

Glossary of Planning Terms

Accessory Use

An activity or structure that is incidental to the main use of a site.

Building Envelope

The space remaining on a site for structures after all building setback, height limit, and bulk requirements have been met.

Capital Improvement Program

A timetable for the installation of permanent public structures, facilities, roads, and other improvements based upon budget projections.

CEQA

The California Environmental Quality Act (see Public Resources Code section 21000). CEQA requires that private and public projects' potential adverse effects upon the environment be reviewed by decision-makers.

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 than do general law cities.

Cluster Development

Development which is clustered in a portion of a site, leaving the remainder in open-space. The amount of development allowed equals the amount that would have otherwise been allowed on the entire site.

COG

Council of Governments. California's 25 COGs are regional planning agencies concerned primarily with transportation planning and housing; they do not directly regulate land use. Elected officials from each of the cities and counties belonging to the COG make up its governing board.

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 contents of the general plan.

Conditional Use Permit (CUP)

A permit authorizing a use not routinely allowed on a particular site, subject to a public hearing. If approval is granted, the developer must meet certain conditions to harmonize the project with its surroundings.

Dedication

A grant of private land to a public agency for public use. Dedications are often used to obtain roads and parkland needed to serve a project.

Density Bonus

An increase in the allowable number of residences granted by the city or county in return for the project's providing low- or moderate-income housing. (see Government Code section 65915)

Density Averaging (or Transfer)

The density of development on a portion of a site is allowed to exceed usual limits provided that the overall density of the site does not do so.

Density increases in one area are offset by a corresponding decrease in allowable density in another part of the site.

Design Review Committee

A group appointed by the city council to consider the design and aesthetics of development within all or a portion of the community.

Development Agreement

A binding contract between a developer and a city or county establishing the conditions under which a particular development may occur. The local government "freezes" the regulations applicable to the site for an agreed upon period of time. (see Government Code section 65864)

Development Fees

Fees charged as a precondition 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 necessitated in part or in whole by the development; (2) connection fees (such as water fees) to cover the cost of installing public services to the development; (3) permit fees (such as building permits or grading permits) for the administrative costs of processing development plans; and, (4) application fees (rezoning, variance, etc.) for the administrative costs of reviewing and hearing development proposals.

Downzone

A change of zoning to a more restrictive zone (for example, from multi-family residential to single-family residential).

EIR

Environmental Impact Report. A detailed review of a proposed project, its potential adverse impacts upon the environment, measures that may avoid or reduce those impacts, and alternatives to the project.

Easement

The right to use property owned by another for a specific purpose. Power line easements are a common example.

Eminent Domain

The right of government to take private property for public use upon the payment of just compensation to the owner. This is also called condemnation (condemnation can also mean the closing of an unsafe structure by a public agency to protect the community safety).

Exaction

A fee or dedication required as a condition of development permit approval.

Final Map Subdivision (*also, tract map or major subdivision*)

Land divisions creating 5 or more lots. They are generally subject to stricter standards than parcel maps. Requirements may include road improvements, the construction of drainage and sewer facilities, park land dedications, and more.

Findings

The legal "footprints" which an agency must leave to bridge the analytical gap between the raw data considered by the agency and its ultimate

decision. They expose its mode of analysis of facts, regulations, and policies.

Floor Area Ratio (FAR)

A measure of development intensity. FAR is the ratio of the floor area of a building to the area of its site. For instance, both a two-story building that covers an entire lot and a four-story building that covers 1/2 of a lot have FARs of 2.

General Law City

A city incorporated under and subject to the general laws of the state.

General Plan

A statement of policies, including text and diagrams, setting forth objectives, principles, standards, and plan proposals, for the future physical development of the city or county. (see Government Code section 65300)

"Granny" Housing

An accessory dwelling for one or more elderly persons that is attached to or separate from a main residence. Government Code section 65852.1 allows cities and counties to approve such units in single-family neighborhoods.

