



Staff Report

City Council

Item No. {{section.number}}.{{item.number}}

Meeting Date: May 7, 2025

From: Andrew Firestine, Director of Community and Economic Development

Title: Presentation by Mintier Harnish on the Development Code Update for Planning Commission and City Council discussion; and ultimately guidance for Mintier Harnish to draft the first section of the code update.

RECOMMENDATION:

Mintier Harnish and Planning staff request direction on topic areas in preparation of drafting the sections of the Updated Development Code, including these:

- Increasing housing options and affordability;
- Addressing overconcentration of certain commercial uses;
- Enhancing pedestrian comfort through shade and accessibility;
- Improving the appearance and upkeep of commercial landscaping;
- Supporting walkable, neighborhood-oriented development;
- Ensuring zoning standards are responsive to neighborhood-specific conditions.

BACKGROUND:

Purpose

The City is initiating a comprehensive update to the City's Development Code and is seeking Council direction on several key areas. The stated goal is to modernize regulations to better align with current community priorities, incentivize development, and improve overall livability.

Community Engagement Summary

To inform the community of this Development Code update, the team from Mintier Harnish along with their partners and City Staff conducted a robust public engagement process designed to gather input from a wide range of community members. The outreach included:

- **Community Open Houses and Walking Tours:** Held in multiple neighborhoods to observe on-the-ground conditions and hear directly from residents about their experiences with the built environment. These events emphasized walkability, shade, safety, land use compatibility, and neighborhood character.
- **Stakeholder Interviews:** Conducted with developers, neighborhood groups,

housing advocates, local business owners, environmental organizations, and other key voices to understand the practical challenges and opportunities within the current code.

- Pop-Up Surveys: Deployed at community events to engage residents who might not participate in formal meetings. These quick surveys focused on specific issues such as parking, shade, accessibility, land use preferences, and housing.
- Citywide Survey and Mapping Tool: An online platform invited residents to provide general and location-specific feedback, including areas residents valued, areas for opportunity where they experience heat, lack of shade, poor pedestrian access, or feel there is an imbalance in land use types.
- Steering Committee: A diverse steering committee meeting was convened in April to discuss the purpose and objective of the Development Code Update and their specific role in serving as the high-level advisory committee. The steering committee will meet periodically throughout the update process and provide overall guidance to ensure priorities are identified, review feedback and advise on policy areas needing focused attention.

Preliminary themes from this outreach reflect strong community interest in:

- Increasing housing options and affordability;
- Addressing overconcentration of certain commercial uses;
- Enhancing pedestrian comfort through shade and accessibility;
- Improving the appearance and upkeep of commercial landscaping;
- Supporting walkable, neighborhood-oriented development;
- Ensuring zoning standards are responsive to neighborhood-specific conditions.

This feedback has directly informed the key topics presented in this report, and staff will continue to engage the public as code updates are developed.

DISCUSSION:

Key Topics for Council Direction

1. Allowable Land Uses and Overconcentration
 - a. Consider limitations or spacing requirements to prevent overconcentration of specific uses such as fast-food restaurants, vehicle service-related, and cannabis-related businesses.
 - b. Evaluate land use compatibility and community impacts.
2. Affordable Housing
 - a. Beyond state law, explore code changes that support a wider range of housing types and affordability levels, including density bonuses, streamlined review processes, and relaxed development standards for affordable projects.
3. Minimizing Heat Islands in Parking Areas
 - a. Consider enhanced landscaping, tree canopy requirements, and material requirements to reduce surface temperatures and improve performance.
4. Improving Pedestrian Experience
 - a. Evaluate requirements to enhance shade, safety, and accessibility in both public and private developments.
 - b. Support walkability through active ground-floor uses, streetscape standards,

- and objective design standards.
5. Commercial Landscape Code Enforcement
 - a. Discuss options to strengthen enforcement of landscape maintenance in commercial areas to improve visual quality, maintenance, safety, and environmental function.
 6. Incentivizing Development
 - a. Consider strategic incentives (e.g., fee reductions, expedited permitting, flexible standards) to encourage desirable development types, especially in targeted areas or those primed for redevelopment.
 7. Calibrating Single-Family Zoning Standards
 - a. Reassess development standards across single-family zone districts to allow for neighborhood-specific adjustments while maintaining community character.
 8. Flexibility and Authority for the Planning Director
 - a. Explore opportunities to delegate minor modifications, interpretations, and process streamlining to the Planning Director to increase responsiveness and efficiency.
 - b. Delegate authority to staff for review of minor projects (small-scale changes, facade improvements, property maintenance).

Next Steps

Following Planning Commission and City Council discussion and direction, Mintier Harnish will begin drafting the first code section (Zoning District Provisions) and conduct stakeholder engagement. A formal draft will be presented at a future work session.

FISCAL IMPACT:

On November 14, 2024, the City Council approved the contract with Mintier Harnish for the preparation of the Development Code Update in the amount of \$479,720, funded through General Plan Maintenance Surcharge fees and Housing Successor Agency funds. The City reviews and approves payment of monthly invoices as work is completed.

FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN:

Goal F-1: Develop comprehensive strategy to amend the zoning code and update design guidelines, including an identification of what work City staff can accomplish and what work optimally should be contracted out including:

1. Development of objective design standards in response to new state housing laws
2. Overhaul of commercial zoning code
3. Substantial update of design guidelines
4. Streamlining of development review processes
5. Implementation of Cathedral City General Plan and Housing Element goals, policies, and programs
6. Continued implementation of new state legislation

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Public Outreach Summary
2. Code Audit