



AGENDA MEMO

PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING DATE: JULY 23, 2009

DEPARTMENT: PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

ITEM DESCRIPTION: TXT-34891 - APPLICANT/OWNER: CITY OF LAS VEGAS

**** CONDITIONS ****

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: **APPROVAL**, subject to:

1. Title 19.06.170 is hereby amended as follows:

19.06.170 HILLSIDE DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

- (A) Introduction. The west boundary of the City of Las Vegas abuts the Spring Mountain Range. A significant portion of the area along this boundary is designated as national conservation and wilderness area. Eventually the foothills leading up to this area will be affected by development and will require special consideration and a development style that will provide for the unique situations which result from the slope of the land.

- (B) Adoption, Purpose and Intent.

- (1) The purposes of this Section are to:

- (a) Adopt criteria for the development of properties within hillside areas, which are defined as any portion of land with a vertical slope of fifteen percent or greater; and
 - (b) Ensure that development in hillside areas is in compliance with the goals, policies, and implementing strategies of the Las Vegas 2020 Master Plan, namely, Policy 3.5.3, which provides as follows:

Policy 3.5.3: That, where possible, development be designed and oriented to ensure that view sheds of the mountain ranges surrounding the Las Vegas Valley are preserved, possibly through the development of a foothills ordinance or a set of specific urban design guidelines.

- (2) This Section:

- (a) Shall apply to development with natural slopes of fifteen percent or more;
 - (b) Is intended to encourage and guide low density, rural type, large lot or cluster, single family residential development that is designed to be compatible with the hillside terrain and its environment; and

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- (c) Is intended to guide the design of development to work with the land, rather than to alter the land to accommodate the development.
- (3) In general, all development in hillside areas shall be designed with the following considerations:
 - (a) Protect and conserve significant natural and visual resources, including major boulder outcrops, major ridges and peaks, prime wildlife habitat, and unique vegetation specimens;
 - (b) Protect people and property from potentially hazardous conditions that are particular to mountains and hillside areas, including rock falls, other unstable slopes, flooding, subsidence, erosion and sedimentation, range fires, soils with high shrink-swell capacity, foundation instability, and air pollution;
 - (c) Protect water quality, air quality, and other resources, such as soil and natural vegetation, from incompatible land uses;
 - (d) Minimize the public costs of providing public services and facilities such as streets, water, sewer, emergency services, sanitation services, parks and recreation;
 - (e) Ensure that decisions regarding development in hillside areas are based on complete and accurate information about the environmental conditions and probable development impacts;
 - (f) Minimize the impacts of development by controlling the location, intensity, pattern, design, construction techniques, and materials of development and construction;
 - (g) Maintain significant open spaces that provide view corridors and land-use buffers, and maintain the City's unique desert setting;
 - (h) Protect landmarks, prime wash area habitats, and environmentally sensitive lands, while also recognizing the legitimate expectations of property owners and the City's overall economic goals;
 - (i) Encourage innovative planning, design, and construction techniques for development in environmentally sensitive areas; and
 - (j) Minimize grading and site disturbance to maximize compatibility with the natural terrain.
- (C) Standards and Guidelines. Development plans must demonstrate compliance with this Section. However, there is flexibility in the degree to which a requirement of this Section may be addressed by a development plan and the method used to comply. An applicant who believes that a

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particular standard does not or should not apply to the applicant's project has the burden to demonstrate why not, and to provide a solution that will meet the intent of the goals and objectives of this Section.

(1) Density.

- (a) The maximum density for a proposed development shall be that permitted by the adopted plan for the area in which the proposed development is located. Where no specific plan for that area has been adopted, the maximum density shall be that established by the land use element of the General Plan.
- (b) The maximum recommended density within hillside development is two units per acre. Large lot development is encouraged. Non-residential development other than public facilities is discouraged.
- (c) One hundred percent site disturbance may occur on areas of a lot or parcel with a slope of less than fifteen percent. Sites with a slope of fifteen percent or greater are subject to the allowable maximum percentage of site disturbance as set forth below:

Slope	Maximum Site Disturbance	Minimum Undisturbed Area of Site
15% to 25%	50%	50%
Over 25%	35%	65%

- (d) Density and site disturbance may be transferred from portions of a lot or parcel with a slope of fifteen percent or greater to any other portion of the lot, parcel or development site. The portions of the lot or parcel from which density and site disturbance are transferred shall be designated as natural areas. The gross density of the parcel(s) to which density is transferred shall not exceed that allowed by the zoning of the property.

