City of Albany

DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR RESIDENTIAL ADDITIONS AND NEW HOMES

Community Development Department

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Introduction

Purpose and Goals of the Guidelines

The City of Albany is a small, walkable, urban community in an urban area, approximately 1.7 square miles in size. The City was subdivided in the 1920's into 2,500-5,000 sq. ft. lots with smaller homes, many of which are nonconforming by current development standards. There is a rich and diverse range of architectural designs found in the city, for example, California Bungalows, Tudor, Mission, modern/contemporary, etc. In the late 1920's, Charles MacGregor was a predominant developer, building more than 1,500 homes in the city. His homes are today referred to as "MacGregors." There is a warm, small city feel in Albany that is unique in the Bay Area, and that is enjoyed by existing residents and attractive to new residents.

The design guidelines have been created to assist applicants, neighbors, staff and commissioners in understanding and applying Albany's Planning and Zoning Code while also communicating the City's design goals through explanations and examples of high quality solutions. The intent of the guidelines is to provide specific design elements that encourage thoughtful development, interaction between neighbors and a sense of community in an urban environment.

The guidelines are meant to enhance, and not restrict architectural creativity in a city where there is no one dominant architectural style. It is acknowledged that there are a variety of budgets, needs and desires by residents, which all need to be balanced to provide high quality homes that are a pleasure to live in as well as live among. Thoughtful application of the guidelines and a sensitive design that is well detailed, using quality materials, reduces the potential for conflict. Applicants are highly encouraged to talk to neighbors about their development needs, options and design proposals.

Use of the Guidelines

The City's Planning and Zoning Code Section 20.24.020 provides the development standards for all residential zoning districts, which include all setbacks, height, FAR, and other requirements. Compliance with the Code's development standards improves the likelihood of a favorable outcome in the Design Review process.

Project development proponents such as architects, designers, homeowners, contractors and developers should use the guidelines to plan additions or new development. Planning staff will rely on the guidelines as a basis for providing and supporting recommendations for design changes. The Planning and Zoning Commission will use the guidelines as a basis for approving or denying applications for design review of residential projects. Finally, neighbors of project proponents may utilize the guidelines to understand the City's design criteria and goals.

It is suggested that applicants make an appointment to meet with City planning staff early in the design process for details on the Planning and Zoning Code and these

Design Review by the Planning and Zoning Commission

A public hearing of the Planning and Zoning Commission is required for the review of any addition over 400 sq. ft. <u>or</u> any second-story addition. (Additions over 240 square feet may trigger City parking requirements.) All public hearings are required to be noticed to neighbors of the project 10-days before the hearing date. Administrative public hearings are required for single-story additions, under 400sq.ft. For all projects requiring Design Review, neighbors within a 100'-300' radius will be noticed of the public hearing.

Municipal Code Section 20.100.050 is the legislative code section regarding "Design Review." Many different aspects of a project may be discussed during a design review hearing. The following are prevalent issues that are often discussed and applicants will want to keep in mind while designing their projects:

- **Floor-Area-Ratio (FAR), which is the total building square footage (total of the square footage of all of the floors) divided by the site size square footage (site area). The intent of an FAR requirement is to guide the mass of buildings. Municipal Code Section 20.24.050 is the legislative code section regarding "FAR." There are several adjustments to gross square footage allowed per the code.**
- **Fire sprinklers are required for projects that include renovations or additions that are equal or greater than fifty percent or more of the existing floor area and the sum of the existing and new floor area is 1,500 sq. ft. or more.**
- **Landscape and hardscape should be complementary and reflect the character of the home.**
- **Privacy, the location of windows compared to neighboring windows should be thoughtfully considered.**
- **Respectful design, considering neighbors' views and daylight can help make your project go smoother and maintain good relations.**

Variances

Variances are "exceptions" to zoning requirements that may be granted to projects with unusual or unique physical circumstances. For example, an odd shaped lot, topography constraints, etc. Findings, found in Municipal Code Section 20.100.040, must be made in order to grant a variance. The findings that must be made relate to physical circumstances on a property that distinguish the property from other nearby properties. Since most parcels in Albany have a similar size, shape, and topography, variances are seldom approved. The Planning and Zoning Code can, however, in some cases, provide flexibility in respect to parking, setbacks, building height, etc.

The 10 Essentials

The following guidelines have been deemed important elements of residential design in the City of Albany. Planning & Zoning Commissioners will be considering these as they review projects. This does not mean that every one of these is directly applicable to every project and site, but some attention paid to the spirit of each Essential is strongly recommended.

