# CITY OF MOUNTAIN VIEW DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR TOWNHOUSE DEVELOPMENT



ADOPTED BY RESOLUTION NO. 14931 March 28, 1989

AMENDED BY RESOLUTION NO. 16932 October 12, 2004

The photographs shown here are of developments intended to represent particular aspects of townhouse developments. In some instances, there are site planning or architectural features that may not comply with these guidelines and, therefore, are not encouraged.

Applicants should meet with Planning Staff early in the formulation of a development concept for assistance with interpretation of these guidelines and their application to a specific site or project.

#### INTRODUCTION

The Design Guidelines for Townhouse Developments are the result of a review of recent developments in the R3 Multi-Family Zoning District. This review focused on the adequacy of the R3 development standards, originally intended for garden apartments, when applied to this relatively new housing type.

This housing type can be particularly desirable because it provides opportunities for home ownership with many characteristics of single-family homes, such as large floor area, private yard areas, ground-floor front doors and, often, attached one- or two-car garages, yet at a somewhat lower cost.

Townhouses developed over the last 15 years in Mountain View reflect the great diversity of this housing type in our community. Many of the earlier projects were developed on large sites with extensive recreational facilities in landscaped, park-like settings. More recent projects are on smaller sites and reflect a trend toward larger units, higher densities and two-car garages.



Townhouses in Mountain View represent a variety of architectural types





These guidelines are the result of a review of approximately 20 projects built since 1973, including an Environmental Planning Commission and staff tour of several recent projects. Specific problems identified by both staff and the Commission included:

- Bulkiness and density of recent townhouse developments, especially on small lots;
- Insufficient landscaping along driveways and at the front doors of units;
- Too much second-story deck area used to meet requirements for open green area;
- Concern regarding the appearance of townhouse developments from the street, particularly unattractive straight-shot driveways;
- Excessive dominance of garage doors as facade elements, creating a stark canyon effect; and

 Parking and circulation problems, including: insufficient parking (particularly for guests), difficult maneuverability, parking on sidewalks and the length of private driveway aprons.



Bulkiness, landscaping, parking and circulation were studied in recent projects.

#### PURPOSE AND GOAL OF GUIDELINES

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide direction for developers, architects and City staff to achieve good-quality residential environments in a townhouse building type. Amendments to the Zoning Ordinance are also included to help address the problems identified during the review process.

Key provisions of these guidelines and amendments to the R3 Multi-Family Zoning District are as follows:

- Reduction of the maximum allowable density for townhouses and a limitation on total allowed floor area (through specification of a floor area ratio for townhouse developments);
- Increased landscape requirements at front doors and in automobile-dedicated areas;
- Elimination of decks above grade from open green area calculations coupled with a reduction of aggregate required open green area to 45 percent;
- Required landscaped relief in the driveway area and a requirement that a significant

- amount of the project landscaping be publicly visible;
- Limitations on garage doors as facade elements; and
- Increased required parking and increased allowed paving coverage, as well as detailed guidelines for driveway aprons, prohibition of rolled curbs and increased landscaping in automobile-dedicated areas and at garage aprons.

These guidelines are organized into sections for use in the analysis of townhouse developments. Each section includes goals, discussion and implementation guidelines to provide guidance to project designers and to provide a framework for evaluation by the Development Review Committee and by the Zoning Administrator.

#### 1.0 Administration

#### GOAL

To facilitate the design of quality townhouse development within a framework which promotes creativity and innovation in housing.

#### **DISCUSSION**

These guidelines primarily address development of townhouses in the R3 Multi-Family Zoning District. Other multi-family building types in the R3 Zone shall comply with the development standards specified in the Zoning Ordinance. These guidelines should be used as a dynamic planning tool subject to review and update, as appropriate.

#### IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

#### 1.1 APPLICABILITY

These guidelines apply to any townhouse development proposal within the R3 Zoning District. The guidelines supplement the underlying development standards of the Zoning Ordinance, including requirements for yard setbacks, building separation and height limitations. Garden apartments, stacked flats and other multi-family building types, which are not townhouses, will continue to be evaluated according to the provisions of the underlying zoning district or precise plan.

