



PLANNING COMMISSION AGENDA REPORT

MEETING DATE: SEPTEMBER 28, 2026 ITEM NUMBER: PH-1

SUBJECT: **CITY OF COSTA MESA NEIGHBORHOODS WHERE WE ALL BELONG PROPOSED ZONING CODE AMENDMENT, ZONING MAP UPDATE, AND ESTABLISHMENT OF CITYWIDE MULTIFAMILY RESIDENTIAL AND MIXED-USE OBJECTIVE DESIGN STANDARDS, AND 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); AND 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); CERTIFY FINAL PROGRAM ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT, ADOPT FINDINGS OF FACT, STATEMENT OF OVERRIDING CONSIDERATIONS AND MITIGATION MONITORING AND REPORTING PROGRAM PURSUANT TO CEQA (CONTINUED PUBLIC HEARING)**

FROM: **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT/
ADVANCED PLANNING AND HOUSING DIVISION**

PRESENTATION BY: **MICHELLE HALLIGAN, SENIOR PLANNER, ANNA MCGILL,
ADVANCED PLANNING MANAGER AND CATHY TANG-
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**FOR FURTHER
INFORMATION
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RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Planning Commission:

1. Adopt a resolution recommending that the City Council take the following actions, including:
 - a. CEQA: Certify the Program Environmental Impact Report and Mitigation

Monitoring and Reporting Program for the Neighborhoods Where We All Belong Zoning Updates and Housing Element Implementation.

- b. General Plan Amendment: Amend the General Plan (Land Use, Circulation, Community Design, Noise, and Open Space and Recreation elements); and
- c. Zoning Code Amendments: Amend the Zoning Code, update the Zoning Map, and establish the Citywide Multifamily Residential and Mixed-Use Objective Design Standards, and repeal the urban plans (SoBECA Urban Plan, 19 West Urban Plan, Mesa West Bluffs Urban Plan, and Mesa West Residential Ownership Urban Plan); and
- d. Amend the Newport Boulevard Specific Plan; and
- e. Amend the North Costa Mesa Specific Plan; and
- f. Amend the One Metro West Specific Plan.

BACKGROUND

At their September 14, 2026 meeting, the Planning Commission received staff's presentation, heard public comments, and closed the public hearing. Commissioner Martinez made a motion to adopt the staff recommendation with modifications, seconded by Chair Harlan. Subsequently, Commissioner Dickson made a substitute motion, which was seconded by Vice Chair Zich, to continue the item to the regularly scheduled September 28, 2026, Planning Commission meeting, and allow additional time for the Planning Commissioners and public to review and consider the proposed modifications associated with the first motion. The substitute motion passed by a 4-3 vote.

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 of Costa Mesa is actively implementing programs identified in the Sixth Cycle (2021-2029) Housing Element, amended September 1, 2026, 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 implements Housing Element programs and complies with State law. NWWAB intends to create additional opportunities for housing and mixed-use development by applying a mixed-use overlay to commercial and industrially zoned properties within the boundaries of Measure K. The proposed amendments to the Zoning Code, Zoning Map, three specific plans, and five General Plan elements, as well as building the development

capacity of the urban plans into the Zoning Code, and establishing Citywide Multifamily Residential and Mixed-Use Objective Design Standards (ODS), reflect the City's commitment to expanding housing opportunities to meet the needs of current and future residents. To keep the community informed of progress, the City hosts a project webpage: <http://www.costamesaneighborhoods.com>

DESCRIPTION

A detailed description of the proposed amendments September 14, 2026 Planning Commission Agenda Report:

<https://costamesa.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=8207183&GUID=2391E6EB-D442-48B4-9B65-8FB80089D0F1>

ANALYSIS

An analysis of the proposed amendments is detailed in the September 14, 2026 Planning Commission Agenda Report:

<https://costamesa.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=8207183&GUID=2391E6EB-D442-48B4-9B65-8FB80089D0F1>

At the September 14, 2026, Planning Commission meeting Commissioner Martinez provided potential revisions as part of his initial motion. Additionally, prior to the meeting, the Sakioka Company, Inc. provided a public comment letter that included proposed revisions, many of which were noted by Commissioner Martinez. Attachment 2 includes comments/proposed revisions from Commissioner Martinez and the Sakioka Company, Inc. While the motion that included the revisions in Attachment 2 received a second, it was not voted on due to a substitute motion to continue the item to September 28, 2026. The intent of substitute motion was to allow additional time for the Planning Commission and the public to review and consider the proposed revisions in Attachment 2. To further assist the Planning Commission, the table provided in Attachment 2 includes additional analysis and considerations, and in some cases staff recommendations, for each proposed revision. If approved, staff would make changes as directed by the Planning Commission prior to the anticipated October 20, 2026, City Council meeting.

