



PLANNING COMMISSION AGENDA REPORT

MEETING DATE: AUGUST 17, 2026

ITEM NUMBER: NB-1

SUBJECT: STUDY SESSION TO INTRODUCE PROPOSED NEIGHBORHOODS WHERE WE ALL BELONG (NWWAB) ZONING CODE AMENDMENTS, CITYWIDE MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL AND MIXED-USE OBJECTIVE DESIGN STANDARDS, AND PROPOSED REPEALING OF URBAN PLANS (PCTY-26-0004), AMENDMENTS TO THE FOLLOWING ELEMENTS OF THE COSTA MESA GENERAL PLAN: CIRCULATION, COMMUNITY DESIGN, LAND USE, NOISE, AND OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION (PGPA-26-0002), AMENDMENTS TO THE NEWPORT BOULEVARD SPECIFIC PLAN (PSPA-26-0003), NORTH COSTA MESA SPECIFIC PLAN (PSPA-26-0004), AND ONE METRO WEST SPECIFIC PLAN (PSPA-26-0005)

FROM: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT/ ADVANCED PLANNING AND HOUSING DIVISION

PRESENTATION BY: MICHELLE HALLIGAN, SENIOR PLANNER AND ANNA MCGILL, ADVANCED PLANNING MANAGER

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RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends the Planning Commission receive the presentation, provide feedback, and file this report.

BACKGROUND:

Neighborhoods Where We All Belong (NWWAB) is the City of Costa Mesa's multifaceted initiative to comply with State-mandated housing regulations, implement the Housing Element and Measure K, and address the City Council's goal to "diversify, stabilize and increase housing to reflect community needs." The City's adopted Housing Element is a State-mandated strategic blueprint for addressing Costa Mesa's existing and projected housing needs through 2029. The Housing Element describes housing characteristics, establishes housing programs, and identifies sites to meet a housing target called the

Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA). Costa Mesa's current RHNA allocation is 11,760 units. The City must complete zoning and land use updates described in the Housing Element to address State law, achieve adequate development capacity at a variety of income levels, and obtain Housing Element certification by the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD). In addition to Housing Element certification, NWWAB additionally encourages housing development in line with the Council's strategic priorities (noted above) by expanding additional housing opportunities along commercial corridors and providing more transparency and certainty in the entitlement process. These efforts reflect the City's ongoing commitment to create new high-quality housing opportunities that meet the needs of current and future residents. To keep the community informed of progress, the City hosts a project webpage to provide updates and ongoing information regarding the NWWAB process: [costamesaneighborhoods.com](https://www.costamesaneighborhoods.com)

In November 2022, Costa Mesa voters approved Measure K, an ordinance to allow updates to zoning and land use on specific commercial and industrial sites without a citywide vote (Housing Element Program 3G). Several efforts to encourage and facilitate housing development comprise NWWAB, including Zoning Code amendments, amendments to specific plans where there are Housing Element and Measure K sites, General Plan amendments for consistency, as well as the establishment of objective design standards for multifamily and mixed-use development. Public engagement is also an important component of implementing the Housing Element and Measure K. A variety of community visioning activities were conducted in three general "rounds" as part of this effort.

July through October 2025, the City conducted the first round of community visioning for NWWAB. In Round One, the City provided background on the Housing Element, Measure K, and asked the community about priorities for new developments, what makes a good neighborhood, and opportunities and concerns about increasing development in the community. The outreach effort included an open house, community workshops, a walking tour, high density residential design discussion, focused discussions with local stakeholder groups, pop-up outreach at community events and organizations, coffee shops, and a pub, as well as in-person and online community surveys. A summary of Round One is available online: <https://www.costamesaneighborhoods.com/resources>.

On November 10, 2025, staff presented an update to the Planning Commission about public visioning and engagement activities for NWWAB and next steps.

- November 10, 2025, Agenda Report and Presentation: <https://costamesa.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=7725804&GUID=F6AACD62-DC13-4F57-AE23-CA4A99B0D519>

On December 8, 2025, staff presented an update to the Planning Commission regarding the potential approach to rezoning Housing Element sites. This included an overview of Senate Bill 131, which established new California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) statutory exemptions effective July 1, 2025, for implementing Housing Element programs. The exemption would allow the City to rezone Housing Element sites in advance of sites within the boundaries of Measure K that are not Housing Element sites.

- December 8, 2025, Agenda Report and Attachments:
<https://costamesa.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=7773717&GUID=27C0C59C-E645-40FE-9970-1CF616A43895>

On January 26, 2026, the Planning Commission held a Study Session to discuss the bifurcation of the rezoning effort: one work stream focusing on expediting the rezoning of Housing Element sites to comply with State law, and a second work stream focusing on creating residential development opportunities on Measure K sites on the City's original NWWAB timeline.

- January 26, 2026, Agenda Report and Attachments:
<https://costamesa.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=7826361&GUID=F156048D-17ED-4207-AD1F-00C34ADD4BC9>

On Feb 9, 2026, the Planning Commission recommended the City Council approve bifurcating the effort to expedite the rezoning of Housing Element sites for compliance and amend the Housing Element to add and remove specific sites due to property owner requests, as well as make amendments to the Zoning Code, Zoning Map, and North Costa Mesa Specific Plan to rezone the remaining Housing Element sites via the Mixed-Use Overlay District.

