



GOOD NEIGHBOR GUIDE TO THE DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS IN DEL MAR

Prepared by the Del Mar Ad Hoc Development Review Process Citizens’ Advisory Committee / Research Subcommittee

July 19, 2016

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1) Introduction

The Design Review process, while regulatory, has the underlying intent to try to protect neighborhoods and the unique character of Del Mar. This Guide is meant to provide some helpful tips that can encourage neighborliness and harmony before, during, and after the completion of new or remodeled structures in Del Mar. The majority of projects subject to the Design Review process are residential in nature, however, the process also applies to all non-residential structures such as commercial, institutional, public facilities, and public recreation. Note that many of the issues addressed here (such as view blockage or privacy) are enumerated in the Del Mar Design Review Ordinance (DRO) contained in Del Mar Municipal Code Chapter 23.08.. This guide is just meant to draw your attention to areas that may be of special concern to neighbors when a new project is proposed in a neighborhood; but you should also familiarize yourself with the relevant DROs.

These “good neighbor” tips are based very simply on the Golden Rule: **“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”** If you follow these guidelines, you may find that going through the Design Review process, as either an applicant or neighbor, will be easier and less disruptive, and lead to better relationships in your neighborhood.

Applicants: if you are planning a change to your property, think about what your concerns would be if your next-door neighbor were proposing to either build a new structure or addition near you.. Incorporate those concerns into your thinking as you design your own new or remodeled house.

Neighbors: if someone is building next-door or nearby to you, think about what it might be like joining a new neighborhood and wanting to fit in; or wanting to create a new or remodeled home for your family with specific requirements that meet your needs.

Successful development always involves compromise and reasonableness on both sides, and common themes for successful outcomes include:

- **Consistency** with the Del Mar Community Plan, the existing neighborhood, the Design Review Ordinances, and the Planning/Zoning Codes that were created by Del Mar’s founders and subsequent community stakeholders to maintain the unique character of Del Mar and to preserve the priceless natural environment that makes Del Mar what it is
- **Transparency** of information about a proposed development (whether provided by the developer, the City of Del Mar, or the neighbors)
- **Effective and predictable methods of communication** between parties
- **Respectful dialogue and good-faith effort** from all parties involved

2) If You Learn There is a Project Pending Development in Your Neighborhood

The City of Del Mar has a long-standing and extensive civic process for developing residential real estate. It is called the Design Review process, and the ordinances can be found here on the city’s website: [Del Mar Design Review Ordinances--Chapter 23.08](#). You are advised to read this document thoroughly, to be familiar with your rights as a neighbor as well as your neighbor’s rights to develop their property.

The City’s Planning Department is always available to you if you have any questions, and can be reached at (858) 755-9313; or you can visit them at City Hall (www.delmar.ca.us). Del Mar is a small city and the staff is there to serve you, so take advantage of that!

What Should You Do First?

It is strongly advised that you open lines of communication with your neighbor planning development as soon as possible. Much of the conflict that can occur in project developing is due to miscommunication or lack of communication.

In this guidebook, we discuss basic “good neighbor” principles that apply to everyone—whether the person developing a property or a person who will be impacted by a new development. You both have rights as well as responsibilities.

What Is the Design Review Process in Del Mar?

This is taken from the City’s Website <http://www.delmar.ca.us/141/Design-Review-Board>:

The Del Mar Design Review process is intended to preserve and improve the scenic amenities of Del Mar and to protect the city's natural environment, its scenic vistas, and the community's overall aesthetic quality. The Design Review process encourages good design, including the use of harmonious materials and colors, and the appropriate use of landscaping. In addition to protecting the city's scenic and natural resources, the Design Review process also has the desired effect of protecting property values.

