments along commercial corridors must employ high-quality urban design to define the character of the proposed development. Storefronts must be vibrant, transparent, and protected, and most importantly, be compatible with the form and character of the existing commercial district. These projects must incorporate the design elements from the Small Lot Design Guidelines under the Special Guidelines for Ground-Floor Commercial Uses section.

Small lot projects with ground floor commercial uses help to fulfill the General Plan Framework's Policy 3.13.1, "Encourage the development of commercial uses and structures that integrate housing units with commercial uses in areas designated as 'Boulevard-Mixed Use'..." in CR, C1, C1.5, C2, C4, [Q]C2 Zones. They also fulfill Policy 2.2.1 of the 2013-2021 Housing Element, to "provide incentives to encourage the integration of housing with other compatible land uses."

Questions regarding this policy should be directed to Jae H. Kim, Senior City Planner, at (213) 978-1383.

MLG:AB:JK:JC

Attachment:

2014 Advisory Agency Small Lot Design Guidelines