1. The Front Yard is the House's "Contribution" to the Street

Narrow frontages in Albany create an urban environment in which the streetscapes provide areas for neighbors to interact.

Short, decorative fences, arbors, and porches are all encouraged to create attractive, and inviting entrances to homes. See Municipal Code Section 20.24.110 for size limitations.

Arbor at Entrance

Landscaping of the front yard dictates the character of the entire street block.

Attractive Landscaping and Low Wall

Low Landscaping

Consider using higher quality building materials, architectural detail, or special accents in the entry areas to emphasize the entrance.

Existing and proposed trees should be shown on Design Review submittals.

2. Every House Needs a Useable Front Porch

Porches create the transition between the public street and private home.

Covered porches can be part width or full width.

Attractive and inviting front porch

Front porches contribute to the warmth of a street block. Thus, enclosing or removing existing porches is not encouraged.

The front elevation is the most visible façade of the home. Details such as the porch materials, railing, architectural style, etc., can all contribute to the aesthetics of the front façade.

Zoning: porches and decks are included in floor-area-ratio calculations when there are 3 or more sides (a roof counts as a side, the floor does

Decorative front porch

Zoning: Open porches can encroach 6′ into the front or rear yard.

Stairs should be gracious and in proportion to the porch, and structured stairs are not allowed to project beyond 6′ into the front yard. Steps on grade may be built within the setback.

3. Garages and Parking are Important Considerations on Albany's Small Lots

As a result of a voter-approved amendment to the Planning and Zoning Code, two off-street parking spaces are required for an increase of 240 sq. ft. or more of habitable space. The parking spaces can be provided in a variety of ways including tandem, open, covered or enclosed, in the side or rear yards.

A special exception is required to exempt a required parking space or to provide parking in the front yard. See Municipal Code Section 20.28.030 for parking dimensions, exceptions, etc.

Decorative pavers

Where front yard parking is permitted, it should make an aesthetic contribution to the street (pervious parking, stone, cobble pavers, or any material that improves the existing paving) and mitigate visual impacts of a vehicle parked in the front yard.

Attached garages should not be more than 40% of the building width. Single-car garages are preferred, but if a two-car garage is proposed, it should have separate garage doors.

The style of the garage door should be consistent with the home. Various types of materials such as steel, glass, sculpted wood, etc are acceptable.

Carriage Style Garage Doors

… A Few More Things to Consider with Parking and Garages….

Whenever feasible, residents should pull the garage back from the front façade as much as possible, and minimize the width of the driveway and curb cut.

Where practical, residents should locate curb cuts to maintain on street parking spaces.

See item #10 "Bay Friendly Landscaping" for more suggestions.

4. Increasing the Livability of Your Home

Removing interior walls, extending bays and dormers, and expanding the first floor are all options for creating more space

☆ Extra care should be taken when approaching floor-area-ratio limits. Projects that exceed 0.45 floor-area-ratio may be subject to extra study in the design review of the project and the analysis of its impacts.

In designing additions and new homes, neighboring homes should be considered in regards to preserving privacy and reducing overall impacts.

The addition should be well integrated into the existing home, such that it looks like it was part of the original structure, or is a well designed, well proportioned and complementary addition.

The roofline is important. Low eave lines, plate heights and sloped ceilings are all encouraged to reduce mass.

There is no rule for where a second-story shall be located. Topography, depth, setbacks, sun orientation, etc are all important considerations in deciding the optimal location for an addition.

Roof types and slopes should be consistent and complementary with the overall character and style of home.

FYI: Solar access California State law seeks to eliminate any unreasonable barriers to the installation of solar energy.

Lifting a home and building habitable space on the ground floor can be a viable option in certain circumstances. Potential issues include the overall height, proportions of stairways, and seismic strength. Compliance with the Planning and Zoning Code and Design Guidelines is still required.

For attic spaces within sidewalls, low-plate heights and sloping ceilings can achieve interior volumes without adding excessive height and bulk to an addition

5. Dormers and Bay are Encouraged

Curved Bays

Dormers can add visual interest and reduce the bulk of a second-story while still providing increased interior space, and in some cases can be built within the existing roof framing.

Squared Bays

Bay windows are allowed to encroach into required setbacks (see Municipal Code 20.24.060). Bays add to the character of the home and break up wall planes.

