



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
AGENDA LETTER

Agenda Number:

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 568-2240

Submitted on:
(COB Stamp)

Department Name:	Planning and Development
Department No.:	053
Agenda Date:	December 16, 2025
Placement:	Departmental Agenda
Estimated Time:	1 HOUR
Continued Item:	No
If Yes, date from:	
Vote Required:	Majority

TO: Board of Supervisors
FROM: Department Director(s): Lisa Plowman, Director, Planning and Development
Contact: Alex Tuttle, Deputy Director, Long Range Planning
SUBJECT: Ordinance Streamlining and Housing Accommodation Amendments

County Counsel Concurrence

As to form: Yes

Other Concurrence: N/A

As to form: N/A

Auditor-Controller Concurrence

As to form: N/A

Recommended Actions:

That the Board of Supervisors (Board) consider the recommendations of the Montecito Planning Commission (MPC) and County Planning Commission (CPC) regarding amendments to the Montecito Land Use and Development Code (MLUDC), County Land Use and Development Code (LUDC), and Article II, Coastal Zoning Ordinance (CZO) to adopt ordinance amendments for streamlining and housing accommodation (Case Nos. 25ORD-00006, 25ORD-00007, and 25ORD-00008), and take the following actions:

- a) Make the required findings for approval, including California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) findings, for the Ordinance Amendments, Case Nos. 25ORD-00006, 25ORD-00007, and 25ORD-00008 (Attachment A);
- b) Determine that the Ordinance Amendments, Case Nos. 25ORD-00006, 25ORD-00007, and 25ORD-00008, are exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Sections 15061(b)(3), 15168(c), and 15265 (Attachment B);
- c) Approve the Ordinance Streamlining and Housing Accommodation Amendments by taking the following actions:
 - i) Adopt an ordinance amending the zoning regulations of the County Land Use and Development Code (Case No. 25ORD-00006), Section 35-1 of Chapter 35, Zoning, of the Santa Barbara County Code (Attachment C);

- ii) Adopt an ordinance amending the zoning regulations of the Article II Coastal Zoning Ordinance (Case No. 25ORD-00007), of Chapter 35, Zoning, of the Santa Barbara County Code (Attachment D);
- iii) Adopt an ordinance amending the zoning regulations of the Montecito Land Use and Development Code (Case No. 25ORD-00008), Section 35-2 of Chapter 35, Zoning, of the Santa Barbara County Code (Attachment E);
- d) Adopt a resolution (Attachment F) authorizing the Planning and Development Department to submit the Coastal Zoning Ordinance Streamlining and Housing Accommodation Amendments (Case No. 25ORD-00007, Attachment D) to the California Coastal Commission (CCC) for review and certification as an amendment to the Santa Barbara County Local Coastal Program; and
- e) Direct the Planning and Development Department to transmit the adopted resolution to the Executive Director of the CCC.

Summary Text:

The Planning and Development Department has undertaken a series of zoning ordinance amendments to update, modernize, and improve the County zoning ordinances in three phases. Phase I included amendments to the outdoor lighting standards, sign standards, and Shopping Center zone district, and was completed early in 2025. Phase II consists of the amendments described in this Board Agenda Letter and the attachments. Phase III includes further amendments to streamline the permit process and identify more projects that can be processed ministerially, and is currently in development.

The Phase II amendments serve two purposes: amendments to modernize and streamline the ordinances; and amendments to accomplish the housing accommodation actions of Program #1 and Program #16 of the County's 2023-2031 Housing Element Update.

Discussion:

1.0 Ordinance Streamlining Amendments

The amendments to streamline the ordinances are divided into two main parts. Descriptions of the parts and key examples of the changes are listed below. For more detailed summaries of the proposed amendments and references to the sections and pages being amended, see the Ordinance Amendment Summary (Attachment G). For complete draft text amendments, see Attachments C, D, and E for the LUDC, CZO, and MLUDC, respectively.

