
DESIGN GUIDELINES-FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

NOTE: The Design Guidelines prepared by the City's consultant and Planning Department staff will apply to all residential and commercial development in Del Mar. The Ad Hoc Development Review Citizen's Advisory Committee was tasked by the City to focus on single-family residential issues, which is the focus of this FAQ document.

Overview & Purpose of Design Guidelines

- Q. How was the Ad Hoc Development Review Citizen's Advisory Committee established? Has the Committee involved architects and other stakeholder groups in the process?**
- A. Approximately 2 years ago, a number of residents expressed multiple concerns about the City's development review process, and the fact that it had become increasingly difficult for residents to navigate. At the same time, applicants and their representatives also expressed frustration that the process lacked transparency and often seemed too subjective. Recognizing that the City had not taken advantage of current technologies that could help to better define the standards expressed in the Design Review Ordinance (DRO), the City Council established the Ad Hoc Development Review Citizen's Advisory Committee to study the existing process and recommend steps to improve it. The Committee was charged with identifying problem areas in the process, and soliciting feedback from stakeholder groups—including residents, applicants, architects, and others. The overall goal was to develop a suite of recommendations that would boost transparency, add clarity, and reduce subjectivity, resulting in a more efficient and equitable development review process. There is an architect on the Ad Hoc Development Review Citizen's Advisory Committee and the RRM Design Group team included an architect.
- Q. Why did the Ad Hoc Committee recommend that the City develop Design Guidelines?**
- A. After more than a year of studying the problem areas and concerns expressed by various stakeholder groups, the committee began studying "best practices" in other California cities that have comparable demographics and similar goals as Del Mar. While Del Mar had a Design Review Ordinance with standards that reflected the key tenets of the Community Plan, nowhere were those standards clearly defined or illustrated, which by default meant that these standards were subjective. In conducting its research, the Committee found that most other cities were using Design Guidelines to complement their planning ordinances and zoning codes, which added the clarity and definition needed so that applicants could see what kind of residential development was deemed desirable. It became clear to committee members that Design Guidelines, including illustrations and tables, could both enhance Del Mar's development review

process and provide the Design Review Board with a sharper and more precise set of tools for determining DRO compliance.

Q. Isn't Del Mar's development approvals process one of the most restrictive in the state? Will adding another layer to this process discourage people from wanting to invest here, and have a negative impact on property values?

A. While some people have the impression that Del Mar's development process is highly restrictive, a survey of the design review and development approvals processes of other affluent California cities does not bear this out. The majority of the more than 20 municipalities examined by the Ad Hoc Committee have more restrictive development regulations in place than does Del Mar. These municipalities also boast higher property values and income levels than the City of Del Mar, which demonstrates that Design Guidelines and comparable planning regulations do not deter investment in a community. In fact, the research confirms that they are more likely to boost property values in a desirable community, by assuring buyers that their city cares about maintaining the unique character that draws people to a distinctive community like Del Mar, and has established standards that will protect their investment.

Q. How will the Design Guidelines be used by the Design Review Board (DRB)? Will the Design Review Ordinance have less importance?

A. The Design Guidelines will function as an important tool in the DRB's toolbox to help them interpret the DRO in a more objective manner than currently exists for many situations. DRB members will also have the authority, however, to disregard a particular guideline if they deem it does not apply to a project due to a unique circumstance, site constraints, topography, historic considerations, or other relevant factors. The Guidelines will serve as an important companion document to the DRO, and will not diminish its importance to the DRB or other stakeholders.

Q. How will the Design Guidelines change the development approvals process for applicants? How will they make the process less subjective?

A. By visually defining DRO standards with illustrations, photographs, and tables that more clearly reflect desirable development—as described in the Community Plan—the Design Guidelines will make the approvals process more transparent, less subjective, and more predictable for applicants. Providing desirable and undesirable design techniques will also help DRB members avoid the personal value judgements that can affect an applicant's confidence in the integrity of the review process. The Guidelines make standards like excessive bulk and mass and acceptable view blockage more objective, which will reduce anxiety for all parties.

The committee has also developed two documents, attached as Appendices, designed to shed more light on the development approvals process and the path forward for applicants and neighbors: *The Resident Handbook: Understanding the Design Review Process in the City of Del Mar* and *the Good Neighbor Guide to the Design Review Process in Del Mar*.

Q. Won't the Design Guidelines inhibit the creativity of architects and designers by making some requirements—such as setbacks—more uniform?

A. The Design Guidelines interpret the Community Plan, and as such, provide applicants and their architects with more specific and quantifiable feedback on what constitutes desirable development in Del Mar. The Guidelines do not dictate or prohibit any one style of architecture. The standards encouraged in the Guidelines reflect accepted design practices and/or the principles espoused in the Community Plan. Del Mar's residential parcels reflect a high degree of irregularity in size, topography, landscape and street patterns/edges. The cookie cutter uniformity that is visible in some suburban planned communities is not desirable in Del Mar and is not encouraged in the Community Plan or the Guidelines.

