



December 12, 2021

City of Alameda Planning Board
2263 Santa Clara Avenue, Room 190
Alameda, CA 94501

Subject: Draft Objective Design Review Standards for One and Two Family Residences pursuant to SB 9- -Item 7-B on Planning Board's 12-13-21 Agenda

Dear Planning Board members:

The Alameda Architectural Preservation Society (AAPS) would like to thank staff for preparing the subject standards for one and two family dwelling projects that could be developed pursuant to SB 9. In general, the draft standards are very good, especially the stated intent that the overall approach is to require any additions or alterations to match the existing building as is currently set forth in the City's Guide to Residential Design.

However, **both the draft standards and the draft Planning Board resolution adopting the standards need to make clear that the standards are applicable only to SB 9 projects, as stated in the public hearing notice and the staff report title.** This clarity is needed because the draft standards, staff report text and draft resolution contain language that suggests that the draft standards could be applied to other projects besides SB 9 projects, including any "housing development projects" as defined by the state's Housing Accountability Act.

For example, since the proposed standards reference government code Section 65589.5's definition of "housing development projects" (including projects consisting of "residential units only"), in determining which projects are subject to the standards. So does that mean that new construction and perhaps additions and alterations of ANY one or two unit dwelling must be reviewed according to the objective standards and that the Citywide Design Review Manual, including the Guide to Residential Design, is no longer applicable, unless the applicant opts for a design that does not conform with the objective standards and therefore chooses to go through discretionary design review? This ambiguity is exacerbated by the standard's statements that they apply only to new construction and additions, suggesting that alterations are still subject to discretionary design review unless currently exempt.

Such expansive applicability suggests that **the draft standards could replace the entire Citywide Design Review Manual including the Guide to Residential Design as the criteria for approving any 1-2 unit residential projects, including alterations.**

If such a broader applicability is actually being proposed, the standards should:

- a. Be brought back to the Planning Board for consideration at a future date for purposes of this broader applicability; and
- b. For purposes of the Planning Board's December 13, 2021 consideration, be revised to clearly state in both the standards and Planning Board resolution that the standards are applicable only to SB 9 projects.

This clarification is especially consequential, since State law has provisions (including in SB 9) requiring that projects processed using objective design review standards (rather than the City's discretionary criteria set forth in the Citywide Design Review Manual) also typically require that the project be processed in ministerially without any public review or appeal. As drafted, the standards and Planning Board resolution could therefore be interpreted to mean that **all applications involving one and two units would not require design review and not be subject to appeal**. This would be a radical overhaul of the City's design review program and should be clearly presented in the public notice, the staff report title and staff report discussion.

Here are our specific comments concerning the standards themselves:

1. The Guide to Residential Design does not apply the golden mean for lifting Victorian and Colonial Revival buildings to create a new first floor, but the proposed standards do. Should the standards not follow this approach? Using the golden mean for Victorian and Colonial Revival buildings can create awkward proportions. If the golden mean is not used, there should also not be front elevation stairs to the second floor. Any existing front elevation porches should be relocated to the new first floor as per the Guide to Residential Design.
2. If the building's original architecture has been adversely altered (including windows, surface materials and/or detailing incompatible with the building's original architectural style), language should be added to the standards requiring the new work to conform with the original architectural treatments. The language in Section 6E of the Multi-Family Objective Design Review Standards adopted February, 2021 might be useful for this purpose.
3. Require new windows to be consistent with the City's Replacement Window Styles Guide (attached), including the diagrams for wood and metal windows, with the understanding that alternative materials are permitted as long as the windows conform with the diagram dimensions and other provisions.
4. Add the following provision:

“New construction on the front portion of the lot shall conform with the context section of the Multi-Family Objective Design Review Standards, even if this results in a design that does not conform with any existing building on the lot”.
5. Consider including the standards within the AMC itself, like Pleasanton (attached). Also consider adding some of the Pleasanton provisions, especially standards K, L, O.5, O.7, and R.2.

See attached marked up pages for specific and relatively minor additional comments.

If the standards are intended to apply beyond SB 9 projects, they should also be reviewed by the Historical Advisory Board, since they could impact Historical Monuments And Historic Building Study List properties. This review could be part of the follow up refinement of the standards suggested in the staff report.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. Please contact me at (510) 523-0411 or cbuckleyAICP@att.net if you would like to discuss these comments.

Sincerely,

Christopher Buckley, Chair
Preservation Action Committee
Alameda Architectural Preservation Society

Attachments:

1. Marked-up pages from the draft standards
2. Alameda Window Replacement Guide
3. Pleasanton Draft SB 9 Ordinance

cc: Mayor and City Councilmembers (by electronic transmission)
Historical Advisory Board (by electronic transmission)
Andrew Thomas and Allen Tai, Planning, Building and Transportation Department (by electronic transmission)
AAPS Board and Preservation Action Committee (by electronic transmission)