



Lower Density Residential Objective Design Standards

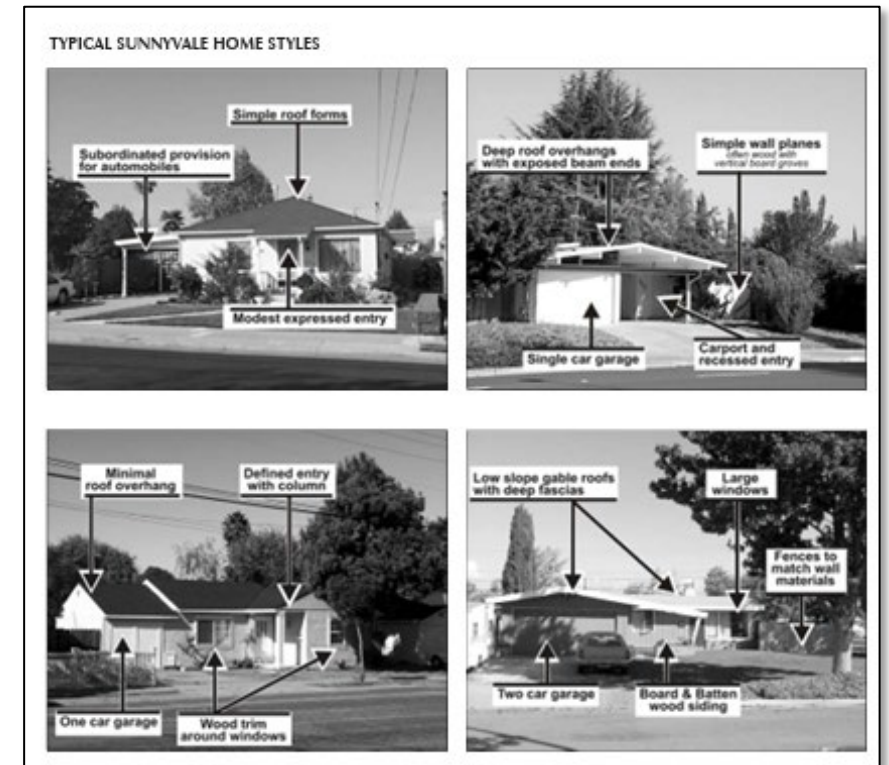
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Planning Commission Study Session, January 12, 2026

Background

Single Family Home Design Techniques

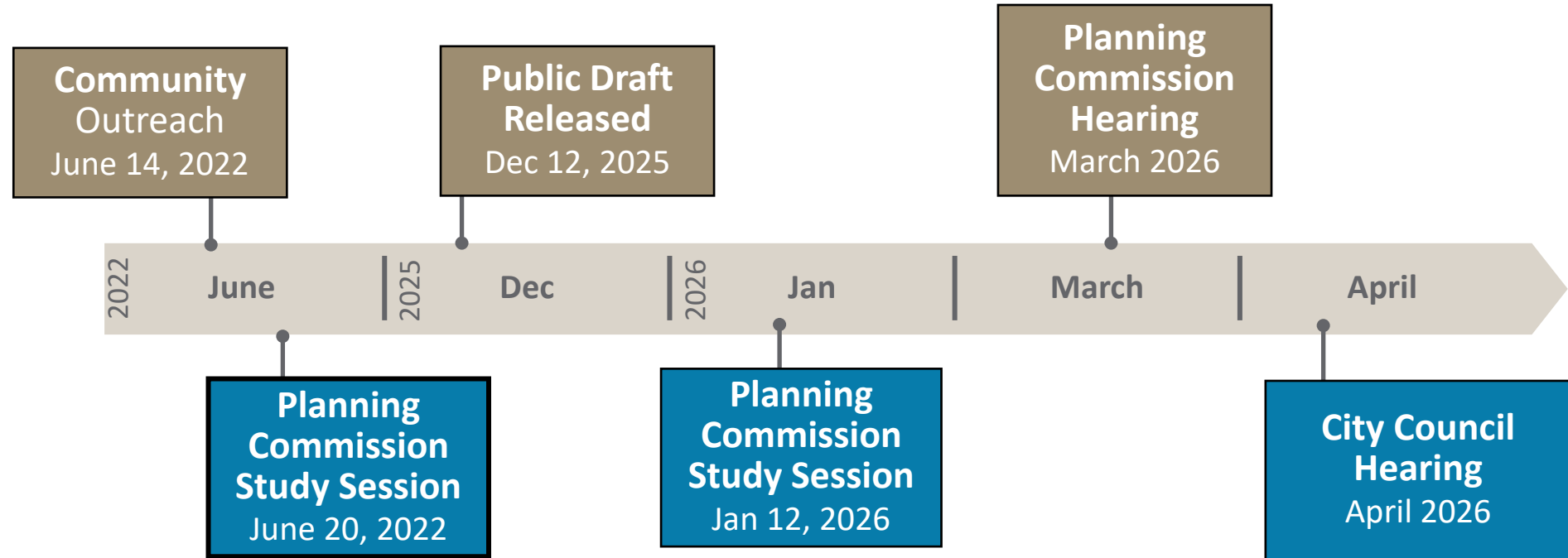
- Existing guidelines for single-family and two-family home projects
- Originally adopted in January 2003
- Included creation of FAR thresholds
- Update sponsored in 2020:
 - ◆ City Council Study Issue Paper CDD 20-01
- Dahlin Group as project consultant in 2022