A. Removing redundancies and simplifying and standardizing language.

These amendments include revisions throughout the LUDC, CZO, and MLUDC to remove redundancies, revise standards and applicability for clarity, remove obsolete provisions, and to simplify and standardize language. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- **LUDC Section 35.22.060/MLUDC Section 35.422.060 (Resource Protection Zone Findings for Project Approval).** This section requires that the standard findings for approval of a Conditional Use Permit are made in the Resource Protection Zone. It is redundant with other sections of the codes and is therefore deleted;
- **LUDC Section 35.30.050/MLUDC Section 35.430.050 (Density).** This section discusses the ability to reduce or increase the densities specified in the County Comprehensive Plan. It is obsolete and no longer generally applicable, and is therefore deleted; and

- **LUDC Chapter 35.36/MLUDC Chapter 35.436 (Parking and Loading Standards).** This chapter is revised to clarify applicability, remove redundant language, and improve functionality.

B. Revising permit procedures and administrative provisions.

These amendments revise procedures, processes, and administrative provisions to standardize, streamline, simplify, and clarify portions of the permit review process. In some cases, this includes downshifting the decision maker from the Planning Commission or Zoning Administrator to the Director. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- **Similar Use Determinations.** Revisions to allow the Planning and Development Director (Director) to make similar use determinations in all zones, rather than allowing them only in certain zones upon the approval of the County Planning Commission;
- **Director Deferral to the Planning Commission.** Revisions to allow the Director to elevate appealable projects customarily under the jurisdiction of the Director to the applicable Planning Commission at the request of an applicant;
- **Design Review.** Revisions to 1) create new exceptions to Design Review for accessory structures that are less than 500 square feet and located behind another building or on the rear half of the a lot, 2) to set the order that Design Review approvals happen, and 3) to clarify the appealability of Design Review approvals such that when a project (i.e., discretionary permit) has been approved by the applicable decision maker, preliminary approval by the Board of Architectural Review cannot be appealed unless it does not substantially conform to the approved project;
- **Coastal Development Permits.** Revisions to 1) create a category of Coastal Development Permit which cannot be appealed to the Planning Commission, and 2) eliminate the need for a Zoning Clearance in addition to a Coastal Development Permit as a follow-up permit for discretionary approvals;
- **Minor Conditional Use Permits.** Allow Zoning Administrator public hearings to be waived if no request for a public hearing is made, similar to current allowance for Modifications and Coastal Development Permits with Hearings;
- **Modifications.** Revisions to make the Director the decision maker for Modifications, downshifting from the Zoning Administrator;
- **Permit Expiration.** Revisions to standardize the expiration date of permits to four years after approval, unless there is an approved phasing plan.
- **Time Extensions.** Revisions to Time Extensions so that the Director is the decision maker for all Time Extensions (rather than the original decision maker, which may be the Planning Commission or Zoning Administrator), and make the action ministerial (i.e., no noticing required, and not appealable);
- **Noticing.** Revisions to consolidate and standardize noticing requirements across permit types; and
- **Changes to approved projects.** Revisions to clarify the procedure for minor changes to approved projects and set Zoning Clearances as the follow-up permit to Substantial Conformity Determinations, rather than Land Use Permits.

2.0 Housing Accommodation Amendments

The housing accommodation amendments primarily revise the development standards of the County's zone districts to facilitate housing development, consistent with Program #1 and Program

#16 of the County's 2023-2031 Housing Element Update. Program #1 requires, among other things, that by July 2026, the County must revise the development standards (e.g., height, lot coverage, and open space requirements) to ensure that maximum densities can be achieved. Program #16 requires, among other things, that within three years of the Housing Element adoption, the County must modernize the multifamily residential and commercial zone districts to facilitate the development of multifamily housing and housing in commercial zones (e.g., allow mixed uses). To satisfy these requirements, the proposed amendments focused around different zone districts. Examples are listed below. For more detailed summaries of the proposed amendments and references to the sections and pages being amended, see the Ordinance Amendment Summary (Attachment G). For complete draft text amendments, see Attachments C, D, and E for the LUDC, CZO, and MLUDC, respectively.

