



## CITY OF SIGNAL HILL

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2175 Cherry Avenue • Signal Hill, California 90755-3799

THE CITY OF SIGNAL HILL  
WELCOMES YOU TO A REGULAR  
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING  
December 16, 2025

The City of Signal Hill appreciates your attendance. Public interest provides the Commission with valuable information regarding issues of the community. Meetings are held on the 3rd Tuesday of every month.

Meetings begin at 7:00 pm. There is a public comment period at the beginning of the regular meeting, as well as the opportunity to comment on each agenda item as it arises. Any meeting may be adjourned to a time and place stated in the order of adjournment.

The agenda is posted 72 hours prior to each meeting on the City's website and outside of City Hall. The agenda and related reports are also available for review online at [www.cityofsignalhill.org](http://www.cityofsignalhill.org).

### To participate:

- In-person : Signal Hill Public Library Community Room, 1800 East Hill Street, Signal Hill, California.
- To make a general public comment or comment on a specific agenda item, you may also submit your comment, limited to 250 words or less, to [commdev@cityofsignalhill.org](mailto:commdev@cityofsignalhill.org) not later than 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, December 16, 2025. Written comments will be provided electronically to the Planning Commission and attached to the meeting minutes. Written comments will not be read into the record.

Planning Commission Members are compensated \$125.00 per meeting.

**(1) CALL TO ORDER – 7:00 P.M.**

**(2) ROLL CALL**

CHAIR MILLER  
VICE CHAIR BELL  
COMMISSIONER LOPEZ  
COMMISSIONER PARKER

COMMISSIONER SAVOULIAN

(3) **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

(4) **PUBLIC BUSINESS FROM THE FLOOR ON ITEMS NOT LISTED ON THIS AGENDA**

(5) **PRESENTATIONS**

- a. DURING THE OCTOBER 28, 2025 CITY COUNCIL MEETING, THE COUNCIL RECEIVED AN UPDATE ON THE OPPORTUNITY STUDY AREA (OSA) PLANNING EFFORT. THE PRESENTATION WAS PROVIDED BY PLACEWORKS, THE CONSULTANT WORKING WITH STAFF ON THE PROJECT. THE OSA FRAMEWORK ESTABLISHES A COORDINATED PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY TO GUIDE REINVESTMENT, IMPROVE INFRASTRUCTURE, AND ATTRACT NEW PRIVATE INVESTMENT WITHIN KEY UNDERUTILIZED AREAS OF THE CITY. IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PLACEWORKS, STAFF IDENTIFIED THREE OVERLAY ZONES: THE COMMUNITY CORE (MIXED-USE); THE INNOVATION & ENTERPRISE; AND THE WORKSHOP, STUDIO, & ENTERTAINMENT OVERLAY ZONES. TOGETHER, THESE ZONING OVERLAYS PROVIDE A FLEXIBLE REGULATORY STRUCTURE THAT ALIGNS LAND USE PLANNING WITH THE CITY'S BROADER ECONOMIC AND FISCAL SUSTAINABILITY GOALS. EACH OVERLAY RESPONDS TO CURRENT MARKET CONDITIONS AND LEVERAGES THE CITY'S ECONOMIC ANALYSIS TO SUPPORT COMPATIBLE, HIGH-QUALITY DEVELOPMENT.

(8) **DIRECTOR'S REPORTS**

- a. 2026 HOMELESS COUNT EVENT

Summary:

The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) sponsors an annual regional homeless count. The 2026 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count event will be held over the course of three days. Signal Hill's count will be conducted on *Wednesday, January 21, 2026, starting at 7:30 pm*. The Community Development Department will host the event and provide coordination and training for volunteers. The Police Department will provide four unmarked vehicles to drive count volunteers through their assigned sections of the City.

Strategic Plan Goal(s):

Goal No. 2 Community Safety: Maintain Community Safety by supporting public safety services and increasing emergency preparedness.

Goal No. 5 High-Functioning Government: Strengthen internal communication, recruitment, retention, systems, and processes to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of City services.

Recommendation:

Save the date and volunteer.

## b. 2026 PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

Summary:

Staff will highlight the upcoming development project for the calendar year 2026.

Recommendation:

Receive and file.

## c. 2026 PLANNING COMMISSIONERS ACADEMY

Summary:

The League of California Cities 2026 Planning Commissioners Academy will be held March 11-13 at the Sheraton Park Hotel Anaheim.

Strategic Plan Goal(s):

Goal 5: High-Functioning Government: Strengthen internal communication, recruitment, retention, systems, and processes to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of City services.

Recommendation:

Select one or more Planning Commissioners to attend.

**(9) CONSENT CALENDAR**

The following Consent Calendar items are expected to be routine and non-controversial. Items will be acted upon by the Commission at one time without discussion. Any item may be removed by a Commissioner or member of the audience for discussion.

## a. PREVIOUS MINUTES

Summary:

Regular meeting of October 21, 2025.

Recommendation:

Approve.

## b. CITY COUNCIL FOLLOW UP

Summary:

A brief summary of the City Council's actions from the last City Council

meeting(s).

Recommendation:

Receive and file.

Background & Analysis:

1) At the October 28, 2025 City Council meeting:

- Mayor Keir Jones presented a proclamation to Colleen T. Doan, Community Development Director, in recognition of her retirement.
- City Council adopted a resolution designating the Community Room of the Signal Hill Public Library as the temporary location of meetings during the remodeling of City Hall.
- PlaceWorks presented an update on the Opportunity Study Areas project.

2) At the November 13, 2025 City Council meeting:

- City Council introduced an Ordinance amending Title 15 of the Signal Hill Municipal Code (SHMC) to adopt by reference the 2025 California Building Standards Code.
- City Council approved a revised ENA between the City of Signal Hill and National Community Renaissance.
- City Council adopted a resolution awarding a contract for the City Hall renovation window installation project.

3) At the November 25, 2025 City Council meeting:

- City Council authorized the City Manager to enter into a contract with CABD Construction for the Amphitheater Project.

4) At the December 9, 2025 City Council meeting:

- City Council reorganized for 2026: Tina Hansen will serve as Mayor, and Charlie Honeycutt will serve as Vice Mayor.
- City Council introduced an Omnibus Ordinance amending various sections of the SHMC to clarify regulations and conform to state law.
- City Council adopted Ordinance No. 2025-11-1555 amending Title 15 (Buildings and Construction) of the SHMC.
- City Council received the Annual Comprehensive Financial Report.
- City Council approved a City Council Committee Policy.
- City Council designated April 14 as the annual Jessie Nelson Day of Remembrance.

c. IN THE NEWS

Summary:

Articles compiled by staff that may be of interest to the Commission.

Recommendation:



Receive and file.

Background and analysis:

Articles include:

- How a Single Stairway Can Take Affordable Housing to a New Level - Planning Magazine
- Pitch Perfect - Architectural Record
- Tiny ADU transforms LA home into stunning art gallery - LA Times

**(10) COMMISSION NEW BUSINESS**

COMMISSIONER LOPEZ  
COMMISSIONER PARKER  
COMMISSIONER SAVOULIAN  
VICE CHAIR BELL  
CHAIR MILLER

**(11) ADJOURNMENT**

Tonight's meeting will be adjourned to the next regular meeting of the Planning Commission to be held on Tuesday, January 20, 2026, at 7:00 p.m., in the Signal Hill Public Library Community Room, 1800 East Hill Street, Signal Hill, CA 90755.

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

If you need special assistance beyond what is normally provided to participate in City meetings, the City will attempt to accommodate you in every reasonable manner. Please call the City Clerk's office at (562) 989-7305 at least 48 hours prior to the meeting to inform us of your particular needs and to determine if accommodation is feasible.

**AFFIDAVIT OF POSTING**

I, Carlos Luis, Acting Commission Secretary of the Planning Commission, do hereby affirm that a copy of the foregoing agenda was posted at City Hall, the Signal Hill Library, Discovery Well Park, and Reservoir Park, 72 hours in advance of this meeting.



## CITY OF SIGNAL HILL

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### STAFF REPORT

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12/16/2025

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#### **AGENDA ITEM**

**TO:**

**HONORABLE CHAIR  
AND MEMBERS OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION**

**FROM:**

**CARLOS LUIS  
PLANNING MANAGER**

**SUBJECT:**

**PRESENTATION**

**Summary:**

During the October 28, 2025 City Council Meeting, the Council received an update on the Opportunity Study Area (OSA) planning effort. The presentation was provided by PlaceWorks, the consultant working with staff on the project. The OSA framework establishes a coordinated Planning and Economic Development strategy to guide reinvestment, improve infrastructure, and attract new private investment within key underutilized areas of the City. In partnership with PlaceWorks, staff identified three overlay zones: the Community Core (Mixed-Use); the Innovation & Enterprise; and the Workshop, Studio, & Entertainment Overlay Zones. Together, these zoning overlays provide a flexible regulatory structure that aligns land use planning with the City's broader economic and fiscal sustainability goals. Each overlay responds to current market conditions and leverages the City's economic analysis to support compatible, high-quality development.



STAFF REPORT

10/28/2025

**AGENDA ITEM**

**TO: HONORABLE MAYOR  
AND MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL**

**FROM: CARLO TOMAINO  
CITY MANAGER**

**SUBJECT: OPPORTUNITY STUDY AREAS PROJECT UPDATE**

**Summary:**

The City Council previously authorized staff to begin work with PlaceWorks on the Opportunity Study Area (OSA) planning effort. The scope of work began with preparation of the Economic Study, which now serves as the foundation for the recommended land use updates. The OSA framework establishes a coordinated planning and economic development strategy to guide reinvestment, improve infrastructure, and attract new private investment within key underutilized areas of the City. In partnership with PlaceWorks, staff identified three overlay zones: the Community Core (Mixed-Use); the Innovation & Enterprise; and the Workshop, Studio & Entertainment Overlay Zones. Together, these zoning overlays provide a flexible regulatory structure that aligns land use planning with the City's broader economic and fiscal sustainability goals. Each overlay responds to current market conditions and leverages the City's economic analysis to support compatible, high-quality development.

