

SMALL LOT SUBDIVISION

CODE AMENDMENT AND POLICY UPDATE

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS – REVISED June 7, 2016



The Department issued an earlier draft of the Code Amendment and Design Standards. How was the January 2016 draft refined?

The Department of City Planning previously issued an earlier draft of the Small Lot Code Amendment and Design Standards, and received helpful feedback from the public throughout the public hearing process. On June 7, 2016, the Department issued an updated draft of both the Code Amendment and Design Standards in response to the input received, with refinements including:

- Clarified language requiring greater setbacks, especially when abutting single-family zones;
- Clarified the administrative review process for small lot projects;
- Clarified the process, procedures, and requirements for bungalow court projects; and
- Clarified design standards for all small lot projects.

What is a Small Lot?

Adopted in 2005, the Small Lot Ordinance (“Ordinance”) established a new *hybrid* housing typology that looked and functioned like row townhomes but where each unit was built independently on individual “small lots”. It combined the benefits of a single-family home and its full fee-simple ownership of building with the conveniences of a townhouse lifestyle.



What is the intent of the Small Lot Ordinance?

The Small Lot Ordinance was intended as an innovative housing tool to encourage the development of alternative fee-simple homeownership in areas *zoned* for multi-family and commercial uses. The City has identified key updates that will continue to promote the smart growth of neighborhoods and enhance livability through compact, but livable, Small Lots. The proposed changes will establish new Commission-adopted **Small Lot Design Standards**, which will provide consistency and set clear expectations for a more straightforward process – while enhancing the overall form and function of Small Lot developments.

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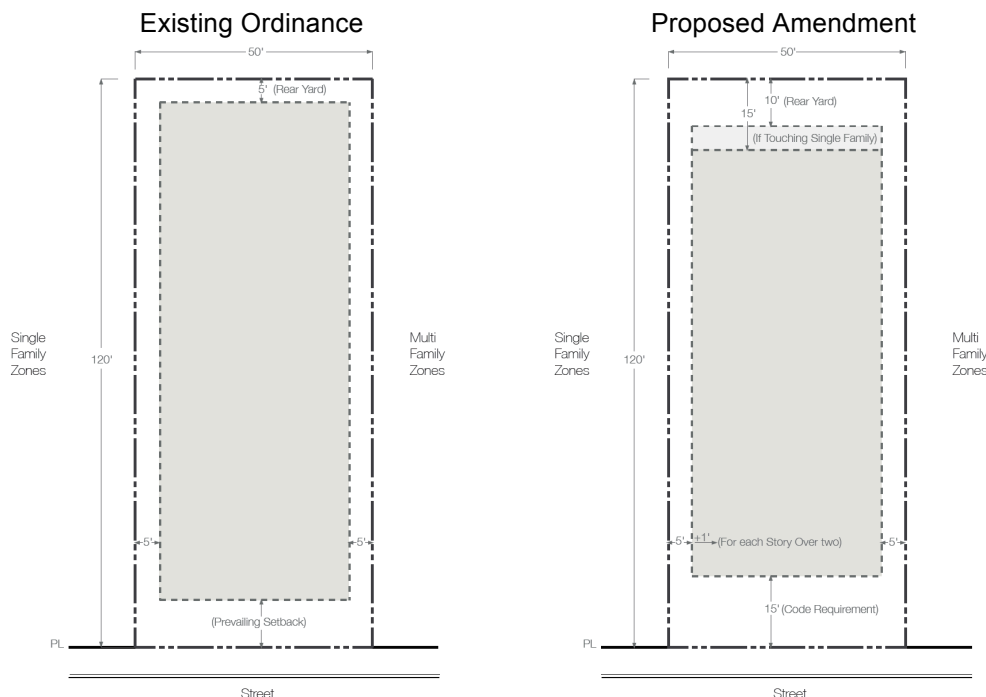
Are Small Lots allowed in single-family neighborhoods?

