

REMOVING GOVERNMENTAL CONSTRAINTS

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Design Guidelines and Design Review

Many communities have adopted design guidelines and design review procedures in an effort to improve the quality of design and ensure that new buildings fit into the context of existing development.

Design review can supplement development regulations by addressing issues that cannot easily be quantified in an ordinance. They also allow more flexibility than a zoning ordinance might provide. The advantage of using design review to promote affordable housing is that it addresses a major concern of neighbors—the fear that the development will be ugly, too bulky, and out of character with the neighborhood. Good design is often the key to overcoming concerns about density because well designed higher density buildings can be much more acceptable than poorly designed lower density buildings.

Design review, however, can be a two-edged sword. If the guidelines are vague and the process too cumbersome, affordable housing will be discouraged. As a general rule, quantifiable standards should be in the zoning ordinance while more subjective provisions should be in the design guidelines. Good design guidelines will help the process to be as objective as possible.

The review process should ensure that development projects are reviewed in a timely manner and should restrict the scope of review. For example, the primary purpose of most design review processes is not to judge the design merits of a building, but to ensure that it reasonably fits within the context of the neighborhood. Many local governments restrict the ability of design review to limit the size of the proposed project.

Benefits

- Assures neighborhood residents that new development will fit into the context of the neighborhood.
- Results in more attractive and functional communities for everyone.
- Potentially reviews how the design of a building contributes to increased public safety.

During the Housing Element Process...

- **Review the General Plan.** The general plan should provide the policy guidance for a design review system.
- **Encourage Community Participation.** Consider organizing a task force of community representatives, interdepartmental staff, design professionals, and local developers to help define a workable set of design guidelines and design review procedures that respond to community priorities and support affordability goals.
- **Review Existing Guidelines and Review Procedures.** If guidelines and review procedures exist, they should be reviewed and evaluated. How much additional time do they add to the development review process? Are guidelines overly vague? Do they support an objective review process? Interviews with local staff and recent development applicants can shed light on existing strengths and weaknesses.
- **Consider Good and Bad Design Examples from the Local Area.** Conduct a participatory assessment of community design examples from the local area to identify building styles and designs that people like, as well as those that they don't like. It is often possible to distill from these a set of general guidelines that can help ensure that future developments help to replicate desirable design examples.
- **Consider Experiences from Other Jurisdictions.** Talk to staff and developers in adjacent jurisdictions to see if they have successful design review programs that you can draw upon.

Potential Programs and Actions

- **Adopt Design Review Guidelines.** Design review guidelines should be prepared or modified to give direction on the design of new and major reconstruction projects.

- **Adopt Design Review Process.** Elements of the process include who conducts the review; whether or not the results of the review are binding; the timelines for review; the scope of the review; and the appeal process, if any.
- **Clarify Role of Design Review.** Design review bodies should be discouraged from reviewing the architectural merits of a building, but instead focus on how the building fits into the existing character of the neighborhood. Design review should not be used to limit innovative design as long as it is compatible with the area.
- **Clarify Scope of Design Review.** The scope of design review should be carefully prescribed. Although some cities allow the design review process to modify zoning standards, such as density and height, a better approach is to have numerical standards addressed through the normal project review process.
- **Tailor Guidelines to Specific Areas.** One set of guidelines does not normally fit all areas of a city or county. Guidelines may need to be based on different areas of the city, different neighborhood design styles, different types of streets, or different categories of building prototypes.
- **Incorporate Graphics into Guidelines.** Design guidelines should use graphics as much as possible. Graphics help to illustrate the guidelines and provide examples of the intent of the text.
- **Integrate Guidelines with Ordinances.** Design guidelines need to be coordinated with the zoning ordinance and other development regulations. The preferred approach usually is to have numerical standards in the zoning regulations and non-quantifiable provisions in the guidelines.
- **Ensure Complete Coverage of Topics.** Typical design guidelines for residential development will include such topics as landscaping, privacy, parking areas, street furniture, defensible space, human scale, pedestrian circulation, and façade materials.
- **Establish an Appropriate Review Authority.** Many jurisdictions use a design review board while other jurisdictions use the staff to review development projects. In either situation, some baseline level of design and architectural expertise is useful.

Contacts and Resources

See Appendix D for phone numbers and addresses, where relevant.

