Community Design Guide

El Dorado County
Planning Department
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Reformatting Notes:

[1] **Original document produced in 1981 not in electronic format. Due to poor print quality, the original photographs could not be reproduced in reformatting this document. For purposes of consistency, photographs of similar buildings, features or architectural theme(s) were used whenever possible.**

[2] **For purposes of readability, minor layout/typeface changes have been made to various section(s) of this document. However, no changes were made to the text.**

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The photographs in this guide illustrate good design in buildings, sties, and landscaping of existing projects in this County. This guide is not intended to exemplify a particular style of architecture to which developments must conform.

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Prepared: November 1981, by the El Dorado County Planning Department,
John Branch, Project Leader

FOREWORD

Good architecture is always desirable both for aesthetic and economic reasons.

Well-designed buildings and landscaping enhance the visual character of an area, reflect the values of a community and increase business and property values.

The very quality of life is affected by building design and the blending of structures to the building site.

Resident and tourist alike can take pleasure in an interesting roof line, contrasting textures of wood and stone, or landscaping of green lawn and flowering shrubs.

DESIGN REVIEW

To promote good architecture, the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors has adopted a design review ordinance that regulates design within designated districts judged to be of special natural beauty or contributing to the County's character and tourist economy.

The same ordinance provides design review for sites and structures of special historical interest and for development in the visually sensitive mountain areas of El Dorado County. This ordinance is also intended to help in situations where there are buffer zones between residential and commercial development or special uses which may be desirable, but are attended by problems like noise and traffic congestion.

Within design review districts, as designated on maps, the County has the ability to review and control the design of commercial, industrial and multi-family residential development.

Design review is just one of several procedures the County can use to guide development in the interest of the public's health, safety and general welfare. It is separate from, and in addition to, other procedures that might be necessary, such as a use permit, rezoning, variance or building permit.

The process looks at more than the proposed building. It also examines the project's layout, landscaping, parking, signs, and other features. It covers all the factors in the project's appearance, plus how well it fits its surroundings. This does not mean the County is dictating a particular style of architecture for design review districts. Variety is preferred, not uniformity. But it does mean the County is seeking higher standards of architecture.

GENERAL

In reviewing plans, County authorities will evaluate a project on its contribution to the County's character and on its suitabi1ity for its 1ocation. Stock building plans might not be acceptable. Some basic questions by which projects will be evaluated are:

Will the project be a good neighbor?

It should not impair the use, value or good development of neighboring property. Its design should minimize interference with the privacy, quiet and views of its neighbors and avoid traffic problems and damage to the natural environment.

Does the project follow the basic principles of good design?

Harmony, continuity, variety, proportion, simplicity and balance should prevail in all aspects of the project, whether it's a multi-unit complex or a single sign. The project should be designed as a whole, fit into its surroundings and avoid monotony in form, detai1 and siting.

Does the project give people some variety and something interesting to look at?

Aesthetics are important. Landscaped areas, benches and fountains are much more appealing to the eye than blank walls and uninterrupted rows of parking.

GUIDELINES

Does the project suit its purpose? Do the various components of the project work well together?

An apartment building, for example, should look residential and be livable.

Does the project make good use of the site?

The interior spaces should be oriented to take advantage of outward views. Natural topography and trees should be retained where possible.

Do different elements fit together logically?

Parking ought to be located so a person can easily get from car to building entrance.

Are materials, forms and other elements of a project suitable for its uses?

Exterior finishes should aid maintenance and be harmonious with surroundings.

SPECIFIC CRITERIA

SITE PLANNING

During review of development projects, specific criteria relating to the site, the building, landscaping, signs, parking and other features will be considered.

Suiting the Site – A designer should try to fit a project to the existing site, rather than alter the site to accommodate a stock plan. Preserve topography, the natural grade and vegetation. Avoid excessive cuts and fills.

Open Space – Natural features and views should be maintained and protected through use of adequate open space.

Parking Areas – Screen parking areas from public ways and divide them up with landscaping, walls, fences, berms and other means.

