



CHAPTER 5

Community Design and Historic Resources Element





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COMMUNITY DESIGN AND HISTORIC RESOURCES ELEMENT

INTRODUCTION

The Community Design and Historic Resources Element sets the policy framework for San Mateo's physical form, which is shaped first by nature and then by human factors. The natural context that has shaped the community and its history includes the city's topography, sloping from the undeveloped foothills to the San Francisco Bay, as well as the urban forest. Human factors in San Mateo's community design includes the architecture of historic and new buildings, the public spaces where people gather, gateways or entrances to the city, street trees lining neighborhoods, and art decorating public spaces. Urban design distinguishes the characteristics of specific areas, like residential neighborhoods and shopping districts, through differences in landscaping, building size and orientation, and treatment of access, entryways, and parking. Archaeological resources and cultural resources that are culturally significant to Native American tribes also serve as important connections to the city's rich history.

This element includes goals, policies, and actions focused on improving the city's urban tree canopy, enhancing the visual and architectural character of mixed-use and commercial areas, and encouraging the design of residential buildings that complement the neighborhood's visual and architectural character. It also includes guidance for the preservation of historic, archaeological, and cultural resources that help maintain San Mateo's unique identity. This element encourages new mixed-use and commercial development that respects the scale and rhythm of the surrounding buildings and provides human-scale design that cultivates pedestrian activity.

The Community Design and Historic Resources Element addresses the following:

- Natural Setting and the Urban Forest
- Archaeological and Paleontological Resources and Tribal Cultural Resources
- Historic Resources
- City Placemaking
 - » Sustainable Design
 - » Gateways
 - » Corridors
 - » Public Art
- Elements of Design
 - » Residential Neighborhoods
 - » Mixed-Use and Commercial Areas



RELEVANCE TO GENERAL PLAN THEMES



Sustainability in this Element:

- Encourages sustainable design features and elements into the design of new buildings.
- Supports new development that respects and responds to the natural topography of San Mateo and minimizes grading.
- Promotes the preservation of protected heritage trees and requires tree planting for new developments, which helps sequester carbon from the atmosphere.
- Supports the preservation of historic resources by retaining existing buildings, which reduces the consumption of new construction materials, uses less energy, and sends less waste to landfills.



Environmental Justice in this Element:

- Adds climate-adapted trees in neighborhoods with less street tree canopy.
- Explores funding sources and other forms of City support for low-income homeowners to plant and/or replace trees on their properties.



Community Engagement in this Element:

- Collaborates with Native American representatives to identify locations of importance to Native Americans, including archaeological sites, sacred sites, traditional cultural properties, and other types of tribal cultural resources.
- Increases public appreciation of historic resources by supporting groups and organizations who provide neighborhood workshops, public presentations, interpretive signage, and walking tours.
- Supports community involvement in the City's efforts to develop and maintain an attractive urban fabric that reflects San Mateo's unique visual and architectural character.
- Encourages the use of outreach and engagement methods that include broad representation and are culturally sensitive.



NATURAL SETTING AND THE URBAN FOREST

The natural setting of San Mateo is the foundation of its unique character and sense of place. San Mateo is set between two dominant physical features: San Francisco Bay and the ridge of hills along the western border. The city has developed between these two natural features following early transportation corridors, and the bay and western hills remain important natural views from many places in the city. Other key natural features of San Mateo include Coyote Point County Park, the Marina Lagoon, San Mateo Creek, and Laurelwood/Sugarloaf Park. The city also has a 3-mile length of shoreline along the San Francisco Bay, which includes a scenic vista point at Seal Point Park. San Mateo County's General Plan also designates the area surrounding Interstate (I-) 280 as a scenic corridor.

