

# Town of Windsor Multifamily Residential Design and Development Standards

## Stakeholder Interview Summary

### Introduction and Purpose

On May 12 through 14, 2020, the Town of Windsor consultants conducted three days of one-on-one and group interviews with local housing developers, landowners, and others identified by Town staff to gain an understanding of the ideas and expectations of the housing development community. The interviews included 11 participants. The input provided during these interviews help provide a starting point for the consultants and Town staff to begin drafting Multifamily Objective Design and Development Standards to streamline multifamily residential development in Windsor. Interview participants included:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Company</b>
Paul Gilger	Hedgpeth Architects
Michael Cobb	Studio Ecesis
Scott Schellinger	CSW Land Solutions
Trini Amador	BHC Consulting
Peter Stanley	ArchiLOGIX
Mitch Conner	ArchiLOGIX
Natalie Balfour	Airport Business Center
Richard Coombs	Airport Business Center
Steve Reilly	Land Advisors Organization
Eric Higuchi	Qtative Development Solutions
Andy Chris	Developer

This Report is organized into three sections: an introduction to the Project, a discussion of the process, and a summary of the input received during the interviews.

## The Multifamily Residential Objective Design and Development Standards Process

In February 2020 the Town began the process of revising the Zoning Code to reflect various changes in State Law regarding the streamlining of multifamily residential project approvals. Specifically, Senate Bill (SB) 35, passed in 2017, set out to “Significantly increase the approval and construction of new housing...by meaningfully and effectively curbing the capability of local governments to deny, reduce the density for, or render infeasible housing development projects” if the proposed project meets all “objective” standards within the General Plan, Zoning Code, and any subdivision standards . (Gov’t Code §65589.5 (a) (1) (K)). The goal of the Project is to create a streamlined “by right” path to multifamily development approvals based on a ministerial process without design review and additional discretionary processes.

**What are objective standards?** California State law defines objective standards as “Standards that involve no personal or subjective judgment by a public official and are uniformly verifiable by reference to an external and uniform benchmark or criterion available and knowable by both the development applicant and the public official prior to submittal.” (Gov’t Code § 65913.4 (5))

The first steps in the Objective Standards process included a work session with Town staff to discuss project objectives and expectations for the Zoning Code revisions; interviewing stakeholders in the local housing development industry; and reviewing existing Town planning documents. Following these initial steps, consultants and Town staff will conduct outreach to solicit input from the community, facilitate two Joint Study Sessions with the Planning Commission and Town Council, draft objective design and development standards and Zoning Code amendments, and complete environment review.

# Stakeholder Interview Summary

Although a variety of opinions and ideas were expressed during the three days of interviews, input can be generally summarized into the following seven categories::

- Administrative Procedures
- Development Standards
- Design Expectations and Affordability
- Architecture
- Density and Demand
- We Have to get Units Built!
- Parking

For each category, this summary includes both notes on common themes that emerged and quotations directly from stakeholders. Please note that all quotations are paraphrased and are presented without attribution.

## 1. Administrative Procedures

*“We have to prove to people that we can get them through the process all the way to the end.”*

- **Lots of mixed messages.** Objective Design and Development Standards should align with public works and engineering expectations.
  - “Check boxes” for streamlined approval need to be approved by Public Works/Engineering.
- **Too many hands on the plans.**
  - Time is valuable to a developer.
  - Review time, number of reviews, and fees for planning review should be fixed.
  - Create an exaction procedure so the process has boundaries.
- **Projects get stalled in Public Works/Engineering**
  - Entitled land doesn’t carry value. *“Dialog about Windsor among developers is that it is to be avoided. They get blindsided.”*
  - Staff are sometimes reluctant to make a final decision on a permit.
  - Like planning, the Town needs specified timeframes and fixed fee structures for Public Works/Engineering reviews
- Use **traditional review process** to allow for creativity.
  - *“We’ll just put our development skills, money, and teams to work in communities that have their act together and actually want our projects.”*
  - Come from a perspective of creating housing. Don’t punish developers for using the discretionary review process by holding them up needlessly.
  - Everyone has opinions. When issues arise, review for subjective concerns within the matter at hand (i.e. don’t open the whole plan back up).
- **Town Council and Planning Commission approval process** can sometimes be very frustrating *“Windsor has a reputation as a difficult place to develop and that if we don’t like the project conditions, we can go someplace else.”*

