

El Camino Real Design Guidelines

Adopted as part of zoning

**Architectural Review Board
City of Palo Alto, California. Nov. 79**

EL CAMINO REAL DESIGN GUIDELINES

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Architectural Review Board
City of Palo Alto
California

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GUIDELINES FOR SIGN DESIGN*

1. The El Camino Real Design Guidelines limit the area of signs along El Camino Real to $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{2}{3}$ the maximum size permitted by the Sign Ordinance.
2. The El Camino Real Design Guidelines limit the height of freestanding signs along the El Camino Real to ten feet if placed at the property line and slightly higher if set back from the property line.
3. Wall signs are generally not allowed above the first floor level.
4. Strict limits are placed on the amount of signs allowed on ATMs and ATM surrounds.
5. Reader board and changeable signs are generally not approved. Churches and community organizations should limit sign copy to the name, address and pastor/director only. Menu box signs for restaurants and information signs for community service organizations and churches are acceptable if located near a building entrance and designed to provide information to someone already on site.
6. External illumination of signs is preferred and illumination is generally limited to the hours of operation of a business.
7. A-frame signs are generally not acceptable and should be applied for only when a group of businesses does not have a street frontage or acceptable wall area for a directory sign.
8. No flashing, moving, or changeable signs are allowed [PAMC Section 16.20.090(a)]
9. Advertising copy on signs is limited [PAMC Section 16.20.090(b)]. Signs should contain only enough information to identify the business. For example, the words "A division of XYZ Company" or "Cocktails, Dining and Dancing" or any like menu of services are considered generally not allowed.

*from the Palo Alto Architectural Review Board Guidelines for the Applicant, Property Owner and Citizen

Preface

These guidelines have been formulated after public meetings so that designers and businessmen may know in advance of review what the Architectural Review Board tends to approve or disapprove. They are, however, only guidelines -not regulations - and the Board encourages innovation, creativity and individuality when it is compatible with the general appearance of the street and when it does not detract from the overall cohesiveness of a landscaped commercial automobile oriented street.

Well designed streets have a consistent design vocabulary. In the past, private developments were designed according to criteria which respected the predominant architectural form, materials and visual rules of the period. They were compatible with their surroundings. More recently, the automobile and advertising have generated more and more eye catching improvements that do not always make for pleasant, well designed streets. The following guidelines attempt to subdue intense visual competition, but they are not intended to restrict imagination, innovation or variety. Rather, they are to assist in focusing on design principles which can result in creative solutions, which will develop a satisfying visual experience within the city, preserve taxable values and promote the public health, safety and welfare.

I Landscaped Street Theme

One of the predominant characteristics of Palo Alto is the landscaping of its streets. The northern length of El Camino Real from University Avenue to Stanford Avenue conforms with the tree-lined characteristic of Palo Alto's streets; the southern length from Page Mill Road to the southern city limits does not. The main thrust of these guidelines is to encourage landscaping along the southern length of El Camino Real to improve its appearance and make it more compatible with Palo Alto's other streets. The use of street trees in the medians and the sidewalks will provide a strong visual theme.

In order to implement this landscaping theme within a reasonable period of time, one street tree will be required for every 25' (or part) of street frontage. This landscaping requirement will be implemented through ARB approvals of building permits. The landscaping will be required by the ARB on all building permit applications for improvements in excess of \$5,000 to property facing El Camino Real.*

These street trees may be located either along the sidewalk or within the median. Only street trees in the following street tree list shall be used:

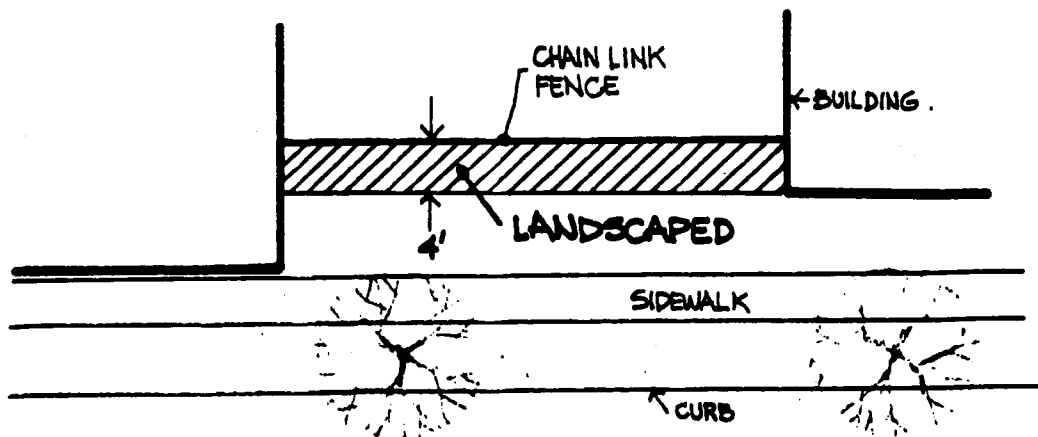
TREE NAME	LOCATION
1. Palo Alto variety of liquid amber	sidewalks and medians
2. Canary pine	medians
3. Redwood	medians

