

elk grove design guidelines

chapter 4A

# site planning for multi-family development

## IV. Multi-Family Development

This section of the Design Guidelines applies to all multi-family development of three or more attached units. For the purposes of these guidelines, multi-family development includes, but is not limited to, apartments, townhouses, condominiums, stock cooperatives, triplexes, and cluster development or portions thereof with attached dwelling units. Guidelines for high-density single-family and cluster development with detached dwelling units are listed in Chapter II (Design Guidelines for Single-Family Residential Development).

### A. Site Design

The site design section is separated into two parts: 1) design concepts, and 2) guidelines. Design concepts identify the desirable characteristics of multi-family development. Design guidelines establish provisions and options to ensure implementation of desirable design concepts.

#### 1. Design Concepts

Through adoption of these guidelines, the City establishes the requirement for quality design of multi-family development. Desired characteristics of multi-family projects are listed below.

- ❑ Ensure that multi-family projects are designed to be compatible with surrounding neighborhoods and land uses.
- ❑ Encourage multi-family projects that residents can take pride in and have a sense of ownership in their neighborhood.
- ❑ Enhance the public interface with multi-family development with attention to structural placement, building orientation, and landscaping treatment along the *streetscape* and open space areas.
- ❑ Ensure that multi-family projects incorporate common open space and amenities that enrich the lives of future residents.
- ❑ Ensure that multi-family projects are designed with proper setbacks, landscape, and *Massing* to address privacy, solar access, and compatibility with adjacent single-family residential development or land.

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## 2. Design Guidelines

Multi-family residential land is designated throughout the City on the General Plan land use map and corresponding Zoning Map. Existing multi-family sites are located adjacent to both non-residential and residential uses and should not be considered an incompatible use. Rather, site and building design should be planned in a manner that ensures compatibility with surrounding neighborhoods and uses. Zoning Code development standards for multi-family residential projects address building setbacks, height, parking, landscape and lighting. Guidelines herein are intended to supplement the multi-family development standards in the Zoning Code. Some of the Zoning Code development standards are reiterated or referenced in the guidelines for informational purposes.

### Building Placement and Orientation

Building placement and orientation on all multi-family sites shall take into consideration the residential use from a physical and functional perspective, relationship and compatibility with surrounding uses, and the visual impact and experience for residents, visitors, and passersby. As defined in these guidelines, multi-family projects can range in *scale* from an isolated triplex to an apartment complex with hundreds of units. Given this broad range of project types, building placement and orientation will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Generally, larger multi-family projects with multiple buildings have an opportunity to create a residential community within property boundaries. Under those circumstances, building placement and orientation can form common open space areas, compel relationships between buildings, and establish compatibility with the form and function of surrounding uses. Conversely, a single triplex or multiple units in a single building will have different needs, opportunities, and constraints to consider. Design provisions herein reflect City objectives and desires.

- 1) Elk Grove Zoning Code establishes development standards for multi-family building setbacks from public streets and interior property lines shared with adjacent property. The Zoning Code lists special setbacks along property boundaries shared with single-family residential property and includes additional restrictions for building *Massing* and height along such boundaries. Proposed multi-family development shall be compatible with surrounding neighborhoods and property in terms of building setbacks, *massing*, height, unit orientation for privacy, and connectivity or screening as appropriate (see on next page Photos IV-1, IV-2, and IV-3 on next page).
- 2) Where three or more units are located within a single structure, the building shall be designed with structural and spatial variety along the front façade and staggered roof planes. The intent is to avoid a monotonous or overpowering institutional appearance. (See Figure IV-1)

"Just because it isn't done doesn't mean it can't be done. Just because it can be done doesn't mean it should."

Barry Glassford

# site planning for multi-family development



Photo IV-1: This multi-family project is scaled down at the edges of the property where it is adjacent to single-family development along the far property line.



Photo IV-3: This photo shows a multi-family development on the left abutting the rear yard of single-family residential homes on the right. A masonry wall, landscaping, and pedestrian walkway separate the residential uses. Additionally, multi-family buildings along the common boundary are designed with single-story portions in proximity to single-family structures.

Photo IV-2: This multi-family project is located across the street from single-family homes. The project is built to mimic the look of the existing large single-family homes by *massing* and grouping of units.



3) Multi-family projects with two or more buildings shall be designed with variation between building setbacks and/or placement to avoid the creation of monotonous streetscapes. Additionally, site plans shall be designed with variation in both the patterns and the siting of structures so the appearance



Figure IV-1A: This image represents building design with structural and spatial variety along the front façade.

