

HILLS

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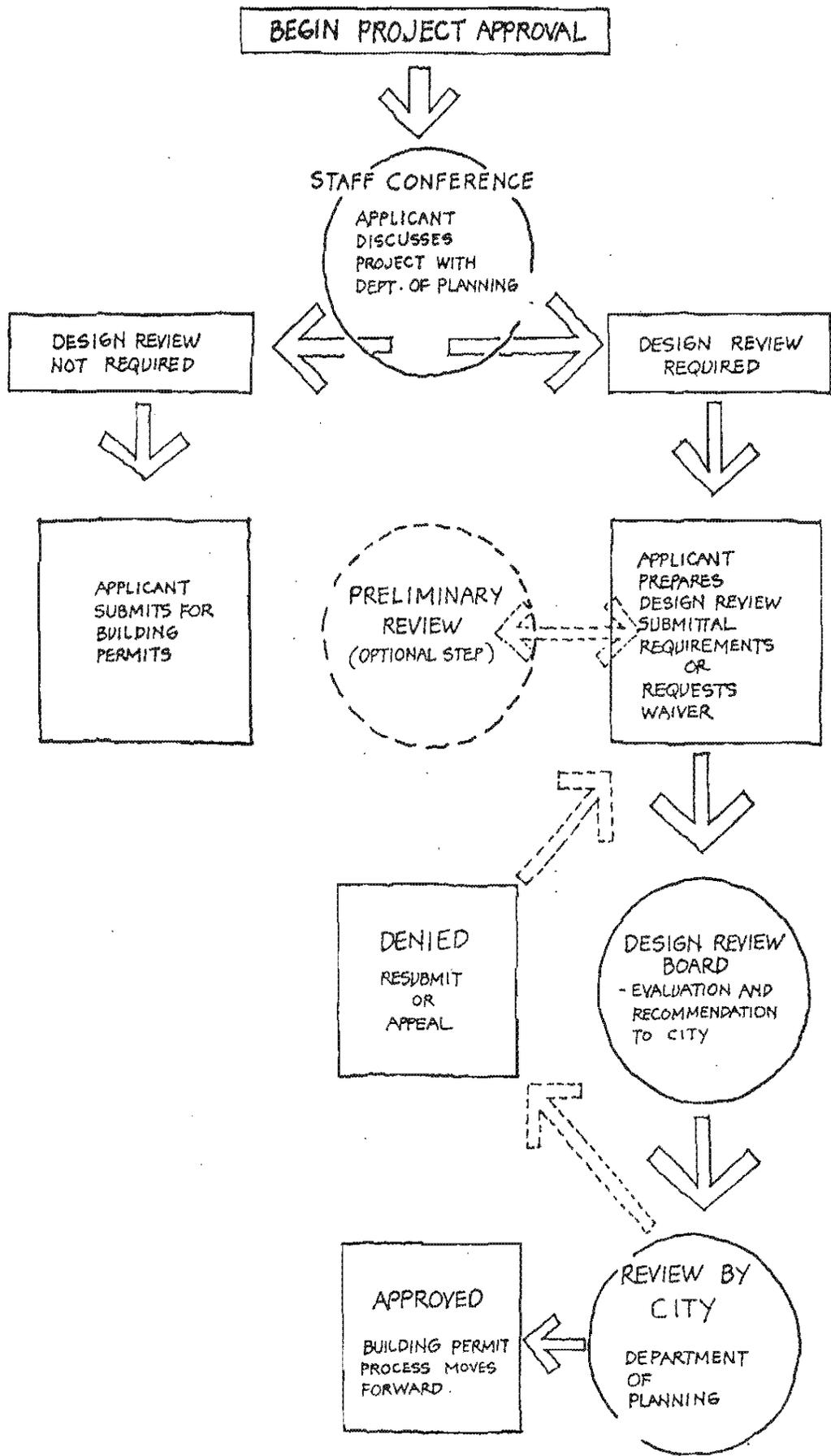
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# Design Standards and Guidelines for Hillside Residential Development City of San Rafael

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# Introduction

## A. The Purpose of Environmental and Design Review

The Environmental and Design Review Process is one of several procedures used by the City to protect the public welfare and natural setting. The process is a comprehensive evaluation of those characteristics of a hillside residential development which have an impact on neighboring properties and the community as a whole. The Environmental and Design review process makes a careful examination of a project's quality of site planning, architecture, landscape design and important details such as retaining walls, fences and site lighting. The purpose is to insure that every new hillside residential development will carefully consider the community context in which it takes place and make a compatible relationship to neighboring properties and City community design goals.

The *San Rafael General Plan 2000* describes citywide objectives and policies relating to design. Persons who use the Hillside Residential Design Guidelines Manual are encouraged to read the *General Plan 2000*.

## B. Application

This booklet outlines Development Standards and describes Design Guidelines to be used for hillside residential projects subject to the Environmental and Design Review process.

## C. Use of the Design Guidelines

Section IV, the Design Guidelines, is listed in a "tiered" organization and should be used in the following manner for projects subject to Environmental and Design Review:

1. First, consult Section IV.A, "General Design Guidelines," for all hillside residential development projects, regardless of use or location in the city.
2. Second, follow the Guidelines in Section IV.B, "Additional Guidelines for Development Types," that most closely correspond to the use of the project.
3. Third, follow the Guidelines in Section IV.C, "Additional Design Guidelines for Special Areas," that most closely correspond to the environmental character of the site, if it is a highly visible ridgeline, a watershed or drainage ravine or hillslope habitat area.

Should a question regarding the use classification occur, consult with the City Planning Staff.