Small Lots are not permitted in single-family zones. Small lots can only be developed in multi-family- or commercially-zoned lots. When Small Lot projects are proposed in a neighborhood developed with single-family homes or small duplexes, it signifies that they are within an older multi-family neighborhood zoned for multi-family uses. In other words, in these neighborhoods, a property with an existing single-family home could be redeveloped with apartments by-right. The Small Lot Subdivision process creates new opportunities for alternative homeownership similar to condos and single-family homes in neighborhoods that could otherwise be developed as multi-family or commercial uses.

Based on the recent Council Motion, is the Planning Department adjusting the rules for Small Lots?

Yes. A comprehensive update of Small Lots is being undertaken by the Planning Department. It will consist of a three-part update including a Small Lot Code Amendment, Small Lot Design Standards, and Advisory Agency Map Standards.

- The **Code Amendment** will require greater front and rear yard setbacks and greater setbacks when abutting single-family zones (see illustrations below), create a division of land process for “bungalow court” small lot projects, and establish design standards for small lot subdivisions with an incidental Administrative Clearance process.



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- The **Design Standards** will create specific and enforceable rules regarding design for all small lot homes, including building orientation, primary entryways, façade articulation, roofline variation, building modulation, pedestrian pathways, landscaping, and common open space areas. All small lot subdivisions must comply with the Design Standards through an Administrative Clearance process.
- The **Map Standards** will update map provisions for all small lots, including common access driveways and walkways, utility easements, maintenance agreements, vehicular guest parking, and on-site trash pick-up. The Map Standards will be adopted by the Department of City Planning Advisory Agency and implemented alongside the Code Amendment and Design Standards.

Together, the Code Amendment, Design Standards, and Map Standards are intended to provide clarity for the Small Lot Subdivision review process, while enhancing the overall functionality of small lot subdivisions. A comprehensive Small Lot Guide will be published online in January 2017 that will include all small lot-related requirements, standards, and guidelines. The Guide will be illustrated to demonstrate best practices for all provisions, and also contain a set of Case Studies for further reference.

What are the refinements from the existing Ordinance?

In addition to a more straightforward review process for all small lot projects including bungalow courts, the Code Amendment also refines some of the existing Ordinance requirements to address project massing such as setbacks, lot width, and lot area. Specifically, some of the changes include:

- Increased front and rear yard setbacks, with additional setback requirements when abutting single-family or more restrictive zones;
- Increased minimum required lot width for new parcels; and
- Further restricted the buildable lot area.

Are the proposed design standards different from the existing Guidelines?

Released in 2014, the Design Guidelines were created to accompany the implementation of the Ordinance and provide examples of best practices in addressing the complexities of designing small lot developments. The Guidelines are used to inform developers and staff, and assist project design at the onset of the process. The proposed Design Standards will go a step further to create specific and enforceable rules addressing site planning, massing and other project features. All new small lot projects will need to show compliance with the Design Standards.

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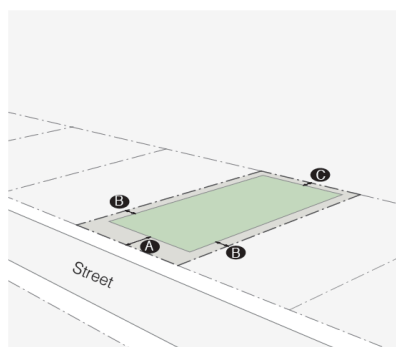


How can massing and integrating Small Lot Subdivisions into neighborhoods with existing single family dwelling units be better addressed from a design standpoint?

Through a combination of changes including yard requirements requiring greater building setbacks (Ordinance), façade, roofline, and building articulation (Design Standards), and access easements (Map Standards), the overall buildable area of a typical 5,000 square foot lot will be reduced by 10%-20% overall.

With the Code Amendment, the front yard of the underlying zone shall apply to the front lot line of the perimeter of the subdivision, and a 10' rear yard shall be required along the Rear Lot Line of the perimeter of the subdivision. Subdivisions abutting any single family zone shall provide larger setbacks with side and rear yards per the underlying zone (see Page 4 for illustrations). This will introduce more open spaces throughout the projects especially along the perimeter of the subdivision that abuts the street or neighboring lots.

