



Frequently Asked Questions

OPEN SPACE-RECREATION ZONING DISTRICT



What is the purpose and intent of the zoning district?

The Open Space-Recreation zoning district is intended to provide for the development and preservation of public and private parks and associated recreation facilities within open space areas.

What land uses are permitted as principal uses within the zoning district?

The following is a non-exhaustive list of land uses that are permitted as principal uses, subject to the approval of required permits (e.g., site development permits):

- ◆ Apiaries
- ◆ Archaeological/Paleontological/Historical Sites
- ◆ Community Gardens/Garden Centers
- ◆ Grazing
- ◆ Greenbelts
- ◆ Parks/Playgrounds
- ◆ Recreation Centers
- ◆ Riding/Hiking Trails
- ◆ Utility Buildings/Structures
- ◆ Wireless Facilities

What land uses can be conditionally permitted within the zoning district?

The following is a non-exhaustive list of land uses that can be permitted, subject to approval of a conditional use permit. Please note that cities are not required to approve conditional use permits. Prior to approving conditional use permits, the Laguna Woods City Council must make certain findings including, but not limited to, findings of compatibility with other land uses in the vicinity, consistency with the Laguna Woods General Plan, and compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA").

- ◆ Animal Clinics
- ◆ Archery Ranges
- ◆ Cemeteries
- ◆ Commercial Stables
- ◆ Country Clubs
- ◆ Golf Courses
- ◆ Helistops
- ◆ Kennels
- ◆ Landscape Service Facilities/Offices
- ◆ Libraries and Museums
- ◆ Maintenance Offices/Buildings
- ◆ Newspaper/Publication Distribution Centers
- ◆ Police and Fire Stations*
- ◆ Recreational Vehicle/Vessel Storage
- ◆ Sewage Disposal Facilities
- ◆ Solar Arrays/Farms
- ◆ Transfer/Materials Recovery Facilities

Can housing be established within the zoning district?

Housing is prohibited except that employee housing may be established if it is ancillary to a principal use of a property, or ancillary to a building or other structure located on the same property.

For example, a historical site (which is permitted as a principal use) could provide a caretaker unit for an employee of the historical site.

Can retail stores and restaurants be established within the zoning district?

Retail stores and restaurants may be established only if they are ancillary to a principal use of a property, or ancillary to a building or other structure located on the same property.

For example, a recreation center (which is permitted as a principal use) could include a retail store that sells recreation-related goods and a restaurant that serves its patrons.

Can solar panels and solar arrays be established within the zoning district?

Roof-mounted solar panels are allowed and locally regulated only through applicable building codes. Ground-mounted solar arrays/solar farms can be conditionally permitted.

What limitations exist regarding building size?

To ensure that outdoor spaces are the focal point of properties, the Open Space-Recreation zoning district allows less building development than commercial or residential zoning districts.

Buildings are limited to a maximum height of 35 feet, which is typically equivalent to two stories plus an attic. More tightly stacked construction configurations may allow three stories to fit within the 35-foot height limit.

The ground floor of buildings must be between 20,000 and 25,000 square feet and cannot cover more than 35% of the net area of a property. For this purpose, “net area” is calculated by taking the area of a property and deducting from it most easements that prohibit surface use of the property (e.g., public street easements).

ABOUT OPEN SPACE

Open space helps to preserve natural resources, provide opportunities for outdoor recreation, and protect and enhance public health and safety (e.g., air quality, flood control, urban heat island mitigation, and water quality). While open spaces are often unimproved, some include recreational facilities and other amenities that are closely associated with open space purposes.

State law requires cities to “plan for the comprehensive and long-range preservation and conservation of open-space land” within their jurisdiction ([California Government Code Section 65563](#)). One of the reasons the California Legislature enacted such a requirement was to assure that cities “recognize that open-space land is a limited and valuable resource which must be conserved wherever possible” ([California Government Code Section 65562\(a\)](#)). Case law notes that “California legislative policy strongly favors the preservation of open spaces” ([Gisler v. County of Madera \(1974\) 38 Cal. App. 3d 303, 307](#)).

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For more information, please contact the City of Laguna Woods Planning & Environmental Services Department at (949) 639-0500 or planning@lagunawoods.gov.