To implement the landscaping of the street, a 15 gallon tree will be required for every 30 feet of frontage on El Camino Real or streets intersecting El Camino Real. These trees will be made conditions of approval during the architectural review process. These trees are to be installed during property improvements and will be placed at locations approved by the Parks and Recreation Department.

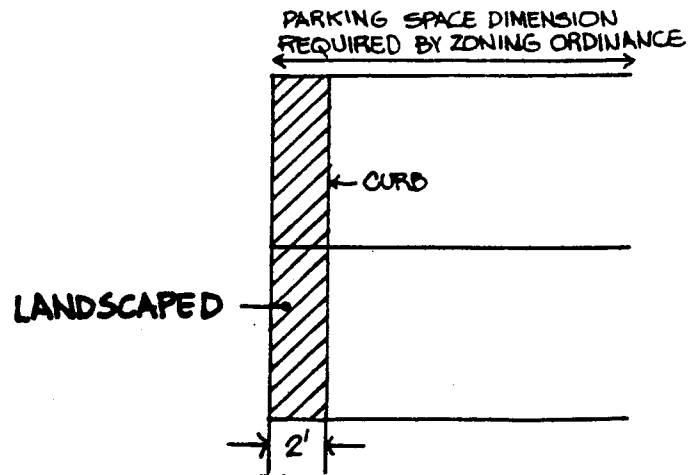
*The Chief Building Official will determine the value of an improvement.

II Landscaping, Paving

1. A landscape and irrigation plan may be required with review of a new building or an addition or with a freestanding sign. Provide landscaping adjacent to and within parking areas in order to screen vehicles from view and minimize the expansive appearance of parking areas. This landscaping should include fast growing deciduous or evergreen trees in parking lots to create maximum summer shade.
2. Tree and shrub planting should be grouped together in order to create strong accent points.
3. Insure that landscaping permits adequate sight distance for motorists and pedestrians entering or exiting the site. Allow for the growth of trees and shrubs when locating landscaping.
4. Size all landscaping so that a mature appearance will be attained within three to five years of planting.
5. Palo Alto's trees are a valuable resource and should be protected. Make every effort to integrate existing trees into the site plan.
6. Protect existing trees during construction. Tree protection details may be required by the Board.
7. Use native drought-tolerant vegetation as far as possible (for examples, see tree list under section 1).
8. Landscaping shall be installed in buffers between residential and commercial lots (see section 4).
9. Chain link fences are discouraged. If they must be used for security it is suggested that they be plastic-coated and dark in color and screened with landscaping.



10. The 2 feet from the wheel stop or curb to the edge of the required parking space can be landscaped but cannot be counted toward the required 5 foot perimeter landscaping.



11. Landscaping in planter boxes and on trellises is encouraged where larger landscape areas are not available.
12. The approved street trees listed under section I - "Landscaped Street Theme" are also recommended for use on the site. In addition, the Board recommends the use of flowering fruit trees.

III Signs

Regulations can limit size, placement, number and lighting of signs, but obviously cannot regulate the more elusive elements of taste and design. The following basic guidelines are to be considered in evaluating a sign's suitability; however, the designer is encouraged to be innovative.

1. In Palo Alto, signs must meet the requirements of two ordinances, the sign ordinance which establishes a maximum area and height, and Ordinance No. 16.48 which requires Architectural Review Board approval of the sign before a sign permit is granted.

