

Planning Glossary of Terms

Acre: 43,560 square feet of area. For example, a residential parcel of land that is 52' x 100' is 5,200 square feet which is 0.12 acres. The term gross acre means all land within a given boundary. The term net acres means all land measured to remove certain features such as roads, utilities, and open space.

Alteration, Structural: Any change or rearrangement in the supporting members of an existing structure, such as bearing walls, columns, beams, girders, or interior bearing partitions, or any enlargement to or diminution of a structure, whether horizontally or vertically, or the moving from one location to another.

Appeal: A written and signed petition that request further action be taken on an action made by an authorized decision making body.

Brown Act: State of California Law enacted to require that Planning Commission meetings and other publicly government sanctioned meetings must be open to the public. The law limits the number of Commissioners that may meet privately to discuss planning matters.

Building Area: The total square footage of a lot covered by a building, measured on a horizontal plane, exclusive of uncovered porches, terraces and steps.

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA): A state law (1) defines state environmental goals and the responsibilities of local government to assist in achieving these goals; and (2) sets forth the requirements for the environmental analysis of proposed public and private projects, including the preparation and/ or review of environmental impact reports or issuance of exemptions and negative declarations.

Categorical Exemption: An exemption from the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act based on a finding by the Department of City Planning.

Charter City:

A city which has been incorporated under its own charter rather than under the general laws of the state. Charter cities have broader powers to enact land use regulations than do general law cities. All of California's largest cities are charter cities.

City Council:

A city's legislative body. The popularly elected city council is responsible for enacting ordinances, imposing taxes, making appropriations, establishing policy, and hiring some city officials. The council adopts the local general plan, zoning, and subdivision ordinance.

Community Plan: A portion of the local general plan that focuses on a particular area or community within the city or county. Community plans supplement the policies of the general plan. In the City of Los Angeles, the Community Plans comprise the Land Use Element of the General Plan.

Conditional Use: A land use that is inconsistent with the current zoning for its location but allowed on a discretionary and conditional basis by the Planning Commission. Examples of conditional uses are day care facilities in a residential area that cares for fifteen or more children, a club or lodge in a residential area or a bar in any commercial area. A Conditional Use Permit is abbreviated as CUP.

Density: The average number of dwelling units (houses, apartments, townhouses, duplexes, etc), or building per unit of land. In Neighborhood Planning, this is usually expressed as dwelling units per acre of du/ac.

Decision Making Body: A group or individual having projects approval authority.

Development Fees

Fees charged to developers or builders as a prerequisite to construction or development approval. The most common are: (1) impact fees (such as parkland acquisition fees, school facilities fees, or street construction fees) related to funding public improvements which are necessitated in part or in whole by the development; (2) connection fees (such as water line fees) to cover the cost of installing public services to the development; (3) permit fees (such as building permits, grading permits, sign permits) for the administrative costs of processing development plans; and, (4) application fees (rezoning, CUP, variance, etc.) for the administrative costs of reviewing and hearing development proposal.

Development Standard: The regulations contained within each zone district or other requirement setting forth minimum requirements or specifications and maximum allowances for development which must be met by all developments within the zone.

Discretionary Action: A action taken by an authorized public agency or body, in which the exercise of judgment, deliberation, or a decision on the part of the public agency or body generally leads to the conferring of approval, denial or continuation of an application request.

Dwelling Unit: A dwelling or portion thereof used by one family and containing one kitchen.

Dwelling, Multiple: A structure or portion thereof used to house three or more families, living independently of each other, and each unit having its own kitchen

Dwelling, Single: A detached structure, including a mobile home or manufactured dwelling unit, containing only one kitchen and used to house not more than one family.

Easement: A right-of- way granted for limited use of property by the landowner for public or quasi-public or private proposes, and within which the owner of property shall not have the right to make use of the land in a manner that violated the rights of the grantee.

Environmental Impact Report (EIR): A detailed information document prepared by the public agency responsible for reviewing a project as par of the CEQA process that describes and analyzes a project's significant environmental effects and discusses ways to mitigate or avoid those effects.

Facade: The exterior walls of a building that can be seen by the public

Final Map Subdivision:

Final map subdivisions (also called tract maps or major subdivisions) are land divisions which create five or more lots. They must be consistent with the general plan and are generally subject to stricter requirements than parcel maps. Such requirements may include installing road improvements, the construction of drainage and sewer facilities, parkland dedications, and more.

Floor Area Ratio (FAR): The total gross square footage of a building on a parcel divide by the square of the parcel.

General Plan: A compendium of city polices, including text and diagrams, setting forth objectives, principles, standards, plans and proposals for its long-term development. The General Plan is a legal document required of each municipality.

"Granny" Housing

Typically, this refers to a second dwelling attached to or separate from the main residence that houses one or more elderly persons.

