

SACRAMENTO CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

July 13, 1965

MEMBERS IN SESSION:

On June 13, 1964, Zoning Ordinance No. 2550-4th Series became effective. Section 8 of this Ordinance created regulations for the first time in Sacramento providing for the establishment of Planned Unit Developments.

The purpose of this report is to suggest to the Commission a series of criteria which the Commission and Staff can utilize as a basis for the administration of this section of the Ordinance. Such criteria, when adopted as the official policy statement of the Commission, will also be valuable to the developers and general public in their understanding of the intended purpose of this regulation.

First, it is believed important to understand the basic reasons for including a Planned Unit Development Section in the new Zoning Ordinance. Consider the following:

Zoning regulations generally apply in a uniform manner to all properties within each of its respective zoning districts. Because of this, zoning itself tends to standardize the development process by applying uniform regulations to the design and improvement of land and buildings. The results of this are self-evident in the repetitious form of most urban communities with standard subdivisions of standard homes on standard lots, neighborhood by neighborhood. Much of the same uniformity applies equally to other parts of the community as well. Shopping centers, office complexes, retail and commercial areas, and industrial developments all appear to have the same homogeneous qualities.

During the last 40 years, almost every country in the world has experienced a percentage increase in population living in cities. In the United States alone, the urban population has increased from approximately 51% in 1920 to 70% in 1960. It is reasonable to believe that the urban population of Metropolitan areas in this country will increase to 80% of the total population by 1980.

As a result, Urban growth today no longer takes place on a lot by lot basis; it happens area by area. New residential communities are built subdivision by subdivision, large retail marketing areas are not created store by store over the years. Rather, entire comprehensive shopping centers are created as one building project. The practice of creating organized industrial districts is gaining rapidly.

While this method of building has a large capacity for monotony, it also, because of its large scale approach, presents new opportunities for variety, interest, and open space. These opportunities should not be lost solely because a City has a zoning ordinance which is inflexible or so cumbersome that the pursuit of new techniques, variations in urban form and innovations in design are discouraged or nullified.

For these principal reasons, a Planned Unit Development Section was created in the new zoning ordinance. Its purpose is to provide for greater flexibility in the design of integrated developments than otherwise possible through strict application of district regulations. It is the intent of this Section to encourage the design of well planned facilities which offer a variety of housing or other land uses through creative and imaginative planning. It is intended that this portion of the zoning ordinance be available for use as a regulation which can permit the building of:

RESIDENTIAL: Large scale subdivision developments which may include a variety in housing types, a variety in site relationships, accessible open greenstrip or recreation spaces adjacent to the majority of residences, an attractive and well-oriented community center, and other features of a viable and balanced community.

THE SIZE: A planned unit for immediate construction should be of such a size, composition and arrangement that its construction, marketing, and operation is feasible as a complete unit without dependence upon any subsequent unit or section. There is not specific limitation on the overall size of a planned unit. Usually it should not exceed about a thousand dwelling units, or be less than a practical minimum. Due to the limiting factors of facilities, costs, and organizational realities, a planned unit of less than 50 dwelling units is not considered worthwhile.

A very large development by a single sponsor may be considered which consists of several separately built and operated planned units, each undertaken successively and without dependence on other units. Such progressive development, unit by unit, may be desirable because of practical limitations of the market absorption rate or the developers operating capacity.

1 - The Plan. Buildings and open space are the basic ingredients of the planned unit development. With skillful design, an economical environment for better living can be accomplished. On a planned unit, the designer has great freedom in the arrangement of buildings. Super blocks with houses on lanes and garden courts are typical in planned unit developments, instead of the block by block patterns of conventional subdivisions. The plan should create an attractive residential environment with efficient street and utility net works and safe circulation patterns.

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2 - The Automobile. Traffic circulation should be around a residential development, not through it. Safety, convenience and pleasant living for the residents take precedence over traffic speed and short cuts through the project. Arterial streets should not be used for direct automobile access to individual home sites. The backing out of cars into fast moving traffic is too hazardous. Collector streets of ample width and flowing alignment should feed traffic from arterial streets to a network of minor access streets on which most homesites are located. Short loop streets and cul-de-sac are best for minor streets. With careful design, common open space and allied facilities can be accessible from all homes without crossing any streets.

