

SAN RAFAEL

DESIGN GUIDELINES

Introduction

The following design guidelines are intended to assist in the design of new buildings and additions so that they will integrate well with their surroundings. The intent is for new development to enhance its environs and achieve community values of “pedestrian friendly” and “people-oriented” design.

In some cases, new development should emulate established patterns of design present in the vicinity. Where there is an existing desirable pattern consistent with zoning regulations of building height, width, scale or materials, new buildings and additions should seek to reinforce the pattern of development.

In other cases, however, there is no predominant design theme or pattern, and more variety may exist. Some existing patterns are only a fragment of a potential pattern and difficult to identify.

The guidelines are indications of what the City considers to be desirable design. The guidelines also offer suggestions on how to address public access, accommodate automobile access and parking, and integrate signage.

The guidelines are discretionary, and are intended to assist projects in achieving high quality design. Applicants are encouraged to seek creative design solutions. Designers may suggest other means of achieving the City’s objective of high quality design, as provided for in the Zoning Ordinance.

The guidelines are used by staff and the Design Review Board to evaluate the quality of project design and to make recommendations regarding design review approval or denial.

The following Residential and Nonresidential Design Guidelines apply to all of the City of San Rafael, except in Downtown and the Fourth Street corridor in the Montecito/Happy Valley Neighborhood where the Downtown Design Guidelines apply, and those lots where the Hillside Design Guidelines apply.

The guidelines are intended as an interim document until such time that more detailed guidelines can be developed with public input in accordance with the direction contained in the Community Design Element of General Plan 2020.

Illustrations by Howard Izkowitz

RESIDENTIAL DESIGN GUIDELINES

Residential design guidelines are one way to protect and enhance existing attractive or historic buildings, and to improve design of other buildings over time, as they are remodeled. The residential design guidelines encourage the qualities that define and make each residential neighborhood unique, and serve to strengthen the overall visual and functional quality of each neighborhood. The guidelines allow for innovative architecture that is in context with the surrounding neighborhoods.

Building Design

- ✓ Where there is an existing pattern, particular attention should be given to maintaining a consistent streetscape.
- ✓ All building facades should be varied and articulated. Long monotonous walls should be avoided.
- ✓ Attention should be paid to the street- and Canal-front facades of buildings by incorporating similar materials and details.

Scale

- ✓ Where necessary to replicate existing patterns or character of development, design techniques should be used to break up the volume of larger buildings into smaller units. For example, a building can be articulated through architectural features, setbacks and varying rooflines to appear more as an aggregation of smaller building components.
- ✓ Transitional elements, such as stepped facades, roof decks and architectural details that help merge larger buildings into an existing neighborhood should be used.

Building Height

- ✓ Adjacent buildings should be considered and transitional elements included to minimize apparent height differences.

Roof Shapes

- ✓ Where possible, relate new roof form to those found in the area.
- ✓ Roof top equipment should be screened from view and integrated into the building architecture.
- ✓ The visual impact of roof vents should be minimized.

Building Entrances

- ✓ There should be a clear, well-defined sense of entry from the street to the building.
- ✓ Where possible, the entrances of street front units should be oriented towards the street rather than to the interior of the lot or to the parking lot.
- ✓ Examples of elements that can be used to define the primary entrance and to further define the street facade are a usable front porch or verandas, an overhead trellis canopy, or other similar feature.

Windows

- ✓ The placement and size of windows in the building should be consistent with the overall building design and the neighborhood streetscape. Where windows do not reflect an existing pattern, greater attention should be paid to other means such as balcony overhangs, porches, materials, colors, etc. of articulating the façade.
- ✓ Window proportions should be consistent with the proportions of the building and with other windows on the building.
- ✓ Windows should overlook the street, parking and public areas to permit surveillance and increased safety.
- ✓ Window placement along rear and side elevations should consider privacy needs of adjacent neighbors.

Driveways and Parking Areas

- ✓ Driveway cuts and widths should be minimized, in compliance with zoning.
- ✓ Where possible, ground level parking areas should be recessed or placed to the rear of buildings.
- ✓ Design for adequate vehicle maneuverability in parking areas. Vehicles should not back out from a parking space onto the street.
- ✓ Minimize large paved areas, for example by using alternative materials (i.e., turf block, stamped concrete or pavers).
- ✓ For multifamily buildings, parking should be distributed to provide easy access to units and/or building entrances. Visible front or structured parking should be screened, landscaped or have an articulated design.