(2) Site Design. (See Figures 1 and 2)

- (a) Structures shall be sited in a manner that will fit into the hillside's contour and relate to the form of the terrain. This may be done through a variety of methods, such as varying setbacks and structure heights; the use of innovative building techniques (e.g., earth shelter or earth berm construction); and retaining walls.

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- (b) Site design should take into account the need to do the following, while maintaining the natural character of a hillside area:
 - (i) Preserve vistas of natural hillside areas and ridgelines from "key vantage points";
 - (ii) Preserve views from existing development; and
 - (iii) Allow new ~~dwellings~~ development access to views similar to those enjoyed from existing ~~dwellings~~ development.
- (c) Site design should allow for different lot shapes and sizes, as well as split development pads, with the prime determinant being the natural terrain.
- (3) Grading, Slope Stabilization, Drainage Design. Disturbance to the natural landform should be minimized, should not destroy visual quality and community character, and should not create conditions that result in flooding or erosion. Grading design should address both safety and aesthetics, incorporating the following requirements and guidelines:
 - (a) Portions of a site or lot that are to be graded must be clearly shown on the grading plan.
 - (b) Landform or contour measures should be utilized to produce cut and fill slopes that are compatible with existing land character. Continuous unbroken slope surfaces that are visible from off the site are discouraged.
 - (c) Berms at top of slopes and other locations should be used to screen, vary profile, and insure drainage away from slopes.
 - (d) Where any cut or fill slope exceeds ten feet in horizontal length, the horizontal contours of the slope shall be developed to appear similar to the existing natural contours. (See Figure 3)
 - (e) Grading should be balanced on site whenever possible to avoid excessive cut and fill, and to avoid the unnecessary import or export of earth material. (See Figure 4)
 - (f) No grubbing, grading or clearing shall occur prior to the approval of civil improvement plans and final grading plans by the Director of Public Works and the issuance of a grading permit. Grubbing, grading, clearing and stockpiling are only to occur in areas identified for those activities on the approved grading plan.
 - (g) All portions of the site or lot that are to be left ungraded are to remain undisturbed, and are not to be used for stockpiling of materials or excess fill.

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- (h) Areas on a site that are designated as natural areas shall be temporarily fenced, or a barrier placed where they abut construction areas, in order to prevent any disturbance of the natural area.
- (i) Disturbed areas shall be restored as close as possible to their natural condition by using eonite, permealite, or a similar approved process designed to restore natural color to the landscape.
- (j) Sides of roadways and driveways that are disturbed shall be revegetated, repaved, or both.
- (k) Cut or fill design on slopes that encroach into a floodplain must be approved by the Director of Planning and Development and the Director of Public Works concurrent with final grading plan approval.
- (l) Pad elevations above street level shall be varied to avoid the appearance associated with monotonous, flat, level pads.
- (m) Unless addressed by means of a retaining wall, slopes that are steeper than thirty-three percent, and slopes for which such stabilization is recommended or required by a geotechnical report, shall be stabilized with properly engineered stone rip rapping, sculptured rock or other similar material as follows:
 - (i) Stabilizing material shall blend with the natural appearance of the site or lot and its surrounding terrain;
 - (ii) Vegetation retention and revegetation shall be used in conjunction with rip rapping;
 - (iii) All site revegetation and repaving shall be completed within ninety days after completion of work or prior to issuance of a final inspection approval, whichever occurs first.
- (n) Project designs shall be in accordance with the Clark County Regional Flood Control District Hydrologic Criteria and Drainage Design Manual, and shall maintain natural runoff characteristics where at all possible.
- (4) Architecture/Building Design. ~~Dwellings built~~ Development within hillside areas shall conform to the following:
 - (a) Reflective building materials (i.e. mirror finishes or metal roofs) are not permitted unless treated to eliminate glare.
 - (b) Limited slab-on-grade, with staggered floor elevations, shall be utilized to avoid massive building forms, excessive cuts and fill, and surfaces which contrast with the surrounding terrain.

