

PLANNING COMMISSION RESOLUTION NO. 9494

County of Santa Clara, State of California

**GUIDELINES FOR
ARCHITECTURE AND SITE APPROVAL**

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INTRODUCTION

A. WHAT IS ARCHITECTURE AND SITE APPROVAL?

Architecture and Site Approval (ASA) is a procedure established by the County of Santa Clara Zoning Ordinance to review the quality of site and architectural design associated with proposed projects. ASA frequently results in conditions of approval being established which change and improve development design.

B. ASA COMMITTEE

In order to promote excellence of development, the Zoning Ordinance establishes a five-member committee, including one Planning Commissioner, to review each project proposal and establish conditions of approval. In carrying out this task, the committee examines numerous factors affecting development excellence, including: design, environmental impacts, landscaping, signs, traffic safety, drainage, fire protection, noise and energy.

C. INTENT OF ASA

Specifically, the County Zoning Ordinance provides that it is the intent of ASA to “secure the general purposes of this ordinance and the General Plan and to maintain the character and integrity of the neighborhood by promoting excellence of development, preventing undue traffic hazards or congestion, and encouraging the most appropriate development and use of land in harmony with the neighborhood.” (Sec. 51-1, emphasis added)

D. DEVELOPMENT REQUIRING ASA

ASA is required in all industrial, commercial, professional office, historic and scenic zoning districts. It is also required in certain multiple residential zoning districts and other designated zoning districts. In addition to the specific requirements of individual zoning districts, the requirements for ASA may arise as a condition of a variance, special permit, or a use permit.

E. STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

There are three principal sources for the policy framework within which the ASA establishes the conditions of approval for individual development projects. First are the uniform standards, ordinances and resolutions adopted by the County Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission. These standards leave little room for interpretation in their application to individual projects. Requirements regarding setbacks, parking spaces, and maximum building height must either be satisfied, or a variance from these standards justified in a public hearing.

A second policy source is the County General Plan. The Plan establishes desired community conditions, goals and policies. It also contains certain criteria for

evaluating the merit of specific development proposals.

The third source for the ASA policy framework has arisen from recent experience with the functioning of various land uses both here and elsewhere in the nation. Policies toward these land uses have been developed based on both successful land development projects and problems associated with past failure to require adequate conditions of a development project.

In practice, these latter policy sources have been more akin to guidelines to reaching a goal of development excellence in the County of Santa Clara, rather than formal inflexible standards.

The guidelines approach attempts to integrate into project design an awareness of potential impacts of the proposed development, so as to bring about a better use of the land.

F. FLEXIBILITY

A key advantage of the development guidelines over standards has been their flexibility. The guidelines merely represent the most current knowledge regarding the reasons for the success or failure of land development. Unforeseen circumstances or an innovative approach may result in an approval design and site plan at variance with the guidelines. As we learn through the evaluation of different projects and designs, new guidelines may be added and former guidelines modified or removed. Nevertheless, throughout the process the basic goal of development excellence remains unchanged.

G. WHY WRITTEN GUIDELINES?

One danger of such flexible guidelines is that their implementation tends to be rather significantly affected by the attitudes and personal experiences of those who are responsible for enforcing them. Unless they are well thought out, clearly written down, and carried out in an intelligent manner, guidelines' vaunted flexibility can degenerate into inconsistency, arbitrariness and lack of fairness. This is why some jurisdictions tend to rely heavily on simplistic and inflexible written standards that are insensitive to the dynamics of new design ideas and building techniques.

These Guidelines for Architecture and Site Approval represent an attempt on the part of the County of Santa Clara to overcome the weaknesses of traditional approaches to design review. By emphasizing that they are but the current means to a goal, avoidance of simplistic implementation may be avoided. Most important, they can be easily updated and changed, based on actual experience with them.

H. HOW TO USE THE GUIDELINES

1. The first step in reviewing a submitted development proposal is reference to

the General Plan and the Zoning Ordinance. The project should be examined for its conformance with the minimal standards established for the zoning district in which it is located. If it is outside an urban service area, it should conform to the development policies and allowable uses stated in the General Plan. Items to look for regarding zoning are the building setback, height, lot coverage, etc. Staff should be aware of certain exceptions in the zoning ordinance which may be used to produce a better project. One example is the exception to residential setback requirements (Sec. 41-3) which facilitates greater compatibility with the neighborhood.

2. Secondly, standards and special ordinances have been adopted or drafted for certain special uses/areas of the County. These standards have been adopted for guidance to the staff and public. These “uses/areas” are listed below and the relevant standards and ordinances are available to the public and have been gathered together in a compendium for staff use. Should a proposed development fall within one of these use categories or geographic areas, reference should be made to the appropriate document for the preparation of possible conditions of development.

County Resolutions, Policies, Ordinances, etc., which should be employed in certain cases during ASA review:

- a. Agricultural Stand Signs
 - b. Billboards
 - c. Cluster Permits
 - d. Farmer’s Market Standards
 - e. Fire Access
 - f. Historical Districts
 - g. Horses
 - h. Mobile Homes
 - i. Off-Street Parking Standards
 - j. Preschools
 - k. Quarries
 - l. Service Station Standards
 - m. Standards for Redevelopment of Previously Approved Service Station to Convenience Commercial with Gas Service
 - n. Solar Access for New Subdivision Development
 - o. Timber Harvesting
 - p. Summary of Zoning Regulations
3. Thirdly, staff should review the guidelines which follow in this document. Where particular guidelines are determined to be relevant to a specific development proposal, they should be translated into appropriate conditions of development. When in doubt about how to apply guidelines to a particular project, check recent ASA actions for similar projects.