Views & Privacy

Q. How do the Design Guidelines address views and view blockage?

A. The Guidelines recognizes the importance of scenic views in Del Mar, both public and private views of the ocean, canyons, lagoons, community, and other scenic vistas. The overall philosophy espoused in the Guidelines is reasonable view protection. Numerous illustrations and a range of percentages are employed to determine acceptable view obstructions, depending on the quality and quantity of a neighbor's impacted view.

Q. How do the Design Guidelines address privacy?

A. The key design principle is that privacy issues should be resolved in the initial design stage, not as an afterthought. The Guidelines present design techniques for addressing privacy concerns, such as the placement of windows and decks, that do not rely on non-structural mitigation measures such as landscaping and fencing between properties.

Preserving Natural Features, Landscaping, & North Beach Exemptions

Q. How do the Design Guidelines protect Del Mar's unique natural environment?

A. Del Mar is blessed with a remarkable variety of topographical features and natural landscapes that distinguish it from other coastal cities. Some of the key design techniques utilized in the guidelines for site planning include minimizing grading to blend in with the natural topography, reducing structural bulk on hillsides and upslope lots, and locating structures to avoid impacts to public view sheds.

Q. Why do several of the Guidelines not apply to the North Beach neighborhoods?

- A. It is not uncommon in communities that have varied terrain to have some Design Guidelines that are more applicable in certain areas than others. In the case of Del Mar, there are notable differences between the relatively flat and more constrained residential lots in the North Beach area and the irregular, topographically varied lots in the North and South Hills and bluff top neighborhoods. Because of these clear differences, Development Guidelines that are relevant for homes sited on an irregular hillside lot, for example, are not going to be applicable to homes in the North Beach, where the topography tend to be flat and the lot sizes tend to be smaller.

Q. Why do the Design Guidelines encourage the preservation of some pervious area and a minimum landscape area? Won't more hardscape conserve water better?

- A. Pervious materials allow for the infiltration of storm water into the soil, thereby reducing runoff and the amount of pollutants that enter the ocean via storm drains. This can improve water quality, help reduce bluff erosion, and facilitate groundwater recharge, which benefits our plants and trees. Extensive hardscape and a lack of landscaping diminish the character of neighborhoods and magnify the visual impact of structures. In addition, plants and trees absorb harmful greenhouse gases and keep things cool, unlike extensive hardscape. In fact, increasing our urban tree cover is an important mitigation measure identified in the City's Climate Action Plan.

Conserving water and preserving the unique Del Mar neighborhood streetscape are two important design principles served by avoiding the removal of existing trees and natural vegetation. Most mature landscaping in Del Mar is drought tolerant and often native to Southern California. In these cases, retaining existing landscaping will require little or no water, in contrast to new planting's which will need more water at least until they are established. While there are certainly instances where keeping existing landscaping is not possible or even desirable, applicants should try to avoid the wholesale removal of existing trees and plants, whenever possible. Applicants and their representative should, however, do all they can to avoid removal of a Protected Tree (Torrey Pines and Monterey Cypress).

Basements, FAR-Exempt Spaces, & Non-Conforming Structures

Q. Will the Design Guidelines prohibit or restrict basements?

- A. The Design Guidelines do not prohibit or explicitly restrict basements. The Guidelines do discourage basements when they contribute to the appearance of excessive building height, require significant alterations to existing topography, or impact neighboring properties by elevating the finished floor level above the natural grade.

Q. Is it true that outdoor spaces such as decks and balconies will be restricted?

A. There is no blanket restriction that says all decks must be a certain size. The Guidelines, which will be applied on a case-by-case basis, attempt to uphold important design principles reflected in the Community Plan and referenced in the DRO. Most covered outdoor structures are treated as exempt from Floor Area Ratio (FAR) calculations in the Zoning Code. The Guidelines recognize that covered porches, loggias, decks, and balconies can enhance a home's design, appearance, and function. When these elements are not in proportion to overall building form and neighboring properties, they can contribute to excessive bulk, mass, and scale. The recommendations for decks, porches, and trellises are intended to reduce the appearance of excessive massing and scale, and ensure that the proportionality of building size to lot size intended by the Floor Area Ratio (FAR) construction standard (in the zoning code) is maintained.

Q. How will I be able to remodel my historic home if it does not conform to the Design Guidelines? What if I don't choose to maintain certain historical features?

A. Del Mar's Community Plan supports the protection of historic residences in the Community Development Element. Therefore, the DRB can consider the historicity of a residence in making its findings of fact. While the City encourages historic preservation of residences, Del Mar does not require this. Consequently, the Design Guidelines do not mandate the protection of historic residences.

Q. Is it true that the Design Guidelines would make some existing homes non-conforming, in which case homeowners might not be able to rebuild their homes in the event of an earthquake or other natural disaster?

A. No. This is not correct. The Design Guidelines are not 'regulations' which would render some homes "nonconforming." Per the Del Mar Municipal Code (DMMC Chapter 30.76; Nonconformities), homes become non-conforming when they no longer conform to current development regulations. If a home is damaged beyond the 50% building valuation allowed by Chapter 30.76, regulatory non-conformities do need to be addressed, but the guidelines themselves do not create 'non-conforming' situations.