

Affordable Student Housing

INFORMATION BULLETIN

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Affordable Student Housing is an optional affordable housing incentive program allowing more dense housing targeting lower income students. Lower income students are students who have a household income and asset level that does not exceed the level for Cal Grant A or Cal Grant B award recipients as set forth in Section 69432.7(k)(1) of the California Education Code.

This Information Bulletin is a summary of the Affordable Student Housing Density Bonus regulations and does not include every requirement or restriction. To view all of the requirements and regulations please see [San Diego Municipal Code Chapter 14, Article 3, Division 7](#) [PDF](#).

Note - Regulations Not in Effect in the Coastal Overlay Zone

Changes to the Affordable Student Housing regulations adopted as part of the [Housing Action Package \(HAP\) 2.0 Update](#) are not effective within the Coastal Overlay Zone. Those changes will become effective within the Coastal Overlay Zone when the California Coastal Commission certifies Ordinance [O-21758](#) [PDF](#).

Affordable Student Housing: Implementation Guide

I. Site Eligibility

1. Sites must be located within one of the following:
- A. An area specifically designated for student housing within the applicable community plan; or

B. A zone that allows multiple dwelling unit development that is located within a 1-mile radius of a college or university campus accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges: Senior College and University Commission or the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges; or

C. Any multiple dwelling unit zone within the Sustainable Development Area.
2. Development on eligible sites must propose at least five dwelling units

Learn your site's zoning: [Zoning and Parcel Information Portal \(ZAPP\)](#)

II. Program Requirements

Eligible developments are required to comply with all of the following:

1. At least 10 percent of the base zone units must be affordable to lower income students at a rent that does not exceed 30 percent of 65 percent of the area median income for a single-room occupancy unit type.
- A. The units must be comparable in mix and amenities to the market-rate student units in the development and be dispersed throughout the development.

B. The units must remain affordable for at least 55 years.
2. All units in the student housing development shall be used exclusively for undergraduate, graduate, or professional students enrolled full time at an institution of higher education accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges: Senior College and University Commission or the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges.
3. Student eligibility shall be verified by an affidavit, award letter, or letter of eligibility provided by the student's institution of higher, or by the California Student Aid Commission, stating that the student receives or is eligible for financial aid, including an institutional grant or fee waiver, from the college or university, the California Student Aid Commission, or the federal government.
4. A resident manager is required to live onsite, with at least one manager accessible on the premises 24 hours per day.
5. A minimum of 10% of the ground floor gross floor area shall be dedicated to student amenities.
6. Onsite laundry facilities must be provided.
7. Parking requirements:
- A. Off-street parking rates are outlined in Section 142.0525 and [Table 142.05C](#) [PDF](#).

B. If the development is located within a 1-mile radius of a college or university campus accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges: Senior College and University Commission or the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges it may meet the off-street parking requirements through a parking agreement between the applicant and the college or university.

III. Program Benefits

In exchange for providing affordable units, an applicant shall be entitled to a Density bonus of up to 75% and up to five Affordable Housing Incentives as outlined in [Section 143.0740](#) [PDF](#) and [Table 143-07B](#) [PDF](#), reproduced in the table below.

Percent Low Income Units	Percent Density Bonus	Number of Incentives
10	20 ¹	1
11	21.5	1
12	23	1
13	24.5	1
14	26	1
15	27.5	1
16	29	1
17	30.5	2
18	32	2
19	33.5	2
20	35	2
21	38.75	2
22	42.5	2
23	46.25	2
> 24-30	50 ²	3
31-32	50 ²	4
> 33	50 ²	5

¹ For development in a Sustainable Development Area containing 50 pre-density bonus dwelling units or less, once the 20% density bonus is reached, an additional 25% density bonus and three incentives are allowed if an additional 10 percent of the pre-density bonus units are restricted to 120% AMI.

² For development in a Sustainable Development Area, once the 50% density bonus is reached, an additional 25% density bonus and three incentives are allowed if an additional 10% of the pre-density bonus units are restricted to 120% AMI.

- Incentives can be any of the following:

I. A deviation to a development regulation;

II. Approval of mixed use zoning in conjunction with a residential development provided that the commercial, office, or industrial uses:

I. Reduce the cost of the residential development; and

II. Are compatible with the proposed residential development; and

III. Are compatible with existing or planned development in the area where the proposed residential development will be located.

III. Any other incentive proposed by the applicant that results in identifiable, actual cost reductions.
- Items not considered incentives include, but are not limited, to the following:

I. A waiver of a required permit, except as permitted by Sections [132.1202\(b\)](#) [PDF](#) and [132.1402\(b\)](#) [PDF](#);

II. A waiver of fees or dedication requirements;

III. A direct financial incentive;

IV. An increase in the maximum permitted floor area ratio in land use plans that use floor area ratio rather than dwelling units per acre or per square foot as the mechanism to control density.
- Where a project is not requesting an incentive to exceed the maximum structure height or setbacks of the base zone, an additional density bonus of 10 percent of the pre-density bonus dwelling units may be granted, provided that development of the additional density does not cause the need for an incentive, waiver, or deviation to exceed the maximum structure height or setbacks of the base zone.

Where at least 20 percent of the total dwelling units are three bedrooms or greater, an additional density bonus of 20 percent shall be granted and an additional density bonus of 10 percent of the pre-density bonus dwelling units shall be granted, if the provided density bonus dwelling units contain at least three bedrooms.

Density Bonus Calculation

- Step 1: Base-zone density.** Base-zone density is calculated by dividing the lot area by the number of square feet required for each dwelling unit outlined in the applicable zoning development regulations tables. See [Section 113.0222](#) [PDF](#) for more information.