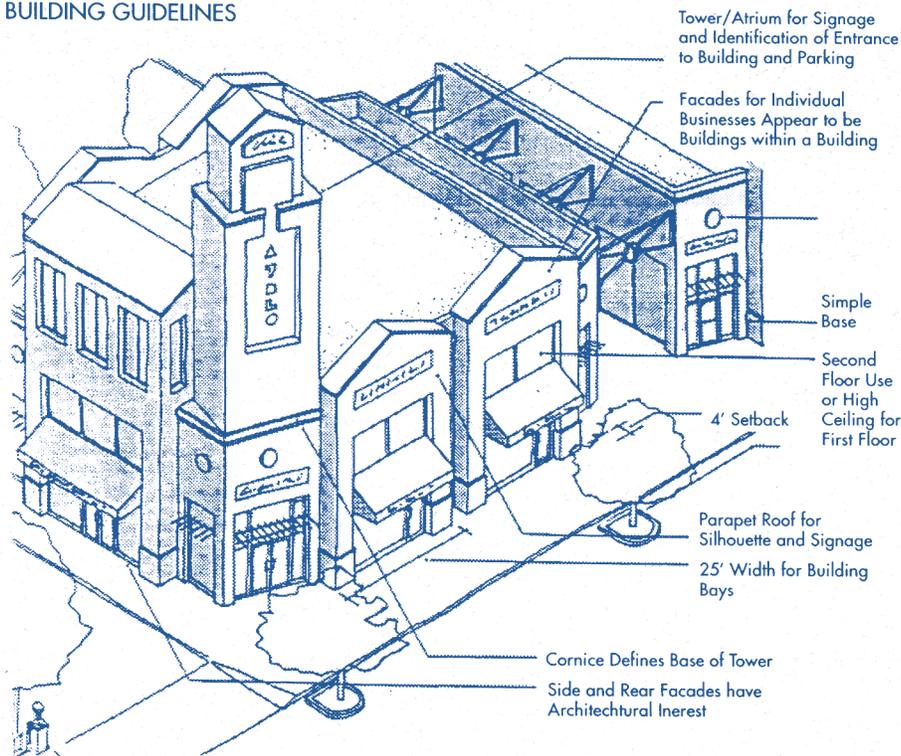
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 Pregliasco, Janice, *Developing Downtown Design Guidelines*, California Main Street Program, Sacramento, 1988.

Success Stories

- **Design Guidelines Promote Mixed-Uses and Higher Densities.** Design guidelines adopted in 1992 to spur development on its main commercial corridor, San Pablo Avenue, led the City of **Albany** to adopt a detailed San Pablo Avenue Vision Plan in 1997. The Vision Plan recommends specific zoning changes and general plan updates to encourage development. It also proposes height minimums, suggests uniform setback lines to create an attractive pedestrian environment, and recommends greater floor-area ratios. Parking requirements for residential development and mixed-use developments are reduced since extensive public transit is available along the entire corridor. Developers submitting designs in line with the new plan will be able to go through a simplified, more rapid permitting process.
- **Design Review Enhances Neighborhoods and Property Values.** After years of additions and new construction built with little regard for existing neighborhood character, the City of **South San Francisco** adopted a *Design Review Guide for Residences and Additions* in February 1998. The guidelines cover basic elements of building height and bulk, lot coverage, and neighborhood compatibility. Parking, outdoor space, building entry, setbacks, materials, roof forms, and detailing are also covered by the ordinance. Simple explanatory diagrams accompany the guidelines. The easy-to-follow handout includes tips on how best to prepare your submittal and communicate with planning staff and the Design Review Board. The goal of the guidelines is to seek a general sense of compatibility in the neighborhoods, while allowing for originality in design, thereby helping to maintain property values and present a positive image of the community to residents and visitors.

BUILDING GUIDELINES



Proposed Design Guidelines, Albany

Design, Community and Environment

Growth Management Systems

Some growth management mechanisms enact outright limits to the quantity of new residential development. These are often in the form of numerical caps on the number of new dwelling units that can be approved during a given period of time. Sometimes, the cap is applied equally to all units regardless of location or affordability, while other jurisdictions provide exemptions and/or incentives for affordable housing and/or city-centered development (Morgan Hill and Half Moon Bay, for example). No matter how a numerical cap is structured, *a community may not restrict growth to less than the number of units necessary to meet its share of the regional need for housing for all income levels during the five-year period covered by the housing element.*

Other forms of growth management include limiting growth in specific areas, establishing Urban Growth Boundaries (UGBs), or restricting major development until certain infrastructure performance standards are achieved.

The relationship between growth controls and housing affordability is a complex topic on which only limited research has been done. Because the factors involved vary significantly between jurisdictions, it is difficult to draw lessons from one experience and apply it to all others. Factors that may affect the impact of growth management policies on housing affordability include the inventory of residential development sites (either vacant or through re-use), the density allowed on those residential sites, the vacancy rate in existing residential units, local demand for housing, and the availability of housing in adjacent jurisdictions.

A well-designed growth management system can support community livability, environmental protection, *and* housing affordability. For example, an UGB combined with encouragement of infill and affordable housing development can encourage more compact forms of development in strategic locations, thereby protecting environmental resources; promoting transit use, bicycling and walking; and reducing per-unit housing costs through better land utilization and efficient use of existing infrastructure.

Benefits

- Potentially lowers infrastructure costs, reduces driving distances, and reduces the need for car ownership.
- Causes the community to focus more on revitalizing its existing developed areas, potentially creating more livable communities (especially if affordable housing needs are taken into consideration).
- Allows the community to address growth concerns without impacting housing affordability if adequate land and exemptions are provided for new low- and moderate-income housing.
- Establishes “smart growth” as a clear alternative to sprawl, making affordable infill development more attractive to the community.

During the Housing Element Process...

- **Examine Existing Systems.** Growth management systems may not be necessary in those communities that have already established good planning programs and effective mechanisms to implement these programs. Therefore, the first step is to improve the existing planning and regulatory systems.
- **Analyze Impacts of Existing Systems on Affordability.** When preparing the housing element, include an analysis of the effect of existing growth management systems on the development of housing for all income levels and whether the systems hinder the community in meeting its share of the regional housing needs.
- **Analyze Impacts of Existing and Proposed Systems on Fair Housing Laws.** When preparing the housing element, include an analysis of whether existing growth management systems may have a negative effect on persons protected by fair housing laws. If new growth management systems are contemplated, their impacts on housing prices and “fair housing” should be carefully evaluated before and during the drafting process.