The City's urban forest—including both public and privately owned trees—is also a key part of the community's identity and quality of life. Trees contribute to the visual character of a neighborhood and can improve the aesthetics in commercial areas. Regular spacing of trees that are similar in form and texture provides order and coherence and gives scale to the street. A canopy of branches and leaves creates a sense of enclosure and comfort and provides shade, which will be increasingly important not only for aesthetics but for reducing building energy use and the urban heat island effect in a warming climate. While some city streets, such as Aragon Boulevard between El Camino Real and Maple Street, are lined with trees, the tree canopy is sparse in other areas.

This section provides policy direction for preserving and enhancing San Mateo's natural setting, minimizing the impact of hillside development, and protecting and improving the urban tree canopy. Goals and policies focused on access to nature and open space lands, natural resources, and parks and recreation can be found in the Conservation, Open Space, and Recreation Element. Strategies to combat climate change are further discussed in the Land Use Element and in the City's Climate Action Plan.



GOALS, POLICIES, AND ACTIONS

GOAL CD-1 Preserve and enhance San Mateo’s natural setting as an irreplaceable asset that is the physical foundation of the community.

POLICIES



Policy CD 1.1 **Respect for the Landscape.** Encourage new development to respect and respond to the natural topography of San Mateo.

Policy CD 1.2 **Preservation of Natural Views.** Preserve and enhance, to the extent feasible, publicly accessible views to the undeveloped foothills and the San Francisco Bay through the design of new development.

Policy CD 1.3 **Scenic Corridors.** Require new development adjacent to designated scenic corridors within San Mateo County’s General Plan to protect and enhance the visual character of these corridors.

GOAL CD-2 Minimize the impact of hillside development on the natural environment and public safety.

POLICIES

Policy CD 2.1 **Hillside Development Principles.** Require hillside development to minimize impacts by preserving the existing topography, limiting grading or cuts and fills, clustering development, and identifying opportunities for restoration or re-wilding. Limit development on steep hillsides with a 30 percent or higher slope.

Policy CD 2.2 **Minimal Impacts.** Require new development to preserve natural topographic forms and to minimize adverse impacts on vegetation, water, soil stability, and wildlife resources.

GOAL CD-3 Protect heritage trees, street trees, and tree stands and maintain the health and condition of San Mateo’s urban forest.

POLICIES



Policy CD 3.1 **Tree Preservation.** Continue to preserve heritage and street trees throughout San Mateo, where feasible.



Policy CD 3.2 Replacement Planting. Require appropriate replacement planting or payment of an in-lieu fee when protected trees on public or private property are removed.



Policy CD 3.3 Tree Protection During Construction. Require the protection of trees during construction activity; require that landscaping, buildings, and other improvements adjacent to trees be designed and maintained to be consistent with the continued health of the tree.



Policy CD 3.4 Public Awareness. Pursue public awareness and education programs concerning the identification, care, and regulation of trees.



Policy CD 3.5 Tree Maintenance. Preserve and regularly maintain existing City-owned heritage and street trees to keep them in a safe and healthy condition.



Policy CD 3.6 New Development Street Trees. Require street tree planting where feasible as a condition of all new developments.



Policy CD 3.7 Street Tree Equity. Plant new street trees to increase the tree canopy throughout the city, especially in gateway areas and in tree-deficient neighborhoods; encourage neighborhood participation in tree planting programs.



Policy CD 3.8 Tree Stand Retention. Preserve the visual character of stands or groves of trees in the design of new or modified projects, where feasible.

ACTIONS



Action CD 3.9 Urban Tree Canopy. Identify neighborhoods with less street tree canopy and adopt programs to plant climate-adapted trees within the public right-of-way, especially in equity priority communities and areas with a high heat index.



Action CD 3.10 Tree Planting Funding. Identify funding sources for tree planting programs for private, residential property on an annual basis.



Action CD 3.11 Tree Support for Low-Income Homeowners. Explore funding sources and other forms of City support for low-income homeowners to plant and/or replace trees on their property.



ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND PALEONTOLOGICAL RESOURCES AND TRIBAL CULTURAL RESOURCES

Archaeological and cultural artifacts are treasures that help to preserve the city's complex history for future generations. The Costanoan people, commonly referred to as Ohlone people, are estimated to have been some of the earliest inhabitants in the area between 5,000 and 7,000 years ago. It is estimated that in 1770, the Ohlone of the Bay Area numbered around 10,000. Forty years later, by about 1810, much of the native population and much of the traditional culture of these people had been destroyed in the face of relentless European encroachment and its devastating impacts – disease, warfare, displacement, and the California mission system. The City acknowledges its history as indigenous land as well as the rich living tribal culture in the Bay Area and strives to protect resources that are culturally significant to present-day Native American tribes through consultation and collaborative relationship-building. Grading and construction in the modern era have eliminated most aboveground record of the region's indigenous inhabitants, but records of these communities may remain undisturbed underground.

Paleontological resources (fossils) are the remains and/or traces of prehistoric plant and animal life exclusive of human remains or artifacts. Fossil remains, such as bones, teeth, shells, and wood are often found in the geologic deposits (rock formations) in which they were originally buried. Due to the scientific and educational value of paleontological resources, they are protected under federal and State law. This section provides policy direction for protecting archaeological, paleontological, and cultural resources. Policy direction for the protection of historic resources can be found under Goal CD-5 of this element.

GOALS, POLICIES, AND ACTIONS

GOAL CD-4 Protect archaeological and paleontological resources and resources that are culturally significant to Native American tribes and acknowledge San Mateo's past as indigenous land. Encourage development projects to recognize historical tribal lands.

POLICIES

Policy CD 4.1 Archaeological Resource Protection. Preserve, to the maximum extent feasible, archaeological sites with significant cultural, historical, or sociological merit for present-day residents or Native American tribes.

Policy CD 4.2 Tribal Cultural Resources. Preserve areas that have identifiable and important tribal cultural resources and comply with appropriate State and federal standards to evaluate and mitigate impacts to cultural resources, including tribal, historic, archaeological, and paleontological resources.



Policy CD 4.3 Tribal Consultation. Consult with Native American representatives, including through early coordination, to identify locations of importance to Native Americans, including archaeological sites, sacred sites, traditional cultural properties, and other types of tribal cultural resources. Respect tribal concerns if a tribe has a religious prohibition against revealing information about specific practices or locations.



Policy CD 4.4 Potential Archaeological Impacts. Consistent with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), prior to construction, consult the California Archaeological Inventory Northwest Information Center for project-specific reviews to evaluate the potential for impact on archaeological resources and determine whether or not further study is warranted.

Policy CD 4.5 On-Site Mitigation. If development could affect a tribal cultural resource or archaeological resource, require the developer to contact an appropriate tribal representative to train construction workers on appropriate avoidance and minimization measures, requirements for confidentiality and culturally appropriate treatment, other applicable regulations, and consequences of violating State laws and regulations.

Policy CD 4.6 Paleontological Resource Protection. Prohibit the damage or destruction of paleontological resources, including prehistorically significant fossils, ruins, monuments, or objects of antiquity, that could potentially be caused by future development.

ACTIONS

Action CD 4.7 Preconstruction Investigations. Consistent with CEQA, establish specific procedures for preconstruction investigation of high- and medium-sensitivity sites identified in the 1983 Chavez investigation, unless superseded by more recent investigations, to assist property owners, developers, and the City in making decisions when archaeological resources may be affected.

Action CD 4.8 Archaeological Sensitivity Data. Update and maintain the City's data on areas with high archaeological sensitivity.

Action CD 4.9 Paleontological Resource Mitigation Protocol. Prepare a list of protocols in accordance with Society of Vertebrate Paleontology standards that protect or mitigate impacts to paleontological resources, including requiring grading and construction projects to cease activity when a paleontological resource is discovered so it can be safely removed.

HISTORIC RESOURCES

Spanish exploration of San Mateo began in the 1770s, but European settlement of this area started around 1793 when the San Mateo area became an asistencia, or outpost, for Mission Dolores. After Mexican independence from Spain in 1822, the missions were divided into large land grants. Rancho San Mateo and Rancho de las Pulgas encompassed what became San Mateo.

