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(213) 978-1300

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200 N. Spring Street, Room 525
Los Angeles, CA 90012-4801
(213) 978-1271

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May 12, 2023

Los Angeles City Council
c/ o Office of the City Clerk City Hall,
Room 395 Los Angeles, CA 90012

Attention: PLUM Committee

Dear Honorable Members:

CF-22-0617, Amending Motion 54A, Item 4: Report on Building Height Limits for Properties Along the Los Angeles River in the Downtown Community Plan

The Los Angeles City Council at its meeting on May 3, 2023 instructed the Department of City Planning, in coordination with the City Attorney, to prepare a report with recommendations within 60 days on measures to ensure that development projects located along the Los Angeles River have consistency in terms of building height, and community stakeholder input is part of the decision-making process. The following report provides background information and describes the zoning regulations that were recommended/modified by the various decision-making bodies during their consideration of the Downtown Community Plan.

Background

The City Planning Commission (CPC) recommended approval of the Downtown Los Angeles Community Plan (the Plan) at its meeting that took place on September 23, 2021. Under this CPC Recommended Draft of the Plan, the properties immediately adjacent to the Los Angeles River have a 5-story height limit (*MB2 in Figure 1*) and the remaining properties to the east of Mesquit Street have a 15-story height limit with the opportunity to go up to 18 stories by providing community benefits (*MM1 in Figure 1*). These height limits were put forth in response to input from the community members in the Arts District, and their desire for a gradation of building heights along the Los Angeles River. The fundamental purpose of the height limits, working in concert with other zoning regulations such as lot coverage maximums and building break requirements, is to ensure that the Los Angeles River viewshed remains porous, and that future river-fronting development projects do not “wall off” the river.

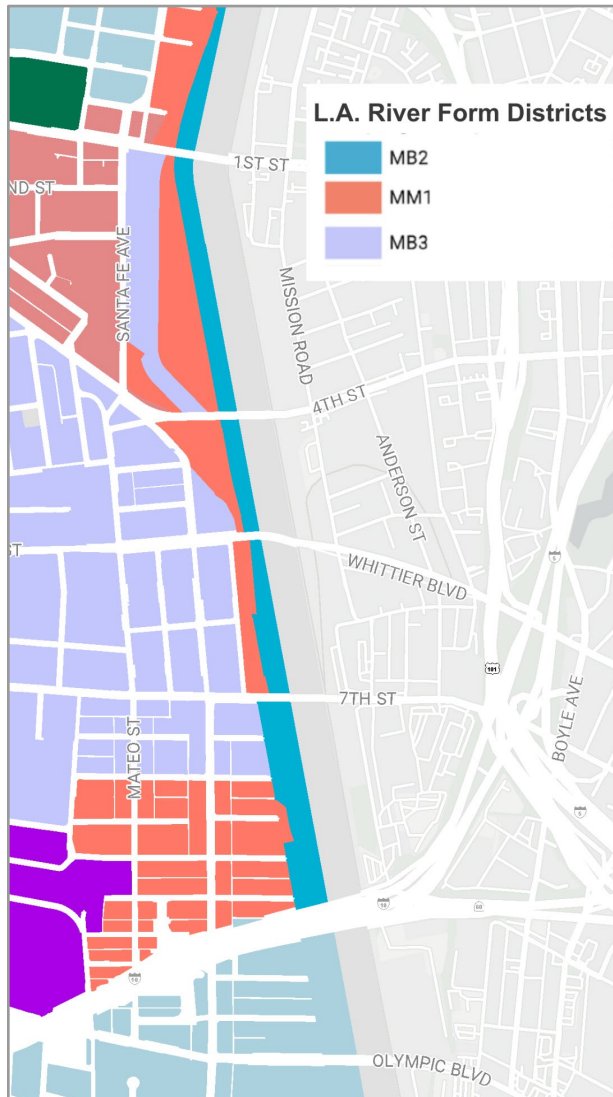


Figure 1: Map showing Form Districts adjacent to the Los Angeles River in the Plan Area

The Planning and Land Use Management (PLUM) Committee considered the CPC Recommended Draft of the Plan during its meeting that took place on April 24, 2023. At this meeting, Council District 14-de León, in a [letter](#) dated April 21, 2023 requested the PLUM Committee to modify the zoning for the property generally bounded by East 6th Street to the north, rail yards to the east, East 7th Street to the south and Mesquit Street to the west from Form District MM1 to MB3.

