

## CODE AMENDMENT AND POLICY UPDATE

Frequently Asked Questions – December 17, 2015

### 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 Ordinance created incentives for infill residential development to spur more housing production. Today, 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 **Small Lot Standards**, which will provide consistency and set clear expectations for a more streamlined process – while enhancing the overall form and function of Small Lot developments.

### Are Small Lots allowed in single-family neighborhoods?

Small Lots are not permitted in single-family zones. The approved Small Lot projects comply with the current rules, which prohibit them in the single-family zones. 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.

### 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 two-phased fix under an Advisory Agency Policy Update that will create enforceable development standards, followed by a Small Lot Code Amendment that will require greater yard setbacks in the front and the rear. Additional design standards will be created to enhance the buildings’ overall look and functionality. A new, user-friendly “Small Lot Guide” that will serve as a consolidated policy booklet will be published online soon after.

### Are the proposed 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 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 standards.

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

Through changes in the yard requirements and new standards, massing will be reduced by 10%-20% overall. With the Code Amendment, yard setbacks in the front and the rear will be pulled back, similar to condos and apartments. This will introduce more open spaces throughout the projects. The common access driveways will be required to be open to the sky 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.

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### **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. However, the front unit(s) abutting the street will be required to provide an open deck or a pitched roof at the top level – providing roofline modulation and enhancing architectural identity. This will also increase light and air to the street. The open decks, along with roof decks, can provide for much needed open space within small lots projects and activate rooftops. Regarding density, small lot projects are also bound by the underlying zone, and inversely, due to their spatial challenges, they typically result in less units than that permitted with condos and apartments.

### **What about open space and guest parking?**

Open space, 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. 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 being 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.

### **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 historic development sites?**

In 2008, the City approved a Small Lot Subdivision for the conversion of the 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. Unfortunately, many are deteriorating and currently 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 rules. The Code Amendment will enable the **adaptive reuse of L.A.’s original small lots** to become a reality – via the Small Lot Ordinance without any variances.



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

There will be two Open House/Public Hearings in the second half of January 2016 – one on the Eastside and one on the Westside (see **attached Hearing Notice** for more information). There will be further opportunities to participate as the proposed Small Lot Ordinance amendment moves on to the City Planning Commission (tentatively planned in the Valley) and the City Council for consideration. In the meantime, please direct your written comments via email or questions to Jane Choi, City Planner, at [jane.choi@lacity.org](mailto:jane.choi@lacity.org) or (213) 978-1379.

The draft code amendment is available on the Department of City Planning’s website ([planning.lacity.org](http://planning.lacity.org)) under the “What’s New” section. The draft Small Lot Design Standards and the Advisory Agency Policy Update that will set the new Small Lot Map Standards will also be available on the website in early 2016.