

7.6 DESIGN REVIEW

7.6.1 Introduction

The Design Review Element is an optional General Plan element permitted by Section 65302 of the Government Code. Its status as an optional element is not meant to understate its role in planning, particularly as it relates to complementing the mandatory Land Use and Circulation Elements. The Design Review Element can also complement the Scenic Highways and Economic Development Elements.

Design review is concerned with the physical design of communities and rural residential landscapes. It involves reviewing certain types of development proposals to ensure that they conform to agreed-upon community standards for design and appearance. It is the role of this Element to provide general guidance and a framework to developing specific community-oriented design review standards.

7.6.2 Findings

Scope of a Design Review Element in Shasta County

The influence of design review standards on the physical appearance of a town or community should be consistent with local character and the desire to create an appealing developed environment. A typical design review program will focus on the urban and suburban environment, but may also provide standards for rural residential development and for community centers in rural areas. Unlike most other land use programs, design review programs deal almost exclusively with design issues involving aesthetics that may include architectural style, building size and dimension, landscaping, color pattern, lighting, signing; and, in congested urban settings, how motorized and non-motorized transit modes can be best interlinked. Typical design review programs provide guidance to commercial and industrial development, as well as for large residential projects. General design criteria may be developed for other smaller projects and implemented through various development standards contained in or as a result of the zoning ordinance. If a design review program is well thought-out and allowed to be implemented over time, it has the potential to be one of the most important planning tools to affect the physical appearance and character of a community.

Design Review in Urban and Town Centers

A design review program has the greatest potential to affect an improved quality of life in urban and town centers. High activity areas, such as central business districts and community shopping centers, are extremely suited for specially-tailored design review programs. Such efforts should be closely coordinated with economic development and redevelopment activities that affect each center. In Shasta County, the communities of Burney, Cottonwood, Fall River Mills, and Palo Cedro contain centralized commercial districts for which special design review programs could be implemented. In Cottonwood, historic design review objectives have been adopted for the Front Street area. The objectives stress architectural designs which reflect turn of the century development, roughly from 1872 to 1930. The implementation of design review programs in these areas should be accompanied by adoption of community design manuals which provide a theme and associated criteria for the review of new development.

In other commercial and industrial areas, a design review effort would be less thematic and more oriented to meeting countywide standards. For larger urban residential projects, a design review program should encourage the development of variety and interest among housing units and avoid the appearance of tract-like housing lacking in diversity. There should be an emphasis on landscaping, which aids in reducing the domination of residential settings by streets. One of the most effective ways to visually de-emphasize the impact and scale of residential streets is to provide large shade trees alongside the street with pedestrian walkways located on the opposite side of the tree-planted landscape strip.

Design Review in Rural Communities

The focus of a design element in rural community and residential areas should center on blending commercial and residential development with natural landscape features afforded by these rural settings. The overall objective of enhancing the natural environment within the context of rural development can be achieved by encouraging development which is as unobtrusive to the natural setting as possible. Design review issues in rural areas generally will involve the use of appropriate building color, fencing and screening, maintenance of viewsheds, use of natural vegetation and terrain when integrating development, and the appropriate mixing of uses in rural centers and private recreational areas.

Countywide Design Review Standards

The development of the County's design review program involves following three related steps. First, the County should develop general guidelines for countywide application of a design review program. This first step would encompass revising the present zoning ordinance and/or related development standards and conditions. Second, the County would begin developing design review programs specific to those areas slated for community planning efforts and which are consistent with the countywide design review standards. Third, the County could consider creating a special design review body with authority to review specific projects and design review policies.

7.6.3 Objectives

- DR-1 Promote a visually appealing developed environment in urban, suburban, town center, mixed use, and rural residential settings.
- DR-2 Provide the County's communities the opportunity to develop their individual and local character, as reflected by citizens involved in their planning process.
- DR-3 Assure that design review standards are cost-effective and promote the value of development, while being consistent with overall economic development themes and programs.

7.6.4 Policies

- DR-a Design review zoning should be applied to identify areas where special design considerations are needed to promote a design theme for a community center, large commercial or industrial areas, or for a major urban highway corridor. The application of design review zoning should be avoided where a single parcel or small groups of parcels are involved, or where the protection of natural resources or viewshed can be assured by implementation of more appropriate zoning.

- DR-b The County should include the development of a community-oriented design review manual as part of the work plan when preparing community plans for areas defined by Policy CO-r or when implementing other economic development plans for the County's urban communities.

- DR-c The County, as staff time permits, should prepare specific design review criteria for areas where design review zoning has been defined. Such areas include, but are not limited to, the Clear Creek and Ashby Road industrial areas, along Interstate 5 in urban areas, and in other tracts of land where such zoning occurs.

- DR-d The County should revise the Zoning Ordinance's design review combining district so as to assure implementation of the County's design review program.

- DR-e As various elements of the design review program are developed, the County should consider the formation of a design review committee consisting of a spectrum of citizen's interests, which acts to review projects based on adopted design review standards.

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