



**STAFF REPORT
HOLLISTER PLANNING COMMISSION
MEETING DATE: February 26, 2026
REPORT # Community Development-2026-17**

AGENDA ITEM: REVIEW OF PROPOSED OBJECTIVE DESIGN STANDARDS FOR MULTI-FAMILY HOUSING AND MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE DOWNTOWN

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

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Staff recommends that the Planning Commission receive the informational report and presentation on the Draft Objective Design Standards (ODS) from Placeworks and provide general feedback to guide the preparation of the final draft document.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: In response to recent State housing legislation concerning streamlined development and the use of 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 been working in collaboration with its on-call consultant, Placeworks, to support this effort. This study session will be focused on reviewing the draft Objective Design Standards (see Attachment 2). The Commission is asked to provide feedback on the overall approach and content of the standards. Commissioners should consider whether any items are missing, whether certain topics have not been addressed sufficiently, whether any elements are overly detailed, or any other perspective that is needed to finalize the document for adoption.

Following the study session, the project team will make final amendments to the standards and incorporate figures and imagery into the final document. The final ODS document is scheduled to be brought forward for a recommendation of adoption at the next regularly scheduled Planning Commission meeting of March 26, 2026.

A PowerPoint presentation prepared by Placeworks will be provided as part of the study session. The presentation will outline the legislative framework, policies, and procedures that shape Objective Design Standards (ODS); highlight the key themes and comments from the March 13, 2025 Planning Commission meeting; and summarize the community engagement activities conducted to date. The presentation will also explain how public and Commission feedback informed the draft ODS and provide an overview of the draft document.

BACKGROUND: In recent years, the State has adopted several housing laws requiring jurisdictions to rely on objective standards when conducting streamlined review of the qualifying housing projects.

Senate Bill 35 (SB 35), which took effect on January 18, 2018, established a streamlined ministerial review process for eligible multi-family residential developments. Senate Bill

330 (SB 330), effective January 1, 2020, further requires jurisdictions to streamline the approval process for qualifying multi-family residential projects based on objective regulatory standards, although it does not require ministerial approval. As a result, the City cannot use standards or guidelines that are subjective in nature to deny SB 35, SB 330, or other applicable projects subject to Government Section 65589.5.

Objective design standards involve no personal or subjective judgment and are uniformly verifiable by reference to an external, measurable benchmark or criterion. In contrast, subjective standards require personal interpretation or judgement by a public official, as they are unmeasurable and lack the specificity needed to provide clear direction. For example:

- Objective Standard: *“Buildings greater than two stories shall be designed to differentiate a defined base, a middle or body, and a top, cornice, or parapet cap.”*

This standard is objective because it clearly identifies the applicable building type and specifies how the requirement can be met.

- Subjective Standard: *“Buildings shall be articulated to be consistent with the neighborhood character.”*

This standard is subjective because it is not measurable and requires discretionary interpretation.

The Objective Design Standards also support implementation of the City’s 2023-2031 Housing Element, anticipated for adoption in Spring 2026. The Housing Element indicates includes policies requiring the city to establish written SB 35 procedures and to adopt Objective Design Standards to streamline qualifying housing development.

The ODS further align with the Hollister 2040 General Plan Update, anticipated for adoption in Spring 2026. The Draft General Plan emphasizes high-quality design, orderly development, and pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods. Relevant policies include developing citywide design guidelines and objective standards (Action LU-16.1) and adopting objective standards for sidewalk and trail design to support a connected pedestrian network (Action C-3.6).

Together, these policies demonstrate that the adoption of Objective Design Standards directly support State housing law, implements the Housing Element, and advances the General Plan’s vision for high-quality design, enhanced walkability, and cohesive community character throughout Hollister.

Chapter 2 of the Housing Element outlines goals, objectives, policies, and programs intended to guide the City’s efforts to meet its Regional Housing Needs Allocation and support streamlined housing production.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: On March 13, 2025, the Planning Commission received an informational presentation from Placeworks regarding the development of Objective Design Standards (ODS) for multi-unit and mixed-used housing projects in the Downtown.