- February 9, 2026, Agenda Report and Attachments:
<https://costamesa.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=7869925&GUID=46ADE2E0-93B1-4307-BB85-FCF45BA3A0C2>

In March 2026, the City completed the second round of community visioning activities for NWWAB. In Round Two, engagement focused on conceptual development standards such as density, floor area ratio, envisioning density and building heights, and considering potential mixed-use and residential land use scenarios. Draft revisions to the Mixed-Use Overlay District and potential Objective Design Standards, were discussed. Outreach events included two in-person community workshops, one virtual workshop, and two focused discussions with local stakeholders. A summary of Round Two is available online:
<https://www.costamesaneighborhoods.com/resources>

On March 17, 2026, the City Council approved an amendment to the Housing Element to add and remove specific sites, effective immediately, resulting in a temporarily inadequate RHNA capacity. Per State law, the City has 180-days to identify additional sites to accommodate the RHNA. At the meeting, the City Council also gave first reading to amendments to the Zoning Code, Zoning Map, and North Costa Mesa Specific Plan to rezone Housing Element sites via the updated Mixed-Use Overlay District and implement Housing Element programs.

- March 17, 2026, Agenda Report and Attachments: <https://costamesa.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=7949569&GUID=A43BC48B-BB4A-4B37-9245-5F818392F704>

On April 7, 2026, the City Council adopted amendments to the Zoning Code, Zoning Map, and North Costa Mesa Specific Plan to rezone Housing Element sites. This adoption implemented all or components of Housing Element programs: 2B, 2E, 2F, 2H, 2J, 2K, 2L, 2M, 2N, 2O, 2P, 3C, 3D, 3F, 3N, 3Q, 3R, 3S, 4E, and 4G.

- April 7, 2026, Agenda Report and Attachments: <https://costamesa.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=7969847&GUID=67D7ED02-CEB9-4795-9C70-1915758F32C9>

In April 2026, the American Planning Association, California Chapter, Orange Section, recognized the City of Costa Mesa for the NWWAB Round One Community Visioning effort with an Opportunity and Empowerment Award of Merit.

On May 18, 2026, draft revisions to the Zoning Code, including the Mixed-Use Overlay, as well as draft objective design standards, General Plan amendments, and draft specific plan amendments were published for public review and comment. In June 2026, the City conducted an in-person open house and two focused discussion groups to collect input on those draft documents as well as newly proposed Housing Element sites. On June 8, 2026, the draft Housing Element was published for public review and comment. Summaries of this round of community visioning is available online: <https://www.costamesaneighborhoods.com/resources>

The public review and comment period for the Draft NWWAB Zoning Updates and Housing Element Implementation Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) took place between June 16 and August 3, 2026.

Staff incorporated community feedback into the draft documents being presented to the Planning Commission tonight for additional review and input.

Regional Early Action Planning (REAP) Grant Funding

In late 2025, the City applied for grant funding from the Southern California Association of Governments Regional Early Action Planning Grant Program (REAP 2.0). As specified by the terms of the grant, the funding provided a consultant team to assist the City in implementing specific Housing Element programs. The grant effort kicked-off in March 2026 and dictated a completion date of June 30, 2026 for all REAP grants, which was later extended to September 30, 2026. The grant-funded proposed Zoning Code amendments pertaining to accessory dwelling units (Program 3E) and density bonus law (Program 2I), for compliance with state law, are provided herein. Grant-funded draft Environmental Justice policies in the General Plan (Program 2G) was presented to the Planning Commission on July 27, 2026 and August 10, 2026. The grant also funded outreach to faith-based and educational non-profit organizations regarding the potential for housing on their sites via Senate Bill 4 (Program 3K) and the creation of a SB 4 Fact Sheet. Finally, the grant scope included production of a memorandum, providing an overview of the City's existing housing policies, programs and regulatory initiatives that support housing production and affordability, as well as potential opportunities for additional housing incentives and implementation actions (Program 2B). This information will continue to be utilized for implementation of the City's Housing Element and potential future Zoning Code updates, including updates to the City's Affordable Housing Ordinance (Program 2A).

DESCRIPTION

The City of Costa Mesa is actively implementing programs identified in the adopted Sixth Cycle (2021-2029) Housing Element and is working toward certification by the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD). Establishing a local regulatory framework that encourages and facilitates higher density and mixed-use housing development is a key component of this effort.

The proposed Zoning Code amendments would provide more specificity, objectivity, and allow higher densities in the Mixed-Use Overlay District (MUOD) to apply to Measure K and Housing Element Sites (with the exception the Fairview Developmental Center, which will be governed by a Specific Plan). It would also update definitions related to uses and application processing, improve the organization of the Land Use Matrix, refine application review procedures, remove references to urban plans, update the Accessory Dwelling Units Ordinance and the Density Bonus Ordinance for compliance with State law, identify additional incentives for affordable housing development, update Residential Common Interest Development standards to include opportunities from the Mesa West Residential Ownership Urban Plan, other zoning amendments, and add references to the new objective design standards for multifamily residential and mixed-use developments. The Zoning Map would be revised to reflect the updated locations where the MUOD is applicable.

The proposed amendments to the Newport Boulevard Specific Plan, North Costa Mesa Specific Plan, and One Metro West Specific Plan are generally limited in scope to recognize new development opportunities and regulations via the application of the MUOD on Measure K and Housing Element sites.

