

---

# Relationship between Zoning and Objective Design Standards



City of Oakland



# Relationship Between **Zoning** and **Objective Design Standards**

The Objectives Design Standards (ODS) Project is an endeavor to develop processes, procedures, regulations, and objective design and development standards to streamline the approval of a wide range of building types.

The Project is part of a larger effort to encourage different housing types, incentivize affordable housing, and reduce constraints on housing development. The effort includes implementing Oakland's 6th Cycle Housing Element and corresponding changes to Oakland's Planning Code (specifically, changes to zoning) that allow for greater density and relaxed development standards, especially in zoning districts that have historically served as single-family neighborhoods.

**Zoning** and **objective design standards** are urban planning tools that work together to regulate land use and development in a community, ensuring that the built environment aligns with desired outcomes and community goals. Zoning provides the rules and boundaries for how land can be used within a community, while objective design standards specify the physical characteristics and aesthetics of buildings and developments within those zones.

**Zoning** is a legal framework that divides land into different zones, each with specific regulations dictating how that land can be used and developed. Zoning typically covers aspects such as land use, building height and size, number of housing units, setbacks, minimum lot size and lot coverage, driveway size, required open space, parking, and more. Oakland has recently proposed changes to zoning to help build more and different kinds of housing. To read more about Oakland's proposed zoning changes, [click here](#).

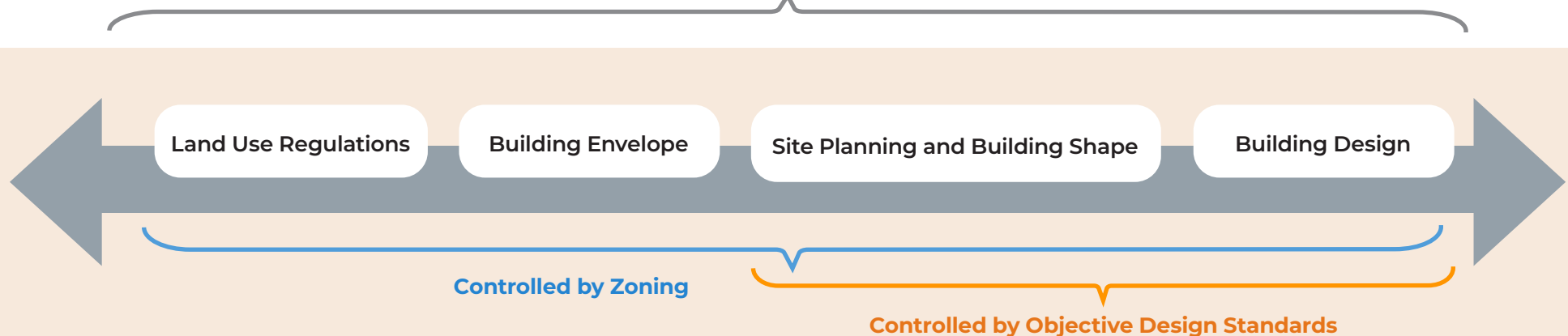
**Objective design standards** are rules and criteria that focus on the physical design and appearance of buildings and public spaces. Unlike traditional zoning, which often focuses solely on use categories, objective design standards provide specific guidelines for building shape, placement, materials, landscaping, windows, rooflines, entryways, ground floor commercial, and other design elements.

When seeking to develop their property, individuals or developers must carefully review both zoning regulations and objective design standards. Zoning regulations and objective design standards can overlap in their efforts to shape urban development and land use, though they are distinct approaches. Zoning creates predefined rules and restrictions in certain areas, such as building height, parking requirements, or setbacks, to maintain compatibility among land uses. In contrast, objective design standards concentrate on the physical attributes and aesthetics of structures within those zones, emphasizing elements like building materials, architectural styles, and landscaping.

