

**Sherman Oaks  
Community Planning  
Guidelines  
for  
Higher-Density  
Housing**

***Sherman Oaks  
VISION Committee***

***November 2017***

**The Sherman Oaks *VISION* Committee**

*Mission*

The *VISION* Committee prepared these guidelines with additional input from the contributors listed below. The Committee grew out of a need to understand the potential of our community and the specific benefits that would enhance the lives of all of us who live, work, and visit Sherman Oaks.

*Chair*

Jeff Kalban, AIA – Sherman Oaks Neighborhood Council (SONC)  
Chair, SONC Planning and Land Use (PLUM) Committee

*Members*

- Bob Anderson, PE – Sherman Oaks Homeowners Association
- Tom Boulet – Sherman Oaks Historian
- Jackie Diamond – SONC PLUM Committee
- Maria Pavlou Kalban – Sherman Oaks Activist
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## Sherman Oaks Community Planning Guidelines for Higher-Density Housing

The State of California and the City of Los Angeles are now mandating higher-density housing. Per Los Angeles Municipal Code 12.22 A.31, *Transit Oriented Communities Affordable Housing Incentive Guidelines*, Sherman Oaks will have two “TOC Incentive Areas” (see <https://planning.lacity.org/ordinances/docs/toc/TOCGuidelines.pdf> for details).

For these areas, the Code provides a list of incentives for real estate developers that allow higher density, reduced open space, reduced setbacks, and lower parking minimums for both commercial and multifamily properties.

Sherman Oaks’ two TOC Incentive Areas comprise one-mile-diameter circles centered at Sepulveda Boulevard and Ventura Boulevard and at Van Nuys Boulevard and Ventura Boulevard, as shown by the blue-shaded circles in *Figure 1*. These areas can have overwhelming impacts on our community. And keep in mind that our TOC areas are served only by bus routes that travel slowly in heavy traffic.

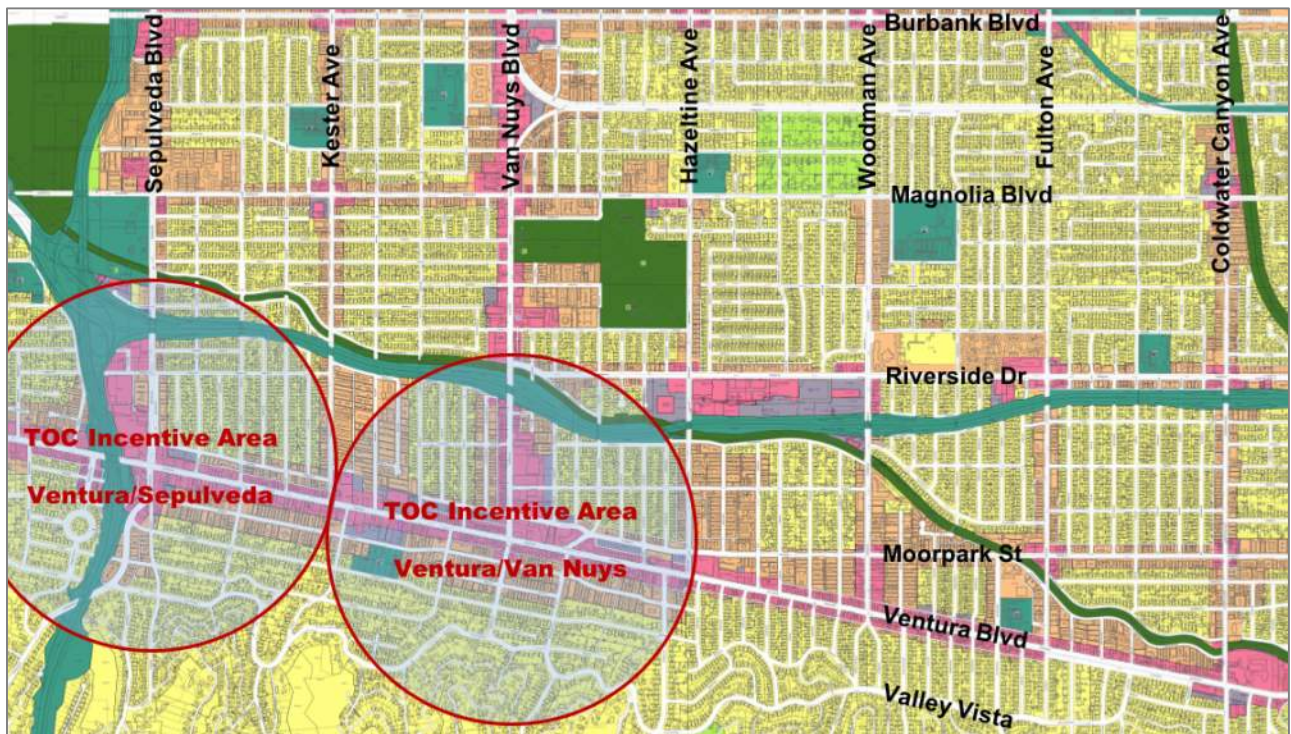


Figure 1. Sherman Oaks Has Two Transit Oriented Communities (TOC) Incentive Areas That Mandate Higher-Density Housing

Fortunately, most remaining large Sherman Oaks’ parcels require rezoning of all or part of the site, and this opens the door to community review.

