

Hillcrest Town Council Development Design Principles

Hillcrest has been targeted for high-density infill development as a part of the City of San Diego's "City of Villages" planning strategy.

In order for any infill development to be embraced by the community, it should adhere to design principles that are broadly supported. This document articulates seven design principles that the community supports. Positive and negative examples are provided order to illustrate how the principle was successfully realized or how it failed to be realized.

This document focuses on specific principles, not on any specific projects that have been built or proposed. References to specific projects are only for the purpose of highlighting a specific principle. They are not meant to endorse or criticize the project as a whole.

The design principles that will be presented in this document are:

- 1) Adequate Parking
- 2) Abundant Landscaping
- 3) Bulk and Scale Appropriate with Neighboring Structures
- 4) Effective Use of Materials and Color
- 5) Sufficient Setbacks
- 6) Green Development
- 7) Appropriate Height as a Defining Feature

For most principles, a positive and negative example will be presented to indicate designs that either uphold the desired principle or fail to uphold that principle.

Adequate Parking

Adequate parking for residents, guests, neighbors and visitors to the community is necessary in order to ensure a high quality of life for residents of Hillcrest. Sufficient public street parking is essential in supporting a vibrant commercial presence as well as providing a pleasant residential living environment.



Positive Example of Adequate Parking at 3687 4th Avenue

The Atlas project (above) is a positive example of a design that allows adequate parking. Parking for residents is concealed and can only be accessed through an alley. Residents are given side-by-side parking in a common garage, with two spaces per living unit. There is additional off-street parking for guests and for those visiting ground-level businesses. No curb cuts are needed and street parking remains available for public parking. Pedestrians walking along the project are not confronted with one garage door after another.



Negative Example of Adequate Parking at 3802 Herbert Street

The townhomes on Herbert Street (above) are an example of a design that does not allow for adequate parking. Excessively wide curb cuts on both sides of a corner lot have resulted in the loss of at least three public parking spaces in an area that already lacks sufficient street parking. Pedestrians walking by the project are confronted with one garage door after another along most of the first floor. Under the assumption that residents in this area will make use of public transit instead of driving a car to work, the townhomes have tandem instead of side-by-side garage parking. The tandem parking

(which requires moving one car out in order to get to the other car) increases the likelihood that residents living in the townhomes will park on the street and not make full use of the garage space allocated to them.

Had this single lot project been designed around a single shared parking facility, then no new curb cut would have been needed and more appropriate parking could have been included. It appears that projects like this one use a corner lot in order to inappropriately take advantage of city curb cut guidelines that are based on the linear distance of the curb.

Abundant Landscaping

The ability to grow a wide variety of plants that are beautiful most times of the year is one of San Diego's greatest assets. Landscaping provides a sense of pride in community and adds to the quality of life. Multi-family residential designs should pay special attention to landscaping. Unlike a single residence, changes and additions to these plantings require coordination between many owners.



Positive Example of Abundant Landscaping at 3620 3rd Avenue

The multi-family project on Third Avenue (above) is a positive example of landscaping that allows the project to fit nicely into the neighborhood. It provides the pedestrian with a pleasant experience when walking down the street. It is an asset to both the homeowners and the community. The landscaping is further enhanced by green parkway strips on Third Avenue.



Negative Example of Abundant Landscaping at 3812 Park Boulevard

The Egyptian multi-family project on University Avenue and Park Boulevard (above) is an example of inadequate landscaping. The landscaping shown here along University Avenue does little to contribute to the outdoor experience of either the home owners or the community.

Note: The use of native Southern California plants is encouraged to reduce the need for water.

Bulk and Scale Appropriate with Neighboring Structures

One of the biggest challenges that much of the new development in the Hillcrest area must overcome is finding a way to introduce the density specified for in the zoning and still design and build structures that are compatible with the surrounding structures. Any assumption that, over time, most of the existing lower-density structures will be replaced, contradicts both community preservation goals as well as any sense of fairness to existing residents.



Negative Example of Bulk and Scale Appropriate with Neighboring Structures at 3740 Park Boulevard

The Deca project along Robinson Avenue (above) towers over the adjacent property. This impacts both the desirability and value of the adjacent property. This building whose density actually exceeded the zoning is not compatible with the adjacent structure. The conflict between the two structures detracts from the appeal of both properties. An objective analysis could easily conclude that this development impacted the adjacent owner unfairly.