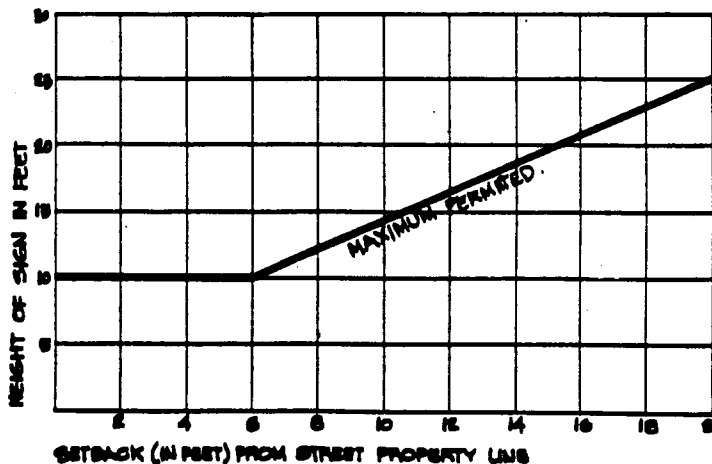
2. Size

Although the maximum allowable size has been approved in certain locations, most businesses request signs that are substantially smaller than the maximum permitted by the ordinance. The Board suggests that the size of sign needed be requested with the understanding that the maximum may not be approved. Only when it is difficult to read the proposed sign is the maximum area approved. An approximate average size of freestanding and wall signs approved by the ARB in the last two years is about one half to two thirds of the maximum permitted by the sign ordinance.

3. Height

- a) Freestanding signs generally should not extend above the height of the surrounding buildings.
- b) Tall signs should be set back from the street property line. Short signs may be located close to the property line.

FREESTANDING SIGN HEIGHT TO SETBACK RELATIONSHIPS



4. Signs mounted on the roof, spinning devices, flashing lights and pennants are not permitted by the sign ordinance.
5. Signs painted on the wall are permitted by the sign ordinance.
6. Attention getters and gimmicks or overdesigned or tortured shapes that call attention to their peculiar form are not usually approved.
7. In general, poles and other supports should be made as inconspicuous as possible so that the sign is the primary focus.
8. The Board does not encourage brightly lit signs.
9. Wall signs should appear as though the building and the sign were designed together. The sign should not appear as if it were attached as an afterthought. In order to insure compatibility, the Board may approve a sign subject to conditions that involve the modifications of the wall.
10. Street numbers shall be installed on all property uses and will not be counted towards permitted sign area.
11. A sign is meant primarily to identify a use. It is therefore important for the message to be as brief and readable as possible. More than two colors or lettering styles are not recommended because they tend to make a sign less readable.
12. The Board usually approves one wall sign per building face and/or one freestanding sign per street frontage.
13. Three signs, one on each elevation, are usually not approved.
14. Non-illuminated, pedestrian oriented signs under a canopy (3 square feet maximum) are encouraged if they are over 7'-6" high.
15. Photographs showing surrounding signs shall be submitted with each application.

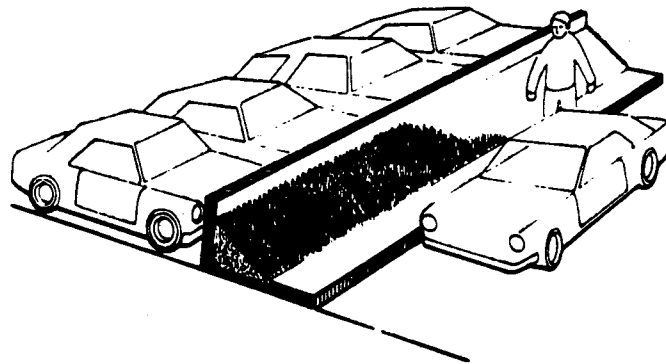
IV Architecture, Site Plan

1. Do not design an improvement primarily to attract attention.
2. When possible buildings should be set back from the front property line, with landscaping or a people-oriented plaza in front.
3. All automobile parking should be screened (see landscaping requirements for automobile screening) from the street.
4. Areas for mechanical equipment, whether on the roof or within parking areas, should be screened. Ductwork should be painted to match the color of the roof if a screen is not appropriate.
5. Trash areas, storage and service yards should be screened and kept away from residential areas. An on-site loading area may be required in areas where the Board finds that street loading will impact neighborhood traffic flow.
6. If a sign is needed, a place for a sign should be designed into the elevation.
7. All building elevations should have an integrated architectural character.
8. Buildings should not be overdesigned or decorated with superfluous details or imitations of structural materials. When remodeling a better alternative than adding materials is repainting and repairing the building, and adding minor landscape improvements.
9. Minimizing the number of driveways to the lot increases the area for landscaping close to the street, decreases the number of conflict points for automobiles, bicyclists and pedestrians using the right-of-way, and increases the area of water permeable surface.
10. In Neighborhood Commercial (CN) zones, the design should be pedestrian oriented. Signs and details should not be primarily automobile oriented.
11. More than three colors used on a structure will make it incompatible with the surroundings.
12. Using bright colors, such as reds, yellows, purples and greens as the predominant color on a structure may make it incompatible with the surroundings. The ARB ususally feels these colors are used to attract attention.