Goals of the Update

- Create **objective & measurable** design standards for housing projects
- Streamline permit process while also promoting variation
- Modernize document to reflect current design & development trends
- Include sustainable concepts & design ideas
- Allow more flexibility to homeowners.
- Balance neighborhoods' and property owners' interest

Process and Timeline



Overview of Update

Lower Density Residential Objective Design Standards

- Public Draft available on City's [website](#)
- Applicability:
 - ◆ Single-Family dwellings
 - ◆ Two family dwellings
 - ◆ Dual Urban Opportunity (DUO) dwellings
- Replace Single-Family Home Design techniques
- Subordinate to the zoning regulations



Draft Structure & Chapters

Chapters	Sections
Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Applicability• Exceptions• Design Principles• Organization
Chapter 2. DESIGN STANDARDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Architectural Style Standards• Neighborhood Scale & Pattern Standards
Chapter 3. GLOSSARY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explanation of terms used in the document
APPENDIX	<p>Appendix A: Guidance on implementation of architectural styles.</p> <p>Appendix B: Recommended list of screening trees and shrubs.</p> <p>Appendix C: Applicability of individual design standards.</p>

Exceptions

- To allow flexibility and creativity
- Majority of design standards include an alternative compliance
- Allowed from **numerical design standards**

Applicability

- Numerical design standards
(as defined in Appendix C)

Deviation

- Max 25%

No. of deviations

- Staff Review: 3
- PC Review: 5

Architectural Style Standards

Design Standards

- Roof Form, Slopes & Materials
- Exterior Wall Materials
- Window & Door Styles
- Decorative Elements
- Entry Porch Style

- Applicable to new dwellings and second stories
- Appendix A includes standards for common architectural styles
- Additional Architectural styles: design intent letter & supporting documents

Neighborhood Scale & Pattern Standards

Neighborhood Scale & Pattern Standards

- Second Floor Area
- Building Heights
- Roofs
- Façade articulation
- Entries
- Privacy
- Covered Parking Standards
- Details & Materials
- Landscaping
- Lighting

Proposed Updates to SMC Title 19

- Goals:
 - ◆ Streamline Design Review process
 - ◆ Minimize number of design review permits
 - ◆ Increased flexibility
- Key Updates:

Chapter 19.32 (Building Heights, Lot Coverage and Floor Area Ratios)

Chapter 19.80 (Design Review)

Lot Coverage & Floor Area Ratio (SMC Ch. 19.32)

- Increase lot coverage and FAR thresholds for R-0, R-1 and R-2:

	Existing	Proposed	Change
Lot Coverage			
One-Story	Max. 45%	Max. 50%	+5%
Two-Story	Max. 40%	Max. 50%	+10%
FAR Thresholds (for PC Review)	45% or 3,600 s.f., whichever is greater	60%; no max Floor Area	+15%

Design Review Thresholds (SMC Ch. 19.80)

	Existing	Proposed
Staff Level Design Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New one-story homes One Story additions > 20% of existing floor area Any exterior modifications facing street 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New one-story homes. One Story additions > 50% of existing floor area. Significant exterior modifications
Staff Level Design Review with Noticing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New two-story homes Two story additions Any second-story exterior modifications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New two-story homes Two story additions Certain second-story exterior modifications
PC Design Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New homes and additions exceeding 45% FAR or 3,600 s.f. floor area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New homes and additions exceeding 60% FAR.