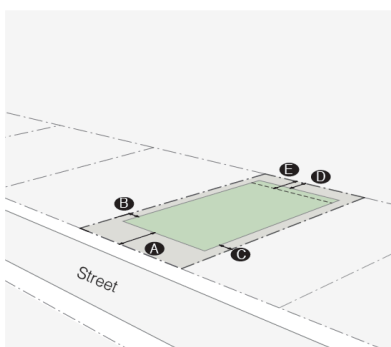
Existing Buildable Area



Setbacks

- A Front Yard: 0' or Prevailing Setback
- B Side Yard: 5'
- C Rear Yard: 5'

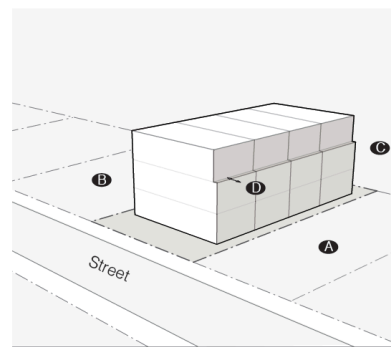
Proposed Buildable Area



Setbacks

- A Front Yard: Underlying Zone
- B Side Yard: 5'
- C Side Yard Abutting R1: Underlying Zone
- D Rear Yard: 10'
- E Rear Yard Abutting R1: Underlying Zone (15' or greater)

Proposed Buildable Envelope



Setbacks

- A Single Family Zones
- B Multi Family Zones
- C Existing Height District Limit
- D Side Yard Abutting R1: Underlying Zone (Greater setback above two stories)

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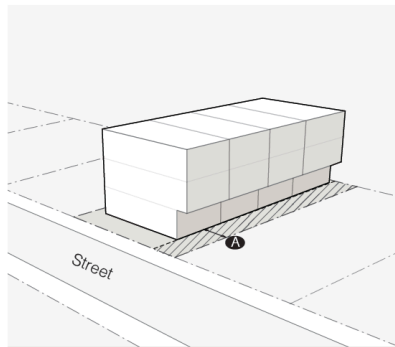
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The common access driveways will be required to be open to the sky for a minimum width of 10' at all times so that cantilevering of the buildings will be limited – reducing the top-heavy look of some small lot designs. The smaller “infill” developments will have a more noticeable visual reduction. The increased front and rear yard setbacks, limited cantilevering within the common access driveway, and new design standards for the top portions of the street-facing units can address design and help to better integrate Small Lot Subdivisions into existing single-family neighborhoods zoned for multi-family uses.

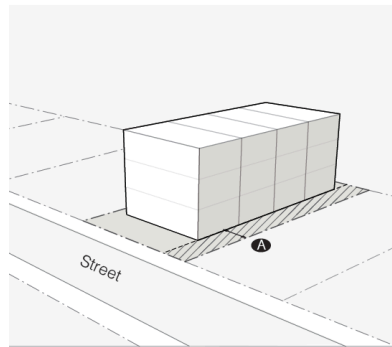
Existing Envelope



Driveway

A Open to the Sky Width:
Code Requirement (Min)

Proposed Envelope



Driveway

A Open to the Sky Width:
10' (Min)

Is the height being reduced? What about density?

Small Lot projects are currently bound by the height limitations of the underlying zone – not by the Small Lot Ordinance. In addition to the increased setbacks and greater front yards per the underlying zone, the front unit(s) abutting the street will be required to provide either a pitched roof, an open deck, or vertical changes in the roofline – providing roofline modulation and enhancing architectural identity. Combined, they can provide for much needed open space within small lots projects. Regarding density, small lot projects are also bound by the underlying zone, and inversely, due to their spatial challenges, they typically result in fewer units than that permitted with condos and apartments.



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What about open space and guest parking?

