

REVISED LEGISLATIVE DIGEST
(Amended in Committee – June 29, 2026)

[Planning Code - Updating Requirements for Institutional Master Plans]

Ordinance amending the Planning Code to temporarily exempt Post-Secondary Educational Institutions located in a C-3 (Downtown Commercial) District and to permanently exempt Post-Secondary Educational Institutions in the Art & Design Educational Special Use District from the requirements for Institutional Master Plans; require Post-Secondary Educational Institutions located elsewhere to file Institutional Master Plans with a development application; require updates to such plans only when the institution will increase by 10,000 square feet or by 25% of its total square footage (whichever is less); exclude student housing from the definition of Post-Secondary Educational Institution; and remove the three-month hold on hearing Conditional Use applications after an Institutional Master Plan has been accepted; affirming the Planning Department’s determination under the California Environmental Quality Act; making findings of consistency with the General Plan and the eight priority policies of Planning Code, Section 101.1; and making findings of public necessity, convenience, and welfare pursuant to Planning Code, Section 302.

Existing Law

Section 102 of the Planning Code defines a Post-Secondary Educational Institution as an Institutional Education Use that is certified by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, including student dormitories and other housing operated by and affiliated with the institution.

Section 304.5 of the Planning Code generally requires every Hospital and Post-Secondary Educational Institution (collectively, “institutions”) to file an Institutional Master Plan (“IMP”) with the Planning Department, subject to requirements for Updates every two years. The Zoning Administrator shall determine whether an institution must submit a new IMP or an Update in the event of “significant revisions” to an IMP, such as plans to construct new facilities that were not previously discussed in the Plan, or if 10 years have passed since the last IMP was submitted and heard by the Planning Commission. Section 304.5 further provides that the Planning Commission may not hear or otherwise approve an institution’s Conditional Use application for three months after an IMP is accepted. Institutions are also required to provide the Planning Department with ten (10) print copies of its IMP and any Update.

Amendments to Current Law

The ordinance would amend the definition of Post-Secondary Educational Institution in Planning Code Section 102 to exclude student housing from the definition and to provide that if an institution is not certified by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, the Zoning

Administrator may nonetheless determine that it is a Post-Secondary Educational Institution if the institution is either (a) accredited by a body comparable to the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, or (b) diligently pursuing accreditation with the Western Association of Schools and Colleges or a comparable body and has substantially progressed in the process with accreditation reasonably likely to be granted.

The ordinance would amend the definition of School in Planning Code Section 102 to exclude student housing from the definition and to provide that if an institution is not certified by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, the Zoning Administrator may nonetheless determine that it is a School if the institution is either (a) accredited by a body comparable to the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, or (b) diligently pursuing accreditation with the Western Association of Schools and Colleges or a comparable body and has substantially progressed in the process with accreditation reasonably likely to be granted

The ordinance would amend Planning Code Section 249.67 to strike the requirement for institutional master plans in the Art & Design Educational Special Use District.

The ordinance would amend Planning Code Section 304.5 to add the following exemptions: (A) allow institutions that occupy less than 50,000 square feet, or less than 100,000 square feet in the C-3 district, to submit an Abbreviated IMP in lieu of a full IMP; (B) provide a temporary exemption for Post-Secondary Educational Institutions located in a C-3 District and a permanent exemption for Post-Secondary Educational Institutions located in the Art & Design Educational Special Use District from the requirements for IMPs, provide that those institutions submit a qualifying declaration. To qualify for this exemption, a Post-Secondary Educational Institution must declare under penalty of perjury, on a form prescribed by the Planning Department, that (i) the institution will not demolish or convert any structure in San Francisco that is used or occupied as housing as of the effective date of the ordinance, or for which the last legal use was residential, and (ii) its development will not result in the elimination of any rent-controlled housing unit. The exemption for Post-Secondary Educational Institutions located in a C-3 District shall expire by operation of law on December 31, 2032.

The ordinance would further amend Planning Code Section 304.5 to (1) require Post-Secondary Educational Institutions to file an or an Update as appropriate, when applying for an entitlement that requires Department or Planning Commission approval, (2) require Post-Secondary Educational Institutions to file Updates to accepted IMPs only when proposing to increase the institution's presence in a Residential District by 10,000 square feet or by 25% of the institution's total square footage (whichever is less), (3) remove the three-month hold on hearing Conditional Use applications after an IMP has been accepted, and (4) remove all requirements for print copies of plans and updates.

Background Information

The ordinance is intended to remove undue barriers to the development of Post-Secondary Educational Institutions in San Francisco, while providing public notice and information about their development in a manner that allows for meaningful public engagement.

On June 2, 2026, Supervisor Dorsey introduced a substitute ordinance containing amendments adopted by the Planning Commission and further amendments by the Supervisor to narrow the scope of an exemption from the requirements for Institutional Master Plans in the original ordinance. As amended, the exemption would only apply to Post-Secondary Educational Institutions located in a C-3 District or in the Art & Design Educational Special Use District that submit a declaration under penalty of perjury, stating that the institution will not demolish or convert any housing or rent-controlled housing unit.

On June 29, 2026, the Land Use and Transportation Committee moved to amend the ordinance by adding a sunset clause to the exemption for Post-Secondary Educational Institutions located in a C-3 District, providing that the exemption will expire on December 31, 2032.

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