



**STAFF REPORT
HOLLISTER PLANNING COMMISSION
MEETING DATE: March 13, 2025
REPORT # Community Development-2025-19**

AGENDA ITEM: RECEIVE AN INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATION REGARDING THE DEVELOPMENT OF OBJECTIVE DESIGN STANDARDS (ODS) FOR MULTI-UNIT AND MIXED-USE HOUSING PROJECTS IN THE DOWNTOWN

DEPARTMENT HEAD: Rod Powell, Assistant City Manager
STAFF CONTACT: Ambur Cameron, Senior Planner

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Staff recommends that the Planning Commission receive the informational presentation from PlaceWorks regarding the development of Objective Design Standards (ODS) for multi-unit and mixed-use housing projects in the Downtown. Discuss and provide feedback to the project team to inform and guide the preparation of the draft ODS.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: In response to recent State housing legislation concerning streamlined development review and objective standards, the City of Hollister applied for and, in 2023, was awarded REAP 2.0 funds from the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG) to develop objective design standards (ODS) for multi-family housing and mixed-use development within the downtown.

The City has chosen to collaborate with its on-consultant firm, Placeworks, to support this project. This study session marks the public kick-off of the Objective Design Standards Project. The primary goals of the session are to educate commissioners about the ODS preparation process, bolster their confidence and engagement, and maximize the value of their input. The session will focus primarily on the ODS Background Package PowerPoint presentation, designed to guide participants through the legislation, policies and processes that inform and relate to the ODS. Topics covered include, but are not limited to:

- The relationship between state laws, such as SB 423, SB 167 and SB 330, and the development of ODS.
- An explanation of ODS, including the distinction between ministerial and discretionary review process.
- A description of the development types and Downtown Mixed-Use (DMU) district to which the ODS will apply.
- Examples of ODS approaches across key design topics, such as site planning, building form, historic sensitivity and parking.
- Local design priorities, with an emphasis on historical preservation and maintaining the character of downtown.

The presentation will conclude with a Q&A session to address any questions and provide further clarification. Following this, PlaceWorks will facilitate a brainstorming session with commissioners, using a series of prepared questions. The discussion will center on downtown design perspective, future residential design beyond the DMU, and local developments that exemplify ideal design standards.

Background: In response to California’s housing crisis, several state laws—Senate Bill (SB) 35, SB 330, and SB 9—have been enacted to stimulate and streamline housing production. These laws aim to facilitate housing development by simplifying permit processes and limiting the ability of communities to deny or reduce the density of housing projects that meet objective General Plan and zoning requirements. As a result, local jurisdictions can no longer rely on subjective design standards for qualifying housing projects and must instead apply objective design standards.

Objective Design Standards (ODS) eliminate discretion or subjective judgment by relying on clear, uniform benchmarks. The City seeks to develop codified ODS to ensure high-quality design for qualifying housing projects, provide clarity and certainty to applicants, and streamline project review timelines. This approach fosters a creative, economically viable, and sustainable framework for new development. The ODS will specifically govern residential housing projects where discretionary review by the City is restricted or prohibited.

One of the City’s primary goals is to promote the development of high-density housing within the mixed-use core of downtown. To achieve this, the City plans to create a toolkit featuring visual and written guidelines to ensure clear and concise communication. A portion of this effort will focus on addressing historic buildings and districts downtown, providing guidance for their redevelopment. While the initial focus is on downtown, the City envisions leveraging these standards, either directly or as a model, to establish ODS for multi-family and mixed-use projects in other areas. The final objective design standards will be adopted by the City Council as a standalone document, with the flexibility to adapt to evolving requirements.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. ODS Brochure
2. ODS PC Study Session Presentation