

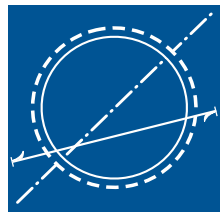


# Fundamentals of Current Planning for Housing

June 23, 2026

# Welcome + Who We Are

**SANDAG**



**CIVIC**  
SOLUTIONS



# Webinar Agenda



**What is Current Planning?**



**Development Review Process**



**Legal/Regulatory Framework**



**Housing Case Study**



**Q&A**

# Webinar Goals

Understand how new development becomes a reality—from project application to approval—and the planner's role at each step of the process.



Understand the planner's role in development application reviews



Learn the basic development review process



Understand major approval types and legal frameworks



Identify common process challenges and best practices

# Why Fundamental Planning Matters



California's housing shortage has increased pressure on local planning departments



State housing laws increasingly limit local discretion and accelerate approvals



Planners play a key role in balancing customer service, legal compliance, and public trust

# Poll Question

# What is Current Planning?

Planner's Role in Development Review

# What is Current Planning



Current planning focuses on reviewing development projects and implementing adopted plans, policies, and regulations



Typical responsibilities include intake, zoning review, hearings, referrals, and permit processing



Current planners guide projects through a legally constrained process

# Current Planning vs Long-Range Planning

- Long-range planning focuses on policy and future visioning
- Current planning focuses on development review, project implementation, and applying adopted regulations
- Both are connected through the General Plan, zoning regulations, and state housing laws

# Key Local Planning Tools



## General Plan

- City's long-term policy vision
- Guides land use, housing, circulation, conservation, etc.



## Zoning Ordinance

- Implements the General Plan through development standards
- Regulates: use, height, setbacks, density, parking



## Specific Plans







- Area-specific planning rules and standards
- Often used for corridors, downtowns, transit areas, or special districts



## Objective Standards

- Measurable and verifiable standards
- Increasingly important under California housing law

# A Current Planner Wears Many Hats

<i>Responsibility</i>	<i>Examples</i>
 <b>Intake &amp; Completeness Review</b>	Reviewing applications and identifying missing materials
 <b>Zoning Review</b>	Checking setbacks, height, density, parking, and use compliance
 <b>Interdepartmental Coordination</b>	Routing projects to engineering, fire, building, and public works
 <b>Public Interface</b>	Answering applicant and community questions
 <b>Hearings &amp; Staff Reports</b>	Preparing findings, recommendations, and presentations
 <b>Regulatory Compliance</b>	Applying CEQA, housing laws, and objective standards

# The Planner's Role in Housing Review



## Facilitator

- Coordinates between applicants, departments, decision-makers, and the public
- Helps move projects through the review process efficiently



## Code Compliance Reviewer

- Evaluates projects against adopted standards and regulations
- Focuses on objective requirements and consistency

