

EASTERN GATEWAY STUDY VISION AND ZONING DISTRICT APPROACH



CITY OF BENICIA
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Attachments:

- A. Existing Conditions Maps
- B. Stakeholder Group Meeting Comments
- C. Walking Tour Summary

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This document presents a vision for the Eastern Gateway Study Area and a recommended approach to a new mixed-use zoning district for the area. The City will use this document to receive public feedback on this vision and zoning district approach. The Planning Commission and City Council will consider this feedback when providing direction to City staff and consultants at study sessions planned for early 2021.

This document contains the following sections:

- I. **Project Background:** Information on the project purpose, process, schedule, completed tasks, and next steps.
- II. **Study Area Vision:** Text and photographs that present a vision for the study area based on public input.
- III. **Zoning District Approach:** A recommended approach to the new zoning district that will implement the study area vision.

Attached to this document are existing conditions maps, stakeholder group meeting comments, and a walking tour summary.

I. PROJECT BACKGROUND

Project Purpose and Origin

In 2017 the State of California established the Senate Bill 2 (SB2) grant program to fund city planning that streamlines housing approvals and accelerates housing production. Benicia is using SB2 funds for the Eastern Gateway Study, which focuses on approximately 13.5 acres near the intersection of Military East and East Fifth Street. The Eastern Gateway Study will create a new mixed-use zone district that allows by-right housing development when that development is consistent with new objective zoning and design standards.

Study Area Boundary

Figure 1 shows the Eastern Gateway Study Area boundary, which includes a primary and secondary study area. Most of the primary study area is zoned General Commercial and contains a mix of commercial and residential uses. The secondary study area is zoned residential and contains single-family homes, a church, and several small multifamily properties.

Project Process and Schedule

The Eastern Gateway Study includes the following five main tasks:

- **Task 1: Project Initiation.** Document existing conditions and receive preliminary public input on key issues (completed in September 2020).

- **Task 2: Issues and Options.** Develop options to address key issues and select preferred approach (to be completed in February 2021).
- **Task 3: Draft Amendments.** Prepare General Plan and Zoning Code amendments (to be completed in June 2021).
- **Task 4: Environmental Review.** Evaluate potential environmental impacts of the project as required by the California Environmental Quality Act (to be completed in July 2021).
- **Task 5: Final Amendments.** Prepare and adopt final General Plan and Zoning Code amendments (to be completed in January 2022).

Figure 1: Eastern Gateway Study Area



Existing Conditions Maps

The City began the Eastern Gateway Study by preparing existing conditions maps for the study area (see Attachment A). These maps provide background information relevant to the vision and zoning district approach described in this document. The maps show existing land use, development conditions, general plan designations and zoning, street conditions, and pedestrian and bicycle conditions in the study area.

Stakeholder Meetings

The City invited a group of project stakeholders to attend the first stakeholder meeting on August 19, 2020. These stakeholders included study area property owners, business owners, developers, architects, housing professionals, service providers, and residents. At this meeting stakeholders reviewed the existing conditions and identified important project issues. The City invited stakeholders for a second meeting on November 18, 2020 where they provided preliminary feedback on the recommended zoning district approach. Summaries of stakeholder feedback is provided in Attachment B.

Walking Tour

On September 23, 2020 the City hosted a self-guided walking tour for the Eastern Gateway Study. The City also posted a “virtual walking tour” video on the project website. Residents provided feedback by submitting the walking tour brochures with written comments, emailing comments to City staff, or answering questions on-line through the City’s Open Town Hall public comment forum. Public comments received are provided in the walking tour summary (Attachment C).

Next Steps

The City will hold a virtual workshop on January 21, 2021 to receive public feedback on the vision and zoning district approach in this document. The Planning Commission and City Council will hold study sessions in early 2021 to receive additional public input and provide direction on the preferred approach. After receiving direction from the City Council, the City will begin drafting the General Plan and Zoning Code amendments.

