

II. REVIEW OF CITY'S PLANNING DOCUMENTS

Review of City's Planning Documents

The intent of this section is to review the City's regulatory documents and provide recommendations for revisions or additions to existing City regulations or policies to encourage the development of Workforce Housing units and potential measures to maintain their affordability.

A. General Plan

The City of Grass Valley updated the General Plan in 1999. The Plan contains goals, policies, and programs that will guide development throughout the City of Grass Valley and its Sphere of Influence. The Land-Use Element contains the primary policies that guide residential development. These policies are implemented through several types of ordinances, including the Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances. These ordinances are currently in the process of a comprehensive update which will combine the two ordinances into a unified Development Code. The new Development Code will establish the amount and distribution of different land uses within the City and establish requirements for the division and improvement of land.

The Land-Use Element of the Grass Valley General Plan contains four residential land-use categories: urban estate density, urban low density, urban medium density, and urban high density. Each land-use designation permits a variety of housing types and densities for residential development. Two additional land-use designations provide for development that would include a mixture of residential and commercial land uses of varying densities. These land-use designations are the Corporate Business Park (CBP) overlay and the Special Development Area (SDA).

TABLE 1: LAND-USE CATEGORIES PERMITTING RESIDENCES

General Plan	Zoning Designation(s)	Density (du/ac)	Minimum Site Area/Unit (sq. ft.)	Maximum Building Coverage	Typical Residential Type(s)
RESIDENTIAL					
Urban Estate Density	Residential Estate (RE)	1 or less/acre	1-3 acres	40%	One single-family detached home per lot
Urban Low Density	Single-Family Residential (R-1) Two-Family Residence (R-2)	1.01 to 4/acre	10,000	35%	One single-family detached home per lot; Single-family patio homes; townhomes
Urban Medium Density	Single-Family Residential (R-1) Two-Family Residence (R-2) Medium Density Residential (R2A)	4.01 to 8/acre	5,000	40%	Single-family attached and detached; single-family patio homes; duplexes; townhomes
Urban High Density	Multiple Family (R-3)	8.01 to 20.0/acre	5,000	50%	Townhomes or row houses; apartments; condominiums
MIXED-USE					
Special Development Area	Interim Development Reserve (IDR) Specific Plan (SP)	No Limit	N/A	Varies with use	Any type proposed within Specific Plan, Master Plan
Business Park (BP)	Corporate Business Park (CBP Office Professional (OP) Industrial/Services (I/S)	8 to 20/acre	10,000/building	40%	Any type pursuant to acquisition of use permit
OVERLAY					
Town Center Overlay (TC)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Upper level residential in Downtown area
Open Space Opportunity Overlay (OSO)	N/A	Underlying GP designation	N/A	N/A	Residential uses corresponding to underlying GP designation

The City has adopted zoning standards for these general plan categories that include five residential zones and two mixed-use zones that allow residences. Table 1 *Land-Use Categories Permitting Residences* summarizes the General Plan land-use categories and corresponding residential zones.

Special Development Areas

The City of Grass Valley 2020 General Plan has identified four areas that are designated Special Development Areas (SDA). Three of the SDAs have been subjects of annexation agreements with the City. Annexation agreements have resulted in the allocation of acreage to various land uses, and a fixed number of housing units to be allowed. Any formal consideration of the SDA annexation applications has been deferred pending the completion of a detailed market and fiscal impact analysis. The General Plan includes identification of units for the following SDAs:

- Loma Rica Ranch (180 housing units, 121 acres),
- North Star (363 housing units),
- Kenny Ranch (100 housing units), and
- Bear River Mill Site (approx. 310 housing units plus approx. 24,000 square feet above ground level residential space, annexation agreement not yet in place).

It is anticipated that the Special Development Areas (SDAs) will include elements of workforce housing and mixed-use development. It should be noted that actual housing units developed in the SDAs may differ from what is identified in the General Plan.

