



# Single Family Design Review (Summary of Proposed Updates)

## Overview & Goals of Proposed SFDR Updates

The Single-family Design Review (SFDR) regulations for new home construction and additions/remodels are proposed to be updated to better meet the needs of the Belmont community. Specific goals of this update are to:

- ▶ Establish a fair, objective, and predictable SFDR process
- ▶ Expand oversight of projects and ensure adequate design and technical review
- ▶ Facilitate improvements to aging housing stock to meet the needs of growing families

To achieve these goals, the updates must: a) Result in regulations that are impact-based; b) Include objective criteria, whenever feasible; and c) Include a regulatory review process that is commensurate with the scope (time/cost/extent) of the project.

## Summary of Proposed Updates

Amendments are proposed to the Purpose Statement, Thresholds for Review, Application Requirements, Review Procedures and Standards (Findings), as follows:

### Purpose

The purpose statement is the starting point from where the rest of the ordinance is derived; the text of the ordinance is written and organized to achieve the purpose statement (intent of the ordinance).

A new purpose statement has been created, as follows:

*“The regulations in Section 13A establish standards that allow residential property owners to develop their property while ensuring that the development is in harmony with and preserves the City’s tranquil, safe and desirable neighborhoods. These regulations, as augmented by the Residential Design Guidelines and together with Section 4 are intended to provide a predictable and consistent framework for review of residential projects.”*

The first part of the statement indicates the intent of Section 13A is to establish standards that allow residential property owners to develop their property, consistent with the City’s Vision Statement. The second part of the statement informs the reader that Section 13A is intended to be used in conjunction with the Residential Design Guidelines and the objective development



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standards in Section 4 (*Residential*). This would include existing standards for floor area, setbacks and height, and new objective standards for bulk.

Thus, the new purpose statement explains to the reader why the regulation was created, and how it will be used to review projects. This amendment provides direction to staff, the applicant, and the review authority for evaluation of SFDR projects, and creates greater certainty in the development review process for applicants and home owners.

## Application

Minor modifications and clarifications to SFDR submittal requirements will occur in this section. In addition, a pre-application meeting with planning staff will be required for Tier 2 and Tier 3 projects to ensure a more efficient and timely review process (i.e., to reduce the number of resubmittals and achieve a complete application).

## Review Procedures

The regulations currently require SFDR by the Planning Commission for additions of 400 sq. ft., and for development projects of any size that endanger a protected tree. The 400 gross sq. ft. threshold is not justified by any particular impact and an SFDR is also required for ground floor additions or underfloor area within the existing footprint of a dwelling. No tiered system is currently available for review of additions with the potential for greater or lesser impacts (i.e., upper vs lower floor, etc.). Tree removals can trigger SFDR review before the Planning Commission for very small additions that would normally be processed with a building permit or through an administrative review.

The proposed updates would establish a tiered system of thresholds and review authority for SFDR. There would be three tiers (1-3); a project's complexity, and potential impacts would increase with each Tier: Tier 1 represents projects of the least complexity and with least potential for project impacts (small ground floor additions with minimal site disturbance); Tier 2 projects would typically have a moderate level of complexity and potential for impacts (large ground floor additions and small upper floor additions); Tier 3 projects would have the greatest complexity and the most potential for project impacts (new homes and large second floor additions). The specifics of the Tier system are described in the SFDR - Tier Review Table.



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SFDR - Tier Review Table

Tier	Project Characteristics	Reviewing Authority
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ground floor additions up to 399 sf. cgfa<sup>1</sup>, with top of the addition plate height 12 feet or less, and top of the new roof 18 feet or less, as measured from finished grade.</li> <li>• Enclosure of carports &amp; additions of any size that do not increase the foot print of the home (i.e., underfloor and attic areas that are made habitable)</li> </ul>	Community Development Department (CDD)
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ground floor additions not consistent with Tier I</li> <li>• Ground floor additions from 400 sf to 899 sf. cgfa</li> <li>• Upper floor additions up to 399 sf. cgfa</li> <li>• Combination of upper and lower floor addition up to 899 sf. cgfa.</li> </ul>	Zoning Administrator (ZA)
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New Single Family Homes</li> <li>• Grading more than 500 cubic yards</li> <li>• Disturbance of 6,000 sf. or more of site area</li> <li>• Upper floor additions of 400 sf. cgfa. or more</li> <li>• Combination of upper and lower floor additions of 900 sf. cgfa. or more</li> <li>• SFDR with other PC level entitlements</li> </ul>	Planning Commission (PC)
<p><sup>1</sup> cumulative gross floor area (cgfa) is a proposed definition that would prevent applicants from avoiding a higher tier of review (the piece-meal of applications). For example, two successive 399 sq. ft., lower floor additions in a two year period would require ZA review.</p>		

The level of review associated with each tier (Tier 1- Community Development Department, Tier 2 - Zoning Administrator, or Tier 3 - Planning Commission) would also be commensurate with the project complexity and potential impacts. In addition, the scope (time/cost/extent) of the review process would be commensurate with the scope of the project.