The guidelines may be reviewed as containing a series of

objectives for achieving development excellence in the County of Santa Clara. It is not the County's purpose to require each development to satisfy every applicable objective. Because of site restrictions or an innovative approach, some individual objectives may not be met. The ultimate test is whether overall, balancing very successful attainment of some objectives with not fully reaching others, the guidelines may have been satisfied by the proposed project.

4. The last step is to review any environmental assessment which may be required for the proposed project. Assessments may point out problems which could have been overlooked during the normal architecture and site approval procedure. Any such adverse impacts discovered through the assessment process would be mitigated by additional conditions imposed by ASA.
5. It should be noted that during the approval process, several additional plans may be required besides the initial site plan or building elevations/floor plan. Most commonly required is the landscape plan. Sign plans are most frequently required of commercial developments. Recently, the County has begun requiring energy conservation plans in certain cases.
6. When reviewing development proposals, staff time should not be wasted in conditioning inadequate development applications. No application should be considered complete which is in conflict with the General Plan or the Zoning Ordinance. Applications which in general fail to satisfy the guidelines or special ordinances or major aspects of them should also not be considered complete for the purpose of formal review and conditioning by the ASA Committee. In refusing to certify the application as complete, staff should make applicants aware of the specific inadequacies of their application.

I. UPDATING THE GUIDELINES

Following approval of these initial guidelines by the Planning Commission, they may be formally updated at the request of staff or individual commissioners. Deletions, changes and additions would be presented to the Planning Commission for its approval.

GUIDELINES FOR ARCHITECTURE AND SITE APPROVAL

I. DESIGN

The appearance of spaces, buildings, and other structures has a material and substantial relationship to property values. In the past, many communities and neighborhoods have deteriorated through poor planning, a haphazard development approach, neglect of proper design standards, and the erection of buildings and structures unrelated to the sites and incompatible with the character of the neighborhood. This has resulted in such problems as the destruction of desirable natural land and vegetative forms, the creation of drainage and erosion problems on adjacent property, and the construction of structures out of scale and harmony with their neighborhoods. An objective of the design guidelines is to help alleviate these and other problems associated with poor design.

A. ARCHITECTURE

Structures should create an attractive and interesting exterior form through variation in surface, colors, textures and materials which carry through on all sides. For example, is sun and shade created through multiple outside surfaces? A change in level? Or does the project offer only expanses of blank wall completely incompatible with its surroundings? The architecture should create an enjoyable environment for those who will be working, shopping, or living in the proposed development.

1. Excellence of Design

Excellence of design is the most important architectural element making for a positive evaluation of a proposed project. A failure to achieve all the objectives suggested by the various guidelines is most likely to be accepted if all structures are of superior design and tied together with hard surfaces of quality material such as brick or tile. A key question would be whether the proposed project represents a clear improvement of the site's and neighborhood's aesthetic environment.

2. Scale

Structures should be designed to reflect a pleasing sense of scale with the neighborhood. Where massive structures out of scale with surrounding land uses are unavoidable, it is preferable that some landscaping/parking be eliminated so as to reduce building height to a scale more compatible with the neighbors. Alternately, taller buildings could be stepped down to lower buildings along the property periphery. A tall building separated from its neighbors by substantial landscaping and parking is not preferred. The result is frequently building isolation and breakup of the surrounding neighborhood. Conversely, in some more urbanized areas or

neighborhoods undergoing transition toward higher density, taller structures may be preferred over more suburban type structures.

3. Colors and Materials

Exterior colors and materials should blend with the natural setting, surrounding neighborhood and positive trends of the area. The use of natural materials and earth tones are encouraged. In some cases, such as structures built in certain cultural or architectural traditions, bright colors may be appropriate. Highly reflective surfaces and colors are discouraged. Materials should be selected for durability and ease of maintenance, as well as initial beauty. Artificial, composition type materials (including simulated wood or masonry) lacking strong evidence of durability and compatibility with traditional types of building materials are discouraged.

4. Roofs

Flat roofed box-like structures are not approved unless part of an exceptional design. Hip, gable, shed and mansard (which wrap around front and sides of the structure) roofs are usually preferred. Encouraged roofing materials include concrete tile, terra cotta tile, wood shingles and shakes (last two are not recommended in high fire hazard zones). Composition roofing may be satisfactory behind mansard roofs or on single family, duplex and triplexes. Machinery on the roof (except solar) should be screened from ground view and from neighboring buildings by projections which appear to be part of the roof.

5. Lighting

External lighting, when used, should be subdued. It should enhance building design and landscaping, as well as provide for safety and security. It should not create glare for occupants, neighboring properties or streets. Lighting fixtures should be durable and compatible with building design and landscaping. Tall fixtures that illuminate large areas should be avoided. Not allowed are festooned or naked bulb lighting, or flashing bulb lighting. Energy conservation should be given consideration when planning the amount and type of lighting. High crime areas should be well lit.

6. Compatibility With Neighbors

Structures should relate in size and general appearance to adjacent buildings and to the neighborhood in which they are located. No structures will be approved which is aesthetically incompatible with the best neighboring structures. Site design, arch architecture and landscaping; use of similar roofing, wall material and complementary colors are means by which a proposed project can be made compatible with its neighbors.