A. All zone districts.

- **Setbacks.** Setback requirements are simplified for clarity and consistency;
- **Design review.** Design review requirements are standardized; and
- **Building separation.** Building separation requirements are addressed in the County Building Code, and are therefore proposed to be removed from the zoning codes.

B. Residential zone districts (DR and PRD zones).

- **Height limit.** For sites with a maximum allowable density of 20 units per acre or more, the allowable height limit is increased from 35 feet to 45 feet;
- **Front Setback.** For sites with a maximum allowable density of 20 units per acre or more, the required front setback is reduced from 20 feet to 10 feet;
- **Site coverage.** The maximum site coverage limit is redundant with other provisions and is eliminated to achieve allowable densities; and
- **Open space.** Requirements for open space are amended to provide a certain square footage per dwelling unit rather than a percentage of the overall site, establish how much open space must be private or common, describe how it can be configured, and set standards for usability and accessibility.

C. Commercial zone districts.

- **Neighborhood Commercial (CN) and Limited Commercial (C-1) Zones.**
 - i. **Residential density.** The allowed density of residential portions of mixed-use development is revised to 20 dwelling units per acre, rather than a floor area limit of two bedrooms per 1,000 square feet of commercial development;
 - ii. **Front setbacks.** The front setback requirement is reduced from 20 feet to 10 feet for the CN zone district and from 15 feet to 0 feet for the C-1 zone district to match the historic development patterns;
 - iii. **Site coverage.** The maximum site coverage limit is eliminated in the CN zone to achieve allowable densities and remove redundant standards; and
 - iv. **Street frontage.** Nonresidential uses are required along street frontages and residential uses are limited to upper stories or behind nonresidential uses.
- **Retail Commercial (C-2) Zone.**
 - i. **Residential density.** The allowed density of residential portions of mixed-use development is revised to 30 dwelling units per acre, rather than a floor area limit of two bedrooms per 1,000 square feet of commercial development;
 - ii. **Height limits.** Height limits are increased from 35 feet to 45 feet for mixed-use development located more than 50 feet from a low-density residential zone.

- **General Commercial (C-3) and Professional and Institutional (PI) Zones.**
 - i. **Residential density.** The residential density is limited to one unit per 1,000 square feet of commercial development rather than two bedrooms per 1,000 square feet, with a gross floor area limit remaining at 50 percent.
- **Community Mixed-Use – Los Alamos (CM-LA) Zone.**
 - i. **Residential density.** The residential density is modified to 20 units per acre rather than a bedroom per commercial square footage ratio of two bedrooms per 700 square feet.

D. Special purpose zone districts.

- **Mixed-Use (MU) Zone.**
 - i. **Residential Density.** Density allowances are modified from a Planning Commission determination to 40 units per acre;
 - ii. **Height.** The allowable height is increased from 35 feet to 45 feet;
 - iii. **Building location.** Criteria for building location are modified/streamlined;
 - iv. **Open space.** Open space requirements are modified to require a minimum amount per residential unit rather than a percentage of the gross floor area, along with configuration standards;
 - v. **Street frontage.** Standards for what uses can be along the street frontage are established; and
 - vi. **Residential area.** The limit on residential square footage is modified from 50 percent of the total area to 50% of the ground floor.
- **Old Town Orcutt (OT-R, OT-R/LC, OT-R/GC) Zones.**
 - i. **Density.** Standards for densities that are not allowed in the zone are removed;
 - ii. **Open space.** The requirement for 40 percent open space is removed; and
 - iii. **Site coverage.** Limitations on site coverage for residential structures are removed to achieve the allowable densities given generally small lot sizes and redundant standards.

E. Overlay zone districts

- **Pedestrian Area – Old Town Orcutt (PA-OTO) Overlay Zone.**
 - i. **Site coverage.** Site coverage limits in the Peripheral Pedestrian Area are removed to achieve the allowable densities and given redundant standards; and
 - ii. **Parking.** Overlay specific parking requirements are relocated from LUDC Chapter 35.36, Parking and Loading Standards, into the overlay standards and clarified.
- **Mixed-Use – Santa Ynez Valley (MU-SYV) Overlay Zone**
 - i. **Parking reduction.** The allowable parking reduction is clarified; and
 - ii. **Residential use.** The limit on residential uses is simplified to upper stories rather than a floor area ratio of at most 66 percent residential.