II. STUDY AREA VISION

The following pages present a vision for the future of the Eastern Gateway Study Area. This vision reflects public input received from the walking tour and stakeholder meetings and is consistent with the goal of accommodating additional housing in the study area. Photographs illustrate the general vision and are not specific development proposals or recommendations. The vision statement describes the outcomes the City aims to achieve in the study area through the new mixed-use zoning district.

A VISION FOR THE EASTERN GATEWAY STUDY AREA

The Eastern Gateway Study Area contains a mix of housing, shops, and service businesses that support a diverse and thriving community. It contains a variety of housing types, which are affordable to a range of household incomes and include workforce housing, senior housing, and a mix of renter- and owner-occupied units. Mixed-use development with multifamily units above neighborhood-serving ground floor commercial uses on Military East and East Fifth Streets encourages community activity and promotes a strong sense of neighborhood. New affordable housing development is not solely located in the study area, as it is the City's goal to distribute affordable housing throughout Benicia and not to concentrate it in one part of the City.



Mixed-use development with housing above ground floor commercial (top left photo), townhomes (top right photo) and four-unit infill on a small parcel (bottom right photo).

The study area accommodates additional housing in a way that enhances Benicia's unique community identity. Higher-density development is carefully designed to fit into and complement its surrounding context. There is a variety of building heights, building sizes, and architectural details that create visual interest and provide a diversity of building forms. Architectural styles are varied, yet consistent with Benicia's historic identity. New development includes landscaping, courtyards, outdoor seating, and other amenities for the use and enjoyment of residents.



Existing development in Benicia with publicly-accessible outdoor courtyard seating (left photo). Variation in building forms, massing, colors, and materials create visual interest (right photo).

The study area is an attractive and welcoming gateway into Benicia. It safely accommodates all modes of travel, including private vehicles, bus transit, bicyclists, and pedestrians. High quality bicycle and pedestrian improvements increase transportation choices and support healthy lifestyles. Area residents can easily walk, bike, or take transit to nearby jobs, services, and activities. Street trees, wide sidewalks, lighting and other public realm improvements enhance livability for residents and encourage long-term and sustained private investment in buildings and properties.



High-visibility pedestrian crosswalk (left photo) and protected bicycle lane (right photo).

III. ZONING DISTRICT APPROACH

The City will create a new mixed-use zoning district to implement the study area vision described above. The mixed-use zoning district will contain new rules for allowed land uses, development standards, and required permits for the study area. The City could also choose to apply the new zoning district to other areas in the city as part of a separate rezoning process.

Below are recommendations for how to approach the new mixed-use zoning district, focusing on the following four topics:

- Allowed Land Uses
- Building Height
- Project Approvals
- Parking

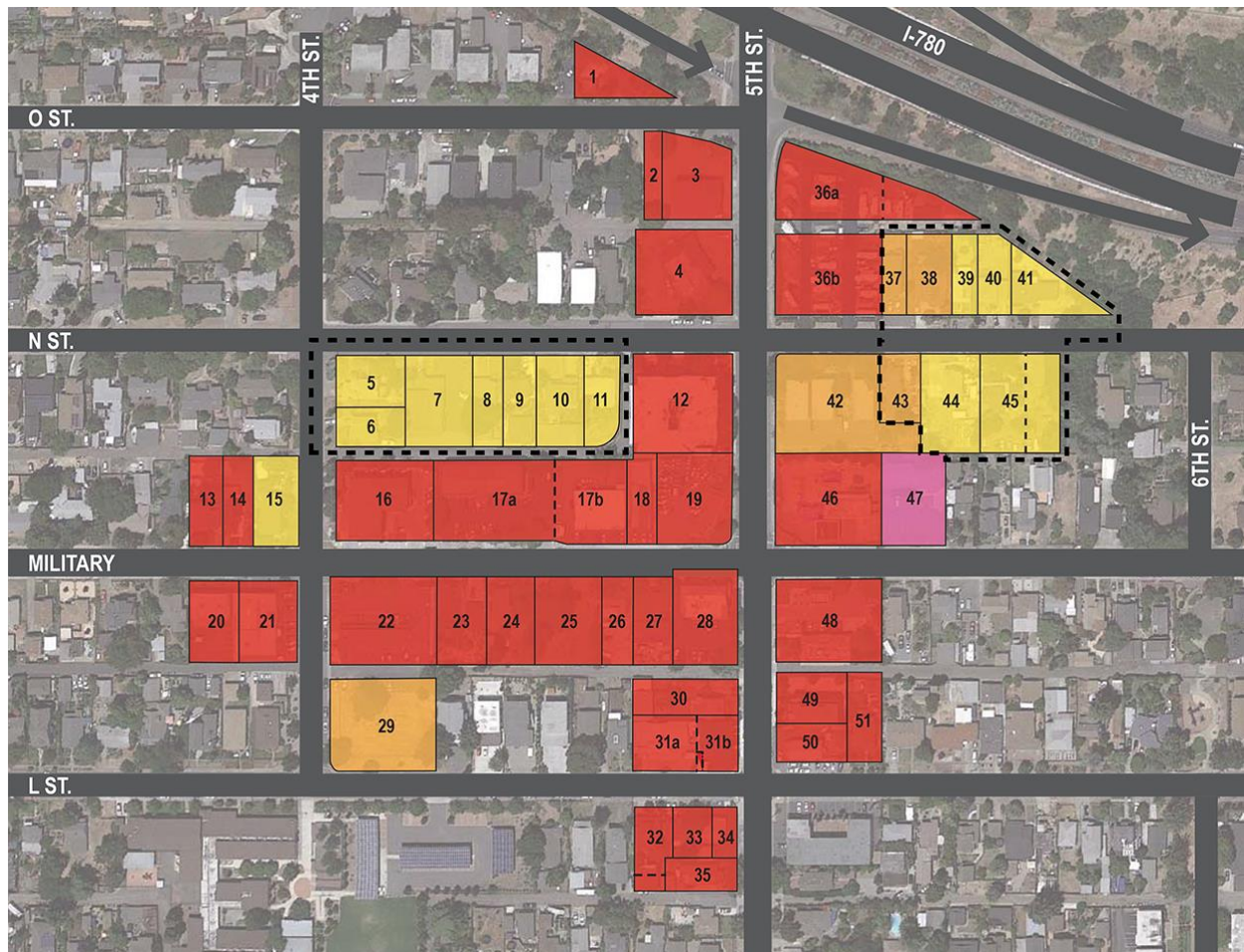
For each of these topics, the discussion below describes existing rules in the study area and a recommended approach for the new mixed-use zoning district.




1. Allowed Land Uses

Existing Rules: In most of the primary study area, the only residential uses currently allowed are group residential and work/live quarters (see Figure 2). Multifamily uses above the ground floor (mixed-use) are allowed on Parcel 47. Multifamily residential (without a ground floor commercial use) is allowed on Parcels 29 and 42. In the secondary study area, multifamily is allowed on three parcels on East N Street. All other parcels in the secondary study area may only be developed with single-family residences and accessory dwelling units.

Group residential means shared living quarters without separate kitchen or bathroom facilities for each room or unit, including boarding houses, dormitories, fraternities, sororities, and private residential clubs. Work/live means “one or more rooms or floors in a building originally designed for industrial or commercial occupancy that includes cooking space and sanitary facilities and working space for artists, artisans and similarly situated individuals.”