Front Landscaping and Fences

- ✓ Landscaped front yards should contribute to the overall visual quality of the neighborhood and to create a strong landscaped character for the site.
- ✓ Fences in the front and street side yards should include detailing in character with the house.
- ✓ Landscaped areas adjacent to sidewalks are encouraged.

Lighting

- ✓ Limit the intensity of lighting to provide for adequate site security and for pedestrian and vehicular safety.
- ✓ Shield light sources to prevent glare and illumination beyond the boundaries of the property.
- ✓ Lighting fixtures should complement the architecture of the project.

Additions to Homes

- ✓ An addition to a home should be related to the original building, respecting the proportions, style and materials of the house.
- ✓ The quality of materials, window placement, detailing, roof pitches and forms of additions should be consistent with or better than the original appearance of the building.

NONRESIDENTIAL DESIGN GUIDELINES

As modifications are made to San Rafael, whether through public improvements or as private development affects neighborhoods or the Downtown, the design quality of these changes should improve the quality of life in San Rafael. These guidelines provide a framework of design principles that builds on the strength of the existing character of an area and that strives to improve the visual unity of the area.

Parking Lots

- ✓ A logical sequence of entry and arrival as part of the site's design should be provided.
- ✓ Where possible, design entrances from the street to direct views towards the building entry.
- ✓ Parking should be distributed to provide easy access to building entrances.
- ✓ Where possible, parking should be located to the rear or side of a building in order to reduce the visual impact of parking areas.
- ✓ Design for adequate vehicle maneuverability in parking areas. Vehicles should not back out from a parking space onto the street.
- ✓ Parking areas should be screened from the street with hedges, walls, fences or berms, subject to security considerations.
- ✓ On major arterials, where possible and appropriate, consolidate curb cuts and reduce entry and exit conflicts.
- ✓ Auto and pedestrian entrances into the development should be easy to find. For example, special entry treatments, such as colored concrete, special planting and signage should be located at the entries to the site.
- ✓ Shade trees should be provided in parking lots per the zoning ordinance.

Landscaping

- ✓ Landscaped areas should be planned as integral parts of the development and to create a strongly landscaped character for the site.
- ✓ Unsightly uses should be screened.
- ✓ Commercial signage or displays should not be hidden with landscaping.
- ✓ Trees should be planted in a variety of locations, such as along the side property lines, clustered in planting areas, or distributed throughout the parking lot, consistent with the zoning ordinance.

- ✓ Pedestrian areas should be made visually attractive with special planting and flowering trees.
- ✓ Where feasible, landscape the area between the building and the property line even when a building is located at the minimum required side or rear yard setback.
- ✓ Retain and maintain existing public street trees and add additional street trees where practical.

Lighting

- ✓ Limit the intensity of lighting to provide for adequate site security and for pedestrian and vehicular safety.
- ✓ Shield light sources to prevent glare and illumination beyond the boundaries of the property.
- ✓ Lighting fixtures should complement the architecture of the project.

Pedestrian Circulation

- ✓ Consider pedestrian orientation when designing building entries, windows, signage and doors.
- ✓ Include a well-defined pedestrian walkway between the street and building entries.
- ✓ Clearly define pedestrian movement through the parking lot. For example, provide changes in pavement or separate landscaped walkways.
- ✓ Where appropriate, pedestrian walkways should be provided between adjacent lots.
- ✓ Special design elements should be included, such as bollards, pots, benches, trash cans, unique paving, tree grates, tree guards and pedestrian lighting to add visual richness to areas designed for pedestrian access.
- ✓ Where appropriate, include outdoor gathering places and seating for the public.
- ✓ Adequate facilities should be provided for bicycle parking, consistent with zoning requirements.

Building Form

- ✓ Where appropriate, locate the building, or a substantial portion of the building along the front yard setback or street edge to create spatial enclosure in relation to the street.
- ✓ Consider the pedestrian experience when designing the ground floor of buildings.
- ✓ A continuity of design, materials, color, form and architectural details is encouraged for all portions of a building and between all the buildings on the site.
- ✓ Consider the development's visual and spatial relationship to adjacent buildings and other structures in the area.

Entryways

- ✓ A defined sense of entry with pedestrian orientation should be provided.
- ✓ Building entrances should be defined with architectural elements such as roof form changes, awnings or other architectural elements.