Lighting – Exterior lighting should be subdued and avoid creating a glare for occupants or neighboring properties. Lighting should enhance the building design and landscaping as well as providing for safety and security.

Trash and other Service Areas – Locate trash containers and loading docks away from public streets and store entrances and screen them. Screening should be durable and an integral part of the overall structural design.

BUILDING DESIGN

The building design should consider many points:

Harmony – Different structures and parts of structures should harmonize with each other and the neighborhood. New construction should go well with the old, or the old may be remodeled to go with the new.

Materials – Use materials honestly. Simulated wood or masonry, for example, generally is not acceptable.

Finishes, Textures, Colors – Exterior treatment should be subdued and restrained. Treatment should aim at durability and ease of maintenance as well as initial beauty. The different building materials of stone, wood and timber need to be skillfully blended. Large building masses should be broken with architectural detail, roof lines developed with interest and variety, and windows enlivened with detail.

Mechanical Equipment and Utilities – Design service equipment, including meter boxes, as part of the structure and provide screening for them.

Energy Conservation – Design should minimize the need for mechanical heating and cooling. Wherever possible, use sunlight for heating and illumination, and natural ventilation and shading for coolness.

LANDSCAPING

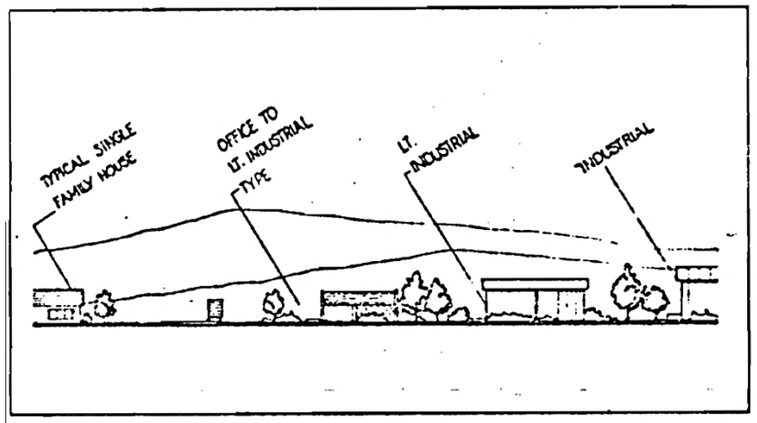
Landscaping improves the appearance of sites and buildings, helps erosion control and provides screening and shade. Landscaping, including trees, shrubs and ground cover, should be included in all development projects.

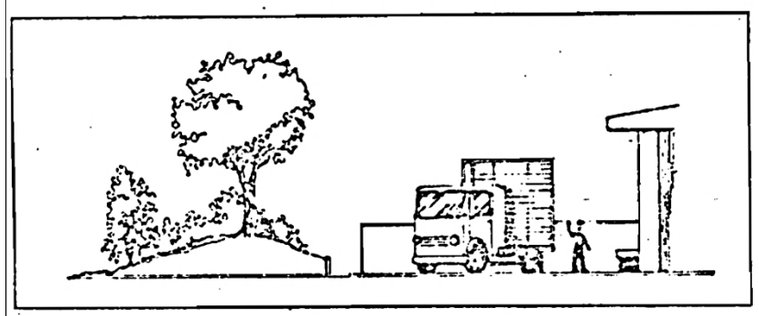
The good designer will incorporate existing vegetation and natural rock formations where possible. The plant materials used should be appropriate for the sun, wind, soil compaction and water conditions of the project.

