



City of Visalia

Stakeholder Interviews Summary

In February 2023, the City of Visalia initiated a technical update to the City's Zoning Ordinance to support residential development. This update focuses on:

- Developing additional standards for residential development.
- Amending current regulations for accessory dwelling units and junior accessory dwelling units.
- Incorporating targeted zoning amendments to ensure consistency between State land use legislation and the Zoning Ordinance.

The success of this planning effort depends in large part on input from the community to fully identify the community's needs and expectations for residential design and development. One of these community engagement efforts includes stakeholder interviews. The input provided during these interviews will help guide the project team in updating the Zoning Ordinance.

From March 31, 2023, through April 28, 2023, the project team conducted one-on-one interviews with community stakeholders to get their feedback on issues and opportunities related to the City's residential development regulations and review processes. Stakeholders included developers, builders, architects, planners, and City staff. A summary of the feedback received during these interviews is provided below.

Summary and Key Takeaways

- 1) **Architectural Elements.** What types of architectural elements result in poor design (e.g., windows flush with walls, use of blank walls, visible accessways, faux window shutters, garage recessed behind front building façade)? What type of architectural elements result in good design?
 - **Poor design:**
 - One stakeholder stated blank walls should be discouraged.
 - Another stakeholder expressed concern over current private development roads. This stakeholder stated many new development roads are too narrow to adequately handle normal wear and tear of waste disposal trucks and emergency service vehicles.
 - The same stakeholder expressed a dislike for "cookie cutter" neighborhoods and encouraged variation in architecture and structure articulation.
 - **Good design:**
 - Some stakeholders stated the city should not be "too specific" about how residences look aesthetically (e.g., exterior color, façade treatments) and that the developer and builder can choose what is best for the project and parcel. These stakeholders agreed design standards which are not too prescriptive could encourage developers to work in Visalia.



- A few stakeholders supported the incorporation of patio and pop-out requirements to add variation to what would otherwise be blank walls in developments. These same stakeholders expressed support for “360 degree architecture” standards in which all structure facades are treated equally.
- Stakeholders encouraged the planting of mature landscaping in new subdivisions, as complaints about young landscaping in subdivisions have been an issue in the past.
- Another stakeholder expressed the incorporation of drought tolerant landscaping standards for new residential development for the purpose of water conservation and neighborhood aesthetics.
- Stakeholders agreed the city should encourage placemaking by requiring developers to study the surrounding neighborhood culture and history.
- A few stakeholders heavily focused on meshing together the “old and the new” structures through adaptive reuse, incorporating existing historical features into developments, creating visual compatibility between existing and new development through urban design (in the form of building articulation, scale and proportion, detailing, etc.), and exploring how contemporary architectural design can be used to evolve neighborhood design.
- Another stakeholder expressed support for design standards which facilitate solid waste collection, such as ensuring the size of residential side gates is adequate to fit waste bins or allowing bins to be stored outside of garage spaces.

2) **Roof Types.** Are there roof types that do not represent or should not be included in Visalia?

- Overall, stakeholders were not concerned about roof type standards.
- One stakeholder expressed dislike of tile roofs as they are difficult to attach solar panels onto. Composition roofs were identified as a better solution for solar paneling on roofs and a cheaper alternative to other roof materials.

3) **Garage Orientation.** Some single-family developments include varying garage orientations (e.g., front facing, alley loaded, side garage, split garage). Should such standards be applied to new single-family residential development in Visalia?

- Stakeholders agreed the city should not dictate garage orientation and felt it should be left up to the developer to propose what is best for the project and site.
- Some stakeholders agreed if the city were to include garage orientation standards, they would prefer recessed, forward-facing garages or staggered setbacks instead.

4) **Fence Standards.** Visalia typically uses a six-foot wooden fence for enclosing single-family developments. Are there any issues with this standard, and if so, what types of screening and/or fencing are the most appropriate for Visalia?

- Overall, stakeholders were not concerned about current fence requirements.
- One stakeholder expressed having no issues with current fencing standards but supported requirements for developers to install consistent fencing throughout projects to create a cohesive development and design.
- Another stakeholder did not support the current wooden fencing used in residential developments, stating that something more robust like walls would be preferable as wooden fences have a much shorter lifespan.