Towers

- ✓ If a tower is included in the design, it should perform a definite on-site function, such as delineating an entrance to a site or a building entry, or emphasizing a display window.
- ✓ The tower should provide an attractive distinctive silhouette against the sky.
- ✓ Where appropriate, the visual bulk of the upper portion of the tower should be reduced to reduce its apparent bulk, for example with openings through it or with open latticework.

Arcades

- ✓ Arcades may be used in shopping areas to provide weather protection for shoppers, add a sense of unity to a larger project and/or provide depth to the building.
- ✓ Arcades may be topped with a simple broad band for tenant signing.
- ✓ Internal illumination may be used to emphasize arcade forms at night.

Awnings

- ✓ Where appropriate, provide well-designed awnings to enhance the design of the building, provide weather protection, and add liveliness, interest and a sense of human scale.
- ✓ Provide a uniform treatment of awnings on multi-tenant buildings.
- ✓ Awning colors may be varied and should be compatible with the colors of the building and of adjacent buildings.
- ✓ Signs may be provided on an awning, consistent with the zoning ordinance.
- ✓ Translucent, internally illuminated awnings are not encouraged.
- ✓ The following building code standards are included for reference:

Minimum height above grade: 8 feet; 14 feet at alleys, parking lots or other areas with vehicular traffic

Maximum horizontal projection (from face of building): 7 feet, or 66% of the distance between the building and curb, whichever is less

Minimum distance to curb: 2 feet between the awning and curb

Materials and Colors

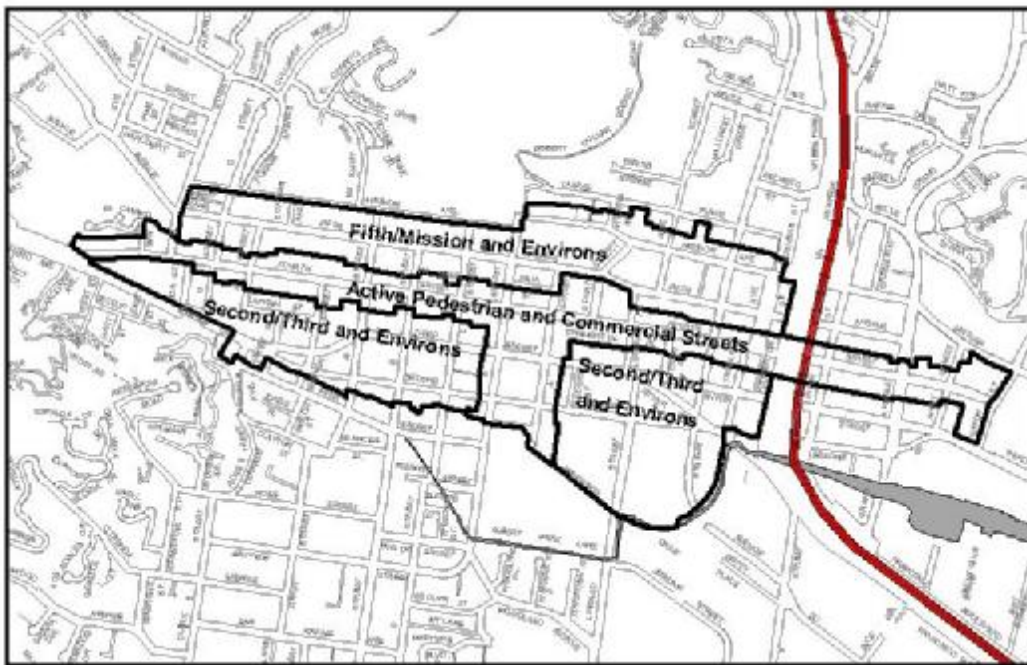
- ✓ Use articulation, texturing and detailing on all concrete exposed to exterior view.
- ✓ Exterior materials should minimize reflectivity.
- ✓ Use color to provide appropriate accents on a building.

DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR DOWNTOWN AND FOURTH STREET IN THE MONTECITO/HAPPY VALLEY NEIGHBORHOOD

Downtown San Rafael is the urban heart of Marin County and is a livable and walkable place where people gather to enjoy life or conduct business. Downtown has a physical aspect described as "hometown". New development contributes to the beautification and vitality of Downtown. Downtown is increasingly attractive with more landscaping and trees. These guidelines ensure that new buildings will be well designed, will respect our historic heritage and will be attractive to pedestrians.

