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INTRODUCTION

This Chapter presents an introduction to the Design Standards and Guidelines document and provides guidance regarding the application of the Design Standards and Guidelines. This Chapter is organized by the following sections:

1.1 Background and Process

1.2 Purpose and Application

1.3 Relationship to the Zoning Code, General Plans and Specific Plans

1.4 Organization of the Design Standards and Guidelines Document

1.1 Background and Process

Background

The Alameda County Board of Supervisors decided to prepare Design Standards and Guidelines for the unincorporated communities of West Alameda County to address neighborhood concerns about the quality of development in these communities.

In the past, a number of developments have used Planned Development zoning to achieve greater density without providing the commensurate amenities and high quality design. Specific problems identified by the community and Staff included, but were not limited to:

- Bulkiness of past developments, especially on small-lots;
- Concern regarding overall appearance of projects including lack of architectural character and blank street-facing facades;
- Insufficient landscaping and open space;
- Parking and circulation issues, including dominance of garage doors and access driveways, creating an unfriendly pedestrian space on the public street, and insufficient guest parking;
- Lack of clarity and detail regarding design expectations.

The Board of Supervisors have requested a set of standards and guidelines be prepared to provide greater detail about design expectations for residential projects, and provide greater consistency in the review of projects by County staff.

Planning Process

The Board appointed a Design Standards and Guidelines Task Force, whose members included architects, developers, and community residents from the unincorporated areas of West Alameda County, to help guide the planning process. Planning consultants were hired to work with the Task Force and County Planning Department staff.

The planning process involved an analysis of existing regulations and standards contained in the County's Zoning Ordinance and Specific Plans, a review of Design Standards and Guidelines from comparable communities, interviews with County Staff and community stakeholders, and a field tour of existing residential projects in the unincorporated West Alameda County areas.

Existing residential projects were further evaluated through the review of development project applications and site visits to the project sites. Reports were prepared for different residential building types that summarized the analysis of existing development in unincorporated West Alameda County and recommended additional

standards and guidelines. The types of development analyzed included: townhomes, small-lot single-family homes, single-family subdivisions, hillside development, multi-family and residential mixed-use development.

A series of study sessions were held with the Task Force to discuss the analysis and recommendations for each different building type, to provide an opportunity for public input, and to review the Draft Design Standards and Guidelines. Public hearings were held with community boards, the Planning Commission, and City Council. The final guidelines were adopted on _____.

1.2 Purpose and Application

Purpose

The purpose of the Design Standards and Guidelines is to provide greater certainty about project design standards and expectations for both project applicants and community residents. The goal is to expedite the review process by clearly stating the County’s desires for high-quality residential projects that contribute to the long-term value of the neighborhood and provide livable units for residents.

Application of the Design Standards and Guidelines

The Design Standards and Guidelines establish the County regulatory framework for the design of residential projects in the unincorporated communities of West Alameda County. They will serve the following functions:

- A guide for the preparation of project proposals by property owners, developers, and architects;
- A guide for the review of projects by County Staff;
- A guide for County decision-makers in reviewing and deciding project applications; and
- A location for updated development standards.

Policies

The Design Standards and Guidelines establish the following policies:

- Policy 1-1:** Design residential development projects to comply with all of the standards and guidelines. In the event of a conflict between the existing development standards in the Zoning Code, and these standards and guidelines, the more restrictive requirements shall apply. In the event of a conflict between the existing development standards in the Specific Plans and these standards and guidelines, the Planning Director shall determine which standards apply.
- Policy 1-2:** Zoning designations shall establish the maximum density allowed on individual properties. If an applicant is requesting a greater number of units than allowed under existing zoning, the applicant is required to rezone the property to another existing zoning category.

- Policy 1-3:** Planned Development zoning cannot be used to increase density above that which is allowed under base zoning.
- Policy 1-4:** Exceptions to design standards and guidelines will only be considered through a discretionary review process, and only approved if:
- Policy 1-5:** There are site-specific conditions that make it physically infeasible to follow the standards or guidelines; and
- Policy 1-6:** The proposed design provides an equal or better design solution in terms of livability for residents and impacts on neighboring properties.
- Policy 1-7:** A development project is not entitled to the maximum density allowed under zoning if the project cannot comply with the design standards and guidelines. On many small and/or narrow lots in the County, the potential density may be lower than the maximum allowed under zoning. A narrow lot is not a basis for approving exceptions to development standards.

Standards

Standards are qualitative or quantifiable rule or measure that must be satisfied. The standards in this document are intended to supplement existing standards and update old development standards in the County Zoning Ordinance. These standards specify residential building types appropriate in each zoning district, and establish a detailed set of project review criteria, which the Board of Supervisors may ultimately decide to incorporate into the County Zoning Ordinance. Until that time, these standards serve as the basis for project review. Exceptions to these standards require either a variance or conditional use permit, as regulated in the County Zoning Ordinance.

Guidelines

Guidelines express objectives with respect to specific development features or conditions and explain why a particular guideline or criterion is an appropriate way to achieve the objective. Guidelines provide graphic examples and verbal description showing approaches that conform to the guidelines. The guidelines in this document establish basic guidelines for aspects of project design that are regulated by the County. These guidelines augment the standards in this document and provide qualitative direction on how to meet the County's goal for high quality design of residential projects.

