



HOUSING WORKING GROUP

**HB2447 GUIDANCE FOR DEVELOPING
OBJECTIVE DESIGN STANDARDS**

July 2025

WHAT IS HB2447?

In 2025, the Arizona Legislature adopted HB2447 to *require*¹ a city/town council to implement the following by ordinance:

- Authorize administrative personnel to review and approve site plans, development plans, land divisions, lot line adjustments, lot ties, preliminary plats, final plats and plat amendments without a public hearing.
- Allow at-risk submittals for certain on-site preliminary grading and drainage work or infrastructure.
- Allow applicants with a history of compliance with building codes and regulations to be eligible for expedited permit review.
- **Authorize administrative personnel to review and approve design review plans based on objective standards without a public hearing.**²

HB2447 also provides that, notwithstanding any other law, the city or town council may *may* by ordinance adopt a self-certification program allowing registered architects and professional engineers to certify and be responsible for compliance with all applicable ordinances and construction standards for projects that the ordinance identifies as being qualified for self-certification.

HB2447 has a general effective date of December 31, 2025. The changes will be codified in [A.R.S. 9-500.49](#). HB2447 can be accessed here: <https://www.azleg.gov/legtext/57leg/1R/laws/0031.htm>.

¹ HB2447 amends the current version of [A.R.S. 9-500.49](#), which provides that a city/town council *may* implement this list by ordinance. To assist municipalities implement A.R.S. 9-500.49, four model ordinances and guidance documents were developed with the input of a Housing Working Group consisting of attorneys, planners, building officials, and other municipal staff. The model ordinances and documents can be accessed on the League's website: <https://www.azleague.org/35/Resources-and-Research>.

² "Public hearing" is not defined in HB2447 or state law. It typically refers to the part of a public meeting that is opened to the public for comment about an item on the agenda (e.g. public hearing for a rezoning).

WHAT ARE “DESIGN REVIEW PLANS” FOR THE PURPOSE OF HB2447?

“Design review plans” is not defined in [A.R.S. 9-500.49](#) or any other state law. As a result, we suggest creating a definition or referring to an existing definition in your local code.

WHAT MAKES A DESIGN STANDARD “OBJECTIVE”?

“Objective” is defined as:

- not influenced by personal interpretation, taste, or feelings of a municipal employee, and
- verifiable by reference to an adopted benchmark, standard, or criterion available and knowable by the applicant or proponent.

Design standards should be clear, measurable, predictable, and easy for all stakeholders to apply to minimize constraints on new development. While the standards should provide predictable outcomes for a wide range of projects, they should not result in monotonous development. They should also be adaptable to evolutions in technologies. Each municipality should aim to balance predictability with flexibility.

Objective standards typically use terms like *shall* and *must* or specific criteria (dimensions, numbers, percentages). Non-objective standards often include terms like *should*, *encourage*, *character*, *feel*, *adequate*, and *appropriate*.

HB2447 does not necessarily require every standard to be quantifiable with a numeric value. Different approaches can be used for objective standards, such as:

- Yes/No
- Counts and Measurements
- Ratios and Calculations
- Lists
- Scorecards
- Benchmarks and Performance Measures

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to developing these objective standards. The same definition of “objective” has been part of California law since 2017.³ As a result, design standards from California have proven useful in developing this Guidance.

Yes/No Standards

A yes/no standard can be useful to describe basic project requirements.

