

Zoning Ordinance Ministerial Streamlining Briefing

Board of Supervisors
May 12, 2026



County of Santa Barbara
Planning and Development
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Briefing Overview

- Zoning Ordinance Amendment Project Background
- Permitting and Design Review Summary
- Residential Development Streamlining
- Commercial Development Streamlining
- Review Potential Thresholds
- Policy Direction

Zoning Ordinance Amendment Project

- Phase I:
 - Shopping Center zone district rezone to Retail Commercial (Approved November 7, 2023)
 - Outdoor Lighting and Signs Amendments (Approved February 11, 2025)
- Phase II: Ordinance Streamlining and Housing Accommodation Amendments (Approved January 27, 2026)
- Phase III: Ministerial Streamlining Amendments (pending)



Phase III: Ministerial Streamlining Amendments

Existing County Permitting

	Exemptions	Zoning Clearances	Land Use Permits (LUP)	Coastal Development Permits (CDP)	Discretionary Permits (DVP & CUP)
Approved By	No approval required	P&D Staff	P&D Staff	P&D Staff, unless within Coastal Appeals Jurisdiction	County decision-maker (P&D Director, ZA, PC)
Appealable	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Noticing	None	None	Yes	Yes	Yes

Current Design Review Process

- Review of projects by Boards of Architectural Review (SBAR, MBAR, CBAR, NBAR)
- BAR requirements for residential depends on community area
 - Required for all Ridgeline/Hillside development
- Required for almost all discretionary and commercial development

Current Design Review by Community Plan Area

	Current Design Review Requirement	Residential Design Guidelines	Commercial Design Guidelines
Eastern Goleta Valley	All development except AG/MT zones and Hope Ranch	Yes	No
Goleta	Isla Vista	Yes	Yes
Gaviota Coast	All development	No	No
Los Alamos	All development along Bell Street corridor	No	Yes
Mission Canyon	All development	Yes	No
Montecito	All development	Yes	Yes
Orcutt	All development in Old Town Orcutt	No	Yes
Santa Ynez Valley	Most development along view corridors and commercial districts	No	No
Summerland	All development	Yes	Yes
Toro Canyon	All development	No	No

Residential Development - Proposed Streamlining

Project Type	Current Requirements	Proposed Requirements
Single Family Dwellings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All require appealable LUP/CDP • Many require BAR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministerial if meet criteria • BAR if exceeds thresholds or ridgeline/hillside site
Accessory Structures (e.g., garages, workshops, guest houses, cabanas, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All require appealable LUP/CDP • BAR for some, depending on location 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministerial if meet criteria • BAR if exceeds threshold
Pools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All require appealable LUP/CDP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exempt
Small Structures (e.g., sheds, pergolas, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exempt if: less than 120 sq. ft., no utilities • LUP/CDP if exceeds exemption 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exempt up to 250 sq. ft., with utilities • Ministerial approval if exceeds exemption

SFD+ Ministerial Permitting Options

Option 1 - Hybrid:

- Establish thresholds to determine ministerial permit vs. appealable LUP/CDP
- Example objective thresholds based on
 - Grading/site disturbance (e.g., 250+ cubic yards grading, 10,000+ sq. ft. site disturbance)
 - Slopes (e.g., greater than 10%)
 - Site resources (e.g., native tree removal, Environmentally Sensitive Habitat areas/buffers)
- Ministerial projects still must comply with County policies



SFD+ Ministerial Permitting Options

Option 2 - Ministerial Review Only:

- Non-appealable permits for all SFDs and accessory structures
- Ministerial projects still must comply with County policies, including resource protection policies
- Use objective thresholds to determine level of review
 - Simple (like over-the-counter permitting): below thresholds, no site constraints
 - Complex (like current LUP/CDP process, without noticing or appeals): above thresholds and/or site constraints
- LUP/CDP requirement if development could create environmental impacts (not CEQA exempt)



Ministerial Policy Direction

Should staff explore:

1. *Amendments to establish criteria/thresholds to distinguish between ministerial projects and projects that require appealable LUP/CDP?*

OR

2. *Amendments to make all single family residential and residential accessory development ministerial/non-appealable, and establish thresholds for simple vs. complex projects?*

