

CITY OF MOUNTAIN VIEW

ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING COMMISSION STAFF REPORT MARCH 17, 2021

5. STUDY SESSION

5.1 R3 (Multiple-Family Residential) Zoning District Update

RECOMMENDATION

That the Environmental Planning Commission provide input to the City Council on Draft R3 (Multiple-Family Residential) Zoning District standards, materials, and concepts.

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

The Environmental Planning Commission's (EPC) agenda is advertised on Channel 26, and the agenda and this report appear on the City's Internet website at www.mountainview.gov. All property owners within the R3 Zoning District and within a 750' radius of R3-zoned properties were mailed postcard notices of this meeting. Additional e-mail notifications were also sent to those who signed up to receive these notifications.

MEETING PURPOSE

The purpose of this meeting is for the EPC to provide input to the City Council on Draft R3 (Multiple-Family Residential) Zoning District standards, materials, and concepts.

OVERVIEW

The R3 project implements City Council Goal II to "Improve the quantity, diversity, and affordability of housing by providing opportunities for subsidized, middle-income, and ownership housing." The R3 project will "review and propose revisions to the R3 Zone standards that consider form-based zoning, incentivizing stacked flats, and updated rowhouse guidelines." On November 12, 2019, the City Council authorized the scope of work and budget for this work, which included hiring Opticos as the project's lead consultant.

Staff notes that conditions have changed substantially due to COVID-19 and the economic uncertainties surrounding development projects. However, this project is intended to address the long-term housing needs and opportunities of the City beyond this current crisis. Additionally, staff expects that the R3 project will be informed by input from the community and developers about issues related to the economic crisis. Therefore, staff is moving ahead with the planning and implementation of this work.

This report discusses the following:

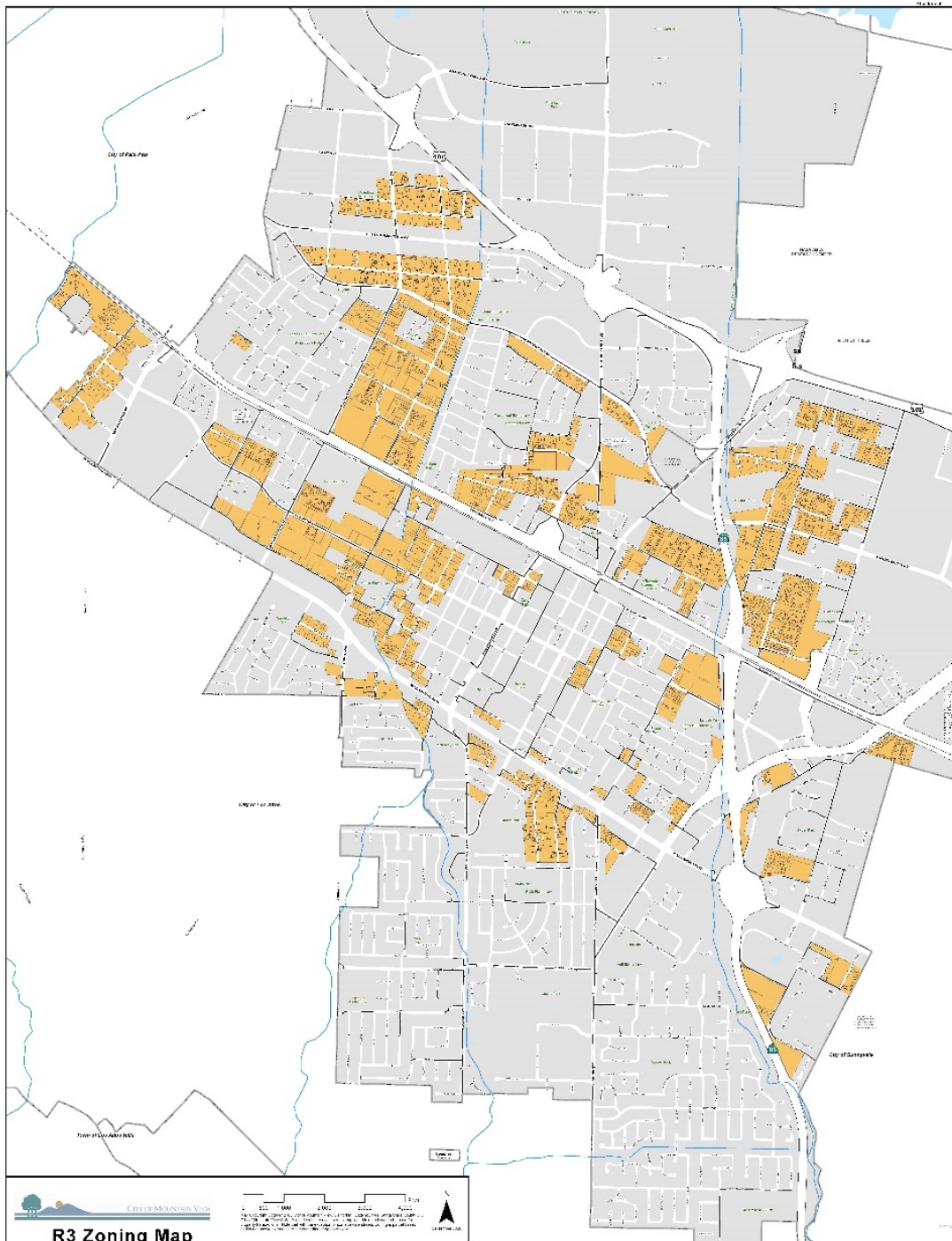
- An overview of the R3 Zone;
- A summary of recent R3 City Council meetings and public workshops;
- Proposed R3 framework and standards approach;
- Other topics; and
- Key next steps.

BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

R3 Zone – Overview

R3 Zoning Districts are located throughout the City and vary greatly in their location: adjacent to single-family neighborhoods; near commercial areas; or along busy corridors. The R3 Zone includes 1,775 parcels (noncondominium) with approximately 11,800 noncondominium multi-family units (see Map 1 below). Many R3 residential buildings are older, built in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.

Map 1: R3 Zoning Map



All multi-family residential rental buildings with three units or more built in Mountain View before 1995 are subject to rent stabilization and eviction protections

per the City's Community Stabilization and Fair Rent Act (CSFRA). Approximately 480 acres of R3 properties have residential buildings built before 1995 and are covered by CSFRA protections, totaling approximately 11,500 units.

The City's R3 Zoning Code allows single-family homes, duplexes, small-lot single-family, townhouses, rowhouses, and apartments. The R3 Zoning Code allows densities up to approximately 33 units per acre (up to 46 units per acre for R3-D) depending on the building type and lot size. The City also uses special development standards and guidelines for small-lot single-family, townhouse, and rowhouse projects. The R3 Zoning Code's base development standards, such as density, height, etc., are used to guide new apartment building development (also known as stacked flats).

