

### Introduction

This element addresses the physical form of the natural environment and the built form of the City. The major features that give San Rafael its visual character are the hills and valleys, the Bay, creeks, the San Rafael Canal, the highways and other transportation corridors, neighborhoods, and the Downtown. The city's historic structures also add to the uniqueness and identity of San Rafael. These include the Mission San Rafael Arcangel and St. Raphael's Church, historic homes, buildings in the Downtown constructed from the late 1800's through the 1920's, the Rafael Film Center and the Marin Civic Center. Community Design policies address how these natural and built elements visually create the identity of San Rafael, and how they contribute to the city's quality of life.

The *City Image* section of this element addresses the qualities that form the City's larger visual character. It provides direction regarding the preservation of views of hillsides and ridgelines, the Bay and Canal, and surrounding areas. It explains how the major transportation corridors can contribute to the quality of life in the City, and how the character of neighborhoods can be recognized, maintained and strengthened.

The *Design Quality* section of this element addresses in greater detail the streets, the Downtown, and other neighborhoods, and provides design direction to guide future development in those areas. The Neighborhoods Element describes policies specific to the Downtown and individual neighborhoods.

-  Transportation Corridors
-  Creeks and Streams
-  SMART Right of Way
-  Scenic Rural Roadway
-  Historic and Architecturally Significant Buildings and Areas
-  Gateways
-  Public Access to Shoreline or Waterfront
-  San Rafael Redevelopment Area Boundary
-  Visually Significant Hillside, Ridges, and Landforms

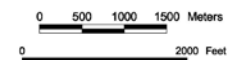


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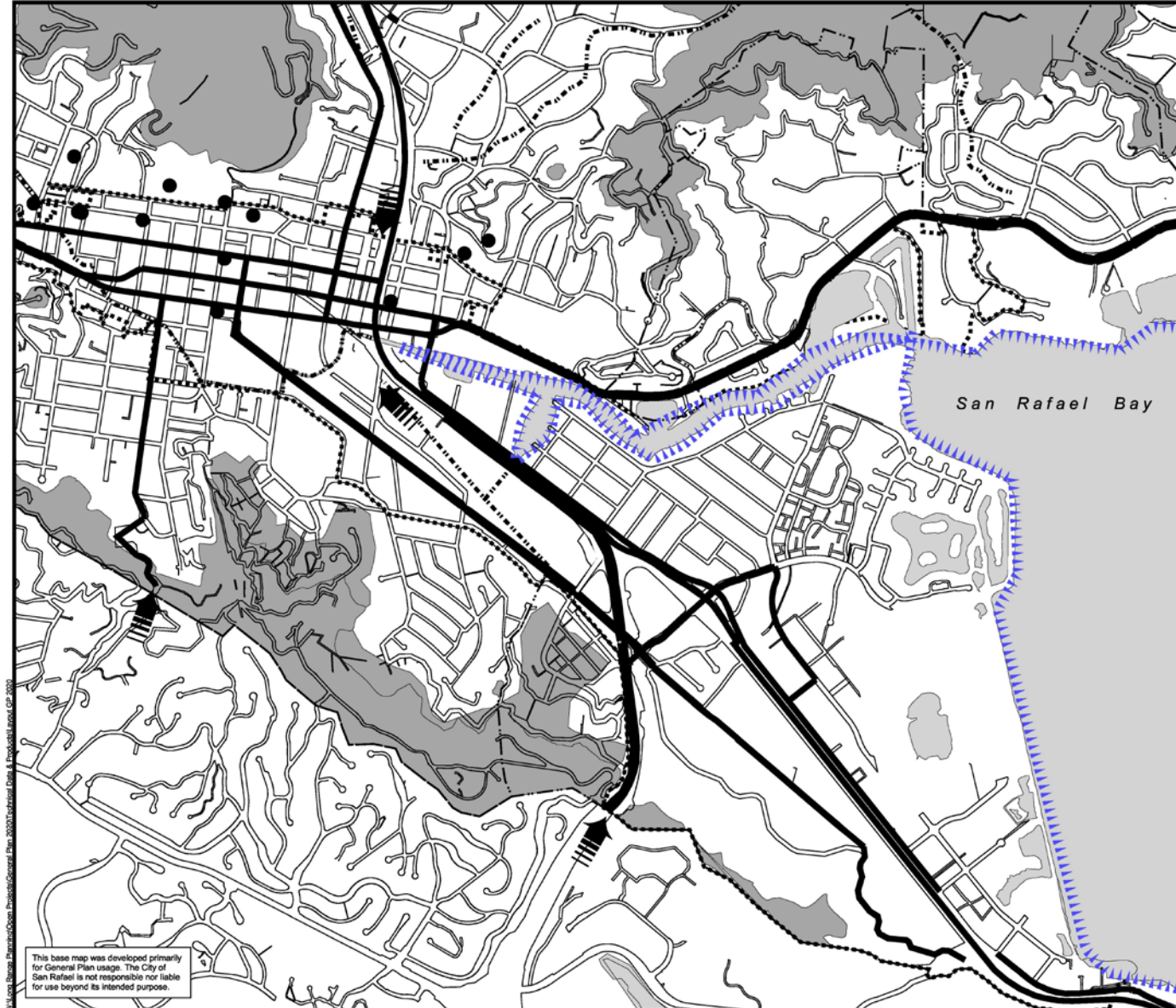
This base map was developed primarily for General Plan usage. The City of San Rafael is not responsible nor liable for use beyond its intended purpose.