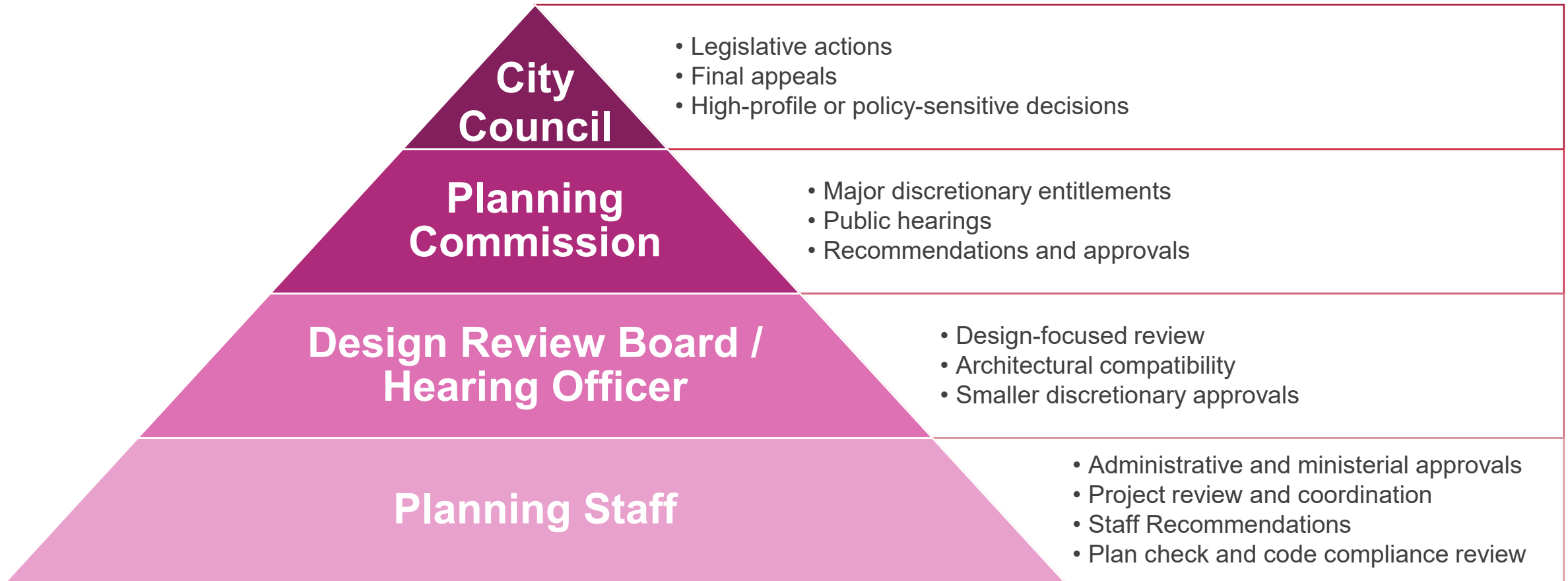


## Process Guide

- Helps applicants understand procedures, timelines, and required approvals
- Explains next steps and review pathways

**Planners balance customer service, legal compliance, and public process.**

# Who Makes Planning Decisions



**Decision-Making Authority ↑**

*(This diagram illustrates approval authority, not project workflow.)*

# San Diego Planning Context



## Coastal Considerations

- Coastal Development Permits
- California Coastal Commission
- Local Coastal Program consistency



## Housing & Development Trends

- Increased infill housing proposals
- Transit-oriented development (TOD)
- Housing streamlining laws influencing review