Although the R3 Zone identifies six different types of allowed housing, recent projects in the R3 Zone tend to be one of two types. Rowhouse projects have been an attractive development type in Mountain View and have been built throughout the R3 Zone. Rowhouse projects have, however, reduced the number of sites that could accommodate new stacked-flat developments at higher densities. Recent City Code changes with higher Below-Market-Rate (BMR) requirements for rowhouse projects and the passage of Senate Bill 330 (SB 330) requiring replacement of existing on-site units have slowed the pace of rowhouse projects.

Another development type is newer stacked-flat projects that have tended to be more "high-end" projects that charge premium rents. These projects include more in-demand amenities, such as pools, fitness centers, theater rooms, etc., than older, more basic and naturally affordable apartments in the City. As noted above, the passage of SB 330, which requires replacement of existing on-site units, has also greatly reduced the number of these types of redevelopment projects.

Staff previously presented to the City Council some initial findings and observations of current constraints for producing new stacked-flat multi-family housing in the R3 Zone. This analysis indicated that the R3 Zoning District standards are too broadly applied as they encompass a very large area with a wide variety of environmental contexts and that a more refined application of R3 standards in new "subzones" is a potential recommended approach. This approach is discussed later in this report. Additionally, initial high-level analysis has indicated that the R3 Zoning District could potentially add up to 12,000 new multi-family units using updated development standards and an increase in allowed densities and floor area ratio (FAR). This is an initial big-picture number and will be refined after these Study Sessions and further analysis and then included in the R3 CEQA document. A summary of this initial R3 analysis is presented in Exhibit 1.

October 13, 2020 City Council Study Session Summary

The City Council provided the following comments regarding the scope and direction of the R3 project:

- Existing R3 standards do not meet community goals; many R3 projects exhibit a lot of “sameness”;
- R3 standards should focus on form and neighborhood fit and less on FAR and density limits;
- Need to look at mitigating parking impacts from new R3 development;
- Look at new tree canopy standards; also preserve existing tree canopies in R3 neighborhoods;
- Public space is lacking with newer R3 development; focus on providing a more pleasant public/pedestrian experience;
- Adding more units in R3 is important;
- Larger units for families are lacking in R3; consider encouraging or requiring a minimum threshold for the amount of larger units in new development;
- Address usable, common open space that is public, efficient, and useable by residents;
- Consider maximizing density and incentivizing new development; new rowhouse development reduces opportunities for new stacked flat/higher-density development;
- Quality of life in R3 is very important; consider any additional infrastructure that is needed;
- R3 project is needed to meet the City’s Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) allocation;
- New R3 standards should increase densities;
- Consider prioritizing R3 “subareas” that require seismic retrofits;

- Focus on “the look and feel” and character of buildings and making great neighborhoods;
- Do not incentive “look-alike” buildings; address architectural variety and interest;
- Consider R3 changes that increase densities near transit; focus on proximity to services, bikeways, etc.
- Concern over potential large increase of new units and impact to community and infrastructure, including potential school impacts; and
- Strategies are needed for new R3 development that displaces residents.

Public Workshop Summaries

The following is a summary of the comments from two public online workshops that were held on this project:

1. Workshop No. 1–October 26, 2021. This first workshop presented an overview of the R3 Zoning District, including its existing character in terms of building types, with a facilitated discussion and then small group breakouts. Approximately 110 members of the public attended this Zoom workshop. Below are some broad themes that represent public input from this workshop. More detailed input from this workshop is included in Exhibit 2.
 - Density. Support for more housing and density but concerned about quality of life and existing neighborhood character.
 - Adjacencies. Concern about effect of more housing on existing neighborhood character. Support for mixed-use near R3 Zone and for more food and shops in addition to Castro Street.
 - Parking. Support for less parking based on proximity to transit and for innovative parking systems and parking permit program because of concern about effect on parking for existing residents. Support for decoupling parking costs from land costs.

- Public Realm/Open Space. Support for more shade elements/trees, especially Heritage trees. Questions about schools, parks, streets: infrastructure first or grow incrementally with development?
 - Frontage/Streetscapes. Support for walkable streetscapes and improved front setback areas, including street-level articulation along facades; interest in “Arcade” approach for some areas in R3 Zone (e.g., Santana Row).
 - Building Scale. Distribution of housing types throughout R3 rather than concentrations; support for up to six stories with step-backs on upper stories; concern about how larger/taller buildings will be massed along the rear where smaller buildings and houses are adjacent; concern about effect of new buildings on existing neighborhood character.
 - Architectural Style. Consider existing neighborhood character; support for interesting architecture while not being too prescriptive; concern about unattractive new buildings; support for enhanced quality of construction, privacy, and comfort.
 - Transit. Support for significantly improving existing transit to support existing and new housing; support for increasing housing density near transit.
 - Recommendations for Changes to R3 Standards. Support for increasing the FAR limit to achieve market feasibility; takes too long to get new apartments; need to make the process clear so that people can plan accordingly; need to make the R3 regulations produce more housing while being thoughtful; flag lots are an issue; concern that the existing R3 standards do not allow much.
2. Workshop No. 2—November 16, 2021. This second workshop presented a summary of Workshop No. 1 input, discussion of R3 character areas, and degree of change desired by participants in small group breakouts. Approximately 130 members of the public attended this Zoom workshop. Below are some broad themes that represent public input from this workshop. More detailed input from this workshop is included in Exhibit 2.
- Density. Prioritize density over open space; possible to replace R3 with R4 Zone? Missing Middle Housing is important; removing density limits is interesting if done through a Form-Based Code; R3 lots are

underutilized and mixed with the R1 Zone; consider high-density with grouped open space; not enough higher density areas, and the General Plan does not provide enough direction on this for the long term; concern about how the updated R3 Zone could affect Precise Plan areas; likely to be tradeoffs between aesthetic concerns and housing production.

- Adjacencies. Transition strategies important near low-, medium-, and high-intensity neighborhoods; support for more housing adjacent to the R3 Zone, especially near transit and walkable centers; consider expanding the R3 Zone to adjacent areas that could help increase housing production; prioritize how new buildings relate to neighbors than to the street; R3 needs to be context-sensitive and include transitions and step-backs as needed.
- Parking. Concern about the approach of one parking space per unit, especially on California Street; require developers to build underground parking to make the most of the land and reduce visual effect of parking lots; require alternative strategies (parking lifts, tandem spaces, and reducing the required amount per unit); on-street parking should be free and easy to find; parking approach needs to be realistic of actual needs; need parking permit program for new housing not to negatively affect existing residents' parking.
- Public Realm/Open Space. California Street should keep current public space; concern about roof decks as open space and compatibility with nearby single-family houses; support for roof decks and balconies to not reduce potential housing units/floor area; support for better streets, walkable places, and more trees and improved sidewalks; consider Vancouver examples; support for improved spaces between buildings; people moved to Mountain View for the open space; okay to eliminate open space if street is changed from a car-centric place to a place for people.
- Frontage/Streetscapes. Stoops and porches improve walkability and social interaction if not far from the sidewalk/street; reduce front setbacks to focus on ground-floor frontage design; concern about lack of setbacks and looking like Palo Alto; unfortunately, improvements to the pedestrian environment are often waived as part of the planning process; prioritize ground-floor frontage design over building massing; include greenery along frontage.