FIGURE 2: EXISTING ALLOWED RESIDENTIAL USES



- | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
|  | Multifamily including ground floor (single use) |  | Residential allowed only as Group Residential or Work/Live |
|  | Multifamily over ground floor commercial (mixed use) |  | Multifamily not allowed |

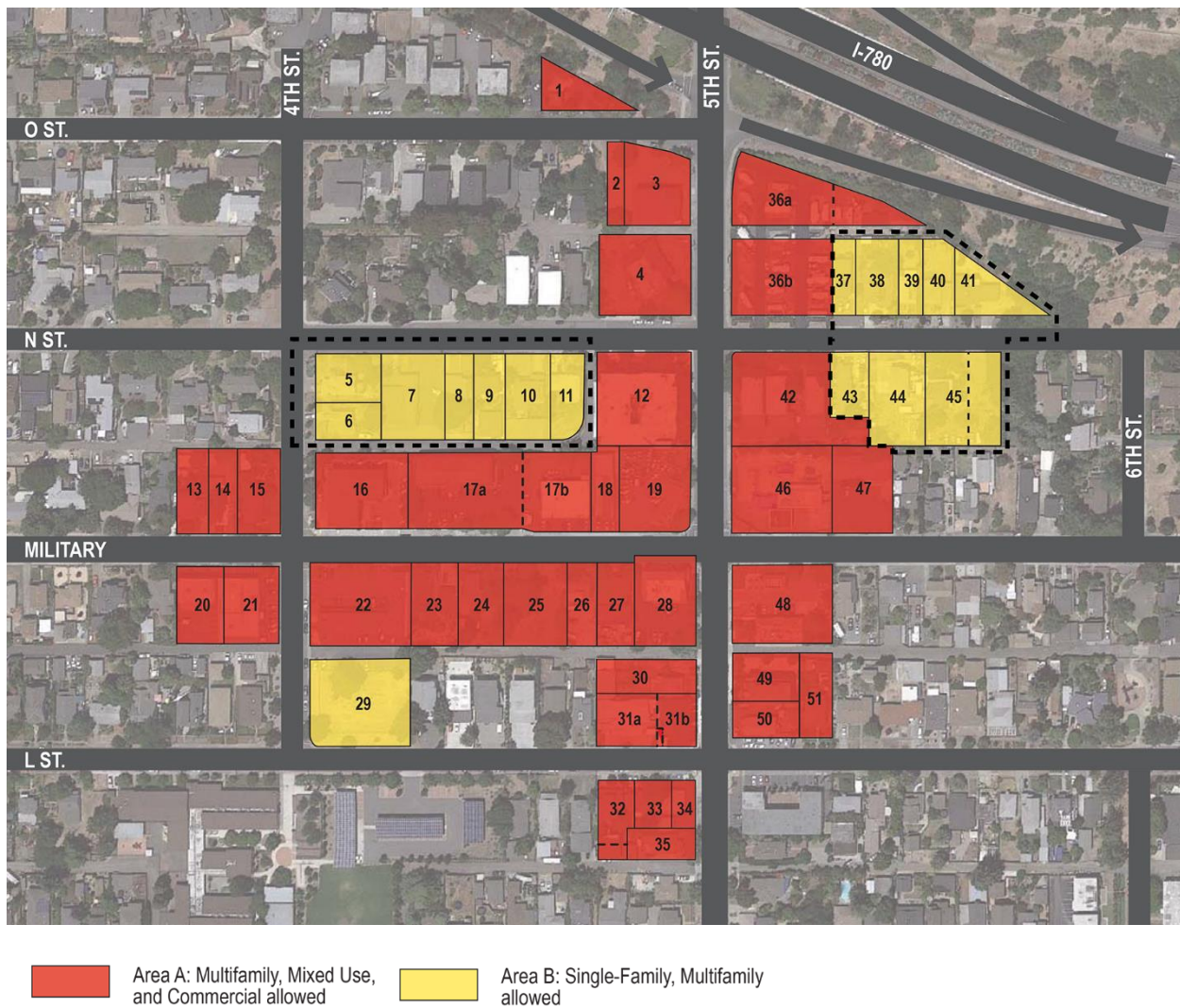
Recommendation: Add multifamily housing as an allowed use in both the primary and the secondary study area (See Table 1 and Figure 3). In the primary study area (excluding Parcel 29), multifamily, mixed-use, and commercial-only land uses will be allowed. As described in the Building Height section below, residential uses above ground floor commercial will be encouraged (but not required) by allowing additional building height for mixed-use development. Allowed uses for Parcel 29 would remain the same (multifamily allowed; single-family allowed; commercial prohibited). Multifamily development in the secondary study area must be of a scale and character consistent with existing single-family homes in the area, as addressed in the Building Height section below. Single-family homes may continue to be built in the secondary study area.