Recommendation:

Workforce Housing Program goals would be modestly achieved with an “Inclusionary Housing” requirement for all the SDAs. Inclusionary Housing units could be required, providing a minimum percentage of affordable as well as workforce housing units. The City could establish, at a minimum, a 20% set-aside of affordable units; however, the final percentage of units being set aside would be determined on a case by case basis and workforce housing demand.

Town Center Overlay

The Town Center (TC) Overlay comprises the Downtown and the surrounding areas. The TC overlay district encourages the development of mixed-land-uses. The City is implementing the General Policies of the Town Center through the Downtown Strategic Plan and incentives for mixed-use development (see Housing Element, Chapter IV, Goal A, Program 2).

Recommendation:

None

Historic Preservation/Development Review

The City has included a Historic Element in the current General Plan. Building alterations for commercial areas within the Downtown Historic District are subject to review by the Development Review Committee through the City's site plan review process.

The time required for Development Review does not impose an additional constraint on the re-use or modification of existing buildings or sites because the Development

Review Committee meets twice monthly. Workforce housing will be subject to Development Review regardless of the presence of historical resources. Most exterior building remodeling and new building construction within Grass Valley requires development review approval with the exception of single-family homes.

The City's review of workforce housing projects with historic significance or within the Historic District has the potential of increasing the cost of the rehabilitation, conversion or infill due to the added cost of maintaining or complementing the historic character of a structure or District in the use of materials, design and construction techniques.

Recommendation:

The City should establish a "National Register Historic District." This would allow for rehabilitation tax credits that would help to reduce some of the additional cost associated with maintaining the historic character of district buildings. The establishment of a facade easement program could also help defray some initial capital cost through the dedication of tax deductible easements and provisions for long-term maintenance.

Community Design Element

The Community Design Element of the General Plan includes goals for the design and configuration development, including residential development. New development is expected to respect the scale and intensity of adjacent older development and provide physical connections between new and existing uses. Workforce housing will be expected to respect the pre-existing uses, patterns, and community aesthetics.

Recommendation:

None

B. Zoning and Subdivision Ordinance

The City's Zoning and Subdivision Ordinance regulates the type, location, density, and scale of residential development.

Grass Valley has five residential zones:

1. RE - Residential Estate (Single-Family Structures)
2. R-1 - Single-Family Residence District
3. R-2 - Two Family Residence District
4. R2A - Medium Density Residential District
5. R-3 - Multiple Family District

See Table 1 *Land-Use Categories Permitting Residences* for a summary of the density, site area and building coverage limitations.

Lot Sizes

Minimum lot sizes for the City's residential zones are 10,000 square feet for both interior and corner lots. Permitted building heights are 35 feet in all zones. The City also permits residential uses, subject to acquisition of a use permit and the City's residential design standards, in several other zoning districts.

Recommendation:

The update of the City's development code should consider reducing lot sizes and creating a minimum that encourages the efficient use of infill land and promotes compact development.

The City should consider a no-net-loss policy when considering larger lot sizes and therefore reduced densities, where a property owner is required to provide appropriate densities elsewhere in the community.

Building Setbacks

Yard and setback requirements vary by zoning district and density of residential development. Frontyard setbacks in residential zoning districts are required to be 20 feet with the exception of the RE zone, which requires a larger 50-foot setback. The Code does not regulate frontyard setbacks in commercial zones, except in the C-1 zoning district, which has a 15-foot frontyard setback requirement. Side yard setbacks are five feet within residential zones. There are no standards for side yard setbacks in commercial zoning districts that allow residential uses except the CBP zone, which requires a five-foot side yard setback. Rear yard setbacks range from five feet in the R-2 and one commercial zone to 20 feet in other residential zones.

Recommendation:

When considered in combination with the parking requirements for residential land uses, the required frontyard setback may present a constraint to workforce housing development on sites with odd configurations, such a shallow, but wide property or sites with steep topography. Garages and/or parking spaces within frontyard setback areas are prohibited. The Code allows the extension of structures such as eaves, cornices, fireplaces, uncovered porches, and stairways into the required yard area but only between two and six feet from the main building.

