



City of Burlingame

# Commercial Design Guidebook

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Original First Edition - 3/31/01  
Updated Edition - November, 2012

The Neighborhood Consistency Subcommittee  
of the Burlingame Planning Commission  
Burlingame Planning Division

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As part of the ongoing development of an effective Architectural Review Process for the City of Burlingame, the Neighborhood Consistency Subcommittee of the Burlingame Planning Commission has developed the Commercial Design Guidebook.

The Commercial Design Guidebook represents nearly a year of concentrated effort on the part of the Committee and the Planning Department to develop a document which would be informative, useful to a range of interested parties and comprehensive with regard to the character and diversity of Burlingame commercial neighborhoods.

This edition of the Guidebook has been released for distribution to aid Design Review applicants, Design Professionals and Design Review consultants in understanding the process and in seeing their role in the making of Burlingame neighborhoods.

It is our hope that this guidebook will be helpful and that current and future applicants will provide feedback regarding its usefulness.

The Guidebook will continue to undergo development and refinement based on feedback received from the community and in reaction to trends in commercial neighborhood development.

Neighborhood Consistency Subcommittee  
Burlingame Planning Commission  
Burlingame Planning Department



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## Introduction

Until recently, cities have relied almost exclusively on zoning ordinances to regulate development and ensure the compatibility of adjacent land uses. However, in recent years the City has become increasingly aware of the fact that the exacting rules established under traditional zoning techniques alone are not sufficient to deal effectively with some of the more subtle aspects of development such as building aesthetics, neighborhood amenities and the interrelationship between uses and city planning.

The purpose of this Guidebook and the Design Review process is to assure that development is in harmony with the character and quality of existing and potential projects and their uses while promoting health, safety and general welfare of the community.

The Guidelines described herein are not specifications and should not preclude alternatives or restrict imagination. These Guidelines are not intended to require a particular style. Rather, they are intended to give the applicant, designer and the City of Burlingame tools to ensure that the quality and character of the commercial neighborhoods are maintained and enhanced.

The Guidelines represent specific considerations for commercial building design and commercial tenant improvements. These Guidelines should be used during the design process, rather than at the end, to enhance a project's ability to fit within, and support the character of a particular commercial neighborhood.

Consistency with the architectural patterns of an existing commercial neighborhood is an important step in maintaining neighborhood character for future generations. New designs and additions must be compatible with their neighbors in positive ways so that interesting, friendly and viable commercial neighborhoods result.

Commercial neighborhoods will exhibit particular patterns regarding architectural style, mass, bulk, scale and the level and quality of architectural detail. Design professionals should look closely at the existing patterns prior to developing a design so that design work will address neighborhood issues while satisfying the needs of the applicant.

Observation will allow the design professional to identify common aspects of example businesses in the neighborhood regarding mass, scale, roof height and configuration, location of appurtenances such as awnings, architectural features and site amenities.

Once patterns are identified, they should be used to inform proposed designs and enhance their compatibility with existing neighborhood patterns.

The larger goal is to establish criteria by which we manage change within a neighborhood so that the community feels that the results are positive.

The Commercial Design Guidelines have been prepared as a tool for use in complying with the City of Burlingame Design Review Ordinance, Burlingame Municipal Code Chapter 25.57.

## Introduction to the Guidelines

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For the Planning Commission to act on an application that has gone through the Design Review process, the Commission must cite findings for or against approval of the project. The findings are defined in the Ordinance as follows:

### Findings:

- Support of the pattern of diverse architectural styles that characterize the City's commercial, industrial and mixed use areas.
- Respect and promotion of pedestrian activity by placement of buildings to maximize commercial use of the street frontage, off-street public spaces, and by locating parking so that it does not dominate street frontages.
- On visually prominent and gateway sites, whether the design fits the site and is compatible with the surrounding development.
- Compatibility of the architecture with mass, bulk, scale and existing materials of existing development and compatibility with transitions where changes in land use occur nearby.
- Architectural design consistency by using a single architectural style on the site that is consistent among all elements of the structure, restores or retains existing or significant original architectural features, and is compatible in mass and bulk with other structures in the immediate area.
- Provision of site features such as fencing, landscaping and pedestrian circulation that enriches the existing opportunities of the commercial neighborhood.

The following Components of the Guidelines will include references to the appropriate Findings. Additionally, each component will list particular criteria which will be important for consideration in support of the appropriate Finding.

### Burlingame Commercial Neighborhoods

Burlingame includes three distinct commercial neighborhoods as well as numerous commercial areas between these neighborhoods. Each neighborhood includes a wide range of commercial building types and uses.

The commercial neighborhoods are characterized by buildings and businesses that have been built over a number of years and change much as the years go by. This has resulted in much diversity in the commercial neighborhoods, a fact which makes them attractive, interesting and viable as community resources.

Commercial projects should respect that diversity and seek to support it by the following methods:

Proposed commercial buildings and additions should be distinctive, while remaining compatible with the existing fabric. Design Professionals should avoid matching adjacent buildings, as that may generate the impression of a shopping mall rather than a neighborhood street.

While supporting architectural diversity, extreme stylistic statements may not be appropriate unless there is an underlying thread of neighborhood compatibility. The desire to make your building different for the sake of difference is not enough. A building should be distinct in order to add richness to the neighborhood fabric. However, it should not simply scream at the neighboring buildings for attention.



### Applicable Findings:

The following Findings in the Design Review Ordinance apply to this Component of the Guidelines:

- Support of the pattern of diverse architectural styles that characterize the city's commercial, industrial and mixed use areas.
- Compatibility of the architecture with the mass, bulk, scale and existing materials of existing development and compatibility with transitions where changes in land use occur nearby.

### Design Review Criteria

A compatible design will support the existing Architectural Diversity of the commercial neighborhood by considering the following:

- Design buildings to be appropriate to the use envisioned while maintaining general compatibility with the neighborhood. Allow the use to determine the appearance as well as the neighborhood context.
- Avoid matching adjacent architectural styles directly. Avoid creating a "mall" appearance.
- Avoid extreme diversity by respecting the character of the surrounding buildings. Do not include distinctive building styles just to be different. Avoid designing buildings as billboards.
- Respect the mass and scale of adjacent buildings even when using differing architectural styles.
- Create human scale buildings no matter what style is used.

## Component 2: Pedestrian Use and Character

### Pedestrian Friendly Neighborhoods

One of the distinctions of most of our commercial neighborhoods is their usability by pedestrians. This characteristic ensures that our streets are busy and alive and that our residents feel safe while using them.

Additionally, this usability supports greater access to businesses by encouraging longer use of the commercial areas. People tend to combine tasks so that entire mornings or afternoons are spent shopping. People tend to visit downtown more as an event than a chore.

### Presence on the Street

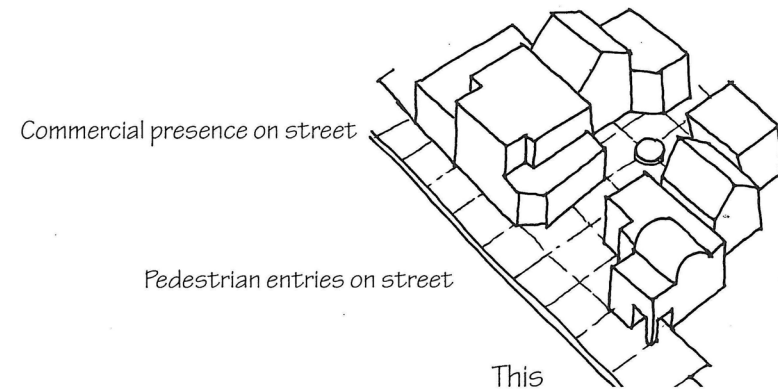
Commercial projects should have a presence on the street. The edges of the building should be as near to the front property line as possible. Refer to the Zoning Ordinance for specific requirements.

Buildings and additions should be placed so as to create a street edge that is alive and visually attractive. Projects should not be hidden behind landscaping. Site work should reinforce pedestrian use by clearly marking the building access route and emphasizing the human entrance to the project.

### Applicable Findings:

The following findings in the Design Review Ordinance apply to this Component of the Guidelines:

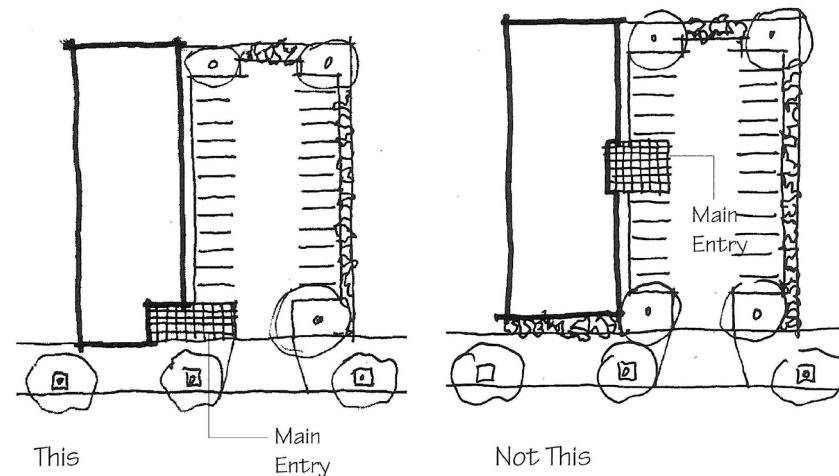
- Respect and promotion of pedestrian activity by placement of buildings to maximize commercial use of the street frontage, off-street public spaces, and by locating parking so that it does not dominate street frontages.
- Provision of site features such as fencing, landscaping and pedestrian circulation that enriches the existing opportunities of the commercial neighborhood.



