

CITY OF LOS ANGELES  
DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING  
ZONING INFORMATION FILE

**Z.I. NO. 2422**  
**POTRERO CANYON**

**COUNCIL DISTRICT: 11**

**BACKGROUND:** The single-family lots that surround the rim of the Potrero Canyon Park, as well as the Potrero Canyon Park itself, are located within the Single Permit Jurisdiction of the State Coastal Act. The State Coastal Commission requires that all development projects be reviewed and/or approved by the local jurisdiction prior to being considered by the State Coastal Commission.

The Potrero Canyon area lies within a geologically and environmentally sensitive area due to its history of slope instability prior to the development of the park. Because of this slope instability, lots that surround the canyon rim are subject to extensive grading regulations that may require construction of retaining walls, caissons or friction piles and grand beams in order to provide a stable building pad.

Zoning Administrator Memorandum 85 (dated December 11, 1992, attached) states that “Historically, it has been the City’s position that in geologically and environmentally sensitive areas a full Coastal Development Permit was necessary”.

In the past, the public received incomplete information from the Department of City Planning on what local Coastal Review Process was needed to build on these rim lots. Therefore, consistent with the Zoning Administrator Memorandum 85, a City Coastal Development Permit (CDP) must be filed for a Project as defined below. This Zoning Information File will outline the required Coastal Development Permit process, necessary environmental review and general development guidelines for development on this rim lots. Potential applicant’s of a CDP are encouraged to consult separately with California Coastal Commission staff prior to the submission of an application with the Department of City Planning.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** A City Coastal Development Permit (CDP) filed pursuant to Section 12.02.1 the Los Angeles Municipal Code must be approved in order to obtain any Coastal Clearance for a Project located along the rim of Potrero Canyon. The City’s Coastal Development Permit process requires a Public Hearing with notification of said Hearing to property owners and occupants within 100 foot radius of the subject property. The decision-maker is required to make five findings in approving or disapproving a CDP. The CDP is appealable to the West Los Angeles Area Planning Commission and to the State Coastal Commission. If the CDP case is not appealed to the Area Planning Commission, the State Coastal Commission Staff has 21 days to determine if the City made the correct decision on the CDP and let the decision stand or appeal the CDP to State Coastal Commission.

**PROJECT**—For the purposes of this Zoning Information File the following activities shall be considered a Project: 1) construction of a new single family house; 2) major additions (more than 500 square feet to an existing house or accessory structure); 3) any addition that results in an increase in the existing graded building pad); 4) raised swimming pools located within the slope of the property; 5) any retaining walls; and 6) accessory buildings and structures.

**ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:** An Environmental Assessment Form (EAF) will be required to be filed with any Coastal Development Permit. The following information is required in addition to the standard EAF exhibits: a copy of the geotechnical report; a grading plan; and a foundation plan.

### **NON MANDATED DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES**

The State Coastal Commission, in discussions with the Planning Department has expressed concern regarding the potential affect of proposed development along the slope areas of rim top properties on the viewshed from the future Potrero Canyon Park trails.

In designing a development project along the canyon rim properties, the following guidelines should be considered: Accessory structures are discouraged; if retaining walls are necessary, they should be low in height; use a combination of lower retaining walls with open railings or transparent screening for safety instead of solid walls; increase the number of retaining walls to create a terracing effect instead of one higher retaining wall; confine project within the existing graded pad; consult with the Fire Department as to the appropriate planting palette for a Fuel Modification Zone that would allow for screening any walls as viewed from the future park; finish retaining walls with beige or a similar earth-tone color materials to better blend the wall into the hillside slope; and design any accessory structure to be setback from the toe of the slope.

### **CALIFORNIA COASTAL ACT-REGIONAL INTERPRETIVE GUIDELINES: (Adopted October 14, 1980 for the Pacific Palisades Area)**

In making its determination the decision-maker must make five findings in order to approve or disapprove a City Coastal Development Permit. Finding number three states “The Interpretive Guidelines for Coastal Planning and Permits as established by the California Coastal Commission dated February 11, 1977 and any subsequent amendments thereto have been reviewed, analyzed, and considered in light of the individual project in making its determination”.