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# I. The Environmental and Design Review Process

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This booklet presents Design Standards and Guidelines for Hillside Residential Development in the City of San Rafael. It is intended to be used in three ways:

1. As a foundation for the creation of a Hillside Residential Overlay Zoning District that is combined with the underlying zoning regulations for the *Hillside Residential* and *Hillside Resource Residential* General Plan Land Use Designations,
2. As guidelines for Environmental and Design Review in Areas covered by the *Hillside Residential* and *Hillside Resource Residential* General Plan Land Use Designations, on other parcels with hillside character that are zoned for residential development, and
3. As guidelines for other types of project reviews for hillside residential development that is not subject to the Environmental and Design Review Process. Some of these standards are contained in other City Ordinances. Where that is not the case, the standards must be authorized through appropriate measures before they can be used in project reviews.

## **Environmental and Design Review**

Section IV of this manual provides guidelines for Environmental and Design Review in areas covered by the *Hillside Residential (HR)* and *Hillside Resource Residential (HRR)* Land Use Designations in the recently adopted *San Rafael General Plan 2000* and on other parcels with hillside character that are zoned for residential development.

Environmental and Design Review in San Rafael is administered by the Planning Department of the City of San Rafael as part of the Development Review Process. Projects are evaluated by the San Rafael Design Review Board, a panel of citizens appointed by the City Council. Actions of the Design Review Board are advisory to the various City authorities (Director of the Planning Department, Planning Commission and City Council) who issue decisions on development proposals.

## **Development Subject to Environmental and Design Review**

Environmental and Design Review is a required step in the development process for the following types of hillside residential development projects located within the limits of the City of San Rafael and areas within its sphere of influence:

- All Hillside Residential Subdivisions and Planned Residential Developments on hillsides covered by the *Hillside Residential (HR)* and *Hillside Resource Residential*

*(HRR)* Land Use Designations and on other properties with slopes of 25% or greater.

- All Single Family Residential Development, including additions over 500 square feet in size, and elevated decks, or additions that increase the height of the roofline on individual lots in the areas covered by the *HR* and *HRR* Land Use designations and on other parcels with slopes of 25% or greater.
- All Multi-family and Duplex Residential Development in the areas covered by the *HR* and *HRR* Land Use designations or located on slopes over 25%.

### **The Purpose of Environmental and Design Review**

Environmental and Design Review is one of several development review procedures used by the City of San Rafael to protect the public welfare and environment. The process is a comprehensive evaluation of those characteristics of a development which have a physical and visual impact on the natural setting, neighboring properties and the community as a whole. Environmental and Design Review makes a careful examination of a project's quality of site and environmental planning, architecture, landscape design and important details such as signage and site lighting. The purpose is to insure that every new development will carefully consider the community context in which it takes place and make a conscientious effort to develop a compatible relationship to the natural setting, neighboring properties and city design goals.

San Rafael residents have strong feelings about the quality of the City's natural setting and the hillside character of residential neighborhoods. The Environmental and Design Review process is intended to protect and retain San Rafael's hillside character.

### **How the Environmental and Design Review Process Works in the Evaluation of Hillside Residential Development Projects.**

The San Rafael Design Review Board evaluates Hillside Residential development proposals using the Design Guidelines described in this manual as criteria.

The Board may recommend to:

- Approve or disapprove proposals.
- Approve proposals subject to conditions.
- Request the applicant to re-submit the proposal with specific changes.
- Forward the project with no recommendation.

Recommendations of the Design Review Board are advisory to the various hearing bodies that will issue final decisions on development applications. Appeals of those decisions are handled through Subdivision Ordinance appeals procedures established by the Zoning Ordinance and the Subdivision Ordinance.

Design Review Board Members will be instructed by Planning Department Staff on the application of the Guidelines, the limits of the Board's review, and the necessity for substantiating the Board's recommendation by identifying those applicable Guidelines that are satisfied or not satisfied by the proposed development.

Prior to the Design Review Board meeting, city staff will refer applications to the appropriate neighborhood associations for written comments.

## **Steps in the Environmental and Design Review Process**

### **1. Staff Conference**

Before planning and design begins, the developer is strongly urged to meet with the City Planning Staff relative to Environmental and Design Review of Hillside Residential Development. The nature of the project and site should be described. The planning staff member will clarify review procedures and submittal requirements. Critical design issues and Design Guidelines important to the project may be discussed.

### **2. Preliminary Review (optional)**

This step is optional but highly recommended for large or complex projects or projects requiring extensive grading or alteration of natural features.

Preliminary Review allows the developer to meet with the Design Review Board to discuss basic intentions and plans before investing time in detailed design. At this stage, site analysis and design, location of buildings, grading, basic form of buildings and landscape concepts are important. Building elevations and other information may be discussed but should be kept in preliminary form.

Preliminary Review is an informal process enabling the applicant to receive input from the Design Review Board and get its opinion on the basic concept of the development proposal. The Board will not take official action until Final Application and Review.

### **3. Waiver Considerations**

Applications which are of a limited scope, e.g., small additions (under 500 square feet) to existing structures, construction of accessory structures, and limited grading or site modification, may require only staff level review and approval. Projects of greater scope or on critical sites are subject to review and approval by the Design Review Board. This two-tiered process allows minor projects to be processed without needless delay and major projects, or those on critical sites, to be reviewed in a more formal manner.

Occasionally, on minor projects, the Design Review Board may recommend a waiver of the final application and review requirements. Projects which may be considered for this waiver include:

- a. Projects which are minor in nature and preliminary review satisfies the Design Review Board's concern.
- b. Projects which, if subjected to final application requirements, would not materially contribute to the attainment of the City's Design objectives.