Infill Development: The development of vacant land (usually individual lots underutilized lands within the city).

Infrastructure:

A general term describing public and quasi-public utilities and facilities such as roads, bridges, sewers and sewer plants, water lines, power lines, fire stations, etc.

Initial Study: A preliminary analysis by the city of a proposed project to determine the level of environmental review the project will require, per the California Environmental Quality Act.

Legal Nonconforming Use: The use of any land, building or structure that does not conform with current zoning regulations, but was lawful or not required to comply with zoning regulations at the time zoning district was established. The use may be permitted to continue or be given time to come into compliance with the existing zoning ordinance.

Ministerial (Administrative) Decision: An action taken by a governmental agency that follows established procedures and rules and does not call for the exercise of judgment in deciding whether to approve a project.

Mitigated Negative Declaration: A CEQA document prepared when a project would have significant environmental effects as originally proposed, but the developer can and will eliminate those effects by changing the project or adopting mitigated measures, meaning that certain steps must be taken but no further environmental review is necessary. For project not in need of mitigation, the project receives a Negative Declaration.

Mixed-Use: Properties on which various uses, such as office, commercial, institutional, and residential, are combined in a single building or on a single site in an integrated development project with significant function interrelationships and a coherent physical design.

Negative Declaration:

When a project is not exempt from CEQA and will not have a significant adverse effect upon the environment a negative declaration must be prepared. The negative declaration is an informational document that describes the reasons why the project will not have a significant effect and proposes measures to completely mitigate or avoid any possible effects.

Overlay Zone: A set of zoning requirements that is superimposed upon a base zone. Overlay zones are generally used when a particular area requires special protection (as in Historical Preservation Overlay Zones) or has a special problem.

Parcel Map:

A minor subdivision resulting in fewer than five lots. The city or county may approve a parcel map when it meets the requirements of the general plan and all applicable ordinances. The regulations governing the filing and processing of parcel maps are found in the state Subdivision Map Act and the local subdivision ordinance.

Planned Unit Development (PUD):

Land use zoning which allows the adoption of a set of development standards that are specific to the particular project being proposed. PUD zones usually do not contain detailed development standards; these are established during the process of considering the proposals and adopted by ordinance if the project is approved.

Planning Commission:

A group of residents appointed by the city council or board of supervisors to consider land use planning matters. The commission's duties and powers are established by the local legislative body and might include hearing proposals to amend the general plan or rezone land, initiating planning studies (road alignments, identification of seismic hazards, etc.), and taking action on proposed subdivisions.

Plot Plan/Site Plan: A fully dimensioned scale drawing or map showing proposed use and structures for a parcel of land required by the applicable regulations. It includes lot lines, lot area, streets, parking spaces, private roadways, walkways, topographic, reserved open space, features, buildings and structures, major landscape features, and the location of proposed utility easements.

Public Hearing: A meeting designed to afford the public the fullest opportunity to express support of or opposition to a proposed project in an open forum, at which a verbatim record (transcript) of the proceeding is kept.

Radius Map: A map showing lots, zoning, streets rights of way width, and land use for a given area surrounding a proposed project.

Setback: A minimum distance required by zoning to be maintained between two structures or between a structure and property lines.

Specific Plan: A plan addressing issues, such as land uses , open space availability and design for a portion of an area within the Community Plan. Specific plans put specific provisions of the community plan into action.

Subdivision: The process of lay out parcels of raw land into lots, block, streets, and public areas. Its purpose is the transformation of raw land into building sites.

Substandard Lot: A lot that does not conform to the zoning standards in area or width.

Tentative Map:

The map or drawing illustrating a subdivision proposal. The city or county will approve or deny the proposed subdivision based upon the design depicted by the tentative map. A subdivision is not complete until the conditions of approval imposed upon the tentative map have been satisfied and a final map has been certified by the city or county and recorded with the county recorder.

Tract Map

See final map subdivision.

Variance: A departure from any provision of the zoning requirements for specific parcels, without changing the zoning ordinance or the underlying zoning of the parcel. A variance usually is granted only upon demonstration of hardship based on the peculiarity of the property in relation to other properties in the same zone district.

Vicinity Map: A vicinity map shows a proposed project in relationship to its surrounding area. Typically a vicinity map is a photocopy of a standard street map with the project highlighted.

Zoning:

Local codes regulating the use and development of property. The zoning ordinance divides the city or county into land use districts or "zones", represented on zoning maps, and specifies the allowable uses within each of those zones. It establishes development standards for each zone, such as minimum lot size, maximum height of structures, building setbacks, and yard size.

Zoning Ordinance: A law dividing all land in the city into zones that specifies uses permitted and standards required in each zone.

Source:

http://ceres.ca.gov/planning/planning_guide/plan_index.html#anchor26073