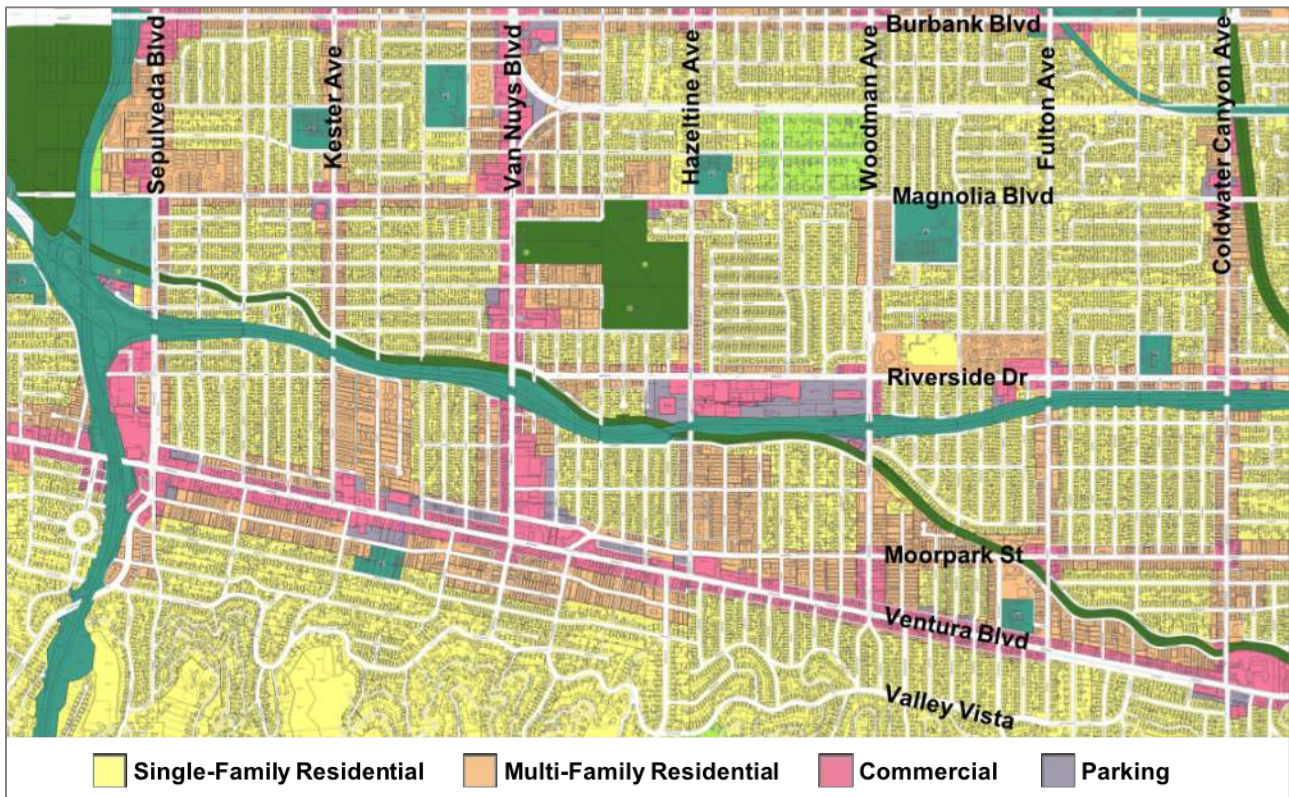
The **VISION** Committee proposes six guidelines that establish a foundation for residents, government, businesses, and developers to effectively collaborate for the benefit of the entire community. The guidelines make it easier for developers to work with our community. Sherman Oaks understands that working together for the good of the entire community will help achieve needed housing while retaining the unique qualities that make our community so desirable.