Design Review Options

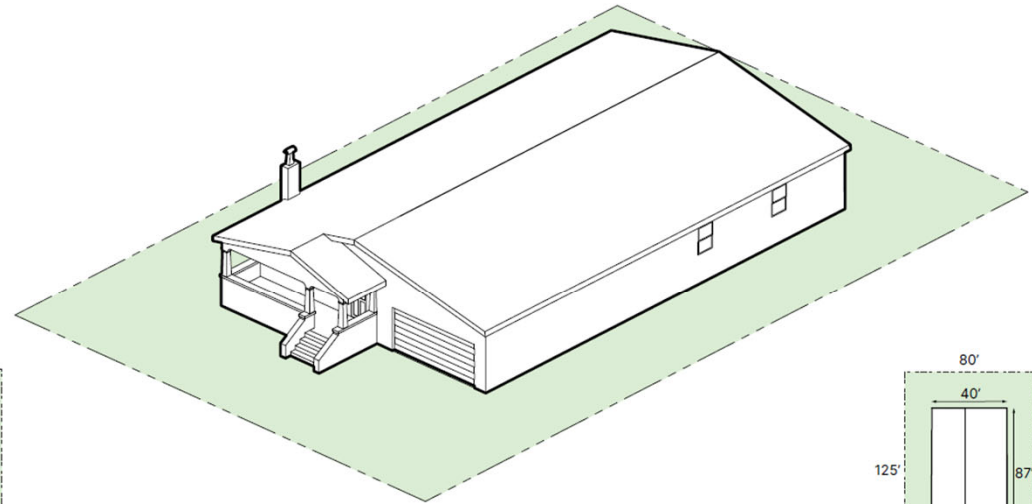
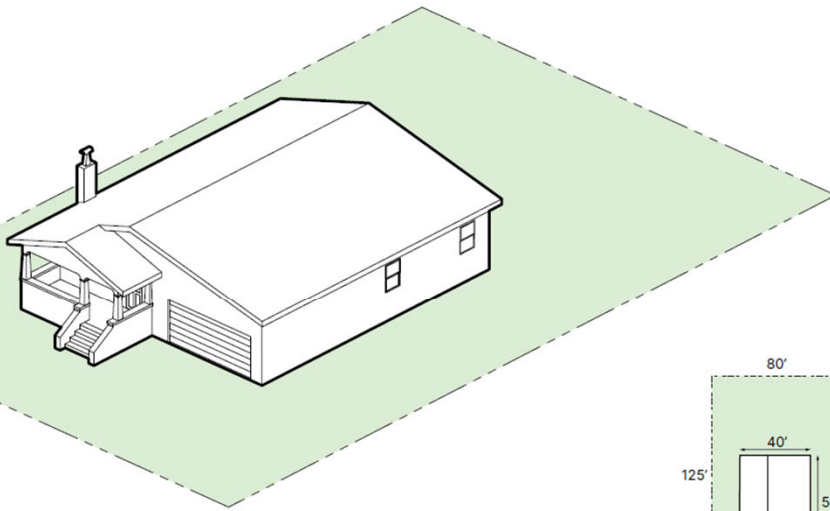
Option 1 - Exemption Criteria

- Establish thresholds or other objective standards to exempt more projects
- Focus review on projects with the most potential to raise issues (e.g., neighborhood compatibility, privacy, visual impacts)
- Example criteria include:
 - Exceeding a Floor Area Ratio (the ratio of the amount of development to the size of the parcel)
 - Exceeding an identified height or number of stories
 - Development on a ridgeline/hillside

Floor Area Ratio

- 1 Story, 0.2 FAR

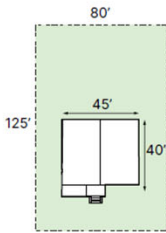
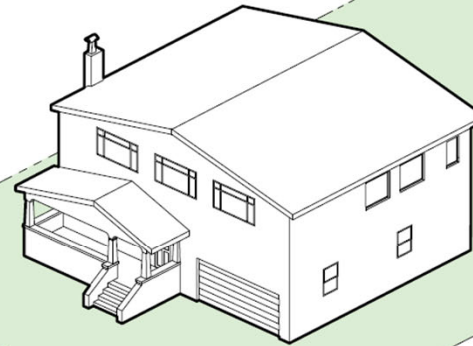
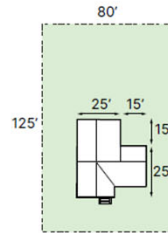
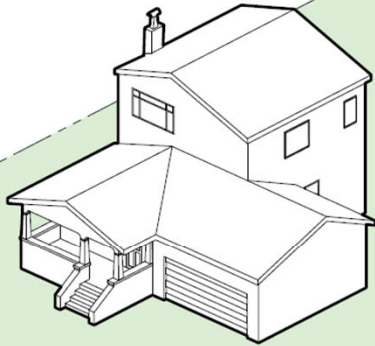
- 1 Story, 0.35 FAR