Growth Management

A local program limiting the rate of community growth. Growth management strategies vary, but they can include capping the annual number of building permits, relating allowable development intensity to certain levels of infrastructure service or limiting the location of new development.

Impact Fees

See *Development Fees*.

Infrastructure

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

Initial Study

An analysis of a project's potential environmental effects and their relative significance. An initial study is preliminary to deciding whether to prepare a negative declaration or an EIR.

Initiative

A ballot measure which has qualified for election as a result of voter petition. At the local level, initiatives usually focus on changes or additions to the general plan and zoning ordinance. The initiative power is reserved for the public by the California Constitution.

Inverse Condemnation

The illegal removal of property value through excessive government regulation. Legal advice should be sought before proceeding in cases of potential inverse condemnation.

LAFCO

The Cortese/Knox Act (see Government Code section 56000) establishes a Local Agency Formation Commission in each county. A LAFCO is made

up of elected officials from the county, cities, and, in some cases, special districts. It administers the state law governing city incorporation and annexation proposals.

Mitigation Measure

The California Environmental Quality Act requires that when an environmental impact or potential impact will occur, measures must be proposed that will eliminate, avoid, rectify, compensate for or reduce that effect.

Moratorium

A halt to new development or the issuance of permits. Moratoria are often imposed while a new general plan or zoning ordinance is written or when sewer or water facilities are inadequate to serve additional development. (See Government Code section 65858)

Negative Declaration

A negative declaration is written when a project is subject to CEQA, but will not have a significant effect upon the environment. The negative declaration describes why the project will not have a significant effect and may propose measures that avoid all possible effects.

Nonconforming Use

A land use which does not meet current zoning requirements.

Overlay Zone

A zone which is superimposed upon other zoning. Overlay zones are used in areas which need special protection (as in a historic preservation district) or have special problems (such as steep slopes or flooding). Development of land subject to an overlay must comply with the regulations of both zones.

Parcel Map

A minor subdivision resulting in fewer than 5 lots.

Planned Unit Development (PUD)

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

Referendum

A voter challenge to legislative action taken by a city council or county board of supervisors. If enough voters' signatures are filed before the legislative action becomes final, the council or board must either rescind its decision or call an election on the issue. The California Constitution guarantees the public's power of referendum.

School Impact Fees

Fees imposed on new developments to offset their impacts on area schools.

Setback

The minimum distance required by zoning to be maintained between two structures or between a structure and a property line.

Specific Plan

A plan addressing land use distribution, open space availability, infrastructure, and infrastructure financing for a portion of the community. Specific plans put the provisions of the local general plan into action (see Government Code section 65450).

Sphere of Influence

A plan for the "probable physical boundary and service area of a local agency" as approved by the LAFCO. It identifies the area available to a city for future annexation. However, unless another arrangement has been made, the city has no actual authority over land outside its city limits.

Spot Zoning

The zoning of an isolated parcel in a manner which is inconsistent or incompatible with surrounding zoning or land uses, particularly if done to favor a particular landowner. A conditional use permit is not a spot zone.

Strip Development

Commercial and high-density residential development located adjacent to major streets. This type of development is characterized by its shallow depth, street-oriented layout, lack of unified design theme, and numerous points of street access. It impedes smooth traffic flow.

Tentative Map

The map or drawing illustrating a subdivision proposal. The city or county will conditionally approve or deny the proposed subdivision based upon the design depicted on the tentative map.

Tract Map

See *final map subdivision*.

Transportation Systems Management (TSM)

A program coordinating many forms of transportation (car, bus, carpool, rapid transit, bicycle, etc.) in order to distribute the traffic impacts of new development. Instead of emphasizing road expansion or construction, TSM examines methods of increasing road efficiency.

Variance

A limited waiver from the requirements of the zoning ordinance. Variance requests are subject to public hearing and may only be granted under special circumstances.

Zoning

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