

**ADMINISTRATIVE MANUAL  
LOS ANGELES COUNTY PUBLIC WORKS  
GEOTECHNICAL AND MATERIALS ENGINEERING DIVISION**

SUBDIVISION – GENERAL GEOLOGIC AND SOILS REVIEW INFORMATION AND CRITERIA

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this memorandum is to describe the subdivision process in order to facilitate the review of tentative subdivisions. The information provided explains general approaches, processes, governmental regulations, and criteria needed for the geologic review. Further details are provided in GS088.0. Refer to specific applicable codes and Division Geology and Soils Development Review Section memoranda for details for actual implementation and compliance.

GENERAL DEFINITIONS

A subdivision is a division of any unit(s) of improved or unimproved land. A "minor land subdivision" is four or fewer lots, whereas a tentative tract is a major division of land, generally in excess of four lots. Somewhat different designations may be used by some contract cities, such as "lot split", or a tract may have fewer than five lots.

A "vesting" tentative tract is a subdivision of land that when approved, has a vested right to proceed for development in accordance with applicable ordinances and plans in effect at a predetermined date.

In any particular subdivision, lots of special designations or purposes may be proposed, such as "Remainder Lot" or "Open Space." Open space are "set aside" lot(s) relative to development.

A "Remainder Lot" is an undeveloped portion, or remaining land of a subdivision. It must be able to be divided into two parcels in the future (see GS002.0 "Remainder Lots").

PROCESSING

All subdivisions submitted by the Department of Regional Planning for geotechnical review are received by the Land Development Division (LDD). A "standardized review sheet" is used to inform the Department of Regional Planning of our findings. A copy of the review is forwarded to the Department of Regional Planning by the LDD.

## TYPES OF SUBDIVISION MAPS

There are various designations of subdivision maps which are sent for geotechnical review including "new" (original) or first filing of the subdivision, "revised," a revision of a current subdivision, "reactivation" or "renewal," extension or renewal of a prior approval, "amended," incorporating a change, and "reversion to acreage," consolidation of existing parcels of land.

Copies of all tentative maps and exhibit(s), regardless of the type of subdivision map, will be saved electronically in Geotechnical and Materials Engineering Division's network.

## SUBDIVISION APPROVAL

Geologic reviews of subdivision maps will result in either an approval, with or without conditions, or a non-approval, listing necessary requirements.

"Conditions" for subdivision approval are used to outline what is required for recordation to bring the subdivision to completion relative to geotechnical issues. Conditions commonly require additional reviews or approvals, such as for grading plans, recordation, and bonding for geologic hazard mitigation.

## CONDITIONS OF APPROVED SUBDIVISIONS

Information and scope of conditions for subdivision approval are indicated on Geology and Geotechnical Development Review Units' standardized subdivision review sheets. Additional requirements can be added; however, as site conditions and proposals warrant.

## FINAL SUBDIVISION MAPS

To record a tentative subdivision, a final map or parcel map is generally required. The Section must review and approve all final maps for subdivisions conditionally approved.

When the final subdivision map is submitted for recordation, requirements for clearance commonly include the following for hillside areas: (a) geotechnical letters/reports from consultants regarding the absence or presence of Restricted Use Areas; (b) approved grading plan; (c) bonds for geologic corrective work; and (d) copy of the final subdivision map. Final maps for tentative subdivisions approved without conditions are not submitted for our review and our approval is not required or requested by LDD.

