

Oakland City Planning Commission
Design Review Committee

STAFF REPORT

Case File Number: DC20.03

April 23, 2003

Location:	Citywide
Proposal:	Draft one and two unit residential design review criteria and guidelines for view, solar access and privacy impacts on neighboring properties and for mass and bulk. The draft criteria and guidelines relate to the revised zoning standards and design review procedures primarily for one and two unit residential facilities adopted by the City Council on December 18, 2001. (Continued from Design Review Committee's March 26, 2003 meeting).
Applicant:	City of Oakland
Environmental Determination:	Exempt; Section 15061(b)(3), State CEQA Guidelines, "general rule", no possibility of significant effect on the environment.
Action to be Taken:	Review draft criteria and guidelines. Provide recommendation to City Planning Commission.
For further information:	Contact case planner Christopher Buckley at (510) 238-6983 .

BACKGROUND: On March 26, 2003, the Design Review Committee considered draft 1-2 unit residential design review criteria and guidelines for view, solar access and privacy impacts on neighboring properties and for mass and bulk.

After hearing comments from speakers and considering oral comments and written comments (see Attachment C), the Committee requested:

1. That the matter be continued to the Committee's April 23, 2003 meeting to give the Committee and public more time to review the draft criteria and guidelines;
2. That a sample section of the criteria and guidelines be revised to shorten the documents as much as possible and to rely primarily on the illustrations to communicate the documents' content, with the text embedded in the illustrations; and
3. That the illustrations missing from the draft criteria and guidelines be provided.

DISCUSSION:

Revised Sample Section of Criteria and Guidelines

The “Views” portion of the criteria and guidelines was selected as the revised sample section and is shown in Attachment A. The revision attempts to condense the text as much as possible without changing the basic content or meaning of the original draft. (The Committee, of course, may wish to make such changes, but staff has not yet received complete direction from the Committee). This revision has been prepared quickly, and some further editing/wordsmithing will be required. It is presented in order for the Committee to decide if this revised format and level of detail is appropriate.

Where illustrations were provided, staff considered, as one option, totally eliminating the original freestanding text and relying entirely on text contained in the illustrations. However, staff concluded that having very limited text in a text box along with the graphic offered a good balanced approach.

Providing the guidelines as separate text, (but now in a more concise form), allows clearer presentation of the guidelines in their totality and makes their interrelationship more obvious. Also, the illustrations show only specific examples of situations addressed in the guidelines and cannot show the many variations of these situations. Relying only on the illustrations may cause users to assume that the illustrations apply only to the specific situations depicted (e.g. only projects on downslope lots, only views from the depicted locations, etc.) without realizing that the guidelines address a much broader range of situations. Presenting the guidelines both as text and illustrations has generally worked well in the existing S-14 guidelines, even for nonarchitects and customers not familiar with design review. Continuing this format, but with more concise text and a closer relationship between text and illustrations should make the format even more effective.

Staff plans to continue working on the illustrations to eliminate unnecessary information, (e.g. identifying particular rooms, showing setback lines, etc. when this information is not relevant to the depicted guidelines) so that the guidelines themselves are more conspicuous.

Other changes in the sample revision include simplifying the original three-number system (e.g. 1.1.2) for identifying each guideline to a two-number system (e.g. 1.2). The first number refers to the chapter or general topic (e.g. “Views”) while the second number refers to a more specific topic (e.g. “View Protection Techniques”). Providing a specific alpha/numeric designation for each guideline assists referencing the guidelines in letters and staff reports, such as when making design review findings.

The Committee should determine whether the sample format revision is appropriate for all of the criteria and guidelines chapters (see list in Attachment B) and identify any further revisions. After the Committee approves a revised format and provides other input, staff will revise the views, solar access, privacy and mass/bulk chapters to conform with this format.

Additional Illustrations

Attachment A shows three new illustrations related to “Protected View Corridors” and “Massing Techniques” for View Protection. These illustrations were not included in the original View, Solar Access and Privacy document in the March 26, 2003 staff report packet.

Other missing illustrations are not included because they are less critical to understanding the guidelines and because staff would like to obtain definitive Committee direction on the guidelines’ content and format before preparing additional illustrations that may ultimately be discarded or significantly changed.

In addition to the guidelines with missing illustrations, there are other guidelines that are not currently proposed for illustrations. These include (referring to Attachment A) Guidelines 1.1a (“Significant Views”), 1.1b (“Primary Living Spaces”) and 1.3 (“View Protection Limits”). Staff believes that the text for these guidelines is self explanatory, and the document will be shorter without them, but the Committee may decide that illustrations would still be helpful.

Relation of Guidelines Chapters to Existing Design Review Procedures

Attachment B is a chart listing all of the City’s design review procedures for 1-2 unit residences and showing which chapters of the complete design review criteria and guidelines would apply to each procedure. This highlights a policy issue identified by the Committee – i.e. that guidelines for views, privacy, solar access, mass and bulk, architectural design, and landscaping do not apply to new construction in most areas of the City. This is a policy issue that can be discussed in the upcoming evaluation of mediated design review, (which was established as a pilot program). It is not a policy issue that needs to be decided in order to complete these design guidelines.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. Determine whether the revised sample format in Attachment A is appropriate for all chapters of the 1-2 unit design review criteria and guidelines.
2. Review the previously submitted view, solar access, privacy and mass/bulk criteria and guidelines and suggest any further modifications, especially in response to the issues listed in the March 26, 2003 staff report.
3. Advise staff whether the Committee wishes to review revised versions of the view, solar access, privacy and mass/bulk chapters before they are considered by the full City Planning Commission.

Respectfully submitted:

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- Attachments:
- A. Revised sample “Views” section of criteria and guidelines.
 - B. Chart showing applicability of proposed design review criteria and guidelines chapters to different design review procedures.
 - C. Letter dated March 21, 2003 from Marjory F. Gibson (distributed at Committee’s March 26, 2003 meeting).