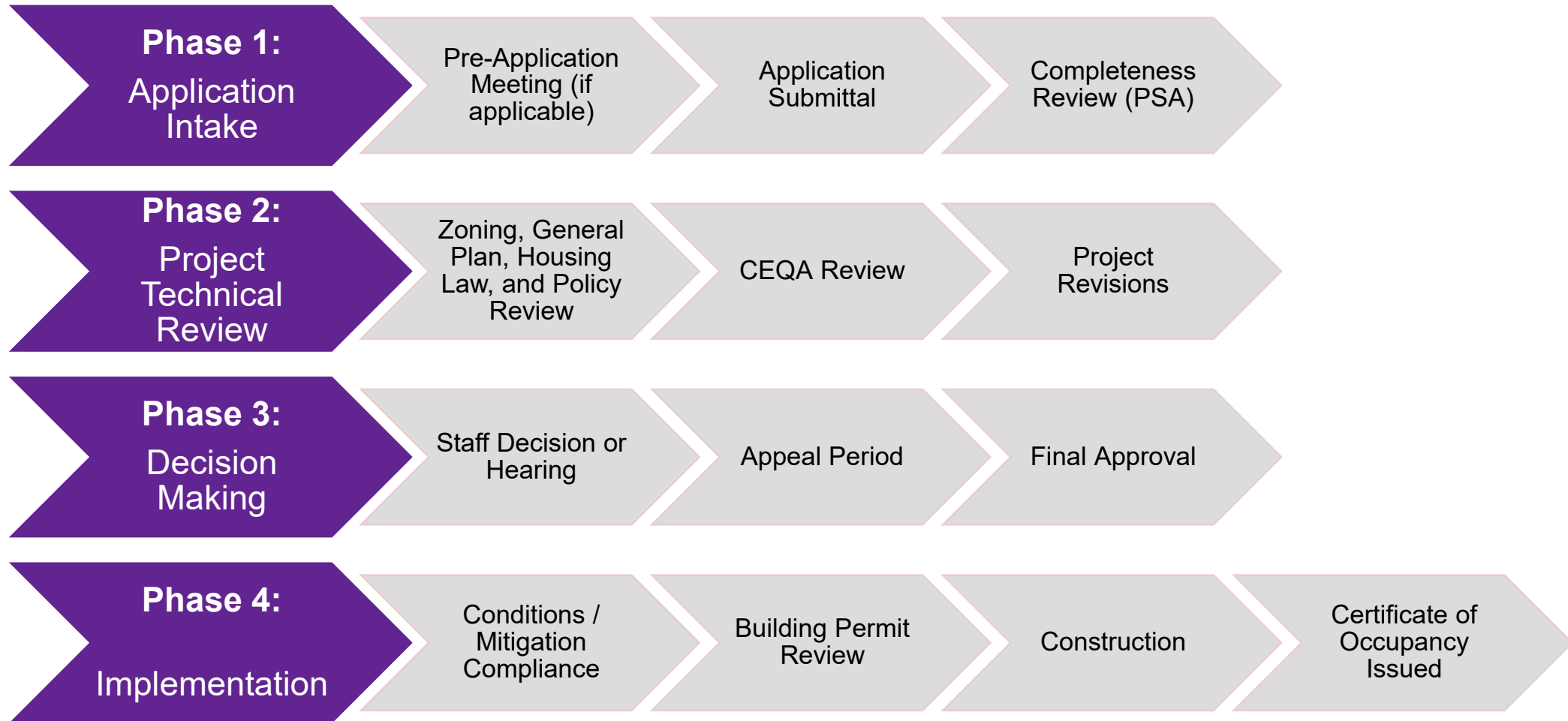
## Regional Planning Framework

- RHNA allocation
- SANDAG Sustainable Communities Strategy
- Regional housing and transportation planning