Some of the overarching themes and key comments from Attachment 2 are highlighted and summarized below.

Prevailing Standard

Several comments (Attachment 2, comment nos. 13, 16, 17, 18, and 28) suggested that in the event of a future unknown conflict between the Zoning Code and ODS arises, the ODS should prevail instead of the City's proposed "more restrictive regulation shall prevail." In preparing this amendment to the MUOD and Zoning

Code, and creating the ODS, City staff and the NWWAB consultant reviewed the documents for potential conflicts and internal consistency. The ODS supplements the Zoning Code by providing design standards specific to three-or-more story mixed-use and multifamily projects. The ODS was crafted and reviewed with the MUOD and other Zoning Code amendments in mind, and staff has not identified any conflicts between the documents.

The proposed inclusion of “more restrictive regulation shall prevail” was an effort to safeguard or “future proof” against an unforeseen conflict that could arise in the future. However, after further consideration and review that revealed no conflicts, staff recommends removing the statement, “In the event of a conflict between these Standards and the Municipal Code, the more restrictive regulation shall prevail” from the sections of the ODS titled “Relationship to Other City Plans, Policies, and Codes” and “Applicability of Other Related Standards.” Any future revision to the ODS or Zoning Code would need to conduct an internal consistency review and propose consistency revisions accordingly.

Because the ODS supplements the standards provided in the Zoning Code by articulating design standards, the ODS does not provide exhaustive development standards. Where development standards already exist in the Zoning Code, the ODS refers back to the applicable section. An example of this is in “Site Design Objective Design Standards” section of the ODS that establishes design standards and also refers to the following sections of CMMC Title 13:

- Article 9 (General Site Improvement Standards) of Chapter V (Development Standards), specifically:
 - Section 13-73 (Trash enclosures).
 - Section 13-74 (Elevation and screening requirements).
 - Section 13-75 (Fences and walls).
- Chapter VI (Off-Street Parking Standards), specifically:
 - Article 3 (Development Standards)
- Chapter VII (Landscaping Standards)

As such, staff does not recommend the proposed revision to the MUOD and other Zoning Code sections stating that the ODS would prevail in the event of a future conflict. In the future, if any specific conflict between the Zoning Code and ODS is identified, staff can propose amendments to either or both documents, through periodically proposed revisions to the Zoning Code, referred to colloquially as “code cleanups.” Additionally or alternatively, a Zoning Administrator determination is another potential approach (even as a temporary approach) to resolving an unforeseen conflict.

Open Space

Attachment 2 (comment no. 11) also includes requested revisions to how "lot area" is defined in the MUOD when calculating open space on lots greater than four acres in size. The proposed revision to MUOD Table 13-83.11.7, would add a footnote to the Open Space Standards, that reads: "For lots greater than four acres, a lot shall be measured excluding streets and rights-of-way."

The CMMC currently defines "lot area" as "The total land area of a project after all required dedications or reservations for public improvements, including, but not limited to, streets, parks, schools, and flood control channels. This phrase does not apply in planned development zones where the phrase "site area," as defined in Chapter V, Development Standards, is used." As currently defined, when calculating open space, the lot area would not include land for dedicated public streets, public rights-of-way, or public easements. Lot area, as currently defined in the CMMC, would include private streets.

