

City of Sunnyvale
HIGH DENSITY
RESIDENTIAL DESIGN GUIDELINES

November 25, 2014

HIGH DENSITY MULTIFAMILY RESIDENTIAL DESIGN GUIDELINES



Applicability

These guidelines are applicable to all projects with a zoning designation of R-4 and R-5, and where multi-family residential is proposed in commercial districts. These projects are allowed the following maximum unit densities.

R-4 R-5

Base Zoning Allowance

36 45

With Affordable Housing Bonus Density of 35%

49 61

With Affordable Housing 35% and Green Building density bonus of 5%

50 63

Context

All residentially-zoned properties are assigned a density designation which is calculated as the number of dwelling units per acre (sometimes expressed as minimum number of square feet of land per dwelling unit). Density is a common approach for guiding allowable residential development, and does not include the unit size or number of bedrooms. Density ensures buildings are developed to meet community expectations for the number of residential units in any given area and is based on the General Plan and zoning. Typically, the higher the residential density allowed, the smaller the individual dwelling units (in terms of number of bedrooms or square footage of the units, or both).

Design guidelines are used to ensure projects observe architectural and site planning principles so that new development is compatible with the surrounding neighborhood or the City overall. The combination of General Plan density, zoning and design guidelines provide the community, developers and decision-makers with the tools to understand and incorporate the community values into planned changes to the physical environment of the city.

Purpose

The guidelines contained in this document are intended to accomplish the following:

- Ensure that new development reinforces and supports the scale and character of Sunnyvale's existing residential neighborhoods.
- Provide guidance to property owners, developers, and their design professionals in planning and designing new medium density multifamily residential and mixed use residential projects.
- Establish a clear statement of community expectations in order to provide a greater degree of predictability and certainty about design expectations during project review.
- Provide a high level of design quality.
- Ensure sensitive transitions between residential areas of differing densities.

Community Expectations

- New multifamily residential development will respect the scale and character of adjacent homes and neighborhoods.
- Usable open spaces will be provided within multifamily residential developments.
- Pedestrian access and orientation within and between multifamily residential developments and adjacent residential and commercial neighborhoods will be emphasized to enhance mobility and connectivity.
- Variety and diversity of architectural character will be expected.
- Unity of design treatment will be expected on all sides of residential buildings, not just on the front facades.
- Parking and driveways will not be allowed to dominate street frontages.
- High-quality durable materials will be used throughout new multifamily and mixed use residential development.
- Careful attention will be given to architectural and landscape details including roof overhangs, window trim and decorative elements, porch columns and railings, trellises, and other features that add visual richness to the project and streetscape.
- A strong commitment will be made to landscaping in all new multifamily residential development. Plant palettes are expected to include large canopied shade trees, flowering plants and other interesting plant selections.

Basic Design Principles

The following principles have been used as touchstones for the development of individual multifamily and mixed use residential design guidelines. In the event that the specific guidelines do not clearly address a given condition, the Basic Design Principles should be consulted for general direction. The Basic Design Principles will be used by the planning staff and Planning Commission/City Council when evaluating higher-density multifamily residential projects in the City, and when considering the acceptability of unique proposals that vary from the specific guidelines.

1. Design to reflect the uniqueness of Sunnyvale and the site

Sunnyvale wishes to maintain a unique sense of place that continues to improve over time as the community evolves. Prototypical architecture found in other cities may be acceptable only if it reflects high-quality design features, is visually appealing, and is compatible with and complementary to existing neighborhoods and surrounding development.

2. Integrate new development into the surrounding city fabric

New residential projects should fit comfortably into their surroundings with multiple pedestrian linkages to adjacent development and open spaces, and with height, scale and color sensitivity to nearby residential development.

3. Design projects with internal continuity

Residents within larger developments should be able to walk easily to other homes in the development and to reach adjacent neighborhoods and open spaces. Transitions between residential units should avoid abrupt changes in size, bulk and levels of architectural detail.

