

PROPOSED ALTADENA HILLSIDE ORDINANCE

An ordinance amending Title 22 - Planning and Zoning of the Los Angeles County Code, relating to the Altadena Community Standards District ("CSD"), to establish restrictions for grading and ridgeline development within the CSD.

SECTION 1. Section 22.44.127 is amended to read as follows:

22.44.127 Altadena Community Standards District.

A. Purpose

Altadena has at its immediate back door the San Gabriel Mountains. Young (in geological time), rambunctious, and among North America's steepest mountains, they also contain the oldest rocks on the west coast of America. John McPhee writes in *Los Angeles Against the Mountains* that every year roughly seven tons of rock, soil, and decomposing granite wash down from every acre off slopes averaging 65 to 70 percent in grade. But the San Gabriels are a transverse range that is rising even faster than it can disintegrate because it sits atop two tectonic plates grinding against each other in opposite directions. These mountains are transected by faults, prone to debris flow, flood and fire, and frequently remind

the community below of nature's force and grandeur. From base to summit they are 3,000 feet higher than the Rockies, and their rise from the foothills of Altadena is startlingly abrupt.

Because of their cultural and physical importance to the community, it is desirable both to preserve pristine views of this unique backdrop for everyone below, as well as to respect the challenges to public safety and services that building in such steep and unstable territory presents. Our purpose in formulating a hillside ordinance is to balance the needs and interests of those owning property in the foothills with the larger public good, including the encouragement of a comprehensive trail system. As real estate values rise and engineering techniques improve, it has become economically feasible to put houses on many sites formerly considered unbuildable. By providing guidelines that minimize visual and environmental impacts, we hope to encourage good architecture, prudent land use, and the building of new homes that will enhance and respect the community of Altadena, the lives of those who live here, and all who enjoy lifting their eyes to the San Gabriel Mountains and foothills.

B. Community-wide Development Standards.

1. A conditional use permit shall be required for all building under Chapter 22.56.215 A, including single-family residences. This section supercedes Chapter 22.56.215C(3).

2. Grading.

- a. No grading permit shall be issued for development associated with a land division prior to the recordation of the final map, except as specifically authorized by the conditions of an approved tentative map.
- b. A conditional use permit as provided in Part 1 of Chapter 22.56 shall be required for any grading on a lot or parcel of land, or in connection with any project, that exceeds 2,500 cubic yards of total cut or fill material. For purposes of computing the 2,500 cubic yard threshold amount, grading necessary to establish a turnaround required by the county fire department shall be included. In addition to the requirements of Subsection A of Section 22.56.090, findings shall be made that the grading will be performed in a manner that minimizes disturbance to the natural landscape and terrain through design features for the project, such as, but not limited to, locating the building pad in the area of the project site with the least slope and least visual impact, clustering structures, and locating the project close to an existing paved street. Findings shall also be made that the grading will be accompanied by other project features that maximize preservation of visual quality and community character

through design features such as, but not limited to, reduced structural height, use of architectural features such as shape, materials, and color to promote blending with the surrounding environment, use of locally indigenous or non invasive drought tolerant vegetation, improvement of an existing trail or installation of a new trail or trailhead.

- c. An approved haul route shall be required for the offsite transport of 1,000 cubic yards or more of cut or fill material, or any combination thereof.
- d. Any grading occurring during the rainy season, defined as October 15 of any year through April 15 of the subsequent year, shall require County approved mitigation measures to prevent run off and erosion.

3. Significant Ridgeline Protection.

- a. Ridgelines are defined as the line formed by the meeting of the tops of sloping surfaces of land. Significant ridgelines are ridgelines that, in general, are highly visible and dominate the landscape. The location of the significant ridgelines within this Community Standards District, and the criteria used for their designation, are set forth on the official Altadena Hillside Area Significant Ridgeline Map, prepared and maintained in the offices of the county department of regional planning, which is adopted by reference as part of this ordinance, and on the map and corresponding appendix following this Section.
- b. The highest point of a structure that requires any permit shall be located at least 50 vertical feet and 50 horizontal feet from a significant ridgeline, excluding chimneys, rooftop antennas, wind energy conversion systems, and amateur radio antennas.

