

DRAFT

**SINGLE FAMILY
INDIVIDUAL REVIEW
GUIDELINES**

**CITY OF PALO ALTO
DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT**

The illustrations contained in this draft document are examples from a variety of sources. The illustrations are used for discussion purpose only and will not be used in the final document.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. INTENT OF THE GUIDELINES

The goal of the Single Family Individual Review Guidelines is to ensure that new and remodeled two-story homes respect their neighbors both functionally and aesthetically.

The Guidelines and associated changes to the R-1 Single Family zone districts were developed after extensive discussion by the “Future of Single Family Neighborhoods Advisory Group”. Three fundamental issues were identified by the Advisory Group and form the core of the guidelines: privacy, massing and scale, and streetscape. A definition and policy statement for these core issues follows this introduction to the Single Family Individual Review Guidelines (*see Section C*).

The Guidelines are intended to help maintain the unique quality of Palo Alto neighborhoods by providing guidance for the sensitive treatment of privacy, massing and streetscape issues.

The second-story threshold (*see Applicability Section D*) is not meant to discourage two-story homes. It is, rather, an acknowledgement that two story houses have the greatest potential to significantly affect the privacy of adjacent homeowners and the perceived sense of neighborhood scale.

The Guidelines are *not* intended to prescribe a specific architectural style or design program. Within Palo Alto neighborhoods, there are many diverse styles and each residential lot presents a unique situation.

The guidelines acknowledge that change occurs, and that individual homeowners should have the flexibility to build, expand or remodel to meet their own needs and objectives. However, such change should respect the adjacent homeowners and surrounding neighborhood context.

B. EXPECTATIONS

A new two-story house is expected to meet the community guidelines, or articulate why the standard does not apply in a particular situation

and provide an alternative solution that addresses the intent of the guidelines.

New second story additions or additions greater than 150 square feet to existing second stories will be reviewed in the context of the magnitude of the proposed changes. As an example, the guidelines relating to privacy considerations would typically be the primary focus of review for an addition to an existing second story.

Overall the guidelines do not prescribe a specific architectural style or design program. Guidelines for new second story additions do, however, encourage sensitivity to the existing style of the house, existing window patterns and roof forms.

C. DEFINITIONS AND POLICY STATEMENTS

PRIVACY:

Definition: A reasonable expectation that personal activities conducted within one's home will not be subject to casual or involuntary observation by others.

Policy Statements:

1. Provide a reasonable level of privacy on each single-family lot by reducing the

opportunities for individuals to be casually observed by others when engaging in activities within or immediately around one's home (*see text of the Comprehensive Plan Land Use and Community Design Element - Goal L-3 in the Land Use*).

2. Acknowledge that complete or absolute privacy is not a realistic expectation.
3. New construction should recognize the pre-existing privacy situation.

MASSING:

Definition: The sense of bulk, size, and shape of a structure, usually perceived by reference to the surrounding space and nearby structures and natural features such as trees.

Policy Statements:

1. Maintain the scale and character of the City. Avoid land uses that are overwhelming and unacceptable due to their size and scale (*Comprehensive Plan Land Use and Community Design Element – Policy L-5*).
2. Provide a coherent sense of scale that addresses the relationship of various parts of the environment to each other, to people, and the limits of perception (*see text of Land*

Use and Community Design Element of the Comprehensive Plan - Policy L-5).

STREETSCAPE:

Definition: The overall impression made by the design, arrangement, and relationship to other structures, landscaping and open space on a block or in a neighborhood.

Policy Statements:

1. *Preserve the character of residential neighborhoods by encouraging new or remodeled structures to be compatible with the neighborhood and adjacent structures (Land Use and Community Design Element – Policy L-12).*
2. *Provide pedestrian-oriented features on residences that enliven the street (adaptation of Program L-11 of the Land Use and Community Design Element of the Comprehensive Plan).*

D. APPLICABILITY

The thresholds for Individual Review are the following:

- New two-story house.
- New second story addition on an existing one story house.

- Expansion of an existing second story that exceeds 150 square feet.

E. OVERVIEW OF THE SINGLE FAMILY INDIVIDUAL REVIEW GUIDELINES

All new house construction must conform to the requirements of the R-1 Zoning Ordinance Regulations (*Chapter 18.12 of the PAMC*). The R-1 Zoning Guidebook provides an illustrated summary of the regulations. The Single Family Individual Review Guidelines presented below are intended to go beyond the basic requirements of the Zoning Ordinance and, in greater detail, address issues specifically related to the relationship to adjacent properties and neighborhood patterns.

