CITY OF CARMEL-BY-THE-SEA, CALIFORNIA

INCORPORATED 1916

Commercial Design Guidelines

COMMERCIAL DISTRICT DESIGN GUIDELINES

I. Purpose

These guidelines establish a series of design statements intended to conserve the historical village character and pedestrian orientation of Carmel's central commercial district. The emphasis of this document is architectural, with special attention to building facades. Please note that these are guidelines and should be taken as descriptive, not prescriptive; they are likely to be most useful as a guide during the preliminary planning process. Strict compliance with every guideline is not necessary for approval of a project, but deviations should be related to good design principles and site conditions. More definitive design specifications are set forth in the Zoning Code, Title 17, Chapter 12.

Carmel's atmosphere of tradition stems from its Italianate and commercial styles, which are typical of turn of the century small-town America, along with expressions of pre-World War II revivals in Spanish Colonial and Tudor architecture. Carmel's multiple variations upon these themes can be as gratifying as their archetypes.

There is great diversity from street to street within the commercial district. For example, designs observable along the five blocks of Ocean Avenue from Junipero to Monte Verde are older, more firmly established, and frequently conditioned by a 25-foot lot frontage not usually found on side streets. Facade proportions, scale, and ornamentation on these side streets are likely to differ accordingly. In sum, Carmel is an ongoing celebration of enlightened architectural eclecticism. For additional discussion of Carmel's architectural diversity, please see Chapter 17.12.010 of the Zoning Code.

II. The General Plan Basis for the Guidelines

Goal 1-1: Continue to maintain the predominance of the residential character in Carmel through appropriate zoning and land development regulations in all districts.

Objective-15: Preserve the scale and character of the community, especially in the commercial districts, through the administration of land use and design standards.

Policy 1-46: Ensure, through the administration of land use and design regulations, that the special and unique character of Ocean Avenue and the adjoining commercial area is protected.

Policy I-50: Continue to control the scale and mass of both one and two story buildings through design review. Guidelines should retain design flexibility, should not be so restrictive that all buildings look alike, and should recognize that in certain areas, the absence of setbacks is positive and contributes to the character of Carmel.

Objective-16: Maintain pedestrian-oriented and attractive commercial and multifamily districts that are well integrated into the residential character of the community.

Policy 1-51: Through design review require architectural and site design within the commercial and multifamily districts to be compatible with the traditional village character.

Policy I-60: Establish development standards for the R-4 district that will enhance the visual quality of this area and improve the transition between the commercial and the R-1 districts. Include requirements for adequate open space, setbacks, the planting of trees, and the provision of infrastructure improvements.

III. The Guidelines

A. Conservation of Design.

1. Modifications to buildings should respect the history and traditions of the architecture of the commercial districts. Basic elements of design integrity and consistency throughout each building should be preserved or restored.

2. New buildings should not imitate styles of the past but strive to achieve compatibility with the old. Renovation and remodeling projects should take into account the possibility that a structure might meet criteria as a historical resource by state or federal agencies.

3. Building forms should complement the rhythms established by other buildings in the immediate vicinity. Such patterns as height, number of stories, width of storefronts, scale of building forms, eave heights, and sizes of doors and windows should be used as guides to establish the context for new or remodeled buildings.

4. Adding a new design element in order to create a separate business or residential unit identity is inappropriate if it breaks the basic lines, materials and concept of a building or imposes a hodgepodge of design elements.

5. Building walls facing public streets and walkways should provide visual interest to pedestrians. Variations such as display windows, changes in building form, and changes in material, texture, or color are appropriate.

6. Long blank walls should be avoided and building facades should be broken up visually to reflect the rhythm of typical storefronts, i.e. alterations, entrances or offsets every twenty to thirty feet.

This,…

not this.

7. Roof forms should be complete and not present false fronts.

8. Partial mansard roofs (typical of franchise architecture) and pitched roofs that do not reach a true peak or hip should be avoided.

This,…

not this.

B. Façade Proportions. Each building should be treated as a consistent whole. Modifications to storefronts, offices or residential units that are part of a larger building or court should preserve or restore the common elements that serve to integrate building design.

1. Modifications to buildings should not create the visual clutter that can arise from too many or uncomplimentary design elements.

2. Lines of construction, patterns of openings, and such details as trim, window style, door dimensions, wall color, and building and roof forms should be integrated throughout the building, even if more than one enterprise occupies it.

3. If one storefront, office or residential unit is to be demarcated from another in the same building, the distinguishing features should be limited to subtle variations in the color or pattern of surfaces of doors, tiling, or entries.

4. Buildings and storefronts in the core commercial area should establish a "pedestrian wall" close to the front property line (generally 0" to 24"). The pedestrian wall in the RC and R-4 Districts generally is between 5' to 7.5'. "Pedestrian Wall" refers to the building façade facing the public way.

5. The pedestrian wall should not be without relief; it should be punctuated by occasional offsets produced by entries, window projections, small planters, and entrances to courtyards and intra-block walkways.

6. Generally, motels, residential and office buildings in the RC and R-4 districts should maintain a greater front setback to create an attractive landscape area and to complement the design and open space needs of such uses. This also establishes a design transition from the downtown core to the residential (R-1) district.

7. Buildings occupied by special land uses also should be setback from the pedestrian wall. Examples include churches, civic buildings and some institutional uses.

8. The relationship between building wall space and openings (windows and doors) should be balanced. Wall space between openings should maintain a sense of visual substance or solidity. This reflects older building limitations common to unreinforced masonry or wood frame construction and avoids excessive transparency.