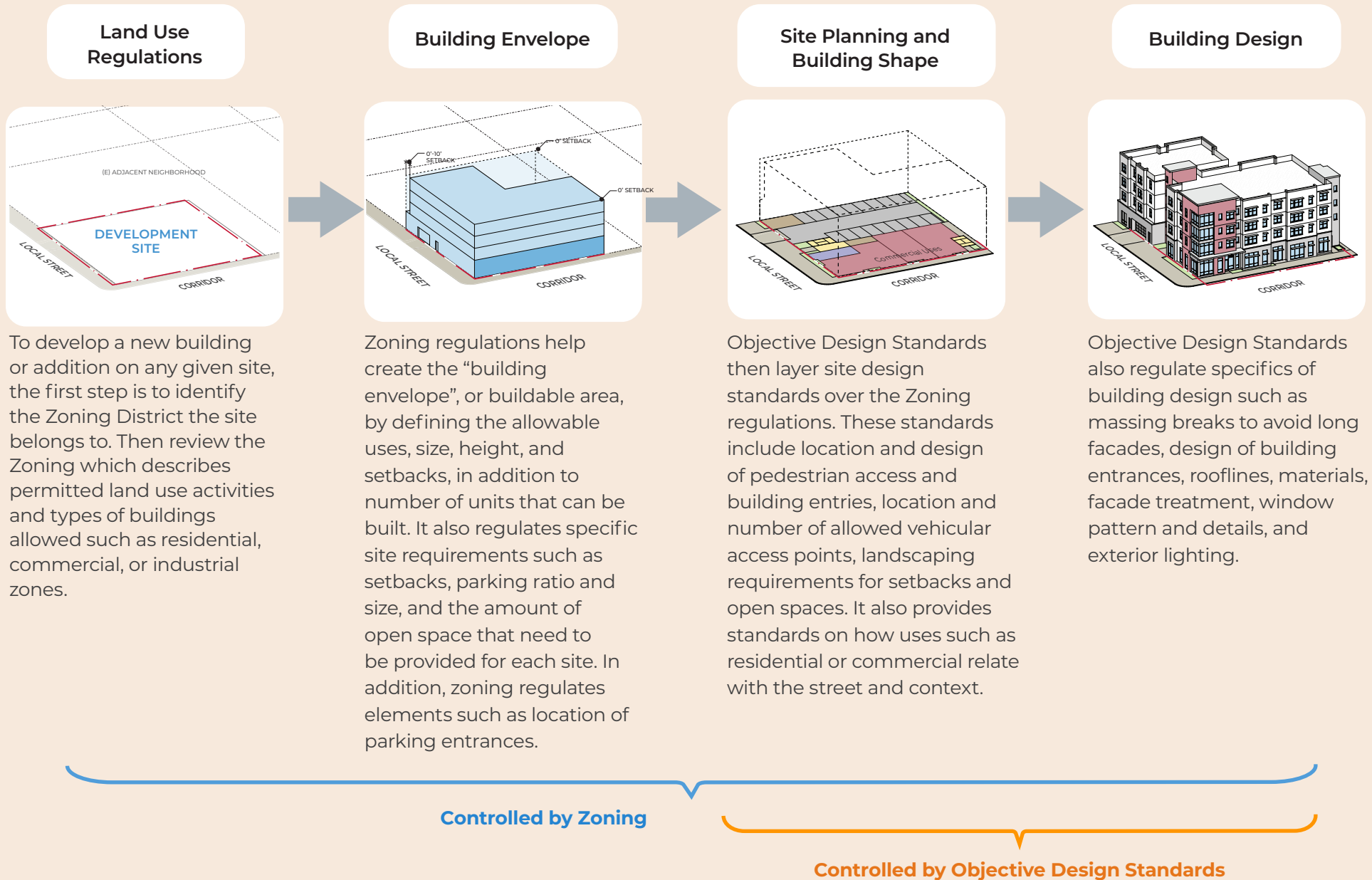
## Zoning and Objective Design Standards:

Aspect	Zoning	Objective Design Standards
Focus	Land use and functional aspects	Physical design and aesthetic aspects
Regulations	Use categories, density and intensity (how much development), setbacks, lot size, height, parking requirements	Building design and site design, neighborhood/site context, materials, placement, aesthetics
Examples	Residential, commercial, industrial zones, setback of a certain number of feet from the property line, number of units per acre	Building shape (massing), streetscape, landscaping, building façade, rooflines, balconies, windows

Zoning and ODS work hand in hand to shape buildings.



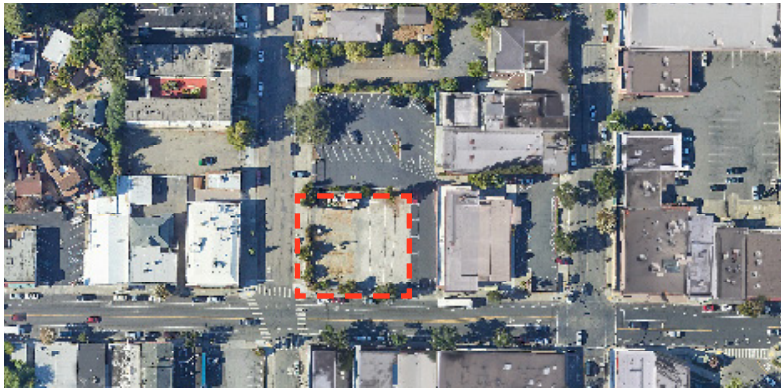
The images on the following pages highlight the relationship between zoning and objective design standards that a property owner might need to consider at various stages of a hypothetical project's path to development.