7. Security

Employ design techniques which will help to increase security and personal safety and which enables cooperative neighborhood awareness of potential criminal activity. Some techniques include: (a) limiting access to the project, (b) securing entry points into unoccupied units, (c) placing windows in such a way that occupants are able to observe people at entry ways and in common areas, (d) lighted access from unit to parked car, (e) emergency vehicle access, (f) fencing around sensitive facilities, and (g) strategic placement of public telephones.

8. Public Urban Spaces

Plazas or patios provided for the general public should include sitting space, access to the sun, protection from the wind, shade trees and a strong connection to the surrounding neighborhood and the street. (See The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces, by William H. Whyte.)

9. Intrusive Impacts

Design of developments (especially residential) shall include techniques to minimize visual and auditory intrusion impacts upon individual occupants from activities originating on adjoining sites. Design should also minimize situations where activities of occupants unreasonably intrude on neighbors. Especially important is mitigation of any potential noise impact on sleeping quarters through building or site design or sound insulation.

10. Additions and Accessory Structures

Such structures should be compatible with or an improvement upon the main or original structure so that the result appears to be an integrated whole. Alternately, such structures might blend in with the natural terrain and vegetation of the site.

11. Trash Collection and Other Service Areas

Trash containers and service and loading docks should be conveniently located and big enough. However, they must not interfere with other circulation or occupy parking spaces on the site. Trash containers should be located away from public streets and store entrances and should be completely screened with solid materials that are compatible with building exteriors. Masonry or concrete materials are usually preferred. Chain link enclosures are not acceptable except in industrial zones, with use of wood slats. Enclosures should be strong enough to withstand contact with a large garbage truck.

12. Mechanical Equipment

Mechanical and utility service equipment, including meter boxes, should be designed as part of a structure and usually should be screened. Screening should be part of the building design; accessory structures added for screening probably will not be acceptable. Solar heating equipment need not be screened but must be as unobtrusive as possible. There should be ready access to utility and mechanical services for maintenance.

13. Residential Conversions to Other Uses

Certain conversions, such as for nursery schools, should retain their residential appearance. This is when there is a need for the building to retain its residential appearance to be compatible with a surrounding residential neighborhood. Normally, conversions from residential to commercial occur in commercial zones. These conversions should be done so the exterior appears commercial by use of screen walls, awnings, new windows and doors, landscaping, walkways or other means.

14. Residential Design Factors

a. Common Area, Elderly and Children

Multi-residential projects (6 units plus?) should have an outside common area with which to identify and where people can meet. The elderly, especially, need a public/common space to meet, sit and observe interaction of other people. They should also have a minimal number of stairs to climb and access to public transit. Children need defined areas to play, separated from heavy vehicular traffic and located where parents can watch over children. Reduction of vehicular speed in housing areas is especially important for children's safety.

b. Private Open Space

All residential units should have adjacent private, outdoor open space with a screening fence, wall or vegetation. The space may be in the form of a yard, patio, balcony or deck. For single family, duplex or triplex there is recommended a minimum of 250 square feet of private open space, with 150 square feet for other multi-family units. No dimension should be less than six (6) feet. Private open spaces should be screened from the north wind, with a number of hours of direct sunlight available each day. To assure year-round use, shade should be provided from the sun in at least part of the open space or opportunity should be available for an owner-occupant to construct such shelter.

B. SITE DESIGN*

Natural land features should be incorporated into the overall project layout. Outcroppings, stream courses, specimen trees or groves should be used as focal points in the project when feasible and should not be overwhelmed by constructed forms. Where space is available, clustering of buildings to retain open space and facilitate flexibility and variety is preferred. The design should minimize the cost of services and streets and encourage efficient use of energy. Unacceptable are designs that favor strip development, urban sprawl, and sterile environments that do not allow for group interaction. Design should take advantage of available views, retain neighbor's views, and respect neighbor's privacy. Design should also take advantage of and protect solar access for both buildings and private and common open space.

1. Hillside Development Standards

Utilization of the County's development standards should balance the need to provide adequate utility and public emergency services against the need to protect the land form, vegetation, and animal life of the hillsides. Roads may be narrowed to avoid trees and stream beds and grading should be minimized by prohibiting mass grading for building sites and by allowing driveways in some cases to serve more than one lot in lieu of public streets.

2. Ridgelines

No buildings shall be placed directly on ridge tops visible from the Santa Clara Valley. Any construction near ridge lines should blend into the ridge. Removal of tree masses and specimen trees, construction of structures which protrude in a conspicuous way above the ridge line, grading which leaves an obvious scar or change from the natural land form and use of colors leaves an obvious scar or change from the natural land form and use of colors or reflective materials which contrast sharply with the natural ridge background should be avoided.

3. Grading

The General Plan requires that grading be minimized and that all activities which would disturb the soil be limited to slopes less than 30% slope. If there exists the potential of the site's finished elevation or altered drainage pattern having an impact on adjacent properties, preliminary grading and drainage plans will be required for review. Normally, preliminary grading plans are required for hillside developments, including driveways to the building site. Where grading is required, it should blend into the terrain to the maximum extent feasible. Steps should be taken to minimize any erosion resulting from grading and construction.

4. Setback Adjustment

The County will not automatically approve project designs which rigidly follow the setback standards established by the zoning ordinance. Setbacks may be adjusted on an individual basis in certain zoning districts as a means to effectuating excellent site design.