### Main Building Entries

Main entries should occur along street side of buildings and tenant spaces wherever possible. Secondary entrances should be discouraged when they will detract from use of the main entry.

Users should be encouraged to use the street entrance, as this will bring more customers and patrons onto the streets in support of the neighborhood as a whole.



### Parking

Street frontages should not be dominated by parking and driveways. Where parking is required it should occur at the rear or sides of a project.

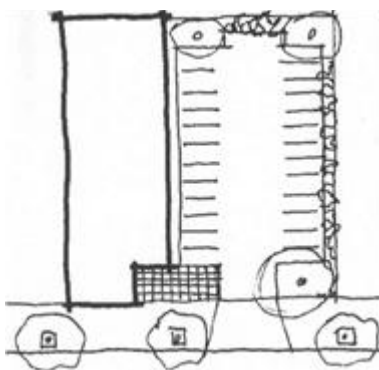
Auto use should be accommodated where necessary but should be deemphasized as the primary access. This can be accomplished by minimizing the width of driveways and by increasing the width and detail of pedestrian access.

In combination with other criteria of this Component, the building and its human access should be the most prominent elements experienced along the public street.

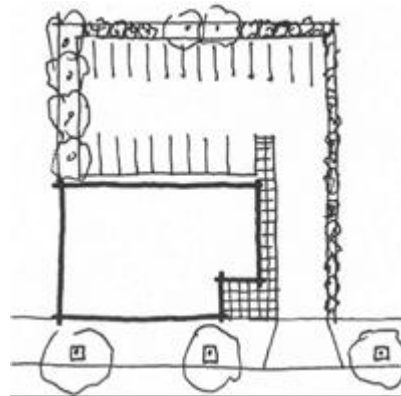
### Design Review Criteria

A compatible design will support and enhance the existing pedestrian pattern in the neighborhood by considering the following criteria:

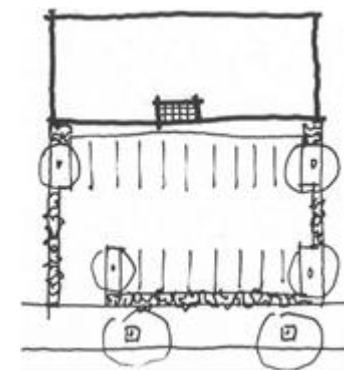
- Projects should have a strong relationship to the street. Users should be encouraged to access the project via the street in order to expose them to other uses along the street and further support the commercial businesses.
- Main pedestrian entrances should occur on the public sidewalk, not at the back of a parking lot.
- Where on-site parking is required, parking should occur to the rear or side of a project.
- Driveways for required parking should penetrate the street at minimum width so as not to interrupt the sidewalk with excessive vehicular uses.
- Projects should be designed for human scale to further encourage use by pedestrians and to enhance the human character of the street as a whole.



*This*



*This*



*Not This*

## Component 3: Visually Prominent, Gateway Sites

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### Visually Prominent and Gateway Sites

There are a number of sites in our commercial neighborhoods that can be considered visually prominent. This means that they enjoy a particular location which is seen by many users of the downtown either on approach by car or foot or from adjacent neighborhoods. These sites tend to be defining sites for the character of their neighborhoods and thus have a greater responsibility for consistency and definitive design.

Common examples are corner buildings or the first building in a row or block of commercial buildings. Additionally, sites which are surrounded by open space such as the railroad or a park site have greater importance since they can be seen by the community from a greater distance.

Gateway sites are those that occur around the entries to Burlingame and the entries to specific areas of Burlingame. These could include sites that occur near the Broadway / California intersection, along California at the San Mateo border, or sites that occur where Burlingame Avenue meets El Camino Real. There are numerous other sites that can be considered gateway sites which are identifiable by their relationship to the rest of the commercial area.

### Applicable Findings:

The following findings in the Design Review Ordinance apply to this Component of the Guidelines:

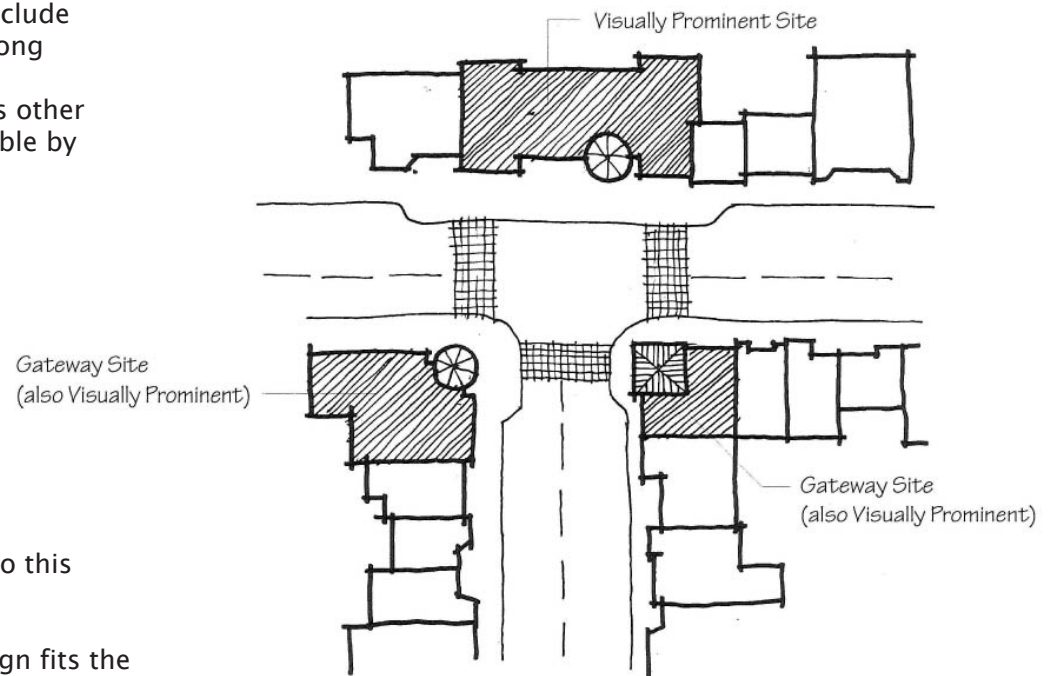
- On visually prominent and gateway sites, whether the design fits the site and is compatible with the surrounding development.

### Visually Prominent Sites

On visually prominent sites, the building has an important responsibility for defining the character of the surrounding neighborhood. Projects on such sites should clearly respond to the street and to the adjacent architecture.

Projects on these sites may be taller than other buildings, particularly if they occur on corners. Alternatively, projects at such locations may include greater pedestrian amenities such as plazas or benches.

If the site is a corner lot, the project should have a clear relationship with the projects on the opposite corners, so that each building supports perception as a pair of buildings. This can create a gateway to a block of a neighborhood. This does not require that corner buildings match each other, in fact that should be discouraged.





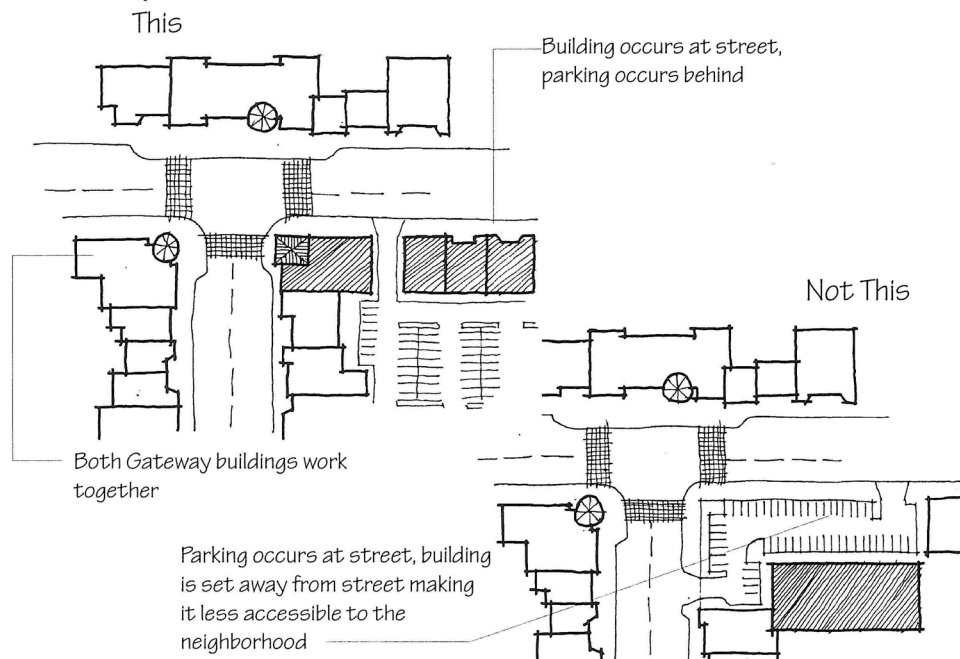
## Gateway Sites

Projects on gateway sites have a responsibility to the City of Burlingame as a whole. As these sites offer the first impression to Burlingame visitors and residents, they should represent the defining characteristics of Burlingame.