# Quick Q&A

# Development Review Process: Step-by-Step

# Housing Development Review Process

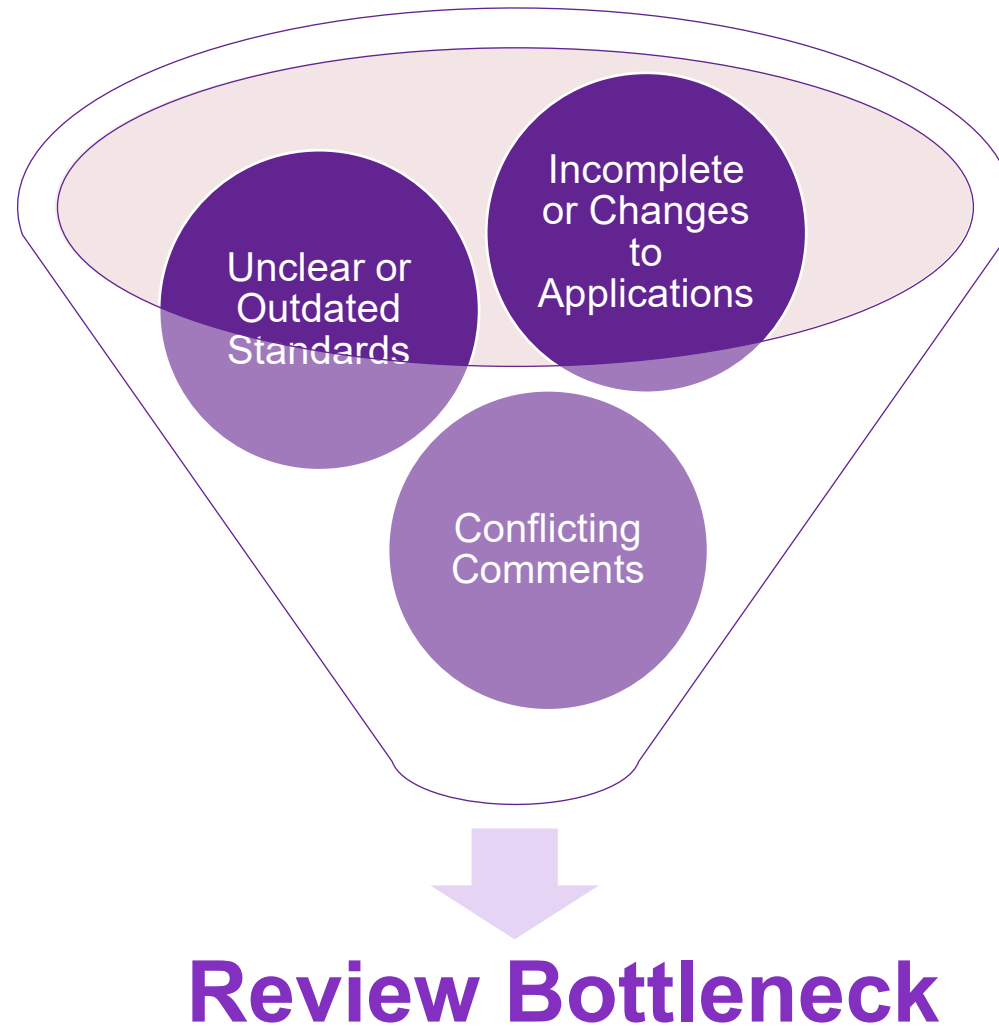


*Not all projects require hearings.*

# Common Housing Approval Pathways

<i>Category</i>	<i>Example</i>	<i>Typical Review</i>
<b>Ministerial</b>	ADU	Staff approval
	SB 35 / SB 423 qualifying project	Staff approval
<b>Discretionary</b>	Design Review Permit	Hearing officer / Board
	Site Development Permit	Planning Commission
	Conditional Use Permit	Hearing body
<b>Legislative</b>	Zone Change	City Council
	General Plan Amendment	City Council

# Common Review Bottlenecks



# Plan Review Comment Best Practices

Good comments should be clear, measurable, actionable, and tied to adopted standards.

<i>Weak / Vague</i>	<i>Strong / Actionable</i>
"Parking appears inadequate."	"Provide parking calculations demonstrating compliance with MC §___ and identify any applicable State Density Bonus or AB 2097 parking reductions."
"Density bonus request unclear."	"Provide a Density Bonus calculation worksheet identifying the requested density bonus, incentives, concessions, waivers, and parking reductions pursuant to Gov. Code §65915."
"The project is not compatible with the neighborhood."	"Demonstrate compliance with applicable objective standards related to height, setbacks, building articulation, landscaping, and open space."

A good review comment identifies (1) the issue, (2) the applicable standard, and (3) the action needed to achieve compliance.

# Quick Q&A

# Laws and Regulations Every Planner Should Know

# Five Laws Every Planner Should Know

Housing  
Accountability  
Act

Permit  
Streamlining  
Act

CEQA

Housing  
Element Law

Density Bonus  
Law

# Housing Accountability Act (HAA)

- **What is it?**

Limits when a city or county can deny, reduce the density of, or impose unreasonable conditions on qualifying housing projects that comply with applicable standards.

- **Why does it matter?**

- Primarily affects housing project review.
- Reinforces the importance of objective standards.
- Requires clear findings and documentation when concerns are identified.
- Illustrates how state law can limit local discretion.

- **Key Takeaway:**

When reviewing housing projects, planners must understand that state law may limit when a project can be denied or conditioned.

# Permit Streamlining Act (PSA)

- **What is it?**

Establishes timelines for determining application completeness and making decisions on development projects.

- **Why does it matter?**

- Affects many types of development applications, not just housing.
- Requires planners to manage project timelines carefully.
- Reinforces the importance of complete and coordinated reviews.
- Influences application intake and project tracking procedures.

- **Key Takeaway:**

Project review is not only about applying regulations correctly—it is also about meeting required timelines.

# California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

- **What is it?**

Requires agencies to evaluate and disclose environmental impacts before approving discretionary projects.

- **Why does it matter?**

- Applies to many different project types, including housing, commercial, industrial, and public projects.
- Influences project schedules and approval pathways.
- Helps planners identify environmental considerations early in the review process.
- Often determines what documentation and analysis are required before approval.

- **Key Takeaway:**

One of a planner's responsibilities is identifying what level of environmental review applies to a project and coordinating that review appropriately.

# Housing Element Law

- **What is it?**

Requires cities and counties to plan for current and future housing needs through policies, programs, and adequate zoning capacity.

- **Why does it matter?**

- Shapes local housing policies and zoning updates
- Influences housing-related development standards
- Connects long-range planning and current planning
- Can affect project review when jurisdictions are not in compliance

- **Key Takeaway:**

Housing Element Law helps establish the local framework that guides future housing development and housing-related planning decisions.