Positive Example of Bulk and Scale Appropriate with Neighboring Structures at 1220 Cleveland Ave.

The Uptown Center (above) at 1220 Cleveland Ave. is a positive example of bulk and scale that is appropriate with existing structures. The mostly three story buildings create a feeling of a city village and community, while the addition of some fourth stories of different heights and shapes add variation and interest. This project serves as an excellent model of new construction that has the appropriate bulk and scale for the Hillcrest Community.

Effective Use of Materials and Color

While beauty is in the eye of the beholder, there are examples where the use of color and materials work and others where they do not. In the two examples below, the contrast is use of materials and color between the two projects of similar height is clear. Color changes, even subtle ones, add interest and break up the mass of the building.



Negative example of effective use of materials and colors at corner of Herbert Street & Robinson Ave.



Positive example of effective use of materials and colors around the 700th block of West Washington Street.

Sufficient Setbacks

An important aspect of the pedestrian experience is that one does not feel overwhelmed by the adjacent structure. One way to mitigate the size of a building is to provide a sufficient setback from the side walk for the structure. In the example below on Washington Street, the pedestrian is confronted with a multiple story building in a narrow passageway.



Negative example of sufficient setback at 3972 Albatross Street.

While walking along Park Boulevard, the front of the adjacent structure does not overwhelm you since it is set back from the side walk.



Positive example of sufficient setback at 3740 Park Boulevard.

Green Development

In recent years, guidelines and scoring systems have been developed to promote responsible growth from an environmental point of view. As a community, it is important for us to embrace and advance those items that work in our community.

Green Development benefits the environment, economy, and the society. The non-profit organization “Build it Green” promotes healthy, energy and resource-efficient buildings. Some of their design principles and strategies that we should adopt are listed below.

- * Designing for livable communities
- * Using sun and site to the building's advantage for natural heating, cooling, and day lighting
- * Landscaping with native, drought-resistant plants and water-efficient practices
- * Building quality, durable structures
- * Reducing and recycling construction and demolition waste
- * Insulating well and ventilating appropriately
- * Incorporating durable, salvaged, recycled, and sustainably harvested materials
- * Using healthy products and building practices
- * Using energy-efficient and water-saving appliances, fixtures and technologies

When implemented holistically, these strategies serve to preserve our environment for future generations by conserving natural resources and protecting air and water quality. They provide benefits for us today by increasing comfort and well-being and helping to maintain healthy air quality. Finally, green building strategies are good for everyone's pocketbook by reducing maintenance and replacement requirements, reducing utility bills and lowering the cost of home ownership, and increasing property and resale values

Appropriate Height as a Defining Feature

In ways different from any other attribute, the height of surrounding structures defines the environment. It is not just the shadows cast by tall buildings that impact one's sense of place, but it is the overall feeling of place that is created by their presence. Historically, the core of the Hillcrest Business District has been defined by low-rise buildings on narrow streets. Taller buildings with varying setbacks have been built in outlining areas where the streets are wider. Finding the correct balance between allowing taller buildings to accommodate smart growth while maintaining the historic feel of the neighborhood has been a real challenge.

To illustrate the issue consider the two following views. The part of University Ave where the Hillcrest sign is located is narrow with two and three story buildings on both sides. Contrast that to a section on Washington Street only a block away. Along Washington Street there are eight story buildings lining a much wider section of street. The difference in the sense of place defined by these two examples is striking.



Example of lower heights along University Ave



Example of tall building along Washington St.

Similar differences between the typical business areas that define Hillcrest and those areas defined by taller buildings can be seen in Bankers Hill to the south. In Bankers Hill, the taller buildings on wide avenues feel more like downtown neighborhoods and less like a village. The simple point is that there are clear differences in the sense of place created by the height of the building framing the streets. For this reason, it is important to carefully consider the character of the neighborhood in determining the appropriate height to allow. Because of the unique nature of the Hillcrest business district, it deserves special attention.

It is the position of the Hillcrest Town Council that appropriate height allowances must be determined by considering the historical nature of the Hillcrest Business District and

its importance in defining the community. To this end it may be desirable to restrict heights in some core business areas so as to preserve the character of the neighborhood. After these principles are adopted, the next step will be to define the specific areas that should be preserved.