

City of San Marcos | General Plan Update

Case Study – Affordable Housing vs. Open Space Requirements



The City of Deville recently updated their General Plan to include policies to promote the development of housing affordable to a variety of income levels and background, including for lower income households, seniors, and people with disabilities. Their General Plan also promotes developing more public and private open space throughout the community, with specific policy direction for new development to provide open space on-site, and the City’s Zoning Ordinance sets specific open space requirements (see following page for hypothetical example). The

City is growing and housing costs are rising; more affordable housing is needed.

A well-respected local developer proposes an affordable housing project to meet the City’s housing needs. However, the proposed project site **cannot** accommodate the number of housing units to make the development financially feasible while also meeting the open space requirements.

Notes and Food for Thought:

What is important for you to know about this project?

What questions do you have?

What other factors might influence your opinion of the project?

What General Plan Elements would you look at to get policy direction on how to consider the merits of this project?

City of Deville Sample Zoning Ordinance Open Space Requirements

Sec. .300. "R-4" High density multiple-family residential zone.

(Ord. No. 4118, § 5.)

L. Open Space.

Usable open space shall be provided in two forms, private and common open space. Private open space shall be directly related to individual units. Common open space shall be dispersed throughout the development and shall be available to all residents of the development.

1. Private Open Space. "Private open space" means and is defined as usable space assigned for the exclusive use of the occupant of a specific dwelling unit.
 - a. Ground Floor Units.
 - (1) Area. One hundred square feet per unit,
 - (2) Dimensions. The minimum dimension shall be eight feet,
 - (3) Enclosure. This space shall be enclosed in a manner to define the privacy of the space;
 - b. Above Ground Floor Units.
 - (1) Area. Seventy square feet per unit in the form of terraces, balconies or rooftop patios,
 - (2) Dimensions. The minimum dimension shall be six feet.
2. Common Open Space. "Common open space" means and is defined as usable open space on the site which is available to all the occupants of the development to be used by all residents. This open space shall be generally distributed throughout the development and must be reasonably accessible to all the dwelling units.
 - a. Area. The area required shall be a minimum of three hundred square feet per unit.
 - b. Dimensions. A minimum dimension of fifteen feet shall be required of any area that is to be counted as common open space.
 - c. Location. Common open space shall not be located in required front yards, side yards, off-street parking areas or driveways.
 - d. Grade. A grade in excess of ten percent, except for landscape features such as earthen mounds or berms that are used to improve the quality and/or function of the space.
 - e. Landscaping. A minimum of fifty percent of the common open space shall be appropriately landscaped with plant materials. Three-fourths of this amount shall be in lawn or turf. The remainder of this space shall be planted in ground cover, trees, shrubs and provided with a permanent irrigation system. Such landscaping shall include a minimum of one tree (twenty-four-inch box minimum standard of the trade for such variety used) for every dwelling unit.
 - f. Recreation Facilities. A maximum of forty percent of the common open space may be paved surface including a swimming pool, walks, patios, terraces, courts and fountains. Recreation buildings or other communal buildings may cover not more than ten percent of this area. Specialized recreation equipment and facilities may be required by the planning commission based on the anticipated age and interest of the occupant; i.e., play equipment for children, shuffleboard for senior citizens.