In addition to the land use recommendations, this report outlines an implementation program designed to transition the OSAs from conceptual planning to development-ready conditions. The proposed actions include preparation of a program-level California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) document to streamline environmental review, amendment of the Zoning Code to incorporate the new overlay districts, and evaluation of two complementary economic tools: the Enhanced Infrastructure Financing District (EIFD) which can fund public infrastructure and remediation through property tax increment and the Federal Economic Opportunity Zone (OZ) designed to provide tax incentives for private investment. The proposed strategies combine local and federal incentives to offset infrastructure and remediation costs, attract private capital, and position the Opportunity Study Areas as catalysts for sustainable growth, job creation, and long-term fiscal stability.

**Strategic Plan Goal(s):**

Goal No. 1 Financial Stability: Ensure the City's long-term financial stability and resilience.

Goal No. 3 Economic & Downtown Development: Improve the local economy, support local businesses, and create a vibrant downtown core.

Goal No. 4 Infrastructure: Maintain and Improve the City's physical infrastructure, water system, and recreational spaces.

Recommendations:

1. Advance preparation of zoning code amendments to establish the three Opportunity Study Area overlay zones consistent with the land use scenarios approved by the City Council and return with a draft Ordinance effectuating the proposed amendments.
2. Issue a Request for Proposals to initiate preparation of a program-level California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) document to evaluate the proposed overlay zones and streamline future environmental review for development consistent with the Opportunity Study Area framework.
3. Initiate discussions with the County of Los Angeles regarding the potential formation of an Enhanced Infrastructure Financing District (EIFD) focused on Opportunity Study Area 1 and report back to the City Council with an update.
4. Engage with the Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz) and the United States Department of the Treasury to assess eligibility and pursue Federal Economic Opportunity Zone (OZ) designation for Census Tract 06037573401 (5734.01) within Opportunity Study Area 1 as part of the upcoming Round 2 nomination cycle.
5. Provide direction regarding proposed branding opportunities for the Opportunity Study Areas and return to the City Council with a plan to brand and promote these areas to future developers.

Fiscal Impact:

The City Council previously allocated \$300,000 for the professional services agreement with PlaceWorks in Fiscal Year 2024-2025. The City Council also separately allocated \$500,000 for environmental studies associated with the Opportunity Study Area Project as part of the adopted Fiscal Year 2025-26 Operating Budget. Subsequent work related to the potential formation of an Enhanced Infrastructure Financing District and a Federal Qualified Opportunity Zone would be funded through future budget allocations pending additional information from the County and the Governor's Office.

Background:

One of the City's key strategic goals is revenue diversification. The City's current revenue portfolio relies heavily on sales tax, which is provided through a healthy balance of various sales tax producing businesses. The City historically relied on tax increment financing to incentivize redevelopment; many of the City's shopping centers, auto dealerships, and residential developments are a testament to the vitality of redevelopment as an economic development tool. With the dissolution of redevelopment, however, tax increment financing is not available to offset the cost of development. Nonetheless, the City desires to create new development opportunities by leveraging

its land use authority and other potential financial incentives that increase property values, create jobs, and generate new revenue opportunities.

The project objectives are designed to address the following:

- Address the high costs of environmental cleanup and oil well remediation required for development in Signal Hill, in the absence of a dedicated funding source.
- Update zoning regulations to better align with market demand and reduce investment risk for developers.
- Evaluate future land use opportunities that support economic growth, job creation, and diversification of the City's tax base.
- Identify a location that can serve as a central gathering place for the community.
- Consider opportunities for additional residential development within the Opportunity Study Areas (OSAs), beyond those identified in the Housing Element.
- Develop financial incentive strategies to encourage development.

The City determined that a market-based economic study was necessary to evaluate the development potential of the OSAs. The purpose of this study was to identify growth opportunities based on the current and prospective development trends over the next several years. The findings would subsequently inform the development of overlay zones to facilitate future development in Signal Hill. The City began the process by identifying three potential OSA Sites north of Willow Street. Staff selected these areas located within a desirable trade area that could benefit substantially from increased development activity. In the case of OSA 1, for example, the area lacks essential infrastructure such as improved streets, curbs, gutters, sidewalks, light standards, and other public amenities.

At the March 26, 2024 meeting, the City Council approved the release of a Request for Proposal for a City-initiated economic and land use study. The goals of the proposed study were to assess the City's development potential through an economic analysis and update the City's zoning ordinance to create opportunities to attract new development. In November 2024, the City Council awarded a professional services agreement to PlaceWorks to prepare a comprehensive economic and land use study for the OSAs.

In March 2025, PlaceWorks completed the Economic Analysis, which formed the technical foundation for all subsequent planning, land use, and zoning recommendations presented in this report. The study assessed current market conditions, development feasibility, and fiscal potential across a range of land use categories, including housing, retail, hotel, office, and industrial uses. Staff has attached the Economic Study for the City Council's reference (Attachment A).

### **Summary of Economic Study Findings**

The Economic Study provides the market foundation for the OSA Project and establishes the economic rationale for the proposed land use framework. The study evaluated existing market conditions, development feasibility, and long-term economic opportunities across the three designated OSAs. The study findings confirm that the City's continued prosperity depends on diversifying land uses, reducing barriers to redevelopment, and attracting investment that supports both fiscal sustainability and job creation. For the City Council's reference, staff has summarized the key findings of the Economic Study:

- The study identifies housing as a central catalyst for reinvestment and mixed-use development. Strong regional housing demand limited local supply, and high construction costs have created market conditions favoring for-sale townhome and small-lot single-family projects in the near term, with opportunities for higher-density multifamily development over time. Integrating housing into the OSAs would provide the population base necessary to sustain nearby retail, hospitality, and employment uses while generating enhanced long-term property and sales tax revenue.
- The analysis also highlights significant retail market potential, particularly for experience-driven and convenience-oriented businesses. Retail leakage data indicate unmet demand in key sectors such as furniture, clothing, and specialty goods. Concentrating new retail development within the City's Central Business District would strengthen Signal Hill's competitive position, enhance local tax revenues, and create a destination that supports the City's vision for a vibrant, walkable environment.
- The hospitality market analysis demonstrates that the City could support an upper-midscale or upscale hotel, given regional occupancy levels exceeding 70 percent. A strategically located hotel could expand visitor spending, generate additional Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) revenue, and complement the City's retail and mixed-use vision.
- While office demand remains weak due to remote work trends, the City retains potential for small-scale medical, professional, and research-based offices. Conversely, the industrial sector remains a major strength, with vacancy rates below 6 percent and continued demand for light manufacturing, warehousing, and logistics uses. The study recommends maintaining strong industrial capacity while allowing flexibility for tech, innovation, and advanced manufacturing uses that align with modern economic trends.

Overall, the Economic Study underscores that the OSAs represent the City's best opportunity to promote long-term economic growth, attract private investment, and balance fiscal sustainability with community development. These findings form the basis for the proposed overlay zones, zoning code updates, and economic implementation strategies now before the City Council for direction.

The economic report also established the underlying rationale for developing a Central Business District within the Town Center area, a concept affirmed in the 2023-2028 Strategic Plan objective to "develop a central business district to support a sense of community and expand local amenities." Earlier this year, PlaceWorks presented the results of the Economic Study to the City Council and worked with staff on additional elements of the project including technical infrastructure analysis and land use options.

## Analysis:

The OSA Project represents a comprehensive planning effort that establishes a clear framework for how the City could accommodate growth, reinvestment, and economic diversification over the coming decades. The following sections of this report will discuss in greater detail the proposed land uses with each OSA, the process of updating the City's Zoning Code, the necessary environmental analysis to facilitate development, and discussion of two potential financial incentives to accelerate development. Collectively, using the economic study as a basis, these next steps outlined in this report enable the City to implement land use and economic tools that work together to improve the City's potential development environment and further its economic goals.

## Overlay Zones and Land Uses

Each OSA builds upon the findings of the Economic Analysis and reflects a coordinated vision for land use, infrastructure, and community identity. As noted earlier, the foundation of this framework includes three new Overlay Zones that together define the desired development pattern and economic direction for the City: the Community Core (Mixed-Use) Overlay Zone; the Innovation & Enterprise Overlay Zone; and the Workshop, Studio & Entertainment Overlay Zone. Each overlay provides a flexible regulatory tool that supplements existing zoning, aligning allowable land uses, design standards, and circulation improvements with the City's long-term planning objectives.

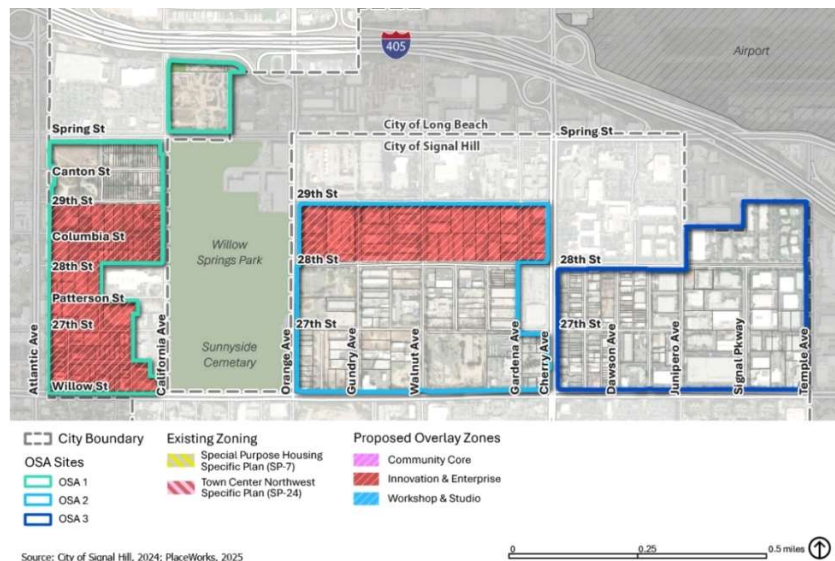
- The Community Core (Mixed-Use) Overlay Zone:** Establishes the foundation for Signal Hill's future Central Business District and urban village concept. This area is envisioned as a vibrant, walkable district that combines residential, retail, and professional uses in both horizontal and vertical mixed-use formats. Design standards emphasize human-scale development, pedestrian connectivity, and high-quality public realm improvements.



