

# Design Guidelines for Single-Family Residential Development

October 1, 2002

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# Design Guidelines for Single-Family Residential Development

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The *Design Guidelines for Single-Family Residential Development* (hereafter referred to as the "Guidelines") have been prepared to encourage new homes and additions that are respectful of adjacent properties and existing residential neighborhoods and supportive of creativity and design diversity.

The Guidelines focus on the following premises:

- That new homes or additions should be architecturally compatible with the character of the existing neighborhood;
- That designs should minimize mass and bulkiness of structures by using scale and proportion that is consistent with the existing neighborhood;
- That the privacy of adjacent and nearby properties needs to be respected;
- That defining patterns in the neighborhood and streetscape should be preserved;
- That solar and daylight access for adjacent properties should be protected; and,
- That proposed projects should consider all aspects of design and site improvements in a comprehensive manner.

### A. Applicability

The Guidelines can be used to help in the planning and development of all single-family residential projects and are most helpful if they are used early in the project planning stages. However, the Zoning Ordinance establishes that, in addition to complying with the development regulations for all single-family residential properties, new two-story homes and additions and one-story homes and additions that exceed a 35 percent building coverage and that require a Single Family Development Permit shall be subject to review based on the provisions in the Guidelines. The review process is outlined in Appendix A.

## **B. Organization of the Guidelines**

Guidelines are established for six areas affecting residential design:

- Compatibility
- Mass and Scale
- Privacy
- Sunlight
- Architectural Details
- Ancillary Structures

In order to determine whether a proposed project meets the City's goals, the Guidelines offer "Preferred," "Discouraged" and "Prohibited" design techniques for each issue area. Using the preferred design techniques will assure that an application for a Single-Family Residential Development Permit will be administratively approved. An applicant has the opportunity to propose alternative designs that will be evaluated based on the goals and Guidelines. All projects will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. In no case shall a "prohibited" design technique be administratively approved.

## **C. Getting Started**

The Guidelines are intended to be used by homeowners, builders, architects and other design professionals, neighborhood residents, city staff, as well as elected and appointed city officials. To a homeowner or neighborhood resident considering these issues for the first time may seem overwhelming. To help in the understanding of the Guidelines, the following section provides additional information on the terms and concepts used throughout the Guidelines, including defining neighborhood and neighborhood patterns, individual house design considerations, mass and scale and primary and secondary elements. Even the most experienced design professional should familiarize himself or herself with the Guidelines and the appendices for a better understanding of the design review process in Menlo Park.

### *1. Terms and Concepts*

The following descriptions provide additional information and explanation of terms used in the Guidelines:

#### *Neighborhood*

The term "neighborhood" refers to an area that is identifiable from its geographic location or boundaries. Menlo Park is considered to have several "neighborhoods," such as Allied Arts, Belle Haven, Downtown, Felton Gables, Linfield Oaks, Sharon Heights, South of Seminary, Suburban Park/Lorelei Manor/Flood Park Triangle, West Menlo, and the Willows. In general, these are large areas that are easy to point out on a map.

However, for the purposes of the Guidelines, the term “neighborhood” is used to define the geographic area surrounding a proposed project site. In this sense, the boundaries of a neighborhood may be defined by the extent to which the proposed project may affect it, both visually and functionally.

The Guidelines rely on the identification of the neighborhood around a project to give direction and guidance to the design of the proposed house. Defining the size or extent of the neighborhood is expected to draw discussion and even debate, particularly when it is used to discuss specific design choices. In some cases a property owner and a neighbor may have different perceptions of a neighborhood area. For this situation, the size of the neighborhood area may vary to demonstrate how the proposal fits in the neighborhood.

### Neighborhood Patterns

Neighborhoods are often defined by visible or physical elements or characteristics. The elements and characteristics may include architectural details, age of structures, and the mass and scale of structures, to name a few (a list is found below). The repeated nature of similar physical elements establishes patterns in the neighborhood. The Guidelines instruct an applicant to identify the existing patterns in a neighborhood area and then use that information to make design choices that complement the neighborhood area. For example, in cases where the majority of garages are detached and in the rear of the property, the proposal should probably include a detached garage.