By the end of the Mexican-American War in 1848, California had become a territory of the United States and obtained statehood two years later. The small village of San Mateo began to develop at the juncture of several stagecoach lines, established in the late 1840s and 1850s, and the San Francisco and San Jose Railroad, which began servicing the community in 1864. San Mateo became a popular destination for tourists visiting Crystal Springs Canyon and for wealthy San Franciscan families, who constructed lavish mansions. The commercial downtown developed around the intersection of the railroad station and B Street, and schools, utilities, and other public services were established to support the growing population. In 1894, an overwhelming majority of residents voted to incorporate the town of San Mateo.

From the late nineteenth century through the 1930s, numerous residential neighborhoods were established throughout San Mateo, particularly as former estates were sold and subdivided. These include subdivisions in the Central neighborhood in the late nineteenth century, and the San Mateo Park, San Mateo Heights, and Hayward's Addition subdivisions in the early 1900s. Residential development intensified following the 1906 earthquake and fires, with new development concentrated in the Hayward Park, East San Mateo, and North Central neighborhoods. Other notable developments included the Glazenwood neighborhood in the 1920s and the Baywood and Aragon neighborhoods in the 1930s.

As San Mateo's population evolved, it expanded from a town to an established community in the early twentieth century. Large numbers of Irish immigrants arrived in the 1860s and were followed by the first Chinese and Japanese immigrants the following decade. Chinese residents initially formed a small Chinatown at B Street and Second Avenue and later at Claremont Street and First Avenue around 1900.



Chinese residents continued to live in small clusters in the downtown area well into the 1940s. Japanese immigrants who arrived in San Mateo found employment as domestic workers and at the local salt plant; they also opened small businesses in the burgeoning downtown and became successful gardeners as part of the Peninsula's flower industry. By the turn of the twentieth century, they made up the largest Japanese community in the county. Following World War II, development increased significantly in San Mateo. Significant postwar development included the construction of the Hillsdale shopping center and large-scale residential tract developments west of El Camino Real.

This history is represented in the almost 200 historic resources and two historic districts as identified in the 1989 Historic Building Survey. Approximately 37 of these structures are individually eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. They range from historic buildings in the downtown to single-family homes from the late nineteenth century. In addition, there are six historic resources listed on the National Register of Historic Places and six historic resources on the State Register of Historic Places, as shown in Table CD-1.

State and federal laws and programs help to protect historic and archaeological resources, including the California Historical Building Code, which preserves California's architectural heritage by ensuring historic buildings are maintained and rehabilitated in accordance with historically sensitive construction techniques. In addition, the Mills Act, enacted in 1976, provides a property tax incentive to owners of qualified, owner-occupied, historical properties to maintain and preserve the historic property in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.

This section provides policy direction for the preservation of historic resources. Goals and policies focused on protecting archaeological and resources that are culturally significant to Native American tribes can be found under Goal CD-4 of this element.

Table CD-1 National Register and State Register of Historic Places in San Mateo

Historic Resource Name	Location	National Register	State Register	Year of Construction
Ernest Coxhead House	37 East Santa Inez Avenue	X	X	1891
Vollers House	353 North Claremont Street	X		1891
Hotel St. Matthew	215-229 Second Avenue	X	X	Early 1900
Eugene De Sabla J. Jr. Teahouse and Tea Garden	70 De Sabla Road	X	X	1907
National Bank of San Mateo	164 South B Street	X	X	1924
US Post Main Office – San Mateo	210 South Ellsworth Street	X	X	1935
Baywood Elementary School	600 Alameda de las Pulgas		X	1939

GOALS, POLICIES, AND ACTIONS

GOAL CD-5 Preserve historic and culturally important resources to maintain San Mateo's special identity and continuity with the past.

POLICIES

Policy CD 5.1 Historic Preservation. Identify and preserve historic resources, including individual properties, districts, and sites to maintain San Mateo's sense of place and special identity, and to enrich our understanding of the city's history and continuity with the past.