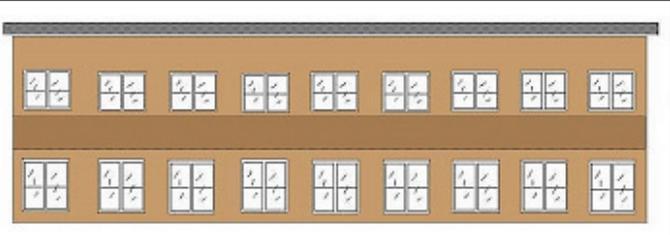


Figure IV-1B: This image exhibits a monotonous, linear façade without structural or spatial variety.

of the *streetscape* is not repetitive. The City recognizes the need for design flexibility for townhome projects. Building placement and setback variation for townhome projects shall be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. (See Figure IV-2)

- 4) The City strongly encourages project design that incorporates existing significant natural features of the site. Significant natural features include, but are not limited to, protected trees/tree clusters,

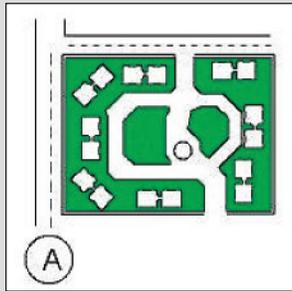


Figure IV-2A: The more desirable street facade designed with variation between building setbacks and placement

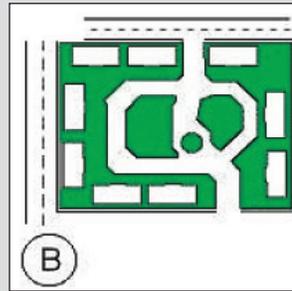


Figure IV-2B: A more monotonous *Streetscape*. Buildings are almost identical in style,

topography and creeks. Projects located along natural creek corridors or wetland areas have a unique opportunity to enhance the natural environment and aesthetics as a design attribute to the project (e.g. buffers, vegetated wetland drainage corridor, active or passive recreational improvement, and /or interpretive area for a riparian or habitat area). Livable portions of residential units shall be designed to take advantage of views of preserved significant natural features. (see Photos IV-4 and IV-5)

- 5) The City encourages innovative designs that mitigate the potential adverse environmental effects of stormwater runoff through minimization of impervious surfaces, use of design features to prevent



Figure IV-4: Preservation of an existing oak tree within a landscaped area in a multi-family development project.



Photo IV-5: Design that takes advantage of an existing water feature than runs throughout a multi-family development project.

Spatial  
Variety

pollutants from contacting runoff, and integration of stormwater quality treatment filters, including infiltration where feasible, into site landscaping. Grassy swales, pervious pavement, diversion to sanitary sewer, and water quality basins are examples of how to mitigate or reduce adverse environmental effects.

## Open Space and Amenities

The City encourages development of multi-family sites with common open space areas and amenities for the use and enjoyment of future residents. To that end, minimum open space provisions and required project amenities are listed below.

- 6) Consistent with zoning code development standards, all buildings, roofed areas, and parking facilities, including drives, shall not cover more than 75 percent of the site. A minimum 25 percent of the gross area shall be designated as common open space. Common open space includes all landscaped areas outside of the required landscape corridors along adjoining streets, active and passive recreation areas, other outdoor amenities, and natural open space areas. Common open space is calculated exclusive of all building footprints, drive aisles, parking areas, required landscape corridors along adjoining streets, and hardscape associated with maintenance and utility structures (see Figure IV-3). The designated approval authority may grant a reduction in the required open space area to a minimum of 20 percent of the gross area for exceptional architectural design. Common open space associated with ownership units (e.g. townhomes) may include private yard areas.
- 7) Common open space shall be incorporated into the site plan as a primary design feature and not just remnant pieces of land used as open space. The open space should be centrally located and



Figure IV-3: Qualifying common space for the purpose of calculating open space is indicated in green.

positioned within the view shed of the nearest units such that the residents can watch over the area (see Photo IV-6). Common open space associated with ownership units (e.g. townhomes) may be located in private yard areas

- 8) In conjunction with the open space requirements, all multi-family projects shall provide one or more amenities for the residents as listed below. Amenities shall be centrally located for a majority of residents.



Photo IV-6: The open space within this multi-family project is centrally located and within the view shed of many units.