The following items will be useful to consider when identifying and understanding neighborhood patterns.

- The locations and styles of houses that were part of the original development of the neighborhood.
- The location and style of newer houses and additions built after the original development.
- The extent of similarities and differences between the newer houses and additions and the original neighborhood development.
- The extent to which a neighborhood has strong identifiable patterns.
- Certain special circumstances such as the proximity of business streets, schools, or other notable boundaries.
- The general setbacks of houses on the street and the ways that the houses meet the street: porches, walkways, landscaping.
- The general height and mass of the houses in the neighborhood.
- The location of parking and garages.
- The pattern of street landscaping and street trees.

### Individual House Design Considerations

Beyond the basic style of the house, the patterns in an existing house include the general mass and bulk, the complexity of the plan, and the details and finishes used to complete the design. Design professionals should not only consider the style, but should look closely at the details: windows should be measured and cataloged; trims should be inventoried and similar profiles used. It is also essential that the design professional work with the project during construction to ensure that the design intentions are realized by the contractor.

When considering additions to existing houses, consistency with the existing architecture is a critical component of neighborhood compatibility. A new addition should harmonize with the existing house and the completed house should look like a cohesive design. Ideally, there should only be subtle evidence that an addition was done. New construction that does not relate to the existing house generates negative impacts for the neighbors by creating undesirable visual inconsistency in the neighborhood.

The following items will be useful to consider when planning additions and new house designs.

- General architectural style.
- Level of complexity of the footprint. Are there lots of bays, porches, extensions and appurtenances? Or is the house plan simple?
- Size, proportion and style of openings such as doors, windows, and vents.
- Type, slope, configuration of the existing roof system.
- Details of the roof including overhang dimensions, fascia profiles, trims and supporting construction.
- Details of appurtenances such as porches, including post sizes and configuration, railing details, roof intersections and decorative components.
- Details and construction of windows and doors, with particular attention to the window casing or stucco molding.

There are cases where an existing residence may not reflect the predominant neighborhood pattern. In these cases, the design professional should use the “preferred” design techniques in the Guidelines to make changes to the existing residence to better reflect the neighborhood patterns. There may also be cases where the existing residence is consistent with the neighborhood pattern, but the patterns in the neighborhood do not reflect the “preferred” technique in the Guidelines. In these cases, it is important to work within the context of the neighborhood patterns when considering the “preferred” technique. Some of the design techniques may not be appropriate and design choices should be based on predominant neighborhood patterns.

## Mass

The term mass represents the overall appearance of the building in regard to its size and solidity. Mass includes actual and apparent components.

Actual mass represents the physical size and configuration of a building. It is measurable (e.g., floor area, roof and wall heights). The actual mass of a building is controlled in part by the Zoning Ordinance via height and floor area limits, setbacks, and daylight plane restrictions.

Apparent mass is a consideration of how large the houses in a neighborhood appear. Certain buildings in a neighborhood may look big when they are actually quite small. Conversely, buildings may look small when they are really quite large. Some buildings appear to be large and bulky and tend to loom over people on the ground. Others appear lower to the ground and achieve a more human scale. It is possible to design a large house or addition that does not appear massive to its neighbors.

Mass is also a function of lot size. Large houses look smaller when set against a large yard. The space between the houses in a neighborhood affects the perception of mass as much as the actual size of the building. When two buildings are close together, there can be a feeling of crowding of one building to the other. Thus, it is important to consider the effects of building mass from all sides of the lot.