#### 1.2 ADMINISTRATION

The Community Development Director shall have the responsibility for interpreting and administering these guidelines. The Zoning Administrator shall review and monitor the implementation of these guidelines and recommend modifications, amendments and updates, as appropriate.

#### 1.3 DEFINITIONS

For purposes of interpreting and administering these guidelines, the following definitions apply:

#### 1.3.1 TOWNHOUSE

A townhouse is typically a two- to three-story, attached dwelling with an individual front door on the ground floor and a private yard area. It is almost always developed as ownership housing. Attached garages are characteristic of this building type, but parking may also be provided in detached garages, parking courts or in some combination of garage types.

#### 1.3.2 GARDEN APARTMENT

A two- to three-story structure in a garden-like setting containing individual residences, each on one floor. This building type often contains shared exterior hallways which provide access to individual units, often around a central garden area with a pool or other amenity. Parking is typically shared, often under the building.

#### 1.3.3 STACKED FLATS

A multi-story building type containing individual complete residences, each on one floor. This building type typically has a shared entry lobby and access hallways to individual units. Parking is typically shared, often under the building.

#### 2.0 ZONING ORDINANCE OVERVIEW

#### GOAL

To clearly identify the various ordinances and regulations which regulate new townhouse development.

#### **DISCUSSION**

These guidelines address many of the qualitative considerations in the development townhouse projects and are to be used in conjunction with other ordinances and regulations of the City. While there is flexibility built into these guidelines to allow judgment in the evaluation of a particular project, the quantitative requirements of the Zoning Ordinance are generally more rigidly fixed. Relevant sections of the Zoning Ordinance are briefly summarized below. Please refer to the particular section of the Zoning Ordinance for the full text. Other provisions of the Zoning Ordinance, which are not summarized here, may also apply, depending on the specified project.

#### IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

#### 2.1 DEVELOPMENT REVIEW (A36.52):

The purpose of development review is to determine compliance with the Zoning Ordinance and to provide qualitative evaluation of development proposals.

#### **2.2 STANDARD DENSITY (A36.12.040K)**

The standard density for townhouses in any multifamily district is limited to a maximum of 12 units per acre, unless the underlying allowable density is more restrictive (i.e., fewer units) or findings can be made by the Zoning Administrator to allow a bonus density as specified below.

#### 2.3 BONUS DENSITY (A36.12.040K)

The Zoning Administrator may grant a bonus density, allowing a density of between 12 and

14 units per acre, based on a consideration of the following criteria:

#### 2.3.1

The underlying density permits 14 units per acre;

#### 2.3.2

Most of the units are generally small (i.e., an average unit size of 1,400 square feet or less at the high end of the density range and generally a larger percentage of small units provided with increased densities);

#### 2.3.3

The aggregate paved area does not exceed 20 percent (for example, by providing underground parking); and

#### 2.3.4

The proposed project is otherwise in substantial compliance with these guidelines.

#### 2.4 FLOOR AREA RATIO (A36.12.040K)

The maximum allowable floor area ratio for townhouse development is 0.55, except that each unit is permitted an additional 200 square feet for a second enclosed parking space provided that the floor area ratio does not exceed 0.60.

#### 2.5 LOT COVERAGE (A36.12.040K)

Buildings or structures shall not cover more than 35 percent of the total lot.

## 2.6 REQUIRED PARKING AND DESIGN CRITERIA (A36.37)

2.6 spaces per unit shall be provided for townhouse developments. Guest parking shall be provided at a ratio of 0.6 space per unit and shall be open and accessible to all. Dimensional requirements for open parking and for garages, roadway widths and other design criteria are specified in this section of the Zoning Ordinance.