The proposed amendments to the Land Use, Circulation, Community Design, Noise, and Open Space and Recreation elements of the General Plan for the NWWAB effort are limited in scope to include the application of the MUOD, remove references to urban plans, and other text edits for clarity. The proposed General Plan amendments are not comprehensive.

While no direct development is proposed as part of NWWAB, the rezoning and other amendments would facilitate future development on over 1,000 parcels via the MUOD. Based on assumptions and projections, the rezoning would create development capacity for approximately 21,522 new dwelling units and 10,630,361 square feet of non-residential uses over the next 30 years.

Finally, the proposed Objective Design Standards (ODS), would apply to all new construction of multifamily residential and mixed-use buildings (consistent with California Government Code Section 65913.4 and 66300(a)(7) of three or more stories in height located in any zone. ODS is intended to provide more certainty to project applicants and the wider community by establishing requirements that are readily available, easy to understand, and objectively verifiable, so a project can be designed to meet those requirements before submittal to the City.

Should the City Council adopt the proposed amendments, the mixed-use, live/work, and residential common interest development opportunities once enabled by urban plans would be built into the Zoning Code and therefore, the urban plans could be "sunset" or repealed.

ANALYSIS:

Proposed Zoning Code Amendments

Chapter I, Article 2, Definitions

Changes and additions to definitions in the Zoning Code are proposed for comprehensiveness, clarity, and to reflect information provided in other revised sections of the Zoning Code. The proposed amendment would help implement Program 2B. An excerpt of the proposed amendment, provided in Section A of Link 1 in ~~striketrough~~ and underline format, would refine the definitions of:

- Development review
- Establishment where food or beverages are served

- Open space
- Open space, common
- Open space, private
- Planning application
- Townhouse

The proposed amendment would define:

- Live/work unit
- Mixed-use, horizontal
- Mixed-use, vertical
- Open space, publicly accessible
- Rowhouse
- Zoning district
- Zoning district, overlay

Chapter II, Zoning Districts Established

The proposed amendment would expand the base zoning districts to which the MUOD can be applied. It would also remove the requirement for mixed-use development to be located within an urban plan and permitted via a master plan. To develop via the MUOD, an urban plan and master plan are no longer necessary as the updated provisions of the MUOD establish applicability, objective development standards, permitted uses, and other regulations for MUOD projects. Additionally, the proposed Citywide Multifamily Residential and Mixed-Use Objective Design Standards (ODS) provide design standards for proposed projects in the MUOD. See Section B of Link 1 for the excerpt of the strikethrough and underline sections of Chapter II. The proposed amendment helps implement Programs 2B and 3S.

Chapter III, Planning Applications

Following the April 2026 amendments to Chapter III, refinements are proposed to specify that residential development permitted by right, consistent with the Zoning Code and Government Code, qualify for streamlined development review, clarify that 1-2 residential development will continue to be reviewed as a building permit under streamlined development review, and clarified that multifamily residential and mixed-use projects of three stories or more must comply with the proposed objective design standards. This is in compliance with State law. Additionally, the final review authority for density bonus requests was changed from the Planning Commission to the Planning Division in compliance with State Density Bonus Law and consistent with the entitlement process for housing projects subject Development Review. Findings for density bonus requests were removed (an update to the City's Density Bonus Ordinance is also proposed as part of NWWAB). The excerpt of proposed revisions to Chapter III are provided in strikethrough and underline format in Section C of Link 1. The proposed amendment helps implement Programs 2B, 2L, and 3S.

Chapter IV, Citywide Land Use Matrix

The Land Use Matrix is proposed to be reorganized into alphabetical order for ease of use and to enable the addition of new uses in the future without renumbering. Other amendments would clean-up the code by removing unnecessary “reserved” and “reserved for future use” categories. The entire reorganized matrix is provided in Section D of Link 1.

Chapter V, Article 1, Residential Districts (Accessory Dwelling Units)

The revisions to the Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) Ordinance reflect minor and targeted text revisions to comply with state law and address comments received by HCD in May 2026. The City is also working on additional user-friendly handouts that further clarify ADU review timelines. Finally, the City has strengthened its ADU and JADU monitoring by requiring additional affordability and rental assumptions by applicants submitted with the building permit process to better ascertain and track ADU and JADU affordability levels through the Housing Element planning period. These efforts serve to implement Housing Element programs 3E and 3M. The amendment is provided in strikethrough and underline format in Section E of Link 1.

Chapter V, Article 1, Residential Districts (Additional property development standards for the multiple family residential districts)

Section 13-38 of the Municipal Code is proposed to be renamed “Additional property development standards for residential districts” and would establish objective design standards (a maximum number of townhomes in a row of a building and window offsets) for residential projects that are not subject to the proposed Citywide Multifamily Residential and Mixed-Use Objective Design Standards. The proposed revision is provided in strikethrough and underline format in Section F of Link 1.

Chapter V, Article 2, Residential Common Interest Developments

Currently, the Mesa West Residential Ownership Urban Plan facilitates the conversion of rental housing to ownership housing, as well as the construction of new condominium projects within a subset of Westside Costa Mesa. Staff proposes to repeal or “sunset” this urban plan without removing the development potential it offers. The proposed amendment to the Residential Common Interest Developments section of the Zoning Code would build in the development potential from the urban plan for sites within the “Mesa West Residential Ownership Incentive Program.” A map of the sites eligible for the “Mesa West Residential Ownership Incentive Program” would be added to the Zoning Code. The amendment would remove subjective design criteria for compliance with the California Housing Accountability Act. Additionally, the proposed update would apply the Citywide Multifamily Residential and Mixed-Use Objective Design Standards to Residential Common Interest projects.

