

CITY OF SAN DIMAS PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES

Regularly Scheduled Meeting
Thursday, April 17, 2025, at 6:00 p.m.
245 East Bonita Avenue, City Council Chamber

PRESENT

Chairman David Bratt
Vice-Chairman John Davis
Commissioner Margie Green
Commissioner James Shirley
Commissioner Doran Barnes
Planning Manager Marco Espinoza
Assistant Planner Yasmin Dabbous
Senior Management Analyst Kimberly Neustice

CALL TO ORDER AND FLAG SALUTE

Commissioner Bratt called the regular meeting of the Planning Commission to order at **6:00 p.m.** and **Commissioner Green** led the flag salute.

CONSENT CALENDAR

CC 1. Approval of Revised February 20, 2025 minutes.

CC 2. Approval of March 20, 2025 minutes.

MOTION: Moved by **Commissioner Green**, seconded by **Vice-Chairman Davis** to approve the consent calendar. Motion carried 5-0.

PUBLIC HEARING

PH 1. Municipal Code Text Amendment 25-01, Consideration and discussion of a City-initiated Municipal Code Text Amendment of Title 18-Chapter 18.40 Affordable Housing Overlay Zone, deleting Affordable Housing Overlay Zone No. 2 (AHO-2)

Staff is requesting that the Planning Commission continue the item until the next regularly scheduled Planning Commission meeting of May 15, 2025. Staff found that a portion of the overlay zone will need to remain due to the Housing overlay zone for the Grove Station/Village Walk area. It has to do with minimum and maximum density levels and if the overlay zone is removed, this could be seen as down zoning. Staff will revise the report and ordinance and re-notice for the next meeting.

RESOLUTION PC-1694

A RESOLUTION OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF SAN DIMAS, COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES, RECOMMENDING TO THE CITY COUNCIL APPROVAL OF MUNICIPAL CODE TEXT AMENDMENT 25-01, WHICH AMENDS TITLE 18 – ZONING, CHAPTER 18.40 AFFORDABLE HOUSING OVERLAY ZONE, TO REMOVE AFFORDABLE HOUSING OVERLAY ZONE 2 FROM THE CHAPTER.

MOTION: Moved by **Commissioner Barnes**, seconded by **Commissioner Shirley** to continue the public hearing to the next regularly scheduled Planning Commission meeting of May 15, 2025.

Motion carries 5-0.

PH 2. Municipal Code Text Amendment 23-05, Consideration and discussion of a Municipal Code Text Amendment to amend Title 18, Chapter 18.162 Tree Preservation to exempt single-family zoned properties and single-family properties within a specific plan from the Ordinance and associated clean-up items.

Staff report presented by **Assistant Planner Dabbous** recommending Planning Commission approve Resolution PC-1696 recommending City Council adopt Municipal Code Text Amendment 23-05. A revised environmental memo from the consultant, Psomas was put on the dais for the Commissioners review.

Vice-Chairman Davis stated that the Commission previously made several suggestions for modifications to the tree ordinance and asked if Staff presented their suggestions to the City Council.

Planning Manager Espinoza stated no, that when the ordinance was presented at the City Council Study Session, the Council only discussed removing the requirements from the single-family areas, but they didn't discuss any other items at that time.

Vice-Chairman Davis asked if Staff wanted the Commission to give the recommendations again for City Council to consider when this MCTA goes for Council consideration.

Planning Manager Espinoza stated that it was up to the Commission if they wanted to make recommendations to City Council but they were pretty clear that the only recommendation they considered was exempting single-family areas from the ordinance.

Vice-Chairman Davis stated that there were a few recommendations that the Commission felt were important.

Planning Manager Espinoza stated that on page 4 of the Psomas memo it does mention the recommendations made previously by the Planning Commission.

Vice-Chairman Davis asked if this new ordinance would trigger an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) to remove Homeowner Association (HOA) trees.

Planning Manager Espinoza stated no, an EIR would not be required.

Commissioner Barnes stated that generally this Municipal Code Text Amendment (MCTA) seems fine but he would like to discuss the items being changed. He asked if accessory dwelling units (ADUs) would be considered part of the single-family lot exemption.

Planning Manager Espinoza stated that yes, ADU's are considered single-family and would be exempt.

Vice-Chairman Davis stated that he would like to discuss if the Commission wants to exempt every tree, or if they would like to have some trees protected from this exemption, and have those protected tree removals considered more closely. He stated that for significant trees, Commission should at least understand why the owner wants to remove the tree and he has a concern about people cutting down major oak trees. He would like to try and encourage the City Council to consider significant trees at least in the front yard, not to be exempt so it can be understood why the owners want these trees removed.

Planning Manager Espinoza stated that Psomas did recommend native trees, predominantly oak trees, not be subject to the exemption. The biologist that prepared the list stated that oak trees are considered rare but not endangered and are protected based more on the location, such as in State Parks. Since San Dimas is a local jurisdiction the City can regulate the types of trees more than State or County areas. The Black Walnut trees can be removed from the list if Commission would like. It might make it easier for the public if the ordinance states that the list of trees are protected no matter the size of the tree.