**THE SIX *VISION* GUIDELINES**

- Guideline 1 – Protect R1 Single-Family Residential Neighborhoods
- Guideline 2 – Correlate Higher Density with Site Coverage
- Guideline 3 – Encourage Visual Community Integration – Residential Zones
- Guideline 4 – Enhance the Public Realm – Commercial Zones
- Guideline 5 – Establish Public-Private Parking Structures and Trip Fees
- Guideline 6 – Address Unique Opportunities in Sherman Oaks

**OUR GUIDELINES WORK FOR ALL OF SHERMAN OAKS**

We support the concept of the TOC affordable housing incentives and their higher-density mandate, and realistically believe that higher-density housing will become the norm across all areas of Sherman Oaks and Los Angeles. Our six guidelines then become even more critical because they create well-designed housing while enhancing the livability and lifestyle of our community. The color legend of *Figure 2* details the four types of zoning in Sherman Oaks to help everyone understand how higher-density housing could impact our entire community in the future – and why our guidelines must apply across this entire Sherman Oaks community.

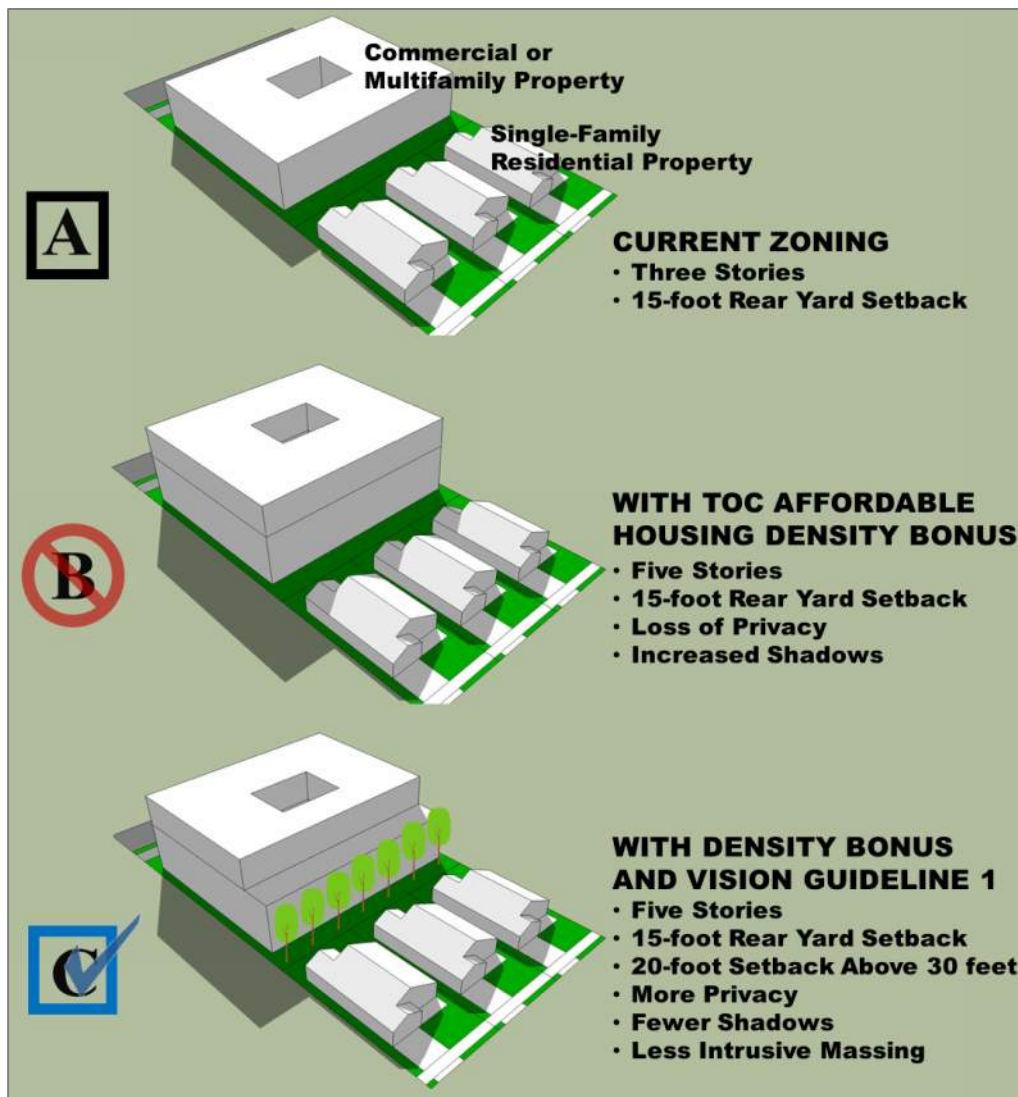


*Figure 2. Our Guidelines Benefit Both Mandated Higher-Density Housing and All Housing Across Sherman Oaks*

**GUIDELINE 1 – PROTECT R1 SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS**

*Any commercial or multifamily property with a building higher than the currently allowable 30 feet should step back from a residential rear or side yard by a 45-degree angle, thus minimizing visual intrusion upon residential housing.*

