

Project Overview

What is the Project Background?

The Community

Unincorporated western Alameda County is located in the East Bay region of the San Francisco Bay Area, generally west of the East Bay hills, south of the city of San Leandro, north of the city of Hayward. It consists of the communities of Ashland, Castro Valley, Cherryland, Fairview and San Lorenzo. The area is approximately 22 square miles of urban and suburban land, with residential uses, built largely between the 1950s to the present, being the predominant land use.

General Plan Update

The Eden Area General Plan and the Castro Valley General Plan, now being updated, are the subsections of the County General Plan that cover the subject area. The draft Eden Area and Castro Valley General Plans prioritize the development of design standards and/or guidelines for improved development and redevelopment of these areas. The Illustrated Design Guidelines and Development Standards will address General Plan policies which support design guidelines for development. More information about existing conditions can be found by viewing these recently completed draft plans on the web at www.edenplan.net and at www.castrovalleygeneralplan.org.

The purpose of the County Illustrated Design Guidelines project is to prepare guidelines that will be used to review site and building design for proposed development projects. The guidelines are to be used by project applicants, County staff, and County decision makers. The key goal is to provide clarity and certainty about site planning and architectural design expectations. The project also involves preparing recommendations regarding the project review process for all the different types of applications.

Land Use Categories

The following is a list of predominant land use types followed by a list of issues identified as needing attention through the new design guidelines and recommendations for development standards.

Residential

- Single family detached on street-facing lots
- Single Family Hillside
- Single family on flag lots and private streets
- Small Lot Single Family
- Townhouses
- Multifamily – 2-4 stories

Commercial

- Auto-oriented Commercial Businesses and shopping centers, with some general guidelines about signs
- Pedestrian-Oriented Commercial
- Mixed Use Development with retail/restaurants/services on the ground floor and office/residential above

- Creekside Development

General Issues

Planning staff, developers and policy makers have identified the following general concerns, such that current development standards:

- Do not provide clear and consistent direction to private developers leading to unproductive project proposals;
- Do not provide planners with the necessary leverage to negotiate desirable site and building design;
- Do not support Planning Commission attempts to pursue better design when considering projects that otherwise meet basic ordinance requirements; and
- Result too often in poor development projects even when all current ordinances and standards are met.

Issues by Land Use

The following issues have also been identified by land use, and would need to be addressed by the design guidelines and recommendations for development standards:

1. Single-family building additions and new construction: Proposed design guidelines and recommendations for development standards for additions and new construction within established, single family neighborhoods, should at minimum address:
 - Massing and scale of new construction and additions
 - Scale of accessory structures
 - Parking and vehicle storage
 - Heights, especially relative to setbacks
 - Setbacks and stepbacks
 - Secondary units
 - Relationship between proposed development, and existing and future context
 - Pedestrian-friendly development patterns
 - Building orientation toward the street
 - Building proportions and materials
2. In-fill development for multi and single family residential: Development opportunities still exist in hillside areas, in the re-use of obsolete commercial uses, and in infill of underutilized sites. Remaining sites are often constrained by long and narrow lot shapes, slopes, and riparian habitat. Design guidelines and recommendations for development standards should at minimum address:
 - Massing and scale of additions and new construction
 - Massing and lot coverage specific to sloped sites

- Parking and circulation
 - Relationship between proposed development, and existing and future context
 - Setbacks, stepbacks, and useable open space
 - Utility placement
 - Heights, especially relative to context and to hillside conditions
 - Gated neighborhoods
 - Subdivision development patterns
 - Landscaping features
 - Building orientation toward the street
 - Pedestrian-friendly development patterns
 - Building proportions and materials
3. Mixed-use development: Development opportunities exist for residential/commercial mixed-use projects. These may be in commercial districts and may be at higher densities than heretofore experienced. The design guidelines and recommendations for development standards should address:
- Relationship between proposed development, and existing and future context
 - Level of detail, proportions, color, and materials
 - Building relationship toward the street and public space
 - Parking, loading, and circulation
 - Preservation of on-street parking
 - Pedestrian orientation
 - Private open space
 - Creation of pedestrian-oriented street presence and framing of public right-of-way.
 - Pedestrian-friendly development patterns
 - Setbacks, build-to lines, and stepbacks
 - Heights, scale, and massing
 - Minimum dimensions of space necessary for commercial uses
 - Utility placement
4. Commercial: Most commercially designated property is regulated by specific plans that have their own design standards. While some standards are unique to each area, many have common features. New design guidelines and recommendations for development standards would coordinate existing specific plan standards into a common format and language while at the same time highlighting requirements unique to each specific plan area. Notwithstanding the above, design issues identified with commercial properties include:

- Relationship between proposed development, and existing and future context
- Level of detail, proportions, color, and materials
- Building relationship toward the street and public space
- Parking, loading, and circulation
- Preservation of on-street parking
- Pedestrian orientation
- Private open space
- Creation of pedestrian-oriented street presence and framing of public right-of-way.
- Pedestrian-friendly development patterns
- Setbacks, build-to lines, and stepbacks
- Heights, scale, and massing
- Reuse of existing building, especially houses
- Development of small, shallow sites
- Location of outdoor activities and/or storage materials
- Utility placement

Unique Character

While the urban and suburban unincorporated areas of western Alameda County have features superficially similar to those found in other communities, taken as whole, the areas' uncommon characteristics need to be recognized.

Among the uncommon characteristics to consider are:

- There is no traditional downtown pattern of development. Retail centers and nodes are generally located along major intercity boulevards.
- There is a lack of relationship between neighborhoods. There is no clear sense of community identity as a whole unincorporated area.
- There is no traditional pattern of square blocks. Instead, long blocks with few intervening streets are common.
- There is a pattern of long, narrow lots is typical in certain districts.
- Intercity roadways, freeways, railroads, channeled creeks and hills divide the area and challenge community cohesion.
- The area is significantly built-out with re-use and infill being the most common form of new development.
- A significant portion of the area is under the local Redevelopment Agency.
- A very high population density exists in some areas, notably Cherryland and Ashland.

What are the goals of the project?

The project involves the establishment of new design guidelines with an extensive graphics component, including illustrations and photographs used to express most design guidelines and concepts, in order to create an engaging user-friendly document that will provide clear direction on design guidelines. The new Illustrated Design Guidelines, and recommendations for development standards and review implementation, are intended to strengthen the County's design review process and result in high quality architecture, landscaping, and site design for new development and redevelopment within the County. The project also involves preparing recommendations regarding revisions to development standards in the zoning code, and recommendations regarding the project review process for all the different types of applications. The guidelines and recommendations will function to preserve and enhance the desired character of existing neighborhoods and improve the aesthetic and functional quality of new development projects.

The Illustrated Design Guidelines and Development Standards Taskforce meets on a regular basis to review the work products of the County's hired consultant in conjunction with County staff. Further, the Taskforce provides input on those products, and provides the policy direction necessary to advance the Design Guidelines and Development Standards process. The Taskforce's role is solely advisory. Final approval of the Design Guidelines and Development Standards can only be granted by the County Board of Supervisors. All Taskforce meetings are open to the public.

Community Participation

A good outreach effort involves both internal and external stakeholders. Engaging in an open dialogue with stakeholders enhances the resulting program and gives policymakers confidence about the feasibility of the proposed Illustrated Design Guidelines and Development Standards and shows that it has the support of the development community. As such, participating Taskforce members, stakeholders and members of the public have an essential role in the public participation process and program development.

All County facilitated public hearings and outreach forums are noticed by mail, internet and newspaper, and are open to the public. Meeting reports, agendas and related correspondence will be made available for review at the County Planning Department Office, 224 West Winton Avenue, Room 111, Hayward, CA 94544, and at the County Planning Department online webpage, <http://www.acgov.org/cda/planning>. Anyone interested in participating in the process can also submit written comments via letter or email.