

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

Proposed Ridgeline Protection Ordinance Webinar Follow-Up

Summary

In response to a City Council Motion (Council File No. 11-1441-S1), which asked Los Angeles City Planning to identify ways to better preserve and protect the City's ridgelines, City Planning is proposing the Ridgeline Protection Ordinance. An online public outreach event was held on November 20, 2020, where staff presented ordinance concepts, and fielded comments and questions. Below you will find some of the frequently asked questions regarding the Ridgeline Protection Ordinance. For more information, including a link to the presentation that was given at the 11/20/20 meeting, please visit planning.lacity.org.

Questions

How were ridgelines identified?

Los Angeles City Planning utilized an objective, data-driven approach to identifying the city's ridgelines. Using geographical information systems (GIS) mapping, staff utilized a formula to conduct a reverse watershed analysis, or examine where water does *not* flow, to identify ridgelines. Since ridgelines are the natural crests of mountains and hills, it would make sense that ridgelines exist in locations where water would flow *from* rather than *to*. In addition to this information, staff also studied a variety of elevation thresholds for ridgeline identification. Ultimately the threshold that captured the most prominent ridgelines was 600 feet above sea level.

Will the Ridgeline Protection Supplemental Use District (SUD) apply to all ridgeline properties over 600 feet?

The Ridgeline Protection SUD is eligible to be applied in areas where ridgelines have been identified on the citywide ridgeline map. Identification, however, does not extend any protections by itself. The Ridgeline Protection SUD must be applied to an area, either through the Community Plan update process, or through a targeted zone change process, for the SUD to be in effect.

How do the Ridgeline Protection height regulations differ from existing height regulations in hillside areas?

The Baseline Hillside Ordinance (BHO) introduced a series of regulations aimed at limiting the height of structures in identified hillside areas. Concepts like envelope height, slope banding, and encroachment planes are all included in the BHO regulations. The proposed Ridgeline Protection Ordinance does not make any changes to these regulations. Rather, the height restrictions contained in RP1 and RP2 are in addition to all other height restrictions contained in the base zone of the property. Furthermore, the Ridgeline Protection height restrictions are oriented around the height of buildings compared to the height of the segment of identified ridgeline, rather than the height of buildings themselves. RP1 requires all points of structures to be below a 50 vertical by 50 horizontal foot window from the ridgeline, while RP2 limits the height that structures can exceed the ridgeline by 18 feet.

Where can I see a map of identified ridgelines in the city?

A map of the identified ridgelines in the city will be included as supplemental material when a draft of the Ridgeline Protection Ordinance is released for public review and comment.

How will RP1 vs RP2 determinations be made?

RP1 and RP2 designations will primarily be made during the Community Plan update process to lots that are eligible for Ridgeline protections. The Community Plan teams will examine each neighborhood where Ridgelines exist and apply the appropriate protection levels based on the existing conditions of the area, including developed and undeveloped lots, property ownership, and community input.

How can areas outside the pilot study area get the RP SUD applied?

The Ridgeline Protection effort includes two key components that work together; one component is an enabling ordinance that would amend the Los Angeles Municipal Code to create a Supplemental Use District (SUD) containing Ridgeline Protection regulations. The other is the application of the SUD and the corresponding regulations through a Zone Change, starting with an initial pilot area. The Ridgeline Protection regulations will be applied to the pilot area first to test how they work with other hillside regulations. This allows City Planning to improve upon the regulations if necessary before the Ridgeline Protections are applied elsewhere. Once the regulations are adopted into the Zoning Code, they will be available to be applied to other communities through the Community Plan update process.

What other tools does the city have to address hillside and ridgeline issues?

There are currently several ordinances, specific plans, and Supplemental Use Districts (SUDs) in place to help regulate hillside development across the city. Examples include the Baseline Hillside Ordinance (BHO), which created development regulations tailored to hillside areas with the intention of preventing out-of-scale development; the Hillside Construction Regulation (HCR) SUD, which regulates and imposes standards for large single-family home construction in hillside communities; and Specific Plans, such as the Mulholland Scenic Parkway Specific Plan, the Northeast Los Angeles Specific Plan, and the San Gabriel/Verdugo Mountains Scenic Preservation Specific Plan, which contain localized regulations to better protect the environment and topography of the hillsides in which they are applied.

Additionally, work is underway on the Wildlife Pilot Study. Occupying a similar geography as the pilot area proposed for the Ridgeline Protection Ordinance, the Wildlife Pilot Study is a project that aims to identify and protect the variety of ecological resources that exist in the City's hillside areas. The Ridgeline Protection Ordinance is intended to complement all of these other tools to address the various issues facing hillside and ridgeline areas.

Will there be any relief mechanisms available for properties that cannot comply with the Ridgeline Protection Ordinance regulations?

Yes, the Ridgeline Protection Ordinance will include an option for relief to accommodate property owners who wish to submit an application for review to develop their lots, but are prevented from doing so due to a hardship created by the regulations contained in the ordinance. Examples of existing relief options in the Zoning Code are adjustments and variances.

What are the next steps in the Legislative Process?

There are more opportunities for the public to learn more and offer their comments on the draft ordinance. City Planning will release a draft of the ordinance for public review. City Planning will then host a staff level public hearing to obtain feedback on the draft ordinance and revise as necessary. The draft ordinance will then be heard at the City Planning Commission (CPC) for recommendation. If approved, the CPC recommendation on the ordinance will then be heard by the Planning and Land Use Management (PLUM) Committee, a committee of the City Council. Finally, the full City Council will consider the ordinance. The Zone Change ordinance for the pilot area will follow a similar process.

Who can I contact for additional information?

Please submit questions and comments for the proposed Ridgeline Protection Ordinance to Patrick Whalen at patrick.whalen@lacity.org or (213) 978-1370 or for the Zone Change Ordinance for the pilot area to Susan Wong at susan.s.wong@lacity.org or (213) 978-1472. To sign up for the updates on this proposed Ordinance and other updates from the Department please visit, planning.lacity.org/about/email-sign-up.