Typically buildings on several corners make up the gateway to a block or to the City as a whole. Buildings on gateway sites should be especially harmonized with other buildings that form the gateway.

Gateway sites do not justify monumental buildings. Human scale is important here as everywhere. Gateway sites do justify a high level of refinement in architectural design and detail. Design Professionals should consider buildings as important parts of a larger community.

Generic strip malls and buildings as advertising are not appropriate on Gateway Sites.



## Appearance

Projects on prominent sites should not be seen as opportunities for advertising. Buildings should not be designed as billboards for their particular tenants. Instead, they should be seen as markers for their adjacent neighborhoods and defining elements in those neighborhoods. They will be more accessible and distinctive based on their location alone.

Projects on prominent sites should include more subdued signage as the building already has a distinct advantage over other buildings in the area. Signage for these locations should adhere strictly to the Sign Ordinance.

## Design Review Criteria

A compatible design will meet the responsibility of important sites for defining the character of the neighborhood or of Burlingame as a whole by considering the following criteria:

- Corner buildings should respond to adjacent corner buildings and seek to create gateways to streets.
- Visually prominent sites should include buildings that carefully respond to the character of the neighborhood and are considered from distant as well as local points of view.
- Projects should include exterior amenities appropriate to the location, not only for the users of the building, but for the users of that part of the neighborhood,
- Projects on prominent sites should not be considered billboards for that site or use. They have a greater responsibility to be more subdued in signage and advertising.

## Component 4: Architectural Compatibility

### Architectural Compatibility

Commercial projects should be architecturally compatible with the existing fabric of the commercial neighborhood. Projects should include architectural styles and forms that harmonize with the buildings that exist in the neighborhood.

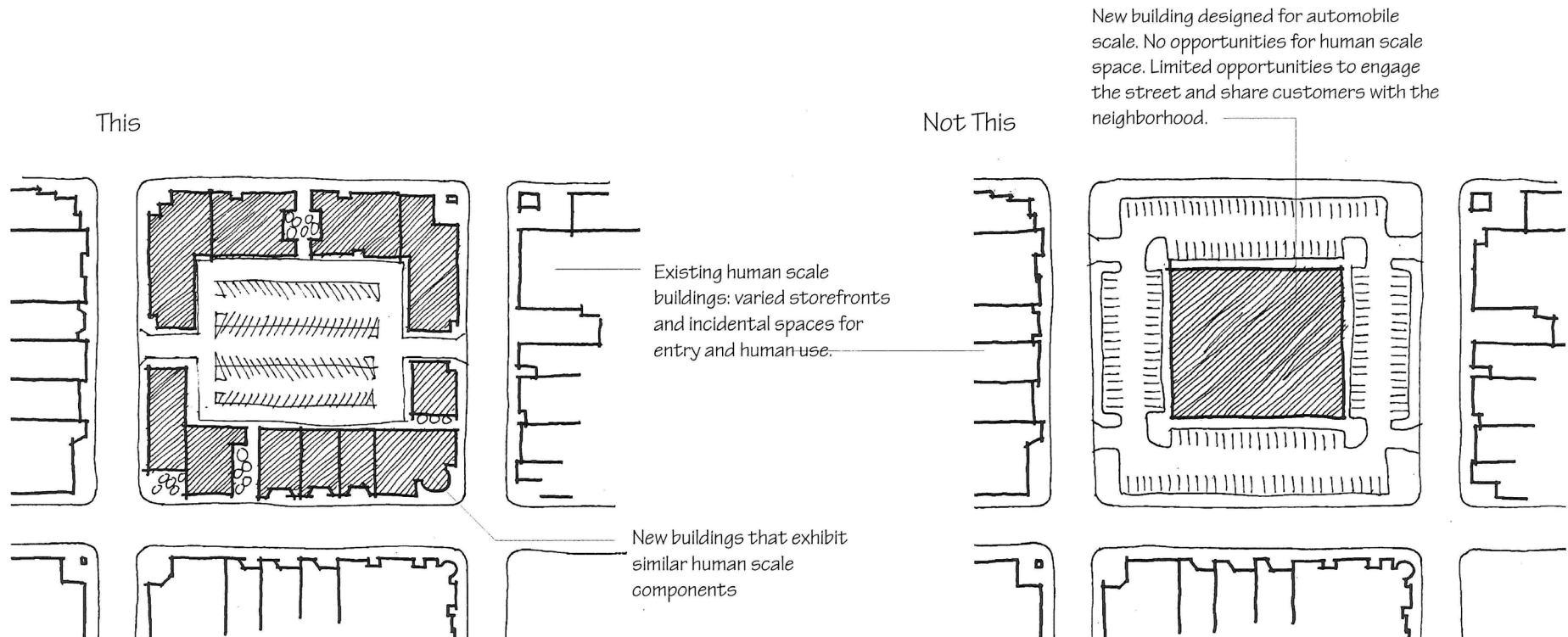
This does not mean that they should match. Commercial neighborhoods are characterized by architectural diversity. The identity of a business is dependent on that fact.

New commercial buildings can be distinct and remain compatible by harmonizing with the mass, bulk and scale of the existing buildings. This is achieved by sensitive design and an awareness of the critical elements that define the character of a building and a neighborhood.

### Applicable Findings:

The following findings in the Design Review Ordinance apply to this Component of the Guidelines:

- Compatibility of the architecture with mass, bulk, scale and existing materials of existing development and compatibility with transitions where changes in land use occur nearby.
- Architectural design consistency by using a single architectural style on the site that is consistent among all elements of the structure, restores or retains existing or significant original architectural features, and compatibility in mass and bulk with other structures in the immediate area.





### Mass, Bulk, Scale

The term **Mass** represents the overall appearance of the building and its apparent size and solidity. Mass includes actual and apparent components. It does not necessarily refer to the actual size of a building, but to the apparent size.

**Actual Mass** represents the physical size and configuration of a building. The actual mass of a building is controlled in part by the Zoning Ordinance via height limits, setbacks and floor area limits. It is also the responsibility of the design professional to manipulate forms in such a way as to achieve the desired physical shape of the building.

**Apparent Mass** is a consideration of how large the buildings in a neighborhood appear. Buildings in a neighborhood may look big when they are actually quite small. Conversely, buildings may look small when they are really quite large. Some buildings appear to be large and bulky and tend to loom over people on the ground. Other buildings appear lower to the ground and feel more comfortable within the neighborhood.

Older buildings in Burlingame, even large ones, tend to appear less massive and less bulky because of the methods of articulation used in their design and the level of detail occurring on the exterior. Materials and details are used appropriately for the particular architecture.

It is possible to design a large building that does not appear massive to its neighbors. Observant designers will note methods used in most older Burlingame commercial buildings which make them appear to be smaller, friendlier and more human in scale.

Design professionals should observe example buildings in the neighborhood and seek to support the pattern of mass and bulk exhibited. In most neighborhoods, this will result in buildings that appear less massive than they might actually be.

These buildings are of different size, but are similar in scale. They include numerous human scale elements which tend to reduce their apparent mass.

This building is a completely different scale from the rest of the street. It has no human scale elements and overpowers the other buildings.



This

Not This

### Scale

Scale is the measurement of the relationship of one object to another and one building to another and can be described in terms of its relationship to a human being. The components of a building also have a relationship to each other and to the building as a whole, which is the scale of the components. Generally, the scale of the building components also relates to the scale of the entire building.

The relationship of a building, or portions of a building, to a human being is called its relationship to human scale. The spectrum of relationships to human scale ranges from intimate to monumental. Intimate usually refers to small spaces and details which are very much in keeping with human scale.

At the other end of the spectrum, monumental scale is used to present a feeling of grandeur, security, timelessness or spiritual well-being. Building types which commonly use elements of monumental scale to express these feelings are banks, churches and civic buildings. The components of this scale reflect the intention and often include two story columns, large double doors and tall glass storefronts.

Scale refers to the level of articulation of a building and the suggestion of mass by the inclusion or exclusion of various details and components. Scale is closely related to mass and the line between the two subjects is blurred.

The patterns in most Burlingame commercial neighborhoods serve to achieve a human scale. This supports the health and comfort of the neighborhood by enhancing the sense of ownership and control residents have over their environment. It makes our neighborhoods seem like friendly, human places.

In contrast, it is valuable to observe neighborhoods in other cities (and in some places in our own city) in which cars and large buildings dominate. These are not often the neighborhoods we choose to stroll in or let our children play unobserved.

Human scale is the most common element of the older neighborhoods. Human scale is achieved by designing and building with elements that respond to human dimensions. Older buildings often include elements that look like they can be handled or managed by a person.

Human scale does not necessarily mean a smaller building. There are numerous examples of larger buildings in Burlingame that maintain excellent human scale.