## Step 1: Zoning - Land Use Regulations

*Illustrated by a 4-story mixed-use building with retail at the ground floor and residential units above.*

To develop a new building or addition on any given site, the first step is to identify the development site's Zoning District, which describes permitted land use activities and types of buildings allowed such as residential, commercial, or industrial zones. You can look up what zone your property is in on the City's interactive [Zoning Map](#) and read more about the requirements in the City's Planning Code. Then, check to see if the use you'd like to build is allowed. For example, if your property is in a Neighborhood Center Commercial Zone (indicated with the abbreviation CN-) you can build a multifamily housing development, a commercial development, or a mixed use development, among other uses.



PERMITTED LAND USE	
Zone	Neighborhood Center Commercial
Permitted Activities	Permanent Residential, General Retail Sales
Permitted Facilities	Multifamily dwelling, Enclosed Non-residential, Sidewalk cafe



*\*Site and Zoning are for illustration only, not a specific location*

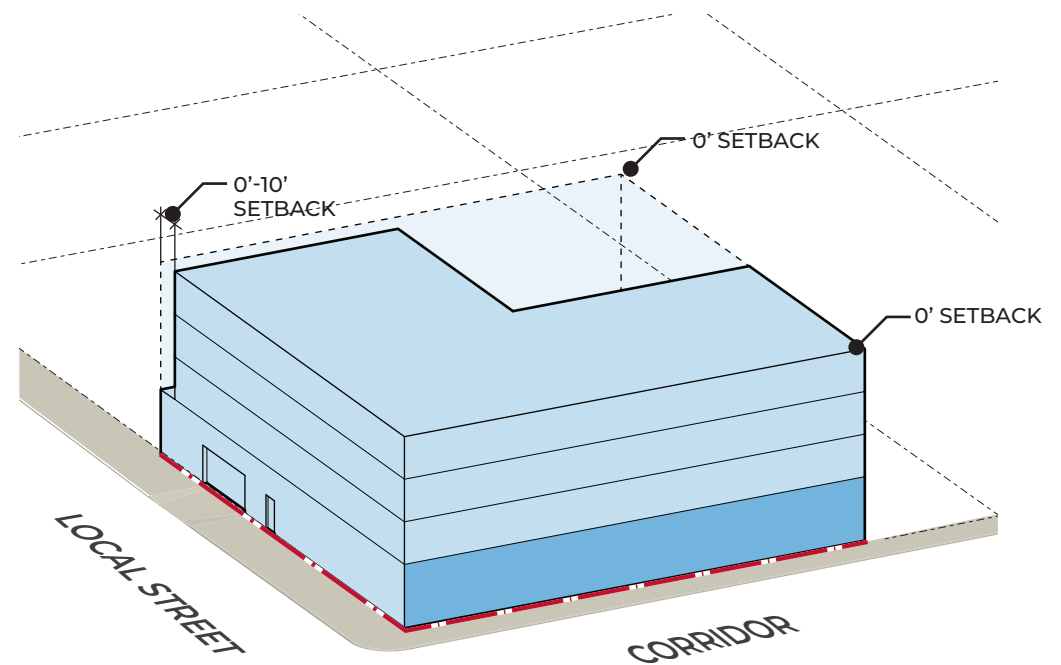
## Step 2: Zoning - Building Envelope

*Illustrated by a 4-story mixed-use building with retail at the ground floor and residential units above.*

Now that you identified the zoning and land use regulations, the next step is to identify the applicable development standards from these regulations to establish your building envelope. The building envelope accounts for all applicable zoning development standards and is the maximum size the development is legally allowed. The building envelope will inform next steps of site planning, building shape, and design.

Check out how the blue building envelope to the right is informed by the development standards in the table below.