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- (c) All external mechanical equipment shall be screened, and required vents shall be architecturally compatible with the structure.
 - (d) Building architecture should have predominant horizontal features. Vertical features should be minimized and generally used to accentuate entryways, garages, main doors and any type of vertical embellishment.
 - (e) No portion of a structure shall exceed a height of two stories or thirty-five feet, and a minimum of twenty feet of the structure must be lower than the elevation of the primary ridgeline. (See Figure 5)
 - (f) ~~Dwellings shall use wall~~ Wall articulation (e.g., insets, pop-outs, etc.) and roof orientation shall be used as a means to prevent a massive look.
 - (g) Rooflines and elements shall reflect the naturally occurring ridgeline silhouettes and topographical variation in order to blend with the hillside. (See Figure 6)
 - (h) Building materials and colors shall be compatible with the natural setting. Whenever possible, exterior colors shall be limited to earthtones that are found in nearby natural vegetation or soil, that come from natural sources (e.g., rock, stone, wood), or that resemble a natural appearance.
- (5) Clustered Development. Clustered development is encouraged as a means of preserving the natural appearance of the hillside and maximizing the amount of open space. Under this concept, ~~dwellings are development~~ development is grouped in on the more level portions of the site, while steeper areas are preserved in a natural state. Clustering can enhance the environmental sensitivity of a development project, and facilitate the permanent protection of key features of the natural environment, such as biological habitats, open space areas, scenic areas, ridgelines, and steep slopes. (See Figure 7) Also, it is often more feasible to provide the needed infrastructure for a cluster development, since clustering results in shorter roads and water, sewer, and utility lines. Clustering does not allow an increase in the overall density of an area beyond that which is otherwise permitted by the General Plan.
- (a) ~~Clustered dwelling units development shall be placed~~ Clustered dwelling units development shall be placed occur in a staggered or stepped manner so ~~their~~ the visual impact is lessened.
 - (b) Clustered subdivisions shall be sited so they do not have a dominant presence within the hillside.
 - (c) The location of clustered units shall be restricted to the flatter portions of a site, unless another location better

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- minimizes impacts as relates to public safety, visual impact or environmental issues.
- (d) Clustered development must preserve open space in its undeveloped form. Appropriate documents must be recorded to ensure the preservation of the open space areas in perpetuity. Open space areas shall be identified on the final subdivision map or parcel map as common lots.
- (6) Walls and Fences.
- (a) The height of walls shall be in accordance with Section 19.12.075.
 - (b) Walls shall conform to the topography of the site. (See Figure 8)
 - (c) Walls shall either incorporate the use of native materials or be earhtone colors to match the native soils and rocks. Walls and fences (other than retaining walls) should be made of natural materials (e.g., stone, wood, split rail) whenever possible and, at a minimum, shall be a color that blends with the surrounding environment. Where retaining walls front on or are visible from public streets or public vantage points, they shall be constructed of (or faced with) materials that are appropriate in color and texture to help visually blend the wall into the terrain. (See Figure 9)
 - (d) The use of retaining walls and retaining structures is encouraged when it significantly reduces site grading.
 - (e) Large retaining walls in a uniform plane should be avoided. Retaining walls should be broken up into elements and terraces, with landscaping used to screen them from view. (See Figure 10)
 - (f) Retaining structures shall be located so that they do not become a dominating visual feature.
 - (g) Tall retaining structures that are absolutely necessary should be located behind the dwelling development so as to be screened from view.
 - (h) Whenever possible, the location of walls and fences (other than retaining walls) should be limited to areas within fifty feet of dwellings primary buildings and accessory structures in order to limit their impact on hillside viewsheds.
 - (i) Solid walls and fences shall be prohibited within fifty vertical feet of a ridgeline in order to prevent impacts on wildlife corridors and maintain the natural area surrounding the ridgeline.
 - (j) Fences that have pointed vertical elements shall not be permitted.