Significant exterior modifications

- Entry porch addition/changes
- Front elevations additions/changes exceeding 75% of length.

Certain second-story exterior modifications

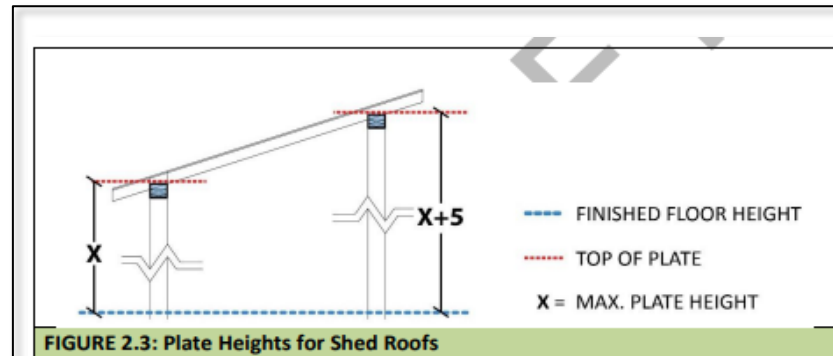
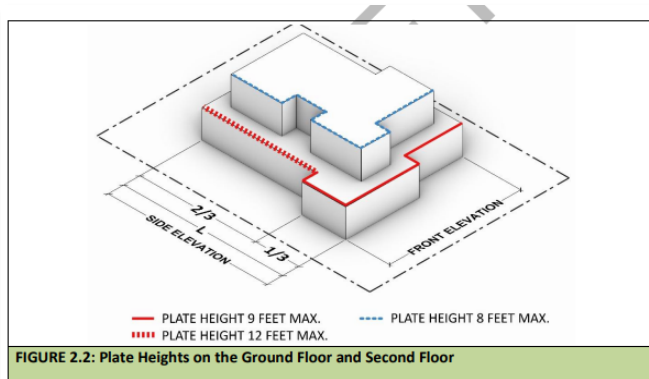
- Second floor balconies.
- Second floor windows facing other lower density structures.

Questions to Consider

- Are the design standards clear and easy to understand?
- Please share your feedback on:
 - ◆ Neighborhood Definition (Glossary, pp. 33–34)
 - ◆ Second-Story Area (Section 2.2.1)
 - ◆ Plate Height Standards (Section 2.2.2)
 - ◆ Screening Trees and Plants (Sections 2.2.6.1 & 2.2.6.2)
- A key goal is to balance the interests of neighbors and individual property owners while providing homeowners with greater flexibility. Do you have any comments or suggestions?

Next Steps

- Planning Commission Hearing: March 23rd
- City Council Hearing: May 11th



Examples of Modern Style

Backup Slides

Neighborhood Definition

Neighborhood: The delineation of a neighborhood area shall be dependent on the location of the subject property, in addition to the configuration of the street layout of the block on which the subject property is located. The following standards apply to all neighborhoods:

- A neighborhood shall only include the types of dwelling units that are subject to the design standards outlined in this document (e.g. single-family homes).
- For a proposed project on a corner lot, the neighborhood dwelling units will be determined based on the shorter of the two lot lines along the streets on the subject property.

In consideration of the variety of street grids present within the City of Sunnyvale, the methodology to determine the neighborhood is based on typical block pattern variations listed below:

For dwelling units located on a block with a rectangular grid pattern (see **FIGURE 3.2**), the neighborhood should include:

- All the dwelling units located on the same block and facing the same street as the subject property
- All dwelling units on the opposite side of the street fronting the subject property
- All dwelling units with parcel lines abutting the rear property line of the subject property
- One (1) dwelling unit on each side of the parcel(s) abutting the rear property line of the subject property



FIGURE 3.2: Neighborhood Definition – Rectangular Grid Pattern



FIGURE 3.3: Neighborhood Definition – Perpendicular Grid Pattern



FIGURE 3.4: Neighborhood Definition – Cul-de-sac Grid Pattern

Second Story Area

2.2.1.1 Second to First Floor Ratio

Design Standard: The second floor area shall not exceed 50% of the first floor area for Predominantly One-story Neighborhoods (refer to Glossary for Neighborhood definitions). In neighborhoods that are not predominantly one-story, the second floor area may be up to 75% of the first floor area.