4. Minimize the impact of parking structures and driveways along street frontages

Unit entries, commercial shops and active living spaces should have greater prominence than parking structures along street frontages. A pleasant pedestrian environment should be created along street fronts.

5. Provide visual variety in multifamily residential projects

A variety of floor plans, elevations, building heights, materials and colors will be expected. However, a unified design approach should be utilized to avoid visual chaos and promote visual cohesion.

6. Design buildings with strong architectural integrity

Multifamily residential projects should be designed with 360 degree architecture with materials and details carried around all sides of a structure to avoid a “false front” look and the presentation of unarticulated and unadorned facades to neighboring residences, businesses, parking areas and public view.

7. Integrate substantial landscaping into all projects

Mature landscaping should be preserved whenever possible, and replaced in-kind when it cannot be saved. Substantial landscaping should be provided along all street fronts to reinforce a strong sense of neighborhood and a pleasant pedestrian environment.

8. Respect adjacent neighbors

Every project should be respectful of adjacent residential neighbors. New development should avoid privacy, noise, light and visual conflicts with adjacent uses to the maximum degree possible. Special care should be given to avoiding tall blank walls and mitigating large building volumes immediately adjacent to smaller homes on adjacent parcels, and to the placement and treatment of windows and site landscaping to minimize views into neighboring residents’ windows and private outdoor spaces. Building location and massing as well as landscape placement should also be sensitive to avoiding the blocking of sun exposure and sky views of adjacent neighbors’ windows and private outdoor spaces.

Site Development

1. Buildings should be located to reinforce the street edge by maximizing building frontage along the street, and should be sensitive to the setback of adjacent development.
2. A minimum of 15 percent of the building facades should be stepped back to allow entry courts, public plazas, and building articulation at the ground level.
3. Primary facades and building entries should face the street, open space areas, or other pedestrian-oriented circulation areas.
4. Emphasize building entries with small entry plazas, vertical massing, and architectural elements such as awnings, arcades, awnings, or porticos.
5. Design entries so that they are clearly identifiable from the street.
6. Provide a walkway leading from the street to the building entrance if not located directly off of a sidewalk.
7. Perimeter parking lots along public streets are discouraged in favor of buildings that contribute to the adjacent streets' urban design quality.
8. Entry driveways should have strong landscaped edges with terminus views focused on landscaped areas or building entries, not the rear end of parked cars.

Parking

1. Fully below grade parking is encouraged with garage entries placed at the rear or sides of the project whenever possible. Garage entries should be recessed as much as possible from the building facade.
2. Partially below grade parking may be considered if geotechnical constraints are severe, but should be limited to a maximum height of 5 feet above grade level unless the garage walls facing the street and pedestrian areas are screened by residential units or commercial development.



Flats above partially submerged podium parking



INTENT

Multifamily development may include either apartments or condominiums. Typically, units are stacked one above another with access to units by way of common building entries and corridors. Parking is usually accommodated in common areas composed of surface parking with carports or individual garages, separate parking structures, or in a parking level located beneath the residential complex.

The intent of these design guidelines is to:

- Maintain a scale and character that is sympathetic to Sunnyvale's other residential neighborhoods
- Maintain high-quality city streetscapes
- Provide for variety and visual diversity
- Enhance the ground floor pedestrian scale and character of structures
- Accommodate parking in a manner to maintain a high-quality residential landscape environment.
- Provide architectural diversity.
- Reduce the visual bulk and mass of larger structures.



Example of landscape screening of podium parking



Provide substantial landscape amenities



Apartment flats with partially submerged podium parking under individual buildings

3. The edges of any garage structure and vents into the garage visible above grade should be screened with evergreen plant materials. Earth berms and other techniques to tie the top of the garage structure into the surrounding grade level should be utilized.
4. If surface parking is used, lots should be broken into smaller segments separated by substantial landscaped islands.
5. Parking areas, including guest parking, that do not have assigned parking spaces should not have dead-end drive aisles.