## Central San Rafael Community Design

-  Transportation Corridors
-  Creeks and Streams
-  SMART Right of Way
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## GOAL 7: A BEAUTIFUL CITY

**It is the goal of the City of San Rafael to have its best natural and built features preserved and strengthened to enhance the attractiveness and livability of the City.** *Community design policies guide the City's built environment to create an appealing, functional and safe City where people will want to live, work and play. Our well-designed city will be attractive and interesting, and will meet the living, economic and social needs of the community. Within the Community Design Element the valuable qualities of the natural and built environment are identified, and the policies suggest methods to preserve and enhance those qualities.*

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### City Image

San Rafael's strong visual quality is based on its setting between two dominant physical features: San Francisco Bay and the hills of Marin County. The City's early transportation corridors were developed based on ease of movement through the hills, along the base of the hills, and alongside waterways. The Downtown and neighborhoods formed along the sections of land that were easier to build upon and close to transportation. The result is a city with a strong relationship to natural features and distinct neighborhoods.

#### CD-1. City Image.

Reinforce the City's positive and distinctive image by recognizing the natural features of the City, protecting historic resources, and by strengthening the positive qualities of the City's focal points, gateways, corridors and neighborhoods.

**CD-1a. Gateway Enhancements.** Fund gateway enhancements.  
Responsibility: Community Development  
Timeframe: Long Term  
Resources: Staff Time, Growth Allocation Program

**CD-1b Finer Grain Design Qualities.** Deleted per Amendment on 12/05/16

**CD-1c. Way-Finding Signage.** Prepare and implement an attractive citywide way-finding sign program to direct people to the City's cultural resources, public facilities, parks and other important destinations.

Responsibility: Community Development

Timeframe: Long Term  
Resources: Staff Time

**CD-1c. Landscape Improvement.** Recognize that landscaping is a critical design component. Encourage maximum use of available landscape area to create visual interest and foster sense of the natural environment in new and existing developments. Encourage the use of a variety of site appropriate plant materials.

See CA-13b (Preservation Ordinance) and LU-2a (Development Review).



The cupola of St. Raphael's Church is a local landmark.

## Neighborhoods

Neighborhoods are the building blocks of San Rafael's character, with the most important neighborhood being the Downtown. In addition to being the urban heart of Marin County, Downtown is a livable and walkable place where people gather to enjoy life or conduct business. San Rafael's residential neighborhoods are unique areas defined by their street trees, architecture, or in some areas, a mix of residential and commercial uses. Many of San Rafael's neighborhoods have a mix of uses, such as Dominican University in the Dominican neighborhood, or the industrial and retail areas in north San Rafael. Neighborhood policies encourage enhancing the qualities that define and make each neighborhood unique, and strengthening the overall visual and functional quality of each neighborhood. Policies that control the defining elements of neighborhoods should also allow for innovative architecture that is in context with the surrounding neighborhoods. (See also the Neighborhoods Element for design policies pertaining to specific neighborhoods.)

### CD-2. Neighborhood Identity.

Recognize and promote the unique character and integrity of the city's residential neighborhoods and Downtown. Strengthen the "hometown" image of San Rafael by:

- Maintaining the urban, historic, and pedestrian character of the Downtown;
- Preserving and enhancing the scale and landscaped character of the City's residential neighborhoods;
- Improving the appearance and function of commercial areas; and
- Allowing limited commercial uses in residential neighborhoods that serve local residents and create neighborhood-gathering places.