#### **4. Full Submittal, Application and Review**

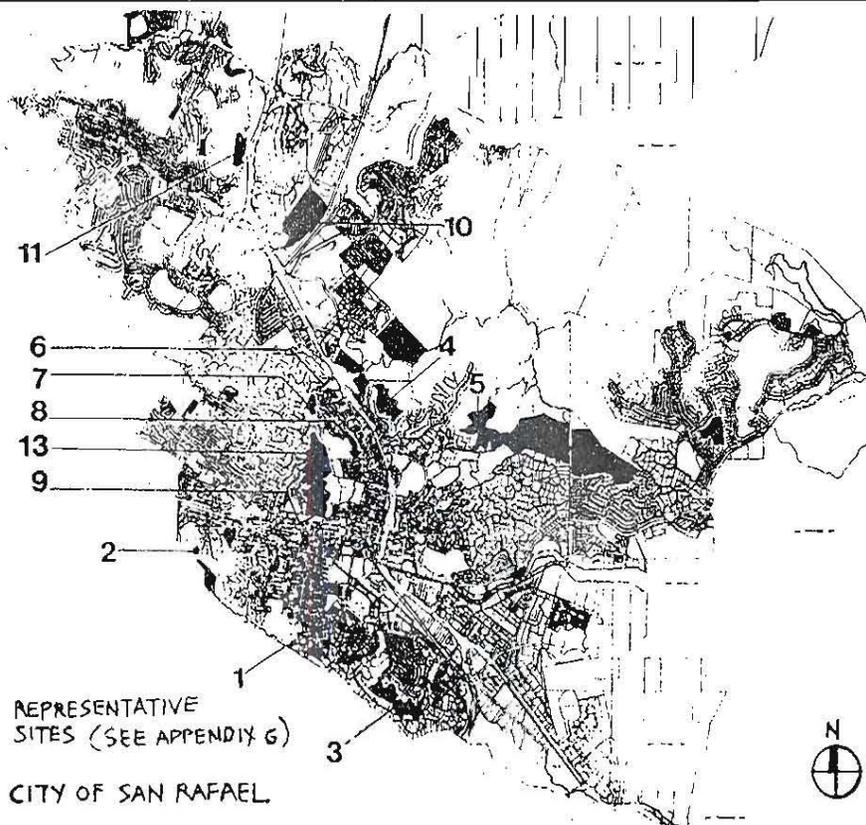
The one required step in the process of Environmental and Design Review for Hillside Residential Development, unless a waiver has been granted, is Full Submittal of an Application and appearance before the Design Review Board. Full Submittal Requirements for Application and Review are given in Appendix A of this booklet.

Applications are filed with the Planning Department. Within 7 days of receipt of a complete application, copies of the application are assigned to a staff planner who reviews them for compliance with submittal requirements. Once the application is complete, the staff planner then schedules the item for review at the next available Design Review Board Meeting and informs the applicant of the time, date and place for the review.

Evaluation of the project by the Design Review Board should focus on the topics contained in this manual. The Design Review Board makes a recommendation to the Applicable City approval authority, citing specific guidelines to which the project conforms or does not conform.

The Zoning Ordinance establishes the appropriate hearing body for applications. If there are major neighborhood concerns, the item may be referred directly to the Planning Commission by the Planning Director. The approval authority also evaluates the project for conformance to this manual, considers the Design Review Board's recommendation, and renders a decision. The decision may be appealed in accordance with the City's appeal procedures.

## II. San Rafael's Design Objectives For Hillside Residential Development



The City of San Rafael has adopted specific policies to assist in the preservation and protection of the wooded and grassy hillsides, canyons and ridgelines that provide a natural scenic backdrop for the city's commercial districts and residential neighborhoods. The *General Plan 2000* states;

*"Those (properties) not publicly owned are projected to be secured as (public) open space either through public acquisition or through careful site planning so that any development will complement or avoid these important natural features."*

Toward this objective, the City has created Residential Land Use Categories and Density Ranges that relate specifically to sensitive hillside areas:

- A. *Hillside Resource Residential*: 0.1 to 0.5 units per gross acre. These areas are characterized by very steep slopes which have geologic and seismic constraints and which have community visual significance or which have been identified as having very limited development potential through prior development approvals, Neighborhood Plan review or County zoning. This designation is typical of sensitive hillside areas in the Planning Area.

- B. *Hillside Residential*: 0.5 to 2 units per gross acre. Characterized by moderate to steep slopes; often unstable geology; may have local visual significance. Typical of developed hillside residential areas in the Planning area.

*Maximum Densities are not guaranteed* by the ranges described in the definitions of the *HR*, *HRR* or other Land Use designations. Densities of residential development on any site shall be determined by the quality of their response to these Guidelines and the following factors:

- *Site resources and constraints.*
- *Potentially hazardous conditions.*
- *Traffic and access.*
- *Adequacy of infrastructure.*
- *City Design Policies and compatibility with existing development patterns.*
- *Compatibility with desirable qualities of building bulk and densities of adjacent developed areas.*

The City has adopted policies to implement the Environmental and Design Review Process to insure that new development is sensitive to the existing natural setting in its intensity and type of new residential development. Policies include:

- *Protection of views of the Bay, Bay wetlands and hills from public streets and open spaces.*
- *Protection of existing mature tree groupings, especially oak, redwood and eucalyptus trees groves and individual specimen oak and redwood trees.*
- *The use of desirable design techniques on hillside sites that minimize grading impacts, protection of sensitive areas such as steeply sloping/hazardous sites, natural drainage features and highly visible slopes.*
- *Requiring adequate landscape buffering between new development and sensitive habitat areas, as well as existing neighborhoods.*
- *Recognition of community concerns related to visually significant hillsides, ridges and landforms shown in General Plan Community Design Maps A and B.*

### Specific Neighborhood Design Objectives

The City has adopted Neighborhood Plans and policies that protect the character and development pattern of established residential neighborhoods.