As part of the review process, application proposals are evaluated for their consistency with the provisions of the Del Mar Community (General) Plan and with the City's Zoning Ordinance as well as consistency with the applicable Design Review standards, found in the Design Review Ordinance (DRO). The Design Review Board's review involves an evaluation of a structure's placement and size, the materials and colors to be used, and in the case of a new structure, the type and extent of the landscaping proposed. It also involves an evaluation of the project's compatibility with surrounding development.

There is a Design Review Board (DRB) made up of seven Del Mar residents appointed by the Del Mar City Council to serve four-year terms and an ex-officio (non-voting) member with professional architectural design experience who serves a two-year term. Any resident, which includes both property owners and renters, can apply to serve on this and any other city committee. The DRB meets on the 4th Wednesday of each month in City Hall, and the meetings are televised on Channel 24 (Time Warner). The Design Review process was developed and is implemented to help preserve the character of Del Mar, which in turn helps preserve property values as well as the overall community's sense of place.

Basically, applicants must complete a number of steps with the City to put forth their plans for a construction project, and must comply with the City's Design Review Ordinances. **See the City of Del Mar Neighbor Handbook for further detail.** (<https://www.delmar.ca.us/DocumentCenter/View/2450/Resident-Handbook---Understanding-the-Design-Review-Process?bidId=>)

3) Applicants: Before Completing a Design

If you are building in Del Mar, before completing a design, consider the following:

- Design your addition or your new house as if you were going to live next door to it.
- Talk with your neighbors and show them your proposed design early in the process.
- Consider organizing a meeting with your neighbors to encourage neighbor discussions before entering into the formal Del Mar process, including the CPP (Citizens Participation Program).

4) Some Basic "Good Neighbor" Principles

If you are an applicant, we recommend that early in the design process of a new or remodeled structure, you should initiate discussions with neighbors regarding the project in the hopes that early communication will lead to mutually agreeable project outcomes. There is a Citizen's Participation Program (<http://www.delmar.ca.us/DocumentCenter/View/5>) that is designed for this purpose and in some cases, is a required part of the process.

It is strongly encouraged that neighbors themselves can meet very early in the process, so that lines of communication are opened. In any case, prior to filing an application for a land use or building permit, neighbors should be informed of a pending project.

As an applicant, when initiating design review, consider mutual neighborhood privacy in all aspects of your new project's design and site layout, including noise, lighting, and sunlight access. Be sure to discuss and show your neighbors placement of second story windows, balconies, and decks in order to resolve any view or privacy problems early in the process.

5) Helpful Tips for a Successful Neighbor Meeting

If you are developing a project, what information can you provide that neighbors will find useful?

- Background information including a complete description of your project and the public process it must go through.
- Site plans, elevations, models, aerial photos, drawings, etc., if you have initial ones to share. If you can provide 3-D imagery, that is very helpful. It will help others visualize the changes you wish to make, as two-dimensional architectural plans or renderings can be challenging to understand.
- Information or other resources that discuss the zoning or land development process.

How Will Neighbors See Your Project?

- Put yourself in the place of the people who surround your property. Will they view your project as an enhancement or unexpected change that may impact their property?
- How might your project affect traffic or pedestrian safety in the area?
- Does your project enhance or complement existing neighborhood character or does it contrast with what surrounds it?
- Will your project alter the natural landscape, topography, trees and landscape, impact views, etc.?
- Might your project reduce the sense of privacy for a neighboring property owner?

Ways to Respond to Neighbor Concerns

- Listen and be respectful—give people the chance to be heard.
- Focus on identifying problems. This meeting is a chance for you to gather input that may be useful to you in getting your project through the review process. The issues that your neighbors raise are often the same issues that may be raised by the Planning Commission or the Design Review Board. Be open to options that could be reasonable or affordable ways to alleviate or address problems.
- Resolving problems at the meeting is not necessary, but it may be helpful to identify areas where there is some flexibility in your plans.
- Know that you won't necessarily be able to please everyone, but that you are providing an opportunity for dialogue. The neighbors will appreciate your effort and the opportunity to share their views.