See LU-2a (Development Review).

### CD-3. Neighborhoods.

Recognize, preserve and enhance the positive qualities that give neighborhoods their unique identities, while also allowing flexibility for innovative design. Develop programs to encourage and respect the context and scale of existing neighborhoods.

**CD-3a. Design Review Process.** Consider ways to perform limited design review for major ground floor additions and renovations to assure compatibility with surroundings.

Responsibility: Community Development

Timeframe: Short Term

Resources: Staff Time

**CD-3b. Development Standards.** Reexamine residential development standards to address building size, setbacks, height, location of parking, landscaping and design impact.

Responsibility: Community Development

Timeframe: Long Term

Resources: Staff Time

**CD-3c. Revisions to Design Guidelines.** Consider revisions to residential design guidelines to further identify design elements and unique neighborhood qualities.

Responsibility: Community Development

Timeframe: Short Term

Resources: Staff Time

See LU-2a (Development Review), CD-10b (Compatibility of Patterns), CD-11a (Compatibility of Building Patterns) and H-2b (Compatibility of Building Patterns).



## Historic Resources

San Rafael is home to many valuable historic treasures. These features aid in defining San Rafael's character and make the City unique. Policies in the Community Design and the Culture and the Arts elements encourage preservation of these identifiable features so that San Rafael can maintain its heritage and identity.

### CD-4. Historic Resources.

Protect San Rafael's positive and distinctive image by recognizing, preserving and enhancing the City's historic resources.

**CD-4a. Historic Resources Information.** Help residents understand and enjoy their City's heritage by providing information about historic resources.

Responsibility: Community Development

Timeframe: Long Term

Resources: Staff Time

**CD-4b. Adaptive Reuse.** Consider revisions to design guidelines and to zoning regulations to provide development incentives for appropriate adaptive re-use. Since the 2004 adoption of the San Rafael General Plan 2020, some of the commercial and light industrial/office zoning districts have been amended to expand the types of allowable uses, some with reduced permit review.

Responsibility: Community Development

Timeframe: Long Term

Resources: Staff Time

**CD-4c. Sign Ordinance.** Revise sign ordinance to allow appropriate signage and plaques identifying historic structures.

Responsibility: Community Development

Timeframe: Long Term

Resources: Staff Time

**CD-4d. Design Guidelines.** As part of the Community Design programs to prepare design guidelines, include guidance to assist property owners of historic properties in defining appropriate changes and alterations and to illustrate outstanding examples of how new developments can fit into an historic neighborhood.

Responsibility: Community Development

Timeframe: Long Term

Resources: Staff Time, Grants

See also CD-3a (Design Review Process), CD-1c (Way-Finding Signage), CA-13a (Inventory Update), CA-13d (Public Education), CA-14b (Zoning), and CA-14c (Incentives).



The Boyd Gatehouse was built in 1879 and now hosts the Marin History Museum.

## Focal Points

Focal points provide orientation by serving as landmarks and designating important places. The Downtown is a focal point because of its taller buildings, the church, and its density, history and lively walkable environment. The hills are focal points because of their size and natural beauty, as are the San Rafael and San Pablo Bays. The Marin County Civic Center is a focal point because of its architecture and important public use.

Views to focal points and entrances into focal points should be recognized and enhanced where desirable. The land uses in the Downtown and Marin Civic Center should continue to be concentrated within their defined areas to further strengthen the character of these areas. Downtown should continue to be characterized by pedestrian oriented uses and its historic buildings, in order to retain its notable character.

### CD-5. Views.

Respect and enhance to the greatest extent possible, views of the Bay and its islands, Bay wetlands, St. Raphael's church bell tower, Canalfront, marinas, Mt. Tamalpais, Marin Civic Center and hills and ridgelines from public streets, parks and publicly accessible pathways.

**CD-5a. Views.** Improve access to and enhance views of the Canalfront. Implement the Canalfront Conceptual Design Plan.

Responsibility: Community Development

Timeframe: Short Term

Resources: Grants, Staff Time

See LU-2a (Development Review) and NH-74a (Design Plan and Vision for the Canalfront).

### CD-6. Hillside and Bay.

Protect the visual identity of the hillsides and Bay by controlling development within hillside areas, providing setbacks from the Bay, and providing public access along the Bay edge.

**CD-6a. Hillside Design Guidelines.** Continue to implement hillside design guidelines through the design review process. Update the guidelines as needed.