# Density Bonus Law

- **What is it?**

Allows qualifying housing projects to receive additional density and development incentives when affordable housing is provided.

- **Why does it matter?**

- Frequently encountered during multifamily housing review
- May affect density, height, setbacks, and parking requirements
- Limits local discretion in certain situations
- Requires planners to evaluate incentives, concessions, and waivers

- **Key Takeaway:**

Qualifying housing projects may receive additional density or development incentives under state law.

# Common Process & Legal Risks

Process Risks	Legal Risks
Inconsistent interpretation	Unlawful conditions
Vague comments	HAA violations
Unnecessary studies	PSA time violations
Poor coordination	Takings / exactions

# Coastal Planning

## Coastal Development Permits

- Some projects require a Coastal Development Permit (CDP)
- Additional review may apply within the Coastal Zone

## Local Coastal Program (LCP)

- Coastal jurisdictions must maintain certified Local Coastal Programs
- Projects are reviewed for consistency with coastal policies

## California Coastal Commission

- Some projects involve Coastal Commission review or appeals
- Coordination with state agencies may be required

# Quick Q&A

# Practical Case Study

# Project Overview

<b>Site</b>	2.36-acre infill parcel in Coastal Zone
<b>Zoning</b>	RM-4 (maximum 36 dwelling units per gross acre)
<b>Base density</b>	2.36 acres × 36 du/ac = 84.96 units → 85 units maximum by zoning
<b>Affordable Units Proposed</b>	20% Low-Income units
<b>Density Bonus request</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 35% Density Bonus = 30 additional units 85 base units + 30 bonus units = <b>115 units</b></li><li>• State Density Bonus parking reduction: 0.5 spaces per unit (assuming transit eligibility)</li><li>• Incentives/concessions and waivers (Setbacks, unit size, height)</li></ul>

# Density Bonus Calculation

## 1. Base zoning capacity

- $2.36 \text{ gross acres} \times 36 \text{ du/ac} = 84.96 \text{ units} \rightarrow 85 \text{ units maximum by zoning}$

## 2. Density bonus allowance

- For a project providing **20% Low-Income units**, California Density Bonus Law provides a **35% density bonus**, subject to compliance with Government Code §65915.

## 3. Maximum density bonus units

- $85 \text{ units} \times 35\% = 29.75 \text{ bonus units} \rightarrow \text{typically rounded to } 30 \text{ bonus units.}$

## 4. Total maximum project density

- $85 \text{ base units} + 30 \text{ bonus units} = 115 \text{ units maximum}$  (subject to final unit-count rounding conventions and local implementation procedures).

## Result

- Maximum units under State Density Bonus: approximately 115 units or 48.7 du/ac.

**Planner Note:** Always verify whether local zoning calculates density using gross acreage, net acreage, or another methodology before calculating the density bonus.

# Requested Density Bonus Incentives/Concessions & Waivers

<i>Category</i>	<i>Potential Density Bonus Relief</i>	<i>Request</i>
<b>Setbacks</b>	Incentive/Concession or Waiver	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduce side yard setback from 10 feet to 5 feet and arterial street frontage setback from 20 feet to 5 feet.</li> </ul>
<b>Unit Size</b>	Incentive/Concession	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduce minimum one-bedroom size from 700 sf to 570 sf; and</li> <li>Reduce minimum two-bedroom size from 825 sf to 800 sf</li> </ul>
<b>Height</b>	Incentive/Concession or Waiver	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase building height from 40 feet/3 stories to 50 feet/4 stories.</li> </ul>

**Incentives/Concessions:** Modifications to development standards that result in identifiable and actual cost reductions to provide affordable housing.

**Waivers:** Modifications or elimination of development standards that physically preclude the project from achieving the permitted density or incentives/concessions under State Density Bonus Law.