This **VISION** guideline protects single-family residential properties that abut commercial or multifamily properties, as shown by the example panels in *Figure 3*. We also encourage planting large trees along shared property lines. Recommended trees include Fern Pine (*Podocarpus gracilior*), Buddha’s Belly Bamboo (*Bambusa ventricosa*), Clumping Giant Timber Bamboo (*Bambusa oldhamii*), Brush Cherry (*Syzygium paniculatum*), and Brisbane Box (*Lophostemon confertus*). Everyone benefits because new higher-density projects will not physically overwhelm single-family residences, helping to encourage good-neighbor attitudes for all.



*Figure 3. Panel A Shows Shadowing with Current Zoning and Panel B with Density Bonus, While Panel C Shows Reduced Shadowing with the Guideline’s 45-degree Setback*

**GUIDELINE 2 – CORRELATE HIGHER DENSITY WITH SITE COVERAGE**

*The height of any commercial or multifamily building should be based on the building’s percentage of site coverage.*

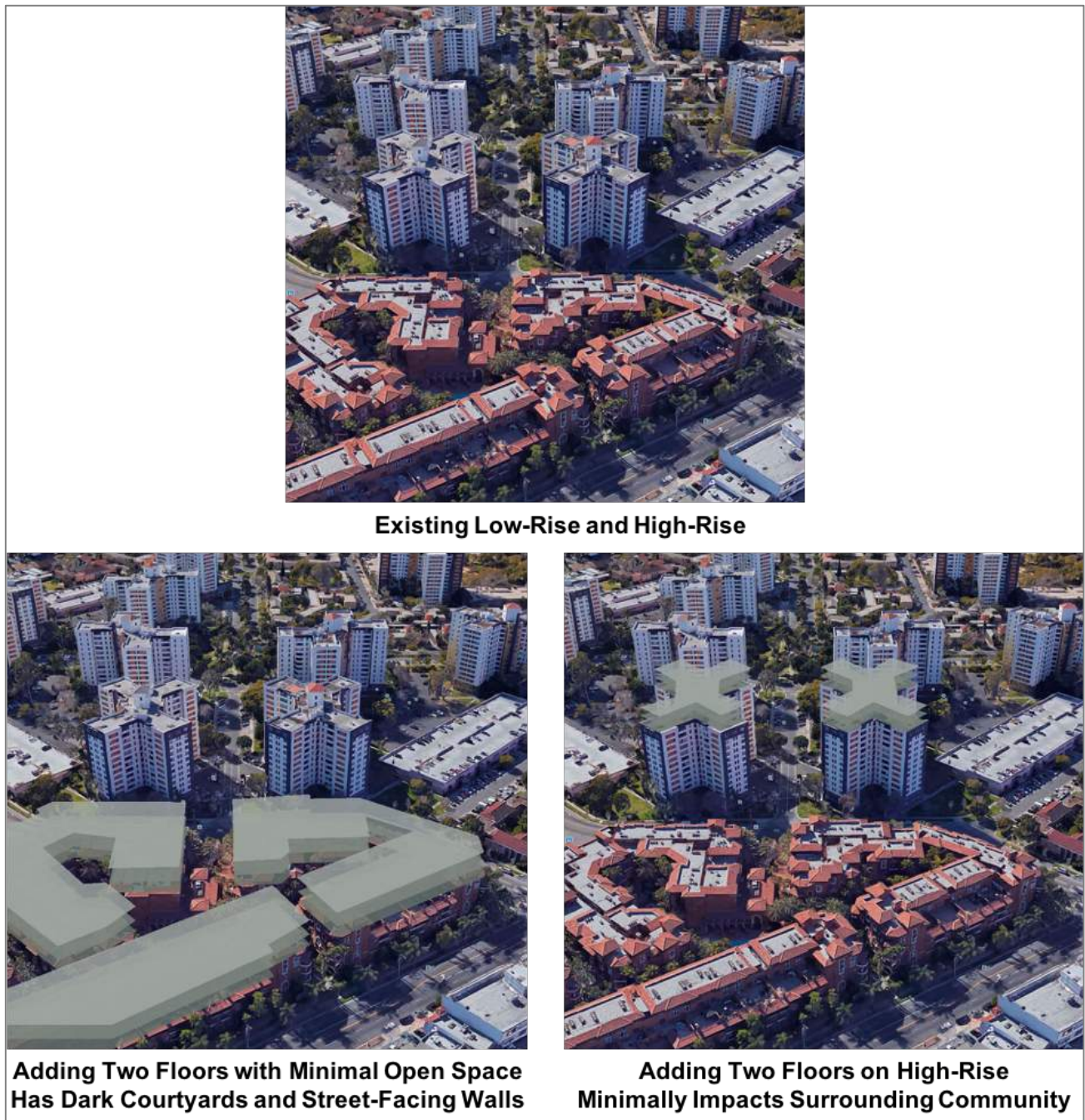
Higher density requires much more than minimum open space. Building higher to increase density can promote livability if done correctly, as shown on the left in *Figure 4*. Alternately, building higher with minimal open space creates light wells that limit light and air at lower levels and confronts communities with massive walls of building, as shown on the right in *Figure 4*. Such intelligent site coverage will establish better living environments for all residents even as density increases.