Policy CD 5.2 Historic Resources Preservation. Actively identify and preserve concentrations of historic resources, which convey the flavor of local historical periods, are culturally significant, or provide an atmosphere of exceptional architectural interest or integrity, when they meet national, State, or local criteria.

Policy CD 5.3 Historic Resources Definition. Define historic resources as buildings, structures, sites, and districts that are listed in or determined to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and/or California Register of Historical Resources, designated resources in the 1989 Historic Building Survey Report, and resources found to be eligible through documentation in a historic resources report.



Policy CD 5.4 Public Awareness. Foster public awareness and appreciation of the City's historic resources and educate the community about how to preserve and improve these resources. Increase public appreciation by supporting groups and organizations that provide neighborhood workshops, public presentations, interpretive signage, and walking tours.

Policy CD 5.5 Historic Resources Renovation and Rehabilitation. Promote the renovation and rehabilitation of historic resources that conforms to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Structures and the California Historical Building Code and prioritize historic structures for available rehabilitation funds.

Policy CD 5.6 Historic Preservation Funding. Pursue and promote historic preservation funding sources to incentivize the protection of historic resources, such as the California Mills Act Property Tax Abatement Program, Federal and State Historic Preservation Tax Incentives Program, and State Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit Program.

Policy CD 5.7 Demolition Alternatives. Require an applicant to submit alternatives to preserve a historic resource as part of any planning application that proposes full demolition. Implement preservation methods unless health and safety requirements cannot be met or the City Council makes a finding explaining the specific reasons why the social, economic, legal, technical, or other beneficial aspects of the proposed demolition outweigh the unavoidable adverse impacts to the historic resource. If a designated historic resource cannot be preserved, require City approval before the demolition of a historic resource.

ACTIONS

- Action CD 5.8 Historic Resources Context Statements.** Prepare a citywide historic context statement to guide future historic resource survey efforts to identify individually eligible resources and historic districts. If a neighborhood is identified as a historic district, prepare a more detailed historic context statement for that individual neighborhood.
- Action CD 5.9 Historic Resources Survey.** Establish and maintain an inventory of architecturally, culturally, and historically significant buildings, structures, sites, and districts. Proactively maintain an up-to-date historic resources inventory by seeking funding opportunities to update the historic survey. Prepare neighborhood-specific historic context statements prior to updating the historic resources survey.
- Action CD 5.10 Historic Preservation Ordinance.** Update the City's Historic Preservation Ordinance to create a framework for the designation of historic resources and districts, establish review and permitting procedures for historic alterations, demolitions or relocations, be consistent with federal and State standards and guidelines, and align with the other goals and policies outlined in this Element.
- Action CD 5.11 Preservation Incentives.** Explore the option to create incentives to preserve historic and cultural resources, such as reducing parking and other prescriptive requirements, allowing adaptive reuse, or establishing a transfer of development rights program.
- Action CD 5.12 Historic Resources Design Standards.** Create objective design standards for alterations to historic resources and new development adjacent to historic resources within historic districts. Use the Secretary of the Interior's Standards as the basis for these objective design standards to ensure projects have a contextual relationship with land uses and patterns; spatial organization; visual relationships; cultural and historic values; and the height, massing, design, and materials of historic resources.
- Action CD 5.13 Certified Local Government.** Explore the feasibility of becoming a Certified Local Government (CLG) to become eligible for federal grant funds and technical assistance in support of historic resource preservation efforts.

CITY PLACEMAKING

San Mateo's image and unique identity is composed of distinct residential neighborhoods, major open spaces, key views and gateways, major corridors, distinct shopping areas, train stations, landscaping, and the spatial arrangement of buildings and architectural styles. Public art can be found throughout the city, from murals and mosaics to interactive sculpture to temporary installations. The city's vibrant downtown, popular Hillsdale Shopping Center, and active dining scene also contribute to the city's image, create a sense of place for residents, and attract visitors from outside of the city.