- (7) Landscaping. Landscape improvements on the overall project site shall be integrated with the natural topography and existing or indigenous vegetation. Plant materials shall be used to mitigate development impacts on washes, slopes, and any other sensitive environmental features.
 - (a) The use of non-native or competitive species that could threaten the native flora within the area is prohibited.
 - (b) Landscape design for all development shall consist of plant materials similar in form and scale to the existing vegetation in the area.
 - (c) Each natural area shall contain only those species that are indigenous to the native desert or mountain elevation and climate zone in which it exists.
 - (d) The interface between new development and natural open space shall be designed to provide a gradual transition from manufactured slopes into natural slopes.
 - (e) Landscaping (which is compatible with natural vegetation) shall be designed so that it extends out from developed areas and forms a cohesive pattern with existing natural vegetation, arranged in random, informal groupings. (See Figure 11)
 - (f) Landscaping along the slope side of development shall be designed to maintain controlled views from the residences, yet screen and soften the architecture from community vantage points.
 - (g) Trees and shrubs shall be arranged in informal, randomly spaced masses, and shall be placed selectively to reduce the scale of and help to blend manufactured slopes.
 - (h) Plant materials that are used to stabilize a graded slope shall blend with the surrounding native plant materials in color and texture to the greatest extent feasible.
 - (i) Landscaping shall be designed so as to avoid invasive species that could negatively impact indigenous plant species. Invasive species shall be identified through a recognized resource, such as a local Cooperative Weed Management Area.
- (8) Trails.
 - (a) Each subdivision shall provide and maintain pedestrian access for trails that are identified in the City's Trail Master Plan and that are located within the subdivision, including subdivisions that are to be established as gated communities.

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- (b) A trail system that is designed to preserve habitat and ensure public safety shall be provided to link new development to existing trails within hillside areas.
 - (c) New subdivisions shall prepare a trails plan to link new residential areas to existing and planned trails in the City that are shown in the Trails Elements of the City's Master Plan, including hiking, equestrian and multi-use trails. The subdivision's trails plan must be submitted to the City for review and approval.
 - (d) Once approved by the City, the trails identified in each subdivision's trails plan shall be constructed by the developer prior to the final inspection of residential units. Such trails shall be maintained as agreed to by the developer and the City.
- (9) Open Space/Natural Areas.
 - (a) Portions of hillside areas will be retained in their natural state.
 - (b) Within areas designated as natural areas, site disturbance, other than for the construction of hiking trails, is not permitted.
 - (c) Any area designated as a natural area shall be shown on the tentative subdivision map with existing surveyed topographical information, and the area itself shall be identified with horizontal control data on the final subdivision map or parcel map.
 - (d) Any area designated as a natural area may be designated as a separate parcel or as a deed-restricted portion of a parcel. If designated as a separate parcel, such parcel:
 - (i) May be under the ownership of a owners' association or may be deeded to any organization which accepts responsibility for the perpetual preservation and maintenance of the natural area, subject to approval and acceptance by the Directors of Planning and Development and Public Works; and
 - (ii) Shall be mapped as a common lot in order to help protect natural areas.
- (10) Circulation/Roadways.
 - (a) All public or private roadways shall be designed according to the standards of this Section, the Master Plan of Streets and Highways (if applicable), the Municipal Code, current City Standards and, if required, an approved traffic study. These standards are intended to supplement the Public

Works Department Review Guidelines. Streets in hillside areas should be constructed in areas that would have the least impact on the natural environment.

- (b) The following elements of road and sidewalk circulation shall be incorporated in hillside area developments:
 - (i) Roadway design which generally follows existing contours, thereby minimizing grading and resulting in an informal, curving internal network;
 - (ii) The provision of two major points of access to principal roads in developments exceeding one hundred fifty units or when required by the Department of Fire and Rescue in order to minimize fire hazards;
 - (iii) Roadways with a maximum slope of seven percent; (See Figure 12 for illustration of a seven percent slope in comparison to other slopes)
 - (iv) Preservation of existing trees and natural features by dividing or routing roads and sidewalks around these elements;
 - (v) Provision of safe, convenient pedestrian access to schools, parks and other recreational facilities;
 - (vi) Combinations of collective private driveways, cluster parking areas and off-street parking bays, which are encouraged in order to minimize paved areas;
 - (vii) The location of all utilities underground in a common trench in the parkway or under the sidewalk;
 - (viii) Rolled curbs as the preferred road edge along any paved roads, where such curbing will be adequate to contain drainage and prevent erosion;
 - (ix) Roadway improvements that do not adversely affect other properties or create the need for extensive grading, flood control facilities, or other types of construction or support infrastructure;
 - (x) Roadways that meet the requirements of the Department of Fire and Rescue, including roadway grades and curves to accommodate safety and emergency vehicles;
 - (xi) Streets that follow the natural contours of the hillside to minimize cut and fill; (See Figure 13)
 - (xii) Cul-de-sacs or loop roads, which are encouraged where they are necessary to fit the terrain;