*Figure 4. Building Higher with Significant Open Space Has Positive Impacts (left), While Building Higher with Minimal Open Space Has Negative Impacts (right)*

**GUIDELINE 2 – CORRELATE HIGHER DENSITY WITH SITE COVERAGE [CONTINUED]**

**VISION** understands that taller buildings can make sense and minimally impact communities if they include significant open space. Low-rise buildings that sprawl can create dark wells and negatively impact communities with walls of buildings. High-rise buildings may more easily maintain significant open space and minimally impact communities, as illustrated in *Figure 5*.



*Figure 5. Adding Floors to High-Rise Buildings May More Positively Impact Communities Than Adding Floors to Low-Rise Buildings*

**GUIDELINE 3 – ENCOURAGE VISUAL COMMUNITY INTEGRATION – RESIDENTIAL ZONES**

Significant cut-outs and recesses should be incorporated into residential building designs to visually expand the public realm and encourage community integration.

**VISION** encourages visual community integration by ensuring that residential buildings integrate with the existing community fabric. Stepped, cut-out, and recessed building walls fronting the street should be encouraged because they integrate residential projects into the existing community and visually expand the public realm, as shown in *Figure 6*. Courtyards open to the street view will further enhance the landscaped beauty of Sherman Oaks.

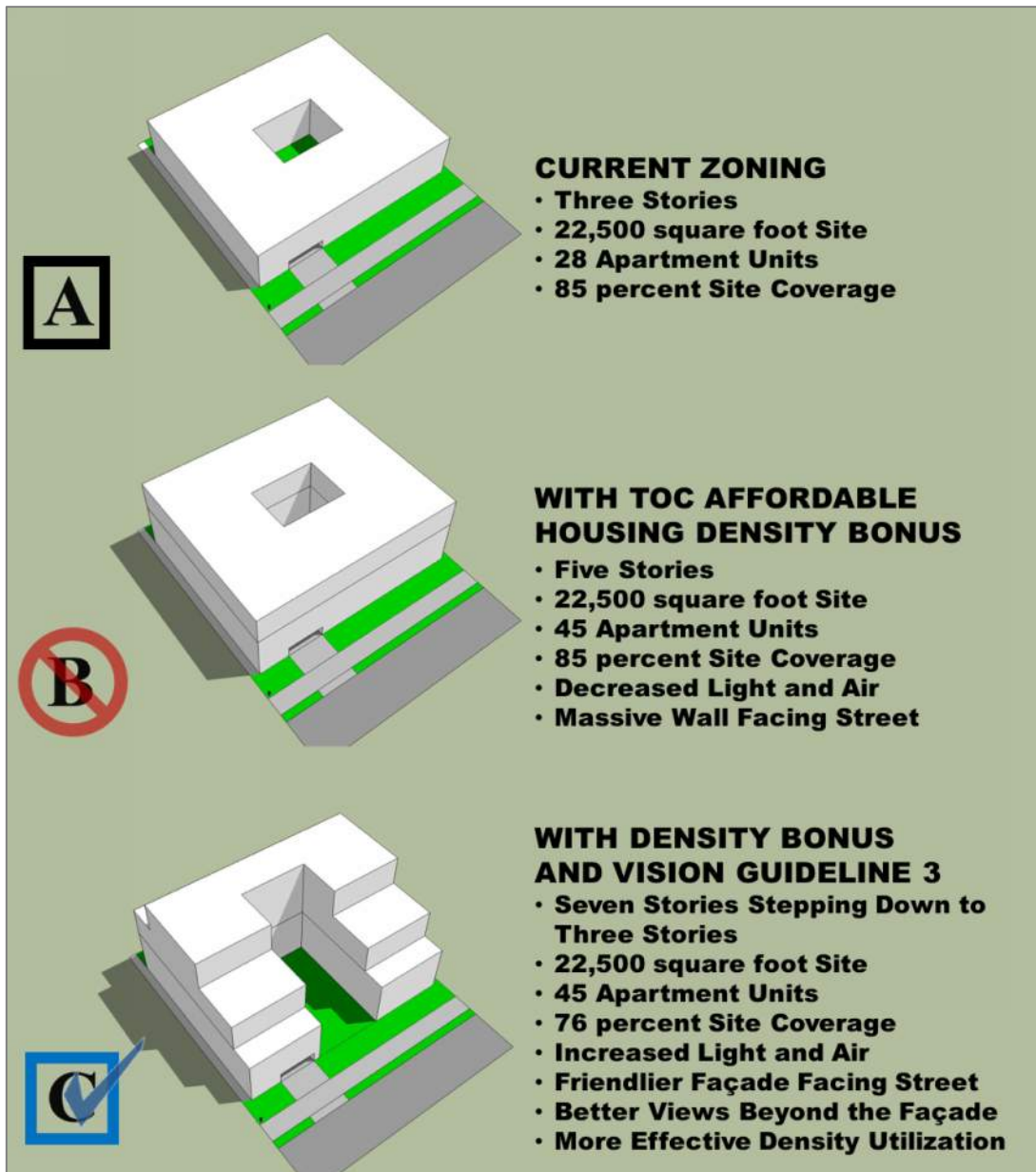


Figure 6. Panel A Shows Frontage Wall with Current Zoning and Panel B with Density Bonus, While Panel C Shows Stepped Wall Better Integrating with Community



**GUIDELINE 4 – ENHANCE THE PUBLIC REALM – COMMERCIAL ZONES**

*Commercial housing development projects should recognize the need to protect and enhance the local public realm.*

**VISION** understands that some commercial housing projects, depending on their location and size, should address the public right-of-way. Large projects might warrant a community open space or plaza as a community benefit for accepting density increases. Smaller projects should provide gathering spaces, walkable arcade-type areas, or other community spaces. Such enhancements and amenities turn development projects into community assets, rather than detriments.

Development projects that do not provide such public amenities should contribute to a fund for Sherman Oaks’ ongoing efforts to enhance our public realm. The fund would be used to enhance local public-realm projects, as demonstrated by the examples in *Figure 7*.