## Scale

Scale refers to a proportion used in determining a dimensional relationship. For homes, scale is relative to adjacent buildings and to pedestrian friendliness. A residence that is much larger than its neighbor may be considered “out of scale.” Many of Menlo Park’s neighborhoods are considered “pedestrian” in scale. Pedestrian scale is the measure of relative or apparent size of a building or architectural element in relation to the view of the house from a person walking by. In contrast, a monumental scale consists of large or over-stated elements and is therefore imposing and can be seen from great distances or from vehicles. In new construction, scale is analyzed in comparison to example houses within the neighborhood and based on a goal of achieving pedestrian scale houses and neighborhoods. Existing scale becomes an important factor.

A pedestrian scale building will feel right and will be less noticeable. A building that is out of scale or of monumental scale will seem large and can make passersby feel small, sometimes overpowered. There are numerous examples of larger houses in Menlo Park that maintain excellent human scale. If an existing residence does not reflect pedestrian scale, additions can be designed to alter the scale of a building and give it a more proportionality. A successful design will respect the existing elements in a building that define its scale and continue those elements. Pedestrian scale does not necessarily mean a small house. In contrast, a house of monumental scale consists of large, overstated elements and is therefore imposing.

Scale can be managed in new construction and additions by including a variety of elements that define the pedestrian scale of the residence, such as bays, porches, dormers, windows with mullions and muntins, etc.

### *Primary and Secondary Elements*

There are primary and secondary elements in house design that establish or maintain hierarchy and design composition. Primary and secondary elements typically include the massing of individual design elements and roof forms.

Many houses throughout Menlo Park exhibit primary and secondary elements. Commonly, a primary mass will be maintained that identifies and anchors the general character of the house. Secondary elements will be incorporated to satisfy functional responsibilities inside the building. Those elements will also serve to mask and fragment overall mass and reflect pedestrian scale within a larger building.

Larger homes may be broken into smaller parts with a clear hierarchy of parts. This hierarchy may include a two-story element with numerous one-story wings, bays or other appurtenances such as porches. It may also be based on a primary roof form with secondary roof forms.

Care should be taken to avoid micro-managing mass. A building can become an agglomeration of room size elements in an attempt to reduce mass. The result will be limited identity and little more than a lumpy building, lacking architectural style and grace. It is often important to include as much of the desired new space as possible within existing forms such as attics so that a second story does not appear to be an afterthought.

## *2. Design Guidelines Checklist*

In preparation for an application for a Two-Story Single-Family Residential Development Permit, the applicant must complete a Design Review Checklist and schedule a pre-application meeting with Planning staff. The Checklist will be used to help evaluate a proposed project. The Checklist is provided in Appendix B. The Checklist is also the appropriate tool for proposing and describing an alternative solution to the “preferred” design techniques.

## II. GUIDELINES

### A. Compatibility

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New homes and additions should be compatible with and complement the streetscape and neighborhood pattern by preserving a sense of rhythm, architectural character and spatial consistency.

#### Design Techniques:

##### Preferred

##### Setbacks

- If there is a strong setback pattern that is greater than the minimum setbacks established in the Zoning Ordinance, the established setback pattern should be followed in order to preserve the existing neighborhood pattern.
- If the majority of homes on a street or in a neighborhood do not have consistent setbacks, then the setback for the new house or addition should be compatible with the average setback pattern.
- If the setback pattern encroaches into the minimum setbacks established in the Zoning Ordinance, then the new construction must meet the Zoning Ordinance setback requirements.

##### Architectural Styles

- If there is an established architectural style, new homes and additions in neighborhoods should be compatible with the predominant pattern by incorporating similar architectural elements, such as porches, garages, bay windows, and window size and shape, and using compatible scale, proportion, and detailing.
- If there is no prevailing architectural style, new homes and additions may have a distinctive design style, but should avoid abrupt changes or radical deviations in architectural style.

##### Roof

- Incorporate consistent roof slope throughout the design that is compatible with the streetscape and neighborhood pattern. For an addition, match or complement the existing roof.

##### Garage, Parking and Driveway

- Garage design, parking and driveway locations should be consistent with the dominant visual pattern in the neighborhood in regard to location, setback, size, materials, and style.
- Driveway design and location should minimize paving in the front yard by narrowing drive aisles and curbcuts at the street where possible.