APPLICABLE PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS FROM ZONING	
Height limit	45' (Corridor)
Density (based on site area)	Max. 29 units
Setbacks	
Front	Min. 0', Max 10'
Interior Side	Min. 0'
Street Side	Min. 0'
Rear	0' (Non-residential) 10' (Residential)
Open space	
	150 sf per unit (30 sf if private space is provided)



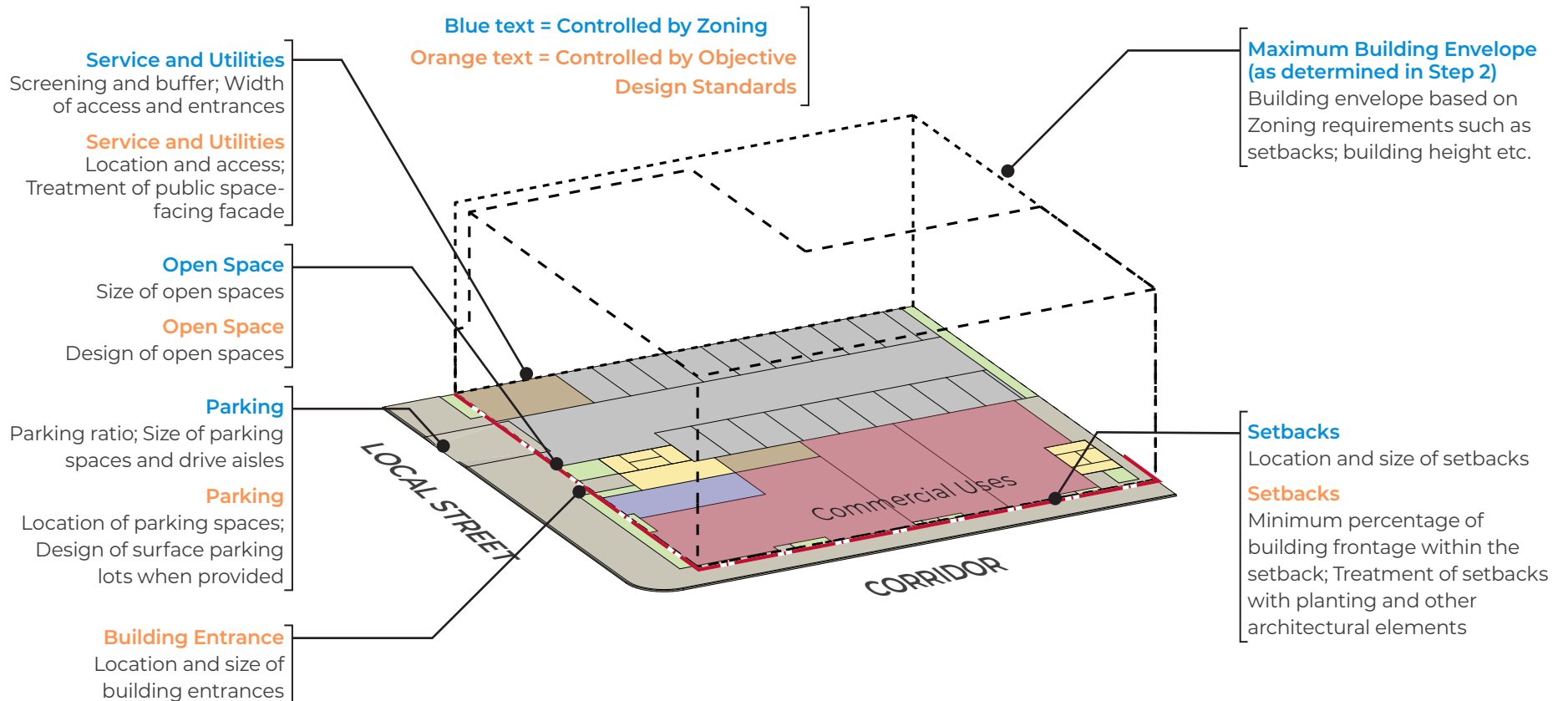
*\*Site and Zoning are for illustration only, not a specific location*

## Step 3: Objective Design Standards - Site Planning and Context

*Illustrated by a 4-story mixed-use building with retail at the ground floor and residential units above.*

Now that you have identified your maximum building envelope you need to start site planning and looking at the surrounding context-- this is where ODS start to come in and layer with Zoning requirements. To figure out which general design standards apply to the project, refer to the Applicability Matrix in Chapter 1, which delineates relevant general design standards for each building type. You will also have to meet the building-specific requirements relevant to the project's building type set forth in Chapter 3. These standards include location and design of pedestrian access and building entries, location and number of allowed vehicular access points, landscaping requirements for setbacks and open spaces.