*See the Landscaping Section for further discussion

5. Boundary and Buffer: Fences/Walls/Berms (See also Landscape Section)

- a. Wood or Stucco Fences - Six feet minimum height. Wood does not have to be painted or stained. Stucco color should match buildings or be earth tone. They should be placed between (1) residential property uses, (2) multi-family units to separate private yards, (3) commercial uses and areas of transition out of residential, and (4) residential and certain commercial/office uses like (i) office parks, (ii) converted residential to commercial along Bascom or (iii) nursery schools, etc. Wood/stucco with masonry posts, or other means of making posts more substantial, are sometimes required around churches. (Walls over six (6) feet require a building permit.)
- b. Masonry/Concrete Walls/Berms - Six feet minimum height. Walls should be painted on both sides unless natural color is earth tone. They should be sited with landscaping (see Landscaping Section) along all boundaries between residential and commercial/industrial, except where noted above. Certain cluster, condominium and office developments may also require masonry or berm boundary structures based on density of development design and potential conflict with surrounding neighborhood. Walls along street frontages should minimize monotony by texturing or use of designed patterns on the wall, or varying the setback of individual sections. (Walls over six (6) feet require a building permit.)
- c. Buffer Wall on Street - No wall over three (3) feet in height erected as a noise/visual buffer between the subject use and street shall be closer than five (5) feet from sidewalk on average. This will allow for the growth of screening plants and placement of an earth berm in the intervening space. Vines should be trained over masonry walls and/or shrubs planted in front to help reduce the problem of graffiti. (Walls over six (6) feet require a building permit.)
- d. Chainlink - Placed around open industrial storage except on street side

and at residential zone boundary. Streetside of open industrial storage would be chain link with slats and intervening landscaping.

6. Underground Utilities

Underground utility connections shall be provided for new developments and for major development modifications requiring additional utility connections. Exceptions may be granted where a substantial cost difference with above ground utilities will occur.

C. ENERGY

1. Energy Conservation

By County ordinance, an energy conservation plan shall be submitted with tentative subdivision maps. Buildings should be designed to minimize reliance on mechanical heating and cooling through insulation and design. They should be designed and oriented to use sunlight for direct heating, solar water heating and illumination whenever possible. Natural ventilation and shading should be used to cool a building. Climatic factors such as prevailing winds, shade trees, window and door orientation, and the positioning of buildings on the site shall all be coordinated to maximize energy conservation.

2. Solar Access

By County ordinance, solar access shall be planned into the site design where possible. Solar easements shall be reserved where appropriate (usually lots one acres or less) and recorded with the final map. Encouraged are both active and passive solar heating. On the south side, an overhang or awning, protruding out from the wall about 1/4 of the window height, can be used to shade the summer sun and let in direct light from the winter sun.

3. Solar Hot Water

Solar water heaters shall be installed in new single and multiple-family residential buildings. Solar panels shall be integrated into the design of the supporting structure.

D. EXISTING STRUCTURES

All existing structures on property proposed for development should be examined regarding their potential value for continued use. Where structures of potential housing, architectural or historic value exist on the property in good condition, the following options should be considered in the order given. The structure should

be (1) integrated into the plans for the proposed development, (2) moved to another site where it might be utilized (the County HCD program or the San Jose Historical Museum, as well as house moving companies) should be contacted, (3) materially recycled or (4) demolished. Reduction of parking, setback or other requirements may be considered if it would facilitate preservation of a structure of value. Projects using existing structures of historic or architectural value should respect the traditional exterior style of the building (i.e. no “modernization”).

II. LANDSCAPING

Landscaping must be included on all development sites. All of the land area not otherwise dedicated to structures, vehicular or pedestrian access, private yards or patios, plazas or other common open areas, or parking, should be landscaped with new plantings and/or its natural vegetation retained or maintained. The landscaping must relate to the whole development, be integrated with building design, enhance the appearance and enjoyment of the project, and soften any adverse impact of buildings and pavement. It should consist of a combination of trees, shrubs and ground cover; ground cover alone will not do. A project's landscaping should blend with vegetation on nearby property if the neighboring vegetation is healthy and appropriate. Innovation in landscape designs and choice of plants is encouraged to serve both aesthetic and functional purposes.

According to the County Zoning Ordinance, Section 51-8(3), the County shall review the application to assure that it fulfills the following:

Requirements and factors relating to landscaping: The effect of landscaping in relation to harmony with adjacent development or to concealing storage areas, utility installations, or other unsightly development. The quantity, location, height and materials of walls, fences, hedges, screen planting and landscaped areas. The planting of ground cover or other surfacing to prevent erosion and reduce dust. The unnecessary destruction of existing healthy trees. The facilities and methods for insuring continued maintenance of landscaping.

A. LANDSCAPE PLAN

The plan should show the portion of the site to be landscaped and be drawn to scale. It should show the location of all plants to be placed on site, including existing plants. The irrigation system should be located with the type of equipment and materials noted. A list should be provided of all plants, including:

1. Common and botanical name grouped according to type (i.e. tree, shrub, ground cover),
2. Quantity,
3. Initial size at time of installation,
4. Spacing of plants (where individual location is impossible to show), and
5. A key to plant identification on the location plan.

