



Planning & Zoning Report

Date: December 10, 2025

To: Planning and Zoning Board

Through: Marc Heirshberg, Assistant City Manager

From: Nana Appiah, Development Services Director
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Subject: Mesa Zoning Ordinance text amendment (**Board Duties and Organization Amendments**) - Proposed amendments to Title 11 Chapters 66 and 67 of the Mesa City Code. (**Citywide**)

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Planning and Zoning Board recommend that the City Council adopt the proposed Mesa Zoning Ordinance (MZO) Board Duties and Organization text amendments.

Purpose

City Council, the development community, and City staff have engaged in discussions aimed at improving the development review process. Staff received consistent feedback requesting clearer procedures, more objective standards, and administrative pathways for routine applications - allowing City Council and the City's Boards to focus policy development and community impact.

Recent changes in state law have further shaped the City's approach to development review - particularly the duties and role of the Design Review Board. Senate Bill 1103, signed on March 3, 2023, initially authorized municipalities to administratively review and approve a broad range of applications, including site plans, development plans, and subdivision actions.

This authority became mandatory on March 31, 2025, when House Bill 2447 amended A.R.S. § 9-500.49 to require all municipalities to adopt ordinances allowing these approvals to occur administratively and without a public hearing. House Bill 2447 also established that design review decisions must be based on clear, objective standards.

These statutory changes reduce discretionary review by staff and the Design Review Board. As a result, the City has an opportunity to realign duties, clarify review authority, and establish a development process that is predictable, objective, and streamlined.

The proposed amendments respond directly to this new legal framework, ensuring compliance with state law while implementing strong design standards and maintaining Board involvement where it adds the most value.

Staff is recommending certain modifications to Chapters 66 and 67 of the MZO. Details of the proposed text amendments are attached in Exhibit 1 – Board Duties and Organization Ordinance. Specifically, the proposed text amendments:

1. Modify the membership and term limits of the Planning and Zoning Board by adding alternate members.
2. Require professional qualifications for a portion of the Planning and Zoning Board.
3. Modify the authority and duties of the Planning and Zoning Board and the Design Review Board.
4. Modify appeal bodies and appeal types.

Discussion

1. Modify the membership and term limits of the Planning and Zoning Board by adding alternate members.

Staff recommends amending Section 11-66-2 of the MZO, adding three alternate members to the Planning and Zoning Board to support consistent and fully seated meetings. In the event of a Board member absence, the Chair would designate an alternate to serve in their place as a voting member for that entire meeting.

The addition of alternate members will help ensure quorum, minimize the risk of delays for applicants, and support fuller and more robust discussions and decision-making.

Staff recommends that alternate members serve terms identical to regular Board members, with a maximum of two three-year terms.

Alternate members would remain eligible for future appointment as regular Board members if selected by the Mayor and City Council. This structure not only enhances Board continuity, but also creates a pipeline of knowledgeable, experienced candidates for future vacancies.

2. Require professional qualifications for a portion of the Planning and Zoning Board.

Staff is proposing minimum professional qualifications for a portion of the Planning and Zoning Board members be added to Section 11-66-2 of the MZO. This will strengthen the Board's technical expertise, support more informed decision-making, and better align the City's practices with industry standards for land use and development review bodies.

The proposed amendments would introduce qualifications similar to those currently required for the City's Design Review Board. Specifically, the Board's composition would include two design professionals (such as architects, landscape architects, engineers, urban planners, interior designers, or other similar design-related professionals), one contractor or developer, and four at-large members from the community.

By incorporating these professional requirements, the City aims to ensure the Planning and Zoning Board reflects a balanced mix of community representation and technical knowledge.

This blend of expertise will enhance the Board's ability to evaluate development proposals, interpret zoning regulations, and guide the City's future growth and development effectively.

3. Modify the authority and duties of the Design Review Board and Planning and Zoning Board.

As part of the Administrative Review Text Amendments staff is recommending a review framework that reduces redundancy, and aligns with the state mandate for objective administrative approval. Corresponding updates to the duties and authority of the Planning and Zoning Board and the Design Review Board are proposed to ensure clarity, eliminate overlap, and better align each Board's role as a recommending body within the process.

The Design Review Board makes recommendations to the Planning Director on Design Review applications. City staff evaluates projects for compliance with Codes and regulations, while the Design Review Board provides advisory design feedback for the Planning Director to consider when making a final decision.

With House Bill 2447 prohibiting the use of subjective design considerations in administrative approvals, projects that meet the objective standards of the Zoning Ordinance will no longer be routed to the Design Review Board for design-related recommendations.

Staff recommends modifying Section 11-66-6(C) (Authority and Duties of the Design Review Board) to include:

1. Reviewing and providing recommendations on Alternative Compliance requests - instances in which applicants seek approval of an alternative to the objective Site Planning and Design Standards of Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8.
2. Making recommendations on City projects to the Planning Director, rather than granting approval.
3. Acting on:
 - a. Appeals of the Planning Director's decisions on Alternative Compliance requests; and
 - b. Matters expressly conditioned through ordinance or resolution to require Design Review Board approval.

Section 11-66-2(C) (Authority and Duties of the Planning and Zoning Board) will largely remain the same; however, proposed modifications include adding the responsibility to provide recommendations to City Council on the design of buildings, structures, landscaping, and open space.

This added authority aligns with the consolidated development review process and reinforces the Board's role as a recommending body, particularly in reviewing and advising on site-specific design guidelines.

4. Modify appeal bodies and appeal types.

Staff recommends updates to Section 11-67-12 (Appeals) to align with the proposed changes to the responsibilities of the Planning and Zoning Board and the Design Review Board.

Table 11-67-12 identifies the original approving bodies for various land use processes and the corresponding appeal bodies. The recommended changes include:

- Removing the Design Review Board as the appeal body for Alternative Landscape Plans.
- Renaming “Site Plan Modification” to the proposed “Development Plan Review”.
- Revising the appeal process for Design Review applications, replacing the current appeal to the Design Review Board with an appeal of an Alternative Compliance request.

These updates ensure consistency with the revised roles of the reviewing and appeal authorities throughout the code.

Implementation

Staff recommends the ordinance approving the proposed text amendments become effective 30 days from the date of City Council approval.

Exhibits

Exhibit 1 – Board Duties and Organization Ordinance