- Building Scale. Transitions should occur across streets; concern about the effectiveness (for neighbors and developers) of upper-story step-backs and transitions; need sensitive transitions to lower-intensity areas; consider including green areas as part of transitions; higher density needs to be context-sensitive; support for setbacks that consider the surrounding context; concern about balconies and overlooking from larger buildings into smaller buildings and lower intensity areas; concern about losing sunlight between new and existing buildings; transitions should occur where adjacent to another Zoning District.
- Architectural Style. Prioritize predictable regulations and more housing; concern about effectiveness of articulation requirements; support for regulating architecture to achieve “nice” buildings that will not be dated; allow architects flexibility on style and details; concern about effect of new buildings on existing neighborhood character; concern about becoming a city of “apartment buildings” instead of a city of condos, townhouses, and single-family houses; new buildings need to contribute to existing neighborhood character and a walkable environment; need to be clear about materials and requirements without dictating results.
- Transit. Areas with more housing should be transit-oriented in their physical design and reliance on parking; concern about local transit’s effectiveness/service; transportation improvements should not be delayed due to changes in housing production; improve bike and pedestrian infrastructure to reduce demand for parking; support for narrowing streets to slow traffic for improved biking and walking.
- Recommendations for Changes to R3 Standards. Concern about R1 properties abutting El Camino Real and potentially large buildings; too much construction and noise in the Cypress Point Drive area; need to remove restrictive zoning on California Street and large parcels north of the expressway; mixed support for Castro Street and El Camino Real building as a good example of building setbacks; better regulate infrastructure, transit, parking, services, and open space; increase potential near El Camino Real to the Bayshore Freeway and on California Street, Mountain View Avenue, near Rengstorff Avenue and Rich Avenue, Rengstorff Avenue corridor, Whisman Station, Central Park, and along the railroad corridor; prioritize more housing and especially affordable housing; concern about change being too rapid.

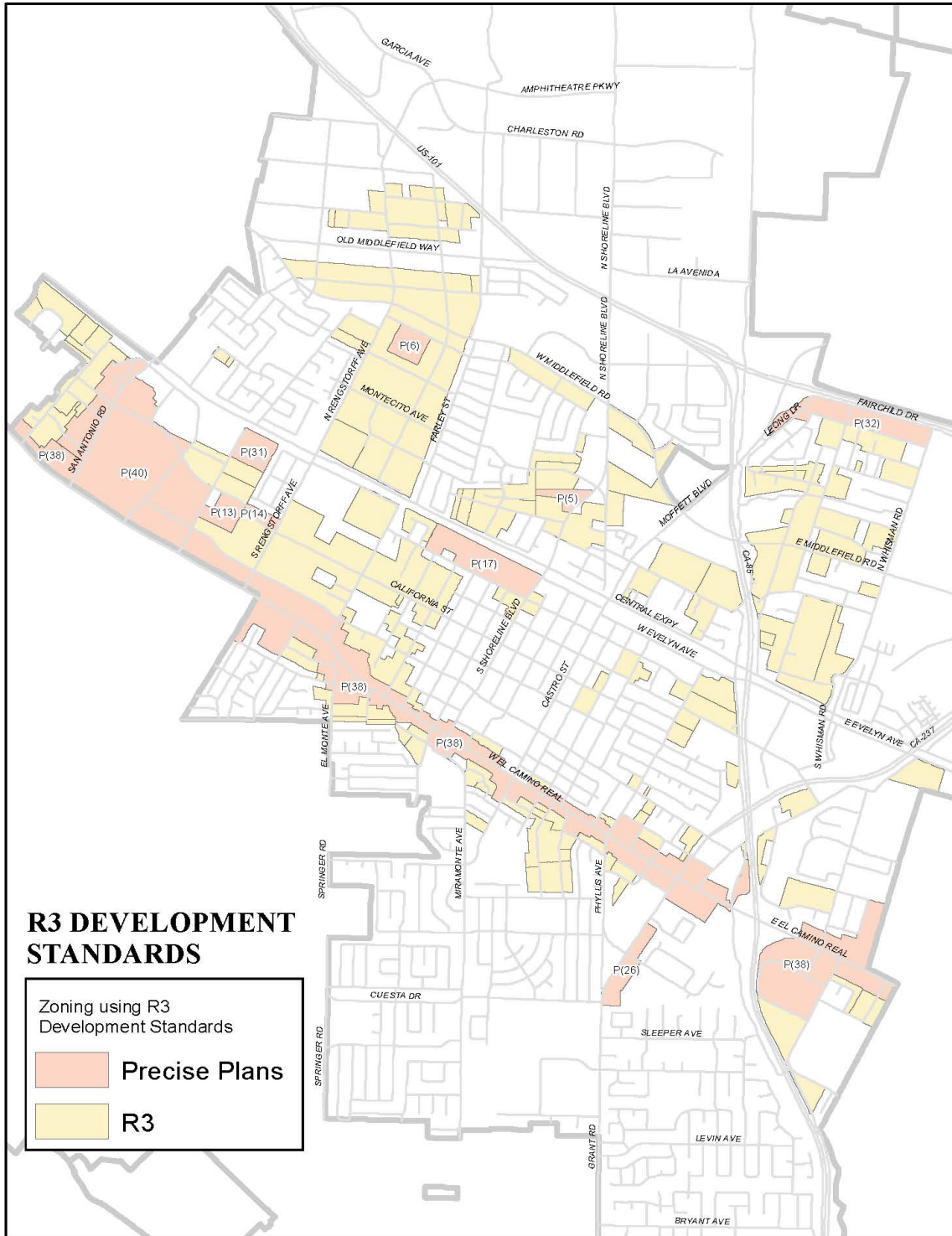
R3 Framework Overview

One of the City Council's goals for the R3 project is to evaluate new R3 standards that incentivizes new multi-family residential development. To accomplish this goal, the R3 team is proposing a wider variety of allowed R3 multi-family building types within new "subzones" with new development standards.

This approach allows more building type choices in different R3 locations that respect surrounding land use adjacencies while updating standards to achieve more feasible development. Building types are broken into either "house scale" or "block scale" categories. House scale includes buildings typically the size of a house, while block scale includes buildings that individually are as large as most or all of a block or when arranged together along a street appear as long as most or all of a block.

Map 2 below shows the existing R3 Zoning Districts, which includes some Precise Plans that reference or use the R3 development standards when new multi-family projects are proposed within these areas. The R3 team has not completed its review of which new R3 development standards are recommended to be applied to these areas. The final R3 Code that will be brought back to EPC and Council will include a recommendation for these areas.