The draft excerpt is provided in strikethrough and underline format in Section G of Link 1. The proposed amendment implements Program 3D.

Chapter V, Article 5.5, Non-Residential Common Interest Developments

Conversions of occupied or previously occupied non-residential development to common interest developments are currently permitted in the urban plan areas if they meet applicable regulations. The proposed revision would change urban plan to mixed-use overlay district. Excerpts of the draft amendment are provided in Section H of Link 1 in strikethrough and underline format.

Chapter V, Article 6, Planned Development

The proposed amendment would remove a reference to existing residential design guidelines due to the guidelines being subjective and therefore not compliant with the California Housing Accountability Act. The proposed revision is provided in Section I of Link 1 in strikethrough and underline format.

Chapter V, Article 9, General Site Improvement Standards

The proposed revision would apply the Citywide Multifamily and Mixed-Use Objective Design Standards to multifamily residential and mixed-use development projects, which includes some standards for general site improvements. See Section J of Link 1 for the draft excerpt of amended text in strikethrough and underline format.

Chapter V, Article 11, Mixed-Use Overlay District

Staff proposes a comprehensive update of the MUOD to reflect the expanded application of the MUOD to Measure K sites and codify residential and mixed-use development opportunities provided in the urban plans into the MUOD in a clear, objective manner. The proposed densities are described in Table 1, below. Density locations are described in Figure 1 on the following page.

Once the urban plans are repealed or "sunset," the properties within their former boundaries will be sub-areas of the MUOD, except for the Mesa West Residential Ownership Urban Plan, which would be addressed in the Residential Common Interest Developments section of the Zoning Code as stated above. See Section K of Link 1 for the proposed revised version of the MUOD. The proposed amendment helps implement Program 3A. Research conducted as part of this update also implemented Programs 3H and 3I.

Key features of the proposed amendment include:

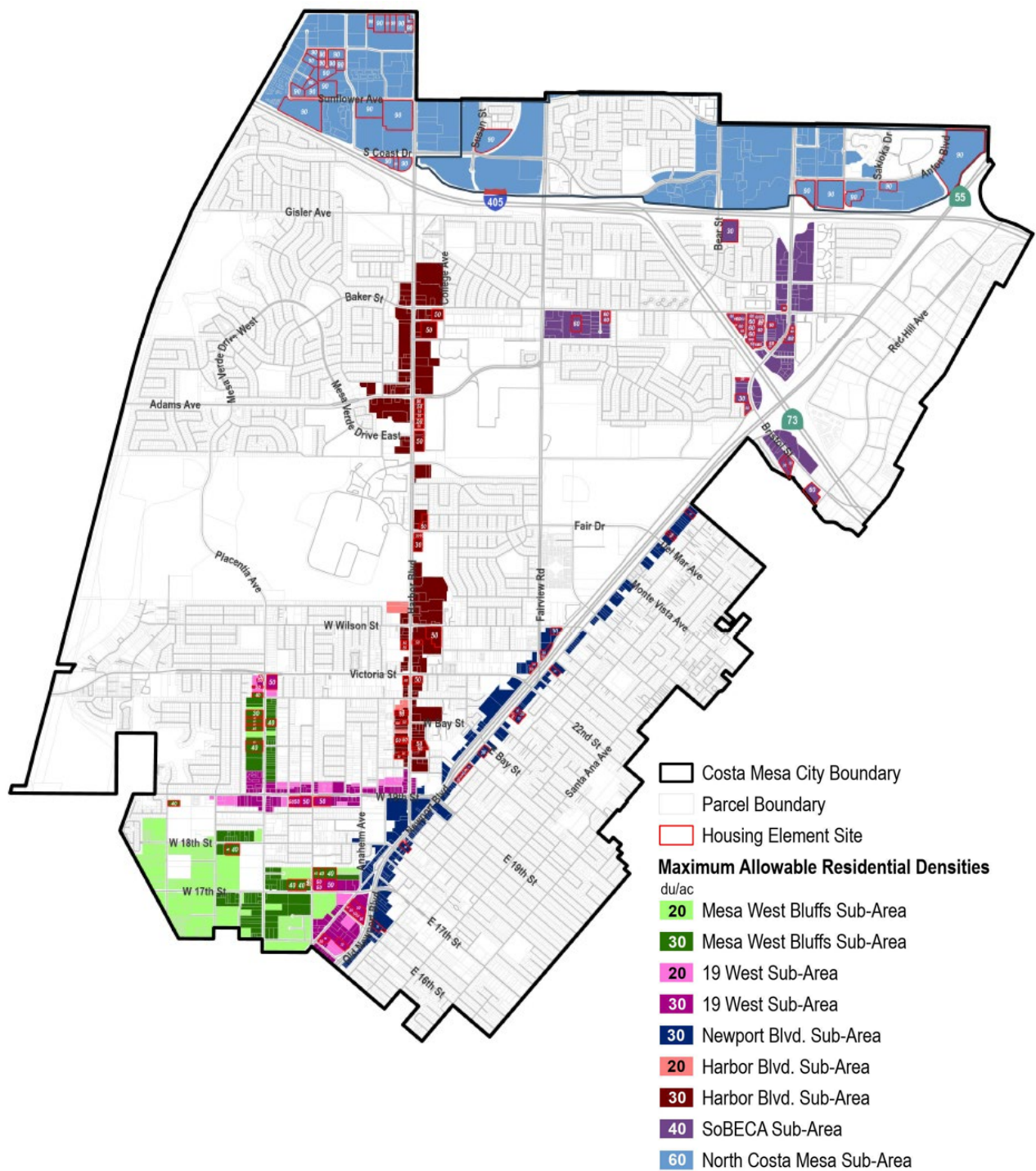
- Removing the requirement for a master plan (subjective)
- Phase 1 Environmental Assessment