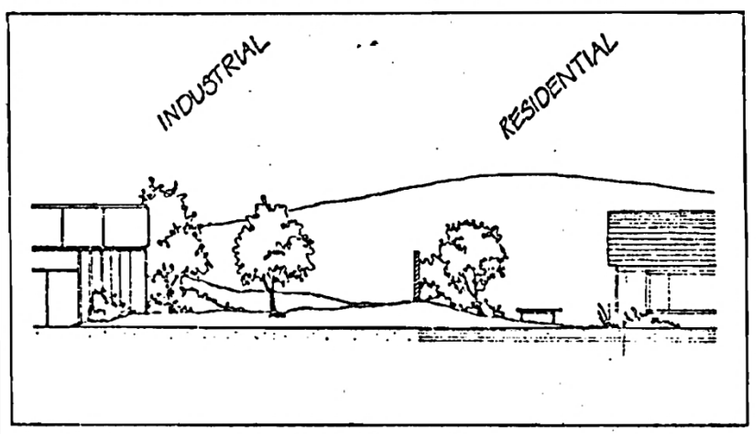
Maintenance – Choose landscape materials and arrangements to minimize maintenance. A permanent irrigation system should be provided. Automatic watering systems, set to water at night or early morning, are encouraged.

Parking Lots – Landscaping ought to include planters at suitable intervals throughout the lot and at the ends of parking rows. It should include trees that will provide adequate visual relief and shading when they mature. Landscaping must not block a driver's view.

Trees – Trees have many uses. They can provide summer shade for parked cars and pedestrian walkways; provide visual screening; provide accent points that help reduce the formless expanse of a parking lot; filter the glare of reflective pavement, muffle noise and trap dust and airborne particles.







BUFFERING

Adequate buffering and screening may be required in areas where different land uses are adjacent to each other.

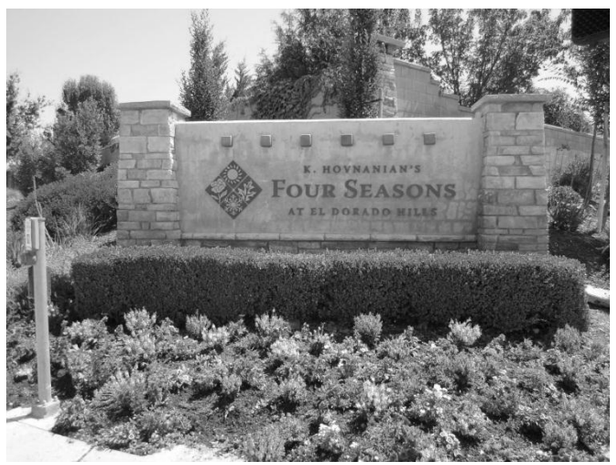
The purpose of screening and buffering is to reduce or eliminate the conflicts and nuisances that some land uses cause to others.

Industrial and commercial land uses should be screened from adjacent residential areas by use of dense landscaping, earth berms and fences so that noise, light glare, and other visual disturbances are minimized.

Where some types of land uses front on and can be viewed from a public road, the use of buffers and other screening techniques may be required to shield areas where there is outside storage of materials and equipment.

When new developments are proposed to be located in existing neighborhoods, the project should not be sited to overlook adjacent homes. The new structures should also be located so that the buildings do not block the sun's light to the adjacent parcels.

Changes of grade, fences, walls, earth berms and dense plantings of shrubs and trees can provide permanent buffering and screening to reduce or minimize the conflicts that one type of land use may cause to another.



SIGNS

Signs are a necessary aid to commercial enterprise but need as careful handling as the building and site.

Design Compatibility – Signs, their materials, size, color, lettering, location and arrangement, should be an integral part of the site and building design and compatible with the surroundings.

Consistency – Keep signing consistent in location and design throughout a development. This includes shopping centers.

Restraint – Signing should be simple, restrained and subordinate to the overall project design. A sign ought to attract and identify, but not dominate the site.

Types – Wall signs, graphic symbol signs and low profile free-standing signs are encouraged. Flashing, moving and rotating signs are prohibited by County ordinance.

Simplicity – Signs should use minimum copy and suitable lettering and avoid garish materials and shapes.

Lighting – Subtle lighting and landscaping can enhance a sign's setting and draw attention to it. The light source should be screened.

An excess of signs or wrong placing confuses a potential customer and destroys the sign's purpose.

