



Planning and Development Department
 Land Use Planning Division

STAFF REPORT
 February 4, 2026

TO: Members of the Planning Commission

FROM: Justin Horner, Principal Planner

SUBJECT: Density Bonus in the Adeline Corridor Commercial (C-AC) Zoning District

RECOMMENDATION

Review the staff report, receive the staff presentation, consider public comments, and provide feedback on policy questions related to density bonus utilization in the Adeline Corridor Commercial (C-AC) zoning district.

BACKGROUND

Adeline Corridor Commercial (C-AC) Zoning District

The Adeline Corridor Commercial (C-AC) zoning district is unique among the City’s zoning districts in that development standards for residential and mixed-use projects vary based on the percentage of affordable units included in a proposed project. Projects that include more affordable units are granted more generous development standards related to height, floor area ratio (FAR), residential density and maximum lot coverage. These variable development standards are summarized in Table 1:

Table 1 C-AC Development Standards

	Less than 14% Affordable (Tier 1)	14% Affordable (Tier 2)	21% Affordable (Tier 3)	25% Affordable (Tier 4)	100% Affordable
Maximum Height					
South Shattuck Subarea	4 stories 45 feet	6 stories 65 feet	7 stories 75 feet	8 stories 90 feet	
North/South Adeline Subarea	3 stories 35 feet	5 stories 55 feet	6 stories 65 feet	7 stories 75 feet	7 stories 80 feet
Maximum FAR					
South Shattuck Subarea	2.5	4.0	5.0	5.5	
North and South Adeline Subarea	2.0	3.5	4.0	5.0	
Maximum Density (du/acre)					
South Shattuck Subarea	120	210	250	300	
North and South Adeline Subarea	100	150	210	250	
Maximum Lot Coverage, Interior Lot					
Both Subareas	60%	90%			
Maximum Lot Coverage, Corner Lot					
Both Subareas	70%	90%		95%	

These different development standards, by providing increased development intensity with the provision of affordable housing, effectively constitute a type of local density bonus program.

State Density Bonus

The State's Density Bonus Law (Government Code Section 65915) was enacted in 1979 to encourage the creation of more housing and address the severe shortage of affordable housing in California. The law allows a housing development to exceed the maximum allowable residential density established for a site by the Zoning Ordinance through the allocation of a specific percentage of deed-restricted affordable housing units included in the project, and can include additional incentives, concessions, and/or waivers to development standards.

State Density Bonus Law defines "maximum allowable residential density" as:

the greatest number of units allowed under the zoning ordinance, specific plan, or land use element of the general plan, or, if a range of density is permitted, means the greatest number of units allowed by the specific zoning range, specific plan, or land use element of the general plan applicable to the project. Density shall be determined using dwelling units per acre.

Using the maximum allowable residential density standard for a particular site, a project applicant develops a "Base Project," which is used to determine the additional development capacity that can be conveyed through the State Density Bonus.

Adeline Corridor Specific Plan

The C-AC zoning district was implemented as part of the adoption of the Adeline Corridor Specific Plan.¹ The C-AC's development standards were intended to create a "supplemental affordable housing incentive unique to the Specific Plan Area that offers a bonus for development projects that provide high levels of affordable housing."

The Adeline Corridor Specific Plan states that any additional density or development capacity pursued through this Adeline-specific affordable housing incentive, or through the State Density Bonus pathway, must be calculated starting with the residential density values for a Tier 1 project. BMC Section 23.204.150 (C-AC Adeline Corridor Commercial District) includes Tables 23.204-43 and 23.204-44, both of which include a note which states "For the purposes of calculating the State Density Bonus the Tier 1 density shall constitute the maximum allowable gross residential density." This reflects the Specific Plan's intent that the Adeline-specific affordable housing incentives "are to be used in lieu of (and not on top of) the State Density Bonus."

In short, the Adeline Corridor Specific Plan does not intend to allow "stacking" of the C-AC zoning district's local density bonus approach with the State Density Bonus.

¹ Adeline Corridor Specific Plan, 2022. <https://berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/2022-03/Adeline-Corridor-Specific-Plan.pdf>

DISCUSSION

C-AC's Variable Development Standards and State Density Bonus

The C-AC zoning district's variable development standards have raised interpretive questions as to how the State Density Bonus law intersects with the local ordinance. To avoid state law pre-emption concerns, staff recommend either amending the existing standards or creating an independent local density bonus program as authorized by state law.

HOME-SF and Local Density Bonus

San Francisco's HOME-SF² is an example of an optional local density bonus program for developers constructing mixed-income in certain areas of San Francisco. Under HOME-SF, 20 to 30 percent of the units in a new housing project must be affordable, and 40 percent of the total units in the building must be two bedrooms or larger. In return, density bonuses and zoning modifications (similar to waivers under State Density Bonus law) are provided, allowing project sponsors to accommodate additional affordable units. To qualify for HOME-SF, a project sponsor must attest that they are "not seeking or receiving any additional state or local development bonuses." That is, they must choose between HOME-SF or the State Density Bonus.

POLICY QUESTION FOR THE PLANNING COMMISSION

Staff is seeking direction from the Planning Commission on the following questions:

1. Should the C-AC zoning standards be revised to clarify that the development standards for a Base Project are determined by the Tier for which the project qualifies? Revising the standard:
 - *would* require an amendment to BMC 23.204.150, removing the notes pertaining to Tier 1 standards; and
 - *could* require an amendment to the Adeline Corridor Specific Plan to revise those sections that refer to Tier 1 standards serving as the development standards for any project proposing to use the State Density Bonus.
2. Shall City staff explore the creation of a local density bonus program that includes benefits like those provided in the C-AC zoning district standards, and which exists as a stand-alone alternative to the State Density Bonus, similar to HOME-SF?

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

There are no identifiable environmental effects or opportunities associated with this informational report.

² <https://sfplanning.org/home-sf#about>

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