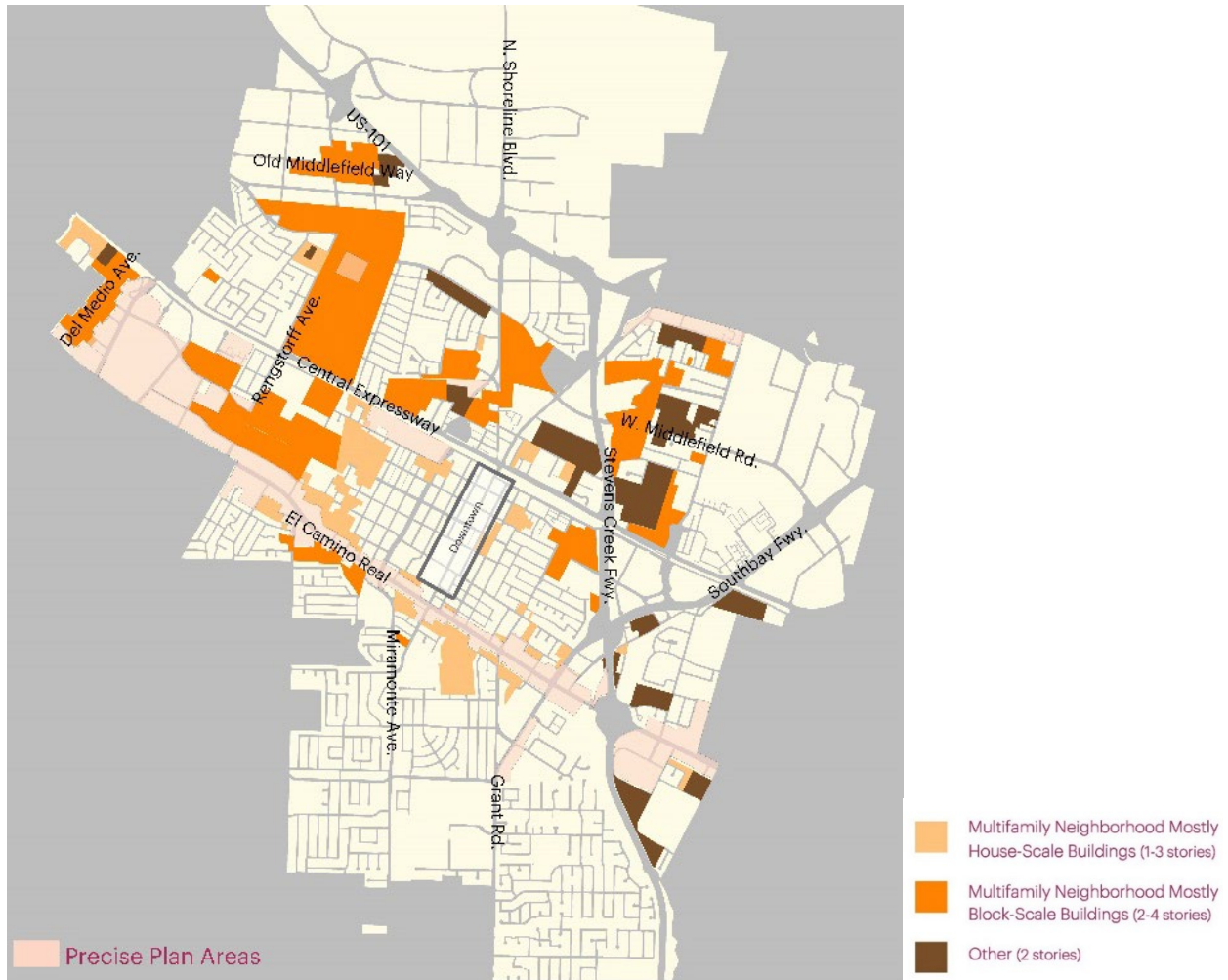
**Map 2: Existing R3 Zoning District and
Precise Plans Using R3 Standards**



R3 Framework Approach: New Subzones

This approach began with analyzing existing R3 development and translating this into form-based areas. This is shown below in Map 3.

Map 3: Identifying Existing Character Areas in the R3 Zoning District



The R3 team then looked at the existing physical character from a form-based perspective to understand prevalent patterns and to understand if those patterns are compatible with surrounding development. Based on this analysis, additional building types were identified that could fit into these areas. In some areas, the recommended approach is to maintain the prevalent physical character while providing additional housing choices. In other areas, the approach is to increase the intensity and new housing choices. This is due to a combination of factors:

proximity to transit; services; or not being immediately adjacent to low-intensity neighborhood(s).

The four proposed R3 subzones (R3-A, R3-B, R3-C, and R3-D) range from the least intensive to most intensive, as shown below.