The Commission discussed the preliminary concepts and provided feedback to help guide preparation of the draft ODS.

As part of the broader outreach strategy, the City conducted public outreach to ensure meaningful opportunities for community participation. Approximately 13,284 postcards were mailed to households throughout Hollister inviting community members to attend the ODS workshop held on December 2, 2025 at Paine's Restaurant and to participate in an online survey. The workshop was structured as an open house from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. with formal presentations at 4:30 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. to share project background, objectives, and early design concepts, and receive community feedback.

To further promote participation, City staff posted event announcements across the City's social media platforms and website. In addition to the workshop, staff developed a Community Objective Stands Survey, available on the City's ODS webpage from early November through the end of December. The survey provided an accessible way for residents to share input on design priorities, community character, and preferences for future development.

RESULTS OF COMMUNITY SURVEY: Between early November and end of December 2025, the online survey collected 72 responses. Participants provided input on preferred design elements and amenities for new housing projects in Downtown Hollister. Respondents expressed strong support for walkable street designs and well-maintained sidewalks that accommodate all ages and abilities. Many favored new development that incorporates architectural elements consistent with existing Downtown styles, emphasizing cohesive and context-sensitive design. There was also broad support for green spaces and outdoor seating areas to enhance storefront activity and visual interest.

Feedback on landscaping and street trees was mixed, with some concerns about long-term maintenance. Parking availability and enforcement were also common concerns. Respondents generally supported increasing parking options and emphasized that any new parking structures should complement adjacent buildings and be screened from primary street frontages.

The full survey results are included as Attachment 1.

DOCUMENT STRUCTURE: The proposed Objective Design Standards document will be organized into three distinct chapters to ensure clarity and ease of use. This structure is designed to guide users through the entire process – from understanding the regulatory context and project applicability to applying detailed design standards from various residential development types. Each chapter builds upon the last, offering a logical progression that supports both first-time users and experienced practitioners as they navigate Hollister's design expectations.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter establishes the foundation for the Objective Design Standards. It outlines the legal framework that necessitates objective standards, provides an overview of Downtown Hollister's historic character, identifies which project are subject to the ODS, explains how the document relates to other City regulations, and describes the

submission and review process.

Chapter 2: Multifamily & Residential Mixed-Use ODS

This chapter presents the objective standards that apply to multifamily and mixed-use residential projects. It addresses site planning, pedestrian-oriented design, building form, architectural character, open space requirements, and landscaping – ensuring that new development contributes positively to the public realm and aligns with Hollister’s historic context.

Chapter 3: Small-Scale Residential ODS

This chapter focuses on standards for small-scale residential development, including single-family homes, duplexes, triplexes, and similar housing types. It provides clear, objective criteria for site orientation, building design, compatibility with historic character, and landscaping, supporting high-quality infill that respects neighborhood scale and identity.

ANALYSIS: The development of Objective Design Standards is necessary to ensure compliance with State housing laws while preserving the character and design quality of Downtown Hollister. The standards will provide clear, objective framework for evaluating multi-family and mixed-use projects, including those processed ministerially under SB 35. Without adoption of the objective design standards, the City would have limited review authority to shape the design of future multi-family and residential mixed-use projects.

Feedback received from the Planning Commission will guide the refinement of the draft standards, including the integration of figures, imagery, and detailed design criteria.

CONCLUSION: The Planning Commission is asked to provide feedback on the overall approach and content of the standards, including whether there are any missing items, items that are insufficiently addressed, or if any items are overly detailed or prescriptive. The project team will use this input to make any final amendments and incorporate them into the final document, along with the figures and imagery. The final draft is scheduled to be brought forward for a recommendation of the adoption at the next regularly scheduled Planning Commission of March 26, 2026.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. ODS Community Survey Results Memo
2. Administrative Draft Objective Design Standards