Example of Yes/No Objective Design Standards	Is the requirement met? (Yes/No)
Street-facing building facades shall have building entrances that front the street.	
Automobile and pedestrian access points shall not be gated or otherwise closed off to the public.	
Rooftop mechanical equipment shall be screened from public view by a parapet wall or decorative equipment screen.	
For ground-floor commercial uses in mixed-use buildings, exterior walls facing a street shall include windows, doors, or other openings for at least 75 percent of the building wall area.	
<p>The landscaped area of single-family residential, multifamily residential, mixed-use, and institutional type projects shall be designed with no more than 20% of the landscaped area planted in turf or plants that are not water-wise plants.</p> <p>Water-wise plants are defined as plants that are evaluated as needing “low” (10–30% reference evapotranspiration [ET_o]) or “very low” (<10%ET_o) amounts of irrigation water as defined and listed by Water Use Classifications of Landscape Species (WUCOLS) at http://ucanr.edu/sites/WUCOLS or other sources of water-wise plant water use classifications as verified by a licensed landscape architect.</p>	

³ See, e.g., “Affordable Housing Streamlined Approval Process” (California SB35, 2017); Housing Crisis Act (California SB330, 2019).

Parking:

1. Parking lots shall include shade elements, such as trees, vine-covered trellises, and overhead solar panels.
2. Parking lots shall be located at the rear or interior of the block and shall not be located between the sidewalk and the building frontage fronting the street.
3. Access to parking lots or structures shall be located along streets or alleys.

Trees shall be planted every 10 feet along streets to provide shade and a barrier to pedestrians.

Blank walls of more than 15 linear feet are prohibited along any street-facing façade.

Counts and Measurements

Count and measurement standards are useful when an objective design standard is based on a numeric value. Count standards represent the *number* of specified elements. Measurement standards represent the *size* of a design requirement (e.g., minimum, maximum, or an acceptable range of sizes). Many design standards are already built around measurements, such as those related to lot size, height, setbacks, and step-backs.

Example of Counts and Measurements as Objective Design Standards

Walls adjacent to streets shall not run in a continuous plane for more than 48 feet without incorporating at least 2 of the following design features:

1. A minimum 2-foot change in plane for at least 10 feet;
2. A minimum 18-inch raised planter for at least 10 feet;
3. A minimum 18-inch change in height for at least 10 feet;

4. Use of pilasters at 48-foot intervals and at changes in wall planes and height; or
5. A section of open grillwork a minimum 4 feet in height for at least 10 feet.

The paved section of sidewalks shall be at least 8 feet in width.⁴

A minimum one-foot offset is required for any wall plane that exceeds 30 feet in length.

The common open space area shall be at least 300 square feet or 25 square feet per dwelling unit, whichever is greater.

The common open space area shall have a minimum width of 10 feet on any side.

Building Articulation: At intervals of at least 100 feet of building length, there shall be a plane break along the facade composed of an offset of at least 5 feet in depth by 25 feet in length. The offset shall extend from grade to the highest story.⁵

Residential Frontages:

1. Multifamily building frontages shall include a terrace or porch.
2. Terraces or porches shall measure at least 6 feet in depth and 8 feet in width.
3. Terraces or porches shall be raised up 2–3 feet from the adjacent grade.
4. Fences or walls defining and/or retaining the front yard shall not exceed 3 feet in height from the adjacent sidewalk.

⁴ In comparison, a non-objective requirement would require sidewalks to “provide ample width and design for universal access along pathways and walk.”

⁵ In comparison, a non-objective building articulation requirement would require the project to “provide articulation to reduce the apparent mass and scale of the building and to be sensitive to the neighborhood.”

Block Size and Connectivity: Block sizes establish the scale and character of the community and can help create connected, pedestrian-oriented neighborhoods.

1. The maximum length of any side of a block shall measure no more than 350 feet.
2. When developing an area with a block length that exceeds the maximum dimension, the area shall be subdivided with new streets such that all resulting blocks are less than the maximum allowed size.
3. No building shall be greater than 200 feet in length.
 - a. Blocks greater than 400 feet in length shall be broken with a midblock connection, courtyard, or public paseo.
 - b. The minimum width of a midblock connection or paseo shall be 20 feet and consist at a minimum of a walking path, landscaping, and lighting.
4. Blocks and connections shall be designed to improve pedestrian linkages.
 - a. Where new streets are proposed, the ends of new streets shall align with existing streets or paseos in adjacent blocks.
 - b. Where cul-de-sacs exist, pedestrian linkages are required and shall provide direct connections to adjacent streets or public areas.
5. The following are prohibited:
 - a. Vacation of existing public street right-of-way.
 - b. Private development over public streets, courtyards, or paseos.