The first floor area includes the primary dwelling unit, attached garages and carports, attached entry porches, and side or rear yard patio covers with more than 50% solid roofs, and attached ADUs.

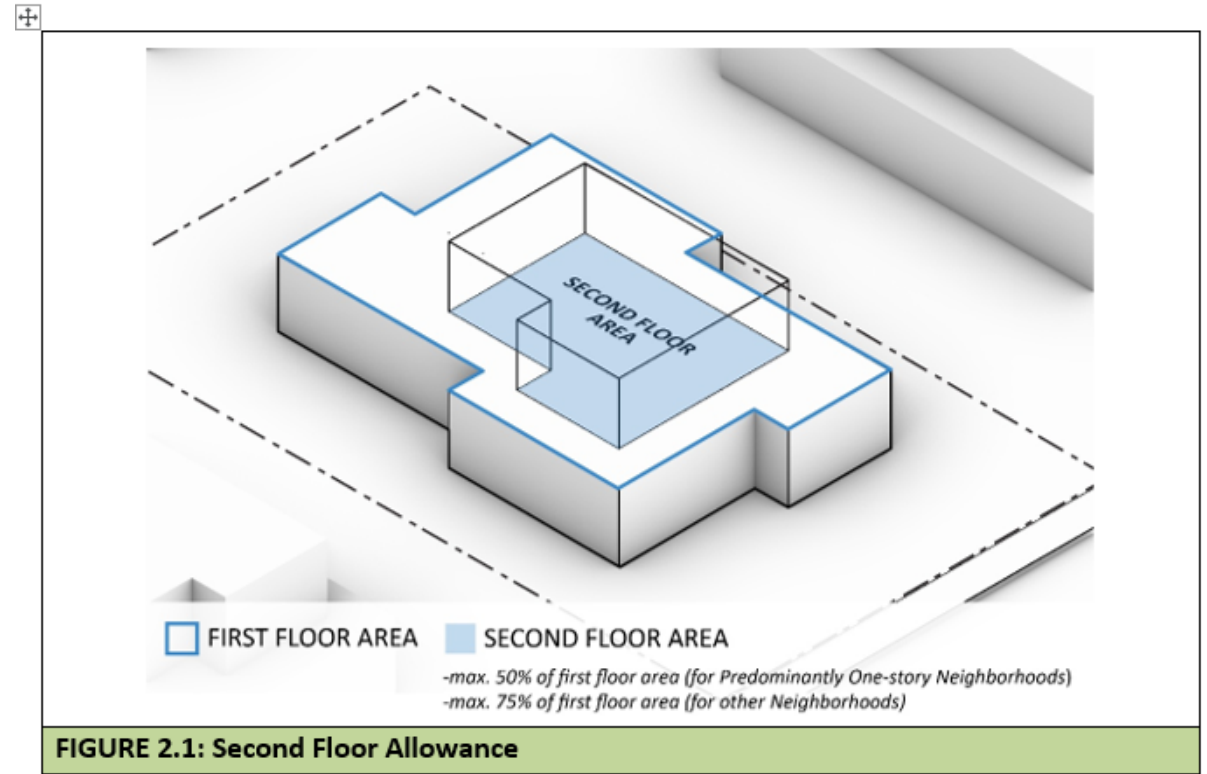
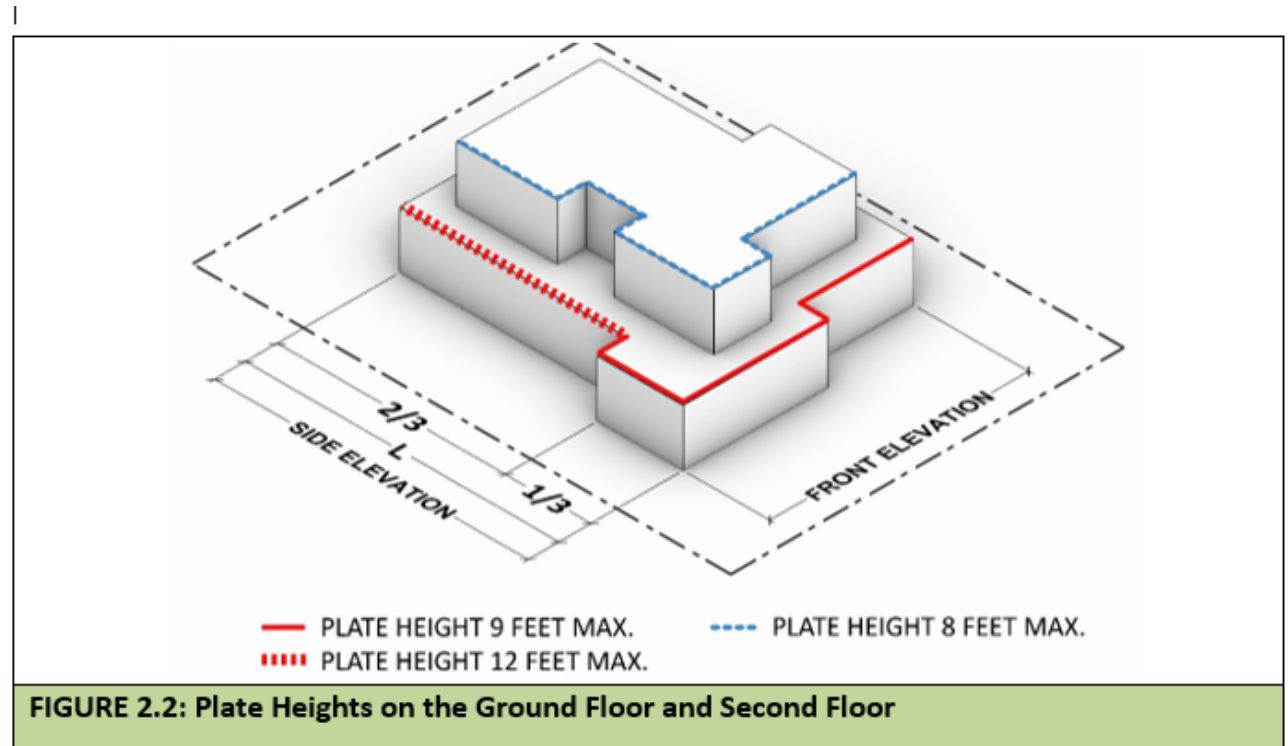