6) Tips Regarding View Blockage

- Visit inside your neighbors' houses to see how your building will affect their views and work to accommodate their concerns.
- Be sensitive to your neighbors' views in the placement and architectural appearance of your structure or addition.
- Identify neighbors' lines of sight and current views and how both your neighbors' views and your own can be preserved or enhanced through a good design.

- Where it is possible to preserve a view from a neighbor's property, achieve your project goals and respond effectively to environmental and other site constraints, then locate new structures so they interfere minimally with the neighbors' views. Where compromise between these various project components must be made, strive to place a new structure so that similar amount and quality of private views may be achieved on a neighbor's property as on your property.
- Reduce height of the new structure to minimize blockage of views.
- Define neighbors' views and how your new project will affect the views.
- Introduce methods that can be used to limit views blocked due to a building's height.
- Be sensitive to the existing size and bulk patterns in the neighborhood.
- Locate higher portions of the structures to minimize view blockage.
- Consider views from major living areas as well as other high quality views.
- Avoid tall landscaping, fences or walls that interfere with your neighbors' views. Consider the mature plant growth height when selecting plants.
- Screen solar panels, satellite dishes, radio antennae and other equipment from neighbors' views to the maximum amount possible.

7) Tips for Minimizing Construction Impacts

If you are an applicant, consider the impacts during the construction process on your neighbors as well. Remodeling and building can be messy processes. Here are a few recommendations:

- Tell your neighbors when work will begin and the approximate completion date; and whom they can contact if any problems or concerns arise.
- Limit the noise of power tools to standard business hours. Del Mar has rules regarding hours of construction; please follow them.
- Have materials dropped in the driveway or yard, not the street, and have dumpsters removed as soon as they are full; only keep them when they are truly needed.
- Confine subcontractors as much as possible to your side of the street
- Keep the construction site neat so as not to affect neighboring properties
- Remind your contractors to be sensitive when parking vehicles

8) Tips for Managing Conflict

Conflict can strengthen and enhance relationships, or it can destroy them. Since we tend to regard conflict as negative, the first step toward constructive conflict is to recognize both positive and negative aspects.

Thoughtful dissent (what may appear to be interpersonal conflict) can result in reaching better decisions. Conflict resolution is not about eliminating disagreements, diversity of opinion, or alternate viewpoints that are crucial to good decision making. Too often, "conflict resolution" takes the form of suppressing all disagreements, rather than using them as decision improvement opportunities.

Before you work on a resolution to an issue/problem/conflict, keep in mind these ideas before you start:

- Be sure it is a real problem worth spending the time to resolve.
- Focus on the root causes of the problem - not just the symptoms or personalities.
- Be prepared to work toward a mutually agreeable solution—not just winning your point of view.
- Prepare yourself to listen and understand other points of view on the issue.
- Keep some perspective. Disagreement and conflict are expected whenever people coexist. Relationships are not destroyed, and often can be enhanced, by working towards a mutually agreeable solution.
- Remember that it is OK to disagree, and the other person is not wrong to disagree with you.
- Keep your sense of humor!

Listen for perspective. Understanding other perspectives is a key to finding resolution. Use reflective listening techniques such as paraphrasing, repeating back, and non-verbal signs. Do your best to understand the frame of reference of the speaker; seek out the background and life experiences on which they base their perspective.

Own your part. It takes at least two or more parties for a conflict to exist. Be willing to take responsibility for your contribution to the problem. Acknowledging your contribution (or perceived contribution) can be an important first step in the resolution process by opening communication and lowering barriers.

Be the first to make a concession. Take the lead in making the negotiation work. An early concession in an area important to the other person/group usually results in their reciprocation in other areas or ideas. Take the lead in suggesting trade-offs by giving something another person wants in return for something you want.

Stay objective. In the heat of discussion, it is easy to display your feelings and emotions to a point they block the possibility of resolution. Work on not letting your own feelings block you from hearing what the other person is saying.