Compliance with this guideline will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis as part of required Design Review with the intent of establishing a selection or combination of amenities that will contribute to the residential quality of life for each project. Amenities may be located within and counted toward common open space requirements.

- a. Tot lot/play structure;
- b. Community garden;
- c. Picnic tables and BBQ areas (preferably with shade structures);
- d. Swimming pool;
- e. Indoor recreation facility;
- f. Sports courts (e.g., tennis, basketball, volleyball);
- g. Natural open space area with benches/viewing areas and/or trails;
- h. And/or other active or passive recreation area that meets the intent of this guideline.

Common

Open

Space

The number, type, and size of amenities should be proportional to the anticipated number and representative of the anticipated needs of future residents. For example, a senior housing complex may not benefit from development of a tot lot and an apartment project located in close proximity to a community park may not benefit from the duplication of park amenities.

- 9) Common facilities such as laundries, mailboxes, and management office should be centrally and conveniently located for accessibility and proximity to the majority of the residents.

## Access, Circulation and Parking

- 10) Multi-family developments with internal streets and driveways should be designed to be easy to navigate through in a logical, common sense manner so that a resident or visitor can easily enter the site, park their car, and find a particular unit (see Figure IV-4 and Photo IV-7).
- 11) Multi-family projects shall be designed with an internal pedestrian/bicycle system providing access to individual units, common areas and off-site connectors as appropriate. The goal of offsite



Figure IV-4: Simple internal driveways, unit mapping system and a variety of visitor and resident parking allows for ease of circulation.

Photo IV-7: This multi-family development project includes a directory sign for visitors showing location, circulation and parking layouts for the units.



# Ped est rian

pedestrian/bicycle connections is to provide convenient access to schools, parks, and other community amenities that are located directly adjacent or in the immediate vicinity of the multi-family site. In addition, designated pedestrian access into multi-family development shall not be limited to vehicle access points only. All connections shall be designed with a priority on personal safety and the intent to deter vandalism. The intent is to require pedestrian circulation to and within the project from primary street frontages at intermittent locations as deemed appropriate on a case-by-case basis.

- 12) Generally, the use of special paving is encouraged to enhance project design. However, special paving should be used as an accent where it serves some purpose. Preferred locations for special paving include: project entryways, pedestrian crosswalks, pedestrian walkways and common open areas (see Photos IV-8 and IV-9).
- 13) Large surface parking areas for resident and visitor parking shall be designed with a series of smaller



Photo IV-8: Special paving used as an accent feature, to highlight a pedestrian walkway and for traffic calming within a multi-family project.



Photo IV-9: Special paving used as an accent feature within a common open space area.

parking fields. These multiple smaller parking lots are preferred and will minimize the expansive appearance of parking fields (see Figure IV-5 on next page).

- 14) Design and locate parking areas such that the walk from the designated parking to the dwellings is short and direct. Ideally, residents will have visibility to their parking stalls. All resident and visitor parking spaces shall be clearly identified.

# Con nect ity<sup>IV</sup>

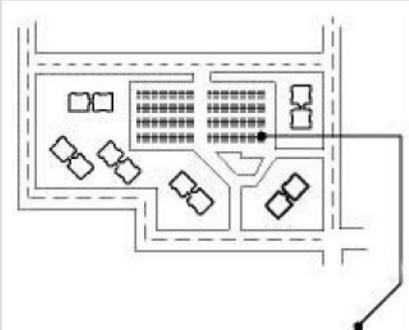


Figure IV-5A: This figure depicts large expansive parking lot design, which is discouraged in multi-family design.

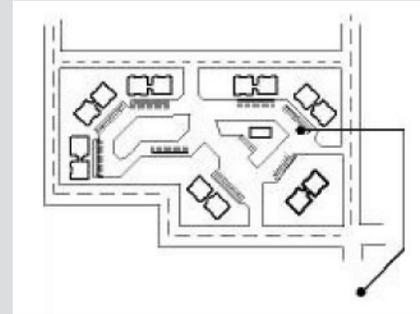


Figure IV-5B: This figure depicts acceptable parking lot design using a series of smaller lots throughout complex.

- 15) Parking areas have the potential to be a source of noise and light that may affect adjacent residential areas as well as dwelling units. In an effort to reduce this potential impact, the following improvements are required:
- a. Landscape areas between dwelling units and parking areas on-site shall be improved with berming and/or landscape to achieve a minimum 36" screen (see Figure IV-6 and Photo IV-10).
  - b. Landscape areas between parking stalls for multi-family development and off-site residential dwellings, not otherwise screened by a masonry wall, shall be improved with berming and/or landscaping to achieve a minimum 36" screen.