*Figure 7. Development Projects Offer an Effective Method to Fund Public Realm Improvements, including Streets, Pathways, Right-of-Ways, Open Spaces, and Public and Civic Buildings and Facilities*

**GUIDELINE 5 – ESTABLISH PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARKING STRUCTURES AND TRIP FEES**

*Reduced on-site parking should require off-site parking structures, while trip fees for unmitigated traffic challenges should fund community improvements.*

Projects that are incentivized with reduced parking for tenants and guests offer major cost savings to developers. Therefore, developers should be required to contribute to a community off-site parking structure fund. The City would use the contributed funds to build parking structures in existing local P-zone or commercial areas, as exemplified at the top of *Figure 8*. If a parking structure faces a residential zone, housing units would be encouraged to front the parking structure thus keeping the residential feeling of the street, as shown at the bottom of *Figure 8*.

The City should convince landowners of P-zone properties that they can financially benefit from such developments, as they would become major community benefits. The City should also encourage project developers to establish shuttle services for their tenants to and from remote parking structures.



*Figure 8. Parking Structures Could Be Built in Existing Parking-Zone Areas and Layered with Multifamily or Multiuse Buildings*

**VISION** further encourages the establishment of trip fees. Development projects that cannot mitigate existing traffic-congested areas should be assessed a trip fee that goes into a community fund for the building of parking structures and other mitigation measures. These fees would be spent for local community improvements, such as parking and traffic improvements or local parks. These and other mitigating measures can make a more aesthetic and better functioning community.

**GUIDELINE 6 – ADDRESS UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES IN SHERMAN OAKS**

Certain Sherman Oaks areas offer unique opportunities that may receive height exemptions while still following all other **VISION** guidelines.

**Sepulveda as a Grand Boulevard** – Sepulveda Boulevard’s west side overlooks the Sepulveda Basin and is well separated from properties on the east side. This unique area is the only one where we recommend high-rise buildings, as shown in *Figure 9*. While meeting all other guidelines, high-rise buildings would also employ 40-foot landscaped setbacks with double rows of London Plane trees (*Platanus acerifolia* Columbia) along Sepulveda, to create the feel of a Grand Boulevard.