This potential constraint could be mitigated by allowing parking areas in the required front yard setback in the R-2 and R-3 zones without allowing parking structures.

The update of the City's development code should consider reducing set-backs to allow for more efficient use of land and encourage more compact development. It should also consider a setback for garages from the front of houses to reduce the "snout-nosed" attached garage configurations that tend to dominate new developments.

Lot Coverage

40 to 50 percent of the lot may be occupied by buildings in the R-2 and R-3 zones. The building coverage limit does not include enclosed parking or other accessory structures, unless they are part of the main building. Therefore, building coverage requirements may impose a constraint on residential development. It is unlikely that additional building coverage in the R-2 and R-3 zones would be necessary to achieve a density of 8 to 20 dwelling units per acre, along with the addition of a 25 percent density bonus for affordable housing.

Recommendation:

The update of the City's development code should consider increasing lot coverage in order to more efficiently utilize land and infrastructure as well as promote more compact development.

Parking

Off street parking requirements vary by housing type. Two spaces per dwelling unit are required within the RE, R-1 and R-2 zones. R-2A and R-3 zones require 1.5 parking spaces for single-bedroom units and 2 spaces for each larger unit.

Mobile Home Parks are required to provide one and one-half spaces per unit with one space provided at the unit. This is an appropriate ratio.

Recommendation:

The City should also consider a reduction in parking to one and one-half spaces for two-bedroom units. It should also consider allowing some of those spaces to be provided on the street as locational circumstances allow.

Bicycle or motorcycle parking is required at a ratio of one bicycle space and one motorcycle space per ten auto spaces. The number of motorcycle spaces may be excessive.

Density Bonus

A density bonus program is available to developers who wish to provide affordable housing.

Recommendation:

Density bonuses should be extended to the provision of Workforce Housing in addition to affordable housing.

Secondary Living Units

Attached and/or detached secondary living units are permitted in the R-1 zone, subject to compliance with zoning and parking standards. Detached units must be separated from the main residence by at least ten feet. Secondary units are subject to the City's use permit process in zoning districts other than the R-1 districts.

Detached secondary units are only allowed on lots of 10,000 square feet or more. The floor space of a secondary unit must be between 275 square feet and 640 square feet. Separate kitchen and restroom facilities must be located within the unit. One off-street parking space is required per unit. However, if the secondary unit contains more than one bedroom, two parking spaces are required per second unit.

Recommendation:

The ten foot separation from the main house standard will cause a constraint on some workforce housing products, particularly where small lots seek to add a secondary unit. The update of the City's development code should consider reducing the separation in order to more efficiently utilize land and infrastructure and promote more compact development.

The parking requirement for secondary units with two bedrooms could pose a constraint to the development of secondary units with two bedrooms on small lots.

See the previous discussion on lot size and parking standards.

Mobile Homes and Mobile Home Parks

Mobile and manufactured homes provide an alternative for workforce housing. Grass Valley's Zoning Ordinance allows for the development of mobile home parks, mobile home subdivisions, and individual mobile home lots within the underlying zoning district, pursuant to meeting the design requirements such as yard setbacks and building coverage established by the underlying district.

Mobile home parks are also required to provide an all-weather walkway to each lot and comply with different parking standards than site built housing. Each mobile home lot must have two 10' by 20' off-street parking spaces, one 10' by 20' off-street parking space for every three mobile home lots for visitors, and one 10' by 20' off-street parking space for every five mobile lots for storage. Landscaping must also be provided to screen the development from adjacent properties.

Density and setbacks of mobile home parks are determined by the base-zoning district. Individual mobile homes on permanent foundations are allowed outside of specified mobile home parks within any residential zoning district with the suffix "MH". Lot size is determined by the base-zoning district and only one mobile home is allowed per lot.