Montecito/Happy Valley neighborhood is in a convenient commercial location, adjacent to Highway 101 and along Second, Third and Fourth Streets, and connecting to Downtown San Rafael. With more than 400 diverse businesses, it is a mixed-use medium density community, and an alternative to auto-oriented suburbs. The neighborhood's commercial anchor is Montecito Shopping Center, with Trader Joe's, restaurants, Rite-Aid, and a canalfront walkway. Fourth Street is a commercial link to Downtown with a wide range of office, service and retail uses.

The map below indicates the various areas of Downtown and Fourth Street and in the Montecito/Happy Valley Neighborhood to which the following guidelines are applicable.



Active Pedestrian and Commercial Streets

Fourth Street and portions of cross streets close to Fourth are active, pedestrian friendly shopping and mixed use areas. The intents here are to enliven these commercial and mixed use areas by encouraging window shopping; by orienting buildings to the street to increase street activity; by including usable, active public plazas, by minimizing parking lots and driveways which interrupt the pedestrian flow, and by encouraging appropriate signage.

Street Edge Pattern

- ✓ Buildings should be located to reinforce the street edge.
- ✓ Much of the front or street side facades of the ground floor should extend to the property line, with exceptions for public plazas, outdoor gathering places, courtyards or landscape setbacks.

Driveways and Parking Areas

- ✓ Driveway cuts and widths should be minimized, and ground level or structured parking should be placed behind buildings.

Building Entrances

- ✓ The primary ground floor entrances should be oriented towards the street or, if appropriate, public plazas or courtyards, and not to parking lots.
- ✓ Ground floor entries should be frequent.
- ✓ Entries should be well-defined and well lit for pedestrian safety.

Windows

- ✓ Large storefront window display areas should be provided at the street level on buildings (i.e., approximately 75% clear glass on the primary street level frontage).

Building Design

- ✓ Building design should provide interest and variety at the street level through awnings, marquees, entries and display windows.
- ✓ Long, monotonous, uninterrupted walls should be avoided.
- ✓ Provide differences in façade treatment between ground level and upper levels to add visual interest to the building and the pedestrian experience.

Public Spaces and Courtyards

- ✓ Public spaces are an integral part of the pedestrian circulation system, and should not be separated from the sidewalk with walls or stairs.
- ✓ Other sides of the public space should provide a sense of enclosure, for example, define edges with buildings, landscaping, street furniture, railings or fencing.
- ✓ Public spaces should be adequately landscaped and should include street furniture.
- ✓ Public spaces should be located to take advantage of sunlight and shield wind exposure.
- ✓ Shopping or eating opportunities are encouraged within or adjacent to public spaces.

Landscaping

- ✓ Colorful, small scale plants, including hanging plants, are encouraged in small areas along the street front for variety and interest or to define building entries.
- ✓ Artificial plants are discouraged.

Height

- ✓ Multi-story buildings on the south side of Fourth Street should include step backs or other design techniques to retain sunny sidewalk areas on the north side of the street.
- ✓ Height should be minimized through methods such as building colors, upper-story step-backs, and placing units under eaves.

Fifth/Mission District and Environs

In this area of Downtown, providing a pleasant walking environment comfortable for people at the ground level is important. These streets are less active, and attractive streets to stroll along.

Building Design

- ✓ To provide visual interest, long, monotonous walls should be avoided.
- ✓ Where retaining walls are needed, they should be low, or terraced and landscaped.
- ✓ Entries should be well defined and orient to the street rather than to a parking lot.

Setbacks

- ✓ Where setbacks are provided, they should be landscaped.
- ✓ Street trees are an important element and should be retained and enhanced.

Residential Design

- ✓ Residential building types that are oriented to and bring vitality to the street are encouraged. Building types include townhouse and podium apartments with garages no more than ½ level above grade.

Second/Third Corridor and Environs

Second and Third Streets are to be attractive, landscaped major transportation corridors. While increased pedestrian safety and comfort is desired on Second and Third, greater pedestrian use of the cross streets is encouraged.

Building Design

- ✓ To provide visual interest, long, monotonous walls should be avoided.
- ✓ Building walls should be articulated.

Streetscape

- ✓ To create a boulevard effect along Second and Third Streets, varied, landscaped setbacks are appropriate.

- ✓ Additional street trees are strongly encouraged.
- ✓ High canopy traffic-tolerant trees should be provided.