An open space easement, among other amenities, will be required for Small Lot projects that include 20 or more units. When the Ordinance was adopted, it was not anticipated that large housing developments would be utilizing the Small Lot process. It was intended for infill developments, so no provisions were required for larger projects. Moving forward, a subdivision that creates a community of small lots involving 20 or more Small Lot Homes (“Small Lot Community”) will be required to provide open space, bike parking, and additional design features. Vehicular guest parking will be required on site for projects creating 8 or more Small Lot Homes.



How can we ensure that trash bins for Small Lot Homes are not on the public street?

All Small Lot projects are now required to provide on-site trash collection, and are prohibited from locating trash bins on streets for trash pickup. In recent months, Small Lot projects have been required to provide a centralized trash enclosure or to coordinate with the Bureau of Sanitation’s new “stinger operation” – where a small jeep (worker bee) drives onto the development, picks up the trash bins onsite and routes them back to the big dumpster (queen bee) waiting on the street. Trash areas and utility equipment will be placed away from the street.



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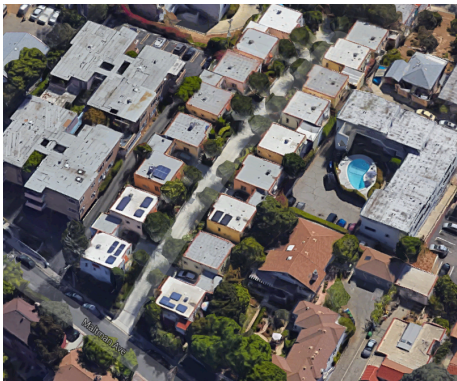
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What circumstances allowed for the historic Maltman Bungalow Courts to be preserved and rehabbed with ownership opportunities created through a Small Lot Subdivision? Is this an option for other similar bungalow courts?

In 2008, the City approved a Small Lot Subdivision for the conversion of the historic Maltman Bungalow Courts into individual “small lots” so that they could now be owned. L.A.’s vernacular bungalows were typically built on one large lot as rental homes in the form of smaller detached dwellings. Unfortunately, many are deteriorating, do not meet current code requirements, and therefore require multiple variances or exceptions to enable their preservation and rehabilitation. Although allowing a path for preserving these bungalow courts was part of the original intent of the Small Lot Ordinance, it was never written into the regulations. The Code Amendment will create a more straightforward review process for the **preservation and rehabilitation of L.A.’s** historic bungalow courts, to ensure they remain in the City’s urban fabric.



What is a mixed-use Small Lot?

In addition to a typical residential small lot subdivision, the Ordinance also allows the creation of “mixed-use” small lots along the street that typically contain a ground floor commercial space with a standard small lot residential dwelling on upper floors.



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What about the larger-scale small lot projects? Are there any additional requirements?

In the special circumstances of larger parcels, small lot subdivisions may yield developments that are much larger in size and scale. Because these subdivisions yield 20 or more units, they are identified as small lot “communities”, and because of the scale of the project, require special considerations with regards to site planning, building, and landscaping that are unique from the typical small lot subdivision. These issues include pedestrian accessibility, neighborhood compatibility, connectivity, and community amenities. As such, there are higher expectations in the design and development of small lot communities, for instance, in the provision of amenities such as shared open space.

When do the Code Amendment and Design Standards take effect?

The proposed Code Amendment will become effective shortly after it is adopted by the City Council. Once the Ordinance is effective, the Design Standards shall be applied to all new small lot subdivision applications.

Where can I find the latest draft Small Lot Code Amendment and Design Standards?

The draft Code Amendment is available on the Department of City Planning’s website (planning.lacity.org) under “News” and “Small Lot Code Amendment and Policy Update”. The draft Small Lot Design Standards and the Advisory Agency Policy Update that will set the new Small Lot Map Standards are also available on the website.

What happens next? How do I give my input for the Small Lot Code Amendment?

The Department of City Planning has issued the latest draft of the Small Lot Code Amendment and Design Standards for public review and comment. There will be further opportunities to participate as the proposed Small Lot Code Amendment moves on to the City Planning Commission and the City Council for consideration. In the meantime, please direct your written comments via email by August 8, 2016 to:

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