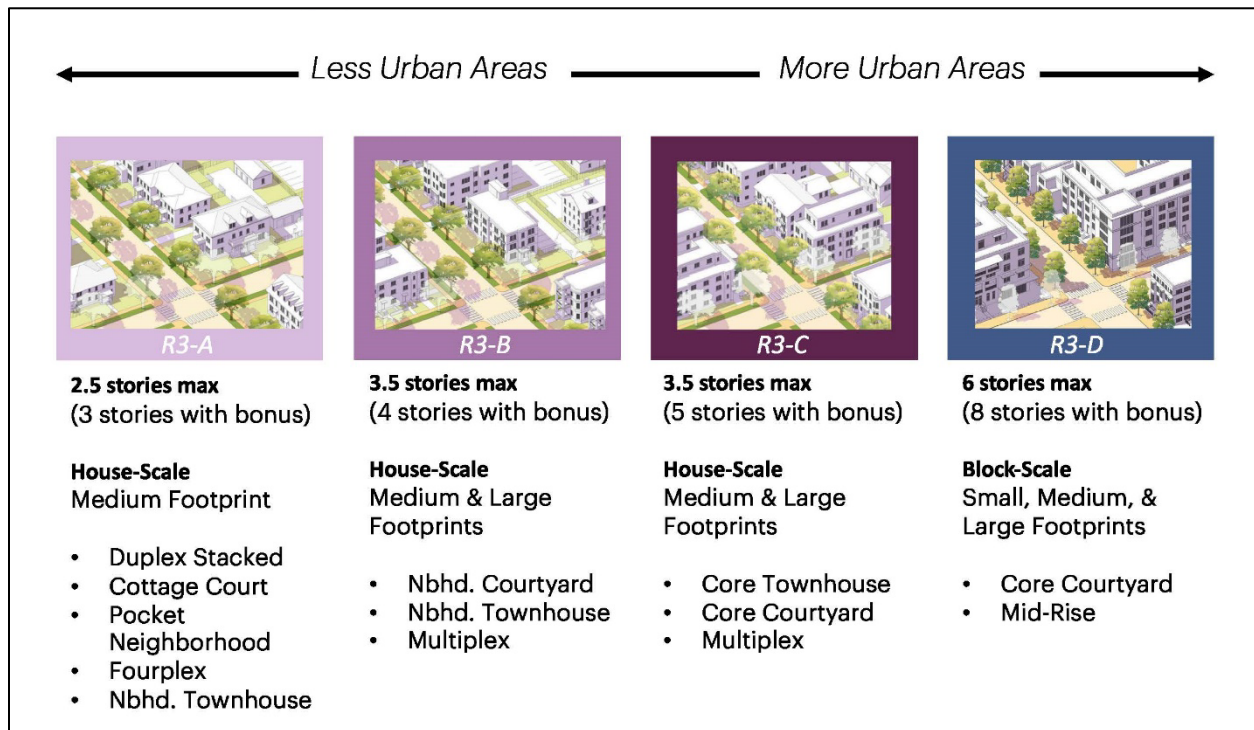
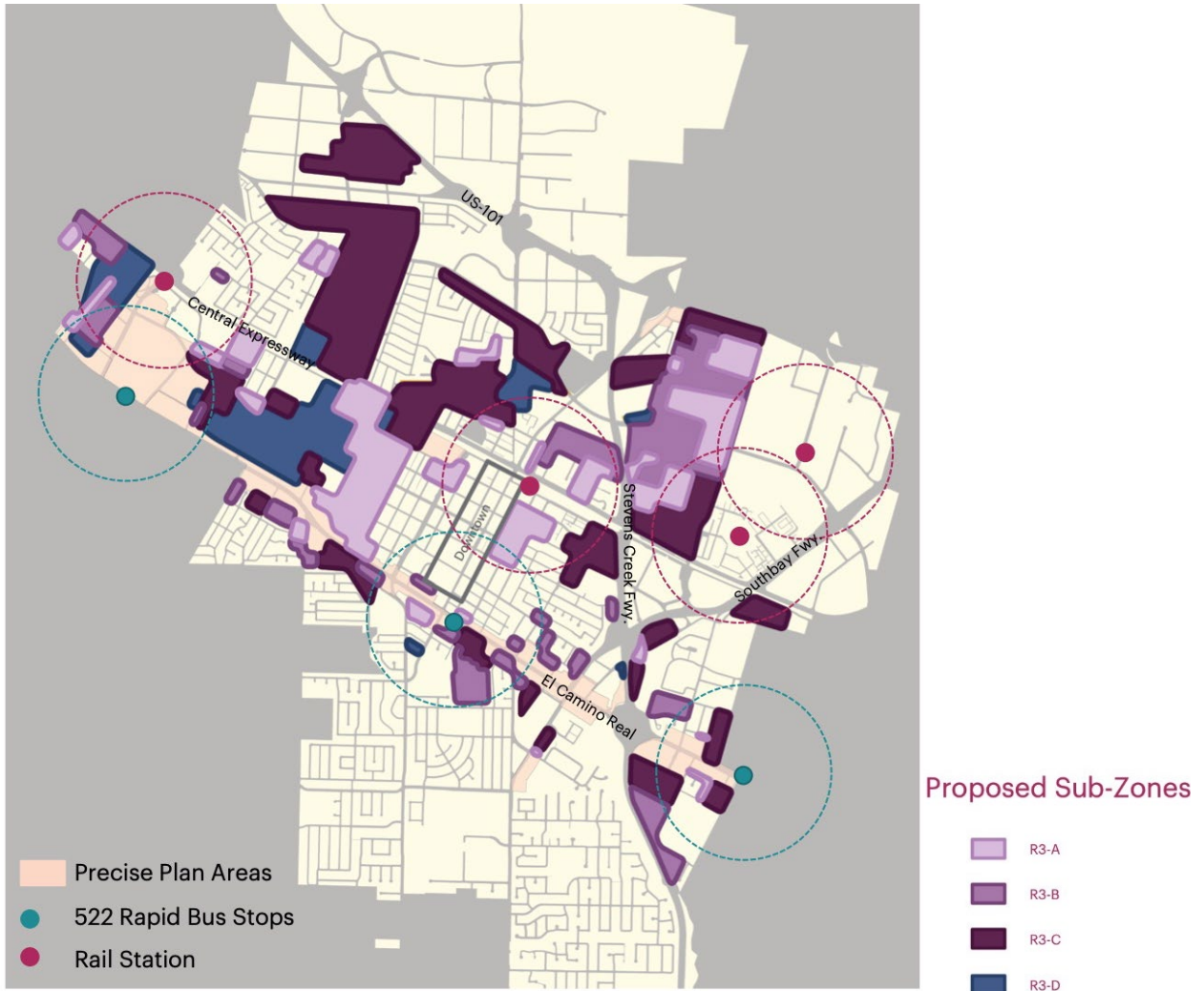