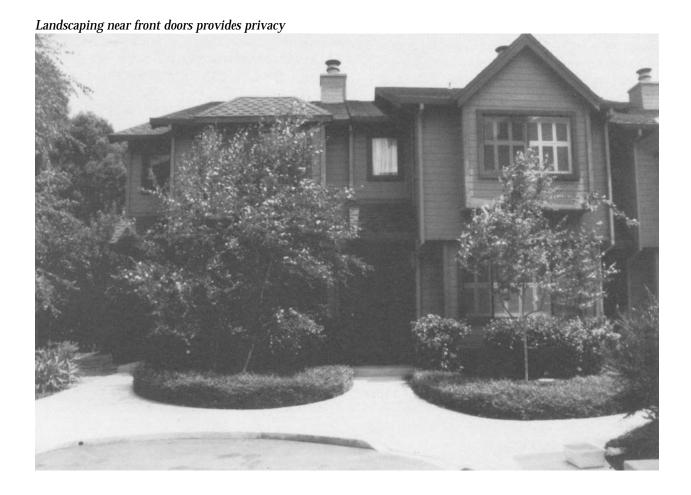
#### **2.7 REQUIRED YARD AREA (A36.12.030C)**

The R3 Zoning District has an absolute minimum requirement of 15' for front, side and rear yard areas for the site as a whole. The required minimum for a specific project is generally equal to the wall height of the building facing the yard area. Space between buildings and property lines and between separate buildings on the site is generally

equal the effective height of the building at that point with a minimum of 15'. The Zoning Ordinance has a more specific definition of this requirement.

#### 2.8 HEIGHT (A36.12.040K)

The maximum height for a townhouse development is 45' and three stories.



#### 3.0 Neighborhood Compatibility

#### GOAL

Promote new development that is compatible with existing neighborhoods, fosters social interaction and cohesion, and provides quality townhouse residential environments.

#### **DISCUSSION**

New developments should be integrated with existing neighborhood patterns with respect to building scale, massing and orientation. Each new development should contribute high-quality design and significant landscaping to the neighborhood. Primary common access drives, which also serve as the pedestrian entrance to a development, should resemble a traditional residential street with frontdoor landscaping for each unit. Secondary common access drives to parking courts may be treated more like traditional alleys but with due consideration to landscaped relief and appearance from off-site. Landscaping, front doorways and living areas should constitute the dominant character of access drives and provide visibility of shared areas from private units. Garages and automobile-dedicated areas should play a subsidiary role.

#### IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

#### 3.1 STREET ELEVATION

The public street elevation should foster an appearance of the residential neighborhood. Facade articulation should reflect the rhythm of nearby residential areas with porches, projecting eaves and overhangs, and other traditional architectural elements which provide residential scale and help to break up building mass. Backs of units, opaque privacy fences and garages generally should not face the street. In some neighborhoods,

a more inward-oriented site plan may be appropriate, if compatible with existing patterns or specific site characteristics, such as size, configuration or environmental concerns, suggest this approach.

#### 3.2 DRIVEWAY CUTS

Minimize the number of driveway cuts onto the public street in order to preserve on-street parking. Where multiple driveways are appropriate, they should be spaced to minimize loss of on-street parking.

#### 3.3 COMMON ACCESS DRIVEWAYS

Common access driveways to new developments should be treated as a continuation of the neighborhood streetscape. A minimum width of 20' for common access driveways is required. The appearance of a straight-shot alley as viewed from the street should be avoided by providing significant landscaping along the driveway area and providing a visual amenity at the terminus. High-canopy tree cover and evergreen trees should be provided in all automobile-dedicated and parking areas.

## 3.4 OFF-SITE VISIBILITY OF LANDSCAPED AREAS

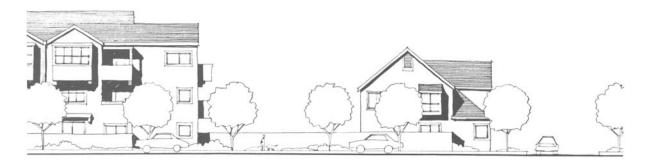
A significant part of the landscaped areas within the project should be visible from the public street and contribute to the neighborhood character.

#### 3.5 SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Noise-impacted sites, large sites or other unique site characteristics, such as preservation of trees or mature significant landscaping, may justify an alternative approach to development of a particular site.