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- (xiii) The elimination of on-street parking and sidewalks in order to reduce required grading, subject to approval thereof by the Planning Commission or City Council (or both) as a specific element of an approved Site Development Plan Review;
 - (xiv) The preferred use of driveways that serve more than one lot, as well as diagonal driveways running along contour lines, where:
 - A. Such driveways will reduce the need for grading, paving, and site disturbance;
 - B. Such driveways have been approved by the Department of Fire and Rescue;
 - C. Sight visibility restriction zones will be maintained in accordance with the most recent version of the guidelines of the American Association of Street and Highway Transportation Officials; and
 - D. The maximum change in grade between driveway slope and the cross-slope of roadways is twelve percent for local roadways, and ten percent for collector roadways; and
 - (xv) Street lighting that is limited to intersections and other locations where necessary in order to provide safe access or passage, as determined by the Director of Public Works. Facilities for other public street lighting will be stubbed out for later use, including all necessary underground conduit and pull boxes at each streetlight location, but the installation of the streetlights may be deferred provided that the developer provide to the City such streetlights for the future installation. Alternatively, monies in lieu of such deferred streetlights, including bases, may be contributed to the City if allowed by the Department of Public Works.
- (D) Hillside Development Design Review.
 - (1) The objective of the Hillside Development Design Review under this Subsection (D) is to preserve significant natural features within hillside areas by encouraging design that minimizes disturbance to existing topographical forms. A development should be designed to fit into hillside areas rather than altering the earth forms to create a flatland type of development.
 - (2) Project design should:

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- (a) Initially identify the existing geographic, topographic, and environmental features of the site (such as geological hazards, steep slopes, ridges, valleys, streams, views, existing drainage patterns, significant biota, and outcroppings); and
 - (b) Then determine the impact the proposed project will have on these elements.
- (3) Preparation of a site plan should be based upon a determination concerning how traffic circulation, fire protection and access, drainage, sound barriers, buffers, land alteration, and other measures will be employed to limit any negative impacts of the development. The final site plan should reflect how all of these impacts are successfully solved or mitigated.
- (4) Other elements that should be considered in a successful design and, where indicated, reflected in submittal documents are the following:
 - (a) Preservation of distinctive natural features, the general existing topographical forms, significant trees, landscaping, natural water courses and wildlife corridors, with data and aerial maps to be provided showing the location, type and nature of existing major vegetation, including significant clusters or contiguous areas of dense growth and existing vegetation to be preserved;
 - (b) Preservation of prominent skyline ridges, which must be shown by providing a graph or other visual analysis indicating rooftop in relation to ridgeline; (See Figure 14)
 - (c) The location of roads and structures below the skyline ridge, with a visual analysis to be provided indicating circulation related to existing contours;
 - (d) The location and construction of roadways, with drawings and explanations to be provided showing how roadways will be constructed in a manner compatible with the natural terrain and with scarring eliminated;
 - (e) Incorporation of hiking, biking, walking and equestrian trails, where appropriate;
 - (f) Variation in lot size, building placements, setbacks, and orientation;
 - (g) Variable changes in elevation and siting of buildings to ensure views and avoid monotony;
 - (h) Preservation of steep hillsides by clustering buildings or use of other innovative approaches;
 - (i) Sensitivity to the project's appearance from lower or adjacent development;