3.0 Planning Commission Recommendations

On October 15, 2025, the Montecito Planning Commission recommended that the Board adopt the MLUDC amendments with four revisions:

- 1) remove the proposed provision for accessory structures of less than 500 square feet located behind another structure or on the back half of a property to be exempted from Design Review;

- 2) Allow appeals by applicants of Time Extensions that are denied by the Director;
- 3) Allow for an additional Time Extension to be approved by the Planning Commission, in addition to the proposed Time Extensions of two years approved by the Director; and
- 4) Increase the proposed allowance for Director review and approval of Development Plans for structures and additions from up to 1,000 square feet to up to 2,000 square feet.

On October 29, 2025, the County Planning Commission recommended that the Board adopt the LUDC and CZO amendments with one revision:

- 1) Modify the provision in the CZO for Director deferral of projects to the Planning Commission to be at the request of the applicant, rather than with applicant consent.

The revision recommended by the County Planning Commission would carry over a change that was made to the LUDC during development of the amendments, but accidentally omitted from the CZO. Staff have included this correction as recommended by the County Planning Commission into the draft CZO for the Board's consideration.

The County Planning Commission was not supportive of the four revisions recommended by the Montecito Planning Commission, instead retaining the draft language as originally proposed by staff. The revisions recommended by the Montecito Planning Commission have not been included in the draft MLUDC, but can be added with the Board's direction. While not mandatory, for consistency and uniformity, staff recommend that any revisions made by the Board to the draft ordinances based on the respective MPC and CPC recommendations be carried over to the other respective ordinances. Alternatively, the Board can decide to follow one or more of the conflicting recommendations, resulting in differences between the LUDC and CZO and the MLUDC. Lastly, with specific reference to the first recommendation of the Montecito Planning Commission, there is an opportunity to revisit the design review exemption as part of the Phase III ordinance amendments rather than the current ordinance package, if preferred.

4.0 Minor Revisions After Planning Commission Review

Following the review and recommendations of the County Planning Commission, staff identified two additional minor revisions to the code to help clarify requirements, and one revision to a standard in the C-2 zone district for mixed-use development. First, the following standard is an existing requirement of the LUDC (Section 35.36.100.D.2):

Encroachment prohibited. Laundry facilities located in a garage for a dwelling unit shall not encroach upon parking.

Staff proposed to move this requirement to Section 35.36.080.J.1, but otherwise maintain it in the amendments reviewed by the County Planning Commission. Since that review, staff has concluded that the standards of the LUDC would be clearer without this requirement, as it could suggest that features other than laundry facilities could encroach upon parking, and are recommending removing it.

Second, the following phrase is included for the residential density standard in the development standards table for every zone district in the LUDC and MLUDC:

Maximum number of dwelling units allowed on a lot. The actual number of units allowed will be determined through subdivision or planning permit approval.

The inclusion of “on a lot” in this phrase is redundant with the listed maximum density for many zone districts, which list the maximum per lot. As an example, the following is the existing residential density standard for the RR, R-1/E-1, and EX-1 zone districts:

Residential density	<i>Maximum number of dwelling units allowed on a lot. The actual number of units allowed will be determined through subdivision or planning permit approval.</i>
Maximum density	One one-family dwelling per lot; plus one or more accessory dwelling units and/or one junior accessory dwelling unit per lot where allowed in compliance with Section 35.42.015 (Accessory Dwelling Units and Junior Accessory Dwelling Units); Agricultural employee housing and farmworker housing if allowed by Section 35.23.030 (Residential Zones Allowable Land Uses).