Neighborhood Plans adopted for the Fairhills (1980), Sun Valley (1980), Gerstle Park (1979), and Peacock Gap (1983) neighborhoods set forth policies that :

- *Initiate the long range planning for the neighborhood.*
- *Set development standards by which applications for development will be measured.*
- *Propose means of improving neighborhood design quality.*
- *Address existing problems.*

It is the City's responsibility to implement the neighborhood plans and when adopted neighborhood development standards are different than the Citywide standards, the City shall enforce the more restrictive standards.

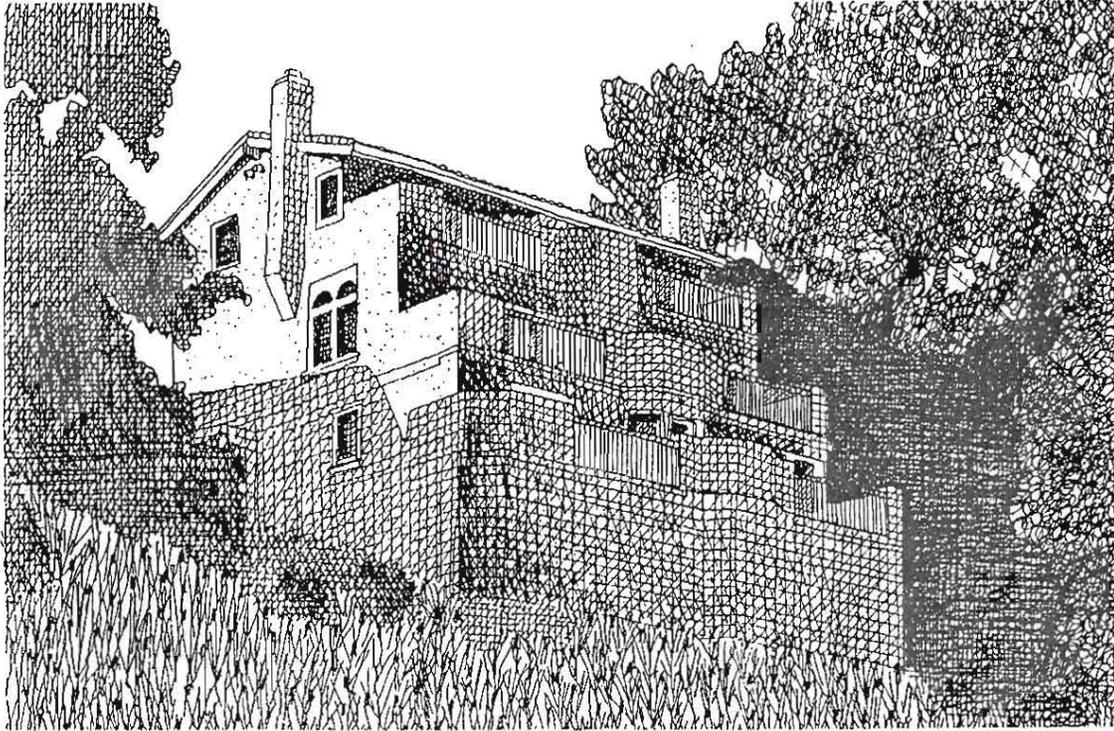
Specific Policies adopted by the City that relate to Hillside Residential Development for specific neighborhoods include:

- *Gerstle Park* Neighborhood - Preserve hillsides and ridges fringing the neighborhood.
- *Fairhills* and *Sun Valley* Neighborhoods - (Neighborhoods 13 and 14)
  1. Protect Open Space Hillsides which serve as backdrops for the neighborhood.
  2. Protect and preserve existing neighborhood residences including historic and architecturally significant residences.
  3. Encourage only new development which would enhance the neighborhood, protect natural site amenities, avoid development in hazardous areas or areas where extensive grading would result, preserve views of open space from existing homes and minimize traffic impacts.
- For the *Lincoln* Neighborhood - Hillside areas shall remain Low Density consistent with existing density and environmental constraints.
- For the *Northgate* Area - Hillside parcels at the end of Los Gamos Road and Orchid Drive are steep, highly visible properties with limited access. Development shall be clustered to avoid the visible hillside areas. Access to the northern parcel is very poor and should be considered through the southern parcel. If possible, development should be clustered toward Orchid drive.
- For the *Scattrini Property* - The site is steep and highly visible from the community. The hillside areas should be preserved and development should be clustered toward the lower portion of the site.

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### III. Hillside Residential Development Standards

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#### A. More Restrictive Standards

The following table describes new Development Standards in the City of San Rafael's *Hillside Resource Residential (HRR)* and *Hillside Residential (HR)* General Plan Land Use Categories, and on properties with slopes of 25% or greater.

In the table, bold italics type indicates a change from existing standards.

There are no changes to the following existing standards:

- Ranges of permitted dwelling units per acre.
- Number of permitted dwelling units per lot area.
- Maximum Building Coverage.
- Maximum Building Height.
- Building setbacks, except when encroachments are allowed through Design Review.

The following definitions and regulations have been adopted:

- The method of calculating “Building Height” is changed.
- Limitations on the maximum building envelope along front and side lot lines to avoid excessive building bulk. This takes the form of a “Building Stepback” provision.
- Implementation of General Plan goals and policies concerning hillside residential development by creating a Hillside Residential Overlay Zoning District that may overlay or be combined with any principal zoning district. Regulations established by the Hillside Residential Overlay District are in addition to the regulations of the underlying zoning district with which they overlay or are combined. In the event of a conflict with the regulations of the underlying principal zoning district, the provisions of the Hillside Residential Overlay District would apply.
- A Maximum Gross Building Square Footage is introduced as a part of the Hillside Residential Overlay District, with permitted floor area based on lot area.
  - In all areas with the *HR* or *HRR* General Plan Land Use Designations and on lots combined with the Hillside Residential Overlay District, the permitted floor area of a structure (including garages and accessory structures over 120 square feet) is limited to 2,500 square feet + 10% of lot area with a maximum gross square footage limited to 6500 square feet.
  - On all lots with slopes over 25%.
- A natural state requirement has been adopted as part of the Hillside Residential Overlay District; the definition of “natural state” follows:

*Natural state: all land and water that remains undeveloped and undisturbed. This means that grading, excavating, filling and/or the construction of roadways, driveways, parking areas and structures are prohibited. Incidental minor grading for hiking trails, bicycle paths, equestrian trails, picnic areas and planting and landscaping which is in addition to and enhances the natural environment are permitted.*

The following changes have been made to existing development standards:

- All Residential Development Projects in the Hillside Residential Overlay District or located on slopes over 25%, will be subject to Environmental and Design Review, including single family residences on individual lots. The Design Guidelines in this Manual will form the Evaluative Criteria for Design Review of all Hillside Residential Development Projects.
- Coupled with the slope table that establishes minimum lot size relative to the degree of slope, The Maximum Gross Building Square Footage provision will keep building sizes and building coverages in an acceptable range.

- Buildings and structures may encroach into a required yard or setback for a distance of not more than one-half of the required yard or setback with the recommendation of the Design Review Board when the encroachment minimizes the impact of hillside development and grading.
- *Preservation of Natural Areas. The percentage of each parcel which must remain in its natural state shall be a minimum of twenty-five percent plus the percentage figure of average slope as calculated in Title 14 (Zoning Ordinance), not to exceed a maximum of eighty-five percent.*
  - Example: A parcel with an average slope of twenty percent would require in natural state twenty-five percent plus the slope percentage figure (twenty percent) for a total natural state requirement of forty-five percent. In addition, no development shall exceed the maximum building coverage allowed in the applicable residential zoning district except in clustering where the total area of the project shall be used in calculating coverage.
  - For Planned Development: The natural state requirement (%) is established at the Master Plan level for the total development property. Building envelopes would be used to establish the appropriate natural state for each lot.

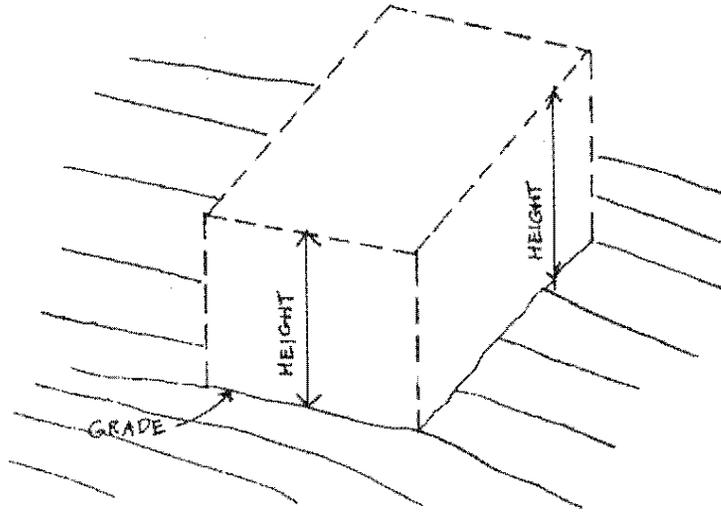
## Hillside Residential Development Standards

General Plan Land Use Designated (Dwelling Units/Acre)	Minimum Lot Area	Maximum Density (Units/Lot Area)	Maximum Lot Width (Feet)	Maximum Building Coverage of Site	Maximum Gross Building Square Footage	Maximum Building Height (Feet)	Additional Height Limit	Minimum Setbacks from Property Line
Medium or High Density Residential	Per Zoning Ordinance	Per Zoning Ordinance	Per Zoning Ordinance	Per Zoning Ordinance	NA	30 Ft. Measured from natural grade	Building Stepback	Same as zoning ord. except with D.R.B. recommendation and hearing body approval.
Low Density Residential	5,000-10,000 S.F.  Refer to Chapter 15.34.020, Standards for Hillside Subdivisions, of the Subdivision Ordinance.	2 - 6.5 gross units per acre  Refer to Chapter 15.34.020, Standards for Hillside Subdivisions, of the Subdivision Ordinance.	50-100 feet  Refer to Chapter 15.34.020, Standards for Hillside Subdivisions, of the Subdivision Ordinance.	Natural State Requirement	10% of lot area +2500 S.F. 6500 S.F. absolute maximum	30 Ft. Measured from natural grade	Building Stepback	Same as zoning ord. except with D.R.B. recommendation and hearing body approval.
Hillside Residential	20,000 S.F. to 2 acres.  Refer to Chapter 15.34.020, Standards for Hillside Subdivisions, of the Subdivision Ordinance.	0.5-2.0 units per gross acre  Refer to Chapter 15.34.020, Standards for Hillside Subdivisions, of the Subdivision Ordinance.	100-150 feet  Refer to Chapter 15.34.020, Standards for Hillside Subdivisions, of the Subdivision Ordinance.	Natural State Requirement	10% of lot area +2500 S.F. 6500 S.F. absolute maximum	30 Ft. Measured from natural grade	Building Stepback	Same as zoning ord. except with D.R.B. recommendation and hearing body approval.
Hillside Resource Residential	2 acres	0.1-0.5 units per gross acre  Refer to Chapter 15.34.020, Standards for Hillside Subdivisions, of the Subdivision Ordinance.	150 feet	Natural State Requirement	10% of lot area +2500 S.F. 6500 S.F. absolute maximum	30 Ft. Measured from natural grade	Building Stepback	Same as zoning ord. except with D.R.B. recommendation and hearing body approval.