Residential Design

- ✓ Where possible, residential buildings in this area should orient to the more pedestrian-friendly side streets.
- ✓ Main entries should be well defined and oriented to the street rather than to a parking lot.

Parking Lots

- ✓ Entrances to parking lots should be distinctive and easy to find.
- ✓ Parking lots should be landscaped between the street and parking lot.
- ✓ Driveway cuts and widths should be minimized to prevent vehicular conflicts.

Historic and Architecturally Significant Buildings

There are many historic and architecturally significant buildings in San Rafael. The City welcomes well-designed diverse architectural styles that respect its historic heritage. These guidelines are intended to assist in achieving this objective, recognizing there are always design exceptions. These guidelines apply to development in the immediate vicinity of buildings listed in the San Rafael Historical/Architectural Survey.

Pattern and Scale

- ✓ Renovations to historic and architecturally significant buildings identified in the San Rafael Historical/Architectural Survey Final Inventory List of Structures and Areas should be carefully designed to retain significant building characteristics.
- ✓ New buildings, additions or major remodels in the vicinity of a building in the Survey should respect the pattern, scale and design of the older building, and not create visual distractions.

Transition

- ✓ Provide an appropriate transition in height between low rise and taller buildings through, for example, careful use of building stepbacks or variable roof heights.

Windows

- ✓ Windows should be properly proportioned.
- ✓ Where appropriate, upper story windows should be vertically aligned with the location of windows and doors on the ground floor.

Horizontal Lines

- ✓ On streets with a concentration of older buildings that have a well-defined design pattern or rhythm, preserve and complement horizontal building lines, such as cornice lines and window frames of adjacent architecturally significant buildings.

Proportions of Openings

- ✓ On streets with a concentration of older buildings that have a well-defined design pattern, the size and proportion of window and door openings should be similar to those of surrounding facades.

Materials

- ✓ On streets with a concentration of older buildings, an infill façade should be composed of materials similar to adjacent facades and should not stand out against the others.

Differentiation between Ground Floor and Upper Floors

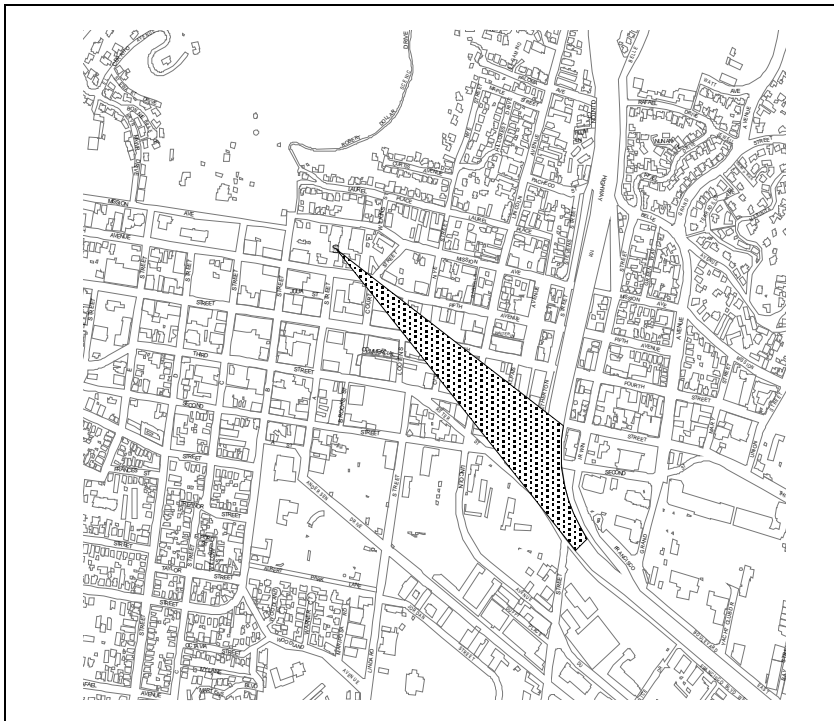
- ✓ Older buildings, particularly mixed use buildings, tend to differentiate between first floor and upper floor façade treatments. This is an appropriate design feature to emulate in new construction adjacent to such buildings.

Roof Shapes

- ✓ Relate new roof forms to those found in the area.

View of St. Raphael's Church Spire

- ✓ Conduct a view analysis for projects over one story in height within the shaded area of the map below to determine the impact the development would have on views of the St. Raphael's church spire.



View Evaluation Area