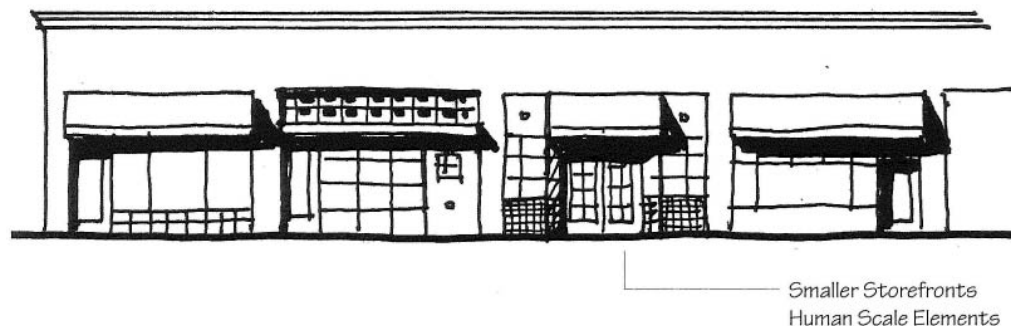
## Managing Mass and Bulk

Managing the mass and bulk of a building is a fundamental design task that must be considered from the earliest part of the design process. It is important that designers consider these criteria as soon as plans begin to emerge. As plans evolve, tenant space plans and arrangements may change to accommodate exterior considerations. A competent Design Professional should have no problem accommodating applicant or tenant needs while managing the mass of a building if the two tasks are considered concurrently.

Considering mass and bulk after a plan is complete will likely result in a design that is not consistent with these guidelines. It will generate superficial gestures that make a building look less massive on paper but do nothing to actually minimize the impact of a building.

Managing mass and bulk should not be considered a cosmetic exercise. It should be embodied in the actual design of the building and should occur in conjunction with good interior planning.

There are a number of ways to manage the mass and bulk of commercial buildings. Beyond making buildings simply smaller, the volume of a building can be articulated into primary and secondary volumes. By reducing the size of the primary volume and allocating space to secondary volumes, the apparent mass is reduced without necessarily reducing space.



## Complexity of Footprint

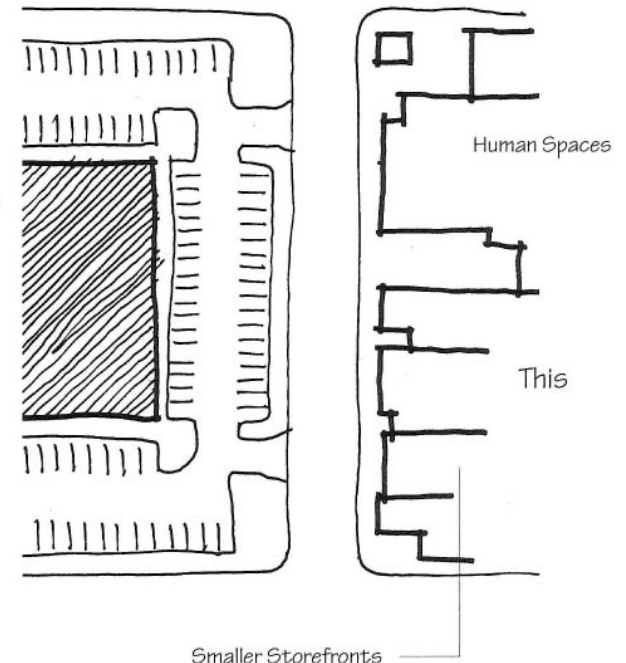
The mass of a building is affected by the complexity of the footprint. Many older businesses in Burlingame have complex footprints representing smaller storefronts for smaller individual tenant spaces. This adds an element of human scale to the buildings and makes them feel less massive.

Storefront development should include smaller storefronts where feasible, even for large tenants. Large tenant storefronts can be broken into multiple bays consistent with storefronts in the neighborhood.

Storefronts can include alcoves and colonnades where entrances occur to further enhance the complexity of the footprint.

Not This

Large retail boxes are too massive and lack human scale



## Component 4: Architectural Compatibility

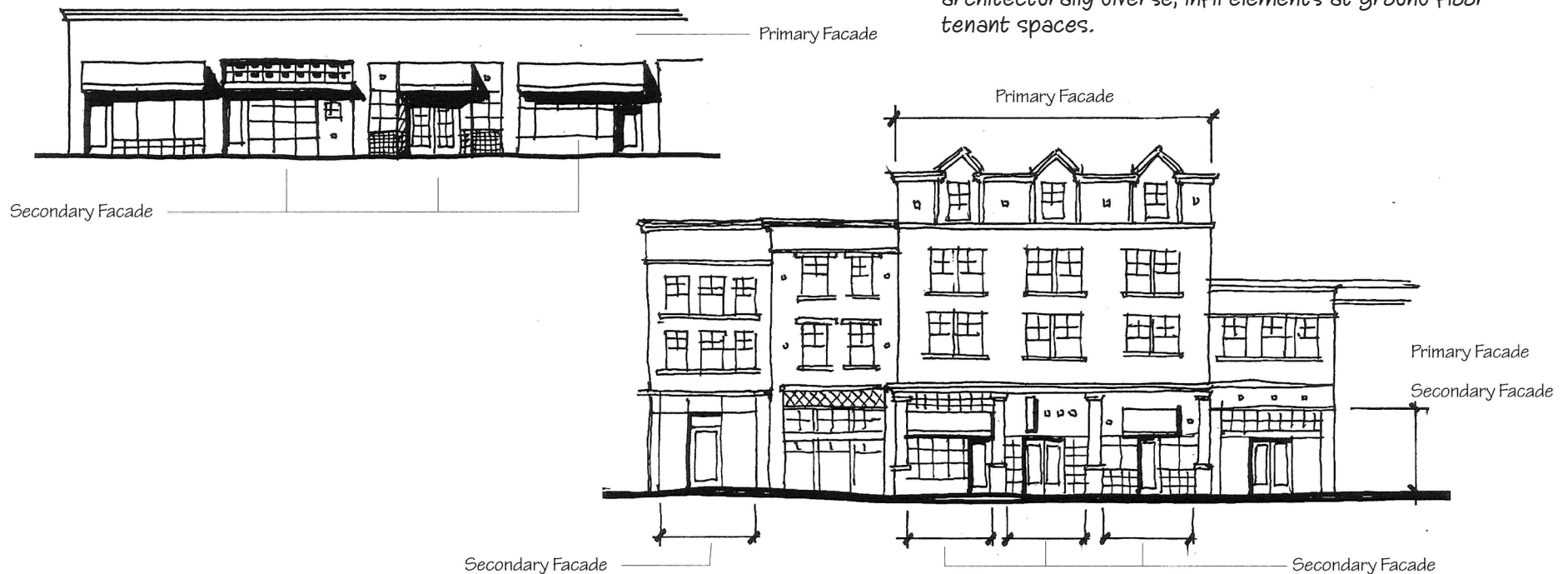
### Primary and Secondary Elements

A primary volume should be established or maintained to clearly identify the building and establish hierarchy.

Example buildings throughout Burlingame will typically exhibit primary and secondary elements. Typically a primary volume will be maintained that identifies and anchors the general character of the building. This will also include the architecture of upper floors, where lower floors may be leased to different retail tenants.

Secondary elements will typically occur to identify tenants within a building. Most often these occur at ground floor storefronts. Well-designed secondary elements are one of the most useful tools for managing mass and supporting human scale.

*Larger buildings may be broken into smaller parts with a clear hierarchy of parts. This hierarchy may include a single architecture for the structural framework of the building and for the skin at the upper floors, with a series of smaller scale, and architecturally diverse, infill elements at ground floor tenant spaces.*



### Human Scale

In new construction, scale is analyzed in comparison to example buildings and based on a goal of achieving human scale buildings and human scale commercial neighborhoods. In additions, existing scale becomes an important factor.

A human scale building will feel right and will be quite possibly unnoticed. A building that is out of scale will seem large and can make the users feel small, sometimes overpowered.

Commercial buildings are often designed to support automobile scale, with the intention of making buildings visible by fast moving cars rather than slow walking humans. The result is often a neighborhood (or strip) which is not enjoyable for people and therefore does not leverage the usability of the neighborhood.

Human scale buildings will include numerous cues that support human and pedestrian use. These elements will cause people to stay longer, shop more and visit more locations in a commercial area.

Example buildings in Burlingame will often exhibit common elements that define human scale. These will include elements that define mass as described above. They will also include the scale of materials, openings and details that occur within the building. Each of these items is considered in detail below.

A successful design will respect the existing elements in a building that define its scale and continue those elements.

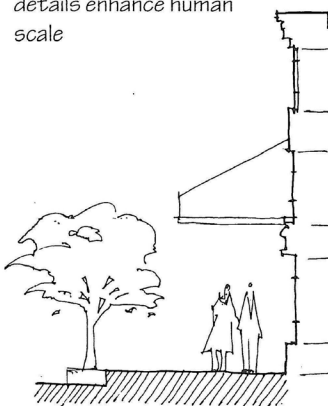
Openings and window patterns that are smaller, closer to human dimensions, or made up of smaller elements can also support the sense of human scale.