TABLE 1: RECOMMENDED ALLOWED USES

	Area A	Area B
Single-family Homes	Not allowed*	Allowed
Multifamily (no commercial on parcel)	Allowed	Allowed
Mixed-Use (residential above commercial)	Allowed	Not allowed
Commercial (no residential on parcel)	Allowed	Not allowed

*Existing single-family homes may remain.

FIGURE 3: RECOMMENDED ALLOWED RESIDENTIAL USES

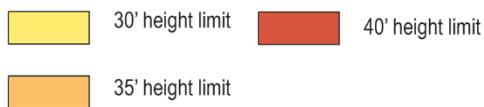
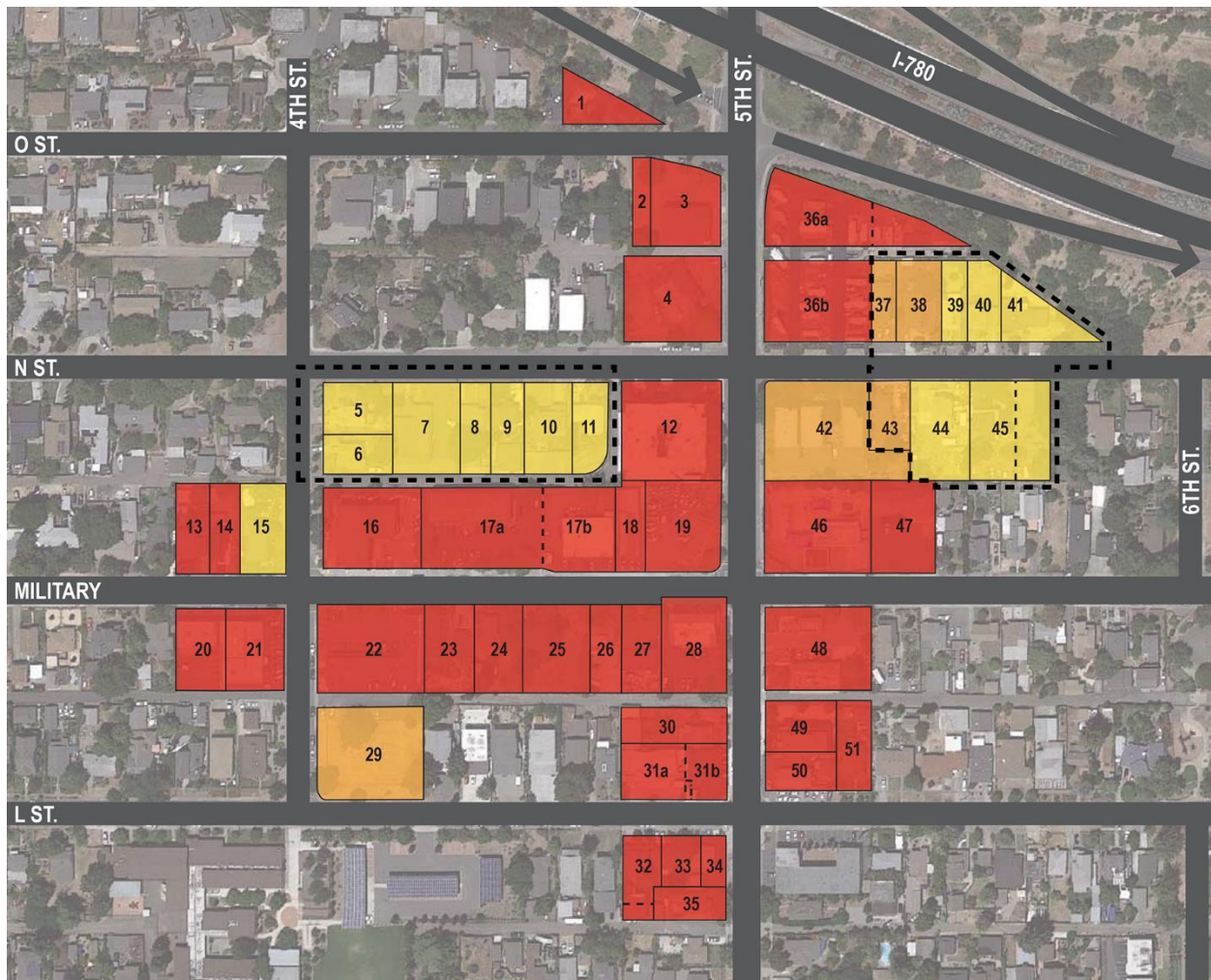