- The Innovation & Enterprise Overlay Zone:** Serves as the City's innovation district, attracting technology-driven, research-oriented, and creative industries. The zone encourages modern, flexible buildings accommodating employment uses such as clean manufacturing,



aerospace, R&D laboratories, and creative offices.



- The Workshop, Studio & Entertainment Overlay Zone:** Celebrates Signal Hill's creative culture and entrepreneurial spirit, supporting a mix of light industrial, entertainment, and small-scale recreation uses. It emphasizes adaptive reuse of industrial buildings and flexible standards that allow integration of social and recreational spaces.



Most of these land use designations exist within all three OSA's; PlaceWorks worked with staff to select locations for these intended land use changes that meet the current market demand. For example, the proposed Innovation & Enterprise Overlay Zone is located in OSA 1, near the existing VAST aerospace campus. OSA 1 has developable land that could allow for the expansion of similar technology or aerospace industry uses in the future. Each OSA includes a mix of overlay zones that enable each area to develop over time based on the expected market demand, including the absorption rate for the Signal Hill trade area.



Notably, the proposed overlay zones would not make existing land uses nonconforming. This is because overlay zones are intended to supplement, not replace, the underlying base zoning regulations. The purpose of an overlay zone is to introduce additional development options, design standards, or incentives that align with specific planning goals, while preserving the rights and entitlements allowed under the underlying zone. By maintaining the existing zoning designation, all legally established uses remain conforming and may continue operating without interruption. Overlay zones do not retroactively alter what is considered a permitted use under the base zone; rather, they offer flexibility and new opportunities for property owners who choose to develop or redevelop in accordance with the overlay.

In addition to studying the land use analysis for each OSA, staff also analyzed the mobility and circulation of the OSA and prepared a draft mobility framework. The draft mobility framework is intended to guide future connectivity to areas of the City north of Willow Avenue. The framework is applicable to all modes of transportation including pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorized vehicles. Improvements to support those users include on-street and off-street extension of roadways, sidewalks, trails, bike paths, and/or lanes. The framework should be considered for implementation alongside the development standards of each Overlay Zone as new projects are submitted for review. This wholistic approach to planning for the areas will ensure better connectivity across the OSAs and to the rest of the Signal Hill community.

### **Integration into the Zoning Code**

Implementation of the OSA framework will require amendments to the Signal Hill Zoning Ordinance to formally establish the new overlay zones and their corresponding development standards. Based on City Council direction, PlaceWorks would prepare draft zoning code language to add new chapters defining purpose, applicability, and regulations of each overlay zone. The amendments would include tables of permitted and conditional uses, development and design standards, and transition provisions between existing districts and overlays. The new chapters would integrate within Title 20 (Zoning) of the Signal Hill Municipal Code, maintaining consistency with format and terminology. PlaceWorks would collaborate with staff to ensure consistency with City objectives and return the draft text for review by the Planning Commission and City Council through the public hearing process.

### **California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Integration**

Incorporating the requirements of the CEQA into the OSA framework is an essential component of project implementation. Early preparation of a comprehensive, program-level environmental document would allow the City to evaluate potential environmental effects of the proposed overlay zones, establish appropriate mitigation measures, and streamline future development review within these areas.

Completion of CEQA documentation at this stage ensures that future projects consistent with the adopted overlays can rely on a tiered environmental analysis, reducing time, cost, and uncertainty for both the City and private developers. This proactive approach positions the Opportunity Study Areas to be ready for future development, meaning that once market conditions and private investment align, new projects can proceed with greater efficiency and predictability.

The City Council previously allocated funding for preparation of this environmental review effort, and staff will issue a Request for Proposals to initiate the work program based on Council direction. The selected consultant would prepare the CEQA document concurrently with the zoning code amendments, ensuring consistency between the environmental analysis and the proposed overlay regulations.

### **Potential Financial Incentives**

For most of its history, much of the land in Signal Hill served as an oil field and produced millions of barrels of oil per year. As a result, oil activity limited the City's potential growth and, due to reduced oil production activity over the past several decades, there are various properties throughout the City available for development. The development of former oil properties requires additional capital investment to address the existing conditions surrounding underground wells, soil remediation, and other mitigation. These existing conditions represent additional development challenges. The City could further address these development challenges through financial incentives that could potentially further offset development costs.

Importantly, implementation of these potential financial incentives requires consensus from other agencies such as the County of Los Angeles and the Governor's Office respectively. In other words, these agencies have the authority to approve these financial instruments. The following sections of this report will discuss two potential options (a property tax increment tool called an Enhanced Infrastructure Financing District and Federal Economic Opportunity Zones) that could be incorporated into the OSA to further encourage development. While the two development incentives are not as essential to the OSA project as the land use incentives provided through the overlay zones, these would be beneficial and provide further incentive to develop in Signal Hill. Before discussing the two development incentives, staff would like to highlight the potential added value of the OSA project to the area's future assessed taxable value.

### **Estimated Taxable Assessed Value**

Staff worked with PlaceWorks to understand the potential economic impact of the full buildout of the OSAs over the next 25 years. If there is no change in zoning and no investment in infrastructure and public realm improvements, it is likely that the OSAs would only appreciate in taxable assessed value (for property tax purposes) based on the maximum allowed 2% annual increase. PlaceWorks modeled scenarios to illustrate the potential positive fiscal impact of the City's effort to redevelop these areas. The conservative scenario below estimates the possible increase in taxable assessed valuation and tax increment revenue for the County and the City through the year 2050.

2050 Taxable Assessed Value				
	OSA-1	OSA-2	OSA-3	Total
With the OSAs	\$585,000,000	\$995,000,000	\$1,087,000,000	\$2,670,000,000
Without the OSAs	\$98,700,000	\$253,000,000	\$340,000,000	\$691,000,000
Potential Change	\$486,000,000	\$742,000,000	\$747,000,000	\$1,975,000,000

The following table shows the estimated net increase in the property tax revenue that Los Angeles

County and Signal Hill could potentially expect to be generated by redevelopment of parcels in the OSAs following zoning changes and infrastructure upgrades.

Illustrative 20-Year Tax Increment Revenue				
	OSA-1	OSA-2	OSA-3	Total
LA County	\$7,580,000	\$17,700,000	\$15,320,000	\$40,600,000
Signal Hill	\$2,270,000	\$5,310,000	\$4,600,000	\$12,180,000

The tax increment estimate still needs to be revised for the specific distribution of the general property tax levy by tax rate area (TRA). There is more than one TRA across the OSAs. The data in the table assumes that the County agencies would be allocated 20 percent of the one percent property tax and that the City of Signal Hill would be allocated 6 percent of the one percent property tax. Overall, the analysis regarding the potential appreciation in property tax can be used as source of discussion when identifying a potential partnership approach between the City and the County to provide additional funding sources to support redevelopment efforts.

### **Enhanced Infrastructure Financing District (EIFD)**

An EIFD provides a mechanism for cities and counties to invest in public infrastructure and community improvements using the growth in property tax revenues generated by new development. Under State law (Government Code §53398.50 et seq.), participating tax agencies may bond against future property-tax increments to fund capital projects that advance economic development, housing, and sustainability objectives. Unlike the former Redevelopment Agencies, EIFDs do not divert school district funding and require voter approval only if the district seeks to issue debt. If the City Council provides direction to proceed, staff would initiate a preliminary discussion with the County regarding its interest in forming an EIFD. Without the County's full cooperation, formation of an EIFD would not be an option.

The EIFD structure would allow the City and the County of Los Angeles to reinvest value created through redevelopment. The District could finance utility upgrades, streetscape enhancements, and storm drain improvements that support new investment. OSA 1 serves as the strongest candidate for an EIFD because of its size, infrastructure constraints, and redevelopment potential. Reinvesting future property-tax growth in this area could provide matching funds for State and federal grants, leverage private investment, and reduce the high up-front costs associated with site preparation and remediation.

Forming an EIFD involves several defined steps under State law. The process would include the adoption of a Resolution of Intention by the City Council describing the proposed district boundaries, the types of public facilities to be financed, and the goals of the district. Staff and consultants would then prepare an Infrastructure Financing Plan (IFP) that outlines the boundaries, eligible improvements, financing structure, and duration of the district. The IFP serves as the guiding document for investment of increment revenues.

After completing the IFP, the City would establish a Public Financing Authority (PFA) to govern the district. The PFA would include City Council members, representatives from participating taxing entities such as Los Angeles County, and public members. The PFA would conduct public hearings to

receive input from property owners and residents, then adopt the Infrastructure Financing Plan to officially form the EIFD. If the City later elects to issue bonds secured by future tax increment, the proposal would require approval from 55 percent of voters within the district.

### **Federal Economic Opportunity Zone**

The Federal Opportunity Zone program, originally established under the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, creates an incentive for private investment in economically distressed communities. The program allows investors to defer, reduce, or eliminate federal capital-gains taxes when they reinvest gains through certified Qualified Opportunity Funds (QOFs) into eligible real estate or business projects located within designated Opportunity Zones. The Federal Opportunity Zone program is a significant tax benefit to developers who specifically seek out these areas for future development opportunities.

The One, Big, Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA) signed July 4, 2025, allows for the designation of new zones as federal Qualified Opportunity Zones (QOZs), with state governors nominating these new zones beginning July 1, 2026, and the Treasury Secretary then certifying these areas. These new zones will be effective for new investments beginning January 1, 2027, and will remain designated for 10 years before requiring re-designation. This process is different than the original QOZ's ("Round One") which expire December 31, 2028. These new federal QOZ's are often referred to as "Round Two" QOZs. The Federal government defines a Round Two QOZ as part of Internal Revenue Code ("IRC") Section 1400Z-1 as a population census tract that meets the definition of a low-income community and that has been specifically designated as a QOZ through a nomination and certification process.

