

ZONING / PERMIT PROCESSING
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PLANNING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

809 Center Street • Room 206 • Santa Cruz, CA 95060 • www.cityofsantacruz.com
Lee Butler, Director

Zoning and Density Guide

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The city is separated into zone districts and General Plan designations.

Visit <https://vw8.cityofsantacruz.com/zone/> to find the zone district and general plan designation of your parcel.

The term 'density' means the number of dwelling units that can be constructed on a site. Density ranges are established by the Zoning Ordinance and the General Plan and are typically expressed as dwelling units per acre but can also be established as a floor area ratio (FAR). FAR is the floor area permitted on a site divided by the total area of the site. Density on a site can be impacted by site characteristics.

The Housing Accountability Act is a part of Planning and Zoning state law. Among other things, it requires a local agency to accommodate the density allowed on the site by the General Plan if the zoning and general plan densities are inconsistent. Therefore, if the general plan provides a maximum density that is greater than what can be achieved through the zoning ordinance, the General Plan density supersedes.

In some cases, where one-bedroom units and/or studios are proposed, the zoning ordinance density calculations may result in a greater number of units than can be achieved through the General Plan density range, which is permissible under General Plan policy LU3.8. However, the calculation is slightly different in that the total density is based on Net Lot Area which deducts areas of 30% or greater slope, areas within a riparian corridor, and areas within an F-P zone district from the total lot size.

Minimum and Maximum Densities

Chapter 4 of the City of Santa Cruz General Plan states: *"Each residential designation establishes a maximum and a minimum development density. A site's density must be at or above the minimum unless constraints associated with the natural environment require a lower density. A site's density must not exceed the maximum requirement, except as otherwise permitted or encouraged by policies and actions in this Plan."*

Similarly, General Plan Policy LU3.7.1 directs city staff to *“allow and encourage development that meets the high end of the General Plan Land Use designation density unless constraints associated with site characteristics and zoning development standards require a lower density.”*

Therefore, the density of a site may not be less than the minimum end of the density range in the General Plan. If the low end of the density range is two or more units, then multiple units must be constructed in order to achieve the minimum density unless the parcel is zoned R-S or R-1, where single-family dwellings are principally permitted (i.e., allowed by right).

Additionally, development should be designed so as to achieve the maximum density permitted under the General Plan and in order to attain the highest and best use of the property. If an applicant does not wish to maximize density as part of their proposed project, it is recommended that the site plan be designed to facilitate a future project that would do so.

Example 1:

- A parcel of land is 10,000 square feet, or 0.22 gross acres.
- The parcel is zoned R-L and designated LM in the General Plan.
- The owner would like to construct one single-family dwelling on the lot.
- The LM General Plan designation includes a density range of 10.1 - 20 dwelling units/acre (du/ac).
- $0.22 \text{ acres} \times 10.1 \text{ du/ac} = 2.2 = 3 \text{ dwelling units minimum}$

In order to comply with the General Plan, a minimum of three dwelling units must be constructed on the site. A standalone single family dwelling would not be permitted.

Example 2:

- A parcel of land is 20,000 square feet, or 0.45 gross acres.
- The parcel is zoned R-M and designated M in the General Plan.
- The owner would like to construct a building with 9 apartments and there are no site constraints on the lot.
- The M General Plan designation includes a density range of 20.1 - 30 dwelling units/acre (du/ac).
- $0.45 \text{ acres} \times 20.1 \text{ du/ac} = 9 \text{ dwelling units minimum}$
- $0.45 \text{ acres} \times 30 \text{ du/ac} = 13 \text{ dwelling units maximum}$

Consistent with General Plan policy LU3.7.1, applicants are encouraged to include a greater number of units to provide development that meets the high-end of the density range or to site development so as not to preclude or make it costly/difficult to achieve maximum density as part of a future development.

FAQ's

The minimum density of my parcel is 3 dwelling units. Can I construct one single-family dwelling now and reserve space to construct two additional units in the future?

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No, all units required to achieve minimum density must be constructed at the same time.

The minimum density of my parcel is 2 dwelling units and the maximum density is 4 dwelling units. There are no site constraints that would preclude the construction of 4 dwelling units; however, I only want to construct 3 presently. Is 3 units considered as being at the high end of the General Plan density range?

While development at the highest allowable density is advised for highest and best use of the property, the General Plan policy is not an objective standard and does not preclude development at a lower density. If you propose a lower density, it is recommended that the development is sited in a way that allows for a future property owner to develop the remaining units.

Can an Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU) and/or Junior Accessory Dwelling Unit (JADU) be constructed and count as one of the required dwelling units?

No, ADU's and JADU's do not count towards density per state law. ADU's and JADU's may be constructed in addition to the maximum number of dwelling units.

The density of my property resulted in a fractional number. Do I round up?

The density proposed needs to be within the density range provided in the General Plan. If the low end of the density range results in a fractional number, then rounding up is necessary to ensure that the density is within the range. Conversely, if the density at the high end results in a fraction, it would have to be rounded down to the whole number to be within the range. The only exception is when a multi-family residential density bonus project is proposed and, in that case, the base density of the site and density bonus calculation will round up at any number greater than 0.01, as per density bonus state law.

When calculating the size of my parcel, do I deduct any areas such as rights-of-way, easements, or slopes?

The General Plan bases density on the number of permanent residential dwelling units per gross acre of land; therefore, no areas are deducted from the parcel size when calculating density per the General Plan. In some cases, the zoning ordinance density calculations may result in a greater number of units than can be achieved through the General Plan. In these cases, the Zoning Ordinance density can be used, however that number is based on Net Lot Area which deducts

areas of 30% or greater slope, areas within a riparian corridor, and areas within an F-P zone district.