Staff does not recommend this revision for the following reasons:

1. As proposed, the revised standard would apply to sites greater than 4 acres, which will presumably be large projects that present the most significant opportunities for providing critical open space. For reference, 67 parcels out of 1,058 total MUOD parcels are 4 acres or greater in size, but they account for 45 percent of the MUOD's total land area.
2. The City Council continues to acknowledge open space deficiencies citywide and emphasize the importance of creating new opportunities for open space, particularly in large projects. In fact, the City Council increased the required open space in the Fairview Developmental Center Specific Plan from 14 acres to 25 acres at their September 15, 2026, meeting.
3. By changing how "lot area" is defined to refer to generic streets and not specific public dedications, the space for private streets would not count toward the lot area. It can be argued that the removal of all streets (both public and private) from the lot area calculation could incentivize an applicant to develop more private streets as a means of providing less open space. The City Council and community members, through the NWWAB community visioning process, have expressed an interest in opportunities to create more open space. The proposed change to the standard would be in conflict with this effort.

Facade Design

An overhaul to building facade design standards in the ODS (Attachment 2, comment no. 29) was recommended as a revision. The proposed revision would replace the facade length and facade modulation design standards with the following text:

Facade Length 1. Maximum Facade Length. Street-facing facades shall be visually divided into sections such that no individual section exceeds 75 feet. Each section shall be separated by at least one of the following features:

- A. A facade break, either as a projection or recess in the entirety of the facade, shall measure at least five two feet deep perpendicular to the facade and at least 10 feet long parallel to the facade, as illustrated in Figure 2.
- B. Variation in apparent building height, of at least five feet between sections, such as with parapets or roofline variation, or at a ground floor entry as shown in Figure 8.
- C. A change in facade materials or color between sections. A material or color change used to satisfy subdivision (d) Facade Hierarchy shall not qualify to meet this requirement.
- D. A vertical architectural element, such as a pilaster, engaged column, column, or vertical fin, projecting a minimum of 6 inches from the facade, extending from the ground or second floor and above.
- E. Variations in fenestration size and pattern.

While staff acknowledge the potential concerns with the sections and the intent behind the proposed revisions, staff does not recommend these revisions, as written, for the following reasons:

- 1. The intent behind the maximum 150 ft. Facade Length standard was less about acknowledging diversity of facade designs and styles, and focused on minimizing the perceived length of what would otherwise be long and potentially monotonous buildings. A physical break in the facade helps to provide physical and visual relief whereby a building entry, an open space, or other special moment could occur. An additional intent statement could be added to this effect. Staff could consider moving this standard to Section 1. Building Mass and Form.
- 2. Proposed maximum 75 ft. facade length. The proposed reduction from a 150 to 75 ft. maximum building facade may be too limiting for a typical multifamily or mixed-use building given that dwelling units widths typically range between 25 ft. (studio/1-bedroom) and 35 ft. (2+ bedroom). The original 150 ft. max. standard was meant to accommodate a variety of dwelling units while also providing enough length for flexibility. Note that many cities in the region with ODS regulate facade length in segments greater than 100 ft., where 150 ft. is typical (Anaheim: 160 ft., Orange: 100 ft., Irvine: 60-100 ft., Newport Beach: 150-200 ft., Santa Monica: 150 ft., Pasadena: 150 ft., Glendale: 120 ft.). As such, staff recommends maintaining the proposed 150 ft. standard.
- 3. Proposed Min. 2 ft. by 10 ft. facade break. While staff recognizes concerns about a 5 ft. x 10 ft. break potentially reducing the buildable floor area for residential uses, the impact is minimal because the break is required less often (every 150 ft. versus every 75 ft.). The break is meant to provide physical and visual relief whereby a building entry, an open space, or other special moment could occur. While 2 ft. may be too shallow to achieve such a result, 4 ft. could be a

reasonable minimum. Likewise, a reduction from 10 to 8 ft. could be a reasonable minimum.

4. Variation in apparent building height and change in facade material/color between façade segments. Staff considered similar standards in earlier versions of the ODS, but did not incorporate such requirements for several reasons. Changes to parapet height do not reduce the scale for the pedestrian experience and might result in a purely decorative aesthetic that presents unnecessarily higher costs without adding much value to placemaking. Also, a prescriptive variation in building height would be counter to Costa Mesa's built aesthetic, which already has a variety of architectural styles throughout the City that would be inconsistent with imposed design for future buildings. Note that the absence of such requirements does not preclude projects from varying building height.
5. A pilaster, column, or fin extending from the ground or second floor through multiple stories creates a strong vertical line. On a three or more-story building, that could make the building appear taller and more imposing, rather than helping break down its perceived mass.
6. Variations in fenestration size and pattern. This may present cost and constructability challenges (e.g., varying window sizes or varying stud spacing) and may result in a purely decorative aesthetic without adding much value to placemaking.