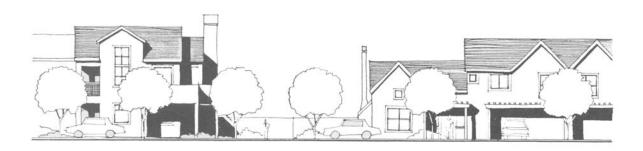
#### NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT

Infill development should sensitively relate to and improve existing neighborhood patterns.



ADJACENT APARTMENT

**TOWNHOUSE** 



ADJACENT TOWNHOUSE

**TOWNHOUSE** 



ADJACENT SINGLE FAMILY HOME

**TOWNHOUSE** 

#### 4.0 AMENITY AREAS

#### GOAL

Provide adequate, usable, safe and high-quality common and private amenity areas in multifamily residential development.

#### **DISCUSSION**

A unique characteristic of townhouses is that much of the open green area for a development is within enclosed private yard areas that are not usable by other residents and not visible from the rest of the project. The attribute may result in stark driveways and other common areas lacking in significant landscaped relief. New developments should provide both adequate private amenity areas and quality shared open green areas, which enhance the livability of life within new development and contribute to the character of the neighborhood. Additionally, adequate private amenity area for each unit should be provided at grade. These guidelines reduce the required open green area for townhouses, but also require that all open green area be at ground level with balcony areas not part of the calculated area. The

Common amenity area for larger project

guidelines also establish a minimum allocation of common amenity area and private amenity areas within a project.

#### IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

#### 4.1 OPEN GREEN AREA

At least 45 percent of the total site area must be landscaped common or private amenity area. This area includes the required front setback for the site as a whole, driveway and front-door landscaping, and private ground-floor yard areas.

#### 4.2 PUBLIC STREETSCAPE

At least 15 percent of the site area for new projects should be open green space not enclosed in private yard areas. Typically, this open green area will be provided in the required front setback area for the site, along entry driveways and at the visual terminus of the driveway. Street trees should be provided along all pubic street frontages of a site, at least every 25' on average, but in no case more than 40'.



#### 4.3 COMMON AMENITY AREAS

Common amenity areas should be appropriate to the size of a project. For larger projects, high-quality common recreational facilities, such as a swimming pool or tennis courts, picnic area, a quality tot-lot or other area designed for children, should be provided. For smaller projects of an acre or less, a formal recreation area may be waived, but there should be benches provided in the common landscaped area.

#### 4.4 PRIVATE AMENITY AREAS

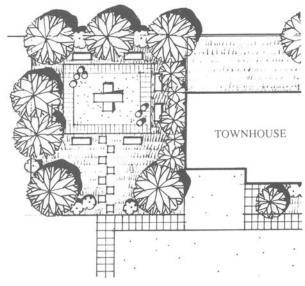
Each unit shall have a private yard area, at grade, with a minimum dimension of not less than 15'. Private yard areas should provide reasonable privacy from nearby units but should not be dark and claustrophobic due to building orientation or excessively high fences. Private deck areas above grade are allowed, but may not count toward the required open green area calculation for the site as a whole.

#### 4.5 SAFETY AND SOCIAL INTERACTION

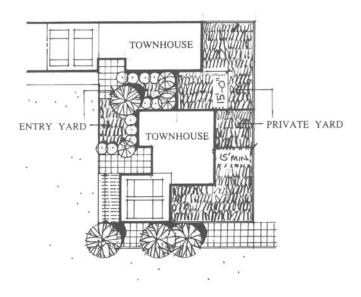
Shared access and activity areas should promote "neighboring" and social interaction. Residents should have a sense of "ownership" of these spaces. Anonymous or sterile common areas not visible from private units are not "defensible spaces." Incorporate human elements, such as windows, decks and porches, while avoiding blank, featureless walls or walls characterized by preponderance of garage doors unrelieved by significant landscaping.



Tot lot play equipment



COMMON AREA FOR A SMALLER PROJECT



**PRIVATE YARDS** 

#### 5.0 Unit Design and Garages

#### GOAL

Individual units should be designed with due consideration of privacy and the automobile, but should also have a public presence and not be inward-oriented, or be walled off from the project or the neighborhood by fences or garage doors.