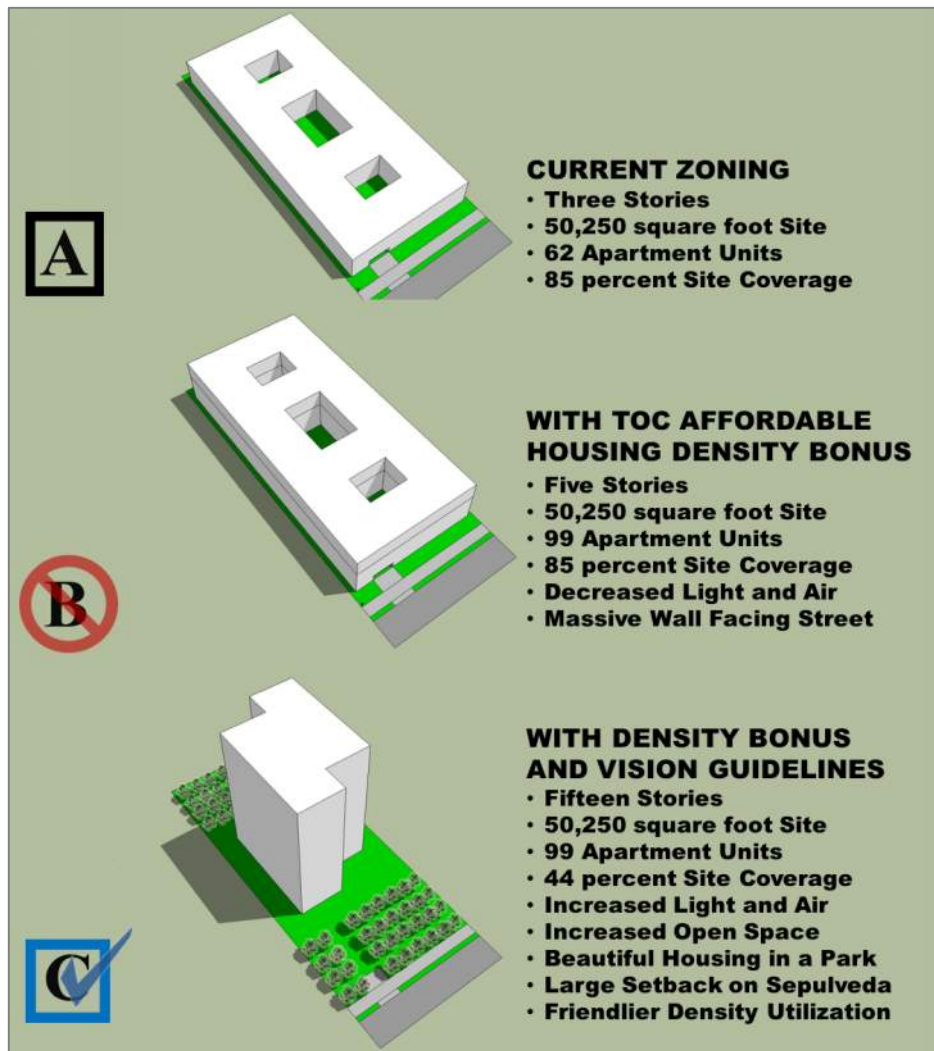


Figure 9. Panel A Shows a Building Under Current Zoning and Panel B Under a Density Bonus, While Panel C Shows an Alternate High-Rise Concept with Maximum Open Space

**Ventura Boulevard Specific Plan Increased Height Limit** – Ventura Boulevard is another unique area that can contribute to increased density. We recommend a uniform 45-foot height limit to the roof of the last occupied floor, with no by-right projects in the Specific Plan. All projects would meet all other **VISION** guidelines.

**SUMMARY AND POSITIVE GUIDELINE EXAMPLES**

We summarize our six higher-density housing **VISION** guidelines below, along with their benefits to our community. *Figure 10* on the following page provides several interesting examples of projects with such positive community benefits.

**Guideline 1** – Protect R1 Single-Family Residential Neighborhoods

*Any commercial or multifamily property with a building higher than the currently allowable 30 feet should step back from a residential rear or side yard by a 45-degree angle, thus minimizing visual intrusion upon residential housing.*

Community Benefit – New higher-density projects will not physically overwhelm single-family residences, and will help encourage a good-neighbor attitude.

**Guideline 2** – Correlate Higher Density with Site Coverage

*The height of any commercial or multifamily building should be based on the building’s percentage of site coverage.*

Community Benefit – Intelligent site coverage will establish better living environments for all residents even as density increases.

**Guideline 3** – Encourage Visual Community Integration – Residential Zones

*Significant cut-outs and recesses should be incorporated into residential building designs to visually expand the public realm and encourage community integration.*

Community Benefit – Courtyards open to the street view will further enhance the landscaped beauty of Sherman Oaks.

**Guideline 4** – Enhance the Public Realm – Commercial Zones

*Commercial housing development projects should recognize the need to protect and enhance the local public realm.*

Community Benefit – Public enhancements and amenities will turn higher-density developments into community assets, rather than detriments.