- When driveways are highly visible from the street, use various patterns, textures, materials and/or colors, including planting strips, to make plain concrete or asphalt driveway more visually interesting or compatible with the new house or addition.

#### Number of Stories

- If there is a strong one-story development pattern, the one-story development should be respected by considering the mass, scale, roof forms, plate heights, and architectural styles of the one-story development pattern.
- A new two-story home or addition in a neighborhood with a strong one-story development pattern should have a proportionately smaller second floor, located over the center of the home and shifted towards the rear of house to minimize visibility.
- Incorporate building heights that are consistent with the neighborhood patterns.

#### Entryways

- Integrate entry features into the overall building design and that are well-related to the surrounding properties in terms of scale and proportion by incorporating pedestrian scaled entryway features, entry courtyards, or recessed entries.
- In a neighborhood where there is a dominant architectural feature such as a front porch, then it is preferred that a new house be built with a front porch. Conversely, in an area where there is an absence of architectural features, such as an Eichler neighborhood where there are no front porches, a porch should not be added because it can disrupt the continuity and character of a streetscape or neighborhood pattern.

#### Landscaping

- Maintain, install, or replace street trees and planter strips in appropriate areas where street trees exist or where new trees are planned.
- Preserve natural site features such as Heritage trees, mature trees, and/or views and incorporate them into the design of new project.
- Develop transitions between properties using landscaping to separate and define spaces, particularly in side and rear yards.
- Use similar species and landscaping materials that are compatible with the architecture of the residence as well as the streetscape and neighborhood patterns.
- Integrate perimeter landscaping with the landscaping of adjacent homes where appropriate.

#### Discouraged

- Dramatically deviating from the streetscape and neighborhood landscape patterns.
- Using landscaping to try to hide the mass of a new residence or addition.

## Prohibited

Design elements that establish neighborhood patterns and streetscape continuity are considered on a case-by-case basis, therefore, there are no prohibited design techniques or solutions.

## B. Mass and Scale

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The mass and scale of new homes and additions should be compatible with adjacent houses and the predominant neighborhood scale.

### Design Techniques:

#### Preferred

- Mass of the second floor should be placed toward the center of property.
- First and second floor plate heights should be consistent with the neighborhood; and, for additions, in scale with the existing residence (special consideration may be needed for projects in designated flood zones).
- Second floors and roof forms should be integrated into the design.
- Overall building height should be compatible with the existing neighborhood height patterns, with specific sensitivity to the relationship to adjacent residences.
- The new home or addition and the individual architectural elements, such as windows, entryways, and exterior wall height, should be pedestrian in scale and in proportion with the neighborhood pattern avoiding monumental and imposing features.
- Reducing the size of the primary elements and using secondary elements to balance the size and mass.
- In some additions, modifications to the existing house may be needed to create a coherent design.
- Second floor setbacks should be increased from first floor building walls on walls that face the street or that face adjacent building walls. The following chart may be used as guide for side yard setbacks.

If Required Side Setback is... (in feet)	Add 50% of requirement (in feet)	Preferred Second Floor Side Setback (in feet)
5	2.5	7.5
6	3	9
7	3.5	10.5
8	4	12
9	4.5	13.5
10	5	15

- Plate heights should be concealed and lowered by using architectural features such as attic rooms, porch projections, and “clipping” second floor ceilings heights at corners to allow typical ceiling heights without increasing plate heights.
- Use dormers or other architectural design elements to:
  - reduce wall and overall building heights;

- break up long walls and ridge lines;
  - provide vertical and horizontal articulation; and
  - increase architectural interest.
- Incorporate second-floor livable space “within” the primary roof form by extending existing roof shape rather than introducing a new roof form.

#### Discouraged

- Boxy architectural designs with uninterrupted two-story vertical walls.
- Designing overall building form in the shape of the maximum allowed daylight plane.
- Two-story entryways or architectural elements that are imposing, large or monumental in size, scale and proportion.
- Placing second stories over protruding garages on street-facing facades.

