

CITY OF CALISTOGA

STAFF REPORT

TO: CHAIRMAN MANFREDI AND MEMBERS OF THE
PLANNING COMMISSION

FROM: KEN MACNAB, SENIOR PLANNER

MEETING DATE: FEBRUARY 13, 2008

SUBJECT: REVIEW OF LOT COVERAGE STANDARD IN CITY
ZONING ORDINANCE

1 **REQUEST:**

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3 Policy Interpretation (P 2008-01): Confirm staff's interpretation of the City's
4 Zoning Ordinance as it relates to the purpose, definition and measurement of lot
5 coverage standards for buildings and structures within residential zoning districts.

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7 **BACKGROUND:**

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9 At the request of Commissioner Coates, staff has prepared the following report
10 addressing the City's lot coverage standard. The purpose of this report is to
11 review and confirm staff's interpretation regarding the application and
12 measurement of lot coverage standards for buildings and structures within
13 residential zoning districts. Establishment of consistent practices for applying and
14 measuring the lot coverage standards will provide clear direction to the public
15 and residential property owners.

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17 **Zoning**

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19 Zoning is one of the primary tools used to implement General Plan land use
20 directives. The General Plan describes the physical character and development
21 intensity of desired land uses within the City and contains corresponding goals,
22 objectives and policies to guide implementation. The Zoning Ordinance
23 establishes zoning districts and land use regulations that direct development as
24 envisioned by the General Plan. Zoning controls the type and intensity of land
25 uses, sets forth procedural requirements for establishment of land uses and
26 identifies specific standards for new development.

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30 **Lot Coverage**

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Lot coverage is one of several zoning standards used to regulate the intensity of site development (others standards include minimum lot area, height limits, floor area ratio and setbacks). Specifically, lot coverage regulates the amount of lot area that can be developed with buildings or structures. It is expressed in terms of a maximum percentage and is calculated based on the size of the lot. All but one of the City's residential zoning districts contains a maximum coverage standard. Table 1 below summarizes maximum lot coverage by zoning district category.

TABLE 1

Zoning District	Max. Coverage (%)
RR Rural Residential	30
R1 Single-Family Residential	30
R2 Multiple-Family Residential	none
R3 Residential / Professional	40
MHP Mobile Home Park	50
CC Community Commercial	60
DC Downtown Commercial	80

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Measuring Lot Coverage

Lot coverage is defined by Section 17.04.422 of the Calistoga Municipal Code (CMC) as follows¹:

“The total ground area of a site occupied by any building or structure, as measured from the outside of its surrounding external walls or supporting members. Lot coverage includes exterior structures such as stairs, arcades, bridges, covered parking, eaves projecting greater than 24 inches from a building, and permanent structural elements protruding from buildings including overhanging balconies, oriel or bay windows, stories which overhang a ground-level story, and covered carports.”

¹ For comparison, the cities of Napa and St. Helena define lot coverage as” the land area covered by all buildings or structures on a lot, including all projections except eaves. Decks or other structures with an elevation of eighteen (18) inches or less above finished grade shall not be considered as contributing to lot coverage.”

59 Lot coverage is measured by tabulating the area of a site that is occupied by a
60 building or structure. Section 17.04.090 of the CMC defines a building as:

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62 *“Anything constructed or erected for the support, shelter or enclosure of*
63 *persons.”*
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65 The term “structure” is not defined in the CMC. The CMC does provide a
66 definition for “Accessory Structure” (Section 17.04.020), which is applicable to
67 both accessory buildings and structures:

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69 *“Accessory building or structure” shall mean a detached building or*
70 *structure which is subordinate and incidental to that of the primary*
71 *building or structure on the same parcel of land, excluding second*
72 *dwelling units which are regulated by Chapter 17.37 CMC. An*
73 *accessory building or structure shall comply with the provisions of*
74 *accessory structure standards contained in CMC 17.38.050.”²*
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76 For the purposes of this discussion the difference between buildings and
77 structures should be understood because both terms are included in the
78 definition of lot coverage. Primary buildings house the principal use of a
79 property. In residential zoning districts primary buildings would include single-
80 family detached homes or a multi-unit apartment. Accessory buildings typically
81 houses secondary or ancillary uses of a property. Examples would include a
82 second unit, guest room or pool house. Structures are similar to accessory
83 buildings in that they too can also provide for secondary or ancillary activities, but
84 are distinguished from a “building” in that they are not built or designed for
85 human habitation. Examples of an “accessory structure” would include a garage
86 or carport, a covered patio, a barn, a workshop, a greenhouse or storage shed.

87 88 **Compliance with Lot Coverage Standard**

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90 To determine compliance with established lot coverage standards, the total
91 ground area of a site that is occupied by a building or structure (as defined
92 above) is tabulated and then compared with the area that is allowed to be
93 occupied pursuant to the maximum percentage established for the zoning district.

94 95 **DISCUSSION:**

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97 The lot coverage standard is one of several zoning tools used to regulate the
98 built environment. As shown in Table 1 above, the City’s lot coverage standards
99 vary from area to area depending on the type of use and the desired character of

² The cities of Napa and St. Helena define structure as “anything constructed or erected, except fences, the use of which requires permanent location on the ground or attached to something having a permanent location on the ground.”

100 the area. Less lot coverage is allowed in single-family neighborhoods in order to
101 maintain a less intense development pattern, to allow a certain degree of
102 openness (exposure to light and air), and to minimize physical and visual
103 intrusion. Higher density residential and commercial areas are allowed greater
104 coverage to accommodate the more intensive nature and needs of these forms
105 of development. The establishment of lot coverage standards specific to the type
106 of use and/or desired character of the area is consistent with and implements
107 General Plan land use directives.

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109 The Planning and Building Department's historic practice for measuring lot
110 coverage has generally been to count the ground area of any building or
111 structure that is subject to setback requirements. Examples of improvements
112 that are typically counted towards the coverage standard include: new buildings
113 or building additions, covered patios or carports, workshops and storage sheds.
114 Structures that are less than 18 inches in height are typically NOT counted as
115 coverage. Examples of such structures would include in-ground pools or
116 jacuzzis, decks and uncovered patios. Staff believes the Department's practice
117 is consistent with adopted definitions, does not unduly restrict use and enjoyment
118 of property, and is respectful of the use and enjoyment of adjacent properties by
119 neighboring property owners.

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121 Recently, the Planning and Building Department received a residential building
122 permit that included a 15 by 25 foot patio area with an overhead gabled trellis.
123 Staff concluded that the design and height of the patio trellis met the definition of
124 an accessory structure and that the ground area occupied by the trellis structure
125 should be counted as coverage. Staff's conclusion was questioned on the basis
126 that a trellis is an open air structure and should not be counted as coverage
127 because it does not "cover" the ground below it (like a covered patio or carport
128 would). This position assumes that the purpose of the lot coverage standard is
129 solely to limit the amount of roofed coverage on a site and does not take into
130 consideration the other purposes served by the lot coverage standard (such as
131 providing for a certain degree of openness or minimizing physical and visual
132 intrusions).

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134 As a result of this instance, staff is seeking Commission confirmation regarding
135 the department's interpretation of the purpose of the lot coverage standard and
136 its current practices in application and measurement.

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138 **RECOMMENDATION**

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140 Staff recommends that the Planning Commission review and confirm staff's
141 interpretation of the City's lot coverage standards.
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