The Floor Area Ratio (FAR) allowances for the MB3 Form District is the same as MM1, however unlike MM1, the MB3 Form District does not include any height limits. The key zoning regulations regarding FAR and height allowances for MM1 and MB3 Form Districts are as follows:

	MID-RISE MEDIUM 1 (MM1) <i>Requires a minimum 10' river setback</i>	MID-RISE BROAD 3 (MB3) <i>10-story minimum height requirement for 50%+ residential projects</i>
FAR	1.5 Base / 4.5 Bonus	1.5 Base / 6 Bonus
Height in stories	15 Base / 18 Bonus	no height limit
Building Width (max)	160'	280'

Table 1: MM1 & MB3 Form District Comparison Table



Figure 2: Map showing Modified area from Form District MM1 to MB3

The subject property (670 Mesquit), for which the modification applies, is approximately 5.45 acres, and is currently pursuing an entitlement for a mixed-use development, consisting of creative offices, multi-family residential units, a hotel, and a grocery store in addition to retail and restaurant uses. The entitlements being sought at this location, under application CPC-2017-0247-GPAJ-VZCJ-HD-SP-SN-MCUP, are for a mixed-use development that is currently on hold, but as currently proposed would transcend the 15-story height limit that would be applied by the MM1 Form District, and the City Planning Commission, and later the City Council may elect to

approve this vested entitlement application, with building greater height than would be allowed by the MM1 Form District.

Discussion

Community members of the Arts District represented by Arts District Community Council LA (ADCCLA) submitted a letter dated May 3, 2023, requesting a reconsideration of the above modification by the PLUM Committee. Council District 14-de León introduced a motion at the City Council meeting on May 3, 2023 to instruct the Department of City Planning to report back on the measures necessary to ensure that development projects located along the Los Angeles River have consistency in terms of building height, taking into account community stakeholder's input. The section below describes the rationale for the zoning that was proposed in the CPC Recommended Draft related to FAR and height regulations along the Los Angeles River.

The development of the Downtown Community Plan has been a collaborative effort between the Department of City Planning and the many community groups that represent different neighborhoods in Downtown. Specifically, the department has repeatedly engaged with Arts District community stakeholders such as the Los Angeles River Artists and Business Association (LARABA) and the Arts District Los Angeles Business Improvement District, and incorporated their feedback into the proposed zoning for this part of the Plan area.

As shown in *Figure-1* above, the CPC Recommended Draft of the Plan stipulates a 5-story height limit for the properties immediately adjacent to the Los Angeles River (MB2). The remaining properties generally to the east of Mesquit Street, Santa Fe Avenue and Center Street are zoned with a base height limit of 15 stories and bonus height limit of 18 stories (MM1). The properties to the west of Mesquit Street do not include any height limits (MB3). The 15 to 18 story height limit described above was intended to ensure a smoother visual transition of building heights between the areas with 5-story height limit to the east of Mesquit and the area with no height limits to its west.

These height standards allow for a gradation of building heights along the properties adjacent to the Los Angeles River. These height limits have generally been applied consistently to all privately-owned properties along the portion of the Los Angeles River located within the Downtown Community Plan area. Additionally, regulations such as minimum 10' setback from the property along the River, frequent entrances and minimum window requirements along building facades facing the River were developed to complement the Form District height standards, promote engaging building frontages, and activate the riverfront as a public amenity.

The Environmental Impact Report that was certified by City Council on May 3, 2023 analyzes the potential aesthetic impacts of the plan. This analysis addresses potential shadows cast by larger buildings allowed under the plan in places that are currently low-scale, such as the Arts District, and along the Los Angeles River. The analysis identifies the height limits that would be established under the plan, along the River, as a mitigating feature of the plan, to address potential aesthetic impacts.

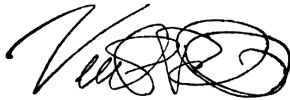
Recommendation

City Planning recommends that the City Council restore the MM1 Form District designation for the subject property (sub area DTL-110-C), thereby establishing a uniform height limit for properties adjacent to the Los Angeles River. The PLUM committee recommended the following modification to the New Zoning Code Map as shown in the table below for properties in the Downtown Community Plan zoning matrix sub area DTL-110-C, as requested in Council District 14-de León's letter to the PLUM Committee, dated April 21, 2023:

Subarea	Zone From - [To]
DTL-110-C	M3-1-RIO - [MM1 MB3- CDR1 CDF1-5][IX4-FA][CPIO]

If the PLUM Committee decides to retain the zoning regulations that were recommended for approval by the CPC, it should recommend to Council to take action to change the zoning for the subject property from MB3 to MM1.

Sincerely,



Vincent P. Bertoni, AICP
Director of Planning