Storefronts should include a basic head height of 8 feet. When taller elements are warranted, they should include human scale datum lines and defining elements that bring the architectural pattern back down to a datum line of 8 feet maximum.

Mall scale storefronts with head heights over 12 feet will not be appropriate for human scale.

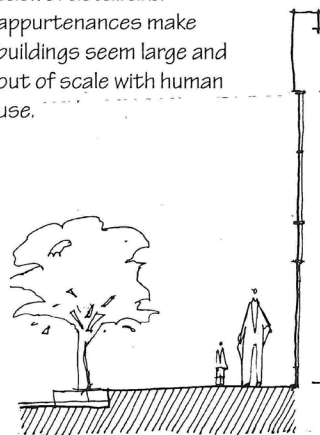
This

Awnings and facade details enhance human scale



Not This

Lack of detail and appurtenances make buildings seem large and out of scale with human use.



## Component 4: Architectural Compatibility

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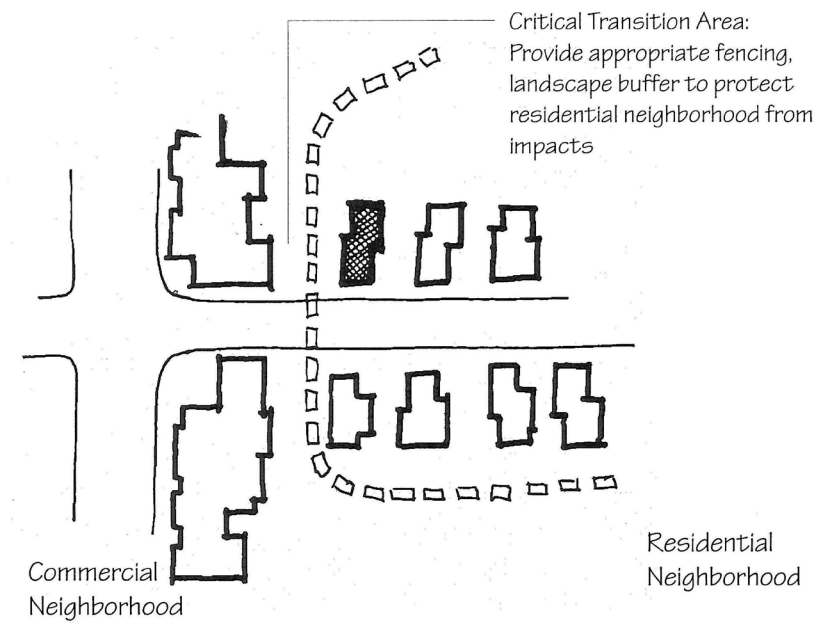
### Transitions in Land Use

Commercial buildings often occur where transitions in land use occur. This means that buildings on the edge of the commercial area may occur next to multi-family housing projects or even single family neighborhoods.

Where these transitions occur, commercial buildings must also be compatible with these neighborhoods.

In such areas, the height and mass of a commercial building must be managed much more carefully. For example, commercial buildings should not extend to their full height limit when overlooking a residential property.

Where commercial buildings occur adjacent to R-1 zones, the design professional should review the Residential Design Guidebook and include consideration for Impacts on Neighbors as defined and regulated therein.



### Design Review Criteria

Compatibility will be achieved by respecting the pattern of building masses present in example business in the neighborhood. It will manage its apparent mass via the following methods:

- Control of pedestrian entrance width and height
- Control of upper floor masses
- Complexity of storefront footprint
- Control of storefront height and width

A compatible design will respect the scale of the existing neighborhood:

- The scale of the building should be consistent with the example buildings in the neighborhood.
- Designs should include appurtenances such as awnings, recessed entries, bays and window systems that are human in scale and clearly intended for human interaction.
- Large components such as full-height storefronts and building entries should be reduced in scale by articulation or by division to achieve human scale.



### Architectural Design in Commercial Buildings

Commercial buildings have a distinctive feature over many other building types: they often house a number of tenants who each have distinctive identities.

For this reason a commercial building often has several architectural characters present at once. These characters are embodied in the design of the various "**facades**" of the building.

For purposes of this Guidebook, the facade shall be defined as the exterior face of the building which is visible to the public from the street or other public way. The facade is often distinct from the other sides of the building and may include a higher level of architectural embellishment, ornamentation or spatial articulation. A building may have several facades when fronting on more than one street. Additionally, when a building is highly visible on other sides from a distance, those sides may be considered important facades.

#### Applicable Finding:

The following finding in the Design Review Ordinance apply to this Component of the Guidelines:

- Architectural design consistency by using a single architectural style on the site that is consistent among primary elements of the structure, restores or retains existing or significant original architectural features, and is compatible in mass and bulk with other structures in the immediate area.

### Primary and Secondary Facades

The "**Primary Building Facade**" is that of the overall building, in some cases referred to as the shell. In multi-story buildings, the primary facade may include the upper floors, the ground floor entrance to the upper floors (lobby, etc.) and the supporting structural components of the upper floors which are present on the ground floor.

The "**Secondary Building Facade**" includes tenant designed storefronts and associated outdoor spaces. These may extend to parking areas, public courts and landscaping that are specifically associated with the tenant space.

This layering of styles is what gives commercial buildings their interest and vibrancy. It is expected that the secondary facades controlled by tenants will have diverse styles and will not necessarily match the architecture of the primary facade. At the same time, tenant facades should not detract from the primary facade.

This component of the Commercial Design Guidebook is concerned with consistency within the primary facade of a commercial building and compatibility among the various secondary facades.



## Component 5: Architectural Design Consistency

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### Single Architectural Style

For projects that house several tenants, the **primary building facade** should be designed as a single architectural effort. Even for single story multi-tenant buildings, there should be a facade that unifies the whole building and provides secondary spaces for individual tenant design and expression.

Design Professionals should avoid making individual tenant facades that span the entire height of a shared building. At some point vertically, the tenant facade should stop and the **primary building facade** should become dominant.





### Impact of Tenant Projects

When projects are proposed by tenants, their designs should not remove or alter portions of the **primary building facade**. Tenant work should respect the existing architecture of the building and tenant design components should remain within the bounds of the tenant space opening, bay or other defining element.

This criteria will preclude tenants from applying overlays of new materials such as sheet metal or wood siding over existing primary components such as brick or terra cotta when those elements span an entire primary facade.



This

Tenant work should be contained within the Secondary Facade and the elements of the primary Facade should remain intact

### Design Review Criteria

A compatible design will support a single architectural style for the **primary building facade** while allowing for diverse, yet compatible, architectural styles for the tenant **secondary facades** by considering the following:

- Primary building facades shall use a single architectural style.
- Secondary facades shall not detract, overlay, interrupt or otherwise compromise the architectural style of the primary building facade.
- Projects performed either on the building as a whole or by individual tenants shall not remove existing significant or historic architectural features from the primary building facade.
- Primary building facades shall be consistent with the mass, bulk and scale of adjacent buildings.
- Secondary building facades (for tenant spaces) shall be consistent with the mass, bulk and scale of existing tenant facades in the commercial neighborhood and shall support the creation and maintenance of human scale in the neighborhood.

Not This

Tenant work should not extend into Primary Facade. Tenant work should not remove significant features of the existing architecture



## Component 6: Site Amenities

### Site Amenities

Commercial buildings are typically understood to be structures that house commercial operations for the benefit of the owner or tenant. They are often seen as objects in a landscape much the same way we view houses.

Commercial neighborhoods, however, serve a very important role in delivering customers to individual businesses. The commercial neighborhood becomes a "building" in its own right and the street becomes a room in that neighborhood.

The importance of design in commercial neighborhoods is not only to enhance individual buildings, but to enhance the larger "room" that is the street. Buildings have a responsibility to contribute their fair share to the life of the street for the benefit of all business operators in the neighborhood.

This often translates into exterior amenities such as landscaping, outdoor seating, exterior enclosures and various supportive architectural components.

When commercial projects include exterior site work, these components should be designed for compatibility with the neighborhood and in support of the pedestrian nature of the commercial areas.

Where landscaping and site development is a component of the design, the Design Professional should prepare a landscape plan as part of the Design Review submittal.

### Applicable Finding:

The following finding in the Design Review Ordinance apply to this Component of the Guidelines:

- Provision of site features such as fencing, landscaping and pedestrian circulation that enriches the existing opportunities of the commercial neighborhood.