As part of the update to the regulations, objective criteria for bulk would be added for review of upper story additions. This objective criteria would be contained in the Residential Design Criteria (RDC). The RDC is proposed as a companion document to the Zoning Ordinance; it will provide additional, objective, measurable, or quantifiable review criteria required for new



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construction. The RDC will include relevant criteria for the regulation of building bulk (such as second story step backs, prescribed articulation, and daylight planes), which will be specified based upon the scope of the project, site conditions, and the architectural style of the home. A draft of the RDC has been prepared and posted on the city’s website.

## Review Procedure

The outreach, noticing, and hearing requirements for residential design review applications are set forth in the table below.

Residential Design Review Procedure

Tier	Neighborhood Outreach	Project Notice	Public Hearing
1	Not required	Not required	Not required
2	All projects - required	Notice to Bordering Property Owners	If requested
3	All projects - required	Public hearing notice per Section 11.4.1	Required

In addition, the following provisions have been included within the ordinance to streamline the review process:

### Neighborhood Outreach

Neighborhood outreach is an effective way to gather feedback and address neighbor’s concerns, before the formal submittal of an application. Neighborhood outreach is currently recommended for all SFDR projects; however this recommendation is not codified, and the recommended outreach area (300-foot radius of the subject property) is well beyond the potential impact area for single family residential construction.

The amendments to the ordinance would require neighborhood outreach for additions over 399 sq. ft. This outreach would be limited to properties that are more likely to be impacted by the project (bordering properties). Definitions for Neighborhood Outreach and Bordering Properties will be included in the definitions sections of the regulations.

### Mandatory Pre-application Meeting

A pre-application meeting with planning staff would be required for Tier 2 and Tier 3 projects to ensure a more efficient and timely review process for these types of applications.



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## Notice

Tier 1 projects can include the enclosure of existing space within the home, and very small additions. These types of projects are often not discernable beyond the confines of the project site. Thus, no public notice would be required (this is the requirement under current regulations). Tier 2 projects have the ability to impact the applicant and bordering property owners. For Tier 2 projects, a “Notice of Intent” of Zoning Administrator (ZA) action would be provided to bordering property owners. This notice would allow ten days for neighbor comment and the ability for bordering neighbors to request a public hearing. Tier 3 projects would follow existing public notice and hearing procedures.

## Appeals

The current regulations allow appeals by any person aggrieved or affected by any decision. There is no requirement that the aggrieved party live near the project site, or even within the City of Belmont.

The amendments to the ordinance would allow appeals by members of the public potentially affected by the project. As previously discussed, Tier 1 projects are often not discernable beyond the confines of the project site. As such, Tier 1 projects will be appealable only by the applicant. Consistent with notice requirements and the potential for impacts, Tier 2 projects would be appealable only by the applicant and bordering property owners. Tier 3 project appeals would remain unchanged by the updated regulations.

## Standards for Approval

The current ordinance includes both technical and design-related standards (findings) for approval of SFDR. Design-related standards include direct evaluation by the decision maker (i.e., review of the project plans in consideration of a particular standard or finding).

Technical standards are not intended for explicit review by the decision maker, as they involve review by qualified technical staff and consultants. For example, when a new home is built a geotechnical report, storm-water checklist, and a preliminary grading and drainage plan are required. The geotechnical report is peer reviewed by the city’s consulting geologist, and geotechnical approval of the detailed working drawings is required prior to grading/building permit issuance; buildings and retaining walls are plan checked by consulting structural engineers for compliance with building code, prior to building permit issuance. The decision maker is not expected to provide technical analysis, but rather ensure that the analysis occurred as part of the process.

As such, the updated regulations would include consolidation and rewording of the technical standards. In addition, the design-related standards would be modified to allow for conditional approval.



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The revised SFDR standards are proposed as follows:

- (a) The buildings and structures shown on the site plan will be:
  - (1) Designed to be compatible with any existing development on the site;
  - (2) Located and designed to minimize disruptions of existing public views, and to protect the profile of prominent ridgelines.
- (b) The overall site and building plans will achieve an acceptable balance of the following factors:
  - (1) building bulk,
  - (2) grading, including
    - (A) disturbed surface area, and
    - (B) total cubic yards, cut and fill.
  - (3) The aesthetic impacts of hardscape as viewed from a public vantage point.
- (c) All proposed accessory and support features, including driveway and parking surfaces, underfloor areas, retaining walls, utility services and other accessory structures will be integrated into the overall project design.
- (d) The proposed landscape plan will incorporate:
  - (1) Native plants appropriate to the site's environmental setting and microclimate, and
  - (2) Appropriate landscape screening of proposed accessory and support structures.
- (e) The project will be in substantial compliance with the Residential Design Guidelines and Residential Design Criteria as applicable.
- (f) City staff and consultants have provided technical review and conditions of approval have been adopted, as applicable, regarding project-related grading, drainage, storm-water runoff, vehicular and pedestrian access, site stability, structural encroachments, and construction impacts.



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As identified in the proposed SFDR standards, projects would continue to be reviewed for consistency with the City's adopted Residential Design Guidelines (RDG). In addition, new objective review criteria for upper-story additions contained in the Residential Design Criteria (RDC) would assist decision makers in evaluating bulk. Overall, the revised standards for approval (findings), together with consideration of the RDG and RDC, would ensure that adequate design and technical review occur, and would result in a more objective design review process.