**City must grant them unless it can make one of the statute's specific denial findings.**

# Parking Requirement Under Density Bonus Law

<i>Unit type</i>	<i>Code Parking Required</i>	<i>**Maximum Parking Allowed Under State DBL</i>
Studio / 1-bedroom	1 space per unit	0.5 space per unit
2-3 bedroom	2 spaces per unit	0.5 space per unit
4+ bedrooms	2.45 spaces per unit	0.5 space per unit

**\*\*State Density Bonus Law:** limits the maximum parking that may be required for qualifying projects. For rental or ownership housing developments providing at least 11% very low-income units or 20% lower-income units and located within one-half mile of a major transit stop, required parking may not exceed 0.5 spaces per unit.

**Planner Note:** Applicants may provide more parking than required. State DBL limits the amount of parking a city may require, not the amount a developer may choose to provide.

# Coastal Overlay Review

<i>Additional Entitlements</i>	<i>Key Review Issues</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Coastal Development Permit (CDP)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Coastal access</li><li>• Coastal Act Policies (if applicable)</li><li>• Visual resources and building massing</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Community character</li><li>• Transportation and parking</li><li>• Coastal hazards (if applicable)</li><li>• Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Areas (ESHAs), if present</li></ul>

## Interaction with Housing Laws

- Density Bonus Law remains applicable, including density bonus units, incentives, concessions, waivers, and parking reductions.
- Housing Accountability Act remains applicable. However, the Coastal Act may provide a basis for imposing conditions or modifications if necessary to avoid a specific Coastal Act conflict.

**Planner Note:** Projects in the Coastal Zone may be subject to both State Housing Laws and Coastal Act/LCP requirements. Early identification of potential conflicts can reduce processing delays and legal risk

# Density Bonus and Coastal Act Considerations

**State Density Bonus Law applies within the Coastal Zone and may provide for density bonuses, incentives, concessions, waivers, and parking reductions.**

- 35% density bonus;
- Incentives/concessions;
- Development standard waivers; and
- Parking reductions

**Density Bonus Law does not automatically override Coastal Act or certified Local Coastal Program (LCP) requirements. Local agencies should seek to accommodate both laws whenever possible.**

## **Example**

The city may need to evaluate whether the requested relief would conflict with:

- Protected public views
- Coastal scenic resources
- LCP development standards and coastal resource protection policies
- Coastal access corridors

**Planner Note:** Identify the specific Density Bonus request, identify the specific Coastal Act or LCP standard, and determine whether an actual conflict exists rather than assuming one exists.

# Multifamily Housing Project Review Process

## Project Approvals Required

- Density Bonus Permit (Gov. Code §65915)
- Coastal Development Permit (CDP) (if located within Coastal Zone)
- Design Review (if applicable and based on objective standards)
- Tentative Parcel Map (if subdivision proposed)

## Decision-Making Authority

### **Planning Commission (Discretionary)**

- Density Bonus Permit (limited discretion under Gov. Code §65915)
- Coastal Development Permit (if Commission is designated approval authority)
- Tentative Parcel Map

### **Planning Director/Zoning Administrator and/or Design Review Board (Ministerial)**

- Design Review or administrative approvals (if authorized by local code)

### **City Council**

- Typically hears appeals

**Planner Note:** Not all approvals carry the same level of discretion. Modern housing projects often contain a mix of discretionary, limited-discretion, and ministerial review processes.

# Interdepartmental and Agency Review

<i>Community Development/Planning</i>	<i>Public Works/Engineering</i>	<i>Building &amp; Safety</i>	<i>Fire Department</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Zoning compliance</li> <li>• Objective Standards compliance</li> <li>• Density Bonus analysis</li> <li>• Coastal Act/LCP consistency(if applicable)</li> <li>• Environmental review</li> <li>• Housing law applicability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access and circulation</li> <li>• Drainage</li> <li>• Utilities</li> <li>• Street improvements</li> <li>• Traffic</li> <li>• Easements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building code compliance</li> <li>• Fire access</li> <li>• Accessibility requirements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emergency vehicle access</li> <li>• Fire flow requirements</li> <li>• Hydrant placement</li> </ul>
<i>Parks/Recreation</i>	<i>Housing Division</i>	<i>Utilities</i>	<i>City Attorney</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parkland dedication or in-lieu fees (if applicable)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affordable housing compliance</li> <li>• Regulatory agreements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water service</li> <li>• Sewer capacity</li> <li>• Dry utilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Density Bonus Findings</li> <li>• Housing Law Compliance</li> <li>• Coastal Act Legal Issues</li> </ul>

**Note:** Department names and review responsibilities vary by jurisdiction. In some agencies, review functions may be consolidated within a single department or performed by contract staff, special districts, or outside agencies.

