

Palmdale Zoning Code Update

Stakeholder Meeting Summary

1. Overview

Purpose: The City is embarking on a comprehensive update of the Palmdale Zoning Code now that the General Plan is being completed. The new Code will be updated to be consistent with the General Plan and recent State and Federal laws. It will also be modernized to include best practices, updated standards, new graphics, and illustrations where needed, and improved administrative procedures.

Objective: To learn about the issues of most concern to stakeholder regarding the Zoning Code.

2. Stakeholders

The project consultant team met with four different city identified stakeholder groups to discuss issues with the zoning code based on topics. Each group met for about one hour to share their thoughts and identify issues pertinent to the code update. The following four groups of participants were engaged:

Market-Rate Housing (October 4th, 2021- 3-4pm)

Planning Commission (October 4th, 2021- 4-5pm)

Affordable Housing (October 4th, 2021- 5-6pm)

Industrial/Commercial (October 6th, 2021- 9:30-10:30am)

3. Zoning Code- Key Issues

A. Development Standards & Regulations

Residential Development

- Residential zones should be close to and supportive of employment centers. Need both corporate and workforce housing, especially near corporate office, Plant 42, etc.
- Zoning should allow and support missing middle type housing (rowhouses, bungalow courts, etc.).
- Lowering parking requirements would make residential development pencil out financially.
- Setbacks in multi-family residential areas should be adjusted to create more of a metropolitan environment.
- Palmdale could use more R-3 and R-4 zoning. Particularly more on the east side which has more services and amenities required to support the funding and development of affordable housing projects. This would speed up the process, review, pre-development phase and reduce fees.
- The city could absorb more multi-family near the Antelope Valley Mall.

Density & Height

- Having a density minimum could help reach RHNA numbers.
- Density is a big factor for affordable housing development. If density requirements allowed for a three-story building without the need to use a State density bonus more affordable products could be built.

Mixed-Use Development

- Vertical mixed-use struggles to succeed in this city. Flexible horizontal mixed use should be more of a focus and vertical mixed use should only be employed in areas with multi-family housing, employment, and transit opportunities.
- The mix of use requirement should be proportional based on size of property and existing amenities in the area.
- Requirements that encourage commercial uses to be geared towards the tenant type would be a way to ensure low vacancy rates (e.g., senior living, professional office, veteran housing)

Industrial Development

- Industrial zoning is too expansive and all over the place. Some industrial zones may be better allocated as multi-family, especially in better parts of the city with proximity to services and transit.

Open Space

- To encourage the development of more affordable units in the city, it should consider lowering its open space requirement from 30 percent to maybe 10 percent. Currently, 30 percent makes it a challenge to achieve financial feasibility.
- For affordable housing developers to use state funding, there is a 0.25-mile radius to open space requirement applied to their project. Concessions on open space requirements typically happen because of proximity to existing open space.

Parking

- Parking reductions could be allowed for residential if the product type and population justify it (e.g., senior housing)
- Parking and open space requirements are at odds with each other and make development a challenge.

Other

- The hiding of rain gutters and down spout requirement can lead to issues with the building and higher maintenance cost for the developer due to freezing and leaking issues.
- Allow for AC units on roofs.
- Sometime fire code requirements conflict with the building code requirements.

B. New Provisions**Cell Towers**

- Establishing a requirement for buildings to install repeaters would diminish the need for additional cell towers.
- Cell tower permit renewals generally move quickly through Planning Commission. Rather than having the commission review, perhaps there is a way to approve them ministerially, so the process is streamlined.

C. Ease of Use**Graphics**

- Having a land use, CUP, by-right matrix makes the code easier to read.
- Charts, graphs, and tables are preferred to help simplify the code and make it easier to navigate.

D. Special Uses**Challenging uses**

- The following uses have presented some issues for Planning Commission & staff.
 - Auto recycling uses
 - Tattoo parlors
 - Bars

Evolving Uses

- The growth of marijuana is currently illegal, but the city could change its sentiment over time and should look to other cities to model their cannabis ordinances.

E. Permits & Decision-Making Process**City Staff & Departments**

- City Council, Planning Commission and staff have a good working relationship which is very refreshing.
- The city has a developer friendly culture (City Council, City Manager, Mayor, & Staff) but sometimes their hands are tied due to zoning regulations.
- City should work with private entities (Edison, Palmdale Water District, etc.) to make the process easier for developers while also helping to have their projects be financially feasible.
- The interdepartmental communication (e.g., DAB) is fractured and not seamless. Sometimes the onus is on the applicant to keep checking in with staff about the process. The city could benefit from a more robust computer tracking system, establish designated staff and concierge, or contract out for this service.
- The city needs to put “teeth” into their code and documents so that if people challenge a project the city can step forward to defend a project.
- Working with the city on applications is currently still really personalized. The user website might be helpful instead of having to depend on city staff for information or responses that could be automated or systematized (e.g., email, tracking, notifications). This would help to reduce the load on city staff and the developer.

Permit Requests

- The city currently receives a high volume of permit requests for restaurants, cell towers and renewals.

Fees

- The city should reduce infrastructure and off-site improvement fees as well as other soft costs (e.g., School Fees).

F. Other Issues**Infrastructure/Utility Requirements**

- The requirement to underground Edison poles is really challenging and can the end to a deal. Infrastructural/ utility requirement should be proportional to the development size.
- Street widening and other improvement requirements are burdensome for developers, raising the cost of all development.

The Market

- Zoning should focus on the market that exists today but be proportional to future demands.

Flexibility

- Zoning should be flexible if there is a compelling need to provide services in a certain area (e.g., allowing commercial uses such as food and childcare in industrial employment centers)

Example Successful Developments

- Fairway Business Park is a significant industrial project that seems to work for the community today.
- NoHo West is a reconverted shopping mall with a mix of townhomes, shopping, and office space. A design with reasonable height, large parking structures, and pedestrian activity.
- The “Sprouts Corner” is a good mix of uses that include residential with shared and private open spaces as well as resident supportive uses like dining and retail.
- Developments that are responsive to weather/climate are ideal for Palmdale. Providing, shade, cantilever design, materials that can withstand extreme weather will function well and likely reduce costs over time.

Relevant Policy

- SB 8,9 and 10 will have a major impact on 7,000 SF lots.
- The city should consider addressing State mandated VMT requirements because those requirements are more inline with the regulation of places like San Francisco and Los Angeles but are not necessarily suitable for the Antelope Valley.

Other City Approaches

- Looking to cities like Santa Monica & Pasadena to understand how missing middle can be approached in Palmdale.
- Other cities are more successful in attracting industrial projects because the infrastructure already exists, and the onus isn't on the developer.
- There is a need for more zoning enforcement officers at the city.
- Other cities have reduced parking requirements to one space for a two bedroom.
- Other cities prioritize affordable housing applications, this affords an expedited process.
- Some cities have their own staff team dealing with affordable housing projects.