Commissioner Barnes stated that the proposal's purpose is to exempt all tree removals on single-family lots and it seems to get complicated when calling out protected or significant trees. The easiest thing would be to say it's your property, you can do what you'd like.

Planning Manager Espinoza stated that City Council's direction was to exempt all trees but the environmental review by Psomas suggested that trees, at least in conservation areas, should be protected.

Vice-Chairman Davis stated that he is ok with protecting trees in conservation areas. He has a scenic easement on his property and he understands why you would want to protect trees in these areas. He stated he is also ok with the list of protected trees.

Chairman Bratt opened public hearing.

No communications were made.

Chairman Bratt closed public hearing.

Planning Manager Espinoza stated that the text for the amendment is on page 45 of the agenda, Item A, under 18.162, and it addresses the environmental concern when it comes to protecting trees in common areas, open space, scenic easements, slopes and maintained areas. All these properties would still be exempt in the developable areas and the protected trees would only apply to the areas just mentioned. There is also an area in the city zoned as Single-Family Hillside that have conservation overlays on them. Those lots would not be part of the recommended single-family exemption but could still apply for a tree removal permit.

Vice-Chairman Davis stated that in his HOA, unless it's on their actual property, it's considered common area and asked if these trees in the HOA area would require City approval.

Planning Manager Espinoza stated yes.

Chairman Bratt stated that whatever they do in the back yard is fine with him but to exempt all trees on a single-family property, including the front yard, shouldn't be done because in his opinion some trees should stay. He disagrees that front yard trees should be part of a blanket exemption. The way he interprets this, the City Council wants to exempt any tree on a single-family lot and he opposes that, and suggests that if it's in the front yard it should be reviewed. Perhaps there are good reasons to remove the tree but it should be up to Staff to consider it as part of an application.

Vice-Chairman Davis agreed that if the tree type is on the Psomas list and meets the requirements, they should not be exempt and should go through the tree removal application process.

Commissioner Green agreed stating it makes sense to her as well.

Commissioner Shirley asked for confirmation that if one of the trees on Psomas list is in the front yard of a single-family property, would have to go through the tree removal application process.

Vice-Chairman Davis stated that was correct.

Commissioner Barnes stated if his neighbors just decided to chop down five mature trees, that would change the landscape view of the neighborhood. He feels that this should be part of a discussion before just allowing them to remove significant trees, native or not. Any large mature tree being removed should be considered by Staff before just allowing them to remove them under the exemption.

Commissioner Shirley asked if the residents have had a chance to share their thoughts on this matter.

Planning Manager Espinoza stated that today's public hearing was the opportunity. The agenda was posted on the agenda boards, on the City website and we published a public hearing notice in the newspaper to try to encourage the public to attend.

Commissioner Barnes stated he feels we should make it as simple as possible. He wanted to remove a tree a while ago and the process seemed complicated and there was a question if he needed an arborist report. He feels that the process should definitely be streamlined but there should be some kind of input and review for the significant trees. He asked if the MCTA was to go forward and single-family lots are exempt, are they subject to a replacement ratio.

Planning Manager Espinoza stated if the trees were covered under the exemption they could be removed without notifying the City and there is no replacement ratio. Right now, Staff reviews applications and they have to write findings as to why the trees are ok for removal which would no longer be done under the single-family exemption.

Vice-Chairman Davis suggests that there should be a review process for significant trees.

Planning Manager Espinoza stated that the Commission would have to come up with a recommendation as to what determines if it is a significant tree. An eight-inch or ten-inch diameter is rather small to consider a significant tree. Under this code amendment the measurement would now be taken at fifty-four inches from the ground instead of the previous thirty-six inches.

Vice-Chairman Davis stated if someone is going to rip out a significant tree, it really doesn't do any good to put a box tree in its place because it won't look the same. He feels that they should get a permit to remove a significant tree in the front yard, but a replacement tree should not be required. Should a conclusion be made that removing a tree would change the look of the neighborhood, it would be appropriate for Staff to deny a permit.

Planning Manager Espinoza stated that City Council is going to expect explanations for Planning Commission's recommendations if they decide to require some trees in the single-family area be permitted for removal. The next change on this MCTA is changing the replacement ratio from either one (1) twenty-four-inch box or two (2) fifteen-gallon trees. This would also apply to commercial areas.

Vice-Chairman Davis asked what happens if the site is over saturated with trees.

Planning Manager Espinoza stated the modification states "up to" and can be reduced as needed. These are part of Planning Commission's previous comments on the MCTA and staff would like to know if the Commission still wants Staff to bring these items up to the City Council when it moves forward. All of these recommendations from Planning Commission were presented to City Council at the study session but the Council did not discuss the items.