# Examples of Additional Information That May Be Requested

<i>Community Development/Planning</i>	<i>Coastal Review</i>	<i>Transportation/Parking</i>	<i>Environmental Review</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Density Bonus calculations and incentive/concessions and waivers justification</li> <li>• Affordable housing unit mix and affordability calculations</li> <li>• Preliminary SB 330 applicability and vesting analysis</li> <li>• Draft affordable housing regulatory agreement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coastal view analysis</li> <li>• Visual simulations/renderings</li> <li>• Coastal access analysis</li> <li>• Coastal hazard assessment (if applicable)</li> <li>• LCP consistency analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transit proximity documentation</li> <li>• Parking Management and operations plan</li> <li>• Transportation Demand Management (TDM) program</li> <li>• Bicycle parking plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biological resources assessment</li> <li>• Cultural resources analysis</li> <li>• Tribal consultation documentation</li> <li>• Phase I Environmental Site Assessment</li> <li>• Noise study (if warranted)</li> </ul>

**Planner Note:** Information requests should be directly related to applicable standards, required findings, environmental review, or implementation of State Housing Laws.

# Objective Standards Review

<i>Site Development</i>	<i>Building Design</i>	<i>Parking and Circulation</i>	<i>Coastal Standards (if applicable)</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lot coverage</li> <li>• Maximum density</li> <li>• Open space</li> <li>• Landscaping</li> <li>• Building separation</li> <li>• Walls and Fences</li> <li>• Setbacks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Height</li> <li>• Building articulation</li> <li>• Façade treatment</li> <li>• Roof design</li> <li>• Building Materials</li> <li>• Unit Size</li> <li>• Screening</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parking ratios</li> <li>• Bicycle parking</li> <li>• Drive aisle and stall dimensions</li> <li>• Loading areas</li> <li>• EV Requirements</li> <li>• Driveways</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public access requirements</li> <li>• Visual resources and view corridors</li> <li>• Scenic resource protection</li> <li>• LCP objective development standards</li> </ul>

**Planner Note:** Development standards modified through approved Density Bonus incentives, concessions, or waivers should be evaluated using the modified standard rather than the underlying zoning requirement.

# CEQA Review Process

## Determine CEQA Applicability and Review Pathway

### Exempt

Examples:

- AB 130 Housing Infill Exemption (if applicable)
- CEQA Guidelines §15183 Consistency with General Plan EIR
- Statutory exemptions
- Categorical Exemptions
- Ministerial Projects (CEQA does not apply)

### Negative Declaration (ND)

- No substantial evidence of significant impacts

### Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND)

- Potential impacts can be reduced below significance through mitigation

### Environmental Impact Report (EIR)

Required when:

- Significant impacts may occur and cannot clearly be mitigated below significance

## Planner Evaluation Factors

- Project location
- Site constraints
- Traffic impacts
- Noise impacts
- Biological resources
- Cultural resources
- Coastal resources
- Hazardous materials
- Tribal consultation requirements

**Planner Note:** The CEQA pathway should be evaluated early in project review because it can significantly affect project timelines, public review requirements, and approval procedures.

# Conditions of Approval

<i>Construction</i>	<i>On and Off Site Improvements</i>	<i>Operations</i>	<i>Coastal Conditions (if applicable)</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Construction hours</li> <li>• Dust control</li> <li>• Noise mitigation</li> <li>• Construction management plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Landscaping</li> <li>• Lighting</li> <li>• Sidewalk improvements</li> <li>• Utility upgrade</li> <li>• Dedications</li> <li>• Roadway improvements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affordable housing restrictions</li> <li>• Property management and maintenance</li> <li>• Parking management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public access improvements</li> <li>• View corridor protection</li> <li>• Coastal resource protection measures</li> </ul>
<p><b>Conditions should be:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Related to the project impacts or required findings</li> <li>• Supported by substantial evidence</li> <li>• Consistent with adopted regulations and permit requirements</li> <li>• Roughly proportional and legally defensible</li> <li>• Not in conflict with State Housing Law</li> </ul>			
<p><b>Planner Note:</b> Conditions should address project-specific impacts and implementation requirements—not serve as a substitute for denial findings or discretionary preferences.</p>			