- Traffic study
- Noise study
- Establishing detailed development standards (vs “excellence in design”)
- Establishing a detailed permitted uses table
- Establishing a variety of potential densities and heights depending on the property location
- Consolidating the Harbor-Mixed-Use Overlay area into the MUOD
- Increasing the maximum density allowed in some sites within the Mesa West Bluffs and 19 West Sub-Areas from 20 to 30 units per acre
- Increasing the maximum density in the SoBECA Sub-Area from 20 to 40 units per acre
- Applying the MUOD with a maximum density of 30 units per acre to non-Housing Element Measure K sites within the Harbor Boulevard and Newport Boulevard Sub-Areas
- Applying the MUOD with a maximum density of 60 units per acre to non-Housing Element Measure K sites in the North Costa Mesa Sub-Area
- All MUOD projects shall be subject to the applicable Multifamily Residential and Mixed-Use Objective Design Standards

Table 1. Draft MUOD Maximum Densities and Building Heights

MUOD Sub-Area	Maximum Residential Density	Maximum Residential-Only or Vertical Mixed-Use Height	Maximum Non-Residential Height
Mesa West Bluffs	20-30 du/ac	60 ft.	40 ft.
19 West	20-30 du/ac	60 ft.	
Newport Boulevard	30 du/ac	60 ft.	
Harbor Boulevard	30 du/ac	60 ft.	
SoBECA	40	60 ft.	
North Costa Mesa	60 du/ac	72 ft.	
North Costa Mesa Housing Element Sites	90 du/ac	108 ft.	

Figure 1. Draft MUOD Sub-Areas with Housing Element Sites



Chapter VI, Article 1 Off-Street Parking Standards (Residential Districts)

The proposed revision of Table 13-85(A) is a formatting change and not a change of parking standards. The other proposed revision would add a reference to the applicability of the Citywide Multifamily Residential and Mixed-Use Objective Design Standards and remove a reference to urban plan parking requirements. The proposed Objective Design Standards would not regulate the number of parking spaces required; it would regulate the design of parking lots and parking structures where applicable. See Section L of Link 1 for the excerpt in strikethrough and underline format. The proposed amendment helps implement Programs 2E and 2M.

Chapter VI, Article 2, Off-Street Parking Standards (Non-Residential Districts)

The proposed revision of Table 13-89 would confirm that parking non-residential components of mixed-use developments is per the Mixed-Use Overlay District and not an urban plan. Ultimately, the non-residential component of a mixed-use project would follow the nonresidential parking standards in Table 13-89 per the Mixed-Use Overlay District. See Section M of Link 1 for the excerpt in strikethrough and underline format.

Chapter VII Landscaping Standards

The landscaping standards would be revised to specify that multifamily and mixed-use projects would be subject to additional, applicable standards in the Citywide Multifamily Residential and Mixed-Use Objective Design Standards. The proposed revision is provided in Section N of Link 1 in strikethrough and underline format.

Chapter VIII, Article 3, Sign Regulations

The sign regulations are proposed to be updated to remove a reference to urban plans for signage in mixed-use developments, and clarify allowances for residential open house, temporary, and balloon signs in the MUOD. See Section O of Link 1 for the excerpt in strikethrough and underline format.

Chapter IX, Article 4, Density Bonuses and Other Incentives

The Zoning Code section on Density Bonuses is proposed to be updated for consistency with State Density Bonus Law (SDBL), identify local criteria such as submittal of additional information related to the affordable units through an SDBL application or affordable housing plan, where appropriate, and reflect that the final review authority will be the Planning Division instead of the Planning Commission, consistent with housing projects subject to Development Review. See Section P of Link 1 for the proposed new density bonus ordinance. This proposed amendment implements Program 2I.

Chapter IX, Article 21, Location of Cannabis Distributing, Manufacturing, Research and Development, Testing Laboratories, Retail Storefront and Retail Nonstorefront Uses

The proposed revision removes references to urban plans. The amendment is provided in strikethrough format in Section Q of Link 1.

Chapter XIII, Noise Control

The noise control regulations would be updated to remove references to master plans for mixed-use development and to add references to specific table numbers within the chapter. See Section R of Link 1 for the excerpt in strikethrough and underline format.

Draft Zoning Map Update

The Zoning Map would be updated to reflect the removal of urban plans and the expansion of the MUOD. The Zoning Map update is a component of implementing Program 3A. See Link 2.

