

About Design Review

This explains 1) what “design review” is; 2) how it fits into our efforts to shape our community; and 3) how you can participate in the design review decision-making process.

What is Design Review?

We shape our community in many ways. One way is to say what kinds of uses go where. This occurs through the General Plan and the Zoning Ordinance.

Another is to regulate the design of structures and other elements on property. *Design review guidelines* are a tool to help buildings “fit in” a neighborhood. These guidelines reflect our community’s vision for how an area should look. The City has design guidelines that apply to commercial and residential properties. The guidelines apply when someone proposes to make a change on his or her commercial property, or add a second story to a residential property.

Guidelines and Standards

Our design guidelines will suggest that buildings should be certain architectural styles and/or be in certain colors. Development standards in the Zoning Ordinance will regulate the size, location and scale of buildings. The relationship of new or changed buildings to neighboring buildings can be a concern. Other areas of concern can be outside lighting, landscaping and signs. These will be controlled through guidelines and standards.

The design guidelines can apply throughout the community. They also can apply just in certain areas, for example, the Downtown Village Specific Plan. Design standards will apply to certain kinds of uses (for example, multi-family developments).

The Decision-Making Process

The task of commercial design review is assigned to the Design Commission. The task of residential design review is assigned to the Planning Commission as part of their discretionary project review process. Individuals with expertise or interest in design issues serve on the Design Commission. Ordinary citizens serve on the Planning Commission. These bodies are appointed by the City Council. These bodies review proposed projects in light of the adopted design guidelines and ordinances (standards).

Professional planning staff also reviews projects for design quality and provides a report and recommendations for decision-makers’ consideration.

Decision-makers want to hear from those who have opinions about whether a project satisfies the community’s design guidelines. Suggestions on what changes might help it to meet those guidelines also are welcome. If you want to share your thoughts, see “[Public Hearings](#)” on the Planning page for some tips.

To Learn More

- *The Planning Commissioner’s Handbook*, League of California Cities, Chapter 4: The Planning Framework (http://www.ca-ilg.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/resources_PCH_sec4.pdf)
- *Curtin’s California Land Use and Planning Law* addresses design review issues, available from Solano Press, (www.solano.com)