# Summary of Housing Project Review Process

*The review process should follow this sequence:*

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Application intake and completeness review      | 7. Conduct technical review                            |
| 2. Identify required approvals and review process  | 8. Apply objective development standards               |
| 3. Route application for interdepartmental review  | 9. Analyze Coastal Act/LCP consistency (if applicable) |
| 4. Identify applicable State Housing Laws          | 10. Prepare findings and conditions of approval        |
| 5. Evaluate Density Bonus eligibility              | 11. Prepare recommendation for decision-maker          |
| 6. Determine CEQA applicability and review pathway | 12. Monitor statutory timelines throughout the process |

**Planner Note:** This sequence mirrors how most California jurisdictions currently process multifamily housing applications and helps ensure compliance with both local regulations and increasingly complex State housing mandates

# Key Planner Takeaways

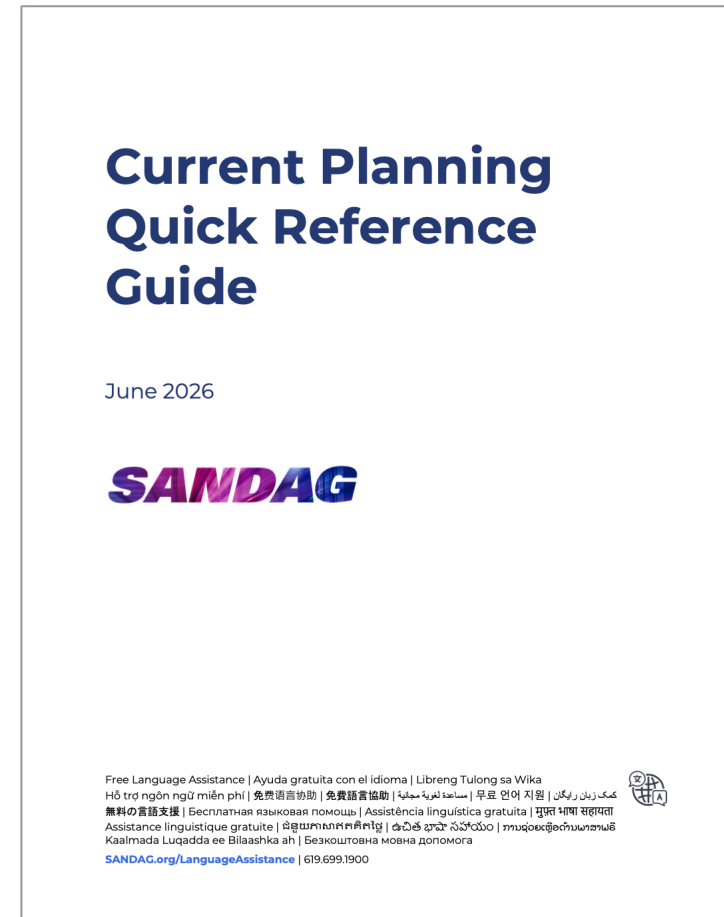
- Housing review is no longer solely a zoning exercise.
- State Housing Laws often limit local discretion.
- Objective standards are increasingly important.
- Density Bonus Law can modify local development standards and parking requirements.
- CEQA should be evaluated early in the review process.
- Coastal Zone projects require integration of both housing and coastal resource laws.
- Conditions of approval must be supported by evidence and consistent with State law.
- Statutory timelines are now a critical part of project management.
- Successful planners focus on coordination, documentation, and legally defensible decision-making.

# Final Q&A

# Where Planners Can Go for Resources

## Quick Reference Guide

- Key development review terms
- Development review workflow
- More information and links to information from agencies on the five areas of law
- Typical coordination and referral examples



# Connect with SANDAG's HAP TA Team

-  Project Website: [SANDAG.org/housing](https://SANDAG.org/housing)
-  Local Staffing Assistance Requests [Housing@SANDAG.org](mailto:Housing@SANDAG.org)
-  Contact SANDAG  
Email: [Stacey.Cooper@SANDAG.org](mailto:Stacey.Cooper@SANDAG.org)

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