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Architectural Review Board Staff Report

From: Planning and Development Services Director
Lead Department: Planning and Development Services

Meeting Date: March 7, 2024
Report #: 2402-2696

TITLE

Ad Hoc Committee Report: Objective Standards Phase 2 for Townhomes

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Architectural Review Board (ARB):

1. Review and provide informal comments. No formal action is requested.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a continuation of the discussion and presentations given by the Ad Hoc Committee on November 17, 2022¹, December 1, 2022², December 15, 2022³, and April 20, 2023⁴. When the Objective Design Standards for Housing Development Projects were adopted in July 2022, it was understood that modifications to these standards would likely be needed. Hence, the ARB Chair formed an Ad Hoc Committee to review the adopted standards and suggest changes to the full Board. This Committee is comprised of Chair Hirsch and Board member Chen.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Committee spent considerable time examining Palo Alto's Townhome communities, visiting similar projects in neighboring communities, and researching online. While this is an ongoing effort, the Committee feels there are many issues that could be modified in the code to address future projects. To inform the discussion, the Committee will present photographs and illustrations that were used to inform its recommended changes.

¹ Minutes from the November 17, 2022, hearing are available online at: [ARB-11.17-Approved-Minutes.pdf \(cityofpaloalto.org\)](#)

² Minutes from the December 1, 2022, hearing are available online at: [arb-12.01.2022-minutes.pdf \(cityofpaloalto.org\)](#)

³ Minutes from the December 15, 2022, hearing are available online at: [arb-12.15.2022-minutes.pdf \(cityofpaloalto.org\)](#)

⁴ Minutes from the April 20, 2023 hearing are available online at: [arb-4.20.2023-minutes.pdf \(cityofpaloalto.org\)](#)

The discussion of modifications is intended to focus on the key recommendations of the committee as a continued discussion from the December 15, 2022 hearing. However, the discussion could include feedback on the other objective standards that should be considered based on experience from projects moving forward through the review process. These could include modifications for clarity or to add to the existing standards. Any Zoning Code amendments proposed by staff based on this feedback, if directed by Council, would be subject to Planning and Transportation Commission review and recommendation, prior to Council review and action. Therefore, these amendments cannot affect any projects currently on file with the Department of Planning and Development Services.

BACKGROUND

The Committee spent considerable time examining Palo Alto's Townhome communities, visiting similar projects in neighboring communities, and researching online. While this is an ongoing effort, the Committee feels there are many issues that could be modified in the code to address future projects. For the previous hearings, the ARB Ad Hoc Committee provided the attached summary (Attachment B) of key recommendations for code changes to add to the objective standards codified in 18.24. To inform the discussion, the Committee will present photographs and illustrations that were used to inform its recommended changes (Attachment A).

The discussion of modifications is intended to focus on the key recommendations of the committee as a continued discussion from the April 20, 2023 hearing. However, the discussion could include feedback on the other objective standards that should be considered based on experience from projects moving forward through the review process. These could include modifications for clarity or to add to the existing standards. Any Zoning Code amendments proposed by staff based on this feedback, if directed by Council, would be subject to Planning and Transportation Commission review and recommendation, prior to Council review and action. Therefore, these amendments cannot affect any projects currently on file with the Department of Planning and Development Services.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

No formal action is proposed. Therefore, the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) does not apply to this study session.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Ad Hoc Committee Presentation on Objective Standards for Townhomes

AUTHOR/TITLE:

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