Responsibility: Community Development

Timeframe: Ongoing

Resources: Fees

**CD-6b. Wetland Setbacks.** Continue to implement the wetland setbacks addressed in Policy CON-4 and in the zoning ordinance.

Responsibility: Community Development

Timeframe: Ongoing

Resources: Fees

**CD-6c. Public Access Opportunities.** Continue to evaluate public access opportunities through the development review process.

Responsibility: Community Development

Timeframe: Ongoing

Resources: Fees

See also C-27c (Bay Trail).

## CD-7. Downtown and Marin Civic Center.

Build upon the character of these areas by controlling land uses to clearly distinguish their boundaries; by recognizing Mission San Rafael Arcangel and St. Raphael Church, Marin Civic Center, and other buildings that help define the City's character, and requiring that these and other architectural characteristics and land uses that give these areas their identity are strengthened.

See LU-2a (Development Review).

## Gateways

Gateways are the entry points to the city or a specific area. A gateway could be a subtle change in the landscaping or a natural feature such as a hill which provides a vantage point. A gateway could also be a noticeable change in land use or a boundary marker. San Rafael's gateways are identified on maps.

## CD-8. Gateways.

Provide and maintain distinctive gateways to identify City entryways.

**CD-8a. Gateways.** Evaluate each of the gateways defined on the design element maps to determine what natural, architectural, signage or landscape treatments should further establish these locations as identifiable gateways within the City, and implement the desired improvements as part of the City's Capital Improvement program.

Responsibility: Public Works

Timeframe: Long Term

Resources: Economic Development, Grants, Staff Time, Capital Improvement Program

See also NH-37a (Freeway Ramps).

## Transportation Corridors

San Rafael's transportation corridors are where most people develop their impression of the City. A well-designed corridor should be inviting, attractive and appear visually organized. A corridor's character should be of native landscaping, a prosperous commercial street, or a groomed neighborhood passageway. Some of San Rafael's major corridors are the freeways, Second and Third Streets in the Downtown, Lincoln Avenue and Redwood Highway, Pt. San Pedro Road, Miracle Mile and the roadways that connect San Rafael to neighboring communities.

Corridors could be visually improved through streetscape programs that include trees, streetlights, and other furnishings. The visual quality of corridors can also be enhanced by requiring consistent building setbacks, controlling the mass and height of buildings, architectural guidelines, landscaping and signage. Each corridor should be evaluated to determine the unique set of controls and features that may enhance its visual appearance.

## CD-9. Transportation Corridors.

To improve the function and appearance of corridors, recognize those shown on Exhibits 17 and 18 and define each corridor's contribution to the City based upon its land use and transportation function and how it is experienced by the public.



**CD-9a. Corridor Design Guidelines.** Develop specific design guidelines for each corridor that address building massing, articulation of building facades, detailing, lighting, landscaping, street trees and other desired infrastructure and characteristics. Include appropriate zoning code provisions.

Responsibility: Community Development, Public Works  
Timeframe: Long Term  
Resources: Staff Time

**CD-9b. Right-of-Way Landscaping.** Encourage Caltrans to install and maintain landscaping along its right-of-ways.

Responsibility: Public Works, Community Development  
Timeframe: Ongoing  
Resources: State and Federal Funds

See also CON-16a. (Distribution of Information) and C-22a (Native Plants Along Roadway).

## Design Quality

As modifications are made to San Rafael, whether through public improvements to streets, parks or other public infrastructure, or as private development affects neighborhoods or the Downtown, the design quality of these changes can determine whether they improve or detract from the quality of life in San Rafael. This section of the Community Design Element recognizes the important qualities of streets, the Downtown, and other neighborhoods, and provides design direction for future development. In many instances implementation of the policies will require the preparation of detailed guidelines or other programs. Design Guidelines should provide a framework of design principles without mandating any one style or genre. See the Neighborhoods Element for design policies related to specific neighborhoods.

### CD-10. Nonresidential Design Guidelines.

Recognize, preserve and enhance the design elements that contribute to the economic vitality of commercial areas. Develop design guidelines to ensure that new nonresidential and mixed-use development fits within and improves the immediate neighborhood and the community as a whole.

**CD-10a. Visual Compatibility.** Ensure that new structures are visually compatible with the neighborhood and encourage neighborhood gathering places. Guidelines may address screening of service functions, materials and detailing, screening of roof equipment, lighting, landscaping, outdoor café seating and pedestrian amenities.