Sustainable Design

Since many goals and policies throughout the Strive San Mateo General Plan 2040 promote San Mateo as a sustainable city, it is important to recognize that site layout and the design of buildings are major factors in meeting the objectives of sustainable design. Sustainability starts in the early design stages of a development, and the Land Use Element includes a number of policies and actions to ensure that features like walkability, transit access, and open space are integrated into new development. High-efficiency heating and cooling equipment and appliances can reduce water use, maximize energy efficiency, and improve indoor air quality, and are called for in the Public Services and Facilities Element. Drought-tolerant landscaping and the use of pervious paving materials can also reduce water waste and runoff into the bay, as noted in the Conservation, Open Space, and Recreation Element. This Community Design and Historic Resources Element focuses on locating and orienting structures on a site to take full advantage of solar access and shading, and to preserve natural resources, such as mature vegetation.

Gateways

Gateways are the key locations where people enter and leave the city, distinct districts, and neighborhoods. They act as a point of distinction between different areas and contribute to a sense of arrival to one place from another. Gateways into and within San Mateo include El Camino Real as it crosses the north and south borders of the city, entrances from US Highway 101 and State Route (SR-) 92, or Third Avenue at the edge of downtown. As gateways convey a sense of arrival and provide initial and lasting impressions, they should be attractive and identifiable. Gateways can express a pleasant welcome through architectural features, landscaping, and art. Signage can also help define city gateways uniformly.

Corridors

Corridors are the way residents and visitors most commonly see the city as they move through it. A well-designed corridor should connect to important destinations, provide a sense of orientation, be attractive, and project a positive image of the city. It should provide appropriate street width for neighborhood character, adequate lighting, accommodation for pedestrians and bicycles, and public spaces for gathering. Heights, setbacks of buildings, and the color and texture of paving materials should also be considered in corridor design.

Major corridors in the city include El Camino Real, US Highway 101, and the railroad. In addition to this element, the City's El Camino Real Master Plan also provides direction for enhancements to El Camino Real from SR-92 to the Belmont border, which will further its role as an important community corridor that supports a vibrant mixed-use community.



Public Art

Public art helps create an inviting atmosphere for gathering, fosters economic development, and contributes to vital public spaces. San Mateo’s Art In Public Places program recognizes that cultural and artistic resources enhance the quality of life for individuals living, working, and visiting the city. The program requires new commercial and multifamily residential projects valued over a certain amount to provide publicly visible art or pay an in-lieu art fee. Since its adoption, the program has resulted in new art installations throughout the city.

This section provides policy direction for developing and maintaining the city’s vibrant image. See the Land Use Element for guidance on different types and locations of future development; the Circulation Element for discussion of roadways, bike paths, sidewalks, and other transportation infrastructure; the Public Facilities and Services Element regarding utility undergrounding; and the Open Space, Conservation, and Recreation Element on the importance of parks and open space as integral parts of the community.

GOALS, POLICIES, AND ACTIONS

GOAL CD-6 Develop and maintain an attractive urban fabric that reflects San Mateo’s unique visual and architectural character.

POLICIES

Policy CD 6.1 Community Cohesion. Design new private development, streets, and public spaces to enhance social connection by providing human-scale street-fronting uses and community spaces, as appropriate.

Policy CD 6.2 Gateways. Develop gateways that visually announce key entrances to San Mateo by maintaining or establishing distinctive architectural, art, or landscape features.



Policy CD 6.3 Sustainable Design. Encourage integration of sustainable design features and elements into the design of new buildings, including locating and orienting buildings to access solar exposure, preserving mature vegetation to the extent feasible, and using green building materials.

Policy CD 6.4 El Camino Real (SR-82) Corridor. Strive to make El Camino Real a destination, not just a corridor for people to pass through, by encouraging improvements to the public right-of-way and private properties along El Camino Real that will make the corridor safer and more attractive for all users. Examples of such improvements include redesigned transit stops, an improved pedestrian realm, and updated/improved building façades. Incorporate the Guiding Principles of the Grand Boulevard Initiative into future plans for the El Camino Real corridor in San Mateo.

