

# Memorandum

**REPORT TO:** City Commission

**FROM:** Tom Rogers, Senior Planner  
Chris Saunders, Community Development Manager  
Erin George, Community Development Director

**SUBJECT:** Discussion of Unified Development Code Update Focusing on Tools to Address Mass and Scale of Buildings and Direction to Staff

**MEETING DATE:** June 24, 2025

**AGENDA ITEM TYPE:** Community Development - Legislative

**RECOMMENDATION:** Discuss and determine which tools the City Commission wishes to include in the Unified Development Code to address mass and scale of buildings

**STRATEGIC PLAN:** 4.2 High Quality Urban Approach: Continue to support high-quality planning, ranging from building design to neighborhood layouts, while pursuing urban approaches to issues such as multimodal transportation, infill, density, connected trails and parks, and walkable neighborhoods.

**BACKGROUND:** The City Commission is reviewing the outcomes of public input on the UDC update. A work session on regulatory tools to address mass and scale will be held on June 24th.

At the May 5th meeting, the Community Development Board packet materials identified some of the primary issues identified in public comments received during the recently completed supplemental public engagement. The mass and scale of buildings was a common theme in the comments. The Board requested that the staff schedule discussions for the Board on topics relating to the code update during regular meetings of the Board. The first was on May 19th to discuss how to approach requested amendments to the zoning map.

The Board began discussion of zoning tools used to address mass and scale of buildings on June 2nd. A memo was provided to describe tools, identify which are presently in use, and if they are proposed to continue in the new draft. The focus of this discussion was not the specifics such as "X feet" setback but rather the general tools. Duplicative tools create additional complexity in the code with limited benefit. Omission can result in unwanted outcomes. Each tool has advantage and drawbacks.

The Board received a presentation from staff and received public comment at the [June 2nd meeting](#) [external link]. Discussion on this item begins at

1:28:30 in the recording. Staff presented information on the general purpose of the discussion and addressed individual tools at the indicated times in the recording: lot setbacks 1:36:30, lot area 1:38:00, height 1:39:35, stories/vertical massing 1:45:20, wall plate height 1:49:40, floor area ratio 1:58:55, building design standards 2:05:45, step backs & planes 2:16:35. Public comment begins at 2:55:15. The Board made two motions to recommend that the City Commission not include Lot Area or Floor Area Ratio as standards in the Unified Development Code update. Both motions passed. The Board continued the discussion to the June 16th meeting.

The Board began discussion of mass and scale tools at 3:12:15 in the recording at their [June 16th meeting](#) [external link]. The Board did not make formal motions but did indicate support or not support for individual tools. Tools receiving support were setbacks, maximum building height measured by feet, wall plate, maximum building size and width, and step backs. Tools not receiving support were building height measured by stories. Tools for further investigation were a graduated square foot building area cap. Additional detail on each recommendation are included with the tool description in the attached memo. The Board did not comment on all tools in the attached City Commission memo as not all the materials were reviewed at the June 2nd meeting.

Mass and Scale of buildings were common subjects in public comment received throughout the UDC update process. The City Commission, at their [June 3rd meeting](#) [external link] beginning at 38:30 in the video identified mass and scale tools as a desired subject for a Commission work session. Attached is a memo from staff describing a variety of mass and scale tools that are in use now, are suggested in the proposed draft, or that have been suggested by members of the public. The Commission will receive a presentation from staff, may ask questions, discuss alternatives, hear from the public, and give direction on which standards to include. Staff suggests that including all the different tools would be duplicative and add unnecessary complexity to limited benefit. The Commission is requested to give direction to include those tools which they find a best fit to accomplish the purposes and criteria required for zoning.

The state has changed the purposes for which zoning may be enacted and the criteria against which proposed regulations are set through the Montana Land Use Planning Act. Purposes from [76-25-301\(2\) MCA](#) [external link] are:

(2) Local zoning regulations authorized in subsection (1) include but are not limited to ordinances prescribing the:

(a) uses of land;

(b) density of uses;

(c) types of uses;

(d) size, character, number, form, and mass of structures; and

(e) development standards mitigating the impacts of development, as identified and analyzed during the land use planning process and review and adoption of zoning regulations pursuant to this chapter.

The new review criteria for approval of zoning are established in [76-25-304\(2\) MCA \[external link\]](#):

(c) make a preliminary determination as to whether the zoning regulation and map as proposed or as amended would be in substantial compliance with the land use plan, including whether the zoning regulation or map:

(i) accommodates the projected needed housing types identified in 76-25-206;

(ii) contains five or more specific strategies from 76-25-302 to encourage the development of housing within the jurisdiction;

(iii) reflects allowable uses and densities in areas that may be adequately served by public safety, emergency, utility, transportation, education, and any other local facilities or services identified by the local government in 76-25-207;

(iv) allows sufficient area for existing, new, or expanding commercial, industrial, and institutional enterprises the local government has identified in 76-25-208 for targeted economic growth in the jurisdiction;

(v) protects and maximizes the potential use of natural resources within the area, as identified in 76-25-209;

(vi) minimizes or avoids impacts to the natural environment within the area, as identified in 76-25-209; and

(vii) avoids or minimizes dangers associated with natural hazards in the jurisdiction, as identified in 76-25-209; and

(d) preliminarily determine whether the proposed zoning regulation, map, or amendment results in new or increased impacts to or from local facilities, services, natural resources, natural environment, or natural hazards from those previously described and analyzed in the assessment conducted for the land use plan.

**UNRESOLVED ISSUES:** None.

**ALTERNATIVES:** As determined by the City Commission.

**FISCAL EFFECTS:** No budgeted funds are expended with this discussion.

Attachments:

[CC June 24 2025 Mass and Scale Memo.pdf](#)

[Zoning District Transition Guide 2-19-2025.pdf](#)

Report compiled on: June 17, 2025