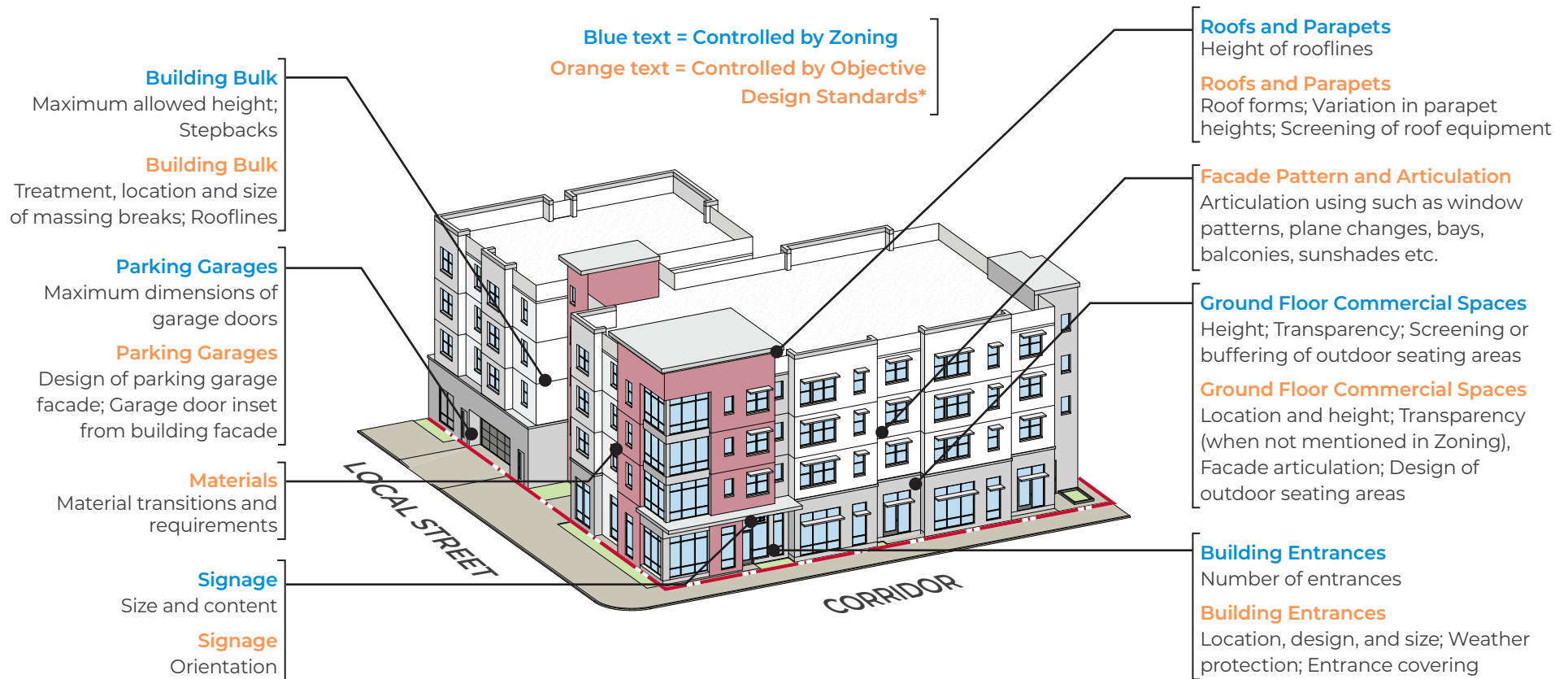
Your property's context is also important. To ensure new buildings are compatible, the ODS include some standards that relate to neighborhood context, like type of roof-line or window proportions and includes a definition of what a "Neighborhood Context Area" means (see diagram below). As such, an applicant may be required in certain cases to observe particular design criteria of properties in the 5 lots closest on each side and 10 of the closest lots across the street and propose a development that blends in with its surroundings (called the '5-5-10' rule.)



## Step 4: Objective Design Standards - Building Design

Illustrated by a 4-story mixed-use building with retail at the ground floor and residential units above.

Objective Design Standards also regulate specifics of building design such as massing breaks to avoid long facades, design of building entrances, rooflines, materials, facade treatment, window pattern and details, and exterior lighting. Like in Step 3, you can use the Applicability Matrix in Chapter 1 to determine which general building design features apply, and Chapter 3 to determine building-specific requirements relevant to the project's building type. The City also will be preparing ODS checklist tools for each building typology, which includes all standards relevant to a project (both from general design standards and building-specific standards). This checklist will serve as a user-friendly tool to help you ensure your proposed project meets all required ODS.



\* Standard and Standard Categories are still being developed and are subject to change