#### Prohibited

- Top-heavy second floors, where second floor plate heights are equal to or taller than first floors.
- Dramatic variations in building height between adjacent residences and neighborhood pattern.

## C. Privacy

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New homes and additions should minimize impacts to privacy by considering the relationships between windows and outdoor open spaces, such as balconies, decks, and patios on adjacent properties.

### **Design Techniques:**

#### Preferred

- Windows on walls adjacent to a neighbor's home should be offset to prevent direct views into neighbor's windows, with specific attention to new second floor windows that look down into first floor windows on adjacent properties.
- Balconies and decks should avoid direct sight lines to neighbor's windows or livable outdoor areas.
- Use clerestory windows or translucent glass to interrupt direct sight lines to neighbor's windows and livable outdoor spaces.
- Use landscaping or garden features, where appropriate, to provide a buffer or screening between properties.
- Recess or enclose second-story balconies and decks on three sides.
- Use solid or translucent materials or walls for balcony or deck railings.

#### Discouraged

- Decks taller than 12" above grade located on or adjacent to required side or rear setbacks that allow for the potential for the subject property to have more direct views into neighbor's homes and outdoor livable spaces.
- Locating high activity spaces adjacent to low-activity spaces on adjacent properties (such as a backyard patio that is adjacent to neighbor's bedroom windows).
- Creating large blank walls as a result of trying to address privacy concerns.

#### Prohibited

- Windows, balconies or decks that face directly into a neighbor's home or livable outdoor space.

## **D. Sunlight**

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Respect solar orientation and access to the sun in relationship to adjacent properties and structures.

### **Design Techniques:**

#### Preferred

- Lower building heights and break up or shift building mass to minimize loss of solar access.
- For the majority of the year, from February 21 until October 21, between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., the shadow cast on an adjacent property should not extend beyond the required setback of the adjacent property. Some neighborhoods may have shadow patterns based on existing setbacks and building massing that extend into the setbacks of adjacent properties. In these cases, shadows cast beyond the required setback may be acceptable but should be minimized.
- Restrict dormers and gable ends on the north-facing sides of a property to minimize the loss of solar access and shadow cast on an adjacent property.
- Balance access to sunlight and shadow casting on adjacent properties with landscaping or garden features used as privacy buffers or screening.

#### Discouraged

- Disrupting existing neighborhood shadow and solar access patterns that are designed to maximize access to the sun and natural landscaping and open spaces between properties (such as an enclave of Eichler-designed homes or other subdivision).
- Casting shadows on passive and active solar features or outdoor living areas, pools or gardens of adjacent properties.

#### Prohibited

- New homes and additions that interfere with existing solar collectors or panels that are used as source of energy for adjacent property.

## **E. Architectural Details**

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The architectural details of the new residence or addition should be consistent with the fundamental architectural style and should be used to balance the composition of the design, enhance the visual interest of the project, and complement the character of the neighborhood.

### **Design Techniques:**

#### Preferred

##### Front Facade

- Provide variation with recesses or relief, using porches, bay projections, trellises or other variations of the plan to provide visual interest in the front façade.

##### Roof

- Relate details to overall form, such as consideration of size and configuration of fascia boards, gutters, barges, rafters, and overhangs.
- Roof form, slope and materials should be consistent with predominant architectural style of an existing house (applies to additions).
- Articulate roof into primary and secondary roof forms. Primary roof element should be defined so that it relates to the actual size and mass of the house, secondary roof forms should complement the primary roof form, rather than complicate it with a series of small roof forms or elements with no unifying element.
- Break up long ridgelines by introducing horizontal or vertical articulation at appropriate intervals.
- Integrate a two-story addition such that it appears that parts of the roof were designed as a whole or original to the building.

##### Garages

- The style of the garage should be consistent with the architectural styling and detailing of the house, including materials and finishes.
- Doors for two-car garages that face the street should be designed to look like two separate garage doors, or two separate doors with a true divide instead of one, double-wide door.
- Garage doors should be set in from the front wall of the garage to create depth and variation in the front façade.