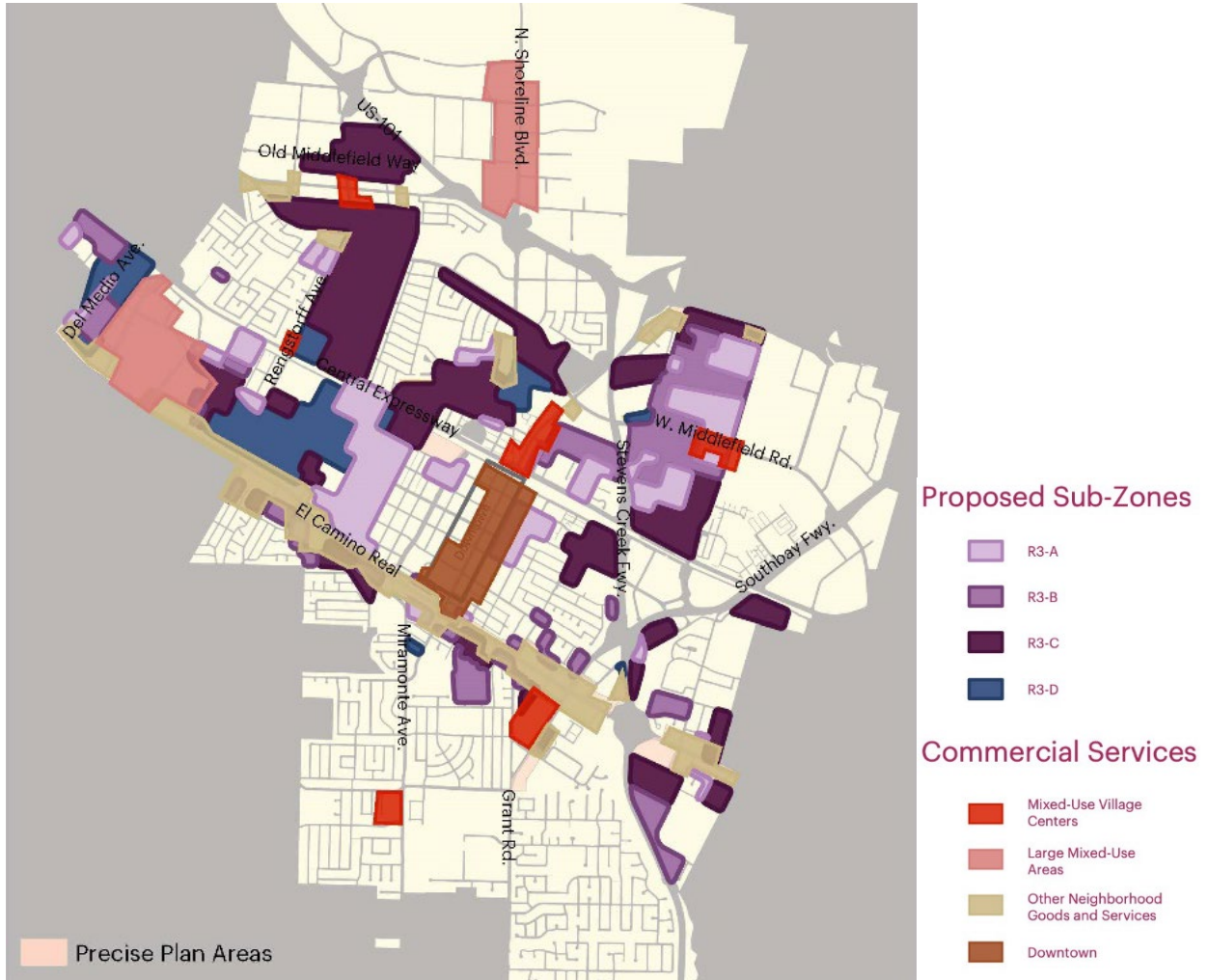
Figure 1: New R3 Subzones

Map 4 below shows these proposed subzones together on one map, while more detailed information on each of these subzones and their locations follow. This information includes the subzones and their proximity to major transit stops and commercial services to understand how accessible these areas would be to new future residents within these subzones.

Map 4: Proposed R3 Subzones and Proximity to Transit



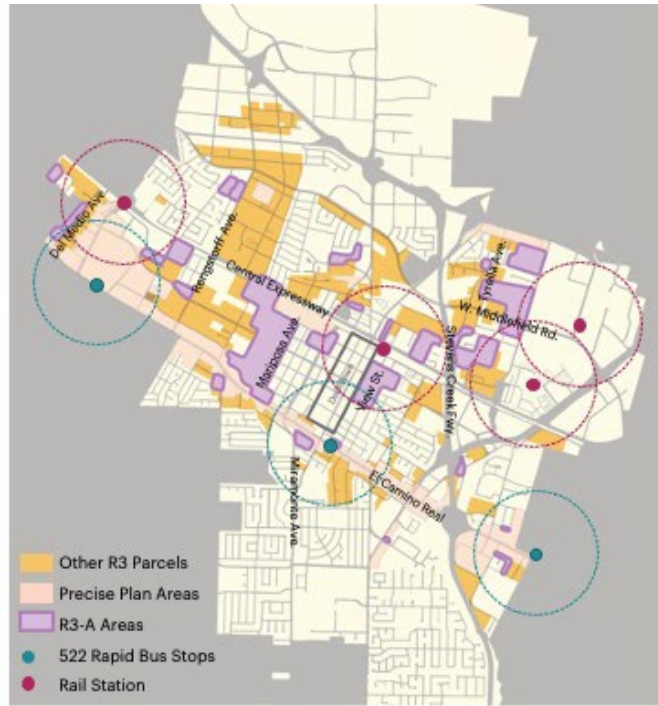
Map 5: Proposed R3 Subzones and Proximity to Commercial Services



R3-A Areas



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R3-A Zone

Standards	
Building Types	Duplex Stacked*, Cottage Court, Pocket Neighborhood, Fourplex*, Neighborhood Townhouse**
Building Footprint	House-Scale: Medium
Building Height	2.5 stories max. (3 with bonus)
Building Placement	10' min.-15' max. front setback 10' min.-15' max. side street setback 5' min. side setback 10' min. rear setback
Frontage Types	Front Yard, Porch Projecting, Porch Engaged, Dooryard, Stoop
*A Stacked Flat Type	
**Must include 2 units per building	

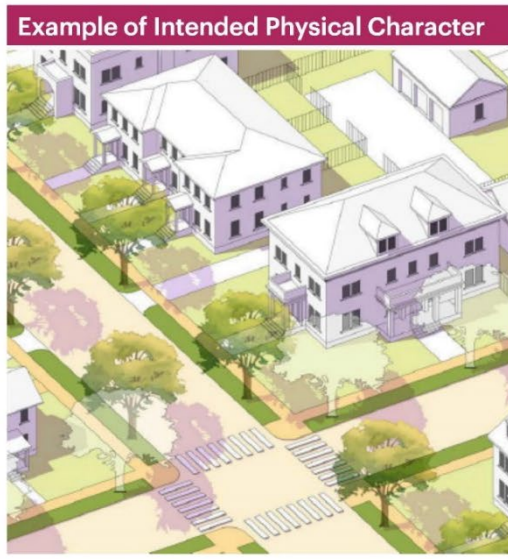
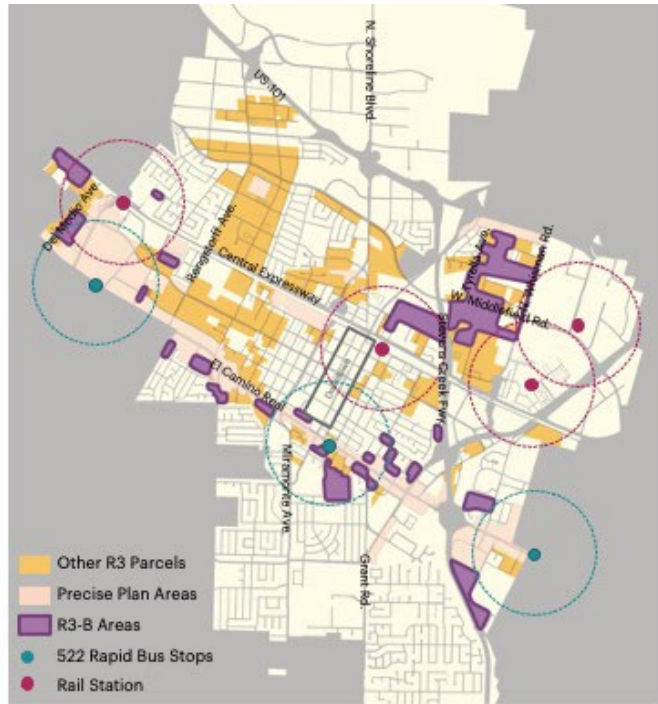


Figure 2: R3-A Subzone Summary

R3-B Areas



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R3-B Zone

Standards	
Building Types	Nbhd. Courtyard*, Nbhd. Townhouse**, Multiplex***
Building Footprint	House-Scale: Medium, Large
Building Height	3.5 stories max. (4 with bonus)
Building Placement	10' min.-15' max. front setback 10' min.-15' max. side street setback 5' min. side setback 10' min. rear setback
Frontage Types	Porch Projecting, Porch Engaged, Dooryard, Stoop, Shopfront (Open), Terrace, Gallery (Open)
*A Stacked Flat Type	
**Must include 3 units per building	
***Maximum 12 units per building	