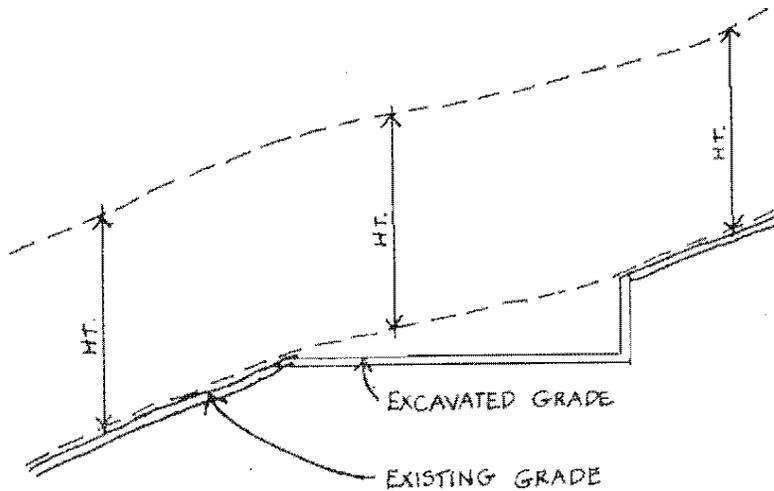
## B. Definitions and Other Regulations

### 1. Definition of Building Height

The height of all structures, fences and walls shall be measured vertically from the existing grade to the uppermost point of the roof edge or peak, wall, parapet, mansard or other feature perpendicular to that grade.



#### a. Height Measurement



#### b. Height Measurement — Section

## *2. Definition of Gross Building Square Footage (Floor Area)*

The sum of all enclosed or covered areas of each floor of all structures on the site, measured to the exterior faces of the enclosing walls, columns or posts, but excluding the following:

- a. Areas permanently open to the sky.
- b. Exterior areas under roof eaves, trellises or cantilevered overhangs.
- c. Attic spaces and underfloor spaces that are not capable of being finished into usable space.
- d. Garage or storage spaces that are not capable of being finished into usable space and whose floors are at least six feet below existing grade. All points of the finished floor elevation must be below existing grade.
- e. Completely detached accessory structures 120 square feet or less in floor area.

The following areas shall be included:

- a. Basement areas, unfinished attic or loft spaces and other areas capable of being finished into usable space as determined by the Uniform Building Code.
- b. Garages and carport areas measured to the exterior face of surrounding walls, columns, or posts;
- c. Other roofs or covered areas supported by walls, columns or posts and capable of being enclosed; measured to the exterior face of surrounding walls, columns or posts;
- d. Roof Penthouses; and
- e. Accessory Structures greater than 120 square feet in floor area.

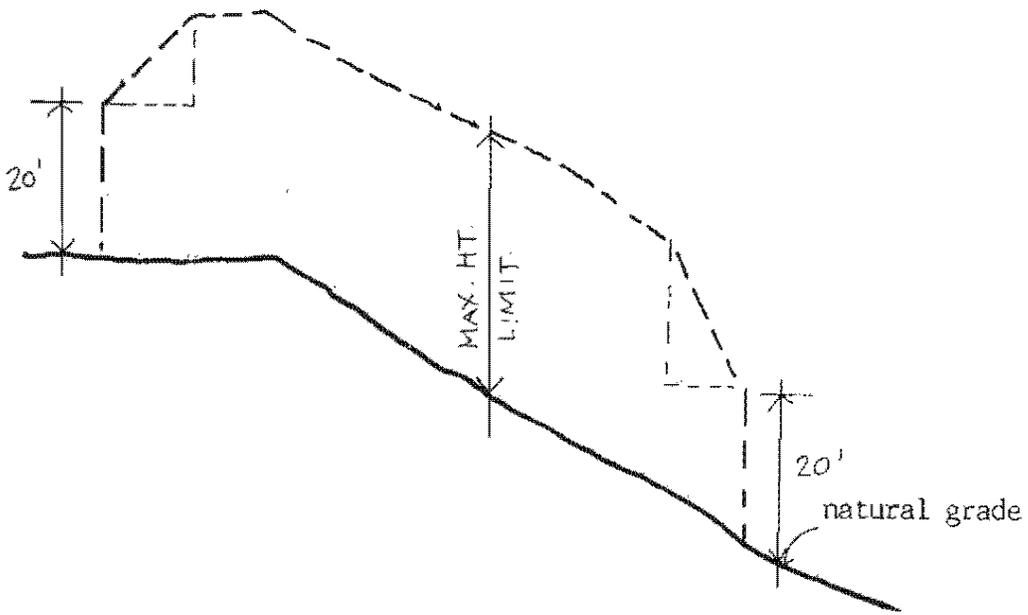
### **3. Building Stepback**

Limitations on the maximum three dimensional building envelope (see Figures 1 and 2) are required to avoid excessive building bulk viewed from downhill lots and front and street side elevations.

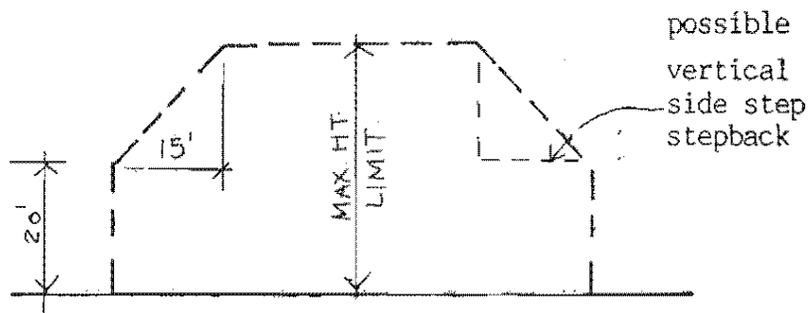
- a. A building stepback shall be required on the downhill elevation and all walls facing the front, street side and interior side property lines.
- b. Downslope Wall Height: Maximum allowed height of the downslope wall shall be 20 feet as measured from the lowest finish grade adjacent to the wall or directly beneath its outermost projection.
- c. Front and Side Stepback: On walls facing front property lines, the Stepback Zone includes all areas within 15 feet of the Maximum Building Envelope limit facing the front property line. Along side property lines, the Stepback Zone includes all areas within 15 feet of the building envelope limit.
- d. Within the Stepback Zone a 20-foot height limit shall be observed, measured from existing grade.
- e. Encroachments: To allow for Design flexibility, the following encroachments are permitted in the Stepback Zone:
  1. Street Front and Street Side: Along front and street side property lines, an encroachment into the Stepback Zone is permitted along 25% of the building length.
  2. Interior Side: Along interior side property lines, an encroachment into the Stepback Zone is permitted along 25% of the building length.