Given the above analysis, if the Planning Commission reaches consensus that this section should be revised, the following specific recommendations could be considered:

Incorporate the intent of the Commissioner's proposed edits as noted below, by keeping modified versions of b) Façade Length and c) Facade Modulation/Articulation but deleting d) Façade Hierarchy.

b) Façade Length

1. Maximum Façade Length. Public street-facing facades shall provide at least one facade break such that no facade length, measured as the horizontal distance across a continuous building facade, exceeds 150 feet. A facade break, either as a projection or recess in the entirety of the facade, shall measure at least 4 feet deep perpendicular to the facade and at least 8 feet long parallel to the facade, as illustrated in Figure 2. Facade breaks are not required for townhouses or above-grade parking structures.

c) Facade Modulation or Articulation

1. Minimum Facade Modulation or Articulation. Public street-facing facades shall incorporate one of the following design features. Facades separated by a required facade break in accordance with Subsection b) shall be considered

separate facades. Facade modulation and articulation are not required for townhouses.

- a. Facade Modulation. Use of recesses or projections of the façade for at least a minimum of 25 percent of the facade area, measured by a minimum of 2 feet in depth and a maximum of 10 feet in depth.
- b. Facade Articulation. Use of one of the following design features for every maximum 75 feet length of facade.
- c. A change in apparent building height of at least 4 feet, such as variations in parapet height or roofline.
- d. A change in facade materials or colors.
- e. Use of pilasters or engaged columns projecting a minimum of 6 inches from the facade.

Ultimately, staff's recommendation is to keep the facade length, modulation, and hierarchy standards as provided in the September 14, 2026, Planning Commission Exhibit A to Attachment 1, Resolution.

Entitlement Process

At their meeting on September 14, 2026, the Planning Commission raised questions regarding how property owners would entitle development projects on properties that are within a specific plan as well as the MUOD (Attachment 2, comment no. 9). Where a property is subject to multiple overlay districts, such as the MUOD and a Specific Plan, in addition to the underlying base zoning district, a property owner may typically elect to develop the property pursuant to the standards and procedures of one applicable overlay. Housing Element sites, however, remain subject to the minimum residential development requirements applicable to those sites. Where both a Specific Plan and the MUOD apply to a Housing Element site, new development must include residential uses on at least 50 percent of the site at a minimum density of 20 dwelling units per acre (or be removed from the Housing Element). Regardless of whether an applicant utilizes the MUOD or Specific Plan development standards, a Housing Element site must be allowed to build to the density and capacity identified in the Housing Element Sites Inventory. Properties within Planned Development zones have additional flexibility. A property owner may apply for approval of a master plan to establish development standards tailored to the unique characteristics of a property and proposed development.

Staff will continue to work with property owners of Specific Plan and Housing Element sites to identify the entitlement process and development standards most appropriate for individual projects. Depending on the property and proposed development, available tools may include concessions or waivers pursuant to State Density Bonus Law (SDBL), a master plan within a Planned Development zone to establish

customized development standards, or major modifications, minor modifications, variances, or other applicable procedures pursuant to Chapter III of the Zoning Code. These mechanisms provide flexibility to address site-specific conditions.

Other Proposed Non-Substantive Draft Revisions

While reviewing Planning Commissioner comments, the City Attorney identified other non-substantive text edits to the Density Bonuses and Other Incentives chapter of the Zoning Code that would be made between the Planning Commission meeting and City Council. The City Attorney's non-substantive text edits related to SDBL, along with edits mentioned at the September 14, 2026, Planning Commission meeting, are provided in underline and strikethrough format in Attachment 3 and will be included in the revisions for City Council consideration on October 20, 2026.

Additionally, staff recommends adding a footnote to Zoning Code Figure 13.83.11.7, MUOD Sub-Area Map, to remind the viewer that on some Housing Element Sites, higher densities can be achieved than shown in the MUOD. Staff proposes "Note: The currently adopted Housing Element Sites Inventory facilitates higher densities on select Housing Element Sites than shown in the MUOD."