Recommendation:

Due to the issues related to lot size, coverage and setbacks, the update of the City's Development Code should reconsider the relationship of mobile home parks to the development requirements of the base zoning category with the intent of allowing higher densities. See previous discussion related to parking standards.

Planned Unit Development Zoning

Planned Unit Development (PUD) zoning consists of a floating zone that allows flexibility and innovation for the development of an area. Residential development within a PUD area is subject to the development standards of the base zone. The benefit to processing residential development within the PUD process is that density of development is slightly different. The minimum lot size requirements do not apply and the maximum residential density is calculated by dividing the PUD plan area by the minimum lot area per dwelling unit required in the zoning district. Under this calculation, the achievable residential density can be higher than in the underlying zone.

Recommendation:

The PUD overlay zone does permit small lot, cluster home, and other alternative single-family lot configurations; however, it does not go far enough to support well designed higher density workforce housing. The update of the City's development code should consider reducing lot sizes and building setbacks. It should also consider increasing lot coverage in order to more efficiently utilize land and infrastructure while promoting more compact development.

Street Improvements

Of all improvement standards, street improvement standards typically have the greatest impact on housing cost. The cost of providing streets is directly influenced by the required right-of-way width, pavement width, pavement improvement, and landscaping standards.

Grass Valley's local streets function as neighborhood roads, providing direct access to lots that are adjacent to the paved section of road. These roads have a typical right-of-way of 50 feet and a pavement width of 36 feet, curb to curb. The pavement width required by the City is the generally accepted minimum necessary to provide for one lane of vehicular traffic in each direction and on-street parking on each side. The City's PUD overlay zone can be used to permit narrow rights-of-way and/or pavement widths when warranted based on proposed lot size, density, and housing unit configuration.

Required street improvements include curbs, gutters, and sidewalks of at least four and a half feet in width. The minimum sidewalk improvement standard is consistent with accessibility requirements for persons with disabilities and is not excessive in light of the need for ensuring minimum pedestrian access in residential areas.

Recommendation:

Some Workforce Housing products may not require the level of street improvements required by the City's Standard. These standards should be reconsidered as part of the update of the City's Development Code.

Drainage

The City requires developments to pay the entire cost of all on-site storm drainage facilities that may be needed. The City also requires developers to pay their pro-rata share of the cost of area-wide drainage facilities through the collection of a drainage impact fee.

Recommendation:

Some workforce housing products may not require the level of improvements required by City Standard for example underground storm drain pipelines, if properly designed, can be substituted by drainage swales. Drainage standards should be reconsidered as part of the update of the City's Development Code.

Sanitary Sewer

Developers are required to install sanitary sewer lines that connect to the City's sewer system, except when a property is too far from an existing sewer main. Under such circumstances, septic systems and leach lines are allowed as appropriate to site conditions.

Recommendation:

None

Water Lines

Developers are required to install water lines that connect to either the City's water system or the Nevada Irrigation District's water system, unless site conditions and the

proposed project permit the use of a private well.

Recommendation:

None

C. Housing Element

The Housing Element establishes the following implementation actions relevant to Workforce Housing:

- Grass Valley shall work with owners of vacant and underutilized land within the City and its Sphere of Influence (SOI) to provide sufficient sites with adequate zoning, public facilities, and services to meet the City's housing needs for all income groups.
- The City shall encourage creative approaches to meeting housing needs through a planned development process and allowances for mixed-use development, such as housing over street-level commercial uses in the Downtown area and mixed-use developments in annexation projects, when such developments can contribute to the City's balance of housing in relation to jobs or provide affordable housing for low- and moderate-income households. The City will promote opportunities for creative development in pre-application and pre-annexation meetings with applicants, information to be distributed at the Community Development Department public counter, and a website link to the Community Development Department (which includes Redevelopment Agency programs). The City shall also implement recommendations of the Downtown Strategic Plan that provide for mixed-use development.
- The City shall review and revise its zoning standards and permit process to encourage the production of ownership housing for moderate-income households and to ensure that zoning requirements do not unreasonably impact low-income housing proposals.
- The City shall continue to implement General Plan policies that encourage efficient use of unconstrained land and a healthy economic base.
- The City shall encourage developers to enter into agreements with Grass Valley (vesting the developer's right to proceed with a project under the regulations in effect at the time of application), in exchange for commitments from developers on providing or establishing a financing mechanism for necessary public facilities that serve new development. Grass Valley will promote this option during pre-annexation and pre-applications meetings.
- The City shall modify its annexation policies and procedures to promote infill development and development adjacent to the City (within its planning area) before seeking to expand the Sphere of Influence. Within the existing city limits, the City will promote infill development in the Redevelopment Area and other parts of the City where adequate public facilities and services are already in place and where small projects can be integrated with existing neighborhoods.
- The City shall continue to allow secondary dwelling units, group homes (residential care facilities), homeless and transitional housing facilities, and manufactured homes on individual lots and in mobile home parks, and farmworker housing according to the requirements of state law. To promote the City's development standards for

alternative housing, the City will provide information at the Community Development Department public counter, provide a website link, and offer pre-application meetings to explain the City's policies and regulations. The City will also promote its standards for alternative housing types through its ongoing contacts with nonprofit housing organizations.

- The City shall continue to implement state standards for accessibility in new housing by handicapped individuals. The City will require developers of affordable housing to incorporate adaptability and accessibility features in their project designs.
- Through its ongoing collaborations with nonprofit organizations and other public agencies to obtain funding for affordable housing projects and programs, the City shall seek to include housing units suitable for large families in new developments containing affordable housing, except in those projects designed specifically for non-family and small-family special needs groups (such as seniors and persons with disabilities).
- The City shall complete a study of options to provide "workforce" housing that is affordable to, and meets the needs of, residents who are employed locally. The study will include a Workforce Housing Design Program Implementation Report.
- The City shall revise its density bonus program to conform to current requirements of State law. This should be expanded to assist in the development of "Workforce Housing".
- The Grass Valley Redevelopment Agency shall continue to implement a plan for the use of tax increment housing set-aside funds and procedures for complying with the affordable housing provisions of redevelopment law.
- The City shall continue to pursue available and appropriate state and federal funding sources in cooperation with private developers, nonprofit housing corporations, the Nevada County Housing Authority, and other interested entities to support efforts to meet the housing needs of low- and moderate-income households and to assist persons with rent payments required for existing units. The City's efforts to support affordable housing activities by others will include expedited processing of permits (particularly when needed to meet funding deadlines), the provision of demographic or other information needed for an application, letters of support for proposals that have received approval (preliminary or final) by the City, and consideration of redevelopment housing set-aside funds (to the extent available) to match state or federal funds.
- The City shall investigate the feasibility of becoming a member of a joint municipal power agency for the purpose of pooling resources to issue tax exempt bonds or mortgage credit certificates for financing the construction of affordable housing or providing financial assistance to low- and moderate-income homebuyer assistance.
- The City shall contact financial institutions serving Grass Valley to solicit interest in providing financing to low- and moderate-income housing as part of their responsibility under the Federal Community Reinvestment Act. The City will seek specific lending commitments in conjunction with Redevelopment Agency, State, and Federal funds.
- The City shall continue to use Local, Federal, and State funds for housing rehabilitation,

provide loans for both owner-occupant and rental rehabilitation, and offer grants to homeowners for emergency repairs. The City will promote this program through a City website link, information at the Community Development Department public counter and other public locations in Grass Valley, and program information in the *Grass Valley City Messenger*.