In each of the above cases, a partial height building element is permitted as an architectural encroachment into the Stepback Zone.

See Figures 1, 2 and 3, following.

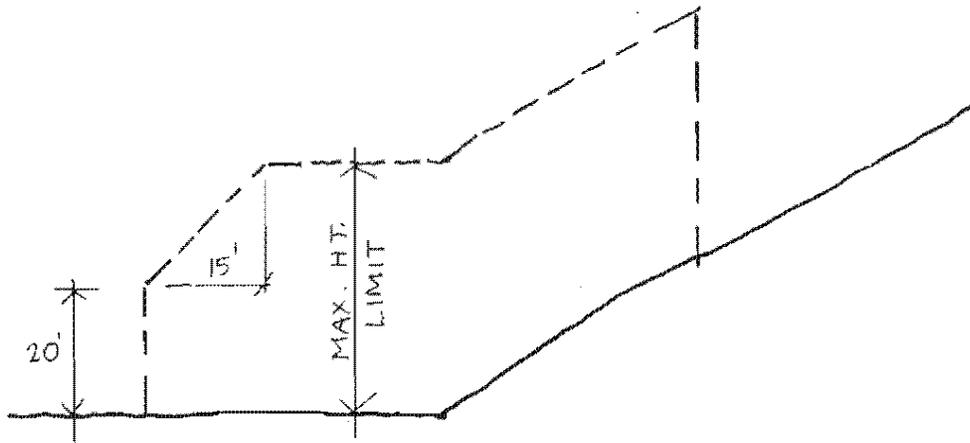


Downhill Section

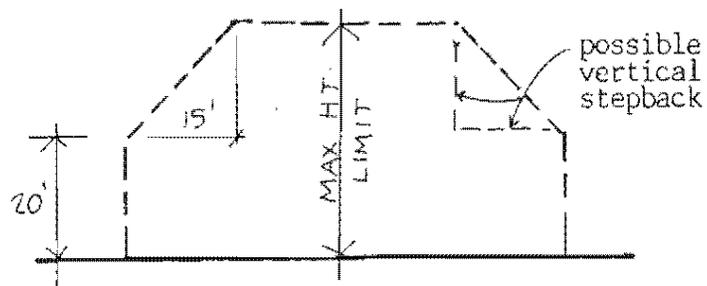


Street Elevation

Figure 1. Building Envelopes — Downhill Condition

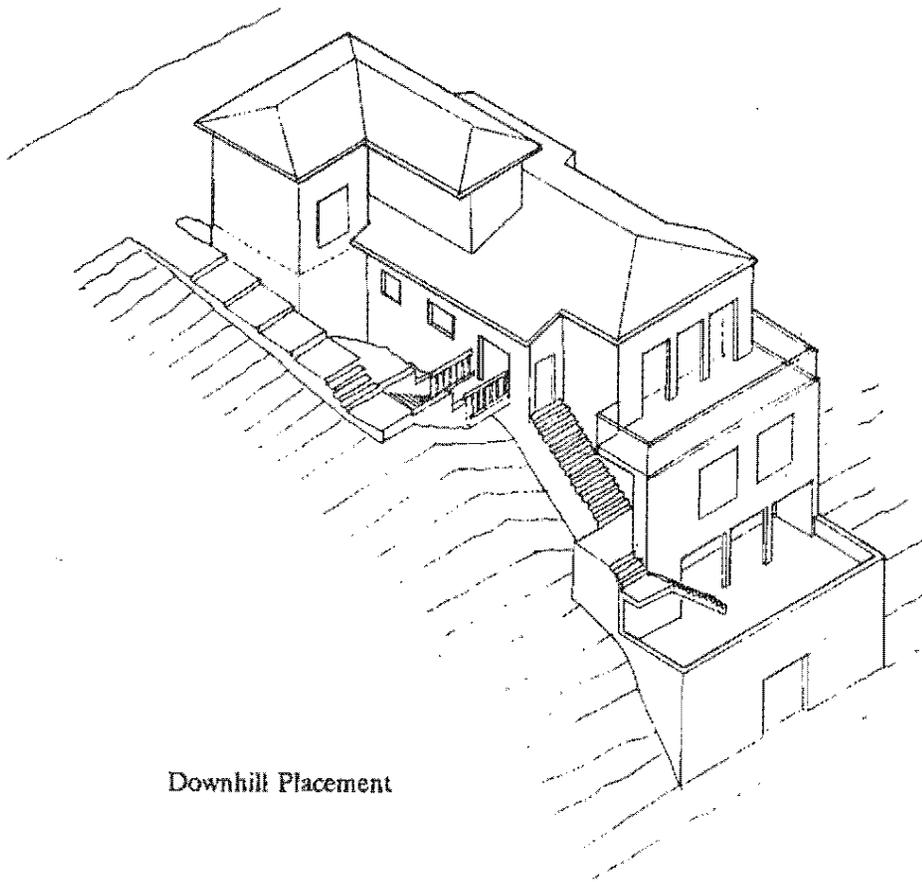