B. AESTHETIC QUALITY

Plantings should enhance the architectural quality of proposed buildings. Normally, when planted for aesthetic purposes, trees and shrubs should be informally clustered together for accent in pleasing groupings and patterns rather than planted at regular intervals. Accent points can be created by plant groupings in large areas, sculpture pieces, outcroppings, stream courses, large tree specimens, etc. An informal character is especially desired for transition to neighboring developments. Formal plantings may be preferable for certain public areas like plazas, entryways, and well-maintained areas using clipped hedges, espaliers, etc.

C. FUNCTIONAL QUALITY

Landscaping's principal functional qualities are visual enhancement and shade. Additional functions facilitated through the right landscaping include exterior climate control by moderation of heat and wind, increasing energy efficiency of buildings, lower water consumption, provision of food, improvement of air quality with soot and dust trapping foliage, and reduction of glare and noise. In the rural areas, especially, landscaping can be used to reduce the dangers from water erosion and fire. All of these functions are achieved by judicious selection of landscaping which is intelligently located on the site.

D. SELECTION

The function of landscaping - shade, screening, erosion control or appearance, for example - should determine what types of plants are selected. Width, height, color, seasonal characteristics and ultimate growth should be considered. The selected plant materials should be tolerant of projected physical conditions on the site, reasonably resistant to insect pests and disease, and not shelter rodents. The overall compatibility of the ultimate form, size, density and color of trees, shrubs and ground cover at maturity should be considered. Also to be considered is the mutual compatibility of the water needs for the various plant materials as well as the ease of maintenance.

A generous variety and quantity of vegetation should be planted. A few dominant types are usually chosen, with subordinate types interspersed for accent. Repeating some types creates unity, but no types should be overused. Conversely, too many types can result in a landscape that is chaotic and formless. Variety should be achieved with respect to seasonal changes, leaf texture, color, growth habitat, life span, and size at maturity.

Where landscaping is intended to perform a function such as screening or shading, where the function is deemed essential its initial size should be selected to achieve its purpose within three years. As an alternative, landscaping should be supplemented by temporary architectural features such as screen fencing or an arbor. Landscaping materials and arrangements should be chosen to minimize maintenance, especially irrigation, unless an adequate maintenance program is

proposed.

I. Selection Priority

The origin of plants selected for landscaping should be made on the priority basis outlined below. See the suggested plant list in the County's Practical Landscaping booklet for examples. The Sunset Western Garden book is an excellent source for deliberating whether particular plants are appropriate.

- o Native or naturalized
- o Areas with a similar Mediterranean-type climate
- o Mild, temperate climate
- o Other

The system of priorities has been established based on: (a) probable ecological compatibility, (b) low water consumption, (c) resistance to pests, disease and fire, and (d) survivability following maintenance breakdown due to business failure or other causes. Drought tolerance qualities are to be especially encouraged for plants selected for placement in rural areas, industrial land uses and parking lot areas. In rural areas, low fire combustibility (especially near buildings) is a high priority.

Where the plants chosen do not reflect the above priority order, evidence should be presented to show that the plants were chosen as superior for some other purpose (i.e., aesthetic, root structure, etc.). Alternately, the overall landscape plan should be of superior design or with an excellent maintenance program.

2. Trees

Existing trees to be saved should be protected by barriers during the construction period. Trees should be planted along street frontage, especially in urban areas. In choosing trees for placement along streets and in parking lots to provide shade, reference should be made to "Suggested Street Trees for Santa Clara County," available at the County Planning Department. If the site is located within the urban service area of a city with a street tree planting program, then the specific species of tree can be coordinated with the city's program. Trees should be provided to shade large paved areas and to screen long building frontages. Trees may also be placed on other parts of a site for shade, screening, visual enhancement or to lower energy usage.

3. Trees for Energy Efficiency

Consider the usage of trees to increase building energy efficiency, except where they would interfere with a solar heated/cooled building. Provide

deciduous trees along south and east building exposures. Conifers and broadleaf evergreens should be considered on the west and north side of areas or buildings needing protection from prevailing winds. Review the County booklet Practical Landscaping for further discussion.

4. Shrubs

The density and placement of shrubs are to be determined by the plant size at maturity. The ultimate coverage should provide for a pleasing appearance in all landscaped areas. Except where screening is required, the shrubs should be clustered together for accent. As a rule of thumb, there should be about twice the number of shrubs as trees.

5. Ground Cover

Ground cover should be spaced for full coverage of bare ground in 2-3 years. Tanbark, gravel, rock are satisfactory as a temporary coverage device until living ground cover has filled in satisfactorily. However, it is unacceptable as permanent ground cover unless part of a superior design plan (e.g. Japanese rock garden tradition) or in children's play areas, etc. Synthetic plant materials, such as "astro-turf" or imitation shrubs, may only be used as a substitute for an existing paved area in certain circumstances. No ivy shall be approved for ground cover because of its association with roof rats.

6. Existing Vegetation and Natural Features

Healthy existing vegetation and natural rock formations should be kept and incorporated into site/landscape plans if they improve the site's appearance or lend themselves to its proposed use. Existing trees should be shown on the site and landscape plan as either to be retained or removed. Where at all possible, existing trees should be retained on the site. Lowest priority, in terms of preservation, are old orchard trees or "weed" trees. Top priority are oak, redwood, sycamore, pepper, olive and walnut trees. If necessary, olive trees may be boxed for relocation. On forested rural lots, priority is to preserve trees of 38" or more circumference, measured at four feet above ground. Measures are to be taken where necessary to protect retained trees during construction. Protective fences should be erected and earth movement restricted outside the drip line. (See chapter on tree preservation in Practical Landscaping.)