### Pedestrian Access

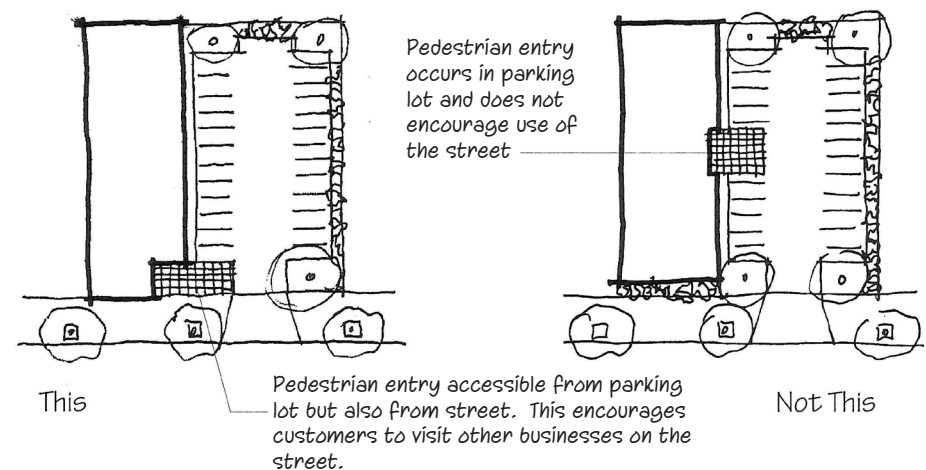
Pedestrian access to main entries and important project components should be addressed in each design. Pedestrian access should be designed as the primary access to any facility, even if that access occurs from a parking lot.

This criteria will translate into distinctive paving design, well-marked pathways, site lighting and supportive landscaping.

Design Professionals should avoid non-specific solutions which simply place a doorway adjacent to a parking lot. The human entrance to a business must be developed as an architectural component.

Where appropriate, the human entrance should have a direct connection to the street to support access to the site by pedestrians. Each ground floor business should have a path that connects to the public sidewalk. The scale of that path should be consistent with the scale of the site. For a large hotel project, the path should be wide and well celebrated. For a small storefront, the path may be only several feet in width.

It is the intent of these guidelines to avoid token paths of plain concrete which are either unusable or undesirable to use.



## Pedestrian Amenities

Pedestrian amenities are encouraged for most businesses. Where allowed by code, outdoor seating and benches should be included. These components greatly increase the usability of the neighborhood, thereby attracting more customers to spend more time in the commercial areas.

Where parking is required, parking areas should be separated from the streets by landscaped areas. These areas should include pedestrian amenities which support the pedestrian use of the neighborhood and decrease the visual and functional impact of the required parking. Amenities may include landscape areas for visual relief or small paved areas with a bench for incidental seating.

In some situations, access to a business or business may occur through courtyards or recesses in a building facade. These areas should be fully developed as places for people. Amenities such as landscaping, seating and appropriate lighting may be required.

Where alleys or courtyards provide secondary access, these areas should also be developed as human spaces.

When an alley occurs adjacent to a project, access to that alley for other than utility reasons may be encouraged to further support the diverse uses available in the commercial areas. Examples may include outdoor seating in these areas in support of food service and retail uses.

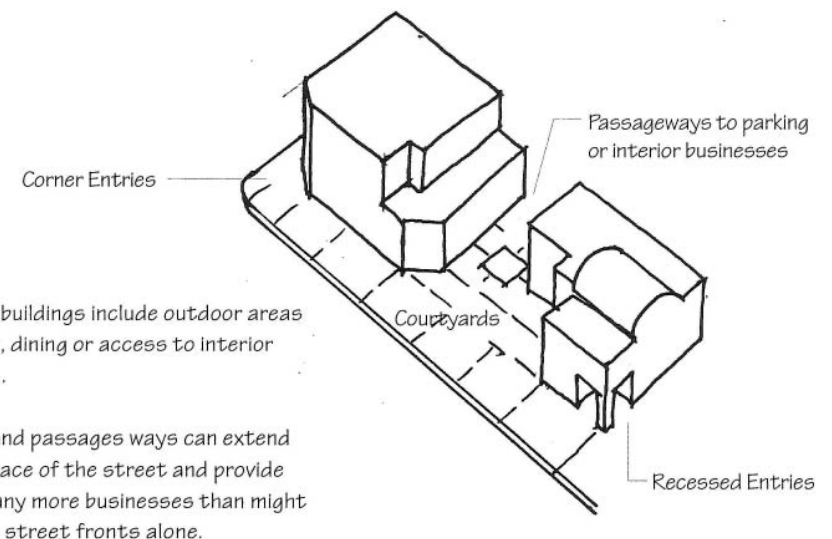
Outdoor employee areas are also supportive of human scale in the commercial areas. Outdoor tables and employee lounge areas that are visible and accessible from the street greatly support the life of the commercial neighborhood.

## Landscaping

Landscaping should remain consistent with the pattern in the commercial neighborhood. In urban neighborhoods, landscaping may be minimal and consist of planting areas adjacent to the public right of way.

Applicable components may include window boxes, storefront planters and planting areas in entry recesses. Landscaping need not mimic residential front yard development, however, small areas of landscaping in urban situations can greatly increase the human character of a project.

Where commercial uses occur adjacent to residential neighborhoods, or where they occur in former residential buildings, there will be a greater need for landscape development. In these situations, landscaping may be necessary to provide a buffer between adjacent non-commercial uses. This can include substantial tree planting, hedges or horizontal separations.



## Component 6: Site Amenities

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### Fencing and Gates

When gates and fencing are necessary, they should allow views into the spaces enclosed to provide additional visual interest to the street.

Fences intended to screen activities from the street should be avoided unless specific utility or functional requirements exist.

In alleys, rear yards and areas adjacent to non-commercial uses, fences may be required for privacy and security.

When such fences occur in the public view they should be designed as architectural components of the project. This may include substantial and high quality materials, supportive landscaping and specific architectural features consistent with the building.

Where fences occur next to residential uses, the fence design should also be complimentary to the residential use. Applicants will be encouraged to consult with adjacent residential neighbors to determine appropriate fencing solutions.

### Parking

Zoning Regulations include specific requirement for parking. Refer to Section 25.70 for parking regulations.

### Design Review Criteria

Compatibility will be achieved by respecting the existing pattern of landscaping and site amenities in the commercial neighborhood. Additionally, where these amenities are limited, projects shall increase the level of amenity by considering the following:

- Provide landscaping appropriate to the existing character of the neighborhood.
- Minimize the impact of parking and vehicle circulation by providing landscaping and pedestrian amenities between parking and the public street.
- Emphasize the pedestrian access to sites and buildings by creating well designed paving, paths and entry courts. Ensure that the pedestrian entrance appears as the primary entrance and that vehicular access is deemphasized.
- Provide outdoor human amenities which increase the human life of the street. Consider outdoor dining and employee areas, outdoor seating and seating for the non-customer public.
- When fencing and gates are used they should be architectural components of the building and should be consistent with the building. Additionally they should be substantial and durable.
- Fencing should not serve to decrease the human presence on the street. Each business should offer a presence on the street that allows the business to be seen and identified. Fencing should serve to screen utility areas and provide security where specifically required by the use.

## Background

### Overview

Burlingame is a unique place. Located in one of the most important geographic and cultural regions in the world, it retains a small-town character based on a compact, identifiable community. It is geographically bounded by San Francisco Bay on one side and the San Francisco Watershed on the other. It shares borders with only three other cities. As such, it maintains a strong physical identity. Unlike many suburban cities, Burlingame has a clear set of boundaries. It is easy to develop a picture of where it starts and stops. This gives us a strong sense of identity as residents. This quality is shared by cities like San Francisco, bound on three sides by water. Cities like Los Angeles, on the other hand, tend to flow from suburb to suburb with little physical demarcation.

Burlingame has three business districts linked by important transportation routes.

Two of these form a "Main Street" pattern much loved and respected by our residents. These areas are not just shopping districts, they are centers of our identity. They are our Main Streets, our community living rooms, they are the places we eat and shop and meet and celebrate.

Mostly, however, Burlingame is where we live. Our city is our neighborhoods; the places we raise our children; the places where we sleep, eat, garden, paint; the places we call home. We do our business here, shop, bank, rent our videos, buy our groceries and have ice cream cones with the kids.

Neighborhoods are more than a collection of houses or shops. Neighborhoods are places which we identify and understand. Each of us has a sense of place regarding our neighborhoods. These neighborhoods are not bound by lines on a map, but by each of our own personal definitions of place. We know when we enter our neighborhood and we know when we leave it. We each have a sense of its boundaries: where it begins and ends, how far our kids can wonder before they our out of the neighborhood, how far we can walk and still know our neighbors.

Our individual neighborhoods connect with other neighborhoods. They connect via streets and sidewalks, but also by the ways in which our lives connect them. We take our kids to school or day-care in another neighborhood, we have an office across town, we shop on the Avenue. Each of these activities takes us through various neighborhoods, so that we become connected to the whole of Burlingame.

In this fashion we are citizens of the City and residents of our neighborhoods. The neighborhood is our first level of geographic identity beyond the home, our first level of participation in the larger society. It is the place we have our Fourth of July barbecue, it is the street we canvas to support a school bond, its where we share our opinions of how the world is working.

In terms of city life, our commercial neighborhoods are our living rooms and dining rooms and kitchens. They are our recreation rooms and classrooms and our houses of government. We all have an important interest in the character and fabric of our downtown areas.

### The Problem

Burlingame is a very desirable place to live for all of the reasons described above. It is also a desirable place to do business.

Our greatest assets are also the basis of one of our potential problems. Because of that desirability, and the resulting property values, there is tremendous pressure placed on all of our neighborhoods to change.