Vice-Chairman Davis stated that he would like to keep this replacement ratio recommendation. He also stated that he wanted to go over Item #1 which deals with who will review tree removal permits. Less than four tree removals is a Staff level review and four or more is Planning Commission. He states Item #2 can stay.

Commissioner Barnes stated that it's up to replacement ratio. What's written now seems very prescriptive and he feels that it should be written differently.

Chairman Bratt stated the wording should not say “up to 1”, but should be changed to “at the discretion of staff”.

Planning Manager Espinoza stated Staff will rewrite this portion to say “up to, but at the discretion of Staff”. That way Staff can be flexible if the lot already has several trees and adding another one would over saturate the lot. The concern he has is that City Council is not going to listen to all of these recommendations and that they will go back to only reviewing the single-family areas for exemption of tree permits. If Planning Commission is going to focus on something, maybe focus on the replacement ratio and the significant tree requirements.

Vice-Chairman Davis asked if an arborist report will be required for tree removals that have to go through the permit process.

Planning Manager Espinoza stated that it wouldn't be required anymore for single-family, however, it could be required for HOA's and commercial areas. If it's obvious to Staff that the trees are dead, Staff won't require a report but if Staff feels it's still alive, the applicant would be directed to get an arborist report.

Vice-Chairman Davis asked to clarify if City Council is proposing to leave the ordinance the way it is, but to exempt single-family lots from the tree removal ordinance. Planning Commission recommended other changes to the code but it seems like City Council wouldn't be open to incorporating additional changes at this time.

Planning Manager Espinoza stated that was the indication he received at the City Council Study Session.

Chairman Bratt felt that the Planning Commission should only make recommendations about single-family lots back to the City Council. He stated that the two recommendations that the Planning Commission should forward to City Council are the requirement for significant trees and that front yard trees should not be exempt from the ordinance.

Vice-Chairman Davis stated that the Commission can recommend that all trees on single-family lots are exempt except any trees in the front yard above a certain size. What is that size? He feels it should be more than a ten-inch diameter but less than a twenty-four-inch diameter and measured at fifty-four inches from the ground.

Chairman Bratt recommended a fifteen-inch diameter.

Vice-Chairman Davis reiterated that any trees in the back yard can fall under the single-family exemption but any tree in the front yard with a fifteen-inch diameter as measured from fifty-four inches from the ground should be subject to the tree removal permit process and reviewed by Staff since these trees could have a significant impact on the landscape of the neighborhood after removal.

Commissioner Barnes stated that if you have a home that has a tree that meet these requirements, you probably bought the home knowing that this tree existed and there are owners that might buy the lot because of these mature trees.

RESOLUTION PC-1696

A RESOLUTION OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF SAN DIMAS, COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES, RECOMMENDING TO THE CITY COUNCIL APPROVAL OF MUNICIPAL CODE TEXT AMENDMENT 23-05, A REQUEST TO AMEND TITLE 18, CHAPTER 18.162 TREE PRESERVATION TO EXEMPT SINGLE-FAMILY ZONED PROPERTIES AND SINGLE-FAMILY PROPERTIES WITHIN A SPECIFIC PLAN FROM THE ORDINANCE AND ASSOCIATED CLEAN-UP ITEMS.

MOTION: Moved by **Vice-Chairman Davis**, seconded by **Commissioner Green** to approve Resolution PC-1696 recommending City Council adopt MCTA 23-05 with the following modifications:

- All tree removal applications should be reviewed at Staff level.
- Exempt tree removals from-single family properties except for mature trees, of any species, in the front yard that are fifteen-inch or more in diameter as measured from fifty-four inches from the ground, which will be subject to the tree removal permit process.
- Require that Single-Family Hillside (SF-H) properties remain protected under the Tree Preservation Ordinance and not exempt.

Motion carried 5-0.

ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

a. Community Development Department

Planning Manager Espinoza gives an update:

- There will be two items for the May Planning Commission meeting.

b. Members of the Audience

No communications were made.

c. Planning Commission

Vice-Chairman Davis asked about the Forestry property. **Planning Manager Espinoza** stated that we have received two different proposals from the owner. The one they would like to build is a one-hundred sixty-one-unit townhome development. The other proposal that they submitted does include two to three story townhomes and some five story apartments in the back. If they

under build this site, we would have to update the housing element to relocate the reduced number of homes from this site either to a new site or to an existing identified site.

Commissioner Green asked about movement on the development on Walnut. **Planning Manager Espinoza** stated that they are moving very slowly but they are still moving forward.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Commissioner Green moved, seconded by **Commissioner Shirley**. Motion carried 5-0. The meeting adjourned at 7:27 p.m. to the regular Planning Commission Meeting scheduled for Thursday May 15, 2025.

David A. Bratt, Chairman
San Dimas Planning Commission

ATTEST:

Kimberly Neustice
Senior Management Analyst

Approved: May 15, 2025