- Sometimes 11<sup>th</sup> hour conditions of approval are added that are infeasible.
- Frequent “micromanaging” of project design has been an issue.

## 2. Development Standards

- Standards need to have **flexibility!**
  - Infill sites require creative use of space.
  - Provide amenity options (e.g., pick 2 of the 5).
- **Let function drive standards.** *“The more you can tie a standard to the function the better for the community. Have a higher cause for the standard.”*
  - *“Don’t lose your way by just focusing on stylistic aspects at the detriment of livability. Expressing functional concerns will create a beautiful place.”*
- **Scale drives cost.** Larger projects have more potential to pencil out.
- **Garages** should be allowed in front. There is demand for more traditional shapes so we should allow for them.
- **Private drives** require HOAs. Don’t require them.
- **Zero lot lining** will help density with MF, allow for courtyard housing types.
- **Landscaping**
  - Consolidate in parking lots. *“Parking lot landscaping and mow strips don’t get maintained.”*
  - Landscaping is expensive. The space requirement is an ongoing financial concern for projects.
- **Setbacks.** Revise traditional setback standards to allow zig-zag designs that allow a backyard zone and a very close (6-8’) zone near street in front yard. No one uses a front yard, backyards are unusable in 5-10’ setbacks, and not functional for family activities. Need to get out of the old mind-set.

## 3. Design Expectations and Affordability

- **Design themes** are fine, but impossible to do them right and stay affordable.
  - Styles don’t match if the materials are affordable. Too expensive to do it right.
  - Prescription reduces creativity. *“The Town should trust that architects can make nice buildings.”* Provide just basic standards.
    - *“Forcing developers to do certain styles creates projects where cheap stuff is tacked on and doesn’t look good in two years.”*
  - Traditional architecture does not match with modern architecture, taste, or technology.
    - Example, lower-pitched roofs allow more solar space/flexibility and should be considered.
  - Cost between styles is negligible.
  - Variety is good for Windsor. *“Architecture should reflect the era in which it’s built.”*
    - *“Downtowns aren’t usually built all at once, so multiple styles in that area is not only good, but authentic.”*
  - The owner/developer’s taste should be considered. They should be allowed to build something they like.

- Design standards can become outdated as products and production types evolve.
  - Prescribed styles don't suit Windsor.
- Published **Town design standards** (Spanish, Norcal wood frame, Victorian, craftsman, mission revival and Spanish colonial) don't make sense for affordable multi-family housing in today's economy. Economical application of these styles looks cheap and unappealing.
- **Modern style.** The Town should allow modern style architecture. Younger generations tend to like this style and the community needs to appeal to younger renters.
- **Issues with Site Requirements:**
  - **Requirements add costs.** Need to keep the costs down or multi-family doesn't pencil.
  - **Setbacks and lot size requirements** make it difficult to achieve increased density in infill locations.
  - Objective Design and Development Standards that are too simple can make it harder because the four-unit complex shouldn't be asked to do the same as 200-unit complex, and vice-versa.
  - **Open Space/Recreation Requirement** is a problem. People would rather have lower rent. Costs are high and spaces don't get used that much. Community rooms get used. Site space is at a premium.
    - It's a balance between what people want and what they are willing to pay for, and requirement assumes decision-makers know the market better than the developer.
- **Manufactured, tiny, and non-traditional styles** should have a place in the code but aren't affordable at this moment.
  - *"Small and micro units make a lot of sense. Around 500 sq feet. You can rent these without parking and maybe turn them into condos for sale if the market increases."*
- **Adaptive Reuse** will be important. Lots of retail expected to become/remain vacant
  - First-floor retail requirement for mixed use is problematic.
    - Ground floor retail standard is the most difficult issue. It doesn't work. Too much turnover and not enough viability in those businesses.