- **Review Zoning Ordinances.** Consider whether local ordinances allow and encourage higher density, infill development, second units, mixed-uses, and other techniques that might compensate for any adverse affects of growth controls.
- **Encourage Effective Public Debate.** Inability to manage growth can create a political backlash and encourage residents to pursue “policy by initiative.” Growth management should be discussed as part of the public process of a General Plan revision.
- **Establish an Advisory Committee.** Advisory committees may be useful to oversee design and implementation of the ordinance and ensure community support for affordable housing.

Potential Programs and Actions

- **Include Exemptions for Affordable Housing.** Various exemptions or other measures should be considered to lessen the impact of growth management systems on housing affordability. Quota systems should exempt low-income and senior housing. Ordinances may award building permits according to formulas that reserve a percentage of the permits for low- and moderate-income housing. Inclusionary units and density bonuses that add affordable housing can be exempted from growth limits. **Note** that second units are exempt by State law from local growth limits.
- **Make Exemptions Meaningful.** Recognize that exemption of affordable units from the numerical limits of a growth management system is not helpful if the affordable units depend upon the construction of non-allowed market-rate units.
- **Provide Sufficient Sites.** Regardless of the growth management system used, ensure that sufficient sites are available to meet the community’s share of the need for housing for all income levels. The system should support rezoning and/or other creative planning processes to enable conversion of under-utilized sites to housing. This provision is particularly important for cities where vacant land is at a premium.
- **Implement Monitoring Systems.** Monitoring systems should accompany growth management systems to track impacts on housing costs and provide the basis for any needed adjustments.
- **Provide Incentives.** Economically meaningful incentives should accompany growth management systems so that a percentage of units affordable to very low, low and moderate-income households can actually be built.

Contacts and Resources

See Appendix D for phone numbers and addresses, where relevant.

✍ Greenbelt Alliance. *Bound for Success: A Citizens' Guide to Using Urban Growth Boundaries for More Livable Communities and Open Space Protection in California.*

✍ Hales, Charles. *Higher Density + Certainty = Affordable Housing for Portland, Oregon* (Urban Land: September 1991).

✍ Porter, Douglas R., *Managing Growth in America's Communities*, Island Press, Washington, DC, 1997.

✍ White, Mark S., *Affordable Housing: Proactive & Reactive Planning Strategies*, PAS Report 441, American Planning Association, Chicago, 1992.

📍 Greenbelt Alliance, San Francisco, CA; <http://www.greenbelt.org>

📍 Shute, Mihaly and Weinberger (land use law firm with specialization in growth management measures that respond to affordable housing needs); <http://www.smwlaw.com>

See Also...

- Adaptive Reuse (*Page 3-5*)
- Increased Densities (*Page 3-9*)

- Infill Development (*Page 3-12*)
- Mixed-Use (*Page 3-15*)
- Rezoning Commercial and Industrial Land (*Page 3-18*)
- Rezoning Surplus Institutional Land (*Page 3-21*)
- Density Bonuses and Other Incentives (*Page 3-30*)
- Zoning Standards and Building Codes (*Page 3-98*)

Success Stories

- **Growth Boundary with Special Provisions for Affordable Housing Production.** For the past two decades, the City of **Morgan Hill** (population 33,100 in the year 2000) has combined a stringent growth cap measure with explicit provisions for affordable housing. Under the current growth control measure (Measure P), housing projects must compete each year for the right to build. These projects are numerically judged against 13 categories. Two of these categories are **housing needs**, which deals with the provision of units to meet the City's need for low and moderate income housing, and **housing types**, which addresses the extent to which the proposed development consists of a diversity of housing types to meet the goals of the housing element. The focus is on a mix of housing types and range of housing sizes that provides for economic diversity within the project. Each housing related category is worth 15 points. Because it is so competitive, a difference of a few points can make or break a project. To get the full 15 points in the housing needs category, developers must reserve 10 percent as affordable below-market-rate units for both ownership and rental for which the City establishes the price, selects the buyers, and records resale agreements. Morgan Hill also reserves 20 percent of its total annual building allotment for developments that are 100 percent affordable to very low and low-income households. On average, approximately 31 percent of Morgan Hill's total housing production is in the affordable range.
- **Strong Growth Control Measure Does Not Hinder Housing Production.** The City of **San Jose** adopted a "Greenline" urban growth boundary in November 1996 to solidify the City's long-standing general plan policies in support of containing outwardly sprawling development. On November 7, 2000, San Jose voters decided to lock in the Greenline policies, establishing strict criteria by which any expansion of the Greenline can be approved. Since adoption of the Greenline in 1996, housing production has skyrocketed from an average of just over 2,000 units per year in the preceding five years to 4,000-5,000 units per year beginning in 1996. Although a booming economy is undoubtedly an important factor, the numbers also show that the adoption of a more stringent urban growth boundary did not hinder housing production. Much of this success is due to San Jose's pursuit of aggressive programs, policies, and planning to strongly encourage a broad range of housing types, and in particular higher-density, transit-oriented infill development throughout the City.
- **Growth Control Measures with Exemptions for Affordable Housing.** **Petaluma** has had a growth management ordinance to control residential growth since 1972 and an urban growth boundary since November 1999. Annual allocation of allotments is capped at 500 units per year, though Petaluma has on average granted allotments of 350 units per year since 1972. However, exemptions are allowed for multi-family housing for the elderly, very low and low-income units, and all developments on less than five acres and 30 units or less (phased at 15 units per year). This, along with a range of programs and strategies to encourage affordable housing development and a supportive local government, has helped Petaluma meet its fair share of affordable housing need.