Who should use the guidelines?

- Homeowners
- Builders, architects and other design professionals
- Neighborhood residents
- City staff

Use of the Illustrations in the Individual Review Design Guidelines

- The illustrations provided in the guidelines are schematic and intended to graphically show the intent of the Guidelines.
- The illustrations are not intended to dictate a particular architectural style or design program.

(Please note that illustrations used for the final document will include examples of contemporary homes.)

F. INDIVIDUAL REVIEW PROCESS

What Are the Steps?

1. Preliminary meeting with Planning staff:

Prior to application you should discuss your project with the City's planning staff. They will answer questions about zoning regulations and the review process and explain submittal requirements. Also, staff strongly recommends discussing your plans in advance with your neighbors.

2. Application for Individual Review Process

- Application will include checklist and "storyboard" with pictures of the three adjacent properties on the right, left and across the street.
- Notice to "invite comments" mailed to adjacent property owners and site "posted" within 3 days.

- Plans available at Development Center for review.
- Comment period is 10 days.

3. Staff Review

- Staff will have conducted R-1 "plan check", staff and architect(s) will have reviewed neighbors' comments.
- Assessment based on "Individual Review Guidelines".
- Typically, this consultation would occur within 12 days of application.
- Tentative Director's Decision (approval, approval with conditions, or denial) sent to applicant, adjacent neighbors and those requesting notification.
- If no optional request for Director's Hearing (see below), the recommendation is final on the 11th day after it is mailed.

4. Optional Director's Hearing

- Notice of Director's Hearing mailed and site "posted".
- Hearing can be requested by applicant, adjacent neighbor.
- The hearing is focused on zoning issues, the "Individual Review Guidelines" and associated checklist.
- Final Director's decision, following hearing, sent to applicant, adjacent neighbors and those requesting notification.

5. "Call-Up" Appeal

- An appeal must be filed within 10 days of mailing of Director's decision.
- An appeal will only be heard if four members of the City Council "call-up" (i.e., agree to conduct a hearing).

6. How long will it take?

- Without optional hearing, decision within approximately 32 - 37 days.
- With optional hearing, decision within approximately 47 - 52 days (end of appeal period).
- With an appeal, the timeline will depend on the time for the "call-up" procedure and City Council agenda availability.

II. GOOD NEIGHBOR CONSIDERATIONS

A. PRIVACY

The guidelines expect sensitivity to privacy issues for both the proposed house and adjacent neighbors. The placement of second story windows and balconies are particularly important aspects of privacy considerations.

1. WINDOWS

Guideline #1:

Second story window placement that respects privacy between properties is expected.

Privacy from second floor windows may be maximized by employing one or more of the following techniques:

- a. Offset or stagger windows facing neighbor's windows.
- b. Use clerestory windows or locate the windows high enough to lessen the impact.
- c. Use obscure glass.
- d. Use landscaping to provide a buffer between properties.

The illustrations contained in this draft document are examples from a variety of sources. The illustrations are used for discussion purpose only and will not be used in the final document.

2. BALCONIES AND DECKS

Guideline #2:

If there are second story balconies or decks, they are expected to be designed and located to mitigate the loss of privacy for neighboring properties.

Providing privacy from balconies and decks may be maximized by employing one or more of the following techniques:

- a. Screen second story balconies and decks from neighboring property by incorporating architectural elements such as enclosing walls.
- b. Locate second story balconies and decks so there are no direct sight lines from the deck to the neighbor's main windows or patio areas.
- c. Incorporate screening devices such as trellises or awnings to increase privacy.

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B. MASS AND SCALE

the property.

B. MASS AND SCALE

The overall massing of new houses and second story additions should be compatible with the adjacent houses and the predominant neighborhood scale. On streets where single story houses or small two story houses are the predominant block pattern, a new two-story house or second story addition may require some special attention to reduce the massing and perceived sense of bulk.

1. MASS AND SCALE:

Guideline #3:

A new house or new second story addition that is sensitive to the predominate neighborhood scale is expected.

Reducing massing bulk may be achieved by employing one or more of the following techniques:

- a. Reduce the apparent size of a two-story building by incorporating dormer windows and lowering the height of the second-story roof.
- b. Divide the building mass by the use of smaller building elements.
- c. Set the second story back from the front of the house.
- d. Place second story mass toward the center of

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Guideline #4:

A new house or second story addition that is sensitive to the prevailing neighborhood height pattern and particularly the height of adjacent houses is encouraged.