## 4. Architecture

- **Materials:**
  - Quality issues. Cheap detailing, lack of detailing/trim (changing planes with just paint)
    - *"No plastic shudders and Styrofoam beams."*
  - Too prescriptive can be a problem: *"Windows set into walls, for instance, is great, but these products don't exist that are nice unless you are doing high end. Don't dictate architectural elements that can't be done at an affordable price."*
    - Covered porch required, NOT, Covered porch that is 5'x7' required. The latter is too prescriptive.
- **Articulation** is a vague term. Define it precisely.
- **Human scale** is important.
- **Colors** are important. Need bolder and richer colors on buildings in town. Rich natural tones are better than the typical beige and grey tones.
  - Consider a range that includes natural colors outside of green, tan, beige, and brown.

- **Shade and shadow** are important. Even a box can look interesting with roof overhangs and window brows, etc.
- **Solar panels on roofs** require at least a 2:12 slope to panels. If placed on roofs, the panels either must be on a rack and hidden behind a parapet or cover on a sloped roof. It's very difficult to make an attractive façade and roof design and meet the solar panel requirements.

## 5. Demand and Density

- Some **multi-family apartment** demand (as rental units).
  - *“Attached in Windsor means rental. You won't get the marketability of detached.”*
  - *“Multi-family housing in Windsor is too expensive to be an option for affordable housing.”*
- Low market demand for **attached** housing.
  - Few want condos and duplexes: hard to insure. Prohibitively expensive.
- High demand for **single-family detached** housing.
  - Lots of rowhouse demand, even rowhouses with accessory dwelling units (ADUs), and more contemporary forms
  - Reduced requirements for detached housing = much cheaper to build
  - Better potential for affordability than attached
  - Multi-family density can be reached as an average density among adjacent detached buildings within a subdivision.
    - *“Detached has more opportunities, costs less, is more marketable and can get you into the same density.”*

## 6. We Have to Get Units Built!

- Only 1 ADU built last year. Everyone mentioned it.
- Lots of approved units not being built
- **Economic recovery** is important. The Town needs to get things in production. Not only cash-wise but it shows people that things are happening. We need to get people back to work when this is all done.
- **We live in a new economic era.** Apartments were historically transitional housing, used as a “stair step” to home ownership. Today the Bay Area housing costs limit home ownership to a very small percentage of people. Due to this reality, multi-family rental housing for majority of population in Windsor is permanent housing.

## 7. Parking

- Parking requirements were an important issue to nearly every caller.
- **Garages** are used for storage rather than parking.
- **Underground and structured parking** don't work in Windsor. They are too expensive. Make projects difficult.
- Fire codes with **parking under units** are costly.
- **Trees** take up parking spaces. Compact spaces head to head can fit a tree.

- Include shade tree exception for projects using solar carports and where solar systems will be affected.
- Most felt that a **site by site determination** should be made:
  - Some said: people in Windsor need cars and don't work in Windsor. When you get rid of parking/cut down, people park five or six blocks away in other neighborhoods. People are not lifelong apartment renters. They want to buy a home and keep their car.
  - Some said: parking takes up space for housing and isn't the way of the future. Long-term outlook not good for cars and affordability increases with site density.
  - Code should allow for reduced requirements for micro units, tiny homes, etc.
- **Bike parking** is great but keep it near unit entrance or in private storage near unit. People do not want to be separated from their bike.
- **Package delivery** areas should be considered, both parking/loading areas and secure dropoff storage.
- **Carports or detached garages** are fine. However solar panels on roofs of garages become problematic because landscape tree planting standards can conflict with solar standards.