Almaden Lakes Apartments and Homes, San Jose

Dixi Carillo

Parking Standards

Parking standards can have a significant affect on housing affordability as well as on the ability to achieve designated densities. Too often, parking standards fail to take into account the real vehicle ownership rates and use patterns of the development's prospective residents, resulting in excessive onsite parking. Excessive parking requirements reduce the number of units that can be provided in the development, add to the per-unit costs, encourage automobile use, and reduce the potential for other site and building amenities. They can also have a significant impact on building design and perceived density, making a relatively low-density development appear to be much higher density and resulting in large portions of the site being covered in asphalt rather than in landscaping or other amenities. Lastly, because parking construction costs are passed on as a housing cost, tenants are forced to pay for a parking space (or even two spaces) whether the spaces are used or not.

Benefits

- Reduces construction costs, especially when spread out over many units.
- Supports community design goals by reducing the perceived density of housing developments and minimizing the site area devoted to parking areas, which are generally considered unattractive and unsafe.
- Potentially supports transit use by removing a hidden subsidy for automobile users.

During the Housing Element Process...

- **Form a Task Force.** Although parking is closely related to design issues such as setbacks, height, and bulk, it may be useful to assemble a task force to just review parking requirements. The task force should include jurisdictional staff from departments responsible for housing, planning, and transportation; residential and commercial architects; business owners; community representatives; and, if available, parking and transportation experts. Wide participation helps to frame the issues, evaluate solutions, and generate a positive community attitude toward the recommendations.
- **Review Parking Requirements.** All parking requirements should be reviewed to determine if they are reasonable in light of contemporary development patterns, automobile ownership rates, and driving habits.
- **Review Data on Parking Utilization.** Take into consideration recent studies on the factors that impact vehicle ownership rates (e.g., income, age, access to transit, etc.). If possible, collect data on actual parking utilization in various types of developments in the local area (e.g., for affordable housing developments, senior developments, and in various neighborhood areas served by transit). Compare this data with existing parking requirements.

Potential Programs and Actions

- **Reduce Parking Requirements for Affordable Housing.** Parking requirements should be reduced for housing units that will remain permanently affordable in proportion with the level of affordability achieved. These reductions should be built in to development regulations rather than negotiated in the project review.
- **Reduce Parking Requirements for Special Needs Populations.** Parking requirements should be reduced, if appropriate, for housing designs serving certain types of inhabitants, such as students, senior citizens, and persons with disabilities.
- **Reduce Parking Requirements for Certain Housing Types.** Parking requirements may be reduced for certain types of development, such as mixed-use and live-work centers, because the residents have less of a need to own an automobile.
- **Vary Requirements According to Transit Access and Other Area-Specific Factors.** Parking requirements should be reduced for residential development near transit access points. Parking requirements may also need to be varied by neighborhood as well as type of use. For example, senior developments in centrally located areas that are well-served by transit and close to shopping may have significantly reduced parking

requirements. Reductions should be built into the development regulations rather than negotiated at the project review stage.

- **Promote Shared Parking.** Shared parking provisions are especially useful in mixed-use developments and areas. They should be clear and easy to administer. The provisions should not be subject to any discretionary review.
- **Encourage Common Parking.** Parking in dense areas, such as downtowns and in already built-out areas is best provided on an area basis rather than as a part of each project. Impact fees for parking and parking districts are ways of financing this type of parking.
- **Establish a Car-Sharing Program.** Car-sharing is an innovative mobility service that makes vehicles available to people on a per-use basis. Car-sharing provides a way to dramatically reduce the number of cars in an urban area and supports a practical shift away from over-dependency on automobiles.
- **Allow More Parking on Streets.** If more on-street parking is allowed, the need for off-street parking is reduced. Parallel and angle parking can have multiple benefits of reducing the need for off-street parking, making the streets safer for pedestrians and cyclists, and encouraging increased pedestrian use of the sidewalks. On-street parking is more acceptable if it is well managed.
- **Encourage Flexibility and Innovation.** Encourage parking solutions that respond to site-specific and area-specific parking concerns. For example, encourage the use of transportation models to predict future parking needs for proposed developments or develop “landscape reserves” that can be converted to parking in the future if needed.
- **Encourage Ongoing Monitoring and Data Collection.** Monitor the actual parking usage in developments with and without reductions in parking requirements or other special parking provisions to help identify successful local parking solutions and workable parking standards.
- **Provide Community Information.** As in nearly every aspect of affordable housing, a pro-active program of community education and participation can help build local support for reduced parking requirements. Information should be developed to help residents understand the trade-offs involved, including the impact of building design, housing cost, and potential site amenities.

Contacts and Resources

See Appendix D for phone numbers and addresses, where relevant.