When a census tract qualifies as a Round Two QOZ, investors who reinvest capital gains from other projects into these Round Two QOZs may defer those gains for up to five years. Investors who maintain the QOZ investment for at least five years may exclude 10 percent of the originally deferred gain from taxation. Investors who hold the QOZ investment for at least ten years may also exclude any appreciation of the investment upon sale, for a period of up to 30 years. For areas designated as zones after July 4, 2025, (i.e., for Round Two zones), the Federal government defines a low-income community as any population census tract if: (i) the tract has a median family income ("MFI") that, in the case of a tract located within a metropolitan area, does not exceed 70% of the metropolitan area MFI or (ii) the tract has a poverty rate of at least 20% and has an MFI that in the case of a tract located within a metropolitan area, does not exceed 125% of the metropolitan area MFI. Of the City's three population census tracts, Census Tract 06037573401 (5734.01) (that includes nearly all of OSA 1) is *likely* eligible to qualify as a low-income community.

Using the latest available American Community Survey (ACS) data from the 2019-2023 period, Census Tract 06037573401 (5734.01) may meet the standard of not exceeding 70% of the metro area MFI at 68.97%. Also, based on ACS data from 2019-2023, this census tract may also meet the alternative standard of at least 20% poverty rate with 23.9% poverty rate while not exceeding 125% of the metro area MFI. Please note that staff expects that the Treasury Department will use additional data that *has not yet been released* to determine census tract eligibility, which is why the preliminary analysis concludes that this tract will *likely be eligible* based on currently released data. Nonetheless, staff would ask for the City Council's direction at this time given that the process to officially qualify an eligible census tract requires additional time and resources. The census tracts within the other two OSAs are not likely eligible based on currently released data.

Beginning with the Round Two zone designations, the determination period for designation is the 90-day period beginning on July 1, 2026, for Round Two and July 1, 2036, for Round Three. By the end of each 90-day period, the California Governor would nominate census tracts in California for designation as QOZs and notify the Secretary of the Treasury of such nominations. The Secretary is then required to certify those nominations and designate the tracts as QOZs within the consideration period (generally 30 days). Both the determination period and the consideration period could be extended by 30 days (IRC Section 1400Z). The number of population census tracts in each state (and U.S. possession) that can be designated as QOZs is generally not allowed to exceed 25% of the total number of LIC in the state.

### **Summary of Economic Study Findings**

In summary, OSA 1 represents a candidate to qualify for a potential QOZ designation due to its existing economic challenges and proximity to regional employment centers in Long Beach and Los Angeles. If the area ultimately qualifies as a QOZ, investors and developers could benefit from significant federal tax incentives, including:

- Deferral of federal capital gains taxes realized in other projects by up to 5 years if such Round Two QOZ investment is held for 5 years (sooner if investment is sold or exchanged sooner);
- Reduction of such deferred federal capital gains tax liability in other projects by 10 percent if Round Two QOZ investment is held for five years; and

Permanent exclusion from any additional federal gains realized from the sale of the Round Two QOZ investment itself (capped at appreciation before year 30), provided the Round Two QOZ investment is held for 10 years.

These benefits could make development projects in the Opportunity Study Area more financially attractive to investors by improving project feasibility and reducing long-term tax exposure. In practice, the program functions as a federal equity incentive, helping bridge financing gaps for projects that might otherwise be cost-prohibitive due to remediation, infrastructure, or site-preparation expenses.

### **Summary: Potential Economic Development Incentives**

Together, the proposed EIFD and potential Federal Opportunity Zone (OZ) designations would establish a comprehensive framework for public-private investment within the OSAs. The EIFD would create a local financing mechanism that channels future property-tax growth into infrastructure, while the Opportunity Zone program would provide federal tax incentives that attract private equity to fund site development and new business activity. While not absolutely necessary to encourage development, establishing one or both of these tools would enable the City to leverage both public reinvestment and private capital, improving project feasibility, accelerating environmental remediation, and advancing long-term economic diversification.

### **Naming, Branding, and Placemaking**

The OSA project would also create additional opportunities to further the City's branding, naming, and placemaking efforts. Branding, naming, and placemaking are essential tools in shaping a community's identity and creating a strong sense of place. Through thoughtful branding, a location can communicate its unique character, values, and vision, distinguishing it from other areas and fostering local pride. Naming reinforces this identity by embedding meaning, history, or cultural significance into everyday reference points, helping residents and visitors connect emotionally to a place. Placemaking, which involves the design and activation of public spaces, brings these elements to life by creating inviting, functional environments that encourage community interaction and a deeper attachment to the area. Together, these strategies help transform spaces into meaningful places where people feel a sense of belonging and connection. Staff is seeking City Council feedback and input on three potential naming, branding, and placemaking options for the project:

- The Place at Signal Hill
- North of Willow (NOW)
- Viewpoint at Signal Hill

Each option reflects a distinct identity and potential vision for the comprehensive project, with varying emphasis on location, character, and community appeal. Building on the branding identity, staff would also establish an OSA website and marketing materials to facilitate conversations with developers.

### **SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDED ACTIONS**

Staff recommends that the City Council authorize a series of coordinated actions to advance implementation of the OSA framework and position the City for long-term economic growth, infrastructure reinvestment, and fiscal sustainability. These recommended actions build upon the land use planning and economic analysis the City Council previously reviewed and represent the next phase of work to transition the OSAs from concept to implementation.

Staff recommends initiating the preparation of zoning code amendments to establish three OSA overlay zones consistent with the preferred land use scenarios approved by the City Council. These overlay zones would serve as the regulatory mechanism to guide future development within the OSAs, ensuring that land use, design, and infrastructure improvements align with the City's adopted vision. Staff would present a draft ordinance effectuating these amendments to the Planning Commission and City Council for formal consideration at a future meeting.

Staff recommends issuing a Request for Proposals to commence preparation of a program-level environmental document under the California Environmental Quality Act. The program-level analysis would evaluate the proposed overlay zones at a comprehensive level and provide a streamlined environmental review pathway for subsequent development projects that conform to the adopted OSA framework. This approach would reduce redundancy in future CEQA analyses, shorten entitlement timelines, and enhance overall predictability for private investment.

Staff recommends initiating a discussion with the County to assess the feasibility of forming an EIFD centered on Opportunity Study Area 1. Staff would also work with the City Attorney's Office to prepare a formal proposal identifying Census Tract 06037573401 (5734.01) for inclusion in California's official nomination to the United States Department of the Treasury.

Lastly, staff is requesting the City Council's feedback regarding a proposed naming and branding convention for the OSAs. The branding effort would enable the City to market the OSAs as part of its developer outreach efforts.

Staff will continue keeping the City Council informed and bring back items to the City Council for further discussion over the next year.

Reviewed for Fiscal Impact:

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Siamlu Cox

Attachment:

- A. Opportunity Study Areas Economic Study



# CITY OF SIGNAL HILL

## STAFF REPORT

2175 Cherry Avenue • Signal Hill, California 90755-3799

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12/16/2025

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### **AGENDA ITEM**

**TO:**

**HONORABLE CHAIR  
AND MEMBERS OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION**

**FROM:**

**SUSANA MARTINEZ  
ASSOCIATE PLANNER**

**SUBJECT:**

**2026 HOMELESS COUNT EVENT**

#### **Summary:**

The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) sponsors an annual regional homeless count. The 2026 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count event will be held over the course of three days. Signal Hill's count will be conducted on *Wednesday, January 21, 2026, starting at 7:30 pm*. The Community Development Department will host the event and provide coordination and training for volunteers. The Police Department will provide four unmarked vehicles to drive count volunteers through their assigned sections of the City.

#### **Strategic Plan Goal(s):**

Goal No. 2 Community Safety: Maintain Community Safety by supporting public safety services and increasing emergency preparedness.

Goal No. 5 High-Functioning Government: Strengthen internal communication, recruitment, retention, systems, and processes to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of City services.

#### **Recommendation:**

Save the date and volunteer.

#### **Background & Analysis:**

The City will recruit community volunteers and coordinate with members of LAHSA to staff the event. The event will need approximately eight to twelve volunteers to carry out the count. As in previous years, staff is requesting Planning Commissioners serve as standby volunteers to supplement the communitywide volunteer round-up. Staff will update the Commission in January regarding volunteer



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12/16/2025

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needs. As of this evening's presentation, approximately seven volunteers have registered to assist with the count.

Approved:

Carlos Luis



STAFF REPORT

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12/16/2025

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**AGENDA ITEM**

**TO:**

**HONORABLE CHAIR  
AND MEMBERS OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION**

**FROM:**

**ALEXIS LOPEZ SEVILLA  
ASSISTANT PLANNER**

**SUBJECT:**

**2026 PROJECT SPOTLIGHT**

Summary:

Staff will highlight the upcoming development project for the calendar year 2026.

Recommendation:

Receive and file.

Background:

Numerous projects are being processed by staff for review by the Planning Commission in 2026. Some of these projects have been pending for several years and are back on track for entitlement review. Notable projects include:

General Plan Element Updates

- Environmental Resources: expected to begin drafting in FY 26-27
- Environmental Justice: expected completion in FY 26-27
- Land Use: expected to begin drafting in FY 26-27
- Circulation: expected to begin drafting in FY 26-27

6<sup>th</sup> Cycle Housing Element Update

- Implementation of Housing Element programs

Zoning Ordinance Amendments

- Implementation of Omnibus Zoning Ordinance updates
- Accessory Dwelling Unit Ordinance

- Density Bonus Ordinance
- Electric Vehicle Charging Station Permit Streamlining Ordinance

#### Annual Reports

- General Plan Annual Progress Report
- Institutional Permits Annual Review
- Adult-Oriented Business Annual Reviews
- Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance Annual Report

#### Commercial/Industrial Projects

- 3201 Walnut Avenue: New Distribution Warehouse
- 3234 East 20<sup>th</sup> Street: New Industrial Building

#### Residential Projects

- 1100 East 23<sup>rd</sup> Street: Two Two-Story Units
- 2750 East 20<sup>th</sup> Street: Smart Homes
- 2599 East Pacific Coast Hwy: PCH Molino
- 2100 Ohio Avenue: New SFD with ADU

Approved:

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Carlos Luis



CITY OF SIGNAL HILL  
STAFF REPORT

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12/16/2025

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**AGENDA ITEM**

**TO:**

**HONORABLE CHAIR  
AND MEMBERS OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION**

**FROM:**

**CARLOS LUIS  
PLANNING MANAGER**

**SUBJECT:**

**2026 PLANNING COMMISSIONERS ACADEMY**

**Summary:**

The League of California Cities 2026 Planning Commissioners Academy will be held March 11-13 at the Sheraton Park Hotel Anaheim.