Specific Plan Amendments

In April 2026, the North Costa Mesa Specific Plan was amended to add a new section specific to the application of the MUOD to Housing Element sites and other edits for consistency. Now that the MUOD is proposed to be expanded and applicable to non-Housing Element Measure K sites, the North Costa Mesa Specific Plan would be amended to update the discussion to include non-Housing Element Measure K sites. The draft amendment would implement Program 3C. See Link 4 for the excerpt of the draft revision.

Limited text amendments are also proposed to the Newport Boulevard Specific Plan and One Metro West Specific Plan to acknowledge that the MUOD would apply to Measure K and Housing Element sites within the boundaries of those specific plans. The proposed amendment excerpt from the Newport Boulevard Specific Plan is provided via Link 3. This implements Program 3J. The proposed amendment excerpt from the One Metro West Specific Plan is provided via Link 5.

On Housing Element sites, the MUOD would supersede the base zoning and specific plan unless the specific plan allows for more flexibility, density, height, etc. for residential development.

General Plan Amendments

The proposed General Plan amendments are technical in nature and not comprehensive updates. The proposed technical, or targeted amendment to the Land Use Element would refine the discussion of mixed-use projects, live/work projects, the MUOD, specific plans, and commercial and industrial districts where the MUOD would apply. Two new Land Use Policies are proposed:

- Policy LU-1.6: Balance housing, retail and employment opportunities by facilitating the development of residential and mixed-uses within the Mixed-Use Overlay.
- Policy LU 2.12: Concentrate new housing in the Mixed-Use Overlay where infrastructure and services can support higher densities.

Revisions to the Land Use Element would also remove references to the urban plans and to development standards and permit processing procedures that would no longer be applicable.

The proposed amendments to the Noise, Circulation, Community Design, and Open Space and Recreation Elements, are also very limited. The revisions would remove references to urban plans and master plans for mixed-use development (the City will be utilizing the MUOD and objective design standards), remove references to broad districts to reduce confusion with actual land use districts, and other simple text edits for clarity and consistency with the Housing Element and Measure K implementation. The General Plan pages that are proposed to be revised, except the Housing Element, are provided in strikethrough and underline format via [Link 6](#).

Citywide Residential Multifamily and Mixed-Use Objective Design Standards

Enabled by state legislation, including Senate Bill (SB) 330 (2017) and 330 (2019), objective standards are those “that involve no personal or subjective judgment by a public official and is uniformly verifiable by reference to an external and uniform benchmark or criterion available and knowable by both the development applicant or proponent and the public official before submittal” (California Government Code Section 65913.4 and 66300(a)(7)). The proposed Citywide Residential Multifamily and Mixed-Use Objective Design Standards (ODS) would apply to new multifamily residential and mixed-use construction of three or more stories in height.

Objective standards provide more certainty to project applicants by making the building and site design requirements clear so a project can be designed to meet those requirements before submittal to the City. They also ensure the community that design standards will be applied consistently. This objective approach is intended to reduce applicant and staff time spent on multiple rounds of application reviews due

to subjective and confusing standards, while still ensuring high-quality development that respects the context of a proposed project.

Building design standards include building mass and form, façade design, and ground floor design. For example, the ODS proposes upper story setbacks when abutting properties in the R1, R2, and R3 zones to help minimize the perceived height and mass of the new buildings and allow for space, light, air, and privacy. Maximum façade lengths without a break (a projection or recess of at least 5 feet by 10 feet) are proposed to discourage blank walls and encourage visual interest in long building facades.

The draft ODS proposes site design standards including access and circulation, private open space, common open space, publicly accessible open space, landscaping, walls/fences, building equipment, utilities, trash and recycling areas, outdoor lighting, and parking/vehicle loading. An example of an objective site design standard is that private open spaces shall extend a minimum of 5 feet in any direction and be located locations at-grade, on upper levels, or on the roof, so long as the private open space is contiguous to and directly accessible from the dwelling unit. Establishing objective design standards would help implement Programs 2B and 3S. The proposed ODS is provided via Link 7.

Sunseting the Urban Plans

In 2006, the City of Costa Mesa adopted four Urban Plans by resolution—the SoBECA Urban Plan, 19 West Urban Plan, Mesa West Bluffs Urban Plan, and Mesa West Residential Ownership Urban Plan. The first three urban plans listed were intended to encourage mixed-use and live/work development at approximately 20 units per acre and up to 60-feet-tall via a master plan. The Mesa West Residential Ownership Urban Plan was intended to facilitate the construction of condominiums through density incentives via a master plan.

Over time, the urban plans were not as successful as originally anticipated to facilitate the development and off-site improvements originally envisioned. In line with direction received by the City Council, staff is proposing to revoke or “sunset” the urban plans. To avoid taking away the residential development potential that was created by the urban plans, the proposed amendments to the Mixed-Use Overlay and Residential Common Interest Developments sections of the Zoning Code, supported by the new Citywide Multifamily Residential and Mixed-Use Objective Design Standards, would ensure adequate residential and mixed-use development capacity remains. In some areas, the MUOD and Housing Element would increase residential and mixed-use capacity beyond the possibilities provided in the urban plans. This would help implement Program 3D.

The proposed Zoning Code amendments and ODS would encourage and facilitate multifamily residential, mixed-use, and live/work development in a more

straightforward, objective manner that provides more certainty to the applicant as well as the application reviewer. Sunsetting the urban plans in favor of objective standards and a simplified review process is important component of the Housing Element implementation strategy given that all Housing Element Sites would be rezoned via the MUOD except for the Fairview Developmental Center Specific Plan site. Draft resolutions to recommend the revocation of the urban plans will be provided to the Planning Commission when making a recommendation to the City Council, tentatively scheduled for September 14, 2026.