Additionally, including “on a lot” can create confusion regarding zones and projects where density and the maximum density of units can be calculated on a site-wide basis across multiple lots. Staff is recommending removing “on a lot” from the phrase listed above in the development standards table for each zone district in the LUDC and MLUDC.

The revision to a standard is to change the proposed allowance for the residential portion of a mixed-use development in the C-2 zone district from 75% back to 50%. This is consistent with the current residential allowance for mixed-use developments in the C-2 zone district, and will reduce any inadvertent loss of critical commercial opportunities in favor of residential development. As proposed, this standard may be increased up to 75% through Development Plan approval where the review authority finds that the proposed development and existing land uses located within a half-mile of the project site provide an adequate amount of commercial uses to meet the overall purpose and intent of the area as a commercial district and the character of the surrounding area is such that additional residential square footage is appropriate.

These changes are reflected in the draft ordinances included as Attachments C, D, and E.

Background

The County’s 2023-2031 Housing Element Update was adopted by the Board of Supervisors on December 5, 2023, and includes programs and actions with specific requirements. Program #1 requires, among other things, that the County:

By July 2026, revise the development standards (e.g., height, lot coverage, and open space requirements) to ensure that maximum densities can be achieved.

Program #16 requires, among other things, that the County:

Within three years of Housing Element adoption, modernize the multifamily residential and commercial zone districts (e.g., allow mixed uses) to facilitate the development of multifamily housing and to implement new state laws (e.g., AB 2011 and SB 6), which streamline the approval process for housing in commercial zones.

The housing accommodation amendments described above in this Board Agenda Letter fulfill these requirements of Programs #1 and #16.

Public workshops were held with the Montecito Planning Commission and County Planning Commission on September 24, 2025, during which the ordinance amendments were explained, and the Commissioners and public were given the opportunity to review the materials and ask questions. The Montecito Planning Commission held a follow up hearing on October 15, 2025, to formally consider the amendments and make their recommendations to the County Planning Commission and the Board. The County Planning Commission held a follow up hearing on October 29, 2025, to formally consider the amendments and make their recommendation to the Board.

Assuming the Board adopts the ordinances, the amendments to the LUDC and MLUDC will take effect 30 days following Board action. Because amendments to the CZO constitute an amendment to the County's certified Local Coastal Program, the amendments to the CZO will take effect following Coastal Commission certification.

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:

Budgeted: Yes

The FY 2025-26 Adopted Budget for the County of Santa Barbara appropriates funds for continued work on the Zoning Ordinance Amendment Project, including technical updates, housing accommodation measures, and process improvements, as well as other long range planning initiatives within the Planning and Development Department's Long Range Planning Division. There are no facilities impacts.

Special Instructions:

The Planning and Development Department will satisfy all noticing requirements.

The Clerk of the Board shall provide copies of the Minute Order and signed resolutions and ordinances to the Planning and Development Department, attention Ben Singer.

The Coastal ordinance (25ORD-00007) shall not be sent to Municode for codification until requested by P&D staff.

Attachments:

- A. Findings for Approval
- B. CEQA Notice of Exemption
- C. County Land Use and Development Code Ordinance Amendment for Adoption (Case No. 25ORD-00006)
 - C-1. County Land Use and Development Code Ordinance Amendment with Revisions Shown
- D. Article II Coastal Zoning Ordinance Amendment for Adoption (Case No. 25ORD-00007)
 - D-1. Article II Coastal Zoning Ordinance Amendment with Revisions Shown
- E. Montecito Land Use and Development Code Ordinance Amendment for Adoption (Case No. 25ORD-00008)
 - E-1. Montecito Land Use and Development Code Amendment with Revisions Shown
- F. Resolution Authorizing Submittal of LCPA to CCC
- G. Ordinance Amendment Summary
- H. Montecito Planning Commission Action Letter and Resolutions, dated October 15, 2025
- I. County Planning Commission Action Letter and Resolutions, dated October 29, 2025
- J. Montecito Planning Commission Staff Report and Attachments, dated October 7, 2025
- K. County Planning Commission Staff Report and Attachments, dated October 21, 2025

Contact Information:

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