Responsibility: Community Development  
Timeframe: Ongoing  
Resources: Staff Time

**CD-10b. Compatibility of Patterns.** Adopt design guidelines to ensure compatibility of nonresidential building patterns. Guidelines may address setback patterns, parking and driveway patterns, building scale, height and building setbacks, transition between commercial and residential districts, signage and landscaping.

Responsibility: Community Development  
Timeframe: Long-Term  
Resources: Staff Time

**CD-10c. Successful Design Portfolio.** Establish a portfolio of desirable projects illustrating successful design.

Responsibility: Community Development  
Timeframe: Long Term  
Resources: Staff Time

For Downtown Design, see NH-29 (Downtown Design) for policies and programs related to recognizing, preserving and enhancing Downtown's design elements.

## CD-11. Multifamily Design Guidelines.

Recognize, preserve and enhance the design elements that ensure multifamily housing is visually and functionally compatible with other buildings in the neighborhood. Develop design guidelines to ensure that new development fits within and improves the character defining elements of neighborhoods.

**CD-11a. Compatibility of Building Patterns.** Adopt design guidelines to ensure compatibility of neighborhood building patterns. Guidelines should address setback patterns, parking and driveway patterns, building scale, transitions between land use districts, height and building setbacks, as well as entries, roof design, roof equipment, windows, architectural style, materials and detailing, lighting and landscaping.

Responsibility: Community Development

Timeframe: Long Term

Resources: Staff Time

See CD-10c. (Successful Design Portfolio).

## CD-12. Industrial Areas.

Recognize the economic importance of industrial areas to the community. Require building and landscape improvements to create a visually comfortable and welcome appearance of the streetscape along roadways in industrial areas adjacent to residential neighborhoods.

**CD-12a. Landscaping.** Adopt design guidelines to address and modify zoning code landscape requirements to ensure compatibility with adjacent residential neighborhoods.

Responsibility: Community Development

Timeframe: Long Term

Resources: Staff Time

**CD-12b. Sidewalk and Street Trees.** Install or improve sidewalks and street trees in existing industrial areas as redevelopment occurs, through the development review process.

Responsibility: Community Development

Timeframe: Ongoing

Resources: Private

**CD-12c. Unlawful Storage.** Use code enforcement to eliminate unlawful storage and to assure property maintenance.

Responsibility: Community Development

Timeframe: Ongoing

Resources: Staff Time, Fines

See EV-8a (Industrial Zoning).

## CD-13. Single-Family Residential Design Guidelines.

Recognize, preserve and enhance the design elements that contribute to the livability of neighborhoods and their visual appearance. Recognize that each neighborhood is unique, and that design review must consider the distinct characteristics of individual neighborhoods. Develop design guidelines to ensure that new development fits within and improves the character-defining elements of neighborhoods.

See CD-10c (Successful Design Portfolio), H-2a (Design Concerns of Single-Family Homes) and H-2b (Compatibility of Building Patterns).

## CD-14. Recreational Areas.

In multifamily development, require private outdoor areas and on-site common spaces for low and medium densities. In high density and mixed-use development, private and/or common outdoor spaces are encouraged. Common spaces may include recreation facilities, gathering spaces, and site amenities such as picnicking and play areas.

**CD-14a. On-Site Recreational Areas.** Continue requirements for on-site recreational areas as specified in the zoning ordinance.

Responsibility: Community Development

Timeframe: Ongoing

Resources: Fees

## CD-15. Participation in Project Review.

Provide for public involvement in the review of new development, renovations, and public projects with the following:

- Design guidelines and other information relevant to the project as described in the Community Design Element that would be used by residents, designers, project developers, City staff, and City decision makers;
- Distribution of the procedures of the development process that include the following: submittal information, timelines for public review, and public notice requirements;
- Standardized thresholds that state when design review of projects is required (e.g. residential conversions, second-story additions); and
- Effective public participation in the review process.

**CD-15a. Notification and Information about Development Projects.** Continue to enhance San Rafael's public notification and neighborhood meeting process to encourage early participation in the review of projects. Create succinct and understandable written handouts to guide property owners, designers, residents and business owners through the City submittal, review and approval processes. Continue notifying neighborhood and homeowner associations about proposed projects in nearby nonresidential areas. Evaluate the adequacy of notification procedures and enhance as needed. For example, consider requiring notification of non-owner occupants and requiring large on-site visible notice of projects under review.

Responsibility: Community Development

Timeframe: Ongoing; Short Term (evaluation of notification process)

Resources: Staff Time, Fees

**CD-15b. Thresholds for Design Review.** Since 2004, some thresholds have been adjusted for projects. Reevaluate thresholds for design review to ensure sufficient public involvement in the evaluation of design review permits.