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- (j) Placement of equipment and other unsightly forms below ridgelines and in bermed and landscaped areas.
- (k) Dwelling Development design, with documentation to be provided indicating that significant effort has been made towards incorporating energy-conservation and water saving techniques;
- (l) Maintenance of natural drainage/water runoff characteristics where possible;
- (m) The use of exterior lighting for buildings that is:
 - (i) Of a "cut-off" type designed to ensure that excess light does not spill over; and
 - (ii) Of the lowest intensity feasible so as to be adequate for the purposes intended but not likely to attract undue attention.
- (5) Prior to the submittal of an application for Site Development Plan Review, a grading plan and drainage plan must be submitted to and approved by the Department of Public Works. The plans must clearly identify the topography of the land and how it relates to the development. Areas known or suspected to be hazardous, as determined by the Department of Public Works, shall not be disturbed without a geological survey, other data and tests, or a combination thereof, as required by the Department of Public Works. The submittal must include or be accompanied by a topographic map of the area proposed for development and shall show the location of, and distinguish, each of the following slope categories:
 - (a) Slope less than fifteen percent;
 - (b) Slope between fifteen percent and twenty percent;
 - (c) Slope between 20.01 percent and twenty-five percent;
 - (d) Slope greater than twenty-five percent.
- (6) A ~~final~~ grading plan must first be approved by the Director of Planning and Development before Site Development Plan Review is considered by the Planning Commission. The Director's review shall coincide with staff review of the Site Development Plan and drainage study.
- (7) Site Development Plan Review for all hillside area development shall be processed as a public hearing item. In order to address the sensitive nature of hillside development, the final grading plan that was approved with the Drainage Study and by the Planning and Development Director shall be submitted with the design review applications.
- (8) The burden of proof is on the applicant to demonstrate that the proposed development:

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- (a) Is located and designed so as to protect the safety of residents and will not create significant threats to life or property by reason of the presence of hazards relating to geology, slope instability, flood, fire or erosion;
 - (b) Is compatible with the natural, biotic, cultural, scenic and open space resources of the area;
 - (c) Can be conveniently served by neighborhood shopping and provided essential public services without imposing significant costs on the total community;
 - (d) Is consistent with the objectives and policies of the General Plan; and
 - (e) Incorporates creative and imaginative design, resulting in a visual quality that will complement community character and benefit residents.
- (9) Any variance from or adjustment to any requirement set forth in this Section may be obtained by means of a Variance application in accordance with LVMC 19.18.070.

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**** STAFF REPORT ****

APPLICATION REQUEST

This is a request to amend Title 19.06.170 to make revisions and updates related to the Hillside Development Standards and Guidelines.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

<i>Related Relevant City Actions by P&D, Fire, Bldg., etc.</i>	
08/15/07	The City Council adopted Ordinance 5923, which was introduced as Bill No. 2007-36, to provide development standards and guidelines for future development in areas with slopes greater than 15 percent or more and satisfies Policy 3.5.3 of the Las Vegas 2020 Master Plan. The Planning Commission and staff recommended approval of this Text Amendment (TXT-8744).

ANALYSIS

The proposed amendment would change references to dwelling in the Hillside Development Standards and Guidelines to indicate that the standards apply to all potential development within the applicable area. Title 19 defines dwelling as a structure with one or more rooms that is used exclusively for human habitation; designed, occupied, or intended for occupancy as a separate living quarter with sleeping, cooking and sanitary facilities provided. When the Hillside Ordinance (Ordinance 5923) was adopted in 2007, it was not anticipated that there would be anything other than residential development contemplated for this area. Since the adoption of these standards and guidelines there has been interest in developing uses other than residential units, most recently was a request for a Church/House of Worship use. The existing language has resulted in confusion and questions regarding the applicability of those standards that refer to dwellings or dwelling units.

The proposed clarification will change the nine references to dwelling or dwelling units to non-use specific language. This modification will eliminate any confusion associated with the expected development patterns and design criteria associated with future development (residential and non-residential) proposed within areas of the City where the Hillside Development Standards and Guidelines section of Title 19 is applicable. Therefore, staff recommends approval of this amendment.

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FINDINGS

The proposed text amendment will accomplish the following:

- Modify language throughout the Hillside Development Standards and Guidelines section (Title 19.06.170) of the Zoning Code to eliminate references to dwelling and dwelling units and refer instead to general development.

The following table summarizes all proposed changes:

Code Requirements	Existing Regulations	Proposed Regulations
Title 19.06.170 Hillside Development Standards and Guidelines	• Nine references to dwelling or dwelling units	• References changed to development or primary building as appropriate • Slight language changes as a result of reference changes

NOTICES MAILED

NEWSPAPER ONLY

APPROVALS

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PROTESTS

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