Plate Height Standards

Ground Floor Plate Height

Design Standard: Ground floor front elevation plate heights shall not exceed 9 feet. Entry porches are exempt from this requirement provided they comply with the 2.2.5.2 Entry Porch Eave Height design standard. Entry foyers may also exceed this limit provided they do not exceed the height of the entry porch.

The side elevation plate heights on the ground floor shall be a maximum of 9 feet for at least $\frac{1}{3}$ of the length adjacent to the front elevation. For all other ground floor elevations, the floor plate heights shall not exceed 12 feet.



Screening Trees & Plants

Alternative Compliance: Plant evergreen screening trees or shrubs in front of second floor windows along the side and rear property lines that meet all the following:

- At least 15-gallon in size
- A minimum six foot height at the time of planting.
- New trees and/or shrubs are required on the subject property in an area bounded by a 30-degree angle on each side window jamb.
- The selected privacy screening shall be of a species with an identified minimum mature growth height of 25 feet. Refer to Appendix B for list of recommended screening trees and shrubs.
- If an alternative species is requested, submit a letter from an International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) certified arborist stating that the proposed tree or shrub will meet or exceed height, spread criteria, and growth rate of the approved planting list, and that they are suitable for planting on the subject property. The Arborist shall demonstrate that the alternative species will provide a partial screening after three years' growth following planting.
- Privacy screening trees or shrubs shall be maintained during the lifetime of the dwelling.

These plantings shall be identified on the landscaping and irrigation plans. All dead and diseased plantings, or trees to be removed for another reason, shall be replaced with evergreen plantings in accordance with the above criteria.