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION

This presentation to the Planning Commission is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Section 15060(c)(3) of the CEQA Guidelines because the action is not a “project” pursuant to Section 15378(b)(5). The action involves an organizational or administrative activity of government that will not result in the direct or indirect physical change in the environment because this is a study session discussion regarding several draft amendments and documents proposed as part of the Neighborhoods Where We All Belong effort.

An Initial Study and Notice of Preparation, Notice of Availability, and Draft Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) were prepared for the NWWAB Zoning Updates and Housing Element Implementation. The Draft PEIR is a high-level environmental review of this large-scale action to apply the MUOD to Measure K sites including Housing Element sites. Given the broad scale of the rezoning effort and inability to pinpoint which sites will develop, the mix of uses that may occur, and timing of future development, the Draft PEIR utilizes assumptions to establish a NWWAB buildout of 21,522 dwelling units and 10,630,361 square feet of non-residential uses through the year 2056 (over 30 years). The Draft PEIR identified the following project impacts as significant and unavoidable: aesthetics, air quality, agriculture and forestry, biological resources, cultural resources, geology and soils, greenhouse gas emissions, hazards and hazardous materials, noise, population and housing, recreation, and tribal cultural resources. Mitigation measures are proposed for all the categories identified as significant and unavoidable, except agriculture and forestry and recreation. The Draft PEIR public comment period took place from June 16, 2026 through August 3, 2026. The preparation of responses to comments and the Final PEIR is in progress.

All applicable environmental documents referenced above (IS/NOP, NOA and Draft PEIR) are available on the following City webpage:

<https://www.costamesaca.gov/government/departments-and-divisions/economic-and-development-services/planning/environmental-notice-and-reports>

PUBLIC NOTICE

There is no public notice requirement for the Planning Commission study session on Neighborhoods Where We All Belong drafts. However, the City provided the following courtesy notices:

- Information on the study session was posted on the Neighborhoods Where We All Belong website and emailed to the interest list on August 7, 2026
- A public notice was posted in the Daily Pilot on August 7, 2026
- A public notice was posted on the City's website and at City Hall on August 7, 2026
- A reminder about the study session was emailed to the NWWAB interest list on August 13, 2026
- Information about the study session was shared in the City Hall Snapshot on August 14, 2026 (distributed to over 10,000 email addresses)
- A reminder about the study session was posted to the City's social media accounts in advance of the meeting

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

Amending the Zoning Code and Zoning Map, as well as related specific plans and General Plan elements, sunsetting the urban plans, and establishing objective design standards for multifamily and mixed-use development are important next steps for implementing Housing Element programs, Measure K, and facilitating residential and mixed-use development in the community. The amendments proposed in this study session and those adopted on April 7, 2026, would implement, or partially implement Housing Element Programs provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Housing Element Programs Implemented as part of NWWAB

Program Number	Program Name	Description
2B	Affordable Housing Development	Incentives for affordable housing projects that meet objective evaluation criteria (i.e., deferment of fees, priority processing, modified development standards, etc.)
2E	Encourage Development of Housing Options for Large-Family Households	Review/revise development standards to encourage development of large units (4 bedrooms +)
2G	Safety Element Update and Adoption of Environmental Justice Policies	Review and update Safety Element. Review General Plan and to identify existing environmental justice policies and potential incorporate new policies.
2H	Farmworker Housing	Permit farmworker housing by right in single-family zones, in compliance with state law

Table 2. Housing Element Programs Implemented as part of NWWAB

Program Number	Program Name	Description
2I	Promote Density Bonus Incentives	Evaluate and update Density Bonus Ordinance to comply with State Density Bonus Law and potentially incorporate additional incentives
2J	Transitional and Supportive Housing	Amend zoning code to include transitional and permanent supportive housing in City's land use matrix, in compliance with state law
2M	Parking Standards for Residential Development	Review/revise zoning code for residential off-street parking for multi-family housing projects
2N	Reasonable Accommodation	Review/revise reasonable accommodation procedures and approval findings
2O	Definition of Single Housekeeping Unit	Review/revise City's definition of Single Housekeeping unit, in compliance with state law.
2P	Group Homes	Review/revise zoning code and procedures as it relates to Group Homes to promote objectivity
3C	Update the North Costa Mesa Specific Plan	Amend North Costa Mesa Specific Plan to permit residential development at an allowable density of 90 du/acre.
3E	Promote the Development of Accessory Dwelling Units	Review/revise City's ADU ordinance as needed to comply with State law.
3D	Update the City's Urbans and Overlays	Amend Urban Plans to provide identified allowable densities of 40-60 du/acre, depending on plan area and remove Mesa West Residential Ownership Overlay.
3F	Motel Conversions, Efficiency Units, and Co-Living Housing Types	Establish definitions of co-living and efficiency housing options in zoning code.
3H	Analyze the Potential of Establishing an Overlay to Permit Residential Use in the Airport Industrial Area	Evaluate the potential to add an overlay to an area in the airport industrial area which would permit residential development.
3I	Analyze the Potential of Modifying the Newport Boulevard Specific Plan to Promote Residential Uses Along Newport Boulevard	Evaluate the potential to add an overlay to an area in the 17 th Street corridor area which would permit residential development.