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION

An analysis of the environmental analysis and determination is detailed in the September 14, 2026 Planning Commission Agenda Report:
<https://costamesa.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=8207183&GUID=2391E6EB-D442-48B4-9B65-8FB80089D0F1>

Staff have analyzed the proposed potential revisions in Attachment 2 and have determined that they do not trigger any additional environmental analysis under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). A lead agency is required to recirculate an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) when significant new information is added to the EIR after public notice is given. New information added to an EIR is not "significant" unless the EIR is changed in a way that deprives the public of a meaningful opportunity to comment upon a substantial adverse environmental effect of the project or a feasible way to mitigate or avoid such an effect (including a feasible project alternative) that the project's proponents have declined to implement. As the considered revisions on non-substantive in nature, do not create new information under CEQA or change any of the previously identified significant thresholds, recirculation is not warranted.

PUBLIC NOTICE

The following public notice was conducted for this Planning Commission item:

- Newspaper publication advertised in the Daily Pilot on August 7, 2026 (advanced notice of the September 14, 2026 Planning Commission meeting for zoning and use changes pursuant to AB 2904).
- A public notice was posted at City Hall on August 7, 2026.
- A public notice was posted at City Hall on August 13, 2026.
- A reminder about the September 14, 2026, Planning Commission hearing was emailed to the NWWAB interest list on September 10, 2026.
- A notice of continuation for the meeting was posted online and at City Hall on September 16, 2026.
- A reminder about the continued hearing was emailed to the NWWAB interest list on September 23, 2026.
- Information about the Planning Commission hearing was shared in the City Hall Snapshot on September 11, 2026.
- Information about the continued hearing was shared in the City Hall Snapshot on September 25, 2026.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

As described in the September 14, 2026, Planning Commission Agenda Report, the amendments proposed in the attached resolution and those adopted on April 7, 2026 would collectively implement 23 Housing Element programs. The NWWAB effort is a comprehensive, critical step forward in implementing the City's Housing Element, Measure K, and the City Council's goal to diversify, stabilize, and increase housing opportunities to reflect community needs. By expanding opportunities for housing and mixed-use development, NWWAB would help accommodate existing and future housing demand, provide greater housing choice, and address the needs of Costa Mesa residents across a range of household sizes, income levels, and stages of life. Applying the MUOD to targeted commercial and industrial properties would facilitate the reuse of underutilized sites, encourage more compact and walkable development patterns, and create opportunities for housing near businesses, services, and employment. This approach would expand housing and mixed-use development opportunities while avoiding broad increases in allowable residential density without rezoning residential neighborhoods.

Overall, the proposed amendments balance the City's responsibility to plan for substantial housing growth with community priorities related to neighborhood compatibility, design quality, and walkability. Adoption of the proposed amendments would establish the regulatory framework necessary to accommodate future housing demand, expand housing choice, support affordable housing opportunities, and facilitate thoughtful reinvestment in Costa Mesa over the coming decades.

As proposed in the attached resolution, following this hearing, staff will consider Planning Commission feedback, evaluate public comments received, and prepare only minor revisions prior to the City Council hearing. Given the motion to continue to item

to the September 28, 2026 meeting, there is no longer sufficient time to notice for the October 6, 2026 City Council meeting. In light of this, the updated tentative schedule is as follows:

Milestone

City Council Public Hearing (NWWAB introduction)
City Council Public Hearing (ALUC overrule)
City Council Public Hearing (NWWAB adoption)

Tentative Date

October 20, 2026
October 20, 2026
November 17, 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.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Resolution
 - Exhibit A Final PEIR Documents
 - Exhibit B Zoning Code Amendments
 - Exhibit C Zoning Map
 - Exhibit D General Plan Amendments
 - Exhibit E Specific Plan Amendments
 - Exhibit F Citywide Residential Multifamily and Mixed-Use Objective Design Standards
2. Draft Responses to September 14, 2026 Comments
3. Proposed revised Title 13, Chapter IX, Article 4, Density Bonuses and Other Incentives (State Density Bonus Law Ordinance)