#### **DISCUSSION**

These guidelines encourage townhouse developments which adequately accommodate the automobile. However, it is also the intent of these guidelines that the automobile play a subsidiary and secondary role to other objectives such as neighborhood character, residential design and quality landscaping. When individual units have windows and living areas on the shared entry drives, the drive becomes part of the neighborhood, people can acknowledge one another and protect each other from suspicious activity.



Emphasis should be placed on the residential entrances, and garages should not occupy more than 50 percent of the front elevation

#### IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

#### 5.1 UNIT DESIGN

Individual units should have a presence on the street or entry drive and not be walled-off or inward-oriented. Buildings should be articulated to provide identity for individual units. Living areas with windows, decks and porches, which overlook common areas and entry drives, are encouraged.

#### 5.2 PROJECT DESIGN

Townhouse developments should incorporate design features to assure high-quality design and to reduce the appearance of building mass and bulk. Building facades should have offsets and stepbacks, particularly above the first floor. Long, horizontal eaves and roof elements across the facade should be broken up with gables, building



Individual unit identity through building articulation and roof forms

projections and articulation. Projecting eaves and roof gables should be related to corresponding projections in building masses, and projections should extend beyond the main facade to increase building articulation (2' minimum recommended). Architectural features such as bay windows, chimneys and porches are encouraged to provide human scale and to break up building mass and bulk.

#### 5.3 BUILDING ENTRIES

Dwelling entries such as stoops and porches should be the predominant facade feature. The porch for each dwelling unit should be the dominant element through articulation or projection beyond the garage door of the unit and should have a floor dimension that encourages outdoor seating and use. Raised porches are encouraged.

#### 5.4 MATERIALS

Building materials are an important component of a quality residential environment and should be consistent throughout a project. Changes in materials generally should not occur on the same plane as this may result in an insubstantial or applied quality. Piecemeal and frequent changes in materials should be avoided.

#### 5.5 FRONT-DOOR LANDSCAPING

A minimum of 10' of landscaping shall be provided between the front elevation of each unit and the common access drive, as measured from the edge of pavement or sidewalk, if present. Paths or walkways to individual front doors and utility easements may occur in this area, but only if the dominant amount of the area remains available to support significant landscaping. At least one tree per unit front must be provided. Entry stoops, porches or architectural elements are encouraged and may encroach into this yard area up to 2'.

#### 5.6 GARAGE DESIGNS

Garages may be attached, detached, underground or some combination of garage types. All garage structures must be consistent and compatible with the architecture and materials of the townhouses. These guidelines encourage a variety of garage types, especially to achieve improved open landscaped areas and reduced paving. Garage doors shall have extensive fenestration, including panels, trim details and windows, and paired, single-car garage doors are encouraged.



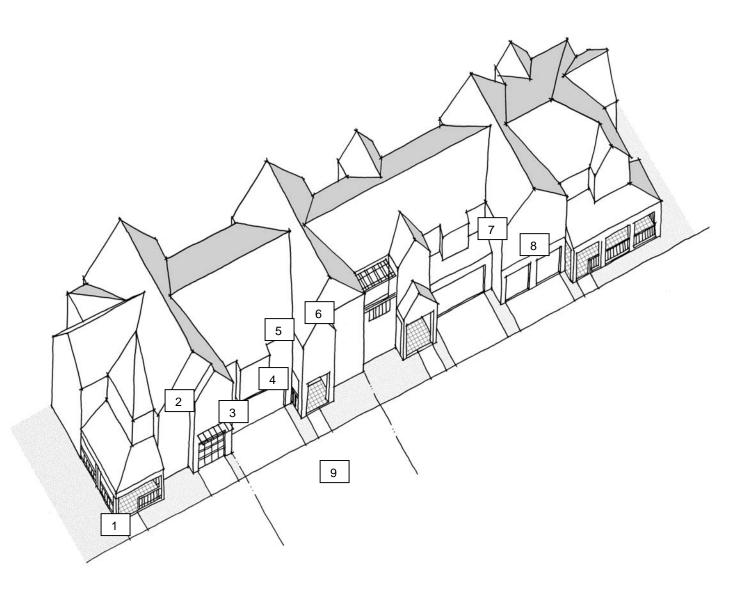
Horizontal eaves broken up with gables, projections and articulation. Projecting roof elements related to building mass.