For the Public’s convenience the appropriate sections of the Regional Interpretive Guidelines for the Potrero Canyon Area are provided as an attachment to this ZI. These relevant Guidelines entitled: Alteration of Landform; Bluff Top Development, and Height should be reviewed when designing any project along the canyon rim.

Attachment 1: Zoning Administrator Memorandum 85

Attachment 2: Regional Interpretive Guidelines

ALTERATION OF LANDFORM:

Grading, cutting or filling that will alter natural landforms (bluffs, cliffs, ravines, etc.) should be prohibited. In permitted development, landform alteration should be minimized by concentrating the development on level areas (except on ridgelines and hill tops) and designing hillside roads to be as narrow as possible and follow natural contours. (30251, 30253)

In all cases grading should be minimized. New residential development should be sited and designed so that as a general rule, no ponds, creeks, or drainages are filled or cleared: clearance and scraping should be limited to the minimum necessary area for a house pad and the legally required brush clearance area for fire safety. Road cuts and new subdivisions should not create lots requiring massive grading or extensive geological marks or cuts. (30251, 30253, 30240)

Cascading project design should be utilized in new developments along scenic routes or if visually obtrusive as methods to blend the proposal with the surrounding topography. (30251, 30253)

BLUFF TOP DEVELOPMENT:

Proposed development should be set back at least 25 feet from the edge of any coastal bluff. (30251, 30253)

Proposed development upon a canyon bluff top should be set back at least ten feet from the bluff-top edge, or set back in accordance with a string line (see String Line in this Appendix) connecting adjacent development, or set back from the primary vegetation line depending upon site characteristics as determined by a staff inspection of the site. (30251, 30253)

DENSITY CALCULATIONS:

Net  $\frac{(\text{No. of units}) \times (43,560 \text{ sq. ft./ac.})}{(\text{Size of lot in square feet})} = \text{du/ac net.}$

Gross Density for Mid-Block Lots  $\frac{(\text{No. of units}) \times (43,560 \text{ sq. ft./ac.})}{(\text{Size of lot in square feet}) \times (1.25)} = \text{du/ac gross.}$

Gross Density for Corner Lots  $\frac{(\text{No. of units}) \times (43,560 \text{ sq. ft./ac.})}{(\text{Size of lot in square feet}) \times (1.5)} = \text{du/ac gross.}$

DEED:

In cases where minor modification to a proposed structure might result in an additional dwelling unit or units, a legally recorded deed restriction which sets forth and limits the use of the structure to the specific number of dwelling units recorded on the permit shall be required. (30252)

## SIGN CRITERIA:

The Commission recognizes that different situations present different signing problems. For that reason it has chosen to abandon the traditional approach to sign regulation in favor of flexible guidelines under which signs can be considered on their own merits. These guidelines contain general criteria which must be met before a permit can be issued:

1. Signing shall be restrained in character and no larger than necessary for adequate identification.
2. Signing for an establishment within a commercial or industrial center shall be in harmony with the signing of the entire center. The theme of such signing shall be approved as a part of plans for new commercial or industrial center.
3. No sign will be allowed which disrupts or detracts from the quality of view or the line of sight in any view corridor (e.g., no rooftop signs, flashing or blinking signs).
4. No scenic values or other public interests should be harmed as a result of signing.
5. Signs should be on-site, not off-site.
6. On-premise signs should be designed as an integral part of development.
7. Roof signs will not be allowed.

(30251)

Local jurisdiction sign criteria should be utilized except where found to be in contradiction to the California Coastal Act of 1976 policies.

## MEASUREMENT OF HEIGHT:

The maximum allowable height for a structure on a particular lot will be determined by the "Buildable Envelope" of the particular site. This Appendix section contains all of the information necessary to determine the dimensions of a buildable envelope. Development may take place anywhere within the perimeters of the buildable envelope. A structure need not fill the entire envelope, but in no case should any portion of a structure exceed the envelope perimeters.