Like our residential neighborhoods, our commercial neighborhoods have seen a tremendous amount of remodeling and reconstruction, a situation we all experience regularly. Just as homeowners have raised concerns that many of the new homes and residential additions do not reflect the style and character of their existing neighborhoods, they are also concerned about the character of our commercial neighborhoods.

Additionally, the interests of our business neighbors are not always the same as those of us who live in Burlingame. The needs of business can differ from the needs of community. Advertising, identity and competition are all forces that can push commercial building design outside the bounds of neighborhood compatibility. Also, corporate identities formed out of notional advertising strategies can be inconsistent with the basic identity of Burlingame, let alone the majority of its existing buildings.

The harmony of business needs with those of our residents requires careful planning and consideration.

### Purpose

The Design Review Process and the Commercial Design Guidebook were created to help conserve the valuable character of our commercial neighborhoods. As these neighborhoods change, there are a number of entities involved in making that change occur. There are property owners, business owners, developers, designers and architects. There are contractors and city agencies and even lenders, all of whom affect what change actually occurs.

It is the goal of the Design Review Process, and this Guidebook, to affect that change in a manner that is positive for our commercial neighborhoods and our community.

We achieve that end by forming a collaborative process which allows the Applicant and the City to work together to achieve common goals. Those goals, supporting a vision of neighborhood conservation, form the basis of the Guidebook which follows and include the following general premises:

- The commercial neighborhood is a place, with a character and a boundary. It can be seen as a room, an institution created by the city to facilitate business and use of business by the residents of the city.
- It is a setting for the businesses located there, composed of the street space, trees, building edges, circulation patterns, pedestrian access from other businesses and transportation. It is also composed of the various characters of the existing buildings that define it. That composition includes a pattern of buildings, storefronts, entries and access. Included also are pedestrian amenities, landscaping and, ultimately, usage by people.
- The commercial building is an integrated object within that room, and, as such, has a role to play in further defining the character of that room. In downtown neighborhoods, commercial buildings rarely stand alone. They have intimate relationships with adjacent buildings and the overall character of the street.
- Business succeeds by attracting customers. Pedestrian oriented neighborhoods with access by diverse means of transportation generate the largest number of potential customers. Additionally, this will also support the widest diversity of business types.
- The inclusion of a wide array of pedestrian amenities and supportive architectural solutions will serve the business interests as well as the residential interests of the community.



- The older buildings and formative elements of our neighborhoods offer value to the community. Likewise elders, they inform us of our past, define our roots and connect us to our culture. They warrant respect and emulation.
- The Design Review process is a collaborative effort between the Applicant and the City. It is recognized that a concise set of standards will not produce the diversity and responsiveness necessary to conserve our neighborhoods. This process is intended to supplement and enhance the Burlingame Zoning Ordinance.

As each project that is built affects and shapes the neighborhood, each of us who initiates a project becomes one of the designers of our neighborhoods. A neighborhood with twenty buildings may have twenty designers shaping it as a place. As such, it is important that we work together so that the resulting design, the neighborhood, is coherent and comprehensive.

Unlike a large project, however, many of the initial designers of our neighborhoods left us many years ago. Their legacy lives in the buildings and streets and subdivisions they left behind. As designers of our neighborhoods, it is important that we respect the intentions of the original designers. We do this by looking at their work, supporting it and adding to it in ways that are harmonious.

The process defined below will assist applicants in fulfilling their role as contributors to neighborhood design.

## Appendix A: Background

### About the Guidebook

The Commercial Design Guidebook is an important tool of the process described above. It is intended to be a resource for applicants, designers, architects and design reviewers.

As a guidebook, it defines a number of "Components". Components are important areas of consideration when designing a building for Neighborhood Compatibility. Components may or may not apply to a particular application. These Components will be used in different ways on each project

It is clearly understood that good neighborhoods, as well as good buildings, don't come out of cookbooks. They grow out of the consideration of a wide range of needs. This Guidebook is intended to express the needs of the commercial neighborhood and the community.

The Guidebook includes six general components:

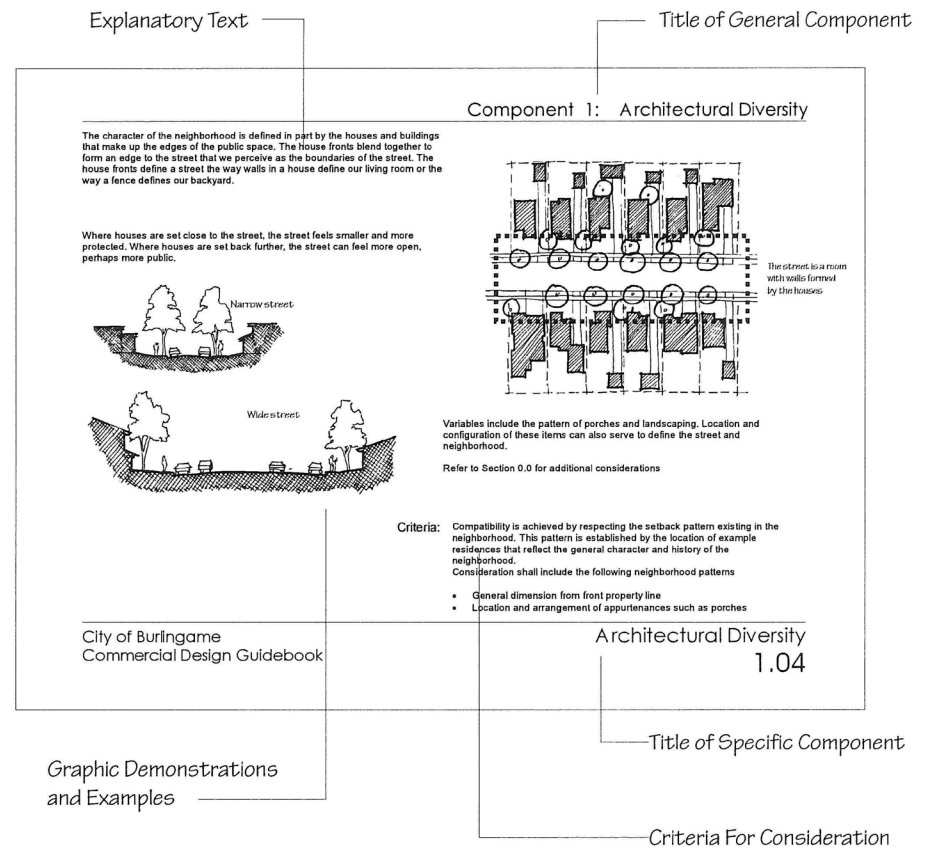
- Architectural Diversity
- Pedestrian Use and Character
- Visually Prominent I Gateway Sites
- Architectural Compatibility
- Architectural Design Consistency
- Site Amenities

These components harmonize with the structure of the Design Review Ordinance. Each General Component includes a number of Specific Components that address specific aspects of neighborhood design. These items are discussed briefly and supported with graphic demonstrations where appropriate.

Each component references the specific findings defined in the Design Review Ordinance that support that component. Each component also includes a short list of Criteria by which a particular application can be measured.

This Guidebook is **not** intended to be an instructional manual on commercial design. It is anticipated that each project will include competent designers who are well versed in such matters. This document is intended primarily to address specific neighborhood concerns and to lay the groundwork for positive communication regarding applications.

We hope it is helpful and beneficial to the community.



Typical Guidebook Page



## Method

The Design Review Process was developed in response to the needs outlined in Appendix A. It is intended to be a positive exercise, one that engages the applicants and their design professionals in the identification of the unique qualities of the neighborhood in which they are building. It seeks to assist in designing a building or tenant improvement that will both contribute to the neighborhood's character, respect the existing patterns that have been established, and serve the business owners specific needs.

The Design Review process is intended to be an integral part of the design process, not an "after-the-fact" review of a completed set of construction level drawings. As such, the Design Review process can be initiated early in the design phase of a project so that significant time is not added to the overall design process.

That Process will include several key steps and participants.

## Steps

### Which Projects Are Reviewed

Projects requiring Commercial Design Review include the following:

- New Commercial Buildings and Substantial Construction of Existing Commercial Buildings.
- Alterations affecting more than 50% of the front facade.
- Alterations affecting more than 50 lineal feet of any facade facing a public or private street or parking lot.

Exceptions include the following:

- All tenant and / or building facades with 25 feet or less of parking lot, public street or private street frontage.
- New or replacement awnings when the facade is not subject to Design review.

**Burlingame Avenue Commercial District:** Within the Burlingame Avenue Commercial (BAC) zoning district, any change to the front façade or any façade facing a public or private street or parking lot requires Commercial Design Review.

To ensure consistent evaluation and enforcement of the design review guidelines, the Planning Commission and City Council have established a design review process to evaluate applications for such projects. The following steps are intended to be an overview of the typical process. Contact the Community Development Department, Planning Division for a detailed list of steps, application requirements and procedures.

## Design

The first step in any project is the design of that project. It is anticipated that projects will be designed by persons capable of understanding functional needs and responding adequately to the desires of the business or building owner.

This Guidebook is an important tool for the Design period of any project. Use of the Guidebook will become an effective way of achieving common ground early on and embodying the spirit of this Guidebook in the resulting design.