##### Porches and Entryways

- Integrate porch elements into the façade, rather than making it a dominant element on the façade.

- Porches and entryways should be pedestrian in scale by using arches, posts, eave overhangs and awnings to break up mass and provide more visual interest.
- The level of detail of a porch may include columns, railing, eaves, brackets, and trim and should be consistent with the level of detail found elsewhere in the house design.

#### Sidewalls

- Create sidewalls that are visually interesting and articulated.
- Minimize full height two-story unbroken side walls. Use Architectural features or second story setbacks to break up uninterrupted vertical planes.

#### Windows and Doors

- Window and door size, placement, and details such as trim and enhancements, should be true to the architecture of the design, compatible with the neighborhood patterns, and compatible with the design of an existing house (for additions).
- Use true or simulated divided lights.

#### Materials

- Use materials that are complementary to the materials found in the structures from the neighborhood and within the natural landscape.
- Materials should be consistent with the architecture of the design.

#### Discouraged

- Use caution when adding architectural details to any project. Too many different design elements or materials can create visual chaos, whereas too few may leave a design flat and uninteresting.
- Long uninterrupted blank walls or roof forms and ridgelines (should articulate every twenty feet).
- Architectural elements that are different in style or scale, such elements that will not support continuity of the architecture.
- Randomly varying roof forms to make interior livable spaces work.
- Monumental, or one and a half- to two-story entryways.
- Balconies on front elevations or that are visible from the street.
- Long blank uninterrupted horizontal sidewalls.
- Windows with “snap-in” grids.

#### Prohibited

- Street-facing three-car garages.

## F. Ancillary Structures

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Minimize potential negative impacts of site amenities to neighbors and to the character of the neighborhood.

### Design Techniques:

#### Preferred

##### Outdoor Lighting

- Direct outdoor lighting away from neighbors and towards the ground to minimize spillover light across property lines.
- Design lighting with specific task in mind that illuminate areas in a manner to support the actual use.
- Use translucent light fixtures and bulbs in outdoor lighting; use light-sensitive devices, timers or motion-detecting fixtures to reduce unnecessary lighting.

##### Accessory Structures

- Locate accessory structures that house workshops, pool changing rooms or recreation rooms that are highly active away from private spaces on adjacent properties, such as bedrooms or outdoor patio areas.
- Accessory structures should be compatible with the architecture of the main structure, and with the patterns and styles of the neighborhood.
- Level of architectural detail of an accessory structure should be consistent with the main structure.

##### Outside Equipment

- Screen, filter, and/or baffle outside equipment from view, smell, or sound from an adjacent property.
- Locate residential satellite dishes in inconspicuous places that will not impact adjacent property owners.
- Locate garbage cans and recycling bins away from livable areas on adjacent properties. Consider screening garbage cans or providing an appropriate structure to house the cans.

##### Fences

- Fences near the street should be consistent with the streetscape and neighborhood patterns.
- Use landscaping to make blank faces of fences or bare walls more visually interesting.
- When gates are used, they should allow at least one car length clearance between the gate and the street to allow for the gate to be opened without blocking pedestrian, bicyclist, or automobile access.
- Use a double gate, rather than a large single gate to reduce the scale of the gate and minimize the impact on the street.
- Gates should slide open or open inwards towards property instead of opening on to the street or sidewalk.

### Driveways

- Driveways should be designed to minimize impacts from headlights in evening hours.

### Discouraged

- Locating air conditioning, pool, or residential generator equipment near livable or highly used spaces on adjacent properties where constant or intermittent noise can be heard.
- Fences should not be used to hide residences, or negatively impact the streetscape by blocking the home from view in a “fortress-like” manner or in a manner that diminishes the sense of connection between the house and the neighborhood.

### Prohibited

- Creating glare onto adjacent properties, particularly livable space from new lighting.

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