DO: Limit the maximum length of any side of a block to no more than 350 feet.

DO: Provide midblock connections to break up large developments.

DO: Where cul-de-sacs exist, pedestrian linkages shall be provided to create direct connections.

Residential Building Frontages

Purpose: Residential building frontages along a public street, public right-of-way, or common area provide an important transition between private development and the public realm.

Setback Treatment

1. To accommodate porches and patios, a setback at least 5 feet and no more than 10 feet from the right-of-way shall be incorporated between the public and private realm and create individual semiprivate landscape areas or garden spaces along the street.
2. The residential ground floor shall be located within 3 vertical feet of the ground level.
3. Fences between any private open space, common areas, or public spaces shall be limited to a maximum of 3 feet in height.

Activation

1. Residential buildings shall be designed with active frontages, with residential units facing the street, public right-of-way, or common open space, with overhangs, balconies, windows, and individual entries and porches to enliven the street edge and add “eyes” on the street.
 - a. All ground-level units shall include an individual entry, porch, patio, or terrace.
 - b. A minimum of 50% of upper-story units shall include a balcony or terrace.
2. Ground-floor windows shall not be opaque or tinted.
3. Rooms such as living rooms and dining rooms shall be oriented fronting toward the street and/or any adjacent common open space.
4. Where residential units are designed as townhomes or rowhomes, individual units shall be distinguished. This may be accomplished with at least 2 of the following:
 - a. Change in wall plane.
 - b. Change in color.

c. Change in roof form.

5. Blank walls without windows, doors, or other articulation are strongly discouraged. The maximum length of any blank wall shall be limited to 20 feet.

DO: Provide a landscape setback between the right-of-way and individual porches and entries.

DO: Design both street and courtyard frontages with overhangs, balconies, windows, and individual entries.

DON'T: Sideload units or create blank or facades without entries.

Ratios and Calculations

Ratios and calculations can be useful for standards that are linked to the scale of a project. Many existing standards already rely on ratios and calculations, such as density, floor area ratio (FAR), lot coverage percentages, parking, open space, and landscaping requirements. Ratios and calculations often require clarifications or examples on how to satisfy the required ratio.

Example of Ratios & Calculations as Objective Design Standards

The common open space area shall be at least 300 square feet or 25 square feet per dwelling unit, whichever is greater.

Common open space must have a minimum width of 10 feet on any side.

For ground-floor commercial uses in mixed-use buildings, exterior walls facing a street shall include windows, doors, or other openings for at least 75 percent of the building wall area.

Lists

Lists are useful when flexibility is needed. Lists can specify a range of acceptable options (“Any of the following...”), require compliance with a minimum number of elements (“At least one of the following...”), or require compliance with a maximum

number of elements (“No more than three of the following...”). Lists can also be useful to provide a palette of choices or allow for variations in a typical architectural element.

Example of Lists as Objective Design Standards

All primary entryways shall incorporate at least 4 of the following elements:

- a. The entryway shall be recessed at least 2 feet from the building facade to create a porch or landing area.
- b. The doorway shall be recessed at least 3 inches from the building facade.
- c. The entryway shall be designed with an overhead projection of at least 6 inches, such as an awning or other architectural design features, to distinguish the front door from the rest of the building facade.
- d. The entryway shall be clearly marked with a side light window panel, adjacent window, or a door with a window.
- e. The entryway shall be raised or sunken at least 1 stair step from the pedestrian pathway.
- f. The landing area shall be enhanced with a unique paving material, texture, pattern, or color that is differentiated.