Policy CD 6.5 US Highway 101 Frontage. Encourage upgrading of the appearance of US Highway 101 and properties adjacent to the freeway through design treatment, screening, and right-of-way landscaping.

Policy CD 6.6 Signage. Maintain signage controls that appropriately regulate the design, size, type, illumination, and quantity of signs visible from corridors and create consistent signage that reinforces San Mateo's unique identity.

Policy CD 6.7 Public Open Space Design. Seek opportunities to establish public open spaces in new developments and new public buildings, and promote innovative and creative designs to create exceptional, unique, and functional spaces. Require signage that clearly delineates these spaces as publicly accessible.

Policy CD 6.8 Public Art. Continue to require public art as part of new development and ensure the art is visible and accessible to the public. Support public art as a resource that enhances the quality of life for individuals living in, working in, and visiting the city, improves the quality of the urban environment, and increases property values.



Policy CD 6.9 Inclusive Outreach. Involve the community in the City's efforts to develop and maintain an attractive urban fabric that reflects San Mateo's unique visual and architectural character. Use outreach and engagement methods that include broad representation and are culturally sensitive, particularly for equity priority communities. Communicate clearly how and at what stages members of the public can provide input for development projects under review.

Policy CD 6.10 Nighttime Lighting. Require nighttime lighting to be energy efficient, be designed to minimize light pollution and light spillage to adjacent properties, while protecting public safety.

ACTION

Action CD 6.11 Brand Identity Package. Develop a brand identity package for the City.

ELEMENTS OF DESIGN

Site design and the architectural style of buildings contribute to the look and feel of a city. The orientation of buildings, the massing and scale of the building, and other design elements can improve the visual aesthetic of an area. Buildings can be oriented to take advantage of surroundings such as fronting sidewalks in commercial districts, capturing scenic views, and/or minimizing environmental impacts such as flooding, wind, shadows, etc. Massing refers to the height, width, and shape of a building. Scale is the relative size of the building overall as well as the elements that make up the façade. Building materials, lighting, landscaping, and outdoor spaces also contribute to the overall appearance and experience of a site. The design choices for buildings vary depending on the area. For example, the design elements for an active mixed-use downtown, auto-oriented shopping center, office park, or residential neighborhood will be different.

Outside of this General Plan, other City regulations and plans also influence the design and architecture of new development. The Zoning Code adds more detail on allowed uses of land and buildings, the density of development and population, the height and bulk of structures, parking provisions, open space requirements, landscaping standards, and other design requirements. The Multifamily and Mixed-Use Objective Design Standards (ODS) provide clear and specific requirements for everything larger than a single-family home. Specific Plans guide infill development in several areas, including Bay Meadows and near the Hayward Park and Hillsdale Caltrain stations, and tend to allow greater flexibility in design than in areas not covered by Specific Plans. Throughout the city, projects that require a higher level of review must submit a Planning Application to ensure consistency with the General Plan and any applicable community or specific plans.

Streetscaping and other public landscaping also shapes the look and feel of San Mateo. The City's Department of Public Works has detailed engineering standards that work in combination with the Municipal Code and adopted plans to establish objective design standards within the public right-of-way.

Residential Neighborhoods

Each neighborhood in San Mateo is a reminder of the unique blend of architectural styles, building materials, scale, and street patterns that were typical at the time of its development. The shape of a house, its placement on the lot, its arrangement of doors and windows, its roof style, and its architectural style all make up the character of a building and contribute to the collective appearance of the neighborhood. In every community, residential neighborhoods grow and evolve while balancing the continuity and consistency of existing physical characteristics through the appropriate design of new development.



This section provides policy direction for the design of residential neighborhoods, and mixed-use and commercial areas. The Land Use Element includes additional goals and policies for shopping areas in transition and three focused planning areas in the city: Downtown, El Camino Real Corridor, and the Hillsdale Station Area. For additional policy direction on sustainability, see the Climate Change and Land Use section of the Land Use Element.