E PLACEMENT

Plants should be placed on the site with full awareness of their life cycles--for such factors as their ability to maintain and reproduce themselves, size at maturity and life span. Placement also should respect the different

environmental requirements of different plants; factors such as temperature, moisture , soil, sunlight and wind should be considered.

F. **LANDSCAPE PROBLEM AREAS**

The following are aspects of proposed landscaping which should be examined with special care. They are frequently problem areas in existing landscape programs.

I. Streetside Landscaping/Yards

The County Zoning Ordinance specifies minimum yard dimension requirements for each zoning district. All of this yard adjacent to the street shall be landscaped, except where needed for access or where occupied by existing structures. Allow for the growth of trees and shrubs when locating the landscape vegetation.

In certain residential districts, the street yard depth may be reduced to one equivalent to the average existing street yard on the block. Where residential uses are nearby on the same street as a proposed commercial/industrial use, the street-side landscaping of the latter may need to be expanded beyond the minimum required by its zone so as to reduce potential conflict with the residential uses.

The normal minimum depth of landscaping required along streets in commercial and industrial zoning districts is ten feet unless buildings exist in the setback area. The ten feet is interpreted as an average depth so as to accommodate various design requirements such as a sawtooth parking perimeter pattern. An earthen berm is strongly recommended within the yard, especially when it separates the street and parking lot. The berm accelerates the screening effect of the landscape vegetation. Where large parking lots or commercial expanses are involved, the ASA Committee may require additional perimeter landscaping. Insure that the landscaping allows adequate site distance for motorists and pedestrians entering or exiting the site.

2. Buffers and Screens

- a. Parking lots should have plants (four plus feet tall at maturity) placed in the street side yards, preferably on an earth berm. These will both screen vehicles from view and minimize the expansive appearance of parking areas.
- b. Buffer walls along streets should be separated from the sidewalk by a minimum of five (5) feet of landscape shrubs/trees (including vines trained over wall) to soften wall expanse and discourage graffiti. The

use of berms, using the buffer wall as a retaining wall, is encouraged.

- c. Along industrial, commercial, and office lot lines adjacent to residential, a 5 to 10 foot deep landscaped boundary yard is required. Mixed land uses, if allowed under ordinances enacted to implement the new General Plan, would be an exception to this requirement. This yard depth is necessary to enable trees or tall shrubs to develop. A lesser depth may be allowed in certain restrictive site conditions where the yard is combined with a masonry wall.
- d. In certain locations, such as around trash enclosures, carports, pool equipment and electric transformers, the landscaping should be designed to provide a visual screen from these less pleasing features of a development.

3. Parking Lot Interiors

Besides perimeter landscaping, islands and/or peninsulas landscaped with trees should be located in parking lots. Their minimum total area should be 50 square feet for every (a) twelve (12) parking spaces (3200 to 4750 square ft.), (b) 2000 square feet of unshaded pavement (after an estimated ten (10) years of tree growth), whichever results in more landscaping. All parking lots with more than 20 spaces should have 5% to 10% of interior landscaping. The landscaping should be distributed throughout the parking area. Planter areas should have minimal dimensions of five (5) feet except where the specific site situation makes this width impractical. This landscaping should include fast-growing deciduous or evergreen trees to create maximum summer shade and provide adequate visual relief.

4. Irrigation

Where plants will require irrigation, an appropriate permanent irrigation system must be provided. It might include sprinklers, bubblers, a drip system or hose bibs. The system must be designed for efficient, conservative use of water. Encouraged are automatic watering systems, set to water at night. A permanent irrigation system may be waived in rural areas if landscaping is to be predominantly drought tolerant. However, a water maintenance program is required for the first two seasons. For certain rural and redeveloped (modified) properties, a hose bib alone may be adequate.

5. Maintenance

When reviewing landscape plans, care should be taken to look beyond the maintenance program proposed on paper, such as an automatic sprinkler system. For certain uses and areas of the County, there is a high probability that extensive semi-public landscaped areas will not receive the maintenance

required to keep them in good condition. Examples would be industrial uses, multiple residential (especially triplexes and fourplexes), and certain lower income or more run-down sections of the County. In these situations, very low maintenance type landscape plans may be preferable. Procedures which might be employed would be greater use of (1) drought tolerant plantings, (2) permanent materials like decorative patio paving, and use of thick concrete planter boxes, (3) berms, (4) fewer but larger plants and more patio or plaza area, etc. (See "Development in Vandal-Prone Area.")

6. Development in Vandal-Prone Area

Where a proposed project is located in an area where vandalism and theft is especially common, special landscaping policies may be required. Examples are:

- a. Encourage use of more common, less expensive, type of plants.
- b. Require at least some large size street trees which are more difficult to steal.
- c. Use methodology such as open steel/iron grating which increases difficulty of theft.
- d. Use more permanent architectural features such as patio/plazas using decorative paving (i.e., not plain concrete or asphalt), raised planted areas bound by heavy concrete seat/wall, etc.