Blending the height of a new house or second story addition with neighboring houses may be achieved by employing one of the following techniques:

- a. Incorporating a height that is consistent with the neighborhood patterns.
- b. Reduce plate heights of second story walls by “clipping” ceilings to allow typical ceiling height without increasing plate height.

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Guideline #5:

Front facades that provide visual interest, a sense of human scale and visual focal points that complement the overall design and enhance the residential scale are encouraged.

Enhancing residential scale and proportion may be achieved by employing the following technique:

- a. Incorporate streetscape elements, such as entry forms and bay windows, chimneys, garden walls, and similar architectural elements to create visual interest.

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2. SUNLIGHT ORIENTATION:

Guideline #6:

A new house or second story addition that respects the solar orientation of the adjacent neighbors' houses and yards is encouraged.

Sensitivity to solar orientation may be achieved by employing the following technique:

- a. Locate taller sections of building where they minimize sunlight obstructions to adjacent houses.

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3. ROOFS:

Roof forms can contribute significantly to the sense of a building's mass and perceived bulk. The primary roof form should relate to the massing of the house. Secondary roof forms should be included to identify important components of the house.

Guideline #7:

A new house that incorporates a roof form(s) that effectively manages the house's scale and proportions is expected.

The roof design can effectively manage the house's scale and proportion by employing one or more of the following techniques:

- a. Incorporate a consistent roof slope throughout.
- b. Articulate the roof into primary and secondary roof forms.
- c. Roof slopes and materials should be consistent with the building style.

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4. SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR SECOND STORY ADDITIONS

Second story additions should consider how the addition relates mass and scale, windows and roof forms to the existing house. The addition should blend with the existing parts of the house and not appear as if it were “tacked on.”

a. Mass and Scale

Guideline #8:

A second story addition that balances the overall form, mass and composition of the existing building is expected.

b. Window Composition

Guideline #9:

A second story addition with carefully composed window location, pattern, proportion and shape is expected.

c. Roofs

Guideline #10:

Roof form(s) that match or complement the existing are encouraged.

III. NEIGHBORHOOD PATTERNS

The intent of this section is promote a neighborhood pattern based on the community desire to preserve a sense of massing, scale and spatial openness within neighborhoods. The neighborhood patterns are defined by existing setbacks, heights, entryways and porches, garages, roofs and field of view.

A. Streetscape

1. SETBACKS:

Guideline #11:

A new two-story house or second story addition that respects the setback pattern of the neighboring houses is expected.

Blending the setbacks of a new house may be achieved by employing the following technique:

- a. Incorporate side setbacks for new construction and second story additions that are consistent with the neighborhood patterns.

Guideline #12:

A new house or second story addition that is in scale with its site is expected.

(Text yet to be included)

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2. ENTRYWAYS AND PORCHES:

In general, entryways and front porches are desirable elements . In a neighborhood with front porches, it is preferable to build a house with a front porch. In a neighborhood, such as an Eichler tract, where there are no front porches, a front porch can be disruptive to the neighborhood pattern.

Guideline # 13:

A new house that integrates the entry design into the overall building design and is well related to the surrounding properties in terms of scale and proportion is encouraged.

Integrating the entry design into the overall building design may be achieved by employing the following technique:

- a. Incorporating pedestrian scaled entryway features.

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3. GARAGES:

Garage patterns are an important component in defining the character of a house and the street. Palo Alto has many examples of garage locations which include front attached garages, attached and detached rear garages.

When garages are added or relocated as part of an addition, the final location and configuration is an important consideration. In general, the garage additions and relocations should respect the neighborhood pattern.

Guideline #14:

Garages and driveways that are located to mitigate their visual impact on the street and to be subordinate to the house, landscape and pedestrian entrance are encouraged.

Integrating the garage into the surrounding context may be achieved by employing one or more of the following techniques:

- a. New garages should follow the setback and location of neighboring houses.
- b. Incorporate garage doors that are compatible with the architectural style of the house and/or contribute to the house's aesthetic character.
- c. If a new or expanded attached three-car garage is proposed,

it is a good idea to either turn the garage sideways to the street, configure it as two tandem spaces and one single space, or split and offset as two distinct garages, a two car garage and a one car garage.

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INDIVIDUAL REVIEW CHECKLIST

INDIVIDUAL REVIEW CHECKLIST (PAGE 2)

GLOSSARY

The terms to be included and correlation to existing ordinance definitions is still under review

Examples: Storyboard, Adjacent (as used for the purpose of public notice), "Call-up" appeal, etc.