How to determine the dimensions of the buildable envelope for any site:

### A. The necessary information:

The buildable envelope will be unique to the individual site, and can be developed from three pieces of data: 1) the maximum allowable height, specified in the preceding area guidelines, 2) the required building setback lines of the lot, and 3) the grade level from which the height shall be measured.

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The first of these, the specified maximum height, will be found within the preceding area specific section of these guidelines. The second, the required building setback lines for the lot, are those available from the local planning and building department as they are modified (e.g., bluff tops, setbacks) within the preceding area specific section of those guidelines. The third piece of data, the grade level from which the height shall be measured can be determined as follows:

1. Measurement shall be from one of the following two grade elevations, depending upon the characteristics of the project site:

a) Grade Elevation #1 -

Lot Characteristics:

If the lot is: a) within an existing area, and b) contains an existing graded building pad of sufficient size upon which to construct the proposed structure, then height shall be measured as follows:

Calculation of Height:

Height shall be measured along perpendiculars (plumb lines) from the existing pad elevation (finished grade) to the guideline specified maximum height above grade.

b) Grade Elevation #2 -

Lot Characteristics:

If the lot has characteristics other than those described under Grade Elevation #1, above, then height shall be measured as follows:

Calculation of Height:

Height shall be measured along perpendiculars (plumb lines) from the elevation of the natural grade to the guideline specified maximum height above grade.

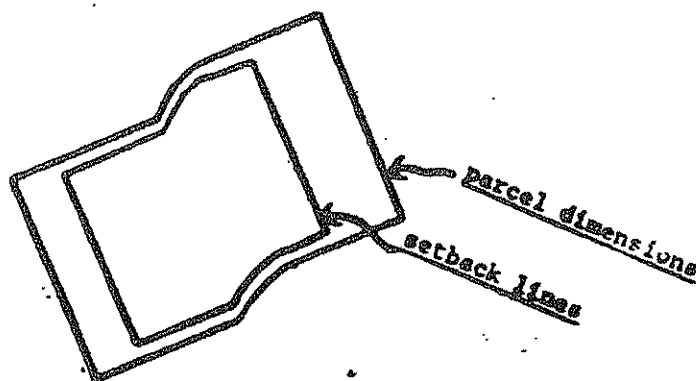
B. Putting it all together to form the buildable envelope.

The above three pieces of data for the parcel can be combined to develop the buildable envelope of the site. A buildable envelope shall be situated upon one of the above two Grade Elevations and will have the following characteristics:

Side Surfaces:

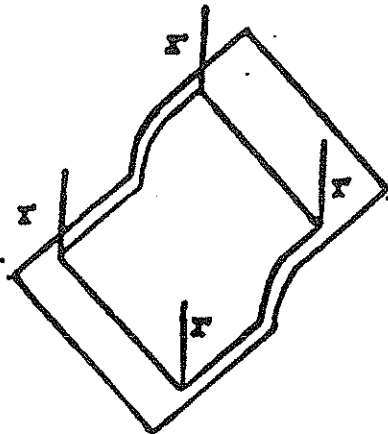
The sides of the envelope are established by the setback lines of the lot.

Figure 1



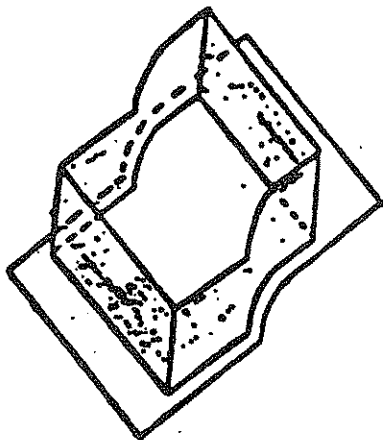
The elevation of any side surface is specified by the maximum guideline height. Height shall be measured along perpendiculars (plumb lines) from the grade elevation.

Figure 2



Side surfaces are established as the guideline height is applied to all points of each side.