Uphill Section

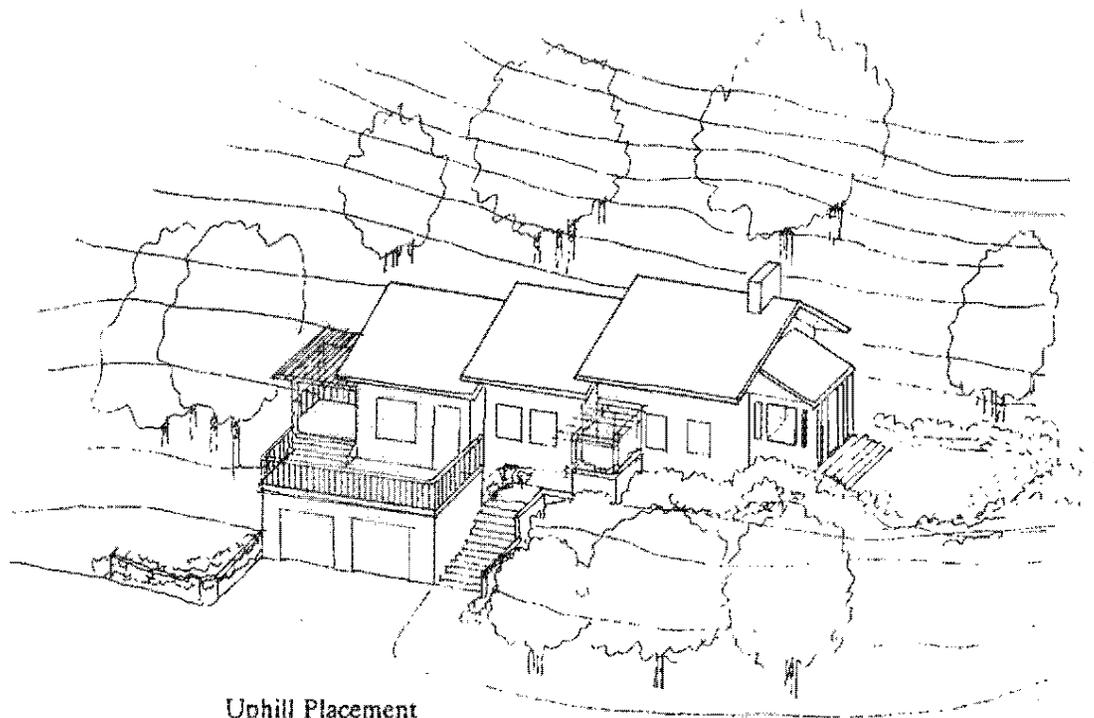


Street Elevation

Figure 2. Building Envelopes — Uphill Condition



Downhill Placement

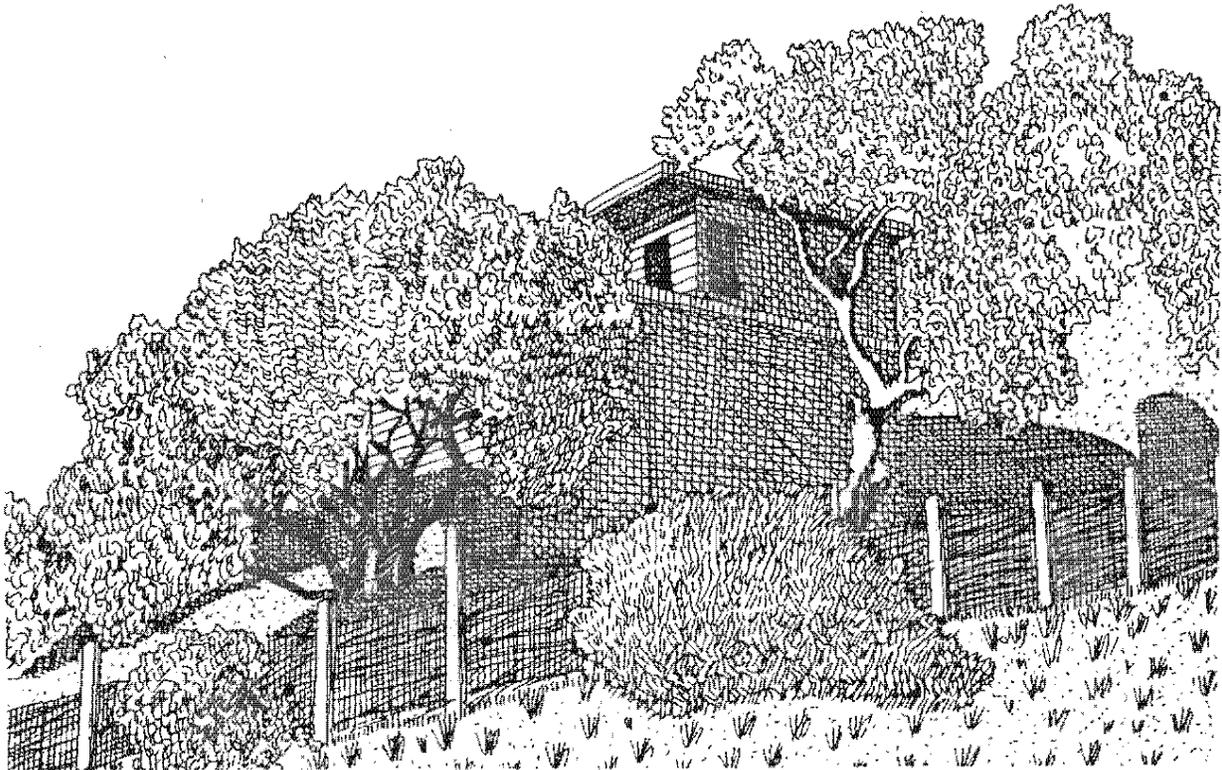


Uphill Placement

Figure 3. Illustrative Examples

## IV. Guidelines for Hillside Residential Design Review

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