Example:

Site: 1.5 acres, zoned RM-2-5 (1 unit per 1,500 sq. ft.)

Lot Area: 1.5 acres x 43,560 (sq. ft./ac.) = 65,340 sq. ft.

Maximum Permitted Density: 1 dwelling unit/1,500 sq. ft.

Units Permitted = 65,340 ÷ 1,500 = 43.56 dwelling units, or 44 units

For purposes of calculating affordable Student Housing density, calculations resulting in any fractional number are increased to the next whole number.

- Step 2: Bonus Units.** Bonus units are calculated by multiplying the base-zone density by the associated density bonus percentage outlined in Table 143-07B based on the percentage of base-zone affordable units.

Example:

33 base zone dwelling units

10% reserved for lower income students

Table 143-07B Low Income Density Bonus Households		
Percent Low Income Units	Percent Density Bonus	Number of Incentives
10	20 ¹	1

Required number of affordable units: 33 x 0.10 = 3.3 dwelling units = 4 dwelling units

Bonus dwelling units: 33 x 0.20 (20% bonus) = 6.6 dwelling units = 7 dwelling units

- For the purposes of calculating a density bonus granted pursuant to [Section 143.0720\(g\)](#) [PDF](#), the term "unit" means one rental bed and its pro rata share of associated common area facilities.

IV. Off-Site Affordable Units

Affordable units may be provided off-site when the off-site units are:

- Within the same community planning area and City Council District; or

Within one mile of the premises of the development (measured in a straight line from the property lines of the proposed housing development)

Off-site affordable units that do not meet the locational criteria above may be located in an area where the receiver site is within a Sustainable Development Area, an area identified as a High or Highest Resource California Tax Credit Allocation Committee (CTCAC) Opportunity Area, and less than five percent of the existing dwelling units in that community planning area are covenant-restricted to very low income, low income, or moderate income households.

Off-site affordable units that do not meet any of the criteria above may be approved with a Process Four Planned Development Permit ([Section 126.0604](#) [PDF](#)).

The off-site units must be provided at the same number of affordable dwelling units required of the development, at the same affordability levels, and the same total bedroom count as the development. Different bedroom mixes may be provided to meet the total dwelling unit and bedroom count.

Prior to the issuance of the building permit for the development, the applicant is required to enter into an agreement with the San Diego Housing Commission for the off-site affordable units.

Existing structures used for off-site affordable dwelling units must have a remaining useful life of at least 55 years and comply with current California Building Code standards.

V. Student Housing May be Eligible for "Housing in All Communities"

Affordable student housing may be permitted on a premises owned by a public agency or a qualified nonprofit corporation within a base zone that does not allow multiple dwelling unit development, subject to all of the following:

1. The application for the premises is submitted by a person that has the authority to fill out an application in accordance with [Section 112.0102](#) [PDF](#) and is a part of a public agency or a qualified nonprofit corporation under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.
2. The lower income student housing is constructed by or through a contract with a community college district or a state operated university.
3. The affordable dwelling units shall remain available and affordable for a period of 55 years.
4. The premises is located:
- A. Within Mobility Zone 1, 2, or 3; and

B. Outside of an area designated for Industrial, Park, or Open Space in a land use plan.
5. Development shall comply with the following development regulations:
- A. Within Mobility Zone 1, residential development shall comply with the underlying base zone, except for the floor area ratio.

B. Within Mobility Zones 2 and 3, residential development shall comply with the development regulations of the RM-2-5 zone with the exception of the following:

I. Floor area ratio and density shall be based on [Section 143.0746](#) [PDF](#) and [Table 143-07E](#) [PDF](#).

II. Lot area and lot dimensions shall be based on the base zone.

Where development complies with all the above, it is entitled to the following allowances:

- A. Incentives and waivers in accordance with [Sections 143.0740 through 143.0743](#) [PDF](#).
- B. Unlimited density.
- C. The residential maximum floor area ratio shall be determined by the Mobility Zone and the percentage of low income dwelling units provided as identified in [Section 143.0746](#) [PDF](#) and [Table 143-07E](#) [PDF](#).
- I. Where a premises is located in two or more Mobility Zones, the entire premises shall be subject to the regulations applicable to the Mobility Zone with the greatest floor area ratio bonus.

II. Development located within the Coastal Overlay Zone and the Coastal Height Limit Overlay Zone shall be limited to a maximum floor area ratio of 2.5, and to a maximum height of 30 feet, except for those areas located within Mobility Zone 1.

VI. State Density Bonus

Pursuant to [AB 3116 \(2024\)](#), a student housing development in which at least 20% of the total units are for lower income students may be eligible for a density bonus pursuant to state law. Eligibility under state density bonus law differs from the SDMC in the following ways:

- The student housing development must contain bedrooms containing 2 or more bedspaces that have a shared or private bathroom, access to a shared or private living room and laundry facilities, and access to a shared or private kitchen.

Students must be enrolled in at least six units, either currently or in the last six months.

For more information about eligibility under state density bonus law please review [Government Code Section 65915](#).

Bonuses and incentives under state law shall be consistent with the figures provided in [Government Code Section 65915\(f\)\(3\)\(C\)](#), reproduced below:

Percent Low Income Units	Percent Density Bonus	Number of Incentives
20	35	1
21	38.75	1
22	42.5	1
23	46.25	2
24	50	2

Reference Table			
San Diego Municipal Code, SDMC Chapter 14, Article 2, Division 5 Parking Regulations PDF San Diego Municipal Code, SDMC Chapter 14, Article 3, Division 7 Affordable Housing Regulations PDF California Government Code, Gov. Code Section 65915			