Table 2. Housing Element Programs Implemented as part of NWWAB

Program Number	Program Name	Description
3J	Analyze the Potential of Modifying the Newport Boulevard Specific Plan to Promote Residential Uses Along Newport Boulevard	Evaluate potential modifications to Newport Boulevard Specific Plan that would promote residential development.
3K	Explore Potential Future Housing Opportunities on Church Sites	Explore potential housing opportunity on faith-based properties.
2N	Candidate Sites Used in Previous Housing Elements	Place a housing overlay over nonvacant sites included in a prior Housing Element and permit housing by-right if site was included in two or more consecutive planning periods.
3R	Development of Large Sites	Evaluate development status of five large, identified candidate sites and explore ways to promote development of these sites and/or subdivision into multiple parcels for future development.
3S	Review and Revise Findings (Conditional Use Permits, Design Review, Master Plan)	Review/revise approval findings for Conditional Use Permits, Design Review and Master Plans and revise findings to promote objectivity and approval certainty.
4E	Low Barrier Navigation Centers	Amend zoning code to permit Low Barrier Navigation Center development by right in appropriate zoning district, in compliance with state law.
4G	Assembly Bill 139 (Parking for Emergency Shelters)	Amend zoning code to comply with parking requirements of AB 139 for emergency shelters.

Another important step is to address Public Utilities Code (PUC) Section 21676(b) and Section 4.3 of the 2008 John Wayne Airport Environs Land Use Plan (AELUP). On July 16, 2026, the Orange County Airport Land Use Commission (ALUC) determined that the NWWAB project, including applying the MUOD to properties in proximity to John Wayne Airport, was inconsistent with the AELUP. Since that time, staff adjusted the scope to not apply the MUOD to properties within airport safety zones 1-3 and/or within the 65-and-over decibel noise contour around John Wayne Airport. However, ALUC's determination included other issues that the NWWAB effort cannot address such as existing heights allowed in the North Costa Mesa Specific Plan. When the ALUC determines that an action is inconsistent with the AELUP, the City may overrule the Commission by a two-thirds vote of the City Council. The Costa Mesa City Council has

the final authority. A City Council public hearing to initiate the overrule process is tentatively scheduled for September 1, 2026.

Following this study session, staff will consider Planning Commission feedback, evaluate public comments received, and prepare any necessary revisions prior to formal adoption hearings.

The Planning Commission is tentatively scheduled to make a recommendation to the City Council on the proposed NWWAB drafts and the PEIR at a regularly scheduled Planning Commission meeting on September 14, 2026.

The tentative schedule is as follows:

Milestone

City Council Public Hearing (initiate ALUC override)
Planning Commission Public Hearing (NWWAB)
City Council Public Hearing (NWWAB)

Tentative Date

September 1, 2026
September 14, 2026
October 6, 2026

Staff will continue to update the Planning Commission and public on project progress through the project website, www.costamesaneighborhoods.com, emails to the interest list, and public hearings.

LINKS:

1. Draft Zoning Code Amendments

<https://www.costamesaca.gov/home/showdocument?id=64277&t=639221478392759956>

A: Chapter I, Article 2, Definitions

B: Chapter II, Zoning Districts Established

C: Chapter III, Planning Applications

D: Chapter IV, Citywide Land Use Matrix

E: Chapter V, Article 1, Residential Districts (Accessory Dwelling Units)

F: Chapter V, Article 1, Residential Districts (Additional property development standards for the multiple family residential districts)

G: Chapter V, Article 2, Residential Common Interest Developments

H: Chapter V, Article 5.5, Non-Residential Common Interest Developments

I: Chapter V, Article 6, Planned Development

J: Chapter V, Article 9, General Site Improvement Standards

K: Chapter V, Article 11, Mixed-Use Overlay District

L: Chapter VI, Article 1, Off-Street Parking Standards (Residential Districts)

M: Chapter VI, Article 2, Off-Street Parking Standards (Non-Residential Districts)

N: Chapter VII, Landscaping Standards

O: Chapter VIII, Article 3, Sign Regulations

P: Chapter IX, Article 4, Density Bonuses and Other Incentives

Q: Chapter IX, Article 21, Location of Cannabis Distributing, Manufacturing, Research and Development, Testing Laboratories, Retail Storefront and Retail Nonstorefront Uses

R: Chapter XIII, Noise Control

2: Draft Zoning Map

<https://www.costamesaca.gov/home/showdocument?id=64255&t=639221301186068924>

3: Draft Newport Boulevard Specific Plan Amendment

<https://www.costamesaca.gov/home/showdocument?id=64257&t=639221301188773743>

4: Draft North Costa Mesa Specific Plan Amendment

<https://www.costamesaca.gov/home/showdocument?id=64259&t=639221301191913621>

5: Draft One Metro West Specific Plan Amendment

<https://www.costamesaca.gov/home/showdocument?id=64261&t=639221301194443580>

6: Draft amendments to the Land Use, Circulation, Community Design, Noise, and Open Space and Recreation Elements

<https://www.costamesaca.gov/home/showdocument?id=64275&t=639221374935687480>

7: Draft Citywide Residential Multifamily and Mixed-Use Objective Design Standards

<https://www.costamesaca.gov/home/showdocument?id=64263&t=639221322172473573>