G. MODIFICATION (REDEVELOPMENT) OF PREVIOUSLY APPROVED DEVELOPMENT

1. Minor Modifications that do not adversely affect traffic demand and are either not adverse to or improve the appearance of the project need not force the project, as a whole, to meet current landscaping requirements.
2. Other Modifications that increase the apparent size of existing approved development by 50% or less, or whose purpose is conversion of existing structures to a different kind of use, may result in conditions for landscaping less extensive than would be required for a totally new development. However, the County may require the addition of landscaping to sites deficient in street yard or perimeter plantings or augmentation of existing planter areas. In older developed areas, such as Bascom (between San Carlos and 280) and along Stevens Creek/San Carlos, lesser landscaped yard depth and the use of planter boxes in redeveloped areas have been approved.
3. Planter Boxes (at least three (3) feet of soil depth) and/or trellises and/or decorative pavement, etc., are encouraged where larger landscaped areas

are impossible due to tight site restrictions and/or existence of older buildings with little or no setback. Planter boxes should be solidly constructed of wood, masonry or concrete. The grouping of plants in large planters is encouraged rather than single plants in a series of smaller planters.

III. PARKING AND DRIVEWAY DESIGN

The guidelines in this section supplement the Offstreet Parking Standards adopted by the County Planning Commission. All parking lot designs must satisfy the standards unless the applicant obtains a variance. The guidelines are used to assess the excellence of the parking lot design.

A. GENERAL DESIGN

The Parking Lot Plan should:

1. Show adequate vehicle maneuvering area.
2. Show impermeable surface only where absolutely necessary for parking spaces, driveways, maneuvering areas, and pedestrian access. No other area should be paved.
3. Be away from street behind proposed buildings, especially in strip development area, or screened from the streets by adequate landscaping. (See Landscaping Section.)
4. Be linked where feasible with parking lots and driveways of adjacent properties through a coordinated circulation network.

B. LANDSCAPING

Landscaping in all parking lots should be placed around the perimeter. In larger parking lots with greater expanses of paving, landscaping is also required within permanent planter islands interspersed throughout the lot and at the ends of parking rows. (See Landscaping Section for more details.) Plants should be predominantly drought tolerant and provide screening from passing pedestrians, vehicles and nearby buildings. Landscaping should include trees that will provide adequate visual relief and shading when they mature. To preserve existing trees, parking space standards may be modified. The landscaping must not block a driver's view necessary for safe vehicular movement.

C. CURBING

Curbing shall normally be placed along the perimeter of landscaped areas where it is adjacent to driveways or parking. No curbing shall be required for single-family, duplex or certain "home business" uses. The curbing shall be 4" to 6" continuous concrete, preferably wrapped under the pavement. Individual concrete wheel stops are not a suitable alternative curbing next to landscaped areas, but may be appropriate to protect buildings, fences, etc., where there is no landscape strip. Wooden railroad ties, etc., may be used to border landscaped in rural areas.

D. PAVING

Driveway and parking pavement in urban areas and for intensive rural uses shall be asphaltic concrete or better (includes "turfstone"). Oil and screening may be allowed for certain industrial truck parking/storage areas and rural low-intensity uses such as stables, churches, and single proprietor, low customer volume businesses. All-weather surfacing may be used for single-family driveways in rural areas.

E. PAVING TEXTURE

In large paved areas (10 plus spaces?), the paving material should in places be varied in texture, color or pattern (examples would be colored concrete, "turfstone" or cobblestone pattern concrete). This method would add visual interest and distinguish special uses such as pedestrian crossings, handicapped spaces, fire truck turnarounds, etc.

F. BICYCLE PARKING

Locking bicycle parking facilities should be provided for commercial and industrial developments, and should be situated in high surveillance areas to minimize risk of theft. Eight bicycle parking facility spaces may be substituted for one required vehicle parking space, up to a maximum of five percent of the vehicle spaces required.

IV. SIGNS

Signs must be an integral part of site and building design and must be compatible with the architecture of the building or complex. Signing should be simple, restrained and subordinate to the overall project design. Signs as described herein include materials, size, color, lettering, location, arrangement and supporting structure. According to the County Zoning Ordinance Section 51-8(2), the County shall review the application to assure that it fulfills the following requirements and factors relating to outdoor advertising:

The effect of outdoor advertising signs and structures in relation to traffic hazards, the appearance of highway frontage and harmony with adjacent development, and the possibility of a motorist gaining a favorable image of the County. The number area, bulk, shape, height, location, separation, clearance, projection, illumination, color and landscaping of such signs and structures.

A. THE MESSAGE

Text should be kept to a minimum. Location, size, materials and other features of a sign should be selected to achieve appropriate message visibility. Copy shall identify the business name and principal service, not advertise individual products unless it is the sole or principal item for sale.

B. TYPES APPROVED

Wall signs, graphic symbol signs and low-profile freestanding signs are encouraged. Roof signs have been approved in a number of cases. Distinctive architectural features, landscaping, window and merchandise displays can be used to communicate some of the image and identity traditionally conveyed by signs. The signs shall be stationary and may be internally or externally illuminated.

C. TYPES NOT APPROVED

Signs incompatible with building architecture, festooned or naked incandescent bulb lighting, rotating or flashing, reader type boards and paper signs are virtually never approved. Pennants, banners, A-frame signs, spinners, flags and other attracting devices are not approved, except during a 30-day opening period for a business. Fin signs (wall signs attached perpendicular to building) are normally not approved except where there was a previous approval, it is part of traditional architecture or located in a pedestrian oriented area. We discourage “can” type illuminated signs which are merely attached with no attempt to maintain architectural compatibility with the building. (Note: “Agricultural Stand Signs” for exceptions to above.)