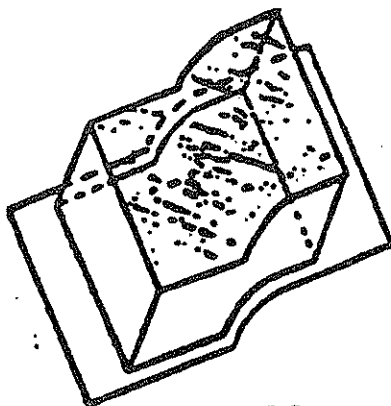
Figure 3



**Upper Surface:**

The upper surface of the envelope shall run parallel to the underlying grade elevation (contours) at the guideline specified height. In other words, the upper surface is that plane of points perpendicular to all points on the grade surface at the guideline specified height.

Figure 4

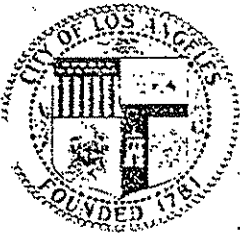


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Notes: Minor irregularities of parcel grade shall be considered on a case by case basis.

Development may occur anywhere within the boundaries defined by the maximum envelope perimeter and height, however, the building site on larger parcels should be chosen so as to minimize, as much as practical, disruptions of significant views and vistas from public places and to maximize the preservation of significant site features.

On extremely steep lots some allowance may be made on a case by case basis for overlapping structural blocks. In any case, the exposed height of wall sections should be no greater than the maximum guideline height of the area.



Los Angeles City Planning Department  
Room 561 City Hall



OFFICE OF ZONING ADMINISTRATION

MEMORANDUM

ZA MEMORANDUM NO. 85

December 11, 1992

TO: All Staff

FROM: Robert Janovici

SUBJECT: **COASTAL DEVELOPMENT PERMITS FOR SINGLE-FAMILY DWELLINGS IN ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE AREAS**

The California Coastal Act (Act) empowers the California Coastal Commission with the authority to approve all "development projects" in the Coastal Zone. In Los Angeles, based upon specific provisions of the Act, the Coastal Commission ("Commission") requires submittal of a development project to the local jurisdiction prior to being considered by the Commission. In conformance with the Act, City procedures and ordinances have been adopted which have established that projects must receive an Exemption, Approval In Concept review, Coastal Development Permit (CDP) or other appropriate clearance from the City as a prerequisite to development in the coastal zone.

In many instances, an Approval In Concept serves as the appropriate clearance for construction of a single-family dwelling. An Approval In Concept however, is not a permit, but instead a general review of a project for conformance with local zoning laws. Following its issuance, the Coastal Commission conducts a public hearing and a Coastal Development Permit is issued by that agency.

Typical projects which require an Approval In Concept and not a full City-issued CDP, include single-family dwellings, multiple unit residences, apartments of four units or less, and new improvements or demolitions costing \$100,000 or less.

Apparently, there has been some confusion over the City's policy due to the lack of a written declaration. Historically, it has been the City's position that in geologically and environmentally sensitive areas, a full Coastal Development Permit was necessary. Recent project proposals and concerns of constituents have mandated reaffirmation of the necessity for a more extensive review other than an Approval In Concept for single-family projects that are located in environmentally sensitive areas such as known landslide areas, flood prone areas or projects requiring new grading.



*A full Coastal Development Permit review of these projects by the City provides for increased opportunities of constituents and City Departments to respond to concerns that are beyond the scope of the Approval In Concept review. A City CDP review likewise enables advocacy and responses on behalf of the applicant of a project be heard. A Coastal Commission CDP review, while in some respects duplicative, is also one step removed from the community and from reviewing City Departments and takes place later in time.*

*For these reasons, this document establishes in writing that the policy of the Planning Department is to require that new single-family dwelling projects in environmentally sensitive areas are not eligible for Approvals In Concept and instead must apply for a Coastal Development Permit under the appropriate Los Angeles Municipal Code provisions.*

*RJ:lmc*