Walls adjacent to streets shall not run in a continuous plane for more than 48 feet without incorporating at least 2 of the following design features:

1. A minimum 2-foot change in plane for at least 10 feet;
2. A minimum 18-inch raised planter for at least 10 feet;
3. A minimum 18-inch change in height for at least 10 feet;
4. Use of pilasters at 48-foot intervals and at changes in wall planes and height; or
5. A section of open grillwork a minimum 4 feet in height for at least 10 feet.

Scorecards

Scorecards are useful to provide a menu of options. Each option is assigned a point value, and the combined point total of the options selected by the applicant must meet or exceed a specified target. A scorecard can also be useful to incentivize exceptional design and features beyond the bare minimum.

Example of Scorecard as an Objective Design Standard		
Required Landscape Area: The required landscape area must provide the type of plants necessary to achieve a total of at least 35 points per square foot of landscape area according to the table below:		
Plant Type	Plant Container Size	Points
Shrub	1-gallon container	1.0
	5-gallon container	2.0
	15-gallon container or larger	10.0
Tree	5-gallon container	5.0
	15-gallon container	10.0
	24-inch box	20.0
	36-inch box	50.0
	48-inch box or larger	100.0

Benchmarks and Performance Measures

External benchmarks and performance measures are generally accepted standards that are verifiable and well documented. Trip generation, vehicle miles traveled calculations, parking ratios, and minimum design standards for roads and parking are often based on quantifiable benchmarks and performance measures.

WHAT ARE BEST PRACTICES FOR DEVELOPING OBJECTIVE DESIGN STANDARDS?

1. Use Simple, Clear Language.

Avoid using “terms of art” and technical terms that are not universally understood. When such terms are used, explain how the standard can be measured or verified. Examples of language to avoid:

- “Respond to adjacent residential uses with a sensitive transition in scale and massing.”
- “Design buildings to fit with the context of their surroundings.”
- “Use trees to delineate a public street.”
- “Produce high quality authentic design.”
- “Building must reflect the look and feel of the community.”
- “Address unmet need for senior housing.”
- “Special care shall be taken to avoid obstructing views to the surrounding hills.”

2. Group Similar Topics Together.

Group similar topics together to highlight that multiple objective design standards are related (e.g., parking, residential frontage, etc.)

3. Use Table and Lists.

Use tables or lists with bullets to organize more complex standards into individual components that can be interpreted and verified as unique standards.

4. Use Graphics to Illustrate Standards.

Graphics, photos, drawings, maps, and concept plan diagrams help illustrate application of the standards. The use of annotations and callouts should be used to further clarify the relationship between the standards and the graphics.

5. Define Key Terms.

Objective design standards rely on *clear definitions*. Definitions should be consistent throughout the zoning code and the building code, especially when they involve architectural terminology. In some cases, methodologies and procedures to perform calculations should be provided.

6. Use Purpose Statements.

Although a purpose statement is not essential to the regulatory aspect of objective design standards, it may help clarify the goal of a particular standard or the context of a group of standards. A purpose statement can also provide a basis for any variance from the standard.

7. Allow for Minor Variances or Deviations.

Allowing minor variances or deviations can provide the flexibility necessary to allow small adjustments based on site conditions or specific design details. The application process and requirements for a minor deviation should be clear.

Examples of Objective Design Standards:

City of Concord:

- [Development Code Chapter 18.152](#)
- [2023 City of Concord Objective Design Standards dated September 6, 2023](#)
- [Allowed building, roofing and fencing materials list](#)
- [Allowed native street trees list](#)

City of Carlsbad:

- [Objective Design Standards](#)
- [Corresponding amendments to the Carlsbad Municipal Code](#)
- [Citywide objective design standards virtual webinar](#)
- [Citywide objective design standards FAQs](#)
- [Citywide Objective Design Manual Checklist](#)
- [City Council action](#)
- [Website](#)

[City of Oakland Objective Design Standards](#)

[Mission Viejo Objective Design Standards](#)

[Association of Bay Area Governments \(ABAG\) Handbook on Preparing ODDS](#)

[Marin County Objective Design + Development Standards Toolkit](#)