D. CITY POLICY/SIGN AREA

City policy is used as a guide for approving and conditioning signs within urban service areas. This is especially so regarding sign area limitations established by the various cities. In the rare cases sign applications are made outside the USA, the County tries to be consistent with or more restrained than the sign area policy of the nearest city.

Use of city policy has one major drawback. City ordinances frequently list the maximum sign area, but the actual city site approval process normally may approve only lesser sign areas. Therefore, should the proposed sign area be close to the maximum stipulated in the city ordinance, it may be appropriate to check with the city's staff regarding what maximum sign area they would probably approve if the sign was in the city.

E. MASTER SIGN PROGRAM/MULTI-UNIT DEVELOPMENT

Multiple use commercial/industrial developments such as shopping centers and industrial parks should establish a master sign program. The sign program would include all signs proposed for the development. The overall format, color, script, size, height and dimensions are approved. Thereafter, Planning staff can approve individual signs consistent with the master sign program. Any freestanding sign should normally be to identify the complex (perhaps with a directory), nor merely one tenant.

F. FREESTANDING SIGNS

"Freestanding" signs are supported by one or more uprights, monuments, poles or braces upon the ground. Generally speaking, one freestanding sign is allowed per development. A monument type supporting structure, rather than the pole type, is preferred. A monument type supporting structure, rather than the pole type, is preferred. No minimum street frontage is required, such as in San Jose, which establishes a minimum of 150'. An additional freestanding sign may be allowed if the development fronts more than one street. Another exception would be in a shopping center which normally would allow only the single freestanding sign. Businesses in separate buildings along the street perimeter of the shopping center may have their own freestanding sign. Wiring to the sign shall be underground.

1. Height Limitations*

ZONE OR SPECIAL USE	HEIGHT MAXIMUM	COMMENTS
Offices	6'	Low directory sign. Require variance in OA zone.

ZONE OR SPECIAL USE	HEIGHT MAXIMUM	COMMENTS
Multiple Residential	3' to 4'	Message limited to name, address and vacancy or not. No internally illuminated sign permitted.
Churches	6'	Monument sign with no internal illumination. Directory permitted.
CN (Commercial)	12'	Monument signs preferred.
CG (Commercial)	20'	Depends on city policy, i.e., if city maximum height is less, follow that.
M (Industrial)	20'	

*Depends also on scale of other signs in area.

2. Placement

Location is limited to street frontage outside of 40' clear vision triangles measured along curb face at street corners. Sign must not hinder vision at driveway's entrance. However, sign may be placed near driveway providing sign face is high enough and sign structure thin enough not to obscure view. There is no policy for a minimum distance from the side property lines.

3. Sign Area

In those cases where the city would not approve a freestanding sign, but the County would, the maximum area of its face would be calculated as if it was a wall sign in the city.

G. WALL SIGNS

Signs are generally limited to walls with street frontage or where main entrance is located. Signs shall not be placed on other walls or where oriented toward single family residences.

H. ROOF SIGNS

No roof signs are permitted to protrude above the ridge line unless it is an existing approved roof sign. Not approved on office (OA) type use or residential.

I. OTHER SIGNS

1. Billboards/Off-Site Signs

See (a) County Zoning Ordinance Section 51-8(2), (b) County Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission resolutions regarding billboards, and (c) previous billboard approvals with attached conditions. All off-site signs are to be removed with development of property or redevelopment of property, except where only a minor modification is proposed. Off-site signs are approved by the Planning Commission through the use permit, and are permitted only in commercial, industrial and A-1 agricultural-residential zoning districts.

2. Marquee Signs/Reader Boards

Limited to special uses such as theaters and agricultural stands, sports arenas and service stations, where changeable copy is allowed.

3. Development Signs

Identification signs for new developments under construction are permitted, but must be removed at the time of final inspection of the project.

4. Driveway Signs

Small directional signs at driveway entrances or exits (no more than 10 square feet) are permitted. However, no name designation of business is to be on signs.

5. Window Signs

Window signs are allowed only on inside of windows. Maximum area allowed is 100 square feet, or 10% of window area, whichever is less.

6. Signs Near Freeways

Signs are not usually approved which are oriented toward a freeway or an expressway when the site of the associated business has no frontage on the freeway or expressway.

7. Grandfathered Signs

New business occupying a site containing existing signs should be informed at time of permit application that a reduction in total sign area and removal of some signs may be required as a condition of approval. Specific conditions regarding approved signs for the new use will be significantly influenced by the legal signs associated with

neighboring businesses, safety, and the aesthetic character of the resulting development.

J. LIGHTING

Lighting for signs should be in harmony with the sign's and the project's design. If outside lighting is used, it should be arranged so the light source is shielded from view.

K. SIGN MODIFICATIONS

Sign modifications may be approved by staff if they satisfy one or more of the following criteria:

1. Compatible with adopted Master Sign Program.
2. Same location, no increase in size or height or change in illumination, same basic color pattern, still compatible with architecture. Frame and message may change.
3. Same frame, internal change may be made.
4. New location with same or lesser adverse impact on average viewer.
5. Change in copy only.

A copy of the new sign plan shall be provided for the file.

L. SIGN REMOVAL

The County has no regulations or policy regarding removal of sign structures or contents thereof associated with a business which vacates a site. Some cities in the County have regulations requiring removal after a 30-day notice to an address having a sign of a business no longer in existence.