2. Building Height

Public input from the walking tour and stakeholder group emphasized a desire for new development that appears to fit into and complement its surroundings. Residents commented that the height of buildings should not overwhelm nearby buildings, should not be overly imposing, and should be of a scale appropriate for Benicia.

Existing Rules: As shown in Figure 4, buildings up to 40 feet are allowed in most of the primary study area, except for two parcels allowing 35 feet and one parcel allowing 30 feet. Most parcels in the secondary study area allow up to 30 feet, with three parcels allowing 35 feet.

FIGURE 4: EXISTING ALLOWED BUILDING HEIGHT



As a frame of reference, Figure 5 shows the height of two existing buildings in the study area.

FIGURE 5: EXAMPLE BUILDING HEIGHTS



Medical Office Building, 1208 Fifth Street
Approx. 38-40 ft.



Holiday Inn Express, 1375 Fifth Street
39 ft. at corner element; 32 ft. adjacent building wall

Recommendation: Incentivize housing production by allowing increased height for multifamily and mixed-use development. For example, continue to allow up to 3 stories for single-use residential and commercial development, but allow up to 4 stories for mixed-use residential buildings. An extra story of commercial space in a mixed-use project would not add residential units to a project, but it could make a project financially feasible and provide services or amenities to the community.

In addition, require new development to conform with new objective design standards to increase neighborhood compatibility, avoid the appearance of monolithic blocks, and complement Benicia's existing character. Standards to achieve these outcomes may include the following:

- **Height transitions:** If the building height is significantly greater than an adjacent building, require design features that minimize the appearance of abrupt changes in building scale.
- **Adjacent residential transitions:** Require a reduced building height for the portion of a building adjacent to an existing single-family home.
- **Maximum facade length:** Require vertical facade breaks for long building facades.
- **Building height variation:** Limit the length of a building facade that may be above a certain height.
- **Facade articulation:** Require facade articulation techniques such as material and color changes, vertical accent lines, wall modulation, balconies, and projecting windows.
- **Street trees and landscaping:** Require new street trees and landscaping along the building frontage.

Photographs below illustrate these possible design standards.



Third floor of living area built into pitched roof element to reduce appearance of height.



Lower building height and landscaped buffer adjacent to existing single-family home.



Long building divided into multiple narrow facade styles.



Variation in building heights, facade articulation, landscaped setback, and street trees.



Street-facing building articulation with material and color changes, wall modulations, and awnings.



Landscaped setback and street trees.

The City is currently preparing 3D models to illustrate potential development in the new mixed-use zoning district. These models test possible development standards and show the general scale of development allowed in the zoning district. Figure 7 shows a model for mixed-use residential development on an 18,750 square-foot corner parcel with four stories at the street, three stories next to an existing single-family home. This model also shows wall modulation along the primary street frontage, new street trees, on-site podium (structured) parking, and new on-street parking.