- The City shall work with property owners, other public agencies, and non-profit housing organizations to preserve existing subsidized rental housing in which the owner could increase rents to market rates within the next ten years. To encourage existing owners to maintain the affordability of such rental housing, the City would offer low-interest rehabilitation loans from its Redevelopment Housing Set-Aside Fund, subject to the availability of funding at the time of request; assist owners in applying for State or Federal assistance for refinancing, acquisition, and/or rehabilitation; or provide "gap" financing to interested public agencies or nonprofit housing organizations interested in purchasing "at-risk" rental housing developments.
- Grass Valley shall meet with mobile home park owners to discuss their long-term goals for their properties and the feasibility of preserving these parks. Feasibility will be evaluated based on the condition of park infrastructure and buildings, the condition of mobile homes located in the park, parcel size, accessibility to services, and surrounding land uses.
- The City shall conduct a housing survey to document its efforts at improving housing conditions and to identify future areas and housing types for targeting its code enforcement, housing rehabilitation assistance, and neighborhood improvement efforts. The survey will also update the City's inventory of historic residential structures and rehabilitation/preservation needs of these residences.
- The City shall continue to combine code enforcement and housing rehabilitation assistance, targeted to older neighborhoods with concentrations of substandard housing. Code enforcement will occur primarily on a complaint or request basis. The code enforcement officer will provide the resident and/or property owner with information on the City's housing rehabilitation assistance program.
- The City shall permit the re-use of large, older homes located in the Downtown area and R-2 and R-3 zoning districts as multi-unit residential structures, provided historic preservation policies of the General Plan Historical Resources Element are followed and the re-use is consistent with zoning requirements. The City will assist in the re-use of older homes that require rehabilitation if the property owner intends to sell or rent the units to low- or moderate-income households. Assistance will be in the form of loans under the City's housing rehabilitation program or first-time homebuyer program for re-use projects that create multi-unit ownership properties. The City shall adopt an ordinance that discourages or prohibits the demolition of historic structures, including historic residence. The City will use incentives to assist owners of historic structures who do not have the financial capacity to maintain their properties. The City will make the community aware of the ordinance through a link to the City's web site, an informational flyer at the Community Development public counter, and distribution of information to local historic preservation organizations.
- The City shall continue to promote equal housing opportunity for all persons regardless of race, religion, sex, marital status, ancestry, nation origin, or color by supporting efforts of community groups that provide counseling, investigatory, legal, or referral services to victims of discrimination.

- The City shall continue to enforce State energy efficiency requirements for new residential construction (Title 24 of the California Code of Regulations) and shall encourage, through the City's residential design guidelines, additional energy conservation measures with respect to the siting of buildings, landscaping, and solar access.
- The City shall post and distribute information on currently available weatherization and energy conservation programs in conjunction with the housing rehabilitation.

Recommendation:

The action items included in the Housing Element are viewed as a benefit to Workforce Housing as well as affordable housing and should be implemented.

The City shall revise its density bonus program to conform to current requirements of state law. Note: this should be expanded to assist in the development of "Workforce Housing".

D. Design Guidelines

The Grass Valley Community Design Guidelines were adopted by the City Council in February 2002. The intent of the Guidelines was to provide clear direction to design professionals, property owners, developers and citizens with respect to aesthetic and functional design elements that the City expects from proposal submitted to the City. The intent is not to prescribe design solutions but rather to provide a framework for creative yet context sensitive design.

The Guidelines do not provide guidance for single-family residential design except in specific subareas of the community. Those areas include: Downtown Residential Area, Colfax Avenue, and the Northern Portion of South Auburn Street. The guidelines for these subareas are related to the preservation of the historic character of the subarea and particular buildings. They are not extravagant nor would they add significant cost to a particular project.

Chapter 6 of the Guidelines provides direction for multi-family projects (3 or more units per structure as permitted in the R-3 zone). The Guidelines provide guidance for site design, architectural characteristic, streetscape design, circulation, and signage. Most of the guidelines are functional in nature and could add some project development cost. With an experienced designer, these costs could be minimized with the responsible design criteria being an asset to the project over the long-term.

Recommendation:

None