Parking Space. Should always be located so that all homesites are conveniently served. Where parking is not provided on the individual lot, it may be located in nearby parking courts, carports, or parking areas. Additional parking facilities beyond that desirable for occupants of the project should be provided for guests and should also be conveniently dispersed throughout the project. Skillful design of all parking facilities is important, as wide open stretches of pavement reduce the visual appeal of a project. The design of these facilities should include adequate areas for planting with shrubs for screening and suitable trees to shade the paved surfaces and reduce glare.

The Pedestrian. A well-planned system of walks is needed for convenient access to recreation areas, service areas, parking areas, and other common facilities. Walks serve many purposes. Thoughtfully designed, they not only have a utilitarian value but can add beauty as well, especially if combine with inviting sitting areas which people can enjoy.

The Open Space. No attempt is made here to establish minimum requirements for open space. This should be a review item appropriate to each project. Good design should always seek to increase the open space above a minimum for this is in large measure the heart of a planned unit development. By reducing vehicular space needs as much as possible, consistent with traffic and parking requirements, more open non-vehicular livability space for people is created. Additional open space may also be created through the arrangement of housing types and the subsequent assignment of excess yard areas to community recreation or greenstrips. The actual distribution of open space within the project itself will depend on overall design factors with many considerations bearing on how best to use the open space and where. Usually, a central location for major facilities is the most appropriate, as it is convenient for the most people. If any of the facilities have a nuisance value, they are best related to the ends of building groups, rather than front or rear of the buildings, as living units are less affected.

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NON-RESIDENTIAL: It is also intended that the planned unit development section be available for use in establishing projects which are not strictly residential in nature. Such projects could include, for example, a mixture of apartments, convenience shopping, motel-hotel accommodations, offices, commercial recreation or other appropriate uses grouped in a well-designed and coordinated site development.

Still another strictly non-residential use of the planned unit development is its potential value in the establishment of organized industrial districts. This type of land use has increased in volume in recent years and has become one of the major gains in the improved urban landscape when compared to the older forms of industrial development. By planning for a well-designed and controlled grouping of research, service, or light industrial uses within an area containing visual and operational amenities, such as selective occupancies, setbacks, landscaping, bulk and building material controls, an attractive and valuable asset to the City's environment can be achieved.

POLICY STATEMENT: It is important to understand the intent and purpose of planned unit development regulations. It is of equal importance to establish these limitations and also where such regulations do not apply. For example:

1 - These regulations are not intended as a "bail out" measure to permit a property owner to increase the development potential of his property merely by increasing the density of his project. Zoning of property is still the basic rule for its land use potential.

2 - In utilizing the Planned Unit Development approach to the design of property, another word of caution is indicated. In any effort to produce a variation in urban form, or to utilize new techniques and innovations, the effect of such a development and its compatibility to the surrounding area must be evaluated. For example, a large rental project in a predominately single family area, though well designed, with good site orientation and generous open space, could still be an incompatible use within the neighborhood. In planning, as always, the block, the neighborhood, and the community are the focal points for evaluation of any proposal, not just the individual property or project.

3. The primary reason for stipulating that a 50% maximum increase in the density of dwelling units could be permitted by the Planning Commission was to have available authority to relieve an unusual situation.

As an example, if a property had some unusual topographic or physical feature that building on a portion of the property were impossible, an increase in density for the remaining portion would help compensate for the enforced open space which was undevelopable.

Another possibility could occur where a development were purposely designed to include some large physical feature, such as a private lake golf course, or other large open space area. Under these circumstances a compensating increase in density for the remaining developable area might be in order.

Under any circumstances, however, the intent was not to increase the overall density of any typical parcel beyond that permitted by its existing zoned status.

4. Further, these regulations were not intended to be used as a crutch to build up the development potential of problem parcels of left-over land due to subdividing, freeway construction, or other contributing factors. These properties are usually small, often odd shaped, and are generally surrounded by conventional single-family developments. Solutions to their problem must be found in other measures provided by the Ordinance.

5. It should also be remembered that planned unit development regulations are no more than a "paper" tool intended to help improve the environment of urban areas. In essence, what must be finally judged is how the project will appear on the ground, what additional contribution it will make toward an attractive neighborhood setting, how it relates to, harmonize with, and enhances abutting properties.

In the final analysis, one should remember that a pretty picture can be prepared and submitted for almost any conceivable type of development. What will make many of these designs doubly attractive is their departure from the conventional type of approach. A change from monotony is desirable, but all change is not necessarily an improvement over tested and accepted patterns. This will be the problem. To weigh each proposal carefully and seek to encourage those which offer something better in the way of an urban environment.


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