- ✍ *Designing Out Parking Spaces*, Urban Ecology’s “Realize the Vision” Series, No. 3, Oakland, 1998.
- ✍ Edwards, John, *The Parking Handbook for Small Communities*, National Main Street Center, Washington, DC, 1994.
- ✍ Russo, Ryan – *Myths & Facts about Parking- Rethinking Residential Parking*, NPH, San Francisco, 2000.
- ✍ Shoup, Donald C., “An Opportunity to Reduce Minimum Parking Requirements,” p. 14, *APA Journal*, American Planning Association, Vol. 61, No. 1, Winter 1995.
- ✍ Wilson, Richard W., “Suburban Parking Requirements: A Tacit Policy for Automobile Use and Sprawl,” p. 19, *APA Journal*, American Planning Association, Vol. 61, No. 1, Winter 1995.

See Also...

- Increased Densities (*Page 3-9*)
- Infill Development (*Page 3-12*)
- Mixed-Use (*Page 3-15*)

- Transit-Oriented Development (*Page 3-26*)
- Design Guidelines and Design Review (*Page 3-82*)

Success Stories

- **Participation Process Builds Support for Reduced Requirements.** A well-informed community is an essential part of implementing smart parking policies. An affordable senior housing project in **San Leandro** being developed by **American Baptist Homes of the West** and designed by **Pyatok Associates** used an exemplary model of community outreach and participatory design to educate the community and build support for reduced parking standards. After four community meetings, most neighborhood residents supported a reduction in the project's parking requirements, from the City requirement of 1.5 spaces per unit to a ratio of 1 space per unit, even speaking in favor of the reduction before City decision makers. As a result, 60 one-bedroom apartments affordable to very low-income senior residents will be constructed with 43 resident and staff parking stalls, and 17 visitor stalls. The reduced requirement saved the space and cost of 30 parking spaces. With less parking, the project will provide more gardening space for residents, more landscaped areas instead of asphalt, and more total units.
- **Landscape Reserves Respond to Community Concerns.** Recognizing that affordable housing developments located near transit have different parking needs, **Palo Alto** has revised its zoning code to give staff and decision makers discretion in "deferring" the standard minimum parking requirements. This allows the developer to reduce the number of parking spaces, holding some of the site's remaining open space in a "landscape reserve" for additional parking. If parking demand proves to be higher than the number of spaces provided, landscape reserve areas can be converted to parking. At California Park, a 45 unit development adjacent to a Caltrain station, **Palo Alto Housing Corporation** was permitted to build 73 instead of 95 parking spaces. In the deferred space, a family play area was installed that includes a sandlot, some play equipment, two picnic tables, and a barbeque. Since the project opened in 1989, the reduced parking has been sufficient and there are no plans to convert the landscape reserve play area to parking.

Procedural Reform

Procedural reform is an important part of the preparation of the housing element because of the need for programs for identifying sites and removing constraints. Developers estimate that every month required for processing a development application adds at least 1 to 2 percent to the overall cost of a housing development. When development processing requires a year or more, the resulting impact on housing costs can be significant.

By reviewing and streamlining land use and development review procedures, local jurisdictions can help keep housing costs down. Procedural reform should increase the level of fairness, certainty, and efficiency in the development review process while maintaining adequate protections for community livability and environmental quality.

Benefits

- Reduces development costs associated with delays in the approval process.
- Makes the project review system more transparent and predictable.
- Improves the time efficiency of those responsible for development review.
- Encourages desirable developments by offering streamlining for preferred project types.

During the Housing Element Process...

- **Form a Task Force or Committee.** Consider forming a task force that includes builders, community representatives, and officials to review existing procedures. Another approach is to form an interdepartmental committee of responsible staff members.
- **Review Recent Permit Data.** Review city or county records to determine the length of the process from application to permit, the number of reviews required, the number of departments or boards reviewing, and the types of information and details required.
- **Identify Procedural Issues and Barriers.** Involve builders, departmental staff, and community representatives in identifying factors that add unnecessary time and cost to the development review process. Use this analysis to define meaningful programs in the housing element for streamlining land use and development review procedures.

Potential Programs and Actions

- **Provide Clear and Objective Regulations and Guidelines.** Local governments should provide as much guidance as possible to prospective applicants on local concerns, priorities, and criteria for approval. Strategies to consider include:
 - *Develop Specific Plans or Community Plans* to provide as much guidance as possible on desired land uses and development types in key areas of concern, and prepare master Environmental Impact Reports (EIRs) for these planning areas to look at community-wide impacts and potentially reduce the number of required discretionary approvals.
 - *Complete Zoning Revisions to Support Affordable Housing*, ensuring that the zoning for areas suitable for affordable housing allow such development by right rather than requiring a conditional use permit. This speeds up the review process and adds certainty, especially because decisions that are of right do not require an EIR.
 - *Complete Zoning Revisions to Support Emergency Shelters and Transitional Housing Development*, ensuring that regulatory burdens, combined with NIMBY opposition, cannot present an insurmountable barrier such developments.