PARKING

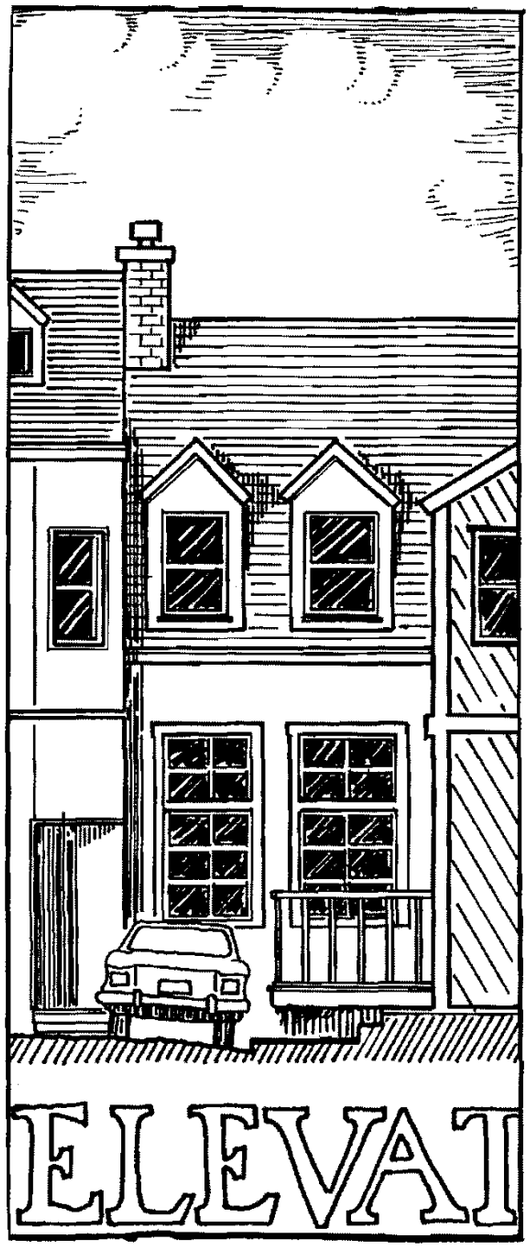
Designers should give careful thought to parking areas.
Well designed buildings on choice sites lose their visual impact if all that is seen on approach is barren blacktop and monotonous rows of cars.

Parking lots also contribute to the deterioration of the environment by reducing ground water and increasing surface runoff and erosion.

Second, there must be a practical and economic use of land in layout of parking spaces, landscape areas and vehicle and pedestrian access.

Third, landscape plants, along with earth berms and walls, must be designed to screen, shade and soften the impact of parking areas.

A good designer should consider locating the parking to the rear or side of a building rather than in front. For a large development, a parking area's apparent size can be reduced by dividing it into several smaller lots or placing it on more than one level.



REVIEW PROCEDURE

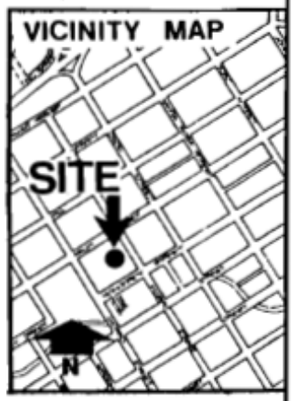
A developer planning to build in a design review district is encouraged to hold early, informal talks with county officials on what information will be required and in how much detail.

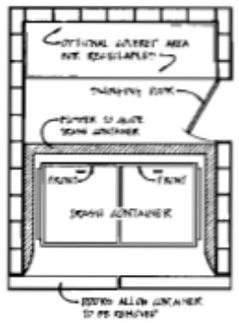
Then the developer should submit detailed plans covering the site, drainage, landscaping and sometimes grading, along with elevations of the proposed buildings and information on such features as signs. These papers first go to the County's Building Department which will pass them on to the Planning Department for review.

The County Planning Director, sometimes with the help of an advisory Design Review Committee, will be responsible for reviewing and approving or denying an application.

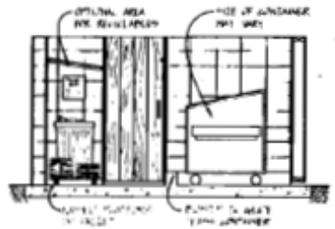
Any appeal will go to a public hearing before, the County's Planning Commission and its decision is final.