Open Space and Landscaping

1. Usable, easily accessible and centrally located common open space is expected in all multifamily residential developments.
 - All dwelling units within a project shall be provided with usable private open space. Ground floor private patios and decks are best when elevated above adjacent walkways to minimize privacy intrusions.
 - Provide a minimum of 10 feet of landscaping around all surface parking lots and garage structures.
 - Provide a minimum distance of 5 feet between buildings and adjacent driveways or pedestrian walkways unless ground floor uses are limited to commercial shops or offices.
 - Consider provisions for rooftop gardens for residents of buildings.



Building Form and Massing

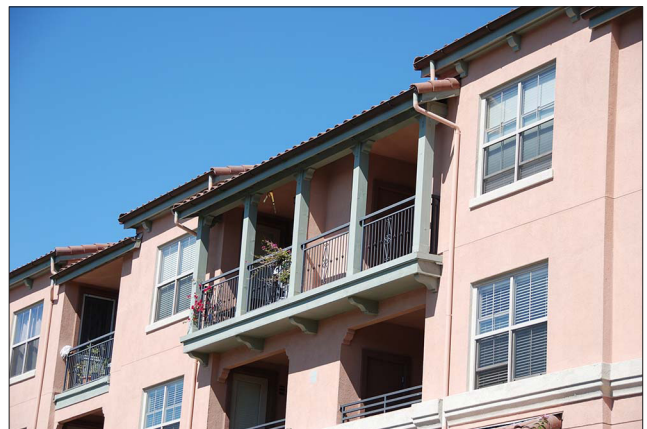
1. Provide well defined common entries related to the sidewalk facing the public streets and parking lots.
2. Individual stoop entries are strongly encouraged for ground floor units at the project's perimeter - especially along any public street front or public walkway.
3. Limit blank walls along streets and pedestrian ways to no greater than 20 linear feet without being interrupted by a window or primary entry.
4. Include features that add depth, shadow and architectural interest, such as balconies, recesses, cornices, bay windows, and step-backs at upper floors, consistent with the building's style and scaled for pedestrians.
5. Multifamily developments adjacent to smaller single-family housing should provide a transition in height between the smaller and the taller structures. Consideration should be given to varying the building heights within any single development in any case.
6. For larger projects, break up the building mass to appear to be an assemblage of smaller buildings. This can be accomplished by deep insets in building planes, variations in height, and color or materials changes.
7. Reinforce street corners with changes in architectural massing and height (see example below).



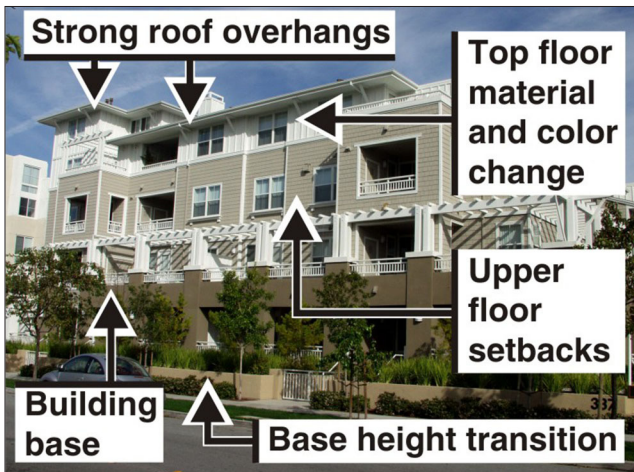
Individual entries to ground floor units are strongly encouraged



Example of special building corner treatment



Examples of facade plane offsets and features to add human scale and visual interest



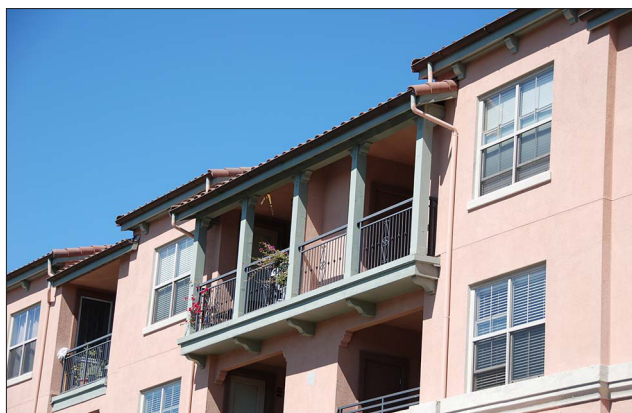
Examples of building base, middle and top with variation in materials and wall planes



