

LEGISLATIVE DIGEST

[Planning Code - Four-Unit Density Exception for Residential Districts]

Ordinance amending the Planning Code to provide a density limit exception to permit up to four dwelling units per lot in RH (Residential, House) zoning districts; affirming the Planning Department’s determination under the California Environmental Quality Act; and making findings of consistency with the General Plan, and the eight priority policies of Planning Code, Section 101.1, and findings of public necessity, convenience, and welfare under Planning Code, Section 302.

Existing Law

The Planning Code sets forth different zoning districts throughout the City, where different uses are permitted, conditionally permitted, or prohibited, and where various controls (such as height, bulk, setbacks, etc.) apply. Residential, House (RH) districts are “intended to recognize, protect, conserve and enhance areas characterized by dwellings in the form of houses, usually with one, two or three units with separate entrances, and limited scale in terms of building width and height. Such areas tend to have similarity of building styles and predominantly contain large units suitable for family occupancy, considerable open space, and limited nonresidential uses.” (Section 209.1). The RH districts are composed of five separate classes of districts, depending on the number of units permitted in each:

- RH-1(D) Districts: One-Family (Detached Dwellings); RH-1 Districts: One-Family; and RH-1(S) Districts: One-Family with Minor Second Unit, which are generally characterized by single-family houses;
- RH-2 Districts: Two-Family, which generally consist of one-family and two-family houses;
- RH-3 Districts: Three-Family, in which structures with three units are common in addition to one-family and two-family houses.

Amendments to Current Law

This Ordinance would create a density limit exception to permit up to four units per lot in all RH districts, for projects that are not seeking or receiving a density bonus under Planning Code Sections 206.5 or 206.6. These four units would be permitted in addition to any Accessory Dwelling Units permitted under the Code. All building standards that are applicable to RH-3 Districts would be applicable to projects that take advantage of this density limit exception.

Background Information

The Ordinance contains ample findings setting forth the need to promote housing development in San Francisco. It states that the City faces a severe crisis of housing affordability and availability, characterized by dramatic increases in rent and home sale prices over recent years and historic underproduction of new housing units across income levels, particularly in the City's western neighborhoods and RH zoning districts. It further explains that adopting policies that promote construction of small multifamily buildings in low density areas to support "missing middle" housing opportunities was one of the recommendations of the City's COVID-19 Economic Recovery Task Force.

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