Responsibility: Community Development

Timeframe: Short Term

Resources: Staff Time

See EV-17a (Pre-Submittal Process), G-7a (Review of Facilities Proposed by Other Agencies), I-5a (Design Review), and H-3a (Neighborhood Meetings).

## CD-16. Property Maintenance.

Provide incentives and enforcement to achieve desirable property maintenance.

**CD-16a. Code Enforcement.** Continue code enforcement efforts for trash and litter removal and other maintenance issues in all types of property.

Responsibility: Community Development

Timeframe: Ongoing

Resources: Staff Time, Fines

**CD-16b. Educational Materials.** Continue to provide programs and educational materials to inform property owners about property maintenance requirements in accordance with zoning regulations and design guidelines.

Responsibility: Community Development  
Timeframe: Ongoing  
Resources: Staff Time

**CD-16c. Loan Program.** Encourage lower income property owners to use the Housing Authority's loan program.

Responsibility: Community Development  
Timeframe: Ongoing  
Resources: Staff Time

See NH-4a (Code Enforcement), NH-4b (Design Review Conditions of Approval) and NH-4c (Property Maintenance Standards Ordinance).

## CD-17. Street Furnishings.

Encourage appropriate benches, trash containers, street lighting, public art, and other street furnishings. Select styles compatible with individual neighborhoods and the Downtown to strengthen their identities.

**CD-17a. Street Furnishings.** Provide street furnishings that are consistent with applicable design style. Work with neighbors and businesses to fund program.

Responsibility: Public Works, Community Services  
Timeframe: Long Term  
Resources: Capital Improvements

See LU-2a (Development Review).

## CD-18. Landscaping.

Recognize the unique contribution provided by landscaping, and make it a significant component of all site design.

**CD-18a. Zoning Regulations for Landscaping.** Evaluate and amend as necessary, the Zoning Ordinance's landscaping provisions to promote development with a strongly landscaped character. The intent is that individual neighborhood character be developed and maintained, architecture be softened by plant materials where appropriate, conflicting uses be buffered, parking areas be screened, comfortable outdoor living and walking spaces be created, air pollution be mitigated and developments be made water efficient through the use of a variety of site-appropriate plant material.

Responsibility: Community Development  
Timeframe: Short Term  
Resources: Staff Time

## CD-19. Lighting.

Allow adequate site lighting for safety purposes while controlling excessive light spillover and glare.

**CD-19a. Site Lighting.** Through the design review process, evaluate site lighting for safety and glare on proposed projects.

Responsibility: Community Development  
Timeframe: Ongoing  
Resources: Planning application fees, Staff Time

**CD-19b. Lighting Plan.** Require new development and projects making significant parking lot improvements or proposing new lighting to prepare a lighting plan consistent with the Design Guidelines for review by City planning staff.

Responsibility: Community Development  
Timeframe: Short Term  
Resources: Staff Time

See also I-6d (Street Lighting Program).

## CD-20. Commercial Signage.

Provide sign regulations and guidelines that allow adequate visual identification necessary for successful commercial uses, while also taking into consideration the visual impact along any given roadway.

**CD-20a. Sign Ordinance.** Update the Sign Ordinance and, when developing regulations, take into account the cumulative effects of possible signage along a roadway or corridor.

Responsibility: Community Development  
Timeframe: Short Term  
Resources: Staff Time

## CD-21. Parking Lot Landscaping.

Provide parking lot landscaping to control heat build-up from pavement, reduce air pollution, provide shade cover for vehicles and soften the appearance of the parking lot. Emphasize the use of trees, and limit the height of shrub plantings so as to avoid creating security problems.

**CD-21a. Parking Lot Landscaping Requirements.** Update parking lot landscape requirements to increase the screening of parking lots from the street and nearby properties. Requirements would address appropriate size and location of landscaping, necessary screening consistent with security considerations, tree protection measures, and appropriate percent of shade coverage required of parking lot trees. Include maintenance requirements in all approvals.

Responsibility: Community Development  
Timeframe: Short Term  
Resources: Staff Time

**CD-21b. Parking Lot Landscape Enforcement.** Require that newly installed parking lot landscaping be maintained and replaced as needed. Assure that landscaping is thriving prior to expiration of the required 2-year maintenance bond.

Responsibility: Community Development  
Timeframe: Ongoing  
Resources: Staff Time

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