- c. Where structures on a lot or parcel of land cannot meet the standards prescribed by subsection B.3.b, above, a variance as provided in Part 2 of Chapter 22.56 shall be required. In addition to the required findings set forth in Subsection A of Section 22.56.330, findings shall be made that: (1) alternative sites within the property or project have been considered and eliminated from consideration based on physical infeasibility or the potential for substantial habitat damage or destruction if any such alternative site is used; and (2) the proposed project maintains the maximum view of the applicable significant ridgeline through the use of design features for the project such as, but not limited to, minimized grading, reduced structural height, shape, materials, and color that allow the structures to blend with the natural setting, and use of appropriate landscaping, including locally indigenous or non invasive drought tolerant vegetation, improvement of an existing trail or installation of a new trail or trailhead, as described on the list referenced in subsection B.2.b.

C. Applicability.

1. The provisions of subsections B.1, B.2b, B.2.c, B.2.d, and B.3 shall not apply to a new development project where, as of the effective date of the ordinance adding those subsections, either of the following has occurred related to such project:
- a. A complete application has been submitted for any subdivision, permit, variance or site plan review; or
 - b. A final approval has previously been granted for any application

described in subsection a, above, provided that the building location and anticipated grading for the project are clearly depicted on the approved project plans and the project is developed in accordance with that application. For purposes of this subsection C.1, a complete application shall be defined as an application that the director finds to contain all of the required documents and information so as to allow the matter to be scheduled for any applicable public hearing or decision.

2. The provisions of subsection B.3 shall not apply to the repair or replacement of a damaged or destroyed residence or accessory structure(s) which, as of the effective date of the ordinance adding that subsection, was legally established, provided such repaired or replaced residence or accessory structure(s) is built in substantially the same location and square footage as the one that was damaged or destroyed. Proof that the residence or accessory structure(s) was legally established shall be demonstrated to the director prior to the commencement of any construction activity. A different location for the residence or accessory structure(s) may be approved by the director if the applicant shows that the new location will avoid known hazards on the project site, such as geotechnical, fire, and/or hydrologic hazards, and also shows that such other location will not result in damage to significant biological resources. The right to repair or replace a qualifying damaged or destroyed residence or accessory structure(s) in accordance

with this subsection C.2 shall exist in perpetuity.

3. Any amount of legal grading that has occurred on a lot or parcel of land, or in connection with a project, prior to the effective date of the ordinance adding subsections B.2.b and B.2.c, shall not be counted toward the grading thresholds set forth in those subsections. Proof that such grading was legally completed shall be demonstrated to the director prior to the commencement of any construction activity. Grading on a lot or parcel of land, or in connection with a project, which is undertaken after the effective date of the ordinance adding subsections B.2.b and B.2.c, other than grading completed for a project described in subsection C.1, above, shall be counted cumulatively in perpetuity toward the grading thresholds set forth in those subsections.

APPENDIX FOR SECTION 22.44.127

ALTADENA COMMUNITY STANDARDS DISTRICT

CRITERIA FOR SIGNIFICANT RIDGELINES

The location and designation of the significant ridgelines within the Altadena Community Standards District were based on the following criteria:

Topographic complexity: Ridges that have a significant difference in elevation from the valley or canyon floor. Generally, these ridges are observable from any location on the valley floor, from a community, or

from a public road. Geologic conditions in the Altadena Hillside Area make this a common condition.

Near/far contrast: Ridges that are a part of a scene that includes a prominent landform in the foreground and a major backdrop ridge with an unbroken skyline. This includes a view into a valley from a public road or viewpoint located at a higher altitude, such as along the valley rim or a pass. Often, layers of ridges are visible into the distance, such as on or adjacent to Chaney Trail. This contrast can be experienced viewing an entire panorama or a portion of a panorama from an elevated point.

Cultural landmarks: Ridges that frame views of well-known locations, structures, or other places, which are considered points of interest in the Altadena Hillside Area. These landmarks include Owen Brown cabin and gravesite, Zorthian Ranch, Echo Mountain, Rubio and Millard Canyons, and the Nightingale Estate.

Existing community boundaries and gateways: Ridges and surrounding terrain that provide the first view of predominantly natural, undeveloped land as a traveler emerges from the urban landscape. These lands introduce visitors to the visual experiences they will encounter in the Altadena Hillside Area. Community boundaries and gateways include all of the surrounding ridges that provide a skyline and boundary to the entire San Gabriel Valley, 210 Freeway East and West, and a vast, integrated, visually coherent viewscape delineating the end of the Los Angeles urban area.