## Application

Once the design has been completed, applications are submitted to the Planning Division. There are specific requirements for information to be included in the submittal. Please contact the Planning Division staff for these submittal requirements.

An important element is the submittal of photographs showing the property in context with neighboring buildings. This will include the front view of the two properties on each side of the property arranged in a streetscape.

Upon submittal each project is plan-checked by staff to ensure consistency with zoning regulations. These plan check comments are provided to the applicant to make sure the project meets current regulations. This will include comments from other City Departments, such as Building, Fire, Parks and Public Works.

### Commercial Design Review

Once the application is determined to be complete, containing all of the required information, the project is scheduled for a Design Review Study meeting with the Planning Commission. The meeting is scheduled as a public hearing on the Commission's regular calendar so that neighboring property owners and businesses may also comment on the design.

The Planning Commission will review the project for consistency with the Design Guidelines and the Commercial Design Guidebook. If the project is within the boundaries of the Downtown Specific Plan, the Bayfront Specific Plan or the North Burlingame/Rollins Road Specific Plan, the project will also be reviewed for consistency with the Design Guidelines contained in these Specific Plans. The Planning Commission will provide comments to the applicant regarding any changes required to the design before it is brought back to the Commission for action.

If only minor changes are required in the design, the Planning Commission may recommend that the project be scheduled on the Commission's consent calendar for approval when the requested changes to the plans are made. If the project needs more revisions, the Commission may request that the item be scheduled on a regular action calendar so that the changes can be discussed at that meeting. In some cases, the Commission will determine that the assistance of a Design Review consultant is required before the application is ready to be scheduled for action. The Commission will provide suggestions for revision, and will direct the applicant and property owner to meet with one of the Design Review consultants specifically selected by the City for this type of review.

The assigned Design Review consultant reviews Commission's comments and the Design Guidelines, offers suggestions and discusses alternatives with the applicant and property owner on how these comments can be addressed with design revisions. This can be a positive exercise for applicants as it often improves the overall project.

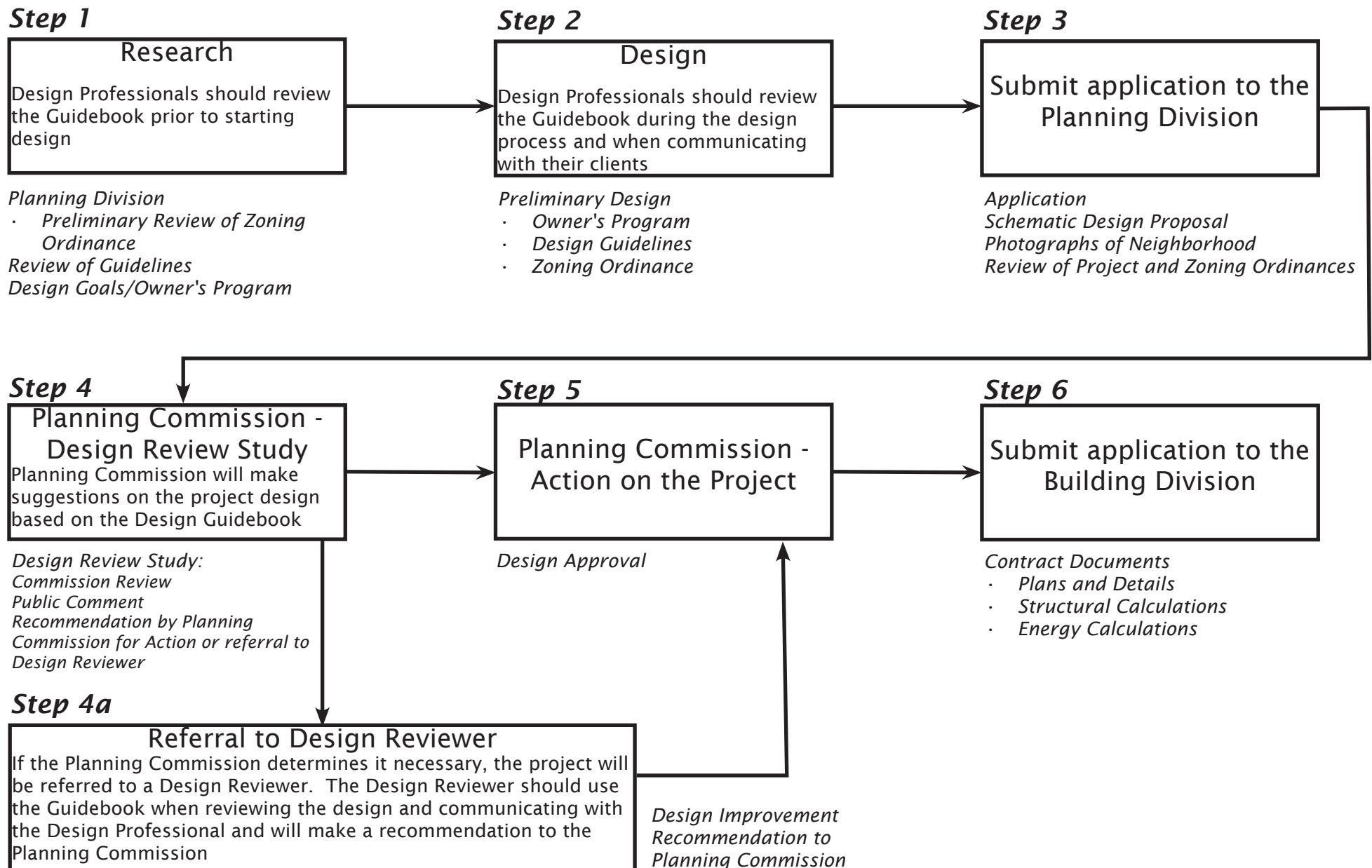
In these cases, it is not the responsibility of the Design Review consultants to design the project; they are required to evaluate the proposal for its fit into the neighborhood and if necessary, to provide some education and direction to the property owner and their designer or architect.

Once the Design Review consultant has reviewed the project, provided a written analysis, and the designer or architect has made the necessary changes, the project is scheduled on the Planning Commission's regular action calendar. Applicants should note that the Design Review consultant makes recommendations to the Planning Commission. Recommended approval, however, does not constitute final approval. The Planning Commission makes a final review of the project and determines whether it is actually in compliance with the guidelines.

It is the goal of the Commercial Design Guidelines to help the applicant identify the components which will create the best fit in their particular neighborhood. By using these guidelines before developing the design proposal, the applicant can have a better understanding of the components of their neighborhood and the criteria by which their project will be evaluated and can incorporate them into their design early on. This can save the applicant a great deal of time in the review process with the Planning Commission and, if required, the Design Review consultant. It can also eliminate the need for extensive revisions which can be costly and frustrating.

The applicant or any member of the public may appeal any decision made by the Planning Commission to the City Council.

This Design Review process has been created to serve the city's residents and businesses and to help applicants better understand and appreciate their neighborhood. Effort has been taken to keep the process user-friendly, simple, personal and one-on-one.



### Recommended References

This Guidebook is not intended to be an instructional manual on commercial or neighborhood design. It is anticipated that each project will include competent designers who are well versed in such matters. This document is intended primarily to address specific neighborhood concerns and to lay the groundwork for positive communication regarding applications.

In support of that goal, we have included a brief list of recommended resources for use by Property Owners, Business Owners and Design Professionals. There are a range of resources here that address larger neighborhood planning concepts as well as individual building design.

This list is provided in the spirit of cooperation and neighborhood participation. Our hope is to generate a deeper understanding of the importance of neighborhood conservation and low impact neighborhood design.

### Styles and Components

#### **A Field Guide to American Architecture**

Carol Rifkind  
Penguin 1980

#### **Identifying American Architecture**

John J. -G. Blumenson  
W. W. Norton & Company 1981  
*A useful and compact guide to architectural styles and components.*

#### **Building Construction Illustrated**

Francis D. K. Ching  
With Cassandra Adams  
Van Nostrand Reinhold 1991  
*An excellent guide for homeowners in understanding many of the components of construction or remodeling that you may be considering.*

## Planning and Neighborhood Development

### **From Frontier to Suburb**

Alan Hynding  
Star Publishing 1982  
*A good snapshot of Peninsula history*

### **San Francisco Bay Area A Metropolis in Perspective**

Mel Scott  
University of California press 1985  
*A deeper exploration of Bay Area history with perspectives on how our towns came to be.*

### **Streets And The Shaping of Towns And Cities**

Michael Southworth & Eran Ben-Joseph  
McGraw Hill 1997  
*The effect of street planning and standards on the character of neighborhoods.*

### **The New Urbanism**

Peter Katz  
McGraw Hill 1994

### **Seaside**

#### **Making a Town in America**

Edited by David Mohoney and Keller Easterling  
Princeton Architectural Press 1991

### **America Restored**

Carol M. Highsmith and Ted Landphair  
The Preservation Press 1994

### **Home From Nowhere**

Remaking Our Everyday World  
For The Twenty-First Century  
James Howard Kunstler  
Simon & Schuster 1996

### **A Better Place to Live**

Reshaping The American Suburb  
Phillip Langdon  
University of Massachusetts Press 1994

### **Towns And Town Making Principles**

Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk  
Rizzoli 1991