Diagrams and Photos

Diagrams and photographs shown here are intended to illustrate a certain standard or intended to represent particular aspects of design. Most of the photographs shown here will have an accompanying caption, which will state what particular design feature the photograph is intended to illustrate.

In some cases, photographs of developments may show site planning or architectural features that may not comply with the Design Standards and Guidelines and, therefore not encouraged. The inclusion of a photograph of a certain development project does not mean that a subsequent similar project will meet the Design Standards and Guidelines, nor does it mean that the development project shown in the photograph is an overall exemplary project.

Applicants should meet with County staff early in the design process for assistance with the interpretation of the Design Guidelines and their application to a specific site or project.

1.3 Relationship to the Zoning Code, General Plans and Specific Plans

Zoning Code

The Design Standards and Guidelines have been carefully crafted to be consistent with the densities of each zoning district. It is important to note that the majority of residentially zoned properties in the Alameda County unincorporated communities are small and/or very narrow and deep. The lot pattern stems from the historical development pattern of agricultural lots.

Analysis shows that on the small and narrow lots, it is not necessarily possible to achieve the maximum density allowed under zoning. The size and shape of these lots is not efficient for development. Potential densities can be 15-25% less than the maximum allowed density, due to the inefficiency of narrow lots. As stated in the policies, property owners are not entitled to the maximum density if they cannot comply with the development standards and guidelines. Merging narrow lots may be required in order to develop to the maximum allowed density and comply with the development standards and guidelines.

General Plans

General Plans exist for both Castro Valley and the Eden Area, covering the urbanized unincorporated communities of the County. The General Plans establish land use designations, densities, and a wide variety of other policies related to future development. Both of these General Plans are in the process of being updated. Public Review Drafts have been released and Environmental Impact Reports prepared. Once the new General Plans are adopted, the County will need to review existing zoning designations, and revise any that are inconsistent with the General Plan. These Design Standards and Guidelines have been prepared to be consistent with the policy direction of the new Draft General Plans.

Specific Plans

The following Specific Plans have been prepared for certain urbanized areas of the County. These provide much greater detail about land use, development standards, building design, and street improvements than exist in the General Plan, and serve as the zoning for the area. Each plan is listed, and its relationship to the Design Standards and Guidelines is described.

Ashland and Cherryland Business Districts (ACBD) and Castro Valley Central Business District (CVCBD) Specific Plans

The ACBD and CVCBD allows multi-family residential projects and mixed-use development projects in certain zones. Special provisions in the ACBD and CVCBD Plans have been incorporated into the Design Standards and Guidelines. The Design Standards and Guidelines should be the primary guiding document for review of multi-family and mixed-use projects in the ACBD and CVCBD as they provide more detail than the Specific Plans, as well as provide guidance about the review criteria for exceptions.

Policies and guidelines not included in this document, but are contained in the Specific Plans (such as, but not limited to signs, graphics, and awnings and public improvements), shall continue to apply. The Design Standards and Guidelines may be updated from time to time as the Specific Plans are updated.

Fairview and Madison Area Specific Plans

The Fairview and Madison Area Specific Plans establish a special set of development standards tailored to the single-family hillside development in those areas of the County. The Fairview and Madison Area Specific Plans remain the governing documents for development in the Fairview and Madison areas. The Fairview and Madison Area Specific Plans set the basic development standards such as density and setbacks, which are summarized in the Design Standards and Guidelines. The Design Standards and Guidelines provide additional guidance relative to height measurement, building design, and other focused topics.

San Lorenzo Village Specific Plan

The San Lorenzo Village Specific Plan contains detailed parcel-specific design recommendations for this small village center area. The San Lorenzo Village Specific Plan remains the governing document for development in San Lorenzo Village.

1.4 Organization of the Design Standards and Guidelines Document

Residential Projects

Standards

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 presents the standards for residential development projects. Section 2.1 describes the residential zoning districts, densities, and discusses the building types appropriate for each zoning district.

Sections 2.2 through 2.5 contain the development standards for each residential building type. These sections contain diagrams illustrating the major development standards and are followed by development standard tables.

Guidelines

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 establishes basic project design guidelines for residential development projects. The project design guidelines are organized by topic, corresponding to the organization of the Design Standards in Chapter 2. Each topic contains an explanation of the overall purpose of the guidelines and provides qualitative direction about how to meet the County's goals for residential projects.

Residential Mixed-Use Projects

Standards

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 presents the development standards for residential mixed-use projects. Section 4.1 describes the mixed-use Specific Plan districts and densities.

Section 4.2 contains the development standards for residential mixed-use projects and contains diagrams illustrating the major development standards, followed by the development standards table.

Guidelines

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 establishes basic project design guidelines for residential mixed-use projects. The project design guidelines are organized by topic, corresponding to the organization of the Design Standards in Chapter 4. Each topic contains an explanation of the overall purpose of the guidelines and provides qualitative direction about how to meet the County's goals for residential mixed-use projects.

Standards That Apply to All or Some Projects

Standards

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 presents development standards that apply to all or some development projects with residential uses, such as parking dimensions, projections, and fence heights.

Definitions and Rules of Measurement

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 presents definitions and rules of measurement.