Dwelling entry as predominant facade feature.



Where garage doors are flush with building facades, upper-level building projections provide visual interest.



#### **TOWNHOUSE PROTOTYPE**

- 1. Dwelling entry predominant facade feature.
- 2. Projections should extend beyond facade (2' minimum recommended).
- 3. Decorative building element.
- 4. Garage doors should be recessed beyond the building face or porch facade (4' minimum recommended).
- 5. Horizontal eaves broken up with gables, projections and articulation.
- 6. Projecting eaves and gables related to building mass.
- 7. Offset between garages of adjacent units (4' minimum recommended).
- 8. Paired single-car doors are encouraged.
- 9. Encourage building massing and roof forms which articulate individual unit definition.

#### 5.7 ATTACHED GARAGES

The appearance of attached garages shall be minimized by limiting garage doors to no more than 50 percent of the linear front elevation of any townhouse dwelling unit or building group, with the remainder of the elevation devoted to living area or porch. Attached garages located on the unit frontage should be recessed from the building face or porch facade (4' minimum recommended). Where two-car garages for two different units are adjacent, the garage faces for the two units should be offset from each other (4' minimum recommended). The garage projecting closest to the street or driveway should feature paired singlecar garage doors. Where garage doors are flush with upper-level facades, the facade should feature upper-level building projections and decorative building elements such as trellises to provide visual interest. Garage doors shall have extensive fenestration, including panels, trim details and windows; and paired, single-car garage doors are encouraged.

#### 5.8 DETACHED GARAGES

Detached garages are encouraged when located in automobile courts or when utilized as a buffer for noise-impacted sites. Garage placement should minimize paved area and maximize usable open green amenity areas for the site as a whole.

#### 5.9 UNDERGROUND PARKING

Shared underground parking is desirable because it can reduce paving, improve open space and reduce the likelihood that parking spaces will be used for storage instead of parking. Special design considerations must be addressed, including the steepness of driveways, drainage, ventilation and fire prevention.

#### 5.10 ADEQUATE STORAGE

Each unit should have at least 80 square feet of enclosed storage area (typically, in the garage area) so that residents will have some place to store bulky personal effects (such as recreational equipment) and, thus, will be less inclined to use their garages for storage instead of parking. CC&Rs for condominiums should continue to prohibit conversion of garage parking into storage space.



Fenestration on garage doors such as panels, trim and details, and windows on garage doors.



Decorative building element above garage door.



Garage doors should be recessed from the building face or porch facade.

#### 6.0 Parking and Circulation

#### **GOAL**

To reasonably accommodate the automobile in the design of townhouse development while avoiding excessive paved area and a preponderance of garage doors on front elevations.

#### **DISCUSSION**

These guidelines attempt to adequately provide for parking and circulation within new townhouse developments while avoiding adverse potential consequences such as stark asphalt canyons walled with garages and lacking significant landscaped relief. These guidelines provide for increased parking for residents and guests but recognize that parking demand varies over time as the age and composition of households change. The availability of required parking is likewise not fixed in time as people convert garage spaces to storage or homeowner associations allow long-term parking of recreational vehicles in required guest spaces. The guidelines encourage explicit

consideration of service vehicles and encourage minimizing the appearance of excessive paving through use of special paving materials and landscape screening of automobile-dedicated areas.