13. Commercial buildings, new or remodeled, which are located adjacent to or in close proximity to other similar properties, should be compatible with their neighbors.
14. Improvements should demonstrate a respect for the rights to light, air, and the privacy of residents in existing developments.
15. In buildings with multiple tenants, the design of individual tenant spaces should be compatible with the design of the building as a whole and with those of the neighboring tenant.

V Buffers, Parking Lots

1. If a non-residential lot abuts a residential lot, a 10' wide landscape buffer shall be provided on the non-residential lot. (See Zoning Ordinance for CN zone - 18.41.070 and CS zone - 18.45.070.) This buffer should cut down noise and screen views into the commercial lot. One 15 gallon tree for every 20' length of common property line is suggested.
2. A 5' to 8' high solid fence is required. (See Zoning Ordinance 18.41.070 and 18.34.070.) Details showing materials and construction must be included with the landscape plan.
3. The front setback should be used to provide a landscape buffer between the building and the street to shield from traffic noise and to create a more pleasant view of the building, and from the building.
4. The Zoning Ordinance does not permit parking within the front setback. (See Zoning Ordinance Chapter 18.83.)
5. All parked cars, including new and used car lots, should be screened with walls, landscaping or berms. The total height of the wall berm or landscaping should be about 3'- 6" above the finished parking lot surface.



6. The Zoning Ordinance (Section 18.83) specifies the minimum basic dimensions and guidelines for parking lots. The Ordinance requires a 5' landscaped perimeter and 5% to 10% interior landscaping. In certain cases, the Architectural Review Board may require a higher percentage.
7. The 5' landscaped perimeter shall contain at least one 15 gallon tree for each 25' of perimeter length.
8. In order to conserve energy and lower ambient temperatures in parking lots in the summer, the interior landscaping should be dispersed so that paving is shaded.

VI Lighting

1. For safety reasons, the light source should be visible from within the parking lot.
2. The light pole should be about 12' to 20' high and the fixture should be vandal-proof.
3. The light source should not be directly visible at any point over 6 feet outside the boundaries of the lot.
4. Overall site lighting intensity should be an average of one half to one quarter ($1/2$ to $1/4$) foot candle.
5. Walkways should be lit with an average of one foot candle with the light source visible.
6. Low pressure sodium lights are not preferred.
7. Spill light shall not exceed 0.10 horizontal foot candle on private property at any point over 6 feet outside the boundaries of the parking lot.

VII Architectural Review Board Procedures

1. The ARB reviews all visible outside improvements that require a permit.
2. The Architectural Review Board meets on the first and third Thursdays of each month. Complete applications for review should be submitted an average of three weeks preceding an ARB meeting. Larger, more complex projects require more lead time.
3. These guidelines are in addition to all codes and ordinances which must be met. A preliminary plan check with the Building Division is suggested.
4. Applicants are strongly urged to have a design representative present at the meeting. The applicant or a representative must be present.
5. All plans must receive a complete check for code and ordinance compliance. Plans that do not conform will not be forwarded for ARB review.
6. Plans and elevations and site plans should show how these guidelines have been considered.
7. Plans for new structures should show the relationship of the proposed structure to existing structures and landscaping on adjacent lots. Photographs are the ideal way to indicate such conditions. Plans may be required in some circumstances.
8. The site plan should show how these guidelines have been considered. Plans should include basic information such as:
 - a. Property lines
 - b. Building setback lines
 - c. All easements
 - d. Significant features to be removed and those to remain*
 - e. Sections showing building heights and relationships to adjacent structures.
 - f. Mechanical equipment and screening

*"Significant features" include buildings, parking lots, roads, paving, open space area, and major trees, to name a few.

9. Building plans, sections and elevations should show:
 - a. All materials to be used
 - b. Type of roof
 - c. Color of materials
 - d. Roof or mechanical equipment
 - e. Sign locations

10. Landscape and irrigation plans covering all areas of the site should include:
 - a. Property lines
 - b. Outline of existing and proposed buildings
 - c. Existing trees and large shrubs, including City street trees, and provision for their protection during construction
 - d. Identification of trees to be removed
 - e. Layout of all proposed plant materials
 - f. Schedule of planting showing quantity, sizes, common name and botanical name
 - g. Complete irrigation plan showing type of system and irrigation pipes
 - h. Proposed drainage plan
 - i. Landscape and irrigation plans must receive ARB approval before a building permit will be issued
 - j. Tree protection details may be required before a building permit is issued

Before submitting plans for ARB review, Planning staff is willing to meet with applicants and/or their designers for a preliminary review.