**Strategic Plan Goal(s):**

Goal 5: High-Functioning Government: Strengthen internal communication, recruitment, retention, systems, and processes to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of City services.

**Recommendation:**

Select one or more Planning Commissioners to attend.

**Background & Analysis:**

Signal Hill Planning Commissioners have attended prior Planning Commissioners academy conferences for training and networking opportunities.

The 2026 PC Academy will be held in Anaheim, CA, March 11-13, 2026. The Academy will be in person with no option to attend virtually. The registration cost for the full conference is \$700/person, and a one-day registration is \$400/person. The current budget for the PC Academy is \$3,000.

Attendees are encouraged to share information from the conference at the March 17, 2026, Planning Commission meeting.



CITY OF SIGNAL HILL  
STAFF REPORT

2175 Cherry Avenue • Signal  
Hill, California 90755-3799

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12/16/2025

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**AGENDA ITEM**

**TO:**

**HONORABLE CHAIR  
AND MEMBERS OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION**

**FROM:**

**CARLOS LUIS  
PLANNING MANAGER**

**SUBJECT:**

**PREVIOUS MINUTES**

Summary:

Regular meeting of October 21, 2025.

Recommendation:

Approve.



## CITY OF SIGNAL HILL

2175 Cherry Avenue • Signal Hill, California 90755-3799

### MINUTES OF A REGULAR MEETING SIGNAL HILL PLANNING COMMISSION October 21, 2025

#### DRAFT

A Regular Meeting of the Signal Hill Planning Commission was held in-person in the Council Chamber on October 21, 2025.

(1) **CALL TO ORDER – 7:00 P.M.**

(2) **ROLL CALL**

PRESENT: CHAIR SAEIDA MILLER  
VICE CHAIR PERICA BELL  
COMMISSIONER GEGE LOPEZ  
COMMISSIONER VICTOR PARKER  
COMMISSIONER SONIA SAVOULIAN

ABSENT: NONE

(3) **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

(4) **PUBLIC BUSINESS FROM THE FLOOR ON ITEMS NOT LISTED ON THIS AGENDA**

There was no public business from the floor.

(5) **PRESENTATIONS**

- a. PLANNING MANAGER CARLOS LUIS WILL GIVE A PRESENTATION CELEBRATING NATIONAL COMMUNITY PLANNING MONTH.

Planning Manager Luis presented agenda item 5a.

- b. PLANNING MANAGER CARLOS LUIS WILL GIVE A PRESENTATION CELEBRATING THE CAREER AND RETIREMENT OF COMMUNITY

DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR COLLEEN T. DOAN.

Planning Manager Luis presented item 5b.

Staff and Commissioners thanked Director Doan for her service to the City.

**(6) PUBLIC HEARING**

- a. CONSIDERATION OF A RESOLUTION RECOMMENDING THE CITY COUNCIL ADOPT AN ORDINANCE MAKING SPECIFIED CHANGES TO TITLE 20 (ZONING) OF THE CITY'S MUNICIPAL CODE TO GENERALLY CLARIFY REGULATIONS, UPDATE PROVISIONS TO CONFORM TO STATE LAW, REMOVE UNNECESSARY OR REDUNDANT REGULATIONS, AND MODERNIZE THE ZONING ORDINANCE

Community Development Director Doan read the form of notice, and Planning Manager Luis gave the staff report.

Commissioner Lopez inquired whether EV charging stations would be required with the updates to the off-street parking ordinance. Director Doan answered that EV chargers are covered by the California Building Codes, not the Municipal Code.

Chair Miller opened the public hearing.

Mike Murchison, Signal Hill property owner, spoke in favor of the project and asked clarifying questions regarding parking studies and when the Ordinance will take effect.

Director Doan answered his questions.

Elias Rodriguz, Signal Hill business owner, spoke in favor of the project.

There being no further public testimony, Chair Miller closed the public hearing.

It was moved by COMMISSIONER PARKER and seconded by COMMISSIONER SAVOULIAN to adopt the resolution recommending City Council approval of ZOA 25-02.

The following vote resulted:

AYES: CHAIR MILLER  
VICE CHAIR BELL  
COMMISSIONER LOPEZ  
COMMISSIONER PARKER  
COMMISSIONER SAVOULIAN

NOES: NONE

ABSENT: NONE

ABSTAIN: NONE

**(7) CONSENT CALENDAR**

- a. PREVIOUS MINUTES
- b. CITY COUNCIL FOLLOW UP
- c. DEVELOPMENT STATUS REPORT
- d. IN THE NEWS

It was moved by VICE CHAIR BELL and seconded by COMMISSIONER LOPEZ, to approve the Consent Calendar.

The following vote resulted:

AYES: CHAIR MILLER  
VICE CHAIR BELL  
COMMISSIONER LOPEZ  
COMMISSIONER PARKER  
COMMISSIONER SAVOULIAN

NOES: NONE

ABSENT: NONE

ABSTAIN: NONE

**(8) COMMISSION NEW BUSINESS**

Commissioner Lopez invited the Commission and the public to attend the Grand Opening ceremony at Fletcher Jones Audi, at 2998 Cherry Avenue on Saturday October 25th.

Commissioner Bell thanked Staff and Commissioner Savoulia for attending the Mayor's Clean-Up event on Saturday, October 18th.

**(9) ADJOURNMENT**

It was moved by COMMISSIONER SAVOULIAN and seconded by COMMISSIONER LOPEZ to adjourn to the regular meeting of the Planning Commission on Tuesday, November 18, 2025 at 7:00 p.m. in the Signal Hill Library Community Room, 1800 E Hill St, Signal Hill, CA, 90755.

The following vote resulted:

AYES: CHAIR MILLER  
VICE CHAIR BELL  
COMMISSIONER LOPEZ  
COMMISSIONER PARKER  
COMMISSIONER SAVOULIAN

NOES: NONE



ABSENT: NONE

ABSTAIN: NONE

CHAIR MILLER adjourned the meeting at 7:43 p.m.

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SAEIDA MILLER

CHAIR

Attest:

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CARLOS LUIS

ACTING COMMISSION SECRETARY



CITY OF SIGNAL HILL  
STAFF REPORT

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Hill, California 90755-3799

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12/16/2025

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**AGENDA ITEM**

**TO:**

**HONORABLE CHAIR  
AND MEMBERS OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION**

**FROM:**

**CARLOS LUIS  
PLANNING MANAGER**

**SUBJECT:**

**CITY COUNCIL FOLLOW UP**

**Summary:**

A brief summary of the City Council's actions from the last City Council meeting(s).

**Recommendation:**

Receive and file.

**Background & Analysis:**

- 1) At the October 28, 2025 City Council meeting:
  - Mayor Keir Jones presented a proclamation to Colleen T. Doan, Community Development Director, in recognition of her retirement.
  - City Council adopted a resolution designating the Community Room of the Signal Hill Public Library as the temporary location of meetings during the remodeling of City Hall.
  - PlaceWorks presented an update on the Opportunity Study Areas project.
- 2) At the November 13, 2025 City Council meeting:
  - City Council introduced an Ordinance amending Title 15 of the Signal Hill Municipal Code (SHMC) to adopt by reference the 2025 California Building Standards Code.
  - City Council approved a revised ENA between the City of Signal Hill and National Community Renaissance.
  - City Council adopted a resolution awarding a contract for the City Hall renovation window installation project.
- 3) At the November 25, 2025 City Council meeting:
  - City Council authorized the City Manager to enter into a contract with CABD Construction for

the Amphitheater Project.

- 4) At the December 9, 2025 City Council meeting:
- City Council reorganized for 2026: Tina Hansen will serve as Mayor, and Charlie Honeycutt will serve as Vice Mayor.
  - City Council introduced an Omnibus Ordinance amending various sections of the SHMC to clarify regulations and conform to state law.
  - City Council adopted Ordinance No. 2025-11-1555 amending Title 15 (Buildings and Construction) of the SHMC.
  - City Council received the Annual Comprehensive Financial Report.
  - City Council approved a City Council Committee Policy.
  - City Council designated April 14 as the annual Jessie Nelson Day of Remembrance.



CITY OF SIGNAL HILL  
STAFF REPORT

2175 Cherry Avenue • Signal  
Hill, California 90755-3799

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12/16/2025

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**AGENDA ITEM**

**TO:**

**HONORABLE CHAIR  
AND MEMBERS OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION**

**FROM:**

**CARLOS LUIS  
PLANNING MANAGER**

**SUBJECT:**

**IN THE NEWS**

Summary:

Articles compiled by staff that may be of interest to the Commission.

Recommendation:

Receive and file.

Background and analysis:

Articles include:

- How a Single Stairway Can Take Affordable Housing to a New Level - Planning Magazine
- Pitch Perfect - Architectural Record
- Tiny ADU transforms LA home into stunning art gallery - LA Times

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PLANNING MAGAZINE

# How a Single Stairway Can Take Affordable Housing to a New Level

*Cities are rethinking their codes to step up housing options and reduce construction costs.*

**INTERSECTIONS**

**(/PLANNING/SECTION/INTERSECTIONS/)**  
**HOUSING**



Single-staircase buildings, like the 101 John Street apartments, have been legal in Seattle since the 1970s, serving as a nationwide example for “smart stair” reform. Photo by Doug Scott Photographer.