The Planning Director will have 15-20 days from the filing of the completed application for design review to give a written decision on whether the application meets the ordinance and a building permit should be issued.



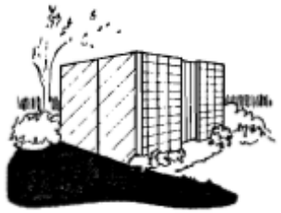


PLAN VIEW



SECTION VIEW

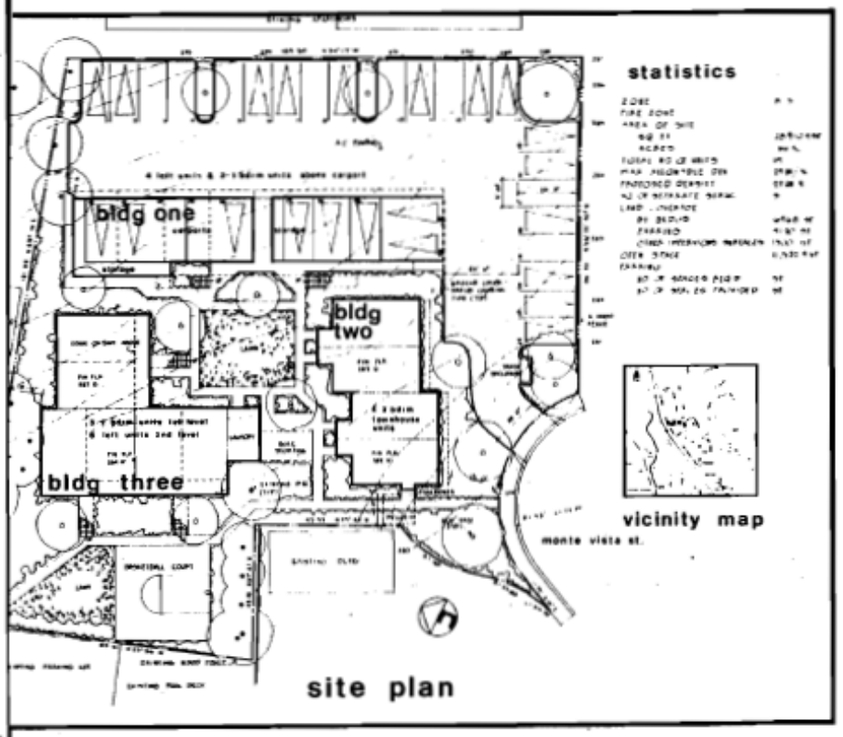
SUGGESTIONS FOR TRASH ENCLOSURE DESIGN

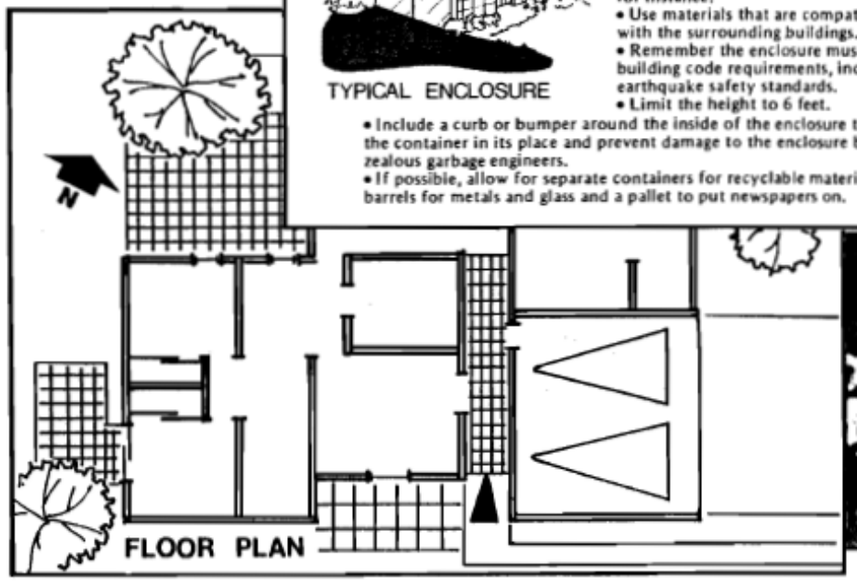


TYPICAL ENCLOSURE

DESIGN NOTES:

- Make it easy for people to get trash in and for the garbage company to get trash out. A swinging door or open passage is easiest for someone with his hands full of trash.
- Make the enclosure easy to maintain — to hose down or sweep up, for instance.
- Use materials that are compatible with the surrounding buildings.
- Remember the enclosure must meet building code requirements, including earthquake safety standards.
- Limit the height to 6 feet.
- Include a curb or bumper around the inside of the enclosure to keep the container in its place and prevent damage to the enclosure by over-zealous garbage engineers.
- If possible, allow for separate containers for recyclable materials — barrels for metals and glass and a pallet to put newspapers on.





PROJECT TYPES

INDUSTRIAL

This section shows different types of projects and lists design considerations which particularly apply to that kind of building.

Select a site large enough to accommodate future expansion as well as provide a buffer to adjacent development.

Present your “best face” to public view.

Screen outdoor storage and loading operations with fencing and planting and separate them from car parking areas.

Install underground utilities where possible.

Provide ample parking for employees and separate from visitor parking.

Use landscaping to break up large areas of asphalt and soften the lines of building and site.

COMMERCIAL

Employ variations from conventional building design and materials.

Provide ample landscaping with large plant materials for quick effect.

Use a minimum of site grading and replant cuts and fills.

Integrate signing with the total architectural design.

Provide screening and light shielding from adjacent residential properties.

Separate pedestrian and car traffic.

Keep the public entrance free of parking.

Provide screening for utilities, trash disposal, vent stacks, etc.

Consider bicycle parking facilities.

PROFESSIONAL

Use landscaping plants suited to the general climate.

Take advantage of special environmental features at and around the site.

Provide sheltered outdoor spaces for informal conversation.

Install underground utilities where possible.

Architectural treatment is important and should integrate the building with the site and surrounding community.

Use construction materials suited to the building type and style and avoid garish colors and contrasts.

Minimize excessive site preparation and grading.

MULTIFAMILY

Take advantage of changes in grade but utilizing site terracing and avoid mass grading.

Leave open space areas within the project for landscaping and group use.

Provide private areas such as patios.

On steep sites, consider locating parking under buildings.

Screen the parking areas from public view.

Maintain driveways and parking areas at a minimum grade.

Avoid monotonous building design.

Provide for children's play areas.

SERVICE STATION

Provide ample landscaping to relieve large, paved areas.

Reduce outdoor display and storage to a minimum.

Screen outdoor storage with fencing and planting.

Reduce signing to that which is necessary for identification.

Separate pedestrian from vehicular circulation.

Refrain from using banners, pennants and wind powered devices.

RESTAURANTS

Choose an architectural treatment that fits into the natural environment.

Provide facilities for outdoor waiting areas.

Provide open areas for visual relief.

Use natural slopes to enhance the design.

Use appropriately placed landscaping to direct pedestrian and vehicular traffic.

Use a well-designed, carefully placed sign for identification.

MOTELS

Select your site to take advantage of special views.

Let the site design, architecture and landscaping works as a unit.

Design your sign to reflect your reputation of service.

Design the facilities to take advantage of the local climate.

Install underground utilities where possible.

Retain native tree cover and replant cuts and fills.

Screen outdoor storage with fencing and planting.

SHOPPING CENTERS

Design the complex to be attractive from ALL directions.

Select a site large enough to provide ample parking.

Enhance the parking area with landscaping.

Retain architectural unity throughout the center.

If outdoor display is necessary, provide a specially designed area for that purpose.

Provide screening and light shielding from adjacent residential properties.

Use planting and fencing to screen loading and outdoor storage or sales areas.