Appendix A: Architectural Style Guide



Examples of Ranch Style

APPENDIX A

This appendix illustrates the major design elements of some of the common architectural styles prevalent in Sunnyvale and provides guidance to implement the Architectural Style Standards in Section 2.1, which apply to **new dwelling units and/or new second stories**, regardless of the proposed architectural style.

A.1 ARCHITECTURAL STYLES

A.1.1. RANCH STYLE

ELEMENTS	ARCHITECTURAL STYLE DEFINING FEATURES
Roof Form, Slope and Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roof pitches between 3:12 to 5:12 Combination of hip and gable roofs. Composition shingles, concrete shake roof tiles, solar roof tiles, or dimensional asphalt shingles.
Exterior Wall Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A combination of two or more wall materials along the front elevation including stucco, brick, wood, siding, or stone.
Window and Door Styles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Window Styles (select at least one): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Casement or double hung windows along the front elevation. One six foot or longer, rectangular or square picture window along the front elevation. Two windows with decorative shutters on either side. Each shutter shall be wide enough to cover up to the window centerline. At least one ribbon window or bay window on the front elevation. Entry doors (select at least one): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> With sidelights, transom, and/or multi-paneled windows Wood trim or wood appearance trim.
Decorative Elements (select at least one)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12 inch to 18 inch roof overhangs with exposed rafters. Integrated masonry planters along the front elevation. The planter shall be provided for at least 25% of the front elevation wall length and not taller than four feet from the adjoining finished grade. Decorative stone, iron, or wood porch supports. Brick, stone, siding, or wood exterior accent wall integrated into the front elevation provided for at least 25% of the front elevation wall length.
Entry Porch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Entry porch with gable or hip roof along the front elevation.

Appendix B: Screening Trees & Plants

APPENDIX B

TABLE B.1 – TABLE OF RECOMMENDED SCREENING TREES AND SHRUBS

Species	Height ¹	Spread ¹	Maximum Planting Distance
Arbutus marina	40'	35'	15'
Calocedrus decurrens- Incense Cedar	30'	50'	15'
Cedrus deodara—Deodar Cedar	Up to 80'	40' at ground	20'
Cinnamomum camphora—Camphor	50'	50'	20'
Hakea laurina- Pincushion Tree	25'	Up to 16'	10'
Laurus nobilis—Grecian Laurel	15' to 40'	20'	10'
Magnolia grandiflora—Southern Magnolia	80'	40'	20'
Melaleuca linariifolia—Flaxleaf Paperbark	30'	12'-15'	6'
Melaleuca quinquenervia- Cajeput Tree	25'	15'-25'	8'
Photinia serrulata- Chinese Photinia	25'	20'	15'
Pinus halepensis—Aleppo Pine	40' to 60'	20' to 25'	10'
Pittosporum crassifolium	25'	15' to 20'	8'
Pittosporum eugenioides	40'	20'	5'
Pittosporum tenuifolium	40'	20'	5'
Pittosporum undulatum—Victorian Box	15' to 40'	15' to 40'	8'
Podocarpus gracilior—Fern Pine	60'	20'	10'
Privet ligustrum—Glossy Privet	35' to 40'	20'	10'
Prunus caroliniana- Carolina Cherry Laurel	30'	15'-20'	3'
Rhus lancea—African Sumac	25'	20'	10'
Thuja occidentalis 'Fastigata'- American Arborvitae	25'	10'-15'	2'-6"
Thuja plicata 'Fastigata'- Hogan's Cedar	25'	10'	6'
Tristania conferta- Brisbane Box	30'	40'	7'
Umbellularia californica- California Bay Laurel	30'-75'	30' to 75'	10'
¹ Values reflect anticipated height and spread at maturity under typical landscape conditions.			

Appendix C: Applicability Table

					Other Modifications			
	New Dwellings	Additions	New Garage or Carports	Plate Height Increase	Exterior front or reducible front elevations	Second Floor	Site	Eligibility for Exceptions
2.1.1 Roof Form, Slopes and Materials	Yes	New second stories	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	No
2.1.2 Exterior Wall Materials	Yes	New second stories	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	Yes (stucco area)
2.1.3 Window and Door Style	Yes	New second stories	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	No
2.1.4 Decorative Elements	Yes	New second stories	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	No
2.1.5 Entry Porch Style	Yes	New second stories	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	No
2.1.6 Additional Architectural Styles	Yes	New second stories	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a