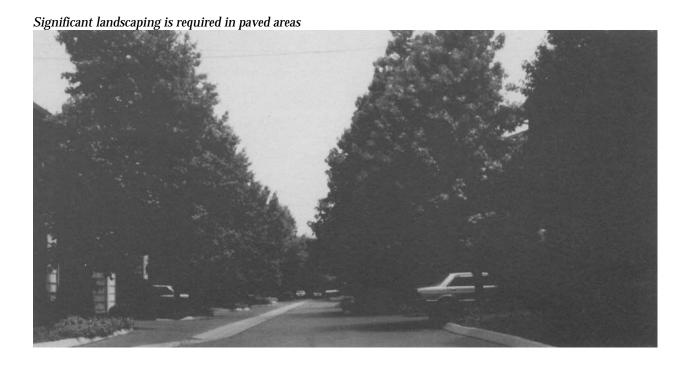
#### **IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES**

#### 6.1 REQUIRED PARKING

Townhouses are required to provide parking at a ratio of 2.6 spaces per unit. Of this total, 0.6 space per unit is for guest parking. Tandem parking may be allowed by the Zoning Administrator, but not to meet requirements for open, unassigned guest parking and not for more than 25 percent of the dwelling units.

#### 6.2 GUEST PARKING

Guest parking should be reasonably distributed throughout a new development and must be open, uncovered and unassigned.



#### 6.3 DRIVEWAY APRONS

Aprons should be no more than 10' long so that people will not be tempted to use them for parking (and block the common entry drive or sidewalks) or at least 20' so that aprons can accommodate parked cars without interfering with sidewalks or entry drives. Landscaped areas should be included in driveway apron areas between adjacent units.

#### 6.4 SERVICE VEHICLES

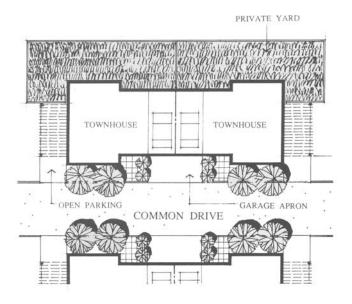
Adequate vertical clearance and maneuverability should be provided for service vehicles such as garbage trucks and moving vans.

#### 6.5 RECREATIONAL VEHICLES

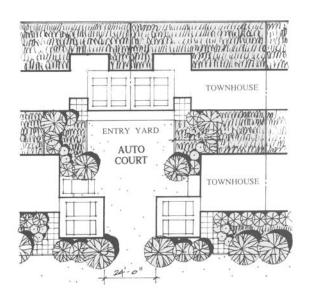
Designated storage areas for recreational vehicles (such as trailers, boats, etc.) should be provided, or storage in designated guest spaces prohibited through CC&Rs.

#### 6.6 PEDESTRIAN CIRCULATION

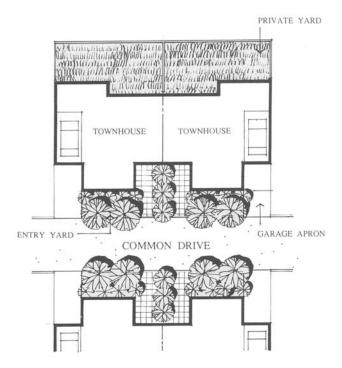
Projects should reflect explicit design consideration of the pedestrian circulation system from the public street to the individual unit entry. Sidewalks should incorporate tree pockets, as appropriate. Monolithic sidewalks and rolled curbs should be avoided.



## ALTERNATE GARAGE AND UNIT RELATIONSHIPS



**AUTO COURT** 



ATTACHED GARAGE AND OPEN CARPORT

ATTACHED GARAGE WITH TANDEM PARKING

### 6.7 CIRCULATION-RELATED COMMON USE AREAS

Automobile circulation and parking must be a consideration in site plan design but not the overriding determinant of the design. Open parking should be well screened with landscaping. Paved areas should have significant landscaping (i.e., on average, a tree every 25' or one tree per unit front). Parking and automobile circulation areas should be designed so that headlights will not shine into individual dwelling units.