- *Create Design Guidelines* to ensure that new developments fit into the neighborhood and community context. Ensure that guidelines are clear and concise with sufficient levels of flexibility built in.
- *Develop Environmental Criteria and Standards* that ensure clear criteria and standards for development review.
- *Create Parking Regulations* that ensure reasonableness and flexibility.
- **Streamline Review Procedures.** Review the application and review process to identify structural or procedural issues that could be improved. Specific strategies to streamline the process might include:
 - *Define Roles and Schedules* for each board and agency involved in the review process; provide timetables to establish deadlines; and eliminate duplication in review, including any overlapping jurisdiction of departments and boards.
 - *Provide Opportunities for Informal Feedback* to give applicants an opportunity to informally present their proposals and get early feedback before formally submitting their application.
 - *Create a Process Overview* to provide an accurate summary of the development review process and timeframe, outlining key steps as well as submittal requirements.
 - *Develop Application Forms* to standardize and simplify the process. Consider developing a master form that can be copied for each agency and department.
 - *Conduct Staff Training* to ensure that planning and building staff are properly trained in development review.
 - *Create Staff Back-Up Plan* to supplement staff with contract planners if needed in times of high development activity.
 - *Develop and Use Uniform Notification Processes* for all types of housing, including affordable housing.
 - *Create Appeal Procedures* to ensure that unnecessary appeals are not allowed.
- **Expedite the Process.** Consider strategies to improve the time efficiency of the actual review process, including:
 - *Appoint Development Review Coordinator* to monitor, expedite and coordinate actions.
 - *Develop Project Review Committee* of responsible representatives from each department to work with the applicant.
 - *Hire Contract Staff* to provide plan checking and engineering review, if city or county staff does not have available time.
 - *Conduct Concurrent Reviews and Hearings* to reduce the overall time for review and approval.
 - *Update Status Information* to provide timely information to the applicant and the public on the status of the application.
- **Give Priority to Affordable Housing Developments.** Provide for fast tracking (i.e., special, accelerated treatment) of development proposals that provide for affordable housing or other types of desirable development, such as senior housing or transit-oriented development.

Affordable Housing Overlay Zones

To facilitate the review and approval of affordable housing developments, some jurisdictions are establishing “affordable housing overlay zones” that permit, by right, the development of affordable housing on medium and high density residential properties that are covered by the overlay. The zone may also cover commercial, mixed-use, and light industrial areas. Developments on properties within the overlay zone would not be subject to discretionary permit approval or zoning change approvals. They would be subject to a full design review, including a public hearing and the opportunity for neighborhood residents to ensure that the design addresses their specific concerns. The Town of Corte Madera is developing such an overlay zone that will designate specific sites in the City for affordable housing development, making affordable housing mandatory on some sites and voluntary on others.

Adapted in part from Affordable Housing Strategies: Suggestions for Policy Formulation in General Plans and Housing Elements by Burbank Housing (Santa Rosa, 2000).

Contacts and Resources

See Appendix D for phone numbers and addresses, where relevant.

-  *Not in My Back Yard: Removing Barriers to Affordable Housing.* Advisory Commission on Regulatory Barriers to Affordable Housing. HUD, Washington, DC, 1991.
-  *Towards More Affordable Homes: Streamlining the Entitlement Process in Silicon Valley.* Silicon Valley Housing Leadership Council, San Jose, 1999.
-  *Removing Regulatory Barriers to Affordable Housing: How States and Localities Are Moving Ahead.* Carol T. Robbins. HUD, Washington, DC, 1992.

See Also...

- Design Guidelines and Design Review (*Page 3-82*)

Success Stories

- **Streamlining the Residential Entitlement Process to Decrease Housing Costs.** Entitlement delays create a significant barrier to increasing housing supply by raising the construction costs of rental housing developments. While increased costs in market-rate developments are passed on to renters, the effects on affordable housing developers who operate on very tight budgets and are often tied into forms of funding awarded on a cyclical basis (like tax credits or tax exempt bonds) is particularly acute, since developments can often get held up for six months to a year. The Residential Entitlement Streamlining Project, sponsored by the Housing Leadership Council, a coalition of community, government and business leaders initiated by the **Silicon Valley Manufacturing Group**, summarizes best practices and identifies critical path items on the entitlement continuum. These include the EIR Review Process, analysis of time taken for each review process, delays in decision-making due to lack of training and clear divisions of responsibility between staff and elected officials, staff empowerment in the review process to allow for public hearings to move forward quickly, and customer-focused service.
- **Neighborhood Planning to Encourage Smart Growth and Resolve Neighborhood Issues.** Recognizing that well functioning urban neighborhoods with a mix of housing, retail, open space, and transit are essential to meeting the City's future challenges, the **San Francisco** Planning Department has launched the "Better Neighborhoods 2002" program in three areas of the City. Through open discussions, walking tours and other public events, the program is initiating a discussion with residents on the future of their neighborhoods. At the end of the two-year process, the Planning Department intends to have specific plans that will be ready for approval by the Planning Commission for all city neighborhoods.

Formulating a policy document with neighborhood resident input gives the community a chance to discuss and resolve many issues related to future development, including housing, without necessarily focusing on any one development. Thus when developments go through the approvals process, there should be less need for public debate and controversy. The advance preparation of the EIR will also facilitate a smoother process for specific developments, reducing processing times and ultimately, reducing costs.



Villa Torino Apartments, San Jose

Tom Jones

Street and Infrastructure Standards

When designed and implemented appropriately, site-planning innovations can provide a win-win outcome, reducing housing construction costs while also creating developments that are more pedestrian friendly. Communities can modify their subdivision and engineering requirements for topics such as street widths, or use performance-based standards in place of prescriptive planning and engineering standards.

Benefits

- Enables more affordable housing to be built by reducing development costs and, potentially, allowing more units per acre.
- Contributes to the livability of a community and reduces energy and material requirements.

During the Housing Element Process...