Figure 8 shows a model for mixed-use residential development on a 6,000 square-foot parcel with three stories at the street, a stepped-back fourth story at the street, and three stories facing an existing single-family home to the rear of the parcel. Vehicle access to surface and garage parking is provided from the rear alley.

FIGURE 7: MIXED-USE MODEL ON 18,750 SQUARE-FOOT CORNER PARCEL

Development Summary

- 18,750 sf lot
- 30 units (925 sf average)
- 6,000 sf commercial
- 1.8 FAR
- 34 parking spaces (1.1/du)
- Commercial parking on street

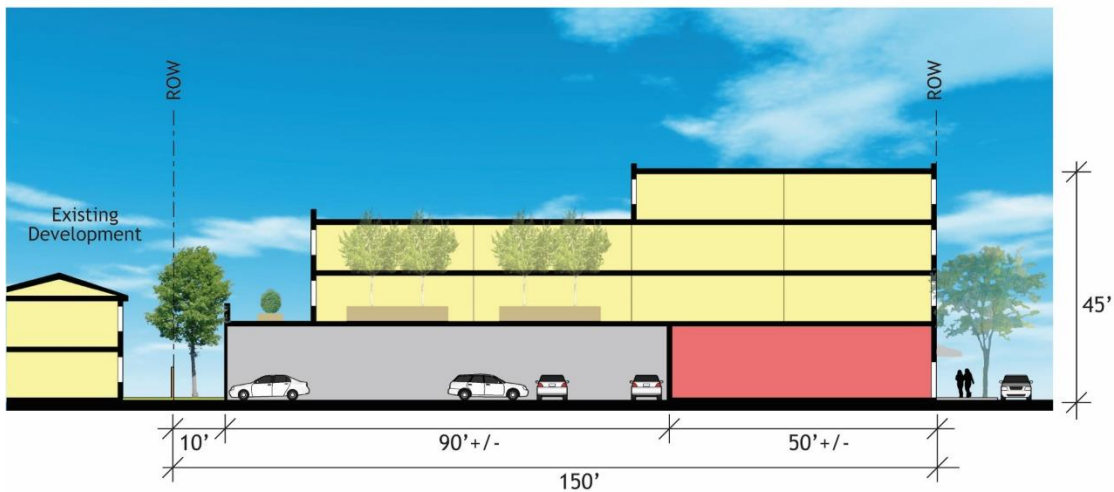
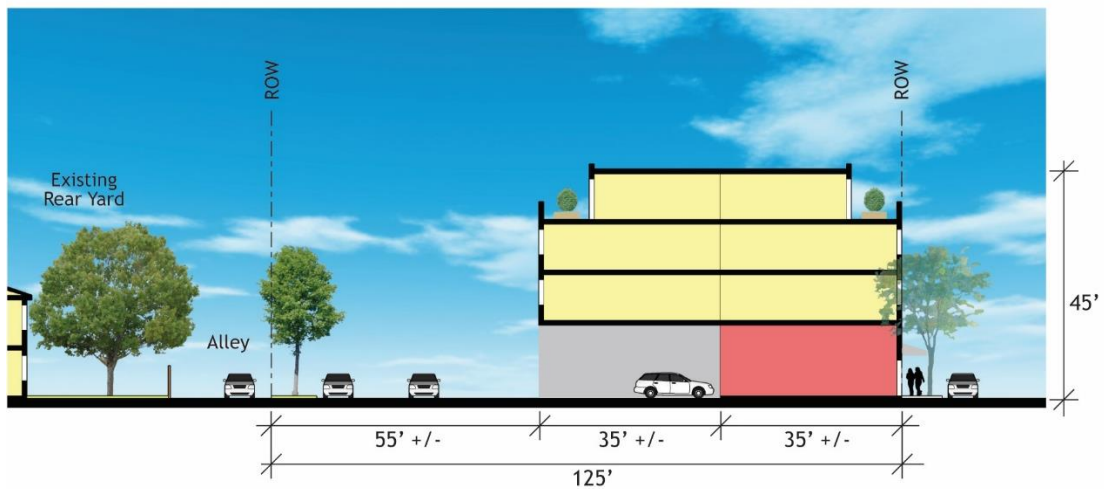