Floor Area Ratio

- 2 Story, 0.2 FAR

- 2 Story, 0.35 FAR



Heights/Number of Stories

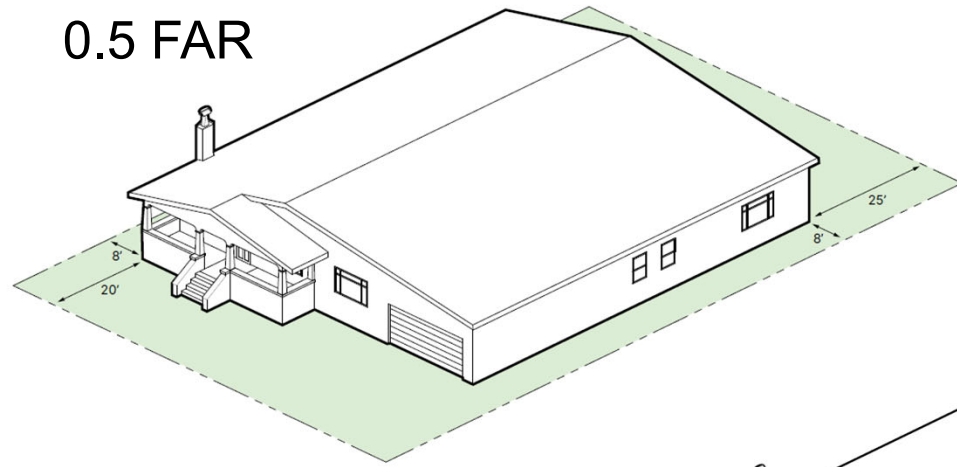
One vs. Two vs. Three Stories



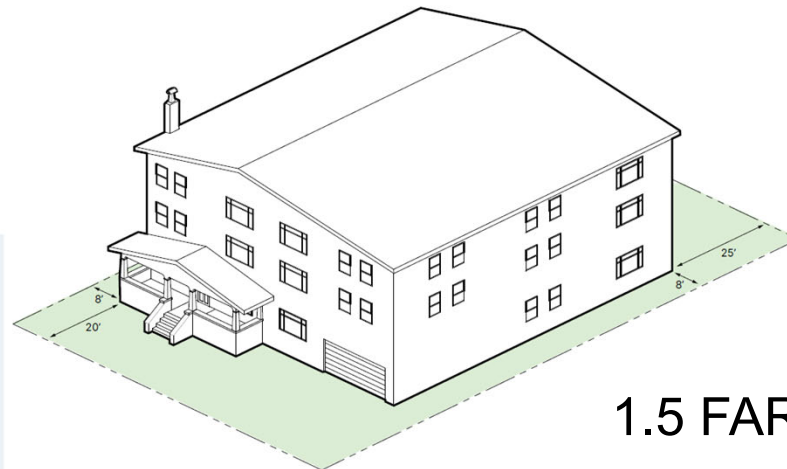
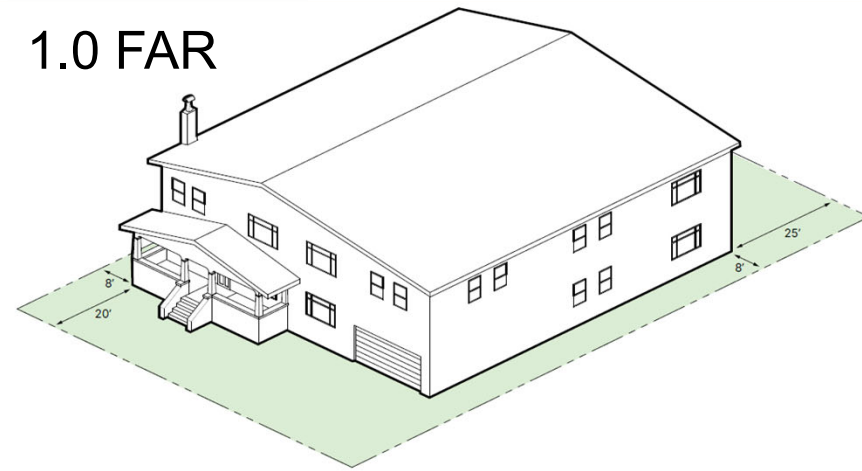
Maximum Buildout