## SCOPE AND CRITERIA OF GEOTECHNICAL REVIEW

1. Documentation for the scope, authority, and criteria of the geotechnical review of subdivisions includes, but is not limited to, the Los Angeles County Subdivision and Building Codes, the State's "Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zoning Act, Seismic Hazards Mapping Act", etc. A subdivision should be denied if development of subdivided lots cannot comply with current code requirements for permits. Administrative Manual policies for subdivisions, such as GS001.0, GS002.0, GS005.0, GS010.0, GS063.0, GS073.0, GS086.0, GS088.0, and GS101.0, etc., provide detailed guidelines for subdivision review.
2. The subdivision map and application (previously called "Owner's Statement") must be thoroughly reviewed as they indicate the extent of proposals and development concept. For example, they may indicate grading, use of individual on-site sewage disposal, grading of roads (or not), ungraded site lots, etc. The scope of grading proposed must be shown. An "Exhibit A", a concept grading plan commonly required by the Department of Regional Planning in hillside areas, must also be geotechnically reviewed and be feasible.
3. Site geologic conditions and proposals are the main basis of our subdivision review. The primary purposes of the geotechnical review include the assurance that each lot or parcel of a tentative subdivision will have a safe site for a structure, safe access to each lot, that regulatory requirements for future permitting can be met, and that any proposals indicated on the application or shown on the plan are geotechnically feasible. Existing and potential geotechnical hazards on the property must be identified and must be remediated or shown as Restricted Use Areas in compliance with the County Subdivision Code.
4. For purposes of subdivision review the scope of geotechnical review includes, but is not limited to, slope stability, hydroconsolidation or collapsing soils, potential or existing mud/debris flows, high groundwater, liquefaction, excessive settlement, secondary effects of seismic shaking, expansive bedrock, etc.
5. Generally, the term "feasibility" when used relative to subdivisions includes economics; however, this factor is beyond the scope of our review. The reviewer's primary responsibilities, relative to proposals, are to review:
  - The presence of existing and potential geotechnical hazards,
  - The need for design and extent of remediation, and
  - Adequacy of data for assessment and remediation.

The geotechnical feasibility of a subdivision may be questionable where it appears that (a) an entire lot may be affected by instability, (b) major changes in tract design are necessary for hazard remediation, (c) remedial measures recommended have not been incorporated into the tract design that extends outside the boundary of the subdivision or increases the scope of grading of natural slopes, or (d) existing or potential geotechnical hazards have not been defined relative to development. Any of these conditions may be a basis of non-approval.

6. Subdivisions may be approved without reports or conditions depending upon geotechnical conditions. If geotechnical hazards exist, a report will probably be required to establish a consultant of record for specific proposals, grading, recordation, etc. Generally, in hillside areas, the reviewer will need geotechnical reports to identify geotechnical conditions on the property and to review proposals of the tentative subdivision.
7. Scope of investigation of proposed graded and development areas should be adequate to define basic geotechnical conditions and to determine geometry for remediation design. The investigation should be sufficient to avoid major changes in tract design when additional data and analysis are provided later, such as at the grading plan stage.

The extent that remaining natural slopes of a subdivision are explored and analyzed depends on proposals. For example, detailed exploration and vigorous slope stability analyses are probably not warranted for natural slopes that are remote from the building site(s), although sufficient information would be necessary to identify significant hazards (Restricted Use Areas) for purposes of recordation later.

8. Review sheets of approvals must include all conditions that must be completed prior to recordation. As we cannot arbitrarily change our conditions or retract our approval, our reviews must be thorough.

When circumstances warrant, we can change our conditions, revoke our approval, and/or require additional consultant information when another map for the subdivision is submitted from the Department of Regional Planning. Such circumstances include the requirement of additional data in areas where proposed grading has been modified, where "new" (adverse) geotechnical information becomes available, when policy or ordinance changes have occurred, or if an issue of health and safety exists.

9. A building area that would require a "slide waiver" (e.g., Factor of Safety less than 1.5) may not be designated as the safe building area for purposes of a subdivision. Any slope created by grading associated with a subdivision must be stable; i.e., designation of Restricted Use Area in lieu of remediation of a proposed cut slope is not acceptable. Graded slopes must meet all applicable County's minimum standards and acceptance of stability calculations is the responsibility of the Geotechnical Engineering Review Section.

Approved By:



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William Man  
Division Head