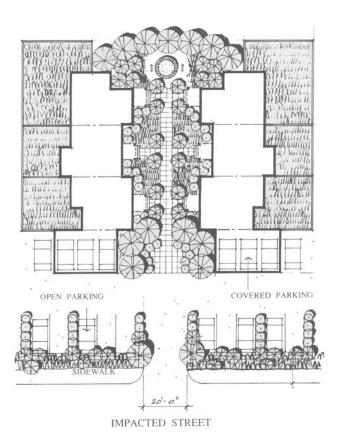
#### 6.8 PAVING MATERIAL

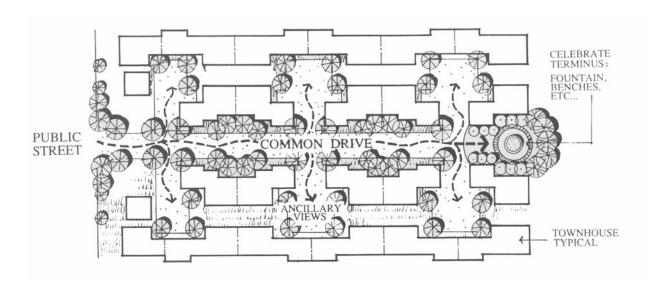
Textured and high-quality paving material should be utilized to soften the hardscape (i.e., at driveway entry and pedestrian walkways) and reduce the appearance of excessive paved area.

#### 6.9 TRASH ENCLOSURES

Opaque screen trash enclosures or individual garbage cans for each unit shall be provided. In either case, provisions should be made to encourage recycling. Trash enclosures should be located to minimize any conflict with individual units, common amenity areas or neighboring properties. Paving material should be capable of withstanding the weight of garbage trucks.

#### PROTOTYPICAL SITE PLANS





#### 7.0 LANDSCAPING

#### GOAL

To enhance the environmental quality of residential neighborhoods and soften the impact of new construction through the use of landscaping, which provides seasonal color, variety in form and habitat for wildlife.

#### **DISCUSSION**

These guidelines encourage variety in color and form of landscaping and reinforce the importance of preserving existing mature landscaping. New landscaping is an essential component of the residential environment and the community character, generally. Adequate space must be provided so that new landscaping can achieve significant growth.

#### IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

#### 7.1 TREE PRESERVATION

New developments should preserve Heritage trees and other major existing landscaping.

#### 7.2 DROUGHT TOLERANCE

Drought-tolerant landscaping and water-conserving irrigation methods are encouraged.

#### 7.3 VARIETY

Landscape plans shall incorporate seasonal variety and color to the extent possible. Tall evergreen trees should be utilized where screening is desired. Deciduous trees shall be utilized where summer shade is needed and winter solar access desired.

#### 7.4 PARKING AND CIRCULATION

High canopy trees shall be provided at least every 25' in parking and circulation areas. A minimum of 10' of landscaped setback shall be provided at the unit front entry. A minimum of 5' of landscaping (excluding vehicle overhang) shall be provided adjacent to any parking or circulation area.

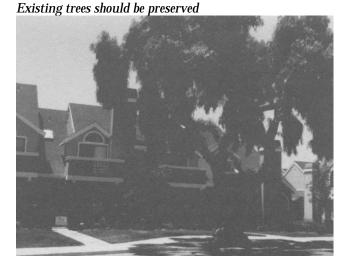
Landscaping should be used to screen open parking and to screen individual units from automobile headlights.

## 7.5 MINIMUM LANDSCAPING REQUIREMENTS

At a minimum, 45 percent of the total site area must be devoted to landscaping. No landscaped strip or tree pocket smaller than 25 square feet may be counted toward the total required landscaping. Utilities may occur within required landscaping, but only if underground utilities will not preclude appropriate planting, including trees, and only if utilities are adequately screened from view. Up to 50 percent of any private yard area may be covered with an open patio or decking.

#### 7.6 LIGHTING

Landscape plans shall include provisions for lighting on-site and along public street frontages. Post top-mounted lights are recommended. Lighting should be adequate to assure safety and visibility in common areas but should not produce glare or be of an intensity inappropriate for a residential environment.



# PROJECT PARTICIPANTS FOR THE DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR TOWNHOUSE DEVELOPMENTS ADOPTED IN 1989

#### MOUNTAIN VIEW CITY COUNCIL

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