GOALS, POLICIES, AND ACTIONS

GOAL CD-7 Balance the growth and evolution of residential neighborhoods with the need to maintain and enhance their existing characteristics and physical qualities through the appropriate design of new development.

POLICIES

- Policy CD 7.1 Low-Density Residential Development.** Require new homes in the Low- and Very Low-Density residential designations, including single-family dwellings, duplexes, triplexes, four-plexes, and accessory dwelling units (ADUs) to be consistent with objective design standards as outlined in the City’s Residential Design Standards.
- Policy CD 7.2 Single-Family Design.** Encourage single-family additions and new dwellings that address the preservation and enhancement of neighborhood visual and architectural character through context-sensitive building scale, materials, architectural style and details, and privacy.
- Policy CD 7.3 Multifamily Design.** Encourage architectural design of new multifamily developments that enhances a neighborhood’s visual and architectural character by providing context-sensitive building and pedestrian-scale elements, high-quality materials and construction, open space, and resident amenities.
- Policy CD 7.4 Multifamily Parking.** Require new multifamily developments to design and site parking to avoid blank, ground-floor walls and to screen views of parking from the street.
- Policy CD 7.5 Multifamily Open Space.** Require that a portion of required open space for new multifamily projects be useable for passive or active recreation.

ACTION

- Action CD 7.6 Objective Design Standards.** Develop and adopt objective design standards that clearly outline the City’s design expectations for new single-family and multifamily projects.

Mixed-Use and Commercial Areas

This element aims to improve the visual and architectural character, livability, and vitality of mixed-use and commercial areas in San Mateo. It supports human-scale design that cultivates pedestrian activity in commercial and mixed-use areas by providing adequate sidewalk widths; activating ground-floor street façades with windows, plantings, and awnings; using high-quality construction materials; and including human-scale details and architectural features. New mixed-use and commercial development that respect the scale and rhythm of surrounding buildings, including by providing breaks in the building face at spacings common to buildings in the area and by stepping back upper floors, feels more appealing and welcoming to visitors. Sidewalk and pedestrian mall outdoor dining and parklets, the outdoor display of goods for retail uses, and public seating areas can add visual interest and activity to commercial and mixed-use areas.



GOALS, POLICIES, AND ACTIONS

GOAL CD-8 Improve the visual and architectural character, livability, and vitality of mixed-use and commercial areas.

POLICIES

- Policy CD 8.1 Objective Design Standards.** Provide clear, objective, and quantifiable design standards to guide new mixed-use and commercial development.
- Policy CD 8.2 Human-Scale Design.** Cultivate pedestrian activity in commercial and mixed-use areas by providing adequate sidewalk widths, activating ground-floor street façades with active uses, windows, plantings, and awnings, using high-quality construction materials, and including human-scale details and architectural features.
- Policy CD 8.3 Respect Existing Scale and Rhythm.** Encourage new mixed-use and commercial development to respect the scale and rhythm of surrounding buildings, including by providing breaks in the building face at spacings common to buildings in the area and by stepping back upper floors.
- Policy CD 8.4 Commercial Parking.** Encourage commercial projects to provide required parking underground to minimize the amount of ground-floor area dedicated to parking. When parking is at grade, it should be located towards the rear of a parcel, away from active street frontages and public spaces.
- Policy CD 8.5 Outdoor Display and Eating.** Support sidewalk and pedestrian mall outdoor dining and parklets, the outdoor display of goods for retail uses, and public seating areas to add visual interest and activity to commercial and mixed-use areas.

ACTIONS

- Action CD 8.6 Objective Design Standards.** Develop and adopt objective design standards for new mixed-use and commercial development to provide a clear understanding of the City's expectation for new project design, including pedestrian-friendly design.
- Action CD 8.7 Commercial Development Adjacent to Residential.** Develop and adopt objective design standards that define and require appropriate design transitions from commercial to residential zones.