

City of Sonoma Planning Commission  
*Study Session Guidelines*

*Purpose:* Study sessions are encouraged in order to provide an opportunity for early feedback on a project concept by the Planning Commission and the public prior to or immediately after the filing of an application. Study sessions are appropriate for development proposals that are large, complex, or potentially controversial. Planning Commission feedback provided in a study session will focus on:

- Site planning
- Compatibility with neighboring uses
- Overall consistency with the General Plan policies and Development Code standards and guidelines
- Scale and mass
- Potentially significant environmental impacts

To qualify for a study session, the project concept should demonstrate reasonable understanding of and adherence to applicable Development Code requirements and guidelines. Staff may reject project concepts that are over-scaled, require multiple Variances or Exceptions, or that clearly conflict with General Plan policies or Development Code standards and guidelines.

*Conduct:* The prospective applicant is expected to provide an overview of the project concept and answer questions from the Planning Commission. Because a study session is not a formal public hearing, the Planning Commission Chair has the discretion to invite the applicant to return for further comments and questions following initial comments from the public and the Planning Commission. Similarly, the Planning Commission Chair has the discretion to invite additional comments from the public after initial feedback from the Planning Commission has been given. Comments on a study session item should be directed toward the project proposal.

*Commission Comments and Feedback:* While a study session provides an opportunity for Planning Commissioners to identify potential issues or concerns, Commissioners will refrain from making statements of absolute judgment, as these could be considered expressions of bias. Straw votes or polls of the Commission will not be undertaken. Commissioner comments made in the course of a study session should not be construed as limiting any action that the Planning Commission may subsequently take with respect to a project in the course the entitlement process.

*Submittal Materials, Required:* 1) Project narrative, including project objectives, schedule of land uses, schedule of residential unit sizes, estimated FAR and coverage, # of off-street parking spaces; 2) Site plan, showing the project in the context of its surroundings, including at a minimum, building envelopes on adjoining properties; 3) Description and outcomes of any neighbor outreach conducted.

*Submittal Materials, Encouraged:* 1) Preliminary pedestrian-level massing studies (using Sketch-up or similar) addressing the project and its neighborhood context; 2) Alternative site plans. Any models used in the preparation of submittal materials should be made accessible at the study session.

*Submittal Materials, Discouraged:* 1) Landscaping plans; 2) Detailed building elevations showing specific architecture; 3) Submittal materials that are overly-detailed or unrelated to the basic issues of land use and compatibility.

*Fees:* There shall be no fee for an initial study session. Follow-up study sessions for a project proposal will only be allowed in cases where the site plan or other key projects components have been substantially modified. A fee shall be required for any follow-up study session.