**Guideline 5** – Establish Public-Private Parking Structures and Trip Fees

*Reduced on-site parking should require off-site parking structures, while trip fees for unmitigated traffic challenges should fund community improvements.*

Community Benefit – These and other resultant mitigating measures will make a more aesthetic and better functioning community.

**Guideline 6** – Address Unique Opportunities in Sherman Oaks

*Certain Sherman Oaks areas offer unique opportunities that may receive height exemptions while still following all other **VISION** guidelines.*

Community Benefit – Higher buildings will result in less site coverage and will allow more landscaping that faces the public realm.

We hope that residents, elected officials, businesses, and local leaders join us in continuing to make Sherman Oaks one of our City’s most desirable communities.

*Sherman Oaks Community Planning Guidelines for Higher-Density Housing*

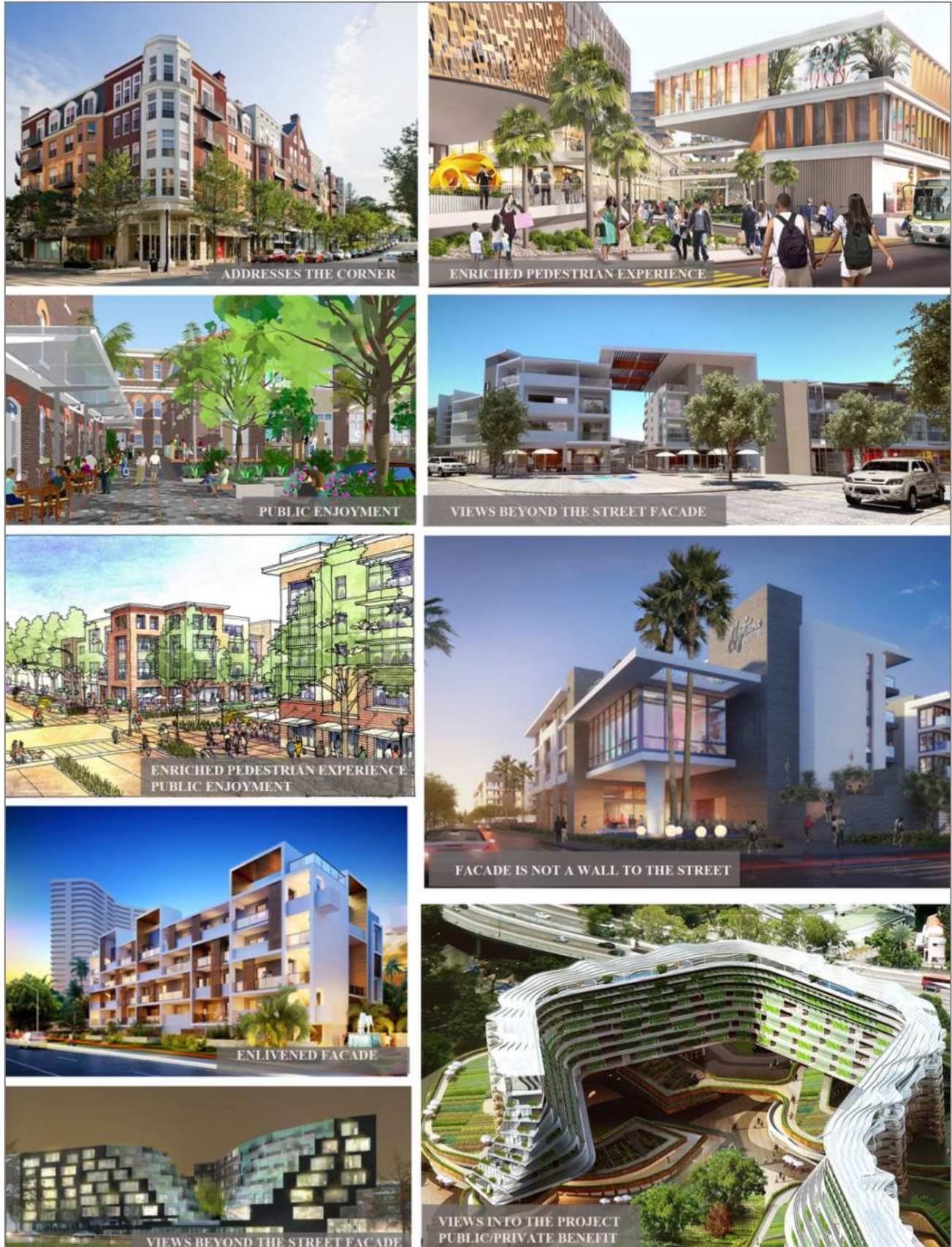


Figure 10. Exemplary Projects That Positively Enhance Their Community

# **Sherman Oaks Community Planning Guidelines for Higher-Density Housing**



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