**Nov. 17, 2025**

*By* JOE TEDINO

Colorado made a bold housing move earlier this year: To encourage higher-density development and enhance the quality of life for apartment dwellers, the state enacted a law in May allowing multifamily buildings (<https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/hb25-1273>) of up to five stories to be built with a single staircase (<https://denverite.com/2025/05/13/denver-colorado-single-stair-apartment-law-passed/>) instead of the two previously required for municipalities with populations exceeding 100,000.

Requiring fewer staircases — sometimes referred to as “smart stair” reform — can lower construction costs by hundreds of thousands of dollars per building, says Stephen Smith, executive director of the Center for Building in North America. Updating building codes to permit just one staircase also can allow apartments to have windows on more than one side for better ventilation, more daylight, and greater comfort for residents, according to Colorado legislators, citing a 2024 George Mason University study (<https://www.mercatus.org/research/policy-briefs/seattle-special-us-citys-unique-approach-small-infill-lots>).

However, building and zoning codes can sometimes be at odds because they are developed separately. “These codes need to work together,” Smith says. “As planners seek to increase densities in cities, they are looking at small, single-family [-sized] lots, and a single stair is a tool in the toolkit.”

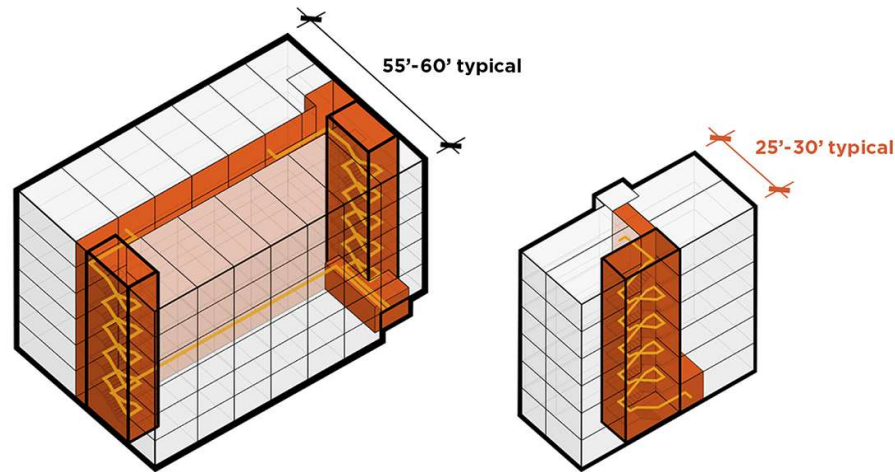
## Listening tour delivers results

It took pro-single staircase advocates in Colorado years to get municipal building officials, fire marshals, developers, and architects on board with the change, with many conversations about public safety concerns. After an earlier attempt to pass single-stair legislation failed in early 2024, state legislators — including Rep. Andrew Boesenecker of Fort Collins — began building support for another try. “We knew that we would need a long runway,” Boesenecker says, “based on the conversations that had transpired with the previous bill that did not pass.”

Outreach efforts included a listening tour with city officials, builders, and other stakeholders — such as the Fire Marshals Association of Colorado, the state chapter of the International Code Council, and the Associated Builders and Contractors Rocky Mountain Chapter — to address their concerns. The feedback resulted in nearly two dozen amendments to the 2025 legislation, including requirements for a staircase to be at least 48 inches wide, a maximum of four apartments per floor, and mandatory smoke detectors and alarms that meet National Fire Protection Association standards. Developers also must comply with International Building Code standards for sprinkler systems and construction materials.

## Inside Single-Stair Apartment Buildings

The design allows for more light, more windows, and smaller lot sizes.



A new six-story apartment building in most of the U.S. requires two stairways and a corridor connecting them, compared to new single-stair six-story apartment buildings allowed in Seattle, New York, Honolulu, and other cities. Image courtesy of SAR+ Architects/The Pew Charitable Trusts.

The listening tour was something that Kate Conley, a principal at Architects FORA in Fort Collins, appreciated. "There was still a little bit of nervousness, especially from fire departments, about the change," Conley says, "but how successful and relatively safe it has been in the jurisdictions where it has been used gives me a lot of comfort. There is already data to back up the claims that these buildings are equally safe."

Overall, Boesenecker, who co-sponsored the 2025 legislation, is pleased with the result. "This work is about building [trusting] relationships among people who might have divergent viewpoints," he says. "To the extent that we are able to do that, compromise and collaboration are often the outcome."

## A wave of single-stair reform

In 1860, a fatal tenement fire led to a two-staircase mandate in New York — and made the external metal fire escape a fixture nationwide for more than a century. Seattle challenged this norm in the 1970s when it legalized single-staircase buildings of up to six stories with modern fire-safety requirements like sprinklers and fire-resistant construction materials.



Now, a wave of reform has swept across the U.S. as a response to a growing housing crisis. New York and Honolulu added single-stair provisions decades ago, and Austin recently passed an ordinance (<https://services.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=449098>) in April 2025 to permit single-staircase construction for buildings of up to five stories. Meanwhile, officials in Memphis, Tennessee, hope a new state law enabling single stairways in multifamily buildings of up to six stories will increase housing options by reducing construction costs and enabling development on smaller lots.

Having data to support reform is key. A February 2025 study (<https://www.pew.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/2025/02/small-single-stairway-apartment-buildings-have-strong-safety-record#:~:text=From%202012%20to%202024%2C%20fire,story%20single%2Dstair%20building%20in>) by the Center for Building in North America and the Pew Charitable Trusts found that single-staircase buildings equipped with sprinklers do not present higher fire safety risks than two-staircase construction. Between 2012 and 2024, the rate of fire deaths in modern single-stairway apartment buildings with four to six stories in New York City was similar to other residential buildings. "Single-stairway buildings as tall as six stories are at least as safe as other types of housing," wrote the authors, who included Smith. "Allowing the construction of such buildings could provide much-needed housing, including homes for people with modest incomes."

The report also found that it costs roughly \$200,000 (<https://www.centerforbuilding.org/publication/small-single-stairway-apartment-buildings-have-strong-safety-record>) to construct a second staircase for a mid-rise apartment building.



In Denver, the Single-Stair Housing Challenge winners designed projects with single staircases, affordability, environmental impact, and fire safety systems in mind. Image courtesy of Buildner.

## Ahead of schedule in Denver

Back in Colorado, the new state law requires cities with populations of 100,000 or more — like Denver, Fort Collins, and Colorado Springs — to update their building codes by December 2027. Eric Browning, Denver's chief building official, outlined the code updates in a public meeting in June



([https://denver.granicus.com/player/clip/16946?view\\_id=180&redirect=true](https://denver.granicus.com/player/clip/16946?view_id=180&redirect=true)), saying the city plans to ensure new buildings are constructed with non-combustible materials, such as concrete block, masonry, and steel, or fire-resistant Type IV heavy timber.

Denver planners expect the city will comply with the new state law a year or more "ahead of time, but it's still very much a work in progress," says Sarah Showalter, AICP, Denver's director of planning and policy. She says it's a bit early to estimate the specific effects on the housing supply and affordability, but the city has identified nearly 6,000 parcels that already are zoned to allow for these single-stair multifamily buildings.

While the new state law doesn't have a specific affordable housing component, officials see the code revisions as part of "a number of steps Denver is taking to provide a greater diversity of housing options, which our citywide plans call for, based on community input," Showalter says. "The department also is looking at zoning and other regulations to create more opportunities for [missing middle] housing options in residential neighborhoods through our [Unlocking Housing Choices](https://denvergov.org/Government/Agencies-Departments-Offices/Agencies-Departments-Offices-Directory/Community-Planning-and-Development/Denver-Zoning-Code/Text-Amendments/Unlocking-Housing-Choices) (<https://denvergov.org/Government/Agencies-Departments-Offices/Agencies-Departments-Offices-Directory/Community-Planning-and-Development/Denver-Zoning-Code/Text-Amendments/Unlocking-Housing-Choices>) project, which is also currently in progress."

A proposed five-story, single-staircase development comprising 15 units in Denver's Globeville neighborhood has received preliminary planning department approval. The project includes 13 market-rate apartments and two units designated for residents earning no more than 60 percent of the area median income. Planning officials did note that the developer has not yet submitted a comprehensive site development plan for formal city review.

While missing middle housing has been largely left out of the picture because of zoning regulations that favor either single-family zones or high-rise apartments, Conley, the Fort Collins architect, has seen community development corporations and land trusts express interest in the new Colorado law as a pathway to affordable home ownership. "I could see a smart-stair building being just as attractive for an affordable homeownership project as for an affordable rental project," she says.

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Joe Tedino is a Chicago-based writer and activist focusing on climate and sustainability.

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## RECOMMENDED ARTICLES

### TOOLS

Innovative Ways to Boost Attainable Housing

### INNOVATIONS

5 Practical Zoning Hacks for Missing Middle Housing

# Pitch Perfect

Tall Architects' gabled residence in Ocean Springs, Mississippi, harmonizes varied forms.

BY SUZANNE STEPHENS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDREW WELCH

**IT IS UNEXPECTED** to find a new house in Ocean Springs, Mississippi, where the end elevations subtly evoke the facades of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown's Nantucket and Block Island houses of the early 1970s and '80s. Not so long ago, these kinds of gables and paned windows were frowned upon for being nostalgic. But, in recent years, such Postmodern elements have been popping up in otherwise contemporary projects, such as this one, called Rayburn House.

In the case of the 3,000-square-foot, three-story house, the designers—Tall Architects' founding principals Mark and Madison Talley—did not merely have Venturi and

Scott Brown's architecture in mind. They also credit Herzog & de Meuron's Blue House (1981) in Oberwil, Switzerland as being particularly influential, with its steeply pitched roof, overhanging eaves, and quirky placement of circular windows. As Mark laments, "Modernism stripped away the playful, leaving only expansive window planes and flat roofs." Madison adds, "It's hard not to pull from architects we admire."