Figure IV-6: An example of landscape with berming used to achieve a minimum 36" screen to shield vehicle headlights from livable portions of the units.



Photo IV-10: This photo shows how landscaping can be used to shield car headlights from shining into living areas of dwelling units.

- 16) The City encourages multi-family projects with more than 50 units to provide a common vehicle wash area. Where provided, the vehicle wash areas shall be paved, bermed and graded in order to drain into the sanitary sewer system.

### Landscaping

Landscaping shall be designed as an integral part of the overall site plan with the purpose of enhancing building design, public views and spaces, and providing buffers, transitions and screening. Landscaping can also serve to filter and infiltrate storm water runoff to reduce adverse environmental effects of urban runoff. Additionally, the City requires the use of drought tolerant vegetation consistent with the City's adopted Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance. Listed below are provisions related to the landscaping for landscape corridors, perimeter landscape, internal landscape, and project entries.

- 17) Landscape Corridors. Landscape corridors along multi-family developments shall enhance surrounding developments, create a pedestrian friendly environment, and establish year round and seasonal landscape to soften the appearance of streets. Except as otherwise vested for an adopted Specific Plan or Special Planning Area, landscape guidelines for thoroughfare, arterial, and collector streets throughout the City are listed below. Street designations, as listed herein, are consistent with the City's adopted street improvement standards.
  - a. Minimum width of landscape corridors along thoroughfare and special thoroughfare streets shall be 36 feet. The City may allow reductions in the corridor width to ensure continuity with an existing approved corridor. The landscape corridor shall include a minimum six-foot-wide meandering sidewalk, separated from the back of the curb by no less than six feet.
  - b. Minimum width of landscape corridors along arterial and collector streets shall be 25 feet. The City may allow reductions in the corridor width to ensure continuity with an existing approved corridor. The landscape corridor shall include a minimum four to six-foot wide sidewalk (depending on the width of the street as listed in the City's adopted improvement standards), separated from the back of curb by no less than six feet.
  - c. Street trees are the primary delineators within the landscape corridors, which aesthetically create rhythm and soften the environment along street corridors. Street trees commonly serve to provide

"One of the first conditions of happiness is that the link between man and nature shall not be broken"

Leo Tolstoy

shade, to *Scale* the environment to the pedestrian, and to define an image. Trees also provide the benefit of water absorption and reduction in the temperature of runoff. A dominant scheme of street trees will unify all the elements with the landscape corridor. Street trees shall be planted in a single row at a maximum spacing of 50 feet, set back a minimum of five feet from the back of the curb and concrete sidewalks/driveways. However, when located within the six-foot planter area between the back of curb and sidewalk or in a narrow planter strip between the sidewalk and the soundwall, street trees shall be planted centrally in the planter. Trees with shallow and/or invasive roots planted in the six-foot-wide planter strip may require root barriers. Minimum street planting size is 15-gallon container. One-third of the street trees shall be at least 24-inch box trees or larger. Street trees shall be selected from the City's adopted street tree list.

- d. Accent trees are intended to supplement and enhance the street trees. Accent trees should have distinguishing characteristics to highlight significant areas within the landscape corridors (e.g., points of entry, pedestrian access points, intersections, transition areas, bus shelters). Minimum planting size for accent trees is 15-gallon container.
  - e. Both street trees and accent trees should include a combination of evergreen and deciduous trees for screening, canopy, and seasonal change.
  - f. Shrubs and groundcover shall be designed to enhance the character of the non-residential development. Landscape considerations should include visual appearance, parking lot screening, clear sight visibility at driveways and pedestrian connections, absorb stormwater runoff, and implement the City's current Water Conservation Ordinance.
- 18) Perimeter Landscape. Perimeter landscape areas shall be designed to maximize screening and buffering between adjacent uses. Privacy shall be maximized between multi-family and adjoining single-family development. This shall be achieved by including initial large plantings of 24-inch box trees, clustering of the plantings, and use of evergreen trees. The placement, number, size and type of planting should also complement the project design.
- 19) Internal Landscape. The following guidelines apply to internal landscape:

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- a. Street facing elevations shall have landscaping adjacent to their foundation. Landscaping on other elevations may be required on a case-by-case basis. Landscaping shall be utilized to frame, soften, and embellish the units, to buffer the units from noise or undesirable views, to break up large expanses of parking and to ensure compatibility to provide visual screening (see Photo IV-11).
- b. All areas not covered by drive aisles, parking or necessary hardscape shall be appropriately landscaped (see Photo IV-12).