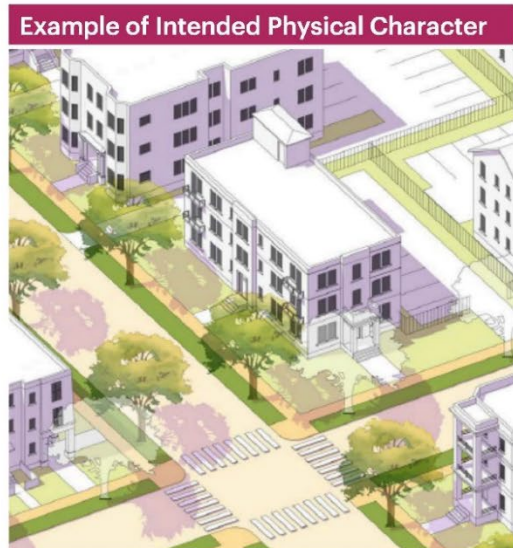
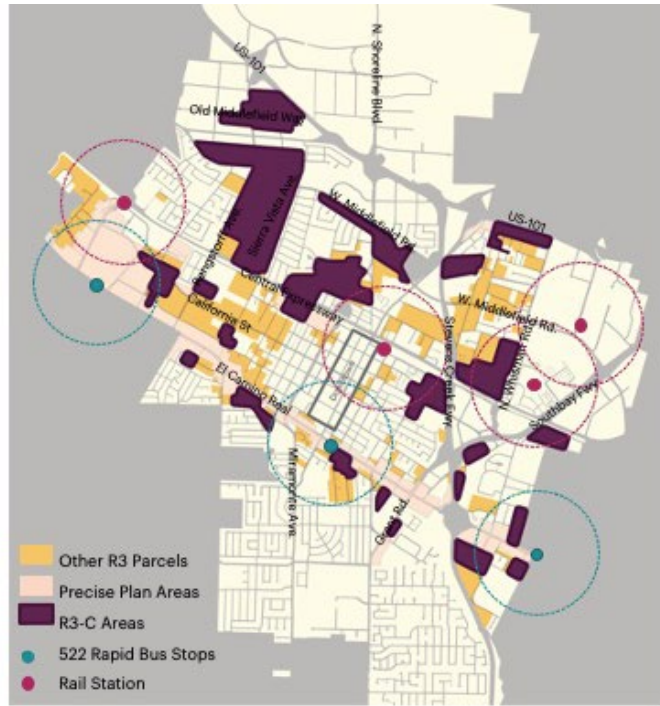


Figure 3: R3-B Subzone Summary

R3-C Areas



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R3-C Zone

Standards	
Building Types	Core Townhouse*, Core Courtyard*, Multiplex**
Building Footprint	House-Scale: Medium, Large
Building Height	3.5 stories max. (5 with bonus)
Building Placement	7'min.-12'max. front setback 7'min.-12'max. side street setback 5'min. side setback 10'min. rear setback
Frontage Types	Porch Engaged, Dooryard, Stoop, Forecourt, Shopfront (Open), Terrace, Gallery
*A Stacked Flat Type	
**Maximum 15 units per building	

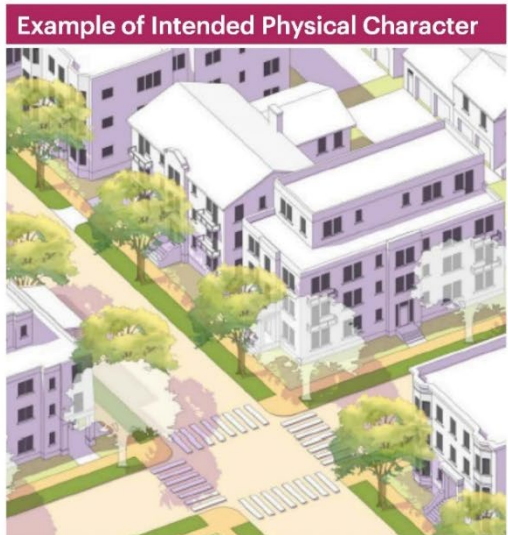
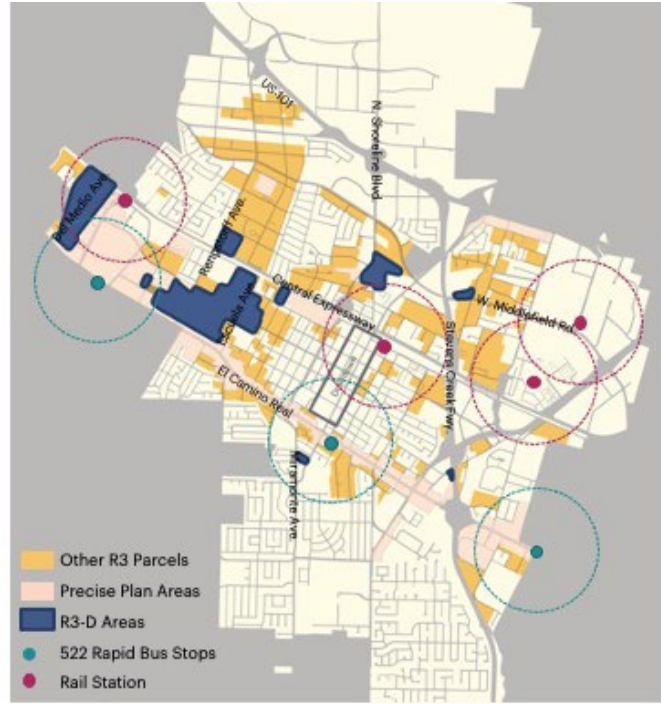


Figure 4: R3-C Subzone Summary

R3-D Areas



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R3-D Zone

Standards	
Building Types	Core Courtyard*, Mid-Rise*
Building Footprint	Block-Scale: Small, Medium, Large
Building Height	6 stories max. (8 with bonus)
Building Placement	7' min.-12' max. front setback 7' min.-12' max. side street setback 5' min. side setback 10' min. rear setback
Frontage Types	Porch Engaged, Dooryard, Stoop, Forecourt, Shopfront (Open), Terrace, Gallery, Arcade (Open)
*A Stacked Flat Type	

Example of Intended Physical Character



Figure 5: R3-D Subzone Summary

EPC Question No. 1: Does the EPC agree with the proposed R3 subzone approach, including each subzone's general location and their key development standards?