Example of top floor setback and variation in materials and wall planes to break up large building

8. The taller portion of a building (i.e., a tower) should not occupy more than 25 percent of the length of the lot dimension.
9. Provide horizontal and vertical wall plane offsets to break up the building mass. Avoid building forms that appear to be large boxes with elements attached to them.
10. Use projecting wall plane widths that are similar to the width of nearby homes if the units are located in or adjacent to single-family neighborhoods.
11. Utilize roof forms and pitches that are similar to those of other structures in the neighborhood.
12. Provide buildings with a well defined base, a middle, and a top is to reduce apparent building height and bulk. Significant projecting roof overhangs are strongly encouraged.
13. Integrate the upper floor units into the roof form, stepping back of upper floors from those below, or the use of a different material on the top floor walls to visually make the building seem lower. This would be especially important for multifamily projects in close proximity to smaller single-family neighborhoods.
14. Add horizontal projecting molding at some floor lines (e.g., top floors) to mitigate the feeling of tall unbroken walls.
15. Step back portions of upper floors to reduce the visual bulk of structures.
16. Projects constructed on top of parking podiums should take special care to provide design elements to minimize the hard edge of the parking podium. Decks extending beyond the podium edge and varied setbacks for the residential units are just two ways of approaching this issue.
17. Provide a varied building silhouette when viewed against the sky. This may be achieved with variations in roof height, the addition of building elements projecting above the roof eave, and other similar means (see example below).





Architectural Details

1. Provide distinctive, residential scale building entries (see example to the left).
2. Provide variations in window design and wall treatments (colors, materials) to reduce uniformity.
3. Introduce non-reflective glass for greater transparency (e.g. staircases and picture windows).
4. Ease harsh edges or corners with angled or curved elements or other architectural treatment.
5. For balconies and decks facing public streets or pedestrian ways that are large enough to accommodate boxes, bicycles and similar stored materials, provide solid walls on the lower portions of surrounding railings. Fully open railings are acceptable for smaller decks and balconies that are less likely to be used for storage.
6. Recess doors and windows from the building facade. Avoid windows that are flush or very near the face of the adjacent walls.
7. Provide projecting window sills and heads where these features would be consistent with the architectural style.
8. Provide trim at door and window openings unless the window frames are recessed at least two inches from the building face.
9. Use materials similar to homes and apartments in the neighborhood. Although it is common for developers to desire the use of stucco for multifamily projects, some significant use of wood or textured siding, stone or brick should be the goal in neighborhoods with a predominant use of these materials on building exteriors. This might be accomplished, for example, with the use of wood as a siding material on projecting bay elements or on the upper floor of multistory structures.
10. Avoid large expanses of unrelieved stucco wall surfaces.
11. Avoid roof materials that are markedly different in scale, texture or color from those common in the neighborhood.
12. Provide visual variety through the use of materials
 - *The use of a combination of materials can visually break up larger building masses. This is especially important for projects adjacent to smaller scale development.*
 - *Projecting entries are good places to consider a material change.*
 - *Use materials with a strong human scale and warmth of feeling at ground floors and entries. Examples include wood, brick and stone.*



13. Screen utilities from view by integrating them into building or landscape elements.
14. Large complexes should use a variety of complementary color schemes.
15. Structures should include substantial architectural details to add visual variety and human scale. Examples include the following:

- Horizontal and vertical wall plane changes
- Varied roof forms and orientations
- Bay windows
- Roof Dormers
- Material and color changes
- Applied decorative features
- Roof segments over windows
- Metal or wood balcony railings
- Planter boxes, pot rails and plant rings
- High quality garage doors with windows





INTENT

Mixed-use projects generally combine residential units with either retail or office uses or, occasionally, both on the ground floor. They are often located in areas with strong public transportation access, but are increasingly found with residential development integrated into shopping centers of all scales. Different land uses may be separated either horizontally or vertically.

