

**MARIN COUNTY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AGENCY  
PLANNING DIVISION**

**M E M O R A N D U M**

**TO:** Members of the Planning Commission

**FROM:** Tom Lai, Principal Planner  
Brian Crawford, Deputy Director of Planning Services  
Christine Gimmler, Senior Planner

**RE:** Continued Public Hearing May 23, 2005  
Marin County Single-family Residential Design Guidelines

**DATE:** May 11, 2005

Since distribution of the Second Revised Single-family Residential Design Guidelines, staff has incorporated minor modifications that reflect recommendations from the Design Guidelines consultant (Dan Hillmer) and the County Open Space District staff (James Raives). The proposed changes are noted in revision marks below.

1. Chapter I Introduction (Page 1)

**A. REALIZING COMMUNITY DESIGN OBJECTIVES IN MARIN COUNTY**

During the past decade, residential remodels and new construction in Marin County have significantly changed the character of many of the County's communities. Traffic congestion is usually cited as the number one complaint against new development projects. However, there are also growing community concerns regarding the incremental, but profound, physical changes that are taking place. In many instances, the special qualities of a place that attracted residents to particular communities are being diminished, or are lost to recent development.

The primary challenge posed by new single-family projects in existing residential neighborhoods is to create desirable new development which: (1) preserves the scenic natural setting; (2) allows mixed (sizes and styles) residential communities while maintaining the predominant community character; and (3) improves the pedestrian environment within and between neighborhoods.

By applying the Design Guidelines as part of the Design Review process, Marin County has the opportunity to provide positive, constructive direction to development within its jurisdiction. The Design Guidelines can save a great deal of time, respond positively to community reaction to development proposals, avoid unnecessary controversy, reduce unnecessary delays and expenses, and most importantly, achieve higher-quality designs.

2. Chapter II Guidelines Applicable to all single-family Residential Development, Section C. Neighborhood Compatibility (Page 34)

#### **Guideline D-1.5 Hillside Design**

**On hillside lots with an average slope of 25% or greater, the form, mass, profile, and architectural features of the buildings should be designed to visually blend with the hillside setting by taking advantage of existing site features for screening such as tree clusters, depressions in topography, setback hillside plateau areas, and other natural features. Hillside structures should not “stand out” prominently when seen from a distance or from downhill properties. Where feasible, development should avoid the highly visible open hillside areas.**

An informal, spacious feeling exists by a predominance of views to the natural setting between buildings, at the ends of streets, and through open spaces of various sizes spread throughout the neighborhood. Implementation of this guideline would help preserve hillside and canyon terrain and views out to the surrounding landscape.

3. Chapter III Future Actions (Page 42)

The following text is proposed to be added to the end of this chapter as the final paragraph.

Although these Design Guidelines are intended to apply broadly in response to design issues that are prevalent in single-family projects throughout unincorporated Marin County, there is a need to prepare community-based design standards and guidelines to respond to design issues that are unique or especially relevant to the setting or characteristics of particular communities, and which are not fully addressed by these countywide design guidelines. Community-based design standards may be adopted as amendments to community plans and/or implemented through the Marin County Development Code as standards for specific communities. The preparation of community-based design standards should be undertaken as a collaborative effort with local design review boards or other community advisory groups having appropriate expertise and insight into local design issues.

4. Appendix K (Planting Design for Hillside Residential Development (Page K-4)

Defensible space is the managed landscape around a home that helps it withstand a wildfire by limiting the availability of fuel and altering its arrangement. This space provides firefighters with more time to respond to an incident and provides an area to work safely and effectively. The table in Appendix I is a fire hazard assessment matrix that defines the recommended extent of defensible space based on site features that include aspect (hillside orientation), slope (hillside steepness), and vegetation type. Defensible space should not encroach onto permanently dedicated (or preserved) open space or adjoining lots where feasible.

In addition, staff has included four additional sketches that have been prepared by Dan Hillmer for consideration and incorporation into the Single-family Residential Design Guidelines or Appendices, as appropriate.

Attachments (4)