9. Purely decorative balustrades and balconies are discouraged.

C. Window Patterns. Window design should be consistent with the original building concept or with its architecture. Wood framed windows with true divided lights (Tudor, Craftsman, Norman), arched windows (Spanish, Colonial Revival), or banded windows (Craftsman) are typical.

1. Large sheets of glass, unbroken by divisions, can appear too urban or modern and should be avoided.

2. Such window treatments as mitered corners, etched glass, and glass block are to be avoided.

3. Transom windows above doors or extending the width of the facade should be preserved or restored as exemplary of traditional storefront design.

D. Size, Shape, and Nature of Doors and Entries. Entrances to stores are typically recessed from the facade by creating a small alcove. This establishes a more definitive sense of entry and affords an alternative view of merchandise in display windows.

1. Conserve or create recessed entries. Should two business entries be close to one another in the same building, a single recess may be designed to accommodate both.

2. Business spaces located on a corner may substitute an angled or beveled entry instead of a recess to create variety and visual interest.

3. The floor of a recess should be differentiated from the adjoining sidewalk through contrasting stone, brick, or tile paving that does not extend beyond the property line.

4. Entrances to stores should not be excessively wide, and single doors are strongly encouraged in preference to double doors.

5. Simple wood doors that are adorned with carvings, moldings, color, hardware, or wood and glass combinations are appropriate.

Dutch doors are a Carmel tradition.

E. Materials, Textures, and Colors. Building materials and colors should respect the traditions already established in the commercial district. The use of richly detailed wood, tile, moldings, corbels, brick, and stone, as well as landscaping, are encouraged.

1. Paint should be applied as a solid color, without texture or mottling. Antiqued and faux finishes are inappropriate.

2. Muted paint colors, which blend with the natural surroundings, are appropriate. Bright and primary colors should be avoided. Contrasting colors should be saturated and earthen.

This…

or this,

not this

F. Courtyards and Intra-Block Walkways. Courtyards and intra-block walkways are important design features of the commercial districts. They provide pedestrians the anticipation of the unusual, swift and gratifying shifts in prospect, and often intriguing connecting routes between two or more streets defining a block.

1. A courtyard should maintain continuity of architecture, colors and materials.

2. The area of a courtyard should be compatible with the size of the building site.

G. Landscaping. Carmel is noted as "the village in a forest," and the forest should not end at the boundaries of the commercial district. Improvements to property that incorporate trees and other living plant materials attractively arranged and maintained are desirable.

1. Significant trees (as determined by the City Forester) need to be preserved, and site design should provide for additional trees. Healthy street trees are encouraged, as is the location of trees within the interior of blocks and away from street frontage in order to enhance the distribution of trees and to create a more effective canopy.

2. Permanently installed planter boxes are encouraged.

3. Street furniture—benches, trash containers, drinking fountains, etc.—can be a welcoming feature in the commercial area, but should be carefully selected for compatibility with the surrounding architecture and commercial activity. Benches should be carefully sited to avoid congestion and litter problems.

4. Flower boxes under display windows, hanging baskets of floral displays in intra-block walkways, and formal flowerbeds in courtyards are frequent and encouraged.

H. Lighting. Lighting should be the minimum required for public safety.

1. Harsh, unscreened, flashing, blinking and garish lights and entry lights on motion sensors are inappropriate, as are wall washing, landscape lighting and tree lighting.

2. Lighting fixtures should be discrete.....or compatible in design with the building and site.

J. Other.

Such external design elements as rooftop equipment, telecommunications antennae, roofing materials, display cases, parking design, public improvements, and flags are given detailed treatment in the Zoning Code, which should be consulted.

K. Parking Design. On-site parking should be designed to limit the visibility of vehicles and vehicle access points as well as to reduce conflicts with pedestrians.

- Vehicles should be located out of view from the public way whenever possible.
- Openings in a building façade to accommodate parking should be as minimal as possible (height, width, volume). A single car garage door or opening is preferred.

(encouraged)

(discouraged)

- Surface parking at the front of a lot is strongly discouraged.
- For most projects, curb cuts and driveways should be limited in width (9-10 ft.). Curb cuts should avoid or limit the removal of existing on-street parking whenever possible.

(encouraged)

(discouraged)

- Architectural details on and around a garage entry should be consistent and compatible with the details on the rest of the building. Mechanical equipment and piping located in a garage should be screened from public view whenever possible.

(encouraged)

(discouraged)

- Darker materials and colors should be considered for subgrade garage entrances if they allow the entrance to blend with the foundation of the building.
- Semipermeable paving materials are strongly encouraged for driveways and existing surface parking areas. Asphalt or monolithic materials are discouraged.
- Surface parking designs, when determined appropriate, should use informal demarcations for spaces (i.e. landscaping, planter boxes, alternative paving patterns etc.) rather than formal striping and tire stops.

(Encouraged)

(Encouraged)

L. RC and R-4 Design. Development in these Districts should be designed to achieve a smooth transition to the R-1 district in both design and land use.

- Building designs should be sensitive to the context of the neighborhood in which they are located.
- Buildings in the RC District should be designed to allow for flexibility in their use over time so as to accommodate the mixed-use pattern of residential over commercial, as well as other uses compatible with this district.
- Paving in the front setback should be limited to a narrow driveway and a front walkway. The remainder of the front setback should be used primarily for landscaping.
- Flexibility is encouraged when significant physical constraints exist for projects in all commercial districts that would otherwise impede a project from complying with the intent of the Design Guidelines.
- The majority of a building's façade at street level should address the public way, be pedestrian oriented and provide visual interest.
- Residential projects should avoid the appearance of a large single family dwelling.