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Photo IV-11: Landscaping at the base of a building can be used to frame and soften the appearance of the structure from the street.

- c. Trees shall be a minimum of fifteen-gallon size when used for accent purposes or when located in passive and active landscape areas.

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Photo IV-12: Landscaping and screening used liberally within a multi-family development project.



- d. Use landscaping, building placement and fencing to create gateways to the common open space, creating a distinction between the public realm and the semi-private open space (see Photo IV-13).
- e. Landscaping shall complement the building design in terms of placement, type and *Scale*. The



Photo IV-13: This multi-family development project utilizes landscaping to distinguish and create public and semi-private open space areas.

City encourages the use of landscape enhancements such as trellises, arbors, cascading landscaping, vines and perimeter garden walls (see Photo IV-14).

- f. The City encourages project design that reduces the amount of stormwater runoff by utilizing rain gardens, landscaping at downspout locations, and other innovative design features.

Photo IV-14: This multi-family development project utilizes arbors and trellises which complement the building design.



- 20) Project Entry Landscape. The use of landscaping and accent paving can help define and beautify a project entrance as viewed from the street. Entries shall be designed as special statements reflective of the character of the development. Special accents such as scaled art or fountains, ornamental features, textured paving, flowering accents, shrubs, and the use of specimen trees shall be used to generate visual interest at these entry points (see Photo IV-15).

Accessory Structures, Utilities and Fencing



Photo IV-15: The entrance to this multi-family development project includes a monument sign along with landscaping and a trellis to create visual interest.

- 21) Trash enclosures should be conveniently located for collections and maintenance and shall be enclosed with durable materials that are architecturally compatible with the design of the buildings. The enclosure area shall be paved, bermed and graded in order to drain into the sanitary sewer system. Where trash enclosures are located adjacent to landscape planters, landscaping shall be incorporated around the trash enclosures to provide more effective screening (see Photo IV-16).
- 22) The City encourages the undergrounding of utility equipment as feasible or otherwise required. Utility equipment such as transformers, electric and gas meters, electrical panels and junction boxes shall be screened by walls and/or landscaping. Combine the location of utilities and services where feasible.



Photo IV-16: This photo shows trash enclosure materials and colors compatible with adjoining multi-family development.

Distinguished

Entry

- 23) Perimeter fencing along an interior property line shall be a minimum 6-foot-tall masonry wall. However, open view fencing is required along interior property lines abutting open space. The City discourages perimeter fencing of any type along street frontages except where noise attenuation is required. Where perimeter fencing is proposed, for purposes other than noise attenuation, along the public street frontage, open view fencing shall be used (such as wrought iron or metal tube). Pedestrian ingress/egress to the site at convenient locations shall be provided (see Photo IV-17).

#### Lighting of Parking Areas, Drive Aisles, and Pedestrian Walkways

Site lighting for multi-family projects include lighting of project entries, drive aisles and parking areas, pedestrian



Photo IV-17: Open view fencing is utilized along the public street frontage of this multi-family project with multiple pedestrian access points.

walkways, and common areas designated for regular nighttime use. This lighting is important for safety reasons and for the architectural enhancement of the development. Building lighting guidelines are listed in the architecture section.

- 24) Exterior lighting shall be pedestrian in *scale* with a maximum height of 14 feet.
- 25) Exterior site lighting shall be designed so that light is not directed off the site and the light source is shielded downward from direct off-site viewing. Specifically, light features shall be located and designed with cut-off lenses to avoid light spill and glare on adjacent properties. In order to minimize light trespass on residential properties directly abutting a multi-family site, illumination measured at the nearest residential property line shall not exceed the moon's potential ambient illumination of one-tenth (0.1) foot-candle.

- 26) The City encourages use of low-level bollard lighting for illumination of pedestrian walkways (see Photo IV-18).
- 27) Outdoor light fixtures used to illuminate architectural and landscape features shall use a narrow cone of light for the purpose of confining the light to the object of interest and minimize light trespass and glare.



Photo IV-18: Bollard lighting is used to illuminate a pedestrian walkway within this multi-family project.

- 26) The City encourages applicants to install public art in accordance with Chapter VI, Voluntary Public Art Design Guidelines, which details incentives available for public art.

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