- 5) **Setback Requirements.** The 20-to-25-foot rear setback has been found to cause issues on some parcels (i.e., small lots, shallow pie-shaped lots on corners, cul-de-sacs). Is there any aspect of Visalia's setback requirements that are overly restrictive or do not offer enough flexibility?
- Most stakeholders expressed support in reducing the rear setback standard to 20 feet if there was increased flexibility with this standard regarding irregularly shaped parcels and smaller backyards (specifically 1,500 square foot yards). These stakeholders dislike the 22-foot front setback, and would prefer a reduction to 20 feet, which would provide more space in the backyard.
 - A couple stakeholders expressed caution in reducing setback requirements, stating that in some neighborhoods, the setbacks are “too close” to the street and inhibits the visibility of drivers pulling out from driveways.
- 6) **Lighting Issues.** Are there lighting issues within/related to single-family developments?
- Overall, stakeholders did not know of any issues with the current lighting standards and expressed no need to change the existing standards.
 - One stakeholder expressed support to improve residential lighting standards, particularly as it related to poorly lit neighborhoods and parks throughout the city.
 - The same stakeholder expressed concern that being too specific in lighting standards could harm the small-scale feel of Visalia; given examples of overly specific lighting standards include requirements on specific light colors or scheduled on-off times.
- 7) **Pedestrian Safety.** Are there issues with pedestrian safety within large single-family developments/subdivisions (e.g., lack of lighting, poorly defined entryways, lack of visibility from residences and common areas)?
- Most stakeholders expressed concern regarding homeowners parking cars on the street instead of in their garage. These stakeholders explained many households have more cars than the street was intended for.
 - Stakeholders emphasized the importance of flow and continuity between neighborhoods. These stakeholders felt this has not been successfully implemented by newer housing developments. A potential solution would be to create development standards that set requirements for continuity between neighborhoods.
 - Another stakeholder stated residents preferred cul-de-sac style street design over through-streets and cautioned the city's restriction of cul-de-sacs in proposed developments.
 - A few stakeholders expressed support in reducing street widths to 56 feet to allow adequate room for fire engine access.
- 8) **Solid Waste Pickup.** Many additional comments by stakeholders were concerning issues related to trash pickup in the city. Below is a summary of these responses:
- Most stakeholders expressed concern about the unavailability of frontage space for both trash bins and parked cars along residential and commercial streets. They expressed the city should stop offering three trash bins per house, as many residents tend to leave the bins along the street all week long (and not only on trash pickup day). Particularly in newer, denser neighborhoods, the lack of frontage space to accommodate both trash and parked cars is an issue. A possible solution could be to require no on-street parking on trash pickup days or reduce the maximum number of bins down to two bins.



- One stakeholder expressed the need for larger waste enclosures in non-residential developments, stating current standards are too small to account for the addition of organic waste bins.
- Another stakeholder expressed concern about street width as it relates to trash pickup, as 40 feet is the minimum street width to accommodate side load residential waste trucks. This stakeholder stated there needs to be enough space for trucks to be able to always move in a forward direction, as moving backwards is dangerous. Additionally, this stakeholder mentioned alley-loaded units are no longer being serviced by solid waste collection.

9) **Summary of Other Questions.** All other questions received either no response or a limited response from stakeholders. Below is a summary of the responses received for these topics:

- **Single-family residential compatibility with other land uses.** One stakeholder found the existing zoning regulations to be satisfactory at ensuring compatibility and creating appropriate buffers between residences and other land uses.
- **Pocket Parks.** One stakeholder supported the development of pocket parks but stipulated pocket parks should receive the same perks as neighborhood parks.
- **Utility Infrastructure Placement.** One stakeholder found no concerns with utility placement. Another stakeholder stated a preference towards subterranean utilities, as it would make single-family homes more appealing.

10) Below are some additional comments from stakeholders.

- **Agriculture mitigation fee.** One stakeholder expressed support of an agriculture mitigation fee for developers.
- **Improved Permit Process.** One stakeholder expressed a desire for improving the permit process for proposed developments in town to encourage developers to move to Visalia. This could be done through streamlining the online approval process to make it more efficient.