- **Establish a Task Force.** Some communities have assembled a housing task force including non-profit and for-profit organizations, public agencies, and community representatives to review local regulatory processes, including street and infrastructure standards. Any task force should include representatives from all departments whose mission is affected by development standards. In particular, the involvement of public works, engineering, fire, and public safety officials is critical in any decision to modify development standards.
- **Involve the Community and Provide Accurate, Accessible Information.** Wide participation helps pinpoint regulatory reform possibilities and generates a positive community attitude toward the recommendations. A public information program can help explain the benefits of modified standards in relation to livability and safety. Design charrettes and computer simulations are useful tools that can help residents visualize alternative development patterns.
- **Review Codes and Standards.** Review the local codes and standards for unnecessary or costly requirements that contribute to construction costs, as well as excessive permit fees.
- **Emphasize the Relationship Between Standards and Livability.** Site and engineering standards have a direct impact on the livability of a neighborhood, especially on pedestrian and bicycle friendliness, safety, and opportunities for social interaction. These considerations should be an integral part of deliberations on site and engineering standards.

Potential Programs and Actions

Streets

- **Reduce Street Width.** Limit street width to the minimum required to carry traffic and provide parking. Consider the use of one-way loop streets as a way to further narrow width.
- **Design Efficient Street Patterns.** Design the street network to reduce the need for driving. A grid or modified grid pattern is preferable to a cul-de-sac/collector/arterial system that requires residents to drive a long distance to reach a shopping area, school, or other facility that is actually located nearby.
- **Reduce Pavement Thickness.** Reduce pavement thickness to conform to actual need.
- **Modify Cul-de-sacs.** Reduce turning radius on cul-de-sacs and work with the fire department to determine actual requirements for modern fire equipment.
- **Reduce On-Street Parking.** Consider requiring parking on only one side of the street (taking into consideration the potential implications of reduced on-street parking to the requirements for off-street parking in individual developments). In areas where street parking is removed, provide adequate separation between the sidewalk and moving traffic through use of landscape strips.
- **Use Natural Stormwater Drainage.** Eliminate curbs and gutters in parking areas, and divert storm water by sheet flows and swales.

Sidewalks and Walkways

- **Consider Combined Sidewalks and Curbs.** Integrate curbs and sidewalks by constructing sloped curbs along streets with light traffic. Combining sidewalks and curbs along busy streets, however, can discourage pedestrian activity due to the distinct lack of separation between the walking path and moving vehicles.
- **Emphasize Pedestrian Circulation.** Design the pedestrian circulation system so that people can walk, rather than drive, to destinations.

Subdivision Design

- **Provide Flexibility for Housing Types.** Provide lots suitable for zero lot line units and other housing types that consume less land per unit.
- **Anticipate Second Units.** Design lots that are suitable for the inclusion of second units.
- **Orient Lots Efficiently.** Orient the lots so that solar energy and natural ventilation can be used to reduce energy bills.

Storm Drainage Systems

- **Use Natural Systems.** Incorporate natural detention and retention systems into the site plan, perhaps as part of the park and recreation lands or habitat protection system.
- **Use Less Expensive Materials.** Consider less expensive materials such as polyvinyl chloride and polybutylene, and/or precast concrete structures.

Sanitary Sewers

- **Modify Manhole Requirements.** Increase manhole spacing and substitute cleanouts for manholes.

Utilities and Utility Easements

- **Change Location of Utility Lines.** Place utility lines in easements instead of rights-of-way in order to reduce length of line.
- **Promote Common Trenching.** Use common trenching for multiple utilities.

Contacts and Resources

See Appendix D for phone numbers and addresses, where relevant.

 Arendt, Randall, *Growing Greener: Putting Conservation into Local Plans and Ordinances*, Island Press, Washington, DC, 1999.

 Burden, Dan, *Street Design Guidelines for Healthy Neighborhoods*, Center for Livable Communities, Sacramento, 1999.

 Jarvis, Frederick D., *Site Planning and Community Design for Great Neighborhoods*, Home Builders Press, 1993.

 Sanders, Welford, et al, *Affordable Single-Family Housing: A Review of Development Standards*, PAS Report 385, American Planning Association, Chicago, 1984.

Southworth, Michael and Eran Ben-Joseph, *Streets and the Shaping of Towns and Cities*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1996.

See Also...

- Design Guidelines and Design Review (*Page 3-82*)
- Parking Standards (*Page 3-88*)
- Zoning Standards and Building Codes (*Page 3-98*)

Success Stories

- **Private Street Width Reductions.** In the City of **Vacaville**, the Public Works Department prefers that street widths be maintained at the current 50 feet wide standard to enable emergency and other service vehicles to move freely. However, city staff has negotiated standards on a case-by-case basis for private street widths to be reduced to 32 to 36 feet in planned unit developments.
- **Encouraging Street Width Reductions to Make Pedestrian-Friendly Streets.** Over the past several years, the City of **Pleasanton** has realized the benefits of reduced street widths along with varied setbacks for homes in new planned unit developments. City staff encourage 32 foot wide streets with parking on both sides. They work closely with engineering and fire departments to evaluate each development and mitigate issues of access in a number of different ways, including the provision of ample numbers of fire hydrants.