They present special challenges of meeting the functional requirements of commercial development while maintaining a strong sense of home with a minimum of privacy, noise, glare and odor conflicts.

The intent of these design guidelines is to:

- Provide a high-quality living environment
- Minimize conflicts between uses
- Accommodate the parking needs of the different uses
- Provide a strong sense of home for residential components
- Maintain a strong pedestrian environment
- Meet the functional needs of commercial development

MIXED USE RESIDENTIAL DESIGN GUIDELINES

Supplemental to the High Density Residential Design Guidelines

Site Development

1. Pedestrian circulation should receive special attention. Pedestrian paths should be reinforced with store-fronts and visually interesting elements to encourage pedestrian circulation. Sidewalk widths should be generous and well landscaped.
2. Commercial uses should be limited to street frontages where they will have the greatest exposure and chance of success.
3. Retail and service uses that can serve the project residents and nearby neighborhoods should be given preference.
4. Residential liveability should not be compromised by the commercial uses.
5. Street setbacks should be minimal to reflect the more pedestrian-oriented character of mixed use development, but residential above must meet setback requirements where applicable.
6. Commercial loading and trash collection should be located to provide the least impact on the residential units.

Parking

1. Commercial and residential parking may be shared provided parking is suitably located relative to residential entries and residential users have safe access to their vehicles. Provisions shall be considered to allow for unbundled parking to encourage parking sharing on site.
2. Commercial parking should be provided at the rear or side of the commercial uses, not between the street and the shop fronts.
3. Structured parking or parking below the buildings is generally most appropriate for mixed-use developments given their development intensity. Alternatively, parking dedicated to the separate uses may be provided in a garage at the rear of the parcel and under the building.
4. Access to parking lots or structures should avoid crossing primary pedestrian walkways whenever possible. Access from side or rear streets is preferred.
5. Surface parking areas should be generously landscaped.

Open Space and Landscaping

1. Special paving and landscaping should be provided along the commercial frontages with special light fixtures and tree grates where appropriate. Provide areas for outside dining if restaurant uses are anticipated.
2. Decorative benches and other pedestrian amenities should be provided in recessed areas or widened sidewalks.
3. Developments on street corners should provide special open space areas (e.g., plazas, outdoor dining, landscaping, public art, etc.) at those corners.

Building Form and Massing

1. Residential and commercial uses should present a unified appearance with similar scale, materials and colors with special attention to providing uniqueness to the commercial storefronts (see examples below and to the right).



2. Break up larger buildings into smaller masses with facade articulation, roof height variations, and similar techniques to give the structure a strong residential character.
3. Blank walls along pedestrian pathways should be avoided.
4. Strong and distinctive residential pedestrian entries should be provided along the street frontages to encourage resident movement past ground floor commercial uses.
5. Commercial entries should receive special treatment. When commercial uses are combined with residential units, the commercial storefronts should reflect a scale and character that is compatible with the residential use. Divided pane windows, wood window and door frames, planter boxes and special doors are some ways that this may be accomplished.
6. Provide a minimum of 20 feet floor-to-floor height for ground floor commercial spaces.

7. Garage edges should be treated architecturally to blend with the rest of the structure using similar materials and detailing.

Architectural Details

1. Ground floor storefronts should have a transparent appearance. The types of commercial uses selected should preclude the use of draperies, blinds or blacked-out windows to shut off transparency.
2. Recessed commercial vestibule entries are encouraged.
3. Subdued signage and signage lighting that is compatible with the residential uses should be used. These should be designed into the project at an earlier stage.
4. Awnings and canopies should be used to emphasize the ground floor commercial uses.
5. Upper floor balconies are encouraged.
6. Decorative lighting fixtures are encouraged on commercial storefronts.