Dormers and bays can be an affordable way to create space without the added cost of new foundations.

Tall Dormers

In Albany, the width of bays cannot exceed 25% of any wall plane, and may extend to the floor.

6. Trim and Details Lend a House Warmth and Character

Trim and details should be consistent in style, regardless of whether the architectural style of the home is to change or remain the same.

True divided lights or surface applied simulated muntins are strongly encouraged and required when featured on the front façade.

FYI: Non-thermally broken metal windows will conduct heat out of a home through the frame, and are therefore discouraged.

★Regarding windows: the surface of the glass shall be recessed at least 2″ from the wall plane to provide an adequate shade and shadow, unless approved otherwise by the Planning Commission in Design Review.

Window and door placement have a huge impact on the aesthetics of building facades.

Decorative architectural details that are present on the existing home can be repeated on the addition.

Details such as eaves, brackets, awnings, trellises, decorative vents, etc., are expected to add character and architectural interest to a home.

Decorative brackets

Vents as an architectural element

2" window recess from face of wall

Where traditional trim details are being utilized, actual sills (drip ledges) should be used as well.

Handrails and guardrails should be well proportioned and integrated into the design.

Ornamental Railing

Shutters, when used, should be sized to cover the windows they are adjacent to, and are ideally functional.

7. Choose Building Materials that are Durable and Attractive

Only quality materials, both aesthetically and environmentally, should be considered.

Materials should not terminate at the corners of the building.

Two different widths of horizontal wood

The weight and finish of a building material can change the overall appearance of a home.

Finishes contribute to the overall appearance of the house. New materials should be at least consistent with, if not better than the original finish materials.

Building materials do not necessarily need to match those of the existing, or be consistent throughout the home. Multiple building materials can be acceptable and even desirable when proportioned and distributed well.

Wood Composite Lap siding and stucco: different but complementary

8. Green Building is a Prerequisite of Every Albany Home

☆ **A total of at least 50 points on Built It Green's rating system are needed for every project, regardless of size.**
See www.greenpointrated.org

Note: 50 Albany Greenpoints does not necessarily earn an official 'greenpoint rated' project. Contact Build It Green to earn the certificate.

Solar panel placement is important. They should be located in areas that provide maximum functionality and sun exposure, and be installed in an aesthetically appropriate manner. Panels should be integrated into the overall design and parallel the roof slope when feasible. They should be shown on installation Design Review Submittal.

FYI: Passive solar design can maximize the energy efficiency of a home with simple considerations such as home placement, window coverings, landscaping, etc.

FYI: Local Incentives Points include seismic upgrades, projects that minimally increase the size of the home, planting of a new street tree, and other priorities (see the Greenpoints list).

I-JOISTS/ENGINEERED LUMBER

ENERGY-EFFICENT APPLIANCES

Insulation, quality windows, weather-stripping, etc. are all easy ways to increase the energy efficiency.

Salvaged materials support the reuse of existing resources, can be of lower cost, and may provide unique design elements.

RECYCLED INSULATION

Say 'no' to vinyl siding. The City has a policy against the use of vinyl siding for both environmental and aesthetic reasons. No-maintenance materials are often a false economy. They cannot be repaired or maintained, and have a limited life.

9. Second-units And Multi-Family Housing

Smaller multi-family projects should be approached, in regards to design, like "big houses".

There are specific floor-area-ratio, height and daylight plane requirements for multi-family housing that differ from those for single-family homes.

Second units are limited to 650 sq. ft. and require a parking space. See the Municipal Code 20.20.080 and 20.28.030 for requirements.

Second units are encouraged, and whether detached or attached, should complement the home and be integrated into the overall design.

As a result of a voter-approved amendment to the Planning and Zoning Code, two off-street parking spaces are required for both second-units and multi-family housing units, regardless of the size or number of bedrooms.

10. Landscaping is an important aesthetic element of home design

Pervious paving materials other than concrete are encouraged.

Hollywood strip driveways are encouraged.

Consult the Bay-Friendly Landscaping Guidelines for types of plants, irrigation, and maintenance. (www.stopwaste.org)

Native, drought-resistant plants are preferred.

Above: A City street median containing Native, drought resistant plants, using Bay-Friendly Landscaping.

Bay-Friendly Landscaping

Conservation of water can be implemented by designing on-site water collection, and by using recycled or grey water

Integrated pest management is recommended to mitigate insects, plant diseases, weeds, and other pests without the use of pesticides

Water cistern