FIGURE 8: MIXED-USE MODEL ON 6,000 SQUARE-FOOT PARCEL

Development Summary

6,000 sf lot
10 units (920 sf average)
1,700 sf commercial
1.8 FAR
11 parking spaces (1.1/du)
Commercial parking on street



3. Project Approvals

Existing Rules: All new construction except for single-family homes requires Design Review by the Historic Preservation Review Commission (HPRC). Design Review requires a noticed public hearing at which the HPRC may approve, approve with modifications, or deny a proposed project. Design Review is a discretionary action, meaning that HPRC members use personal judgement when acting on a proposed project.

Recommendation: Allow by-right all multifamily and mixed-use projects that comply with objective standards. This would include all age-restricted housing for seniors and residential care/assisting living facilities. Action on a proposed project would be ministerial, meaning that the City's decision to approve or deny the project involves little or no personal judgement. Instead, City staff would review the project for conformance with objective standards and approve the project if it complies with these standards.

A proposed multifamily or mixed-use residential project consistent with all objective standards would not require a Design Review application, review by the HPRC, or a public hearing. This approach would encourage investment in the study area and production of new housing by shortening the development timeline and providing certainty about the City's requirements and expectations.

A project proponent could request deviation from the objective standards subject to approval by staff, the HPRC, or Planning Commission. Non-residential uses in a mixed-use project that could impact neighbors, such as bars, would continue to require a Use Permit.

Other Option: Allow by-right only certain types of projects that the City wants to encourage, such as senior housing, affordable housing, or projects with specified community benefits. Require Design Review approval for all other projects.

4. Parking

Parking in the study area is a topic of considerable community interest. Public feedback from the walking tour and stakeholder meetings included concerns about existing parking shortages, the amount of on-site parking for new development, and design of new on-site parking facilities. At the same time, the public also supports increased housing and mixed-use development in the study area, which could be difficult to achieve with the amount of off-street parking currently required for new development.

Existing Rules: Table 2 shows the number of off-street parking spaces currently required for certain residential and commercial land uses in the study area. The Zoning Code allows the Community Development Director to reduce the number of required parking spaces for uses smaller than 2,000 square feet. The Planning Commission may reduce the number of required

parking spaces for uses greater than 2,000 square feet upon finding that the use will generate parking demand less than the spaces required by the Zoning Code.

TABLE 2: EXISTING REQUIRED PARKING SPACES

	Required Spaces
Residential Uses	
Multifamily Residential	
Studio	1.2 per unit
One or two bedrooms	1.5 per unit
Three or more bedrooms	2.0 per unit
Single-Family Residential	2 including one covered space
Senior Housing	0.5 per unit
Commercial Uses	
Eating and Drinking Establishments	1 per 4 fixed seats, or 1 per 50 sq. ft. of seating area if there are no fixed seats
Offices, Business and Professional	1 per 300 sq. ft.
Offices, Medical and Dental	1 per 250 sq. ft.
Personal Services	1 per 250 sq. ft.
Retail Sales	1 per 200 sq. ft. for less than 5,000 sq. ft.; 1 per 250 sq. ft. over 5,000 sq. ft.

Recommendation: Explore parking regulations and tools for the study area that support the study area vision while minimizing adverse parking impacts on neighborhood residents. Potential parking strategies would 1) increase the supply of public parking; 2) utilize available parking more efficiently; and 3) reduce the need for parking. Specific measures could include the following:

- Utilize excess right-of-way widths to increase the supply of street parking.
- Establish limits on new driveway entrances and curb cuts to preserve existing street parking.
- Encourage use of tandem parking spaces, parking lifts, and structured parking to increase the number of parking spaces that can fit on a development site.
- Encourage shared and joint use of existing off-street parking.