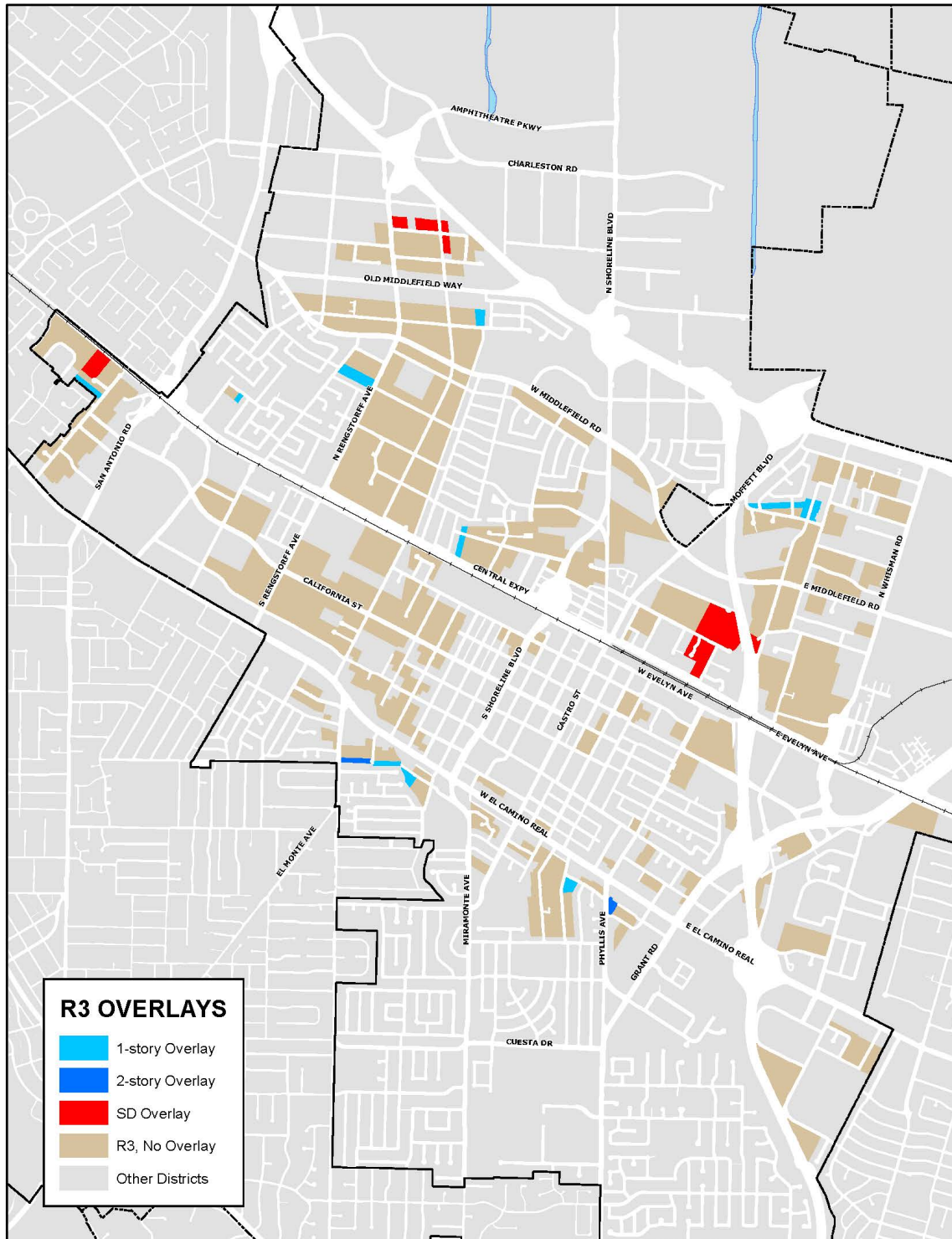
R3 Overlay Zones

The R3 Zoning District includes several existing “overlay” zones. These overlay zones add additional requirements or restrictions, in addition to any “base” zoning standards, on those properties with specific overlay designations.

The two R3 overlays, as shown below in Map 6, include building heights (shown in blue) and special design considerations (shown in red). Building height overlay zones are depicted with an “hs” designation. For example, R3-1hs notes the base zone, R3, and adds an additional single-story (“1hs”) limitation. These designations limit heights in areas due to concerns over how new more intensive R3 development in these areas might affect either surrounding land uses or property owners.

The second overlay designation, “sd,” indicates that special design considerations, such as setbacks or building design and location, shall be applied to new development in these areas. Properties with this overlay designation are typically located near freeways, train corridors, or adjacent to industrial uses where concerns over noise or other factors from these sources may affect new residential development in these locations.

Map 6: R3 Zoning District Overlay Zones



There are several options for addressing these existing overlay zones with the new R3 subzone approach. For example, the new R3 subzone standards could partially or entirely replace one or more of the existing overlay zones.

The EPC may wish to consider the following strategy for these overlay zones. For the height overlay areas, these could remain as height-restricted areas but could also fold in new R3 subzone standards, such as setbacks, frontage standards, and building types. This could allow more flexibility regarding development standards in these properties without changing the fundamental existing zoning constraint – building height – that was previously applied to these properties. For the sd overlay zone properties, the EPC may want to consider completely replacing this designation with new R3 standards. Using updated R3 development standards will provide more flexibility to these property owners, while advances in building technologies, namely soundproof windows and newer HVAC systems, could be utilized in new development in these areas to help reduce the impact of some of these previously identified environmental conditions.

EPC Question No. 2: Does the EPC agree with the proposed approach to the R3 Zoning District overlays?

Other Topics

General Plan Amendments

The General Plan's land use designations for R3 properties are also being analyzed as part of this work. The current high-density residential land use designation allows up to 80 units per acre but also envisions larger buildings than the proposed R3 subzone approach, which includes larger buildings but also small- and medium-sized buildings designed to the sizes of existing parcels. Some of the General Plan residential land use designations will likely need to be amended to align with the proposed subzone approach that is based on a previous analysis of existing parcels and the resultant densities needed to achieve market feasibility. Staff notes that the current R3 work could potentially allow densities ranging up to approximately 150 units per acre but would be further refined or adjusted based on EPC and Council input. It is important to note that the ability to achieve these numbers can range greatly depending on parcel size due to the inherent efficiencies in site design for larger parcels.

Multi-Family Residential Design Handbook

This project will also include a new Multi-Family Residential Design Handbook. The new R3 development standards will focus on the desired form of new development or more objective standards, while the Handbook will include guidelines that can be used to help guide desirable development on topics that are too subjective to regulate. These guidelines will either be appended to the R3 Code or be within a separate document.

While recent State legislation limits the City's ability to impose "nonobjective" or subjective development guidelines on new development, the Handbook will still serve an important role. They will graphically describe the City's desired architectural guidelines, styles, and options so property owners, developers, and the City have clear expectations for new R3 development. They will also provide developers with some resources they can utilize in their design work that may be of value to their overall building program and design objectives.

Displacement Response Coordination

The R3 team will continue to coordinate with the Housing and Neighborhood Services Division on how the R3 work can inform potential displacement strategies. For examples, these potential strategies could include, but not be limited to, increases in densities to incentivize replacement units on-site, alternative mitigations to on-site replacement, etc.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

In conclusion, staff is seeking EPC input on the key questions outlined in this report.

Following this meeting, staff and the consultant team will present EPC comments to the City Council and then continue developing the R3 Code while also beginning the required CEQA analysis and work. Staff estimates returning with a draft ordinance for EPC and Council consideration in early 2022.

Prepared by:

Martin Alkire
Advanced Planning Manager

Approved by:

Aarti Shrivastava
Assistant City Manager/
Community Development Director

MA/6/CDD
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Exhibits: 1. Initial Findings and Observations
2. Public Workshop Information