The resulting reduction in asphalt hardscape has translated to increased landscaping and separated sidewalks, which makes for visually and spatially more attractive streets. The reduced street widths also slow down traffic by requiring drivers to pay more attention to the road, making the streets more pedestrian friendly. Together with other traffic calming devices like traffic circles being implemented through the City's Capital Improvement Program in older areas, Pleasanton is actively trying to return streets to neighborhood residents. The City also relaxes setbacks for functional porches to 15 feet (with the setback for the house at 20 feet) and grants an additional five feet for porches when garages are set back 23 feet from the street. By encouraging residential design that brings porches and homes closer to the street and sets garages further back, Pleasanton is encouraging the development of pedestrian-friendly, attractive neighborhoods.

Zoning Standards and Building Codes

Zoning standards and building codes can have a significant affect on housing affordability. They can also act as barriers to achieving designated densities or have unintentional impacts on community design and character. Inflexible standards may also inhibit innovative housing types and design. The housing element process is an opportunity to establish clear community housing and design goals and to ensure that zoning and building standards are consistent with those goals.

Benefits

- Supports affordability goals by reducing or eliminating unnecessary or excessive requirements.
- Leads to better building and urban design by ensuring that zoning and building standards are consistent with community housing and design goals.
- Produces better communities—safer, more interesting, and more diverse. If zoning standards do not achieve this result, they should be modified.

During the Housing Element Process...

- **Review Existing Standards.** Make sure that existing zoning and building standards do not act as barriers to achieving desired densities or affordability. Identify potentially excessive building code standards that may increase construction costs unnecessarily, such as building material requirements, roofing requirements, sprinkler system requirements, or others.
- **Involve Local Builders.** Ask for input from for-profit and non-profit developers and local contractors to help identify zoning and building standards that may act as barriers to higher density development and/or impact housing construction costs unnecessarily.
- **Contact Other Organizations.** It may be useful to look at what other jurisdictions have done and to contact organizations that advocate design and regulatory reform solutions, such as the Northern California Association for Non-Profit Housing, Local Government Commission, Congress for the New Urbanism, and Urban Ecology.

Potential Programs and Actions

- **Make Regulations Consistent.** Lot size, setback, height, and bulk requirements should be consistent with density and parking requirements. Inconsistent regulations often make it difficult to achieve density standards, especially when a density bonus is used.
- **Reduce Lot Size.** Large lot size requirements make housing unaffordable to many people and consume land that could be used more intensively.
- **Revise Open Space Requirements.** Many development regulations require individual-unit or common open space for multi-family development. These requirements should be reviewed in light of resident needs and the facilities available in the immediate neighborhood.
- **Encourage Mixed-Use Zones.** Single-use zoning districts should be reviewed to determine if a range of appropriate uses can be introduced, allowing greater flexibility in the application of zoning standards.

Contacts and Resources

See Appendix D for phone numbers and addresses, where relevant.

 Ewing, Reid, *Best Development Practices*, Planners Press, American Planning Association, Chicago, 1996.

 *The Principles of Smart Development*, PAS Report 479, American Planning Association, Chicago, 1998.

 Local Government Commission

See Also...

- Adaptive Reuse (*Page 3-5*)
- Air Rights Development (*Page 3-7*)
- Increased Densities (*Page 3-9*)
- Infill Development (*Page 3-12*)
- Mixed-Use (*Page 3-15*)
- Second Units (*Page 3-23*)
- Density Bonuses and Other Incentives (*Page 3-30*)
- Design Guidelines and Design Review (*Page 3-82*)

Success Stories

- **Relaxed Standards for Interiors, Not Exteriors.** The City of **Palo Alto** initiated its Below-Market-Rate (BMR) program in 1974 to require all new developments of 10 or more units to provide at least 10 percent of units at costs affordable to low- and moderate-income households. On sites larger than five acres, 15 percent of the housing units must be below-market-rate. While in-lieu fees are acceptable, the City encourages housing construction over fee payment. However, the City recognizes that scatter-site affordable housing production is difficult to achieve in light of the area's land costs and the City's relatively demanding standards. To help make affordable developments more feasible, the City has relaxed the development standards for the interiors of BMR units. However, the City requires that the building exteriors meet the same standards as market-rate developments, helping ensure that affordable housing developments "fit in" with surrounding neighborhoods and enjoy ongoing community support.
- **Facilitating Increased Housing in a Thriving Mixed-Use Corridor.** The Van Ness Avenue Area Plan prepared by the City and County of **San Francisco** retains the historic character of the area while adding a significant increment of new housing to this medium density mixed-use district. The number of residential units within individual infill developments depends on the height and bulk of the building, the amount of commercial space provided under the minimum housing-to-commercial ratio, amount of on-site parking provided, and size of units. The Plan emphasizes a larger number of medium sized rental units (one and two bedroom) since Van Ness is not anticipated to be a preferred area for family housing. It also encourages greater affordability by suggesting higher densities, smaller unit sizes, and design and marketing strategies such as "no-view" or "street-facing" units with lower cost appliances and carpeting to reduce unit costs and prices.
- **Incentive Zoning to Encourage Affordable High-Density Housing.** The City of **Mountain View** has used incentive zoning to encourage more affordable high-density housing through lot assembly and redevelopment in a 1940s style highway commercial and residential area. The new zoning for the 15-acre subject area has a base density of 21 dwelling units per acre with a 25 percent bonus on properties aggregated to five acres or more and another 25 percent, if low and very-low income units are incorporated.