- 1, 2, and 3 stories, built setback to setback

0.5 FAR



1.0 FAR



1.5 FAR

Design Review Options

Option 2 - Tiered Approach

- Establish an Administrative Design Review tier
 - 1) Exempt (existing)
 - 2) Staff/administrative review (new)
 - 3) BAR review (existing)

Applicability

- Uniform countywide OR maintain community differences

Design Review Policy Direction

Should staff explore:

1. *Amendments to exempt single family residential and accessory development from Design Review using certain criteria?*
2. *Amendments that establish a tiered approach with an administrative Design Review category?*
3. *Uniform applicability of these amendments or maintain differences for community planning areas?*

Commercial Development

Project Type	Current Requirements	Proposed Requirements
Change of Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exempt if like-for-like (e.g., café to restaurant) • LUP/CDP if change in type of commercial (e.g., café to retail) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exempt in all cases • Parking requirements an optional standard
New Structural Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All require appealable LUP/CDP • May require DVP based on amount of development • All require BAR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministerial below certain threshold • BAR exempt below threshold or in some areas of County

Change of Use

- Currently - appealable LUP/CDP required unless the uses are the same type (e.g., café to restaurant or retail to retail)
- Proposal - make changes between any permitted uses exempt

Parking

- Changes of use can require additional parking, which may not be feasible and can limit the potential uses
- Consider allowing changes of use and minor expansions without providing additional on-site parking

Limited Commercial Development

Streamlining Option - Permit Requirements:

- Establish a limited amount of commercial development that could be approved ministerially
- Threshold examples:
 - Up to 500-1,000 sq. ft. of commercial development for uses that are listed as a permitted use within the zone
 - Any commercial development currently permissible with appealable LUP/CDP to be approved ministerially (e.g., development less than 5,000 square feet in the CN, C-1, C-2, C-3, and OT zones)

Limited Commercial Development

Streamlining Option - Design Review:

- All new commercial development currently requires BAR review/approval
- Establish a threshold to exempt some projects from Design Review
 - Limited to small projects or minor additions if not visually prominent
 - Uniform approach versus tailored to community plan areas

Commercial Policy Direction

Should staff explore:

1. *Amendments to exempt changes of use and minor expansions without requiring additional on-site parking?*
2. *Amendments to establish a threshold for ministerial approval of commercial development?*
3. *Amendments to exempt limited commercial development from Design Review? If so, with uniform application or community plan area differences?*

Permit Review Thresholds - Downshifting

Downshifting Permit Requirements

- Each zone district has its own permit requirements for the more than 250 uses described in the zoning codes
- Staff is reviewing these uses and requirements with the goal of identifying some that can be downshifted
- Examples include:
 - Changing certified farmers' market from a MCUP to a LUP/CDP or ZCI
 - Changing fences/walls exceeding exempt heights from a MCUP to a LUP/CDP

Permit Review Thresholds - Exemptions

Exemptions

- Some uses/development are exempt from permit requirements
 - Fences/walls below certain heights, structures less than 120 sq. ft., interior alterations, etc.
- Proposal is to expand/update the list
- Examples include:
 - Increasing exempt structures from 120 sq. ft. to 250 sq. ft.
 - Exempting pools
 - Exempting HVAC equipment and back-up generators

Review Thresholds Policy Direction

Should staff explore:

- 1. Amendments to downshift certain permit requirements and, if so, any particular areas/uses?*
- 2. Amendments to expand the range of projects that would be exempt from permit requirements?*

Recommended Actions

- A. Receive and file the staff report
- B. Provide direction to staff on the proposed amendments
- C. Determine these actions are not a project subject to CEQA

Policy Direction - Residential

Residential Ministerial Permitting

1. Establish criteria for ministerial vs. appealable permits?

OR

2. Make all SFD and accessory structures ministerial and establish simple vs. complex review?

Design Review

1. Exempt SFD and accessory structures from Design Review by certain criteria?
2. Establish a tiered approach with administrative Design Review?
3. Uniform applicability or community plan differences?



Policy Direction - Commercial

Commercial

1. Exempt changes of use and minor expansions without requiring additional parking?
2. Establish thresholds for ministerial commercial development?
3. Exempt limited commercial development from Design Review?
 - Uniform approach versus tailored to community plan areas?

Policy Direction – Permit Review Thresholds

Review Thresholds

1. Downshift certain permit requirements?
2. Expand exemptions?



Thank You!
Any Final Questions?