The Talleys, who opened their office in 2014 after each graduated with a B.Arch. from Mississippi State University, had another reason to be drawn to peaked roofs and small, syncopated fenestration: the husband-

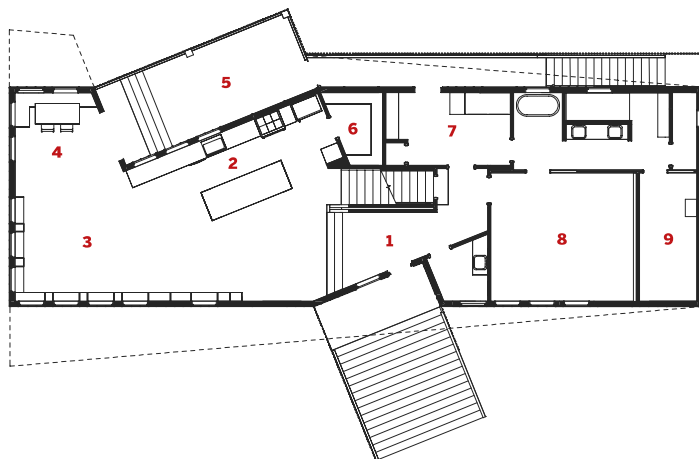
and-wife team was adhering to the construction guidelines for scale, proportions of windows, materials, and colors given by the historic-preservation commission of this picturesque Southern town.

The clients for the Rayburn House (named for the street it faces) are Caroline Croom and Julian Rankin, a couple with two children. They had bought the small corner site, about a quarter of an acre, with an existing cottage. But, since the property was in a "special flood-hazard zone," the architects and owners thought it best to replace the old house with a new one, where the main floor would be elevated about 8 feet above the ground.





## HOUSE OF THE MONTH



FIRST-FLOOR PLAN

- |           |          |                   |
|-----------|----------|-------------------|
| 1 ENTRY   | 4 DINING | 7 LAUNDRY         |
| 2 KITCHEN | 5 PORCH  | 8 PRIMARY BEDROOM |
| 3 LIVING  | 6 PANTRY | 9 CLOSET          |

Rankin, an arts and communications consultant and author, and Croom, an art collector and consultant, met the Talleys through their involvement with a local museum. “We had a rapport before starting,” says Madison, who notes Croom’s “focused eye” and welcomed her involvement in selecting furnishings, finishes, cabinetry, and colors.

Tall Architects clad the wood-frame house in humidity-resistant cementitious boards and battens, placed according to an idiosyncratic rhythm of broad and narrow intervals. Then the firm enclosed the ground level for parking cars with a screen of wood slats, and used corrugated metal for the roof—both gestures to the budget and a vernacular palette.

To further keep costs down, the architects began with a simple rectangular plan, but angled a protruding screened porch out from the elevated main floor to the west. On the east side, facing Rayburn Avenue, they carved out an entrance, which, in turn opens onto a broad stairway projecting to the ground at another angle. In one more such gesture, the architects placed an open kitchen on a diagonal to the living area. Most of the rooms, however, are laid out on an orthogonal grid, and some levels are dropped or elevated slightly to enhance the spatial dynamic.

After visitors mount the outside stairs to the entrance vestibule, they climb several steps to the living area, where the ceiling vaults upward. Beyond the living area is a dining nook created by an arched ceiling of drywall, and from this point a few more steps lead down to the screened porch. The level changes are tricky, the architects admit, but they are important to add a sense of surprise when walking through the interior. “We wanted lower and higher ceilings to create distinct spaces,” says Mark. The duo also note that the manipulation of levels and apertures promotes cross ventilation along with more opportunities for daylight and views.

Whereas the parents have their bedroom on the north end of the first floor, the children can claim their own turf on the top level. In addition to their bedrooms and a guest room, they have a playroom, where a large unglazed opening in the south wall encourages the two boys to keep in touch with their parents in the kitchen and living area below. Near the playroom, they can enjoy a balcony that is open to the outdoors by virtue of a wide, V-shaped notch in the roof.

The architects’ playful allusions, veering between past and present approaches to



architecture, convincingly demonstrate why Tall Architects is included in the exhibition of emerging practices *A South Forty: Contemporary Architecture and Design in the American South*, at the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C. (on view through winter 2026). The Rayburn House has a quixotic freshness that stands out in its environs without being showy. And it reminds us of Philip Johnson's famous saying "You cannot not know history." But you should experiment with that history as well. ■

#### Credits

**ARCHITECT:** Tall Architects — Madison Talley, Mark Talley, principals; Morgan Warmath, studio director

**ENGINEER:** Terry Moran Engineering (structural)

**CONSULTANT:** Architerra (landscape)

**CONTRACTORS:** Round 2, Dennis Frulla

**CLIENT:** Caroline Croom and Julian Rankin

**SIZE:** 3,080 square feet

**COST:** withheld

**COMPLETION DATE:** January 2024

#### Sources

**ROOFING:** Galvalume

**WINDOWS/DOORS:** Sierra Pacific, Pinkys

**INTERIOR FINISHES:** Sherwin-Williams (paint); Fireclay, Popham Design (tiles)



A staircase (above, left) leads to a vestibule with niches (above) and the combined living/dining area (this image). The childrens' rooms are upstairs (opposite).



# Thanks to a tiny ADU, an L.A. home transforms into a stunning art gallery and studio



Antonio Adriano Puleo remodeled his L.A. home after architectural designer Ben Warwas suggested some “little tweaks” that would transform the property into a “forever home.”



By **Lisa Boone**  
Staff Writer | [Follow](#)  
Photography by **Juliana Yamada**

Oct. 8, 2025 3 AM PT

- L.A. artist [Antonio Adriano Puleo](#) wanted an ADU, or an accessory dwelling unit. He got a “forever home” in Glassell Park, thanks to thoughtful tweaks from architectural designer Ben Warwas.
- The art studio and ADU was once a garage and laundry room. Now it’s filled with art along with a kitchen and bathroom.
- “People often take notes when they come to visit,” Puleo said of his art collection.

[Antonio Adriano Puleo](#) didn't intend to renovate his traditional 1946 bungalow in the Glassell Park neighborhood just north of Mt. Washington, but after consulting with architectural designer [Ben Warwas](#), who told him he could transform the house into a “forever home,” the artist changed his plans.

“I originally wanted an ADU,” Puleo said of [adding an accessory dwelling unit](#) to expand the art studio in his garage. “For me, it was about having a bigger studio and being able to have collectors and curators come to the studio.”

However, as Warwas explored the two-bedroom home and corner property — the designer had previously designed and built a wood deck in Puleo's backyard — he began to envision a new narrative for the spaces.



The Glassell Park home before the renovations. (Ben Warwas)



The exterior of the house and ADU is now painted bright yellow. There's also easy access to the outdoors.



“The living room wasn’t big enough, and it featured a huge red brick fireplace that had doors on either side of it, leading to the backyard,” said Warwas, who first met Puleo when they were undergraduate students at Massachusetts College of Art (now called Massachusetts College of Art and Design). “To access the outdoors, you had to walk down concrete steps to a covered patio.”

Paired with a third door off the kitchen, the home’s entrance to the backyard was awkward at best.

After touring the property, Warwas proposed some subtle changes: adding a 250-square-foot ADU to the garage, removing the fireplace and raising the ceiling height in the living room; adding a loft bedroom in the attic; and redesigning the exterior of the house.

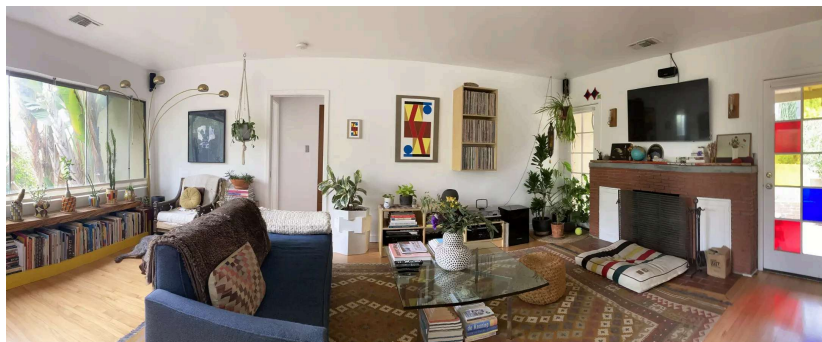


The front of the 1946 house remains the same.

“It was a small project, but there were a lot of issues with the house,” Warwas said. “I thought, ‘Why don’t I propose four different things and he can choose two or three of them?’ He chose all four.”

Puleo, 49, purchased the bungalow in 2010 for \$387,500 after seeing an ad for a two-bedroom home “priced well for a quick sale” in Glassell Park. Although only 1,000 square feet in size, the house offered a backyard for his dog and a detached garage.

“The garage was really the draw,” Puleo said. “The thing about the house that attracted me is that it had a space that could be a studio.”



The living room of Puleo’s Glassell Park home before it was redone. (Ben Warwas)



Puleo, standing, and Warwas in the living room today. “We both have a love of design,” Puleo said of his longtime friend.

Shortly after purchasing the house, Puleo renovated the kitchen and bathroom, opened up the wall between the two spaces and widened the kitchen door. “There were so many doors,” he said of the compartmentalized floor plan. “Doors in the kitchen; doors in the dining room.”

Still, it wasn’t easy to reach the garage, which housed his art studio, and the adjacent laundry room. “I was always frustrated with the house because it was not maximizing space efficiently,” Puleo said. “The studio was detached, and we had to enter through a gate.”



LIFESTYLE  
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**Frustrated with exorbitant home prices, they built this L.A. hillside retreat themselves**

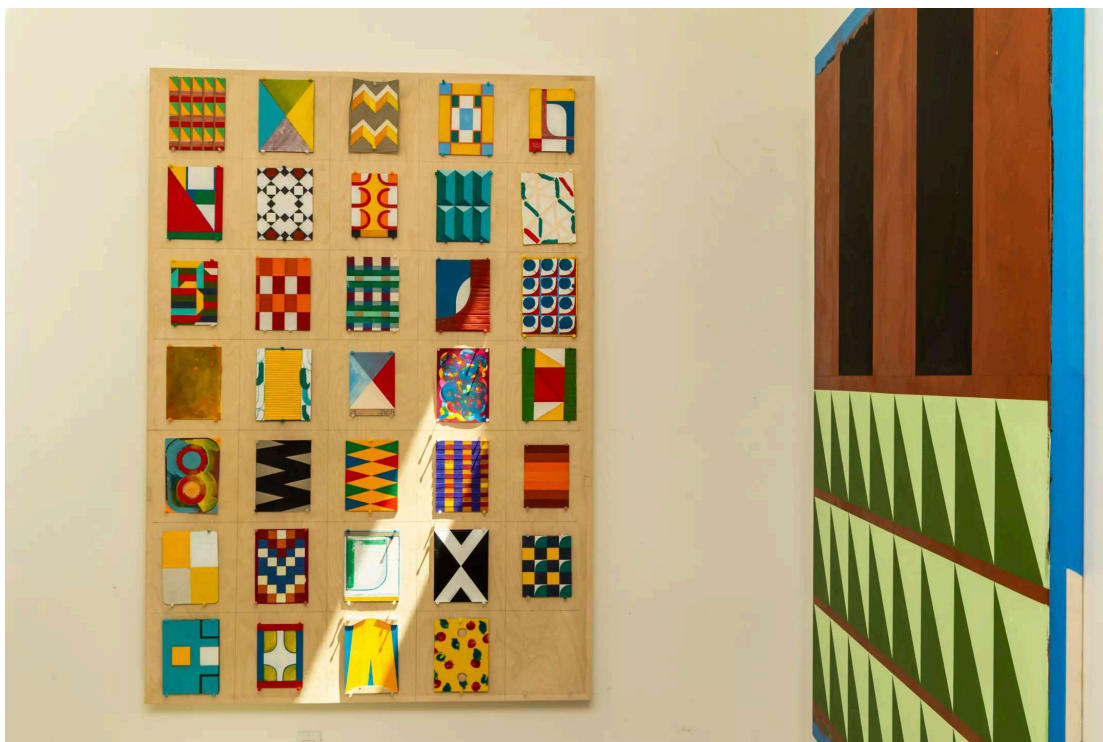
July 21, 2025

And so the makeover began.

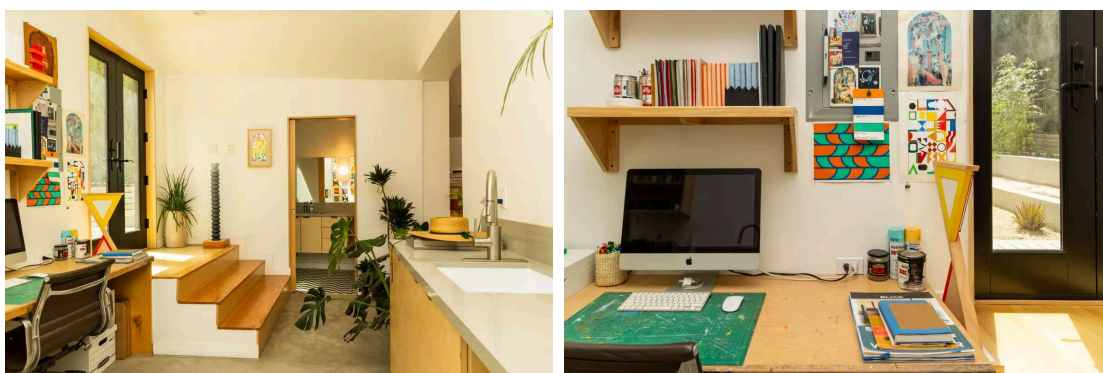
Warwas tore out the fireplace and extended the living room by six feet, adding a sleek Fleetwood sliding door that provided instant access to the backyard. Then, he raised the ceiling of the living room and added a sculptural curve that completely transformed the living space.

Because the home had a complex roof and an accessible attic, Warwas then transformed the attic into a loft that Puleo uses as his main bedroom. (The two bedrooms on the first floor are used as a den and a gallery space/guest room.) Thanks to the high ceilings and a new skylight, the attic now floods the center of the living room below with natural light.





Puleo's patterned canvases hang in the ADU.



The ADU, which is attached to the garage, and just six inches from the main house, features a kitchen, bathroom and living area. Puleo is using it as part of his art studio.

“Little tweaks totally transformed the house,” Warwas said.

In the garage, Warwas designed an ADU that can function as an art studio or rental, featuring a small kitchen, bathroom and enough room for a bed. The design of the ADU was carefully considered to maximize space and light, with a skylight and high window flooding the space with light.

A level shift offers a dramatic experience when you step into the ADU, as the floor drops below to the art studio and the ceiling goes up, creating a sense of spaciousness.

The living room of the main house is now open and airy, with custom cabinets and millwork by [James Melinat](#) that showcase the artwork Puleo made himself and the pieces he has collected for more than 30 years, including ceramic pendants by [Torbjörn Vejvi](#) and [Courtney Duncan](#), vessels by [Bari Ziperstein](#) and [Pilar Wiley](#), and paintings by [Patricia Fernández](#) and [Steven Criquei](#).

The living room’s fireplace is gone, but the wooden mantle remains atop a console behind the sofa, graced with a series of colorful ceramic planters by Ashley Campbell

and Brian Porray of [Happy Hour Ceramics](#).

“Ben and I have known each other since we were in college,” Puleo said, emphasizing their long-standing relationship and the collaborative nature of their process. “The fun thing about the project is that we did a lot of back and forth in terms of communicating shapes and forms. We both have a love of design, and Ben does a great job of using traditional materials in a way that ignites them and increases the dynamics of a space.”



Puleo chose bright blue tiles from Daltile for the shower of the ADU.



Puleo's art studio, a former garage, rests a few steps below the new ADU.

On a recent visit, Warwas was still fine-tuning home improvement possibilities. “You could put a stackable washer and dryer here,” he suggested to Puleo as they stood in the hallway. (Puleo had moved the appliances from the laundry room in the garage to the basement of the main house.)



Similarly, Warwas appreciates Puelo's curatorial skills. "He's made his home so personal," Warwas said of his friend, who, for the last year, has featured the works of local artists in one of the downstairs bedrooms, which served as an art gallery.

"It's an amazing house," Warwas said of the interiors, which are enhanced by the artworks and make visitors feel connected to the space.

"People often take notes when they come to visit," Puelo said of his art collection.



1. Designer Ben Warwas stands inside the 250-square foot ADU, which features a tall window and a skylight. 2. In the former garage, stairs from the art studio lead up to the ADU and bathroom. (Lisa Boone / Los Angeles Times)

From the sidewalk, the traditional stucco bungalow looks like so many others in the neighborhood. But step into the backyard, past the colorful paintings, textiles, tiles, stained glass and ceramics and the new rear exterior — painted a bright yellow — and it's like a completely different property.



LIFESTYLE

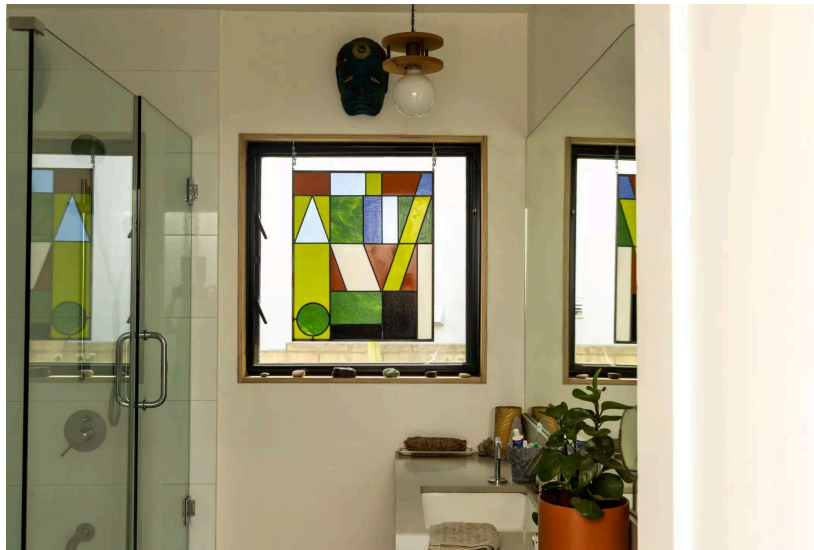
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July 2, 2025

"The front of the house didn't change, and the back of the house is totally different," Warwas said of the exterior, which reminds him of a piece of paper that has been cut up and folded together. "It's a fun moment."

That he was able to totally transform the house without adding much square footage does not escape him. "It creates a landscape where you can travel back and forth, and the garden is now much more a part of the house," Warwas said. "The yard got smaller, but it feels bigger."



A stained-glass panel by Puleo hangs in the bathroom.



Mixed-media pieces by [Megan Reed](#) are on display in Puleo's bedroom art gallery.

Despite a \$95,000 ADU addition eventually growing into a \$320,000 overhaul for the property, Puleo is happy to have the flexibility that comes with living in a home with two separate spaces.

"I could add a lofted bed and live in the ADU and make art and rent out the house if I wanted," Puleo said. "It would allow me to go back and forth between the East and West coasts and teach and be with my family in Boston."

As he sat taking it all in from his dining room table overlooking the San Gabriel Mountains, the artist said, "The house is super efficient now. This is a magical space."



Puleo also chose colorful textiles for his dog Ono's bed.

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Lisa Boone is a features writer for the Los Angeles Times. Since 2003, she has covered home design, gardening, parenting, houseplants, even youth sports. She is a native of Los Angeles.



### Juliana Yamada

Juliana Yamada is a photography fellow at the Los Angeles Times. She grew up in Torrance and earned her bachelor's degree in

photojournalism from San Francisco State University. She has held photo internships at the San Francisco Chronicle, KQED and the